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A review of quality education: the role of the community in Ghana

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Abstract

The main purpose of this study was to review the role of community participation in Ghana towards quality education. Community participation is very crucial to the education system. It has been established that through community participation, schools can create nourishing atmosphere and positive community-school partnership. However, the situation of community participation in Ghana has not been the best as compared to last century where middle school system was operational. Even though, some community still organise and operate to support schools but community participation in education has not fully gain root in several communities in the era of democratic dispensation. Community responsibilities towards infrastructure, school furniture, decision-making process, monitoring and supervision of the teaching and learning have not been fully recognised. PTA and SMC established under the constitution of the Republic of Ghana are no more functioning in most communities. It appears that the poor state of community participation is as result of political parties' promises and insufficient knowledge on the part of community members. It is therefore, imperative for government to realise the significance of community participation in education to make proper policies for education but not for power gains.

Key words: Community, Education, Involvement, Management and Participation,

INTRODUCTION

It is no more furtive that family participation is an integral part of a successful accomplishment of the child education. Several studies have identifies parental involvement as a crucial factor affecting the individual learning and the school environment. However, many people and educational institutions have recognised that the high rate of students success are as results of three components collaborating to give better opportunities for the student future, the teacher, the family and the community. Almost all the time family and teachers roles are discussed forgetting the role of community towards education. Therefore, this study seeks to review the role of community participation in the provision of quality education for students. Major themes reviewed are *quality education and its importance, concept of community participation, forms of community participation, the role of community participation in education, how community get participation in education, the role of community towards quality education in Ghana, and implication of community participation on Ghana Education.*

METHODOLOGY

This research work falls under review paper, which focuses on critical and constructive analysis of literature in the areas of quality education and the role of community in education. The researchers, therefore, employed Issues Review under Best Evidence Review Approach (Mayer, 2009). Best evidence reviews, according to Mayer (2009) focus on studies selections for result exploration on a point of disagreement or a question in a specific field of research. The choice of the research design was appropriate since it allows the research to gain control in obtaining substantial amount of knowledge for decisions to be made. In this case, the researchers used several books, journals and articles from online database. In all cases, the researchers made use of Scheepers et al (2014) search strategy approach by using keywords. Again, inferences were made from the reviews for conclusion and recommendations.

QUALITY EDUCATION AND ITS IMPORTANCE

Every human society needs progress and development in greater levels of material and socio-cultural achievement. For such a progressive transformation of the society to take place, education has to be the key instrument. Education according to Rabie (2007) is the key method in which the society used to inculcate knowledge from one generation to another, learn how to develop and accumulate knowledge, maintain certain values and transform others that society deems vulnerable, and establish non-conventional ideas, attitudes and norms, social and cultural change and non-traditional ways of thinking in a new form. Since immemorial education has been the basic human right and important vehicle for the development of people, society and nations. According to Peters (2010), education is perceived as a process that encapsulates the criteria to which any one of the family processes must conform. A critical look of Peters' belief of education however, is based on 'reform'. Therefore, as much as society is dynamic so should education. Indeed, I believe no one will argue on the fact that education is a reform tool for society to achieve its desired goals. However, the question is 'what form of education can bring the desired achievement for the society to benefit? In looking for the right answer to this

question, UNESCO (2000), UNICEF (2000) and OCED (2012) propagate quality education for all children in all countries. Quality education according to Chapman and Adams (2002) refers to all the inputs, processes, and output of education to produce the desired outcomes for the society to benefit. According to them, the inputs include the teacher, amount of teacher training, number of textbooks, whilst the process means the amount of direct instructional time, the extent of active learning, and output also refers to test scores, graduations, etc. and the desire outcome is the performance in subsequent employment. It implies that for education to be termed as quality it must be able to secure employment for the individual under training. In 2000, UNICEF provided the contextual features that should characterise quality education. These include:

- Learners who are healthy, well-nourished and ready to participate and learn, and supported in learning by their families and communities;
- Environments that are healthy, safe, protective, gender-sensitive, and provide adequate resources and facilities;
- Content that is reflected in relevant curricula and materials for the acquisition of basic skills, especially in the areas of literacy, numeracy and skills for life, and knowledge in such areas as gender, health, nutrition, HIV/AIDS prevention and peace;
- Processes through which trained teachers use child-centred teaching approaches in well-managed classrooms and schools and skilful assessment to facilitate learning and reduce disparities;
- Outcomes that encompass knowledge, skills and attitudes, and are linked to national goals for education and positive participation in society. Source: UNICEF (2000, p 4)

In this knowledge-based economic and societal development, quality education should manifest in various levels of professional system that will bring change to political, economic, social and moral aspect of the world. The importance of education according to early scholars like Plato, Dewey, and Aristotle believed that education is central to the moral fulfilment of individual and the well-being of the society in which he lives (OECD, 2013). Even, the conventional wisdom indicates that quality education helps to promote healthy life, improves individual performance in labour market and promotes good citizenship. This tells us that the outcome of quality education in human dispensations promote social, emotional, physical, emotional psychological and spiritual well-being of the individuals. So there is no argument on what OECD (2013) posits, that the benefit of quality education is to bring significant benefits to the society, not only through higher employment opportunities and income but also via enhanced skills, improved social status and access to network. If everyone is recognising the full potential of the power of quality education, policy makers of education could critically address the societal challenges facing education. In another perspective, quality education opens the doors for individuals to break the chains of poverty since it has the link to all development goals, including gender empowerment, improving health and maternal health, reducing hunger, fighting diseases and increasing economic growth and building peace.

From the review of Peters (2010), education is important to the fact that it gives

the right to education, information and communication, attitudes, institutions and societal systems. In total support to UNICEF (2000), quality education should be common and lead to change and evolution towards information in the context of new understanding of society challenges.

CONCEPT OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

The meaning of community participation is better understood when the two emerging words are explained. Community according to Mathie and Cunningham (2003) is used to denote a group of people as in a village, neighbourhood, or ethnicity boundary. Bray (2000) contends that, there are about 94 alternative definitions of community, but suggest that a community could be some features like a network of shared interests and concerns, a symbolic or physical base or in a narrowly defined household. For the purpose of this study community is a group of people living in a well-defined locality who share common interest.

Participation is a widely used language in institutions when it comes to development. Cornwall (2008) noted that participation refer to anything that involves people. However, in a more clearer sense Ahiabor (2017) explain that participation from World Bank point of view refers to a process of contributing, influencing and sharing control over development initiatives and making decisions over the use and control of resources that affect them. For the purpose of this study, the researchers agree with Dale (2000) that participation is the involvement of people or stakeholders with different interests and abilities towards an achievement of a goal.

Having digested the meaning of Community and Participation, Community Participation is simply the involvement of the community in decision-making process towards common goal. In education, community participation means involvement or partnership with the citizens and social agencies which are affected by the schools in policy decision-making processes in areas including selection of school personnel, infrastructure, budget and plans for integration (Narwana, 2010). In this sense, one can assume that community participation in education is ways that community that the school is located share common responsibilities towards the improvement of the education for prosperity of the children in the society.

FORMS OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATION

Education across the world does not only take place in the schools. However, within the homes, communities and society as a whole. Despite, the various responsibilities that the school perform towards educating the child, the aforementioned groups have several roles to support the child's education. It is important to note that none of the groups can solely take the full responsibility of education. Therefore, community and society must support parents and families in educating, nurturing, socialising the children in the society. According to Ahiabor (2017), schools are institutions responsible for preparing the children for future.

Community participation comes in different forms. Griffin and Steen (2010) suggested four ways in which community participation can be; finance, material contribution, labour and ideas. Indeed, the level and the processes of the participation do not occur equally, but the effectiveness depends on the leadership, understanding and commitment of the school and the community.

According to Swanepoel and De Beer (2006) participation can be direct or indirect and it does not exist unless through mobilisation. According to them, there was former community participation that occurs when community participate directly in the educational programs. On the other hand, community participate indirectly in education through associations, committees, and clubs.

Therefore, Epstein (1995) noted that there should be partnership between the schools, community, families in ways that can help children achieve a better future. To achieve this Epstein (1995) provides several areas through which the school and the community succeed through partnership. These are (i) Improving school programs and school climate; (ii) providing family services and support; (iii) increasing parents' skills and leadership; (d) connecting families with others in the school and in the community; (e) helping teachers with their work.

To be able to achieve successful partnership Epstien (1995) provided different responsibilities that community can participate actively:

Parenting: the community could assist all families to establish home environments that could sustain students learning at school, for instance, provision of community library and social learning centres to support children learning.

Communication: there could an effective design form of school-home and home-school communication channels to encourage parents to learn about the school programs and their children's progress as well as teachers' effectiveness in the school.

Volunteering: the community can recruit and organise parents to help and support schools as teachers, caregivers, security personnel and other voluntary services.

Learning at home: There should be seminars on curriculum related issues, decision-making process and planning of school events.

Decision-making: community can get involve in school decisions on the matters of the school

Collaborating with schools: integrating community resources and service in the school

THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY IN QUALITY EDUCATION

The responsibilities of realising the full dream of quality education for every child lie on all stakeholders of education. However, one important stakeholder who is normally neglected by many scholars in their quest of promoting quality education is the 'community'. According to UNICEF, the first feature of quality education is learners who are healthy, well-nourished and ready to participate and learn, and supported in learning by their families and communities (UNICEF, 2000, 4). According to MacQueen et al (2001) concept of community centred on five (5) main elements; first, community as 'locus, a sense of place' referred to the geographical entity ranging from neighbourhood to city size, or a particular place to live. Second, community is also seen as a group of people sharing common interests and perspectives such as values, norms and culture. Third, element of community manifest in their joint action, as a sense of coherence and identity, social ties and diversity that exist between different groups but exist and sharing tasks and responsibilities. Fourth is the strong conviction of community in the performance of a common task, sharing responsibilities

and fifth is the community interest in promoting community development. Uemura (1999) explain community as group of people sharing culture, language, tradition, law, geography, class and race.

The relationship that exists between education and community is seen as symbiotic. As much as the community is expected to support education to function well to achieve its desired results, the community expected to see education help solve the societal problems. Therefore, for any given community to get good returns from the education there must be community participation.

Even though most scholars misunderstood the role of community towards quality education as synonymous to the role of parents towards quality education, it can be emphasised that there are clear distinctions between them. While parents provide school fees, textbook, school uniform, feeding, etc for their awards, the role of the community takes forms of providing furniture, school blocks, provision of teachers, library, etc. According to Shaeffer (1994) community role comes in the form of enrolling children in school, contribution of money, materials and labour, implying passive acceptance of decisions made by the school, making decisions including setting realistic goals, making feasibility study, planning, implementation and evaluation of educational projects. In another dimension, Colletta and Perkins (1995) also noted the role of community as having dialogue with policy makers; involvement in school management; curriculum design; provision of teaching and learning materials, and construction of school infrastructures. These are clear evident that communities and societies should support families and parents in educating the children for the society. Williams (1994) is with the view that there are three models that exist between Education and Community; traditional community-based education, government-provided education, and collaborative model. The traditional-based model occurs whereby the community provides education to the young ones through their own effort. The government-based model is where government assumed full responsibility of providing education to the community. The collaborative model is where community makes a supportive role to government made provisions. Uemura (1999) was with the view that education prepares children in the community for the betterment of the community and education cannot be a separate entity within the society, therefore, it is important to operate in partnerships.

CHALLENGES HINDERING COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATION

The effectiveness of community participation in education is marred several factors. Kumar and Corbridge (2002) indicated that lack of sufficient knowledge and skills to manage schools pose major challenges to people in involving themselves in community and school programmes. Inadequate knowledge and skills of community participation has also echoed in Harriet, Anin and Yussif (2013) report. Again, poor communication on the part of school authorities accounts to low community participation. According to Ahiabor (2017), political influence has also be one of the factors affecting the effectiveness of community participation in education. Some community members fell threatened by government officials and agents of political parties when local decisions are not favouring them (Addae-Boahene, 2007). In another situation, there is “colonial mentality’ that the rural populace lack the initiative to make productive contribution to education planning processes. In Ghana, Baku and Agyemang (2002) were

with the view that wrong timing of SMC/PTA meetings; responsibilities given to people by government without community knowledge; educational authorities failure share information with community members on education and lukewarm attitudes of community members towards education are some major factors affecting the effectiveness of community participation in Ghana.

Addae-Boahene (2007) also added that difference exists between government officials and the local community members result to mistrust and marginalisation, which affect community participation. Again, Kolkman, Kok and van der Veen (2005) also indicated that language barrier is another factor hindering community participation. This occurs when the education officials do not speak common language with the local people.

It is credible to agree with Addae-Boahene (2007) that leadership styles, school-community relationships, information sharing and interaction styles demand that nature of community participation. The perception that educational stakeholders are more reactive to planning issues result to poor community participation. Inferably, stakeholders should command respect for each other. In a situation whereby such respect is not given to each member of the stakeholders it strongly affect the community participation.

THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY TOWARDS QUALITY EDUCATION IN GHANA

In Ghana, traditionally, government has been the main agent in the funding of public schools in terms of construction and operation of schools. Because of increase in population of the country, provision of resources has become limited to the school management affecting the quality of education intended to achieve. Some communities in Ghana having realised that they are not benefiting from the government education cake mobilised themselves to undertake initiative in building established schools in their communities so the youth will get access to education. In Ghana, there is evidence that communities initiate supporting the government by providing infrastructures such as classroom and teacher accommodations, teaching and learning materials and transportation (Attrams, 2012). Even some communities hire teachers to teach their children in government schools. Adam (2005) listed traditional Ghanaian community involvement in education as provision of communal labour to establish infrastructures, making monetary contributions to support school projects, provision of accommodations, giving out land for school farming, etc, churches were also allowing schools to use chapels as classrooms and seriously attending school function such 'open days'

The support communities were providing to education was so tremendous that the Ministry of Education encouraged every school to have Parent Teacher Association (PTA). Although, PTA is voluntary association of parent and teachers they serve as pressure group to the communities. Community involvement in education has not been the best over the last two decades due to urbanisation, occupational challenges, lack of legal backing to community involvement in education and weak institution to enforce by-laws.

Not until 1994, government having realised the poor involvement of community in Ghana education, established school management Committees (SMCs) under the Ghana Education Act of 1994 in all basic schools as intervention to strengthening

community involvement. The School Management Committee represents the entire community in the education (Osei-Owusu & Sam, 2012). Beside the PTA and the SMC, there are other committees, for instance, District Education Oversight Committee (DEOCs) that have been put in place to promote community involvement in education. Recently, the Ghana Education Service as part of its effort to promote community involvement in education has instituted Community Participation Officer at each District to oversee and strengthen the link between school and community.

The effectiveness of all these interventions seem not has been working best for the promotion of community involvement toward quality education in this 21st century. These days, school PTA meetings have not been well patronised by parents; School Management Committees also have not been functioning well to the desired expectations. As a personal experience, the role of the PTA and the SMC executives only turn to be the sole responsibility of the effective and caring chairperson. Community members poorly attend educational forums and durbars. It is rather unfortunate that hardly do we see community members having communal labour to promote education. Churches are no longer supporting education if not for their private gains. Chiefs and elders no longer discuss issues related to education in the community.

The community attitudes to education in Ghana has been so poor in this era that every nation is seeking for quality education for its young and is having serious implication on the future of Ghana Education. However, for the Education Officer and Community Participation Coordinator this negative attitude is a concern, and should be to all stakeholders of education. Definitely, one would be tempted to ask the possible cause of these poor attitudes towards our education, which is the key to economic development. Perhaps, one could attributed urbanisation. Nevertheless, if churches organised successful programmes in the cities why not educational programmes. However, intuitively, one serious possible cause to the poor attitudes of community towards quality education is political talk from the Ghanaian politicians. Power-driven politicians make many promises to the community as if government should do everything. This in many cases make communities and other organisations and even individuals forget about their social cooperate responsibilities towards education.

IMPLICATION OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION ON GHANA EDUCATION

Effective educational system is established when all the stakeholders of the education work collaboratively. Some years back, Ghana education system was regarded as a shared responsibility between government, community and parents. Traditionally, the state and the civil society have been the main providers of school education. With the emergence of political gains and power-driven politicians, the educational system has been affected resulting in the government accepting all the responsibility of providing education. These responsibilities range from payment of employees' salary, provision of infrastructures, furniture, school uniforms, school feeding, textbooks, payment of examination fees, teaching and learning materials. These huge responsibilities on the government has put Ghana Education at a disadvantage because of delays in releasing funds, to the district Assemblies to perform the necessary tasks. In fact, in a number of occasions, resources promised by government are not honoured. Some district assemblies even divert educational funds to their own political benefits. The acceptance

of the government to provide the necessary resources for effective teaching and learning has also denied the communities and parents opportunity to contribute their quota to the education. Even where some parents are willing to support education in their community, government interference by declaring statement like no parent should pay PTA dues and no levy in schools. However, the government over the years has not been able to deliver budgeted promises as expected.

Currently, Ghana education system has been politicised to the extent that directors of education do not have a say to suggest and make decisions to promote effective teaching and learning, and government policies are not good for the progress of the education system. Communities have stopped initiating or establishing schools for their children, they do not even take school maintenance responsibility, and as a result, most school buildings are in bad state to the extent that it has become a death trap in the school compound. Communities do not have any input when government is building school blocks for a community. Ironically, the government has declared schools, especially the basic schools as community and missionary based with a few being managed by the district.

The inability of the community to get involved in the educational system has led to poor performance of students, indiscipline in schools and dilapidated structures of school buildings.

In this perspective, Ahiabor (2017) indicated that comprehensive stakeholders support reduced students and teachers' absence, and improved students learning in villages with high illiteracy level.

We do agree perfectly with Addea-Boahene (2007) that most Ghanaian schools were initiated and established by the communities and later absorbed by government, therefore, management and control of these schools then shift from community to central government authorities bringing minimum participation of the community. There is strong evidence that community participation influences the development of the education.

CONCLUSION

The research therefore noted that communities no longer involve themselves in education as happened some years back. Again, the established institutions such as PTA, SMC and District Oversight Committee entrusted to manage the schools were not properly functioning because of low or no motivation for volunteers (Osei-Owusu & Sam, 2012). Parents do not have time visiting the schools even some ignoring PTA meetings.

Education plays a significant role in political and socio-economic development of any nation. It generates substantial benefits to the people and the society as a whole. Much as the school is not isolated from the community, and are, living in symbiotic system the communities should be encouraged to participate actively in the school affairs. It is the duty of the government to make such the communities see the schools as their properties by taking full responsibility as individuals take full responsibility of their own properties. Again, parents should fight for safe environment for their children in the school by giving necessary support.

The government of Ghana should realise that the impact of participatory governance, participatory management, school monitoring networking and coalition

building, community resource mobilisation are effective means of achieving educational goals of every nation (Berends, 2009; World Bank, 2006). Community involvement is mainly ranging from decision-making, provision of resources, financial support, voluntary collaborating, material contribution and labour contribution. The support community provides towards education should never be underestimated by the government. Currently, most school are in bad shape due to poor maintenance culture by the government. The questions to be asked are: 'who's responsibility to maintain the school buildings? Can government alone support education in Ghana?

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Based on the review, the researchers recommended that PTA and SMC should be mandated to schools with support from government.

2. There should be frequent educational empowerment such as training for Community Opinion Leaders, PTA, SMC members to have enough knowledge and skills in a situation whereby the management falls short in managerial system.

3. It also recommended that politicians should not politicise education in the country. They should therefore, realise that government alone cannot take full responsibility of education in the country. It is collaborative and participatory effort that will help government achieve quality education at all levels of the education system in Ghana.

4. The existing policies about community's role in education in the country should be strengthened.

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