



HOW PARENTAL EDUCATION AND LITERACY SKILL LEVELS AFFECT THE EDUCATION OF THEIR WARDS: THE CASE OF TWO SCHOOLS IN THE EFFUTU MUNICIPALITY OF GHANA

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ABSTRACT

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Extended and parental involvement.

The study sought to explore how parents' level of education and literacy skills affect their children's basic education within the context of cultural capital theory. To achieve the objectives of this study, a case study design was employed which comprised the use of interviews with twelve parents and twelve teachers in two school communities in the Winneba East educational circuit of the Effutu Municipality of Ghana. The population of the study consisted of all parents in the Effutu Municipality in the Central Region of Ghana. A snowball sampling technique was used to select the individual parents for the study. The data were analysed through coding to identify themes. The study reveals that most parents were aware of the benefits of education but the reality of their lives including educational and literacy challenges affected involvement in their children's basic education. In spite of this handicap, most parents relied on extended families and community members for assistance. Thus, when parents are eager to see their wards through formal education, their own illiterate status does not become a handicap. Consequently, the study recommends that policies on education decentralization must reflect greater consideration of contextual factors including formal education and literacy skill levels which impact on parental involvement in children's basic education.

Contribution/Originality: The study contributes to the existing literature related to parental education and literacy skill practices in the home setting. The study has highlighted specific issues to do with differences in parental capacity linked to level of education and literacy skills which affect children's education. This demands focus on contextual factors when considering parental involvement in children's education.

1. INTRODUCTION

Parental involvement in education is a concern both in developed and developing contexts (Holloway *et al.*, 2008; Tao *et al.*, 2008) as this is seen to have the potential to impact positively on educational access, retention and quality in schooling to benefit children (Fan and Chen, 2001; Jeynes, 2005). It takes different forms across contexts. Literature offers examples of the activities parents undertake in different regions of the world, participation based in school, at home and between teachers and parents (Epstein, 2001; Jeynes, 2005). Much of the literature on parental involvement in the developed countries focuses on the role of parents both at school and at home in directly supporting their children's academic development (Edge *et al.*, 2008; Holloway *et al.*, 2008). Numerous studies have shown that parents are more likely to be involved with their children's education at home rather than at school (Lee and Bowen, 2006). Research has also demonstrated that there is a positive relationship between parental

involvement at home and a range of school-related outcomes, including academic achievement, school engagement and socio-emotional adjustment (Izzo *et al.*, 1999). For example, parental involvement in activities at home such as checking homework, communicating about school, and reading with children have been shown to be related to positive outcomes amongst minority students in the United States of America (Sui-Chu and Willms, 1996; Jeynes, 2003). Conversely, a significant proportion of the literature on parental involvement in developing countries focuses on engagement in issues related to school-based management and administration (school governance issues). In Africa, specifically, the literature places greater emphasis on parental roles in financing education and participation in school decision-making as opposed to parental involvement in the child's learning per se. Ghanaian education policy has identified parental involvement as a central element (Adam, 2005; Pryor, 2005; Akyeampong *et al.*, 2007). In spite of the enormous role of parents both in school and at home, very little research has been done on investigating the home background of the pupils particularly parental education and literacy skill levels and how this might affect parental involvement in children's basic education. This is a significant gap in knowledge considering its implications for policy and practice which this study sought to fill.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

Parents play enormous role in children's education both in school and at home. It is unfortunate that little attention is paid to issues surrounding the pupils' home background particularly parents' education and literacy skill levels and how these might affect their children's education. Literature appears to suggest that, when parents are educated their pattern of influence on their children's education in various ways tend to differ from parents with low or no formal education (Desforjes and Abouchaar, 2003; UNESCO, 2008; Drajea, 2015). This implies that the number of years a parent spends in schooling and the qualification obtained as a result in addition to whether or not parents are able to read and write, understand text and use it in everyday life impacts on children's education (Drajea, 2015). In Ghana, parents' education and literacy skill levels have been found to influence children's education (Tansel, 1997; Johnson and Kyle, 2001) unfortunately very little is known about the Effutu Municipality.

1.2. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore how parents' level of education and literacy skills affect their children's basic education in the Effutu Municipality.

1.3. Objectives of the Study

The study sought to:

- i investigate the nature of parental education and literacy skill levels in the Effutu Municipality.
- ii find out how parents' education and literacy skill levels affect their children's basic education in the setting..
- iii examine the available strategies that can be employed to improve parents' education and literacy skill levels for active involvement in their children's basic education.

1.4. Research Questions

In order to guide the study, the following research questions were formulated:

- RQ 1: What are the nature of education and literacy skill levels of parents of children in the Effutu Municipality?
- RQ 2: How do the education of parents and their literacy skill levels affect their children's education?
- RQ 3 In what ways can parents' education and literacy skills be improved for active involvement in their children's basic education?

1.5. Significance of the Study

The findings of the study would help educational authorities in the setting to understand how parents' education and literacy skill levels can be improved to enable them effectively engage with the children's education. It is hoped that the findings and conclusions of this study would be useful in providing information for education managers and policy-makers. At the local level of the Effutu Municipality, in sharing their experiences of involvement, parents, teachers and members of the wider community might be better informed as they work together to establish the school as an institution that can be of benefit to all. Accordingly, education managers might wish to employ the recommendations of this study to improve parental involvement in schooling, especially in the most deprived areas of the country. Similarly, the study might assist education policy-makers to identify obstacles to effective sector development, which could result in recommendations for improved practice.

Also, the study would contribute to limited literature on the parents' literacy on their involvement in children's basic education in Ghana. The need for parental involvement in their children's schooling through active SMC and PTA membership is highly emphasised in the 1987 and 1995 Ghanaian education reforms (MoE, 2005). Therefore, the importance of this study lies in its potential to contribute to the literature by enhancing the grassroots influence – negative as well as positive – of parents on the education outcomes of their children in the Ghanaian context.

The findings would inform policy. Indeed, policy-makers at both state and local levels might be interested in the results of this study in terms of assessing the degree of parental engagement in education and future planning around school based decision-making. School boards, principals, and GES officials could use the results of this study to inform their practices, and make necessary changes in the administration of the SMCs and PTAs.

1.6. Definition of Key Terms

Parents: The biological father, mother or guardian of the learner. It includes other members of the family, such as grandparents, older siblings, aunts and uncles who undertake to fulfil the obligation of a pupil or learner at school.

Literacy: The skill to recognize, understand and use text in reading and writing.

Basic Education: Since education reform in 2007, basic education in Ghana has consisted of six years of primary school and three years of junior high school (JHS). A preparatory two-year kindergarten programme for children aged four to five became part of the mainstream education system in 2002. Formal basic education is thus now expected to begin at the age of 4 and end at the age 15 (Ministry of Education Science and Sports (MOESS), 2005).

2. RELATED LITERATURE REVIEW

The review delves into theoretical and empirical review of the study.

2.1. Theoretical Framework

2.1.1. Cultural Capital Theory

Bourdieu (1990) cultural capital theory illustrates intergenerational transfer of culture including educational opportunities from parents to the child that may result in success or failure of the basic school going child. Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital claims that one's home background can exert influence on pupil's failure or success. The theory argues that class position and class culture become a form of cultural capital. This discourse is relevant for the study as it highlights what an individual child derives from the home and what parents in particular are able to transmit to their children to determine their educational outcomes. In this study, parents' influence based on their education and literacy skill levels are counted as variables for ensuring children's learning in both formal and informal communication (Rogoff, 2003).

The literature review focuses on the nature of literacy skill levels, effects of parents' education and literacy skill levels on children's basic education and available strategies of improving the education and literacy skill levels for active engagement with children's basic education.

2.2. Nature of Literacy Skill Levels in Ghana

In 2008, only 51 per cent of adults in Ghana were able to read and write in English or a local language; substantial differences exist between the sexes, just over six out of ten men, but only four out of ten women were literate (Ghana Statistical Service (GSS), 2008). Whilst 47 per cent of adult males are literate in both English and a local language, the corresponding figure in respect of their female counterparts is only 28 percent. There is also a disparity in literacy levels between urban and rural areas; about 70 percent of adults in towns and cities are literate, whilst only 40 percent of rural dwellers are literate (GSS, 2008). This is likely to have implications for parental involvement in their children's education. Only 48.5 per cent of adults in the Effutu Municipality are considered to be literate, about 31 per cent of the adult population has never enrolled in school, and just 22 per cent attended school regularly between the ages of 6 and 14 years (GSS, 2000). Rural parents in Ghana because of their low literacy levels have little or limited interest in their children's education as opposed to urban households (Ministry of Education, 2002).

2.3. How the Parental Education and Levels of Literacy Skill Affect Children's Basic Education

Children's academic performance is closely linked to their parents' educational levels (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003; UNESCO, 2008). This suggests that children require families that can provide them with adequate education to enable them perform creditably in their school work.

The low literacy levels limit the active parental involvement in children's education (Adam, 2005; Donkor, 2010). This implies that parents with low literacy level might have the will to assist children with their learning but are constrained by their own limited formal education (Adam, 2005; Donkor, 2010). Although parents are not obliged to communicate in English at most official fora, that is the preferred medium. As a result many who are unable to read, speak or write in English are compelled to be mere spectators at most official gatherings (Adam, 2005; Donkor, 2010). A similar situation pertains in the Parliament of Ghana where some representatives are described as 'mute MPS' because they hardly contribute to debates on the floor of Parliament. This is in spite of the fact that the Country's 1992 Constitution does not insist on English as the sole medium of communication. English language is an issue in terms of home learning and it is the language used in the formal structures and therefore alien to many parents (Opoku-Amankwa, 2009) some of whom are also not literate in their own language. The GES policy on language at parent meetings stipulates that as much as possible medium of communication be done in the local dialect to ensure free expression of views and participation (Ghana Education Service, 2001). However, a communication gap between the school and its community will invariably create a barrier to parental involvement in children's education (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003; Adam, 2005; Dampson and Mensah, 2010).

The Non-Formal Education division of the Ministry of Education was established in 1991 tasked to carry out the eradication of illiteracy in Ghana by the year 2011. The statistics available indicate that through functional literacy programme, national literacy rate has currently been reduced from 69 % to 52 % (MoESS, 2005).

2.4. Conceptual Framework

The study has two set of variables: parents' levels of education and literacy skill on one hand and children's basic education on the other. Parents' level of education is expressed in terms of access to formal education, for example, Middle school, Junior High School, Senior High School, College of Education and University education and that of literacy skill levels cover skill to recognise, understand, use texts in reading and writing. As discussed in

the literature review, parents' influence based on their education and literacy skill levels may result in success or failure of the basic school child. The variables are presented in Fig 1.

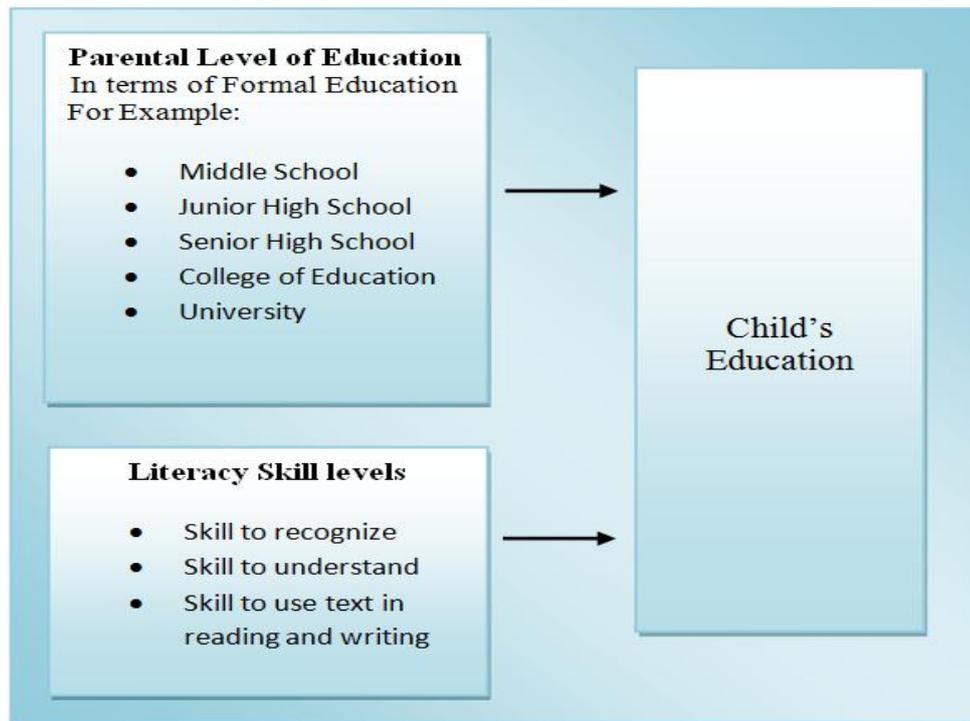


Figure-1. Research Conceptual Framework

Source: Designed by Researcher, 2018

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Case Study

The study was qualitative, specifically a case study. According to Yin (2009) “the case study design facilitates an empirical inquiry well suited to investigating a contemporary phenomenon in-depth and within its real life context particularly when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly drawn” (Yin, 2009). One of the major reasons for opting for the case study approach is that quite a small number of carefully selected respondents in a specific instance can provide information that is close up and highly context-specific (Yin, 2003; Kusi, 2012). According to Gall *et al.* (2007) “a case study is the in-depth study of one or more instances of phenomena in the real-life context that reflects the perspective of the participants involved in the phenomenon”. This was helpful as it assisted to achieve the purpose of the study which was to explore the influence of parents' education and literacy skill levels on their involvement in children's basic education in the Effutu Municipality.

3.2. Case Selection and Access Issues

Ghana is a country in sub-Saharan West Africa. It was the first country in the sub-Saharan West Africa to gain independence from British colonial rule in 1957. English, however, is the official language, a legacy of colonialism (Opoku-Amankwa, 2009). Administratively, Ghana's basic education system falls under the authority of the Ghana Education Service (GES) of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport (MOESS). Although concerns about parents' education and literacy skill levels on their children's education have been expressed nationwide, the study focused on parents in the rural Effutu municipality in the Central region of Ghana. The study was conducted in two school communities in the Winneba East educational circuit of the Effutu municipality. According to the Poverty Profile of Ghana in the 1990s, Central Region is the poorest region in southern Ghana (GSS, 2000). Vulnerability to poverty in Effutu Municipality is further deepened by low returns on fishing which is the major occupation of the people of Effutu Municipality (Brown, 2005). The

municipality has a total population of 68,597, which amounts to about 3.1 per cent of the total population of the region (GSS, 2010). The economic activities of the Municipality are farming and fishing, with full occupational distribution showing that 49 per cent are involved in fishing, 22 per cent in farming and 29 per cent in commerce (GSS, 2010). The municipality has three educational circuits namely Winneba East, Winneba West and Winneba Central. The choice of Effutu Municipality for this study was informed by the fact that in most rural areas, school children engage in commercial activities, mostly to support their families and themselves (Casely-Hayford, 2002; MoE, 2005). Considering the potential impact this could have on schooling and parental involvement in education, it seemed useful to explore how this challenge was addressed. Two schools that represented the municipality's two broad livelihood profiles' engagement in fishing and farming (School 1) and trading and commerce (School 2) were selected for the study with the assistance of the Municipal Director of Education.

A letter was written to the Effutu Municipal Education Directorate for permission to conduct the study in that setting. Also letters were sent to parents in the two school communities to seek their informed consent. Data gathered were kept confidential and anonymity of the participants was protected. Responses of the participants were audio-recorded with their permission. Figure 2 below shows the geographic location of the study district.

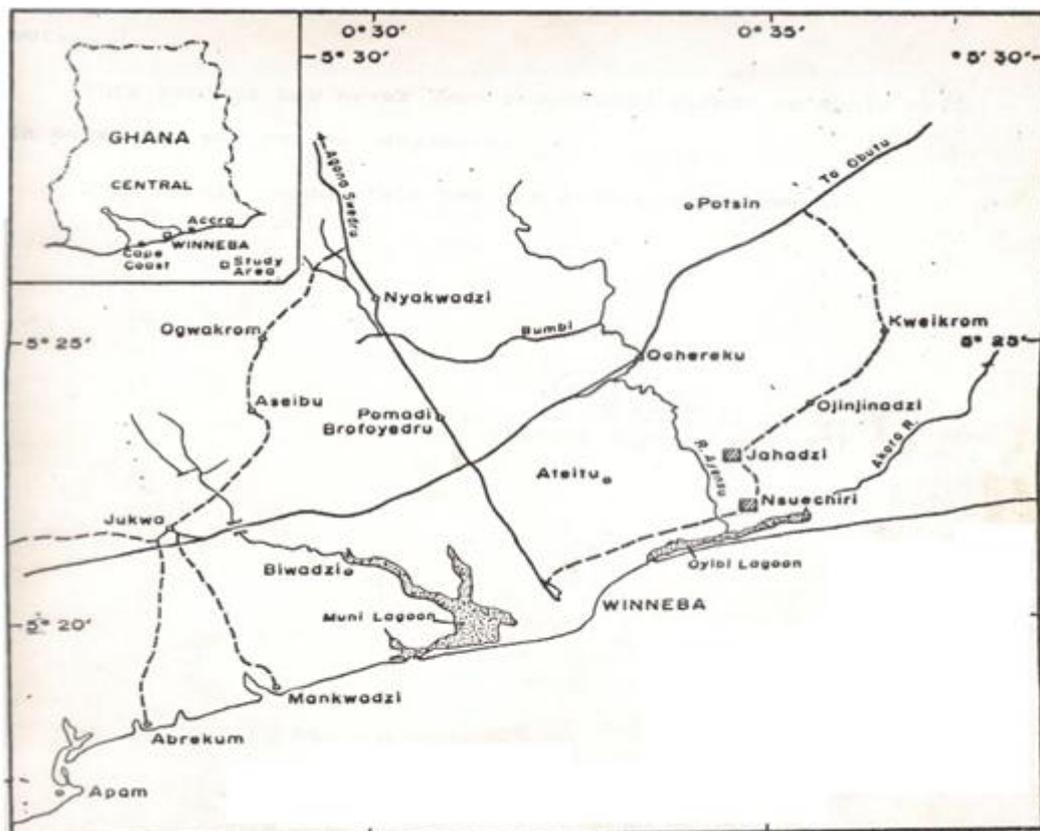


Figure-2. Map of Ghana showing the Study District

Source: Ghana Districts, Effutu Municipal Assembly, Annual Report (2008)

3.3. Population, Sample and Sampling Techniques

The population of the study consisted of all parents in the Effutu Municipality in the Central Region of Ghana. The sample consisted of twelve individual parents and twelve teachers in two school communities in the Effutu Municipality. Johnson and Christenson (2004) suggest that six to twelve participants can be used to provide rich in-depth data concerning a research topic in a qualitative study. In selecting participants, 12 parent interviewees were aimed at, six from each school community based on purposive or judgemental sampling. This involved a broad representation of the term 'parent' and a mix of literate and illiterate individuals since available literature in Ghana supports the inclusion of all education levels in parental engagement in basic schooling (GSS, 2008; GSS, 2010).

Parents were identified for interview by means of the snowball method of sampling. With this method, the researcher gains access to prospective study participants through contact information supplied by those already engaged (Blaikie, 2000). According to Noy (2008) in order to generate a sample consisting of a specific group of participants, the researcher must rely on the assistance of an actual informant to identify other individuals for interview, who, in turn, become informants themselves. Cohen *et al.* (2007) indicate that the snowball is useful in a context in which it is difficult to obtain access to a given population due to the sensitive nature of the research topic. The snowball sampling was thus adopted to select twelve parents in the Winneba East educational circuit of the municipality for the study due to difficulty in gaining access to participants with limited involvement unaided. There was a methodological challenge here as the saturation point of the snowball could not be reached.

3.4. Data Collection

Semi-structured interview data was analysed through development of interview guides to explore issues about the parents' literacy skill levels on their involvement in children's basic education. The instrument (interview guides) were piloted with two parents in Gomoa West District. This was chosen for the pilot exercise because parents have similar characteristics as those in Effutu municipality which had the potential to ensure reliability of the instrument for the main study. The decision to undertake one-to-one interviews with parents hinged on the belief that they could provide deeper insight into their involvement in basic education and the implications of this for ensuring positive school outcomes for their children. Dunne *et al.* (2005) assert that interviewing amounts to talking with people, and getting their views and their interpretation of the social context. This was necessary in order to elicit a wide range of responses from the parents and school staff. Each parent thus selected was interviewed once on the understanding that I might need to conduct a short follow-up session to clarify anything outstanding if this seemed appropriate and the participant was willing. A conversational style was adopted so that the participant would feel free to speak his or her mind. Such a style of interviewing was appropriate and effective because the respondents were able to relate to me in the vernacular. This technique also generated a series of responses that drew out the respondent's own interests. Teachers in the study schools were also interviewed to provide deeper insight into some of the issues raised. A power dynamic applied to me as an indigene of the municipality and also a lecturer from the university located in the study area which had potential to place a limitation on the amount of information the participants especially teachers could freely provide. I guarded against my impression of superiority, appearance and composure to deal with my positionality as an insider. I also assured the participants of confidentiality and anonymity of their information.

3.5. Data Analysis

Data through interview schedules were analysed qualitatively. Question by question approach was used for the analysis. This approach enabled me to organise the data across all the respondents in the two school communities to identify similarities and differences. The process of data analysis began after all the audio-recorded parent interviews had been fully transcribed.

The process involved in data transcription and analysis was as follows: parent interview data in school 1 and 2 communities were transcribed and analysed, comparing and contrasting data to identify emerging themes. The first step was the identification of codes. Coding has been described as a means of identifying and labelling concepts and phrases in interview transcripts and field notes (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Every response of each participant was checked and assigned a code, a process that generated several codes for the interview transcript. The initial codes were listed on separate sheets of paper after which they were compared, sorted and grouped. The groups of codes were then summarised into broad themes for the analysis.

3.6. Validation of Findings

Findings were validated through cross case flow of information about similarities and differences in issues raised by parent and teacher interviewees.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Table-1. Details of Parent Participants

| Relationship to Pupil (Role) | | School 1 | School 2 |
|------------------------------|--------------|----------|----------|
| | Mother | 4 | 2 |
| | Father | 2 | 3 |
| | Other (Aunt) | 0 | 1 |
| | Total | 6 | 6 |

Source: The author (Field data, 2017)

Twelve parents of the pupils were interviewed, six at School 1 and six at School 2. Of these, seven were women and five were men. There were more women in School 1 than School 2. Four were mothers and two were fathers at School 1. Two were mothers; three were fathers and one aunt (an extended family member) in School 2 which reflects the definition of a parent in this context as indicated in chapter one. Details of parent participants are as shown in Table 1.

Table-2. Education and Literacy Skill Levels of the Parent Sample

| Name of Parent | Child's School | Educated Yes/No | Literate Yes / No | Level of Formal Education |
|----------------|----------------|-----------------|-------------------|---------------------------|
| Parent 1 | School 2 | No | No | None |
| Parent 2 | School 1 | Yes | Yes | JHS |
| Parent 3 | School 2 | Yes | Yes | TTC |
| Parent 4 | School 2 | Yes | Yes | SHS |
| Parent 5 | School 1 | No | No | None |
| Parent 6 | School 2 | Yes | Yes | Polytechnic |
| Parent 7 | School 2 | Yes | Yes | SHS |
| Parent 8 | School 1 | Yes | Yes | Middle School |
| Parent 9 | School 1 | No | No | None |
| Parent 10 | School 2 | No | No | None |
| Parent 11 | School 1 | Yes | Yes | JHS |
| Parent 12 | School 1 | No | No | None |

SHS- Senior High School. JHS- Junior High School. TTC- Teacher Training College

Source: The author (Field data, 2017)

Table 2 draws out parental involvement relationship with education and literacy skill levels. The data in the Table highlights that the majority of parents of pupils in School 2 sample were more educated and literate than those in School 1. As indicated in the literature review, when parents are educated and literate, their pattern of influence on their children's education in various ways tend to differ from parents with low or no formal education (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003; Feuerstein *et al.*, 2008). This implies that parental education and literacy skill levels are more likely to affect involvement in their children's education.

4.1. How Parents' Education and Literacy Skill Levels affect Children's Education

Parent respondents were mostly of the view that the reason for sending their children to school was to enable them to receive the best education possible given the prevailing contextual socio-economic constrictions of the communities and their residents. In view of this, many believed that the responsibility for providing a high standard of basic education rested with the professionals, as one parent, a father exemplified:

I'm a trader who has not been to the classroom before but seeing some benefits associated with schooling in my community, if my child brings an assignment

home, how do I assist him or her since I do not know a, b, c...? What I can do is ask someone well versed in the subject-area to assist [PI 5 (School 1)].

Another parent, a mother, explained:

I've been a trader all my life, engaged in buying and selling firewood. I attended school up to class one and so it would be extremely difficult for me to assist my child in his or her homework since I'm not formally educated. I fall back on an educated cousin to attend on my behalf [PI 10 (School 2)].

The above quotes indicate that parents with low literacy level and limited formal education were less likely to assist children with their home assignments. The GES policy expects parents to assist with children's home work (GES, 2001) but the reality about the nature of parents' literacy and formal education made it difficult for its implementation showing a gap between policy and practice.

The interview results again indicated that the majority of parents expressed concerns about their inability to help with their children's homework due to little formal education and preoccupation with other jobs. Such parents tended to rely on family members (siblings, cousins, etc.) for support of homework. One parent, a mother, had this to say:

I wish I could help with my children's homework but I do not have formal education, I cannot read neither can I write and so I ask my siblings, cousins or friends who have completed schooling to assist [PI 12 (School 1)].

Another parent shared similar sentiment:

Teachers forget that most of us in the rural communities are not educated but expect us to be involved in the monitoring and supervision of our children's homework. It is extremely difficult to assist due to lack of capacity to undertake the role [PI 1 (School 2)].

This suggests parents' inability to assist with children's homework due to little or no formal education which makes them to rely on their siblings or cousins who have formal education to help most importantly in the area of supervision and monitoring. This implies that many illiterate parents tend to rely largely on siblings, relatives and community members for literacy and educational support indicating the importance of the extended family system or community network.

Teachers noted that absence of clear written policy on homework made it difficult for them and parents to know exactly how to go about home assignments in class. For example, one teacher noted: Even though there is no clear policy on homework which is a bother, we do assign pupils with it and expect parents to sign or thumbprint [Teacher interviewee (School 2)].

One head teacher explained:

Assigning homework is one thing and pupils doing it with the help of parents is another thing. Most parents are unable to assist their children due to illiteracy and limited formal education [Teacher Interviewee (School 1)].

The findings revealed that little formal education made it difficult for parents to help with their children's homework. Literacy level of parents is likely to affect assistance with homework.

Teachers noted that most parents in the communities have little or no education making it difficult to monitor and supervise children's home work. One head teacher explained:

In this community, most of the parents are illiterate or have limited formal education. So, most often than not they are unable to assist their children with their homework [Teacher interviewee (School 2)]

Another head teacher remarked:

Children in this community do not do their homework very often. When questioned, they tend to say their parents do not have formal education to assist them with their homework and that they even write letters on their behalf [Teacher interviewee (School 1)]

The findings reveal that low literacy level among parents poses a great challenge in the monitoring and supervision of children's homework which corroborates the claims in the parent interviews.

Interviews with teachers revealed that in spite of illiteracy or limited formal education of parents, they endeavoured to assist with homework with the help of their literate family members, siblings and friends. One teacher noted:

Even though most of the parents are illiterate or have limited formal education, they make sure their siblings and other family members assist with the monitoring and supervision of children's homework [Teacher Interviewee (School 2)]

Another teacher added:

Interestingly, some parents in spite of their limited formal education or illiteracy background show interest in their children's homework by asking literate family members and friends to assist [Teacher interviewee (School 1)]

The findings reveal that parents' limited formal and illiteracy background did not deter them from active interest in their children's homework showing the importance of family and community networks in children's education

Parent interviews revealed that parents with formal education and literacy skills assisted children with reading of textbooks, story books and spoke English which is the official language with them. One parent had this to say:

I make sure I assist my ward to solve Mathematical problems involving Addition and subtraction. While in school I did a lot on that and won many prizes [PI 2 (School 1)]

Another parent commented:

I speak English with my ward at home and also assist in writing of English Composition and answering of comprehension questions. I mark the work Myself [PI 6 (School 2)]

The quotes above suggest that parents with formal education and literacy skills were more likely to assist with children's studies at home.

Teachers indicated that parents with formal education and literacy skills ensured often that their children complete their homework and assist with studies as well. One teacher explained:

Educated parents assist with their children's homework and go to the extent of helping them solve mathematical problems which manifest in the quality of their homework submission [Teacher interviewee (School 2)]

Another teacher also commented:

Parents with formal education need to be commended for their assistance to their children's homework and effort to collect library and story books for them [Teacher interviewee (School 1)]

The quotes above corroborate the claim in the parent interviews about the capacity of parents with formal and literacy skills to assist with their children's homework and studies.

4.2. Ways to Improve Parental Education and Literacy Skill Levels

Parent Interviews (PIs) revealed the need for adult literacy education. The majority of parents with limited formal education and low literacy levels suggested the organisation of adult basic literacy class to enable them raise the educational status of their household. For example, one parent indicated:

If the school is able to organise adult classes for us, we will be able to at least read a, b, c etc to assist in our children's homework and follow issues discussed at PTA meetings [P 12 (School 1)]

This suggests parents confidence in the school's ability to assist improve their literacy skills level through adult classes. The implication is that parents will be able to assist their children with their homework with the knowledge acquired from the adult classes

Teacher interview supported the need for adult literacy classes for parents. One teacher explained:

We support the move for adult literacy classes to be given needed attention by the government as this would relieve us from the trouble of going over homework which is supposed to be supervised and monitored by parents [Teacher interviewee (School 1)]

This implies teachers' support for the reinforcement of adult literacy class policy to enable parents assist children with their homework or assignment.

Another parent had this to say:

Schools should identify those of us who are educationally handicapped and organise classes for us over the weekend. This will encourage us to freely communicate with the school, accept appointment to serve on PTA offices but as it is now, language is a barrier [P 1 (School 2)].

Teacher interview raised the need for special classes or training for parents to enable them accept responsibility to serve on PTA and SMC. One teacher remarked:

At PTA and SMC meetings, most parents refuse to accept responsibilities for fears of being asked to speak or write simple English. We believe special classes for them can deal with this challenge [Teacher interviewee (School 2)]

The above quote supports the call for special classes to assist parents to be able to speak and write simple English at PTA and/ or SMC meetings

Similarly, another parent remarked:

Even though most often than not we rely on literate relatives and community members for assistance in our children's home and school work in this community. It will be better the school takes us (illiterate parents) through a kind of training or classes to be able to do the work [P 5 (School 1)]

This suggests that parents in spite of their illiteracy or limited formal education wished they had the means to be able to assist children with their home and school work. It also implies parents' confidence in adult literacy classes or training to enable them actively participate in their children's education.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study revealed that parents' low literacy and limited formal education posed a great challenge in their children's education, however, when parents are eager to see their wards through formal education, their own illiterate status does not become a handicap as they tended to rely on extended and family members for assistance implying that illiterate parents are interested in their children's education.

Based on the conclusion above, the study therefore recommends that policies on education decentralization must reflect greater consideration of contextual factors including parental literacy and education background which impact on their involvement in children's basic education. The study re-echoes the intensification of adult literacy policy to cover illiterate or parents with limited formal education.

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