

Strategies Used By Head Teachers And Ministry Of Education Officials To Strengthen Parent-Teacher Partnerships In Early Years: A Case Of Uasin Gishu County

Peter Kibet Koech

Department of Educational Communication and Technology and Early Childhood Education,
Machakos University

Abstract: The Kenyan Government in her partnership policy intends to promote the relationship between parents, teachers and the community in enhancing children's education. This will be possible if: First, parent-teacher partnerships were enhanced in Epstein's six modes of involvement and partners' roles were defined; second, varieties of techniques were employed; and finally, factors that relate to parent- teacher partnerships were appreciated and catered for. A parent-teacher partnership in Kenya was found to be low. Local researches in Kenya reveal minimum levels of parent-teacher partnership in primary and secondary schools. Studies show that the role of the community and parents was low and seemed to be restricted to the provision of finances and facilities. The purpose of this study was to explore parent- teacher partnerships and strategies used to promote these relationships in pre- schools. The study was done in Uasin Gishu District. Epstein's Family, and Community Partnerships theory, Dunst, Johanson, Rounds, Trivet and Hamby's Family Enabling Empowerment Model and Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's Model of Parental Involvement, guided it. This study used an Ex Post Facto design. The independent variable was strategies used. The dependent variable was parent-teacher partnerships. The target populations were parents and teachers of preschool, pre-school and primary school Head teachers and Ministry of Education Officials. The sample size consisted of 135 parents, 60 teachers, 10 Head teachers, 5 Ministry of Education Officials at the district level and 4 at the national level. Questionnaires and interview schedules were used for data collection. Data was prepared for statistical analysis using Statistical Package for Social Sciences. Means, percentages formed part of the descriptive statistics. ANOVA and t-test of independent samples were used and null hypotheses were tested at alpha value 0.05. Findings revealed that the level of parent-teacher partnerships was low. The most frequent strategies used by the Head teachers and Ministry of Education Officials were sending letters, organizing workshops on transition, holding parent's teachers' meetings, holding closing term meetings and providing information about children's progress. The strategies used included sending information to the teachers through DICECE officers, organizing for sensitization meetings, organizing academic days, open visits by parents, and using class representatives. It was recommended that there is need to use appropriate strategies to promote partnerships for harmonious working relationship.

I. INTRODUCTION

Partnerships mean sharing and taking part in the same activity or joining in an activity with another. This partnership is characterized by mutual trust and respect, two-way collaboration and support in relationship. Successful parent-teacher partnerships require a sustained

mutual collaboration, support, and participation of teachers and parents at home and at school in activities that can directly affect the success of children's learning (Gargiulo & Graves, 1991).

Partnerships therefore imply active and committed involvement between parents and teachers where they share

responsibility for a joint activity (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985).

If parents are to work with teachers as partners in the education of their children, schools must provide them with the opportunities and support they need to become involved (Anderson, 1982). According to Epstein (2000) when parents and teachers partner in children's education, parents will feel more confident in assisting and supporting learning in class and at home, support teachers by enforcing rules and expectations, turn to teachers as resource persons for solving problems and encourage cooperative attitudes and behaviours among their children. Research suggests that when parents are involved in their children's education, children perform better academically (Christenson, 2004). In addition to children's improvement academically, their behaviour and school attendance also improve (Epstein 2003). Also, parents express a greater degree of satisfaction with their children's education, as well as a greater sense of trust in the teachers and administrators when communication is open and positive (Spann, Kohler, & Soenksen, 2003).

Increased partnership has also been shown to lead to greater teacher satisfaction, improved parental understanding and parent-child communication and more successful and effective school programs (Russell & Reece 2000). Teachers who establish and maintain positive relationships with parents were more likely to experience higher morale, be perceived more positively by parents, improve classroom behaviour, develop positive presence in the community and gain access to valuable community resources (Gonzalez, 1992). Parents and teachers therefore require broad understanding to achieve workable parent-teacher partnerships. Elcholtz (1984) asserts that parents and teachers involvement is most successful when it is viewed, practised, and promoted as a partnership between the home and school.

Governments of the world recognize the significance of these partnerships. Article seven of the World Declaration on Education For All (EFA) Convention, held in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990 state that new ways of enhancing partnership at all levels of education is necessary. The Convention states that partnership is important among all stakeholders such as educators, government and non-governmental organizations, private sectors, local communities, religious groups, and families (Bray, 1999). Since independence, the Kenya Government has been providing education in collaboration with partners such as parents, local communities, local authorities, voluntary organizations, churches and civil societies. The Kenyan Government has a policy of partnership at all tiers of education that supports partnership between parents and teachers (GoK, 2006). According to MacConchie (2004), the existence of a range of public statements concerning the need for parent-teacher partnership is not necessarily a good indicator of the extent and quality of such partnerships. In reference to Kenyan pre-school education, the parents are the most important partners as they start and manage over seventy-five percent of the pre-schools in the country. The other partners, including churches, non-governmental organizations, and local government had been instrumental

in providing funds, furniture, feeding programmes, payment of teachers' salaries and learning materials and teaching facilities (Koech 2003).

There are some evidence of partnerships and parent-teacher collaboration in Kenya. Some examples are Parent-Teacher Associations (PTA) (Kamunge Report, 1979) and school practices such as parent-teacher meetings and school partnership policies (GoK, 2006) which require schools to involve parents in educational process. However, recent research (Ndani, 2008) suggests that parent-teacher partnerships at the pre-school level may not be extensive. In addition, research suggests that parent-teacher partnerships have been less than effective in enhancing pre-school teachers' terms and conditions of service (Makoti, 2005) and in establishing quality in pre-schools (Wawire, 2006). These studies documented aspects of partnerships but they did not focus their investigation on partnership as an active and committed involvement. To enhance the quality of partnerships, parents, teachers and other relevant stakeholders need to understand the nature of parent-teacher interactions and partnerships. Epstein (2003) identifies six types of involvement in her model that are relevant in understanding partnership in the Kenyan context. According to her framework, parents, teachers and community can collaborate in six key areas to foster a caring community that children require to maximize their potential in school and in later life. These are: parenting skills, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, collaboration with communities, and communication. Four of these have been investigated in Kenya (Ndani 2008), but a comprehensive study of all of them had not been conducted. In addition, parental involvement in Kenyan pre-schools appears to be concentrated in activities that community members were invited for such as contributing finances and matters related to children's discipline (Ndani, 2008). This study was conducted in Thika District with one community. What was not known was whether these findings could be generalized to other communities in Kenya. As it is now, one cannot tell with certainty whether there is an active and committed involvement between parents' and teachers' in preschools. One may ask, what are the levels of parent-teacher partnerships in Epstein's six modes of involvement in Uasin Gishu District? This was a critical concern for this study.

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1995) model of Parental Involvement explains that parents may decide to participate in the partnerships when they understand that collaboration is part of their role as parents, when they believe they can positively affect their child's education and when they perceive that the child and the school want them to be involved. Katz (1984) asserts that stakeholders may hold conflicting perceptions about their roles and the roles of other stakeholders. Powell (1995), Hughes and MacNaughton (2002) suggest that the success of parent-teacher partnerships strategies will be inadequate until parents' and teachers' understand their roles. Wambiri (2006) and Ngugi (2000) suggest that parents were not aware of their roles in stimulating young children and believed they are teachers who are solely responsible for children's academic development. This lack of awareness may contribute to low involvement and ineffective

partnership. Christenson (2004), Griffith (1998), Mueller (1997) and Swick (1991) identified strategies that could be used to strengthen parent-teacher partnerships. These include home visits, conferences, and involvement in classroom, participatory decision-making and home-learning activities, among others. According to Epstein (2000), schools are responsible for designing comprehensive strategies for partnerships between the parents and teachers. In their theoretical model, Dunst, Johanson, Rounds, Trivet & Hamby (1992) recommend that schools and Ministry officials should design strategies of strengthening parent-teacher partnerships. The Kenya Government through the Ministry of Education has developed School Empowerment Programme (SEP) training manuals to increase the capacity of Headteachers in primary schools to foster parent-teacher cooperation (SEP, 2004).

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study tried to answer the question; What strategies do Head teachers and MOE officials use at the district and national level use to strengthen parent-teacher partnerships?

III. METHODOLOGY

This study used an Ex Post Facto design. The independent variable was strategies used. The dependent variable was parent-teacher partnerships. The target populations were parents and teachers of preschool, pre-school and primary school Head teachers and Ministry of Education Officials. The sample size consisted of 135 parents, 60 teachers, 10 Head teachers, 5 Ministry of Education Officials at the district level and 4 at the national level. Questionnaires and interview schedules were used for data collection

IV. RESEARCH FINDINGS

Based on the study question above, the study established the strategies used by the Headteachers and Ministry of Education officials at district and national level in promoting parent-teacher partnership in pre-school. The study documents the strategies used by Headteachers and Ministry of Education officials to strengthen parent-teacher partnerships. Strategies used were important because they help educators, administrators and school managers' deal with the challenges of collaboration.

A total of fifteen strategies were given to Headteachers and Ministry of Education Officials who were asked questions about the frequency of activities undertaken in the past six months. Table 1 shows the overall mean scores of Headteachers and Ministry of Education Officials.

Overall Score for Strategies Used			
Officials	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
County Education Officers	5	2.20	.40

National Education Officers	4	1.85	.21
Head teachers	10	2.10	.44
Overall Mean		2.08	

Table 1: Means Score of Headteachers and Ministry of Education Officials Strategies Used

Table 1 shows that overall mean score was 2.08. The findings document that Ministry of Education Officials at the district level had the highest mean score. It was followed by Headteachers. This means that they reported using more of the suggested strategies than the Officials at the national level.

The researcher further sought to establish if there was statistically significant difference in the frequency of use of suggested strategies used by Headteachers and Ministry of Education Officials. ANOVA was used to get the level of significance and the following hypothesis was tested:

H_{13} : There is no significant difference between strategies used by Headteachers (HS score) and Ministry of Education Officials (DS score and MS score) to strengthen parent teacher partnerships.

The researcher used ANOVA to find out the difference in strategies used to promote parent-teacher partnerships. Table 2 presents the findings on the ANOVA computation of the significance level between means.

		Sum of	df	Mean	F	Sig.
Overall Score for Strategies used	Between Groups	.283	2	.141	.878	.43
	Within Groups	2.739	17	.161		
	Total	3.022	19			

Table 2: ANOVA Computation on Strategies Used to Enhance

Table 2 shows ANOVA scores for Headteachers and Ministry of Education Officials on the strategies they used to enhance parent-teacher partnerships. The table shows that the significant difference for strategies used between groups and within groups was 0.434. This shows that there was no significant difference between the strategies used by the three groups. However, as it was seen earlier, the use of the other strategies by these three groups shows major differences in the frequencies.

The null hypothesis that stated that: There is no significant difference in the frequency of use of strategies by Head teachers (HS score) and Ministry of Education Officials (DS score and MS score) to strengthen parent teacher partnerships at 0.05 level of significance was therefore accepted. It was concluded that the strategies used by Head teachers and Ministry of Education Officials were not significantly different. This suggests that Head teachers and Ministry of Education Officials' use of strategies was the same.

In summary, the uses of strategies suggested by the three groups were not many. The findings also show that the use of strategies by these three groups to strengthen partnerships was reported to be almost the same. The reason for low usage of strategies by national officials would be because they deal with district officials who were supposed to pass information to parents and teachers in schools.

To obtain more information about other strategies used, ten Head teachers, five DICECE officers and four officials at the national level were interviewed. Their responses are presented in table 3. The following question was asked: *Apart*

from the strategies given, what other strategies had you used to strengthen parent- teacher partnerships in the last 12 months?

Table 3 shows the frequencies of other strategies used by Head teachers and Ministry of Education Officials to strengthen parent-teacher partnerships.

Other Strategies Used	HT	DEO	NOE	Total
Organizing workshops on transition	10	0	0	10
Conducting home visits	5	0	0	5
Organizing for graduations	9	0	0	9
Holding farewell parties	7	0	0	7
Using class representatives	4	0	0	4
Organizing academic days	6	3	0	9
Taking children for academic tours	6	0	0	6
Encouraging parents to allow children to participate in games	7	2	0	9
Sending letters	10	5	0	15
Organizing for sporting days	5	0	0	5
Open visits by parents	4	0	0	4
Providing information about children's progress	10	0	0	10
Holding parents teachers meetings	10	3	0	13
Involved administrators (chiefs/assistant chiefs)	3	8	0	11
Organizing for sensitization meetings	4	5	0	9
Holding class meetings for parents	5	0	0	5
Participation in volunteer services in school	3	0	0	3
Holding closing term meetings	10	0	0	10
Sending information to the teachers through DICECE officers	0	0	8	8
Organizes training opportunities for DICECE officers	0	0	3	3
Passing policy did documents to DICECE officers	0	0	4	4
Total Frequency of Other Strategies used within The Last 12 Months to Strengthen Parent-teacher Partnerships	118	27	15	160

*Note: the frequencies indicated 0 showed that the activity was not applicable to the group.

Table 3: Frequencies of Other Strategies Used by Headteachers and Ministry of Education Officials to Strengthen Parent-teacher Partnership

Table 3 shows the frequency of other strategies used by Head teachers and Ministry of Education Officials in the last 12 months. The following conclusions were made about the strategies used to strengthen parent-teacher partnerships.

- ✓ Head teachers and Ministry of Education Officials varied considerably in the other strategies used.
- ✓ The most frequent strategies used by the Head teachers and DEO were Sending letters, organizing workshops on transition, holding parent's teacher's meetings, holding closing term meetings and providing information about children's progress.
- ✓ The most frequently used strategy by National Education Officials was sending information to the teachers through DICECE officers.
- ✓ The least frequent strategies used by Head teachers were involving administrators, participation in volunteer services in school, organizing for sensitization meetings, open visits by parents and using class representatives.
- ✓ The least frequent strategies among DICECE officers were encouraging parents to allow children to participate in games, holding parent's teacher's meetings and organizing

academic days.

- ✓ Organizing training opportunities for DICECE officers was the least frequent strategy used by MOE.
- ✓ The least mentioned strategy was participation in volunteer services in schools and organizing training opportunities for DICECE officials.
- ✓ The findings revealed that few other strategies were used to strengthen parent- teacher partnerships in pre-school on the basis of the strategies mentioned by these three groups. The findings also revealed that few strategies were used in a year.
- ✓ Diversity of strategies reportedly used at the national and district levels were lower than those reportedly used by the Head teachers. This implied that the relationship between school and home was weak.

V. DISCUSSION OF STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE PARTNERSHIPS

In relation to question four which sought to establish the strategies used by Head teachers and MOE officials at the district and national level use to strengthen parent-teacher partnerships, the study established that Head teachers and MOE officials uses few strategies to strengthen parent-teacher partnerships. This means that they use few of the stated and recommended strategies to strengthen partnerships and increase opportunities for engagement. This may suggest that:

- ✓ There is lack of knowledge about effective strategies that would be used
- ✓ Recommended strategies are not practical
- ✓ Conflicting in roles
- ✓ Strategies requires a lot of mobility and resources and
- ✓ Logistical problems as many schools are in rural areas.

Apart from the strategies stated, the study also established that there were many other strategies that were used by Head teachers and MOE officials to strengthen parent-teacher partnerships. But, it appears that these many other strategies were not effective since partnership was found to be low. These findings relate to Epstein (2003) who says that schools were responsible for designing comprehensive strategies for partnerships between the parents and teachers. These findings are also close to Fantuzzo & McWayne (2002) study that found that traditional strategies to involve parents, such as inviting parents to meetings and school events, did not promote genuine interaction between home and school. Instead, they separate parents and teachers. They suggested that two-way communication between home and school is essential to building successful parent- teacher partnerships. This can be done by: (1) informal, social meetings with parents; (2) frequent, positive phone calls; (3) newsletters which elicit parental feedback; and (4) home visits. Two-way communication provides choices to parents as to the times and ways they can be involved in their children's education. These findings are inconsistent with Williams & Cartledge (1997) who found that written communication was the most efficient and effective way of providing valuable ongoing correspondence between school and home. Unfortunately, many teachers were not specifically trained in the skills they need to communicate effectively with parents (Hradecky,

1994; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2004). These findings are also inconsistent to Swick (1991) who found that strategies that were used in schools include home visits, conferences, involvement in the classroom, participatory decision-making, home learning activities, and family-school networking. According to Epstein & Dauber, (1991) teachers often did not have the attitudes, knowledge, skills, and strategies needed to collaborate with families effectively because the topic of family involvement in education has not enjoyed a central role in teacher education programs.

VI. STUDY CONCLUSION

Findings from this study have clearly shown that parent-teacher partnership in pre- schools in Uasin Gishu district is weak. The stakeholders were found to use several strategies whose impact is not known. The study suggests that many strategies should be employed by stakeholders to break the barriers that may hold back strong parent-teacher partnerships.

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