



THE ROLE OF PARENTS IN ENHANCING STUDENTS' ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN RWANDAN NINE YEARS BASIC EDUCATION A CASE STUDY OF NYAGATARE DISTRICT, RWANDA

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to analyse “the role of parents in enhancing students’ academic performance in Rwandan nine years basic education” especially at G.S.BUFUNDA in Nyagatare District where the research was conducted. We drew upon Epstein (2002) Parental involvement framework to examine how Rwandan parents participate in their children’s education and the challenges they encounter when they try to be involved. This research would be useful because the results and recommendations may contribute in increasing the level of parent participation to the teaching/ learning processes in improving academic performance of student in secondary schools. The study utilized mixed methods that integrated both qualitative and quantitative approaches. A questionnaire was administrated to parents, students and teachers while interviews were conducted with school administrators (Headteacher and Director of education at sector level).The results of this study indicated that a small number of parents of Mukama sector are not involved in their children’s education, they participate at moderate level. Parents were not doing well on issues related to their participation in school different activities because of different challenges such as: Low level of education and illiteracy, lack of time, lack of family basic needs and parents’ lack of confidence etc. It is recommended that since the rate of parental participation in enhancing children’s academic

performance is low, school authorities need to organize for seminars and workshops to parents on the importance of their participation in school related programs that enhance the academic performance of the children.

Introduction

Children's education begins from birth, with parents as their first teachers and role models. Parents play a critical role in providing a learning bridge between school and the home, while instilling in their children positive attitudes and values towards learning and life. Parent engagement in their children's upbringing and education is thus crucial for a child's holistic development (Manzon, et al., 2015). Families are the first educators of their children and they continue to influence their children's learning and development during the school years and long afterwards. Parents engage in their children's education in many ways at home, in the community and in schools (Jennings and Bosch, 2011). According to Price (2002), students whose parents are highly involved in their education tend to perform better and have fewer behavioural problems. A historical overview indicates that several legislations were passed to support parental involvement practices in schools; as early as 1642 when Massachusetts colony passed a law that required parents to be actively involved in their children's education to reduce poor performance in the classroom (Pulliam and Patten, 2007). Parental involvement is an important consideration for school personnel while according to Wilson and Gross, (2018), awareness and understanding of how parents' educational involvement

affects children's learning and academic success are also of paramount importance.

In England, parents are being urged to visit schools and to talk to the teachers about their children's work. This ensures that the parents get an accurate idea of how their children are performing and these visits are more profitable than report records sent home, (Farrent, 1980). There are a number of parents who are keen to learn about the progress of their children while others seem to have very little interest in what their children are doing and never visit the school.

In Africa, the issue of parental involvement has been taken seriously in some countries though its progress is not as expected. In South Africa, for instance, there is an educational transformation which is associated with parental involvement rather than their exclusion. Following the 1994 democratic elections, a new educational system was established in order to create equity amongst all racial groups in South Africa. In order for this to be successful, a National Department and nine provincial departments of education were established. Parental involvement in their children's schooling was encouraged through legislations such as the South African Schools Act in 1996 (South Africa, DoE, 1996). The Act made a conducive environment for the

parents to involve effectively and become important partners in the education of their children.

In Kenya, the government has acknowledged the need to improve the learning environment by involving parents. National Council for Law Report (2013) was enacted necessitating the school Boards of Management to evaluate school needs with full participation of parents. Thus, in Kenya, parents have been involved and the government passed an Act which states that there should be full participation of parents in education for future development. However, despite the existence of such law in Kenya, parents still do not understand their role in enhancing academic performance of their children.

In Rwanda, students in secondary schools had low performance between 2005 and 2007 (MINEDUC, 2009). In Nyagatare District, especially, the results from national examinations have proved the low performance. In Rwanda, MINEDUC focuses on flash or effective collaboration of different stakeholders to ensure the quality of education by stating interaction, collaboration and cooperation among parents/guardians, teachers, and secondary school principals is seen as the paramount apparatus for academic performance (MINEDUC, 2012).

The concept of parental involvement in children's education seems to be new in Rwanda and mainly in rural areas like Mukama sector where many parents are not

well educated. In Rwanda and overseas, the majority of parental engagement programs and strategies have been targeted at low-income communities where educational participation and achievement tend to be lower. As implication, parents decide to engage when they understand that collaboration is part of their role as parents, when they believe they can positively influence their child's education and when they perceive that the child and the school wish them to be involved (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 2005). Hence, such a situation motivated us to undertake this research to come up with tangible facts and seek how parents can be made aware of their role following their children education.

However, as stated previously parents in most rural Rwandan areas are less educated or not educated at all, with some financial constraints to sustain their families. The fact that parents are always striving to earn their daily lives may lead them to forgetting the other role of making a follow-up of their children education not only because of the ignorance, but also because of poverty. Hence, this paper seeks to address that part of the research gap and represents a modest attempt to explore the importance of parental involvement in children's education and is intended to answer the following research questions:

- How are parents involved in academic activities of their children?
- What are the barriers to parents in enhancing academic performance?
- What is the relationship between parental participation and the students' academic performance?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter deal with literature review in the line with past studies, theoretical review and conceptual framework on the role of parents in enhancing students' academic performance. The researcher's interest is to find out what other people have written, or other related documented materials that may help researcher to understand the depth of the problem under investigation.

1. The theory of Epstein

Epstein (1995, 2001) argued that school, family, and community are important sphere of influence on children's development and that a child's educational development is enhanced when these three environment work collaboratively toward shared goals. Epstein encourages school to create greater overlap between the school, home and community, through the implementation of activities across six types of involvement:

Parenting: includes all of the activities that parents engage in to raise happy, healthy children who become capable students. Unlike teachers, whose influence on a child's is relatively limited, parents maintain a life-long commitment to their children. Activities that support this type of involvement provide information to parents about their child's development, health, safety, or home conditions that can support student learning.

Communicating: Families and schools communicate with each other in multiple ways. Schools send home notes and flyers about important events and activities. Parents give teachers information about their child's

health and educational history. A school website is an additional mode of communication with parents and families. Includes: conferences with every parent at least once a year, language translators to assist families as needed, regular schedule of useful notices, memos, phone calls, newsletters, and other communications.

Volunteering: applies to recruiting and organising help and support from parents for school programmes and students' activities. There are three basic ways that individuals volunteer in education. First, they may volunteer in the school or classroom by helping teachers and administrators as tutors or assistants. Second, they may volunteer for the school; for instance, fundraising for an event or promoting a school in the community. Finally, they may volunteer as a member of an audience, attending school programmes or performances.

Learning at home: Pertains to providing ideas and information to parents about how they can best assist their children with homework and curricular-related decisions and activities. Parents helping their children with homework or taking them to a museum are examples of this type of involvement. These activities produce a school-oriented family and encourage parents to interact with the school curriculum. Activities to encourage learning at home provide parents with information on what children are doing in the classroom and how to help them with homework.

Decision making: refers to including parents in school decisions and to developing parent

leaders and representatives. Parents participate in school decision making when they become part of school governance committees or join organizations, such as the parent/teachers association. Other decision-making activities include taking on leadership roles that involve disseminating information to other parents.

Collaborating with community: Identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development. Information for students and families on community health, cultural, recreational, social support, and other programs/services is an interesting collaborating with the community.

2. Implications of the school family and community partnerships

The enhancement of students' academic performance in Nyagatare secondary schools could be understood by applying the school family and community partnerships theory that claims the development of a child takes place at home, school and in the community; whereby the child is at the centre. The family, school, and community are the overlapping spheres or environments in which children develop (Epstein, 1995:706; Lemmer, 2012:84). Based on the school family and community partnerships theory, parents, schoolteachers, home, community, and peers have a greater impact on the academic performance of a student at school. In spite of this, the balance between parent's role and the school's role regarding the child's schoolwork should be in equilibrium, in order for a student to acquire good academic performance.

However, this denotes that the schoolteachers have to design measures to help parents in establishing a home environment that is conducive to the student's learning.

3. Benefits of parental involvement in schooling

Parents play a significant role in the academic achievement of primary and secondary students (van Deventer & Kruger, 2009:9). According to Van Deventer and Kruger (*ibid*), the enhancement in school academic performance, reduced dropout rates, a decrease in delinquency, and a more positive attitude towards the school are the benefits of parental role in education. The barriers affecting the student's academic performance expressed are based on a global academic perspective. A developing child undergoes social, cognitive, and an emotional dimension. Parents' behaviour could influence learner's performance. Bronfenbrenner (1986:724) states that parents' conduct at home could influence children's academic performance at school.

3.1 Demographic barriers on parents' role in enhancing students' academic performance

The present study regards demographic barriers as including social barriers (marital status of parents, availability of parents, gender and age child), environmental barriers (parents' level of education), and economic barriers (family income, parents' work status and availability of time to be involved) (Hayes, 2012:568). These barriers play a greater role on the performance of a child at

school (Bronfenbrenner, 1986:723). For example, children growing under poverty, a lack of learning environment and proper care at home are more likely to perform badly at school. Furthermore, children who do not get safety on the way to school and back possibly will bring their stress into the classroom and their stress can affect their performance and the performance of other learners.

3.2 The parents' state of health and availability of parents at home

The parents' state of health and availability or unavailability can serve as a barrier in involvement at school. Some parents do not attend school meetings owing to their state of health, time of the school meetings, and distance from the school to home and the unavailability of transport fare to attend the school meetings. Globally, there are families that are led by children owing to the dearth of their parents. Van Wyk and Lemmer (2007:301) support this point of view in their study, when stating, "HIV/AIDS orphans, and vulnerability of students are often observed as a barrier on parental involvement in the education of their children."

3.3 Socio-economic status of parents

According to Harris and Goodall (2008:277) the level of parent's involvement in their children's education is mostly influenced by socio-economic status. Harris and Goodall (2008:278) state, "Engaging all parents in children's learning improves both parental engagement and students' achievement." Bower and Griffin (2011: 77) claim that schools continue to struggle with increasing

parental involvement with learners of low socio-economic status.

3.4 Cognitive barriers

By cognitive barriers, this study refers to the level of academic support a child gets at home, in the family and in the community; the relationship between the child and family concerning school work. Children who do not get enough school resources from home are more likely to underperform at school. Parent involvement in organising resources for learning motivates the children's performance at school.

3.5 Parent linguistic and cultural background

Mncube (2009:83) states that parents with linguistic and cultural backgrounds different from those of the host culture are likely to be less actively involved in school activities compared to their 'mainstream' counterparts.

Walker, Ice, Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler (2011:411) are of the view that the English language is a barrier for parents to be involved in schooling. Limited parental education, poverty, discrimination, and residential instability are also contributors to the lack of parent's motivation for involvement in their children's schooling (Walker et al. 2011:411). Moreover, Mncube (2009:83) in his study on the role played by African parents in former model-C schools in decision-making initiatives in the school governing bodies reveals that language barriers affect parents in playing their role as mandated by legislation.

3.6 Parents' level of education

Mncube (2009:98) states that the level of education of parents in general, and the lack of parental knowledge on parent involvement in school activities were the major barriers presented in his study on parent involvement in school governing bodies. Walker et al. (2011: 411), substantiate Mncube's view when stating that "language barriers, limited parental education, poverty, discrimination, and residential instability are the cause of poor parental involvement". This clearly informs the school personnel to screen and recruit parents according to their readiness and capabilities before assigning duties in school activities and serving in the school governing body.

3.7 Curriculum difficulties

The older students' school subjects that may be unfamiliar to parents or that exceed their comfort levels or expertise (Elish-Piper, 2008:59) can serve as a barrier to parental involvement. However, students may disregard their parents in school matters because of the lack of academic support from them. Eventually the parent's inability to help their children may cause them to be lenient in controlling them regarding school affairs.

4. The strategies to improve parents' involvement in the children's education

To increase parent engagement in schools, it is essential for the educational stakeholders including the district, sector, schools and school staff and community partners to recognize the advantages of working together

to guide children's learning (Davies, 1983). All these stakeholders must make a positive connection with parents by providing a variety of activities and frequent opportunity to fully keep parent involved (Liontos, 1991).

4.1 Empowerment of parents

The mandatory involvement of parent in education will empower them to be equal partners in decision making. At the same time such empowerment will require them to be equipped with the kind of knowledge and skills necessary for dealing with educational issues in broader terms. Davies (1987) suggests that to overcome the organizational resistance, new legal mandates concerning parental involvement are necessary.

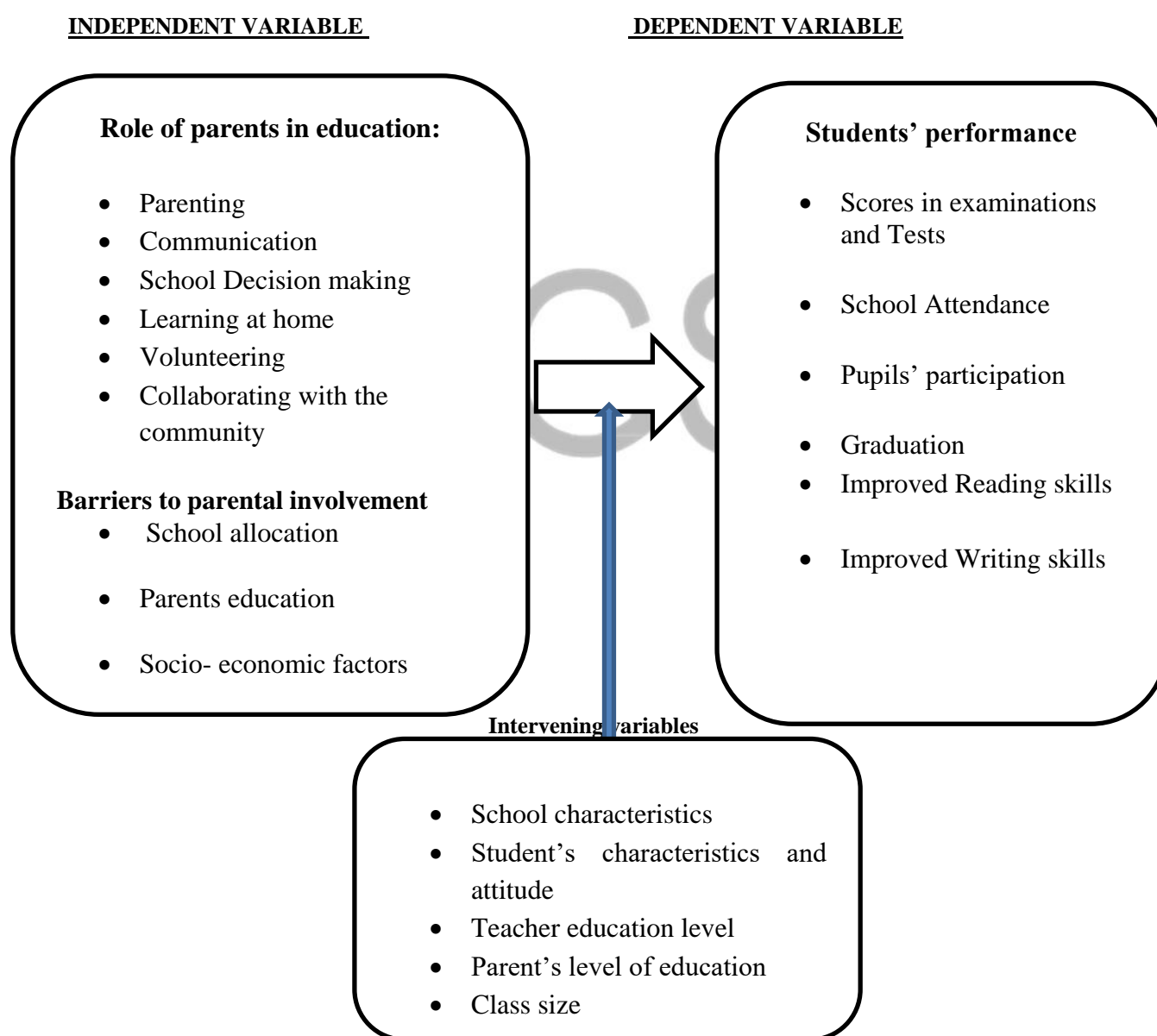
4.2 Administrators' support

It goes without saying that parents' involvement in education is inconceivable without the support of the administrators at the site and board levels. Chavkin and Williams (1987) have pointed out a number of ways whereby administrators can promote parents' involvement in education.

These include collaborating with parents to develop a clear statement about the goals of parents' involvement; formalizing and documenting policies encouraging parents' involvement by involving teachers and parents; participating in parents' involvement training activities, ensuring that parents are involved at all levels of educational system, establishing the framework for parents' involvement programs in a sequential form and making available the appropriate kinds of resources for parents' involvement efforts.

5. Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework that guided this study was the following:



Source: Researcher compilation, 2022

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1. Research design

The study employed mixed the research approach to organize the qualitative and quantitative data so as to deal with the research problem. Descriptive research design was used in recording, analysing and interpreting the quantitative data while the thematic approach was used to present the qualitative data.

2. Population and sampling

The population of this study was 182 where the sample size was 60 included thirty eight students from one Nine years basic education secondary schools whereby Simple random sampling was used to select them. Purposive sampling was used to select the one Headteacher and one Sector education inspector and fifteen teachers while five parents were selected through convenient sampling procedures.

3. Instruments and Validation

Data was gathered through a questionnaire, observation, data analysis and the interview schedule. The instruments were validated by two research experts from University of Kigali.

4. Ethical consideration

The researcher maintain a high degree of academic ethical values and ensure that measures are put in place to guard against and protect the research process to ensure it is successful. Such measures include: obtaining a letter of introduction from University of Kigali (UoK) seeking consent from management to carry out the research. The researcher would seek the permission for conducting the research from mayor of Nyagatare District where research will be conducted

Results and Discussion

1. Involvement of parents in school academic activities

As the first objective of this study was to find out the extent to which parents are involved in

education of their children in terms of six aspects among nine years basic education school in Nyagatare district. The findings are summarized in the following table.

Table 1: Involvement of parents in school academic activities

		Weighted mean	Standard deviation
Valid	Communication	1.86	0.865
	Decision making	2.216	0.946
	Learning at home	2.18	0.265

Volunteering	0.832	0.81
Collaboration with the community	1.04	0.573
Parenting	2.092	0.854

Source: primary data, 2022

Communicating

Table 1 indicates that, 1.86 mean (SD=0.865) respondents reported that parents never engage in communication. As the result, this may affect academic performance of the children.

The lack of parental involvement in communication was also indicated through the interview with Headteacher and sector education inspector. They revealed that:

Parents do not effectively cooperate with teachers. Most of them seem to lose hope and some of them are very lazy. As headteacher, I receive very little support from parents and when I call them to come so as to discuss different matter concerning students' academic performance, most of them don't show up.

Decision making

Another aspect for parental involvement is decision making whereby mean is 2.216 and S.d is 0.946 of respondents indicated that parents sometimes participate in decision making. This suggests that parents somehow participate in decision making regarding school related activities as majority of respondents admitted that the parents sometimes do participate. Through the interview with headteacher and Sector education inspector, they revealed that:

The issue of parental participation on decision making in my school is a problem as they sometimes participate but the majority of them do not. This trend affects our school because we need parents to be part of our decisions so as we can improve students' academic performance together.

Learning at Home

Supervision of learning at home is another important aspect of parental engagement. As reflected in Table 1, mean of 2.18 (Sd =0.265) of respondents indicated that parents never participate in supervision of students' learning at home. Therefore, majority of respondents revealed that the rate of parental participation in supervision of students' learning at home is very minimal despite the fact that participating in learning at home is very important since it enables parents to be closer to their children and at the end helps to improve children's academic performance. This finding was further supported by information from the interview schedule whereby headteacher and Sector education inspector revealed that:

Parents are not effectively involved in the learning process of their children at home, and this is due to the fact that most of them are very busy with economic activities, forgetting that they have also a responsibility of helping

their children so as to be able to improve their academic performance.

Volunteering

Table 1 further shows that a mean of 0.832 (Sd=0.81) of respondents reported that parents never volunteered at school activities. This suggests that the rates of parents volunteering in school development activities is very low and needs special attention. This was further emphasized by one of the respondents through interview: “When parents are asked to volunteer in school activities, most of them never respond. When they are asked to provide reasons, most of them say, they are busy in economic activities so as to generate money for their families. While volunteering activities are created to enable schools and community including parents to socialize and work together for the common goal of enhancing children’s academic performance, parents need to volunteer and be part of the school project activities. According to Bandura (1997), socialization is the agency of developing human behavior, and therefore parents as part of the society should be a good example to their children by volunteering in different activities which will make students to learn from them. In that way, students will be prepared to be active members in various aspects of community development.

Collaboration with Community

Table 1 further show the rate of parents’ collaboration with the community whereby mean of 1.04 (Sd = 0.573) of respondents revealed that parents never collaborate. These

results indicate that parents are not doing well on issues related to community participation even though there are many things which parents should work together with the community which are related with academic performance of the students. These include building classrooms and toilets, buying learning materials and solving different problem related to education.

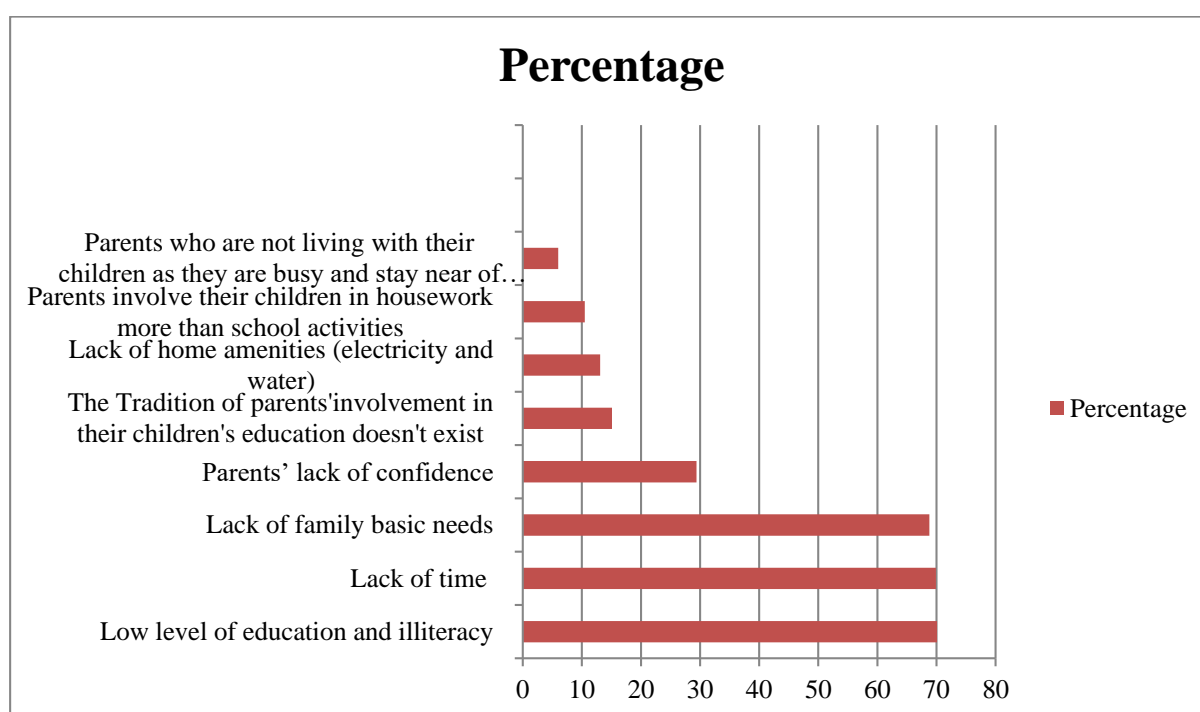
Parenting

Table 1 shows that, mean of 2.092 (Sd = 0.854) of respondents indicated that parents do not participate well in parenting. The finding suggest that parents are somehow not doing very well on the issue of parenting as a good number of parents do not play their parenting role effectively, which may hinder the effective academic performance of the children.

2. Barriers to parent in enhancing academic

The objective two was to investigate the barriers to parents in enhancing academic performance. Today’s parents are often preoccupied with the distractions and demands of daily life. Burdened by low-income, inflexible work hours and language barriers, some parents are unable to attend school activities or participate in the schooling of their children on a regular basis (Ho, 2009). Bæck (2010) as well as Lee and Bowen (2006) cite cultural norms, insufficient financial resources, and lack of educational attainment as barriers to parental involvement in school.

Table 2: Barriers to parent in enhancing academic



Source: Primary data, 2022

The data presented in Bar chart above gives the information on barriers against parental involvement in students' academic performance. Low level of education and illiteracy of the parent is the barriers confirmed by 70.1% the majority of respondents. Lack of time to be involved in their children's was reported by 69.9% respondents, lack of family basic needs and

school needs due family poverty by 68.9% and parents lack of confidence was reported by 29.4% respondents, etc.

In few words, it is observed that parents in G.S.Bufunda in Nyagatare District which may display the whole image of urban areas in Rwanda; parents face a lot of challenges in giving hand to their children 'education. Much

advocacy is still needed for parents to be

1. Relationship between parental participation and students' academic performance.

The third objective of this study was to establish the relationship between parental participation and students' academic performance. The involvement of parent was measured using six indicators meaning

aware of their role in their children education.

communication, school decision making, collaborating with the community, volunteering and learning at home. And the researcher found that is necessary to measure the relationship between each measurement of involvement and performance of students. The findings are summarised in the following table.

Table 3: Relationship between parental participation and students' academic performance.

			Students' Performance	Comments
Spearman's rho	Communication	Correlation Coefficient	0.580**	Positive relationship
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	Significant
		N	60	
	School Decision making	Correlation Coefficient	0.018	Positive relationship
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.004	Significant
		N	60	
	Learning at home	Correlation Coefficient	0.433**	Positive relationship
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.002	significant
		N	60	
	Collaboration with community	Correlation Coefficient	0.098	Positive relationship
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.001	Significant
		N	60	
	Parenting	Correlation Coefficient	0.877**	Positive relationship
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	significant
		N	60	
	Volunteering	Correlation Coefficient	0.632**	Positive relationship
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	significant
		N	60	

Source: Primary data, 2022

Table above, shows the relationship between involvement of parents in its six indicators and performance of students. There is a positive relationship between involvements of parents in terms communication on the correlation coefficient of 0.580 and that is statistically significant since the Sig. (2-tailed) p-value is less than 0.01, positive correlation between parents involvement in terms of school

decision making on the correlation coefficient of 0.018 and statically significant since the Sig. (2-tailed) p-value is 0.004 (less than 0.01), positive correlation between parents involvement in terms of learning at home on the correlation coefficient of 0.433 and statically significant since the Sig. (2-tailed) p-value is 0.002 (less than 0.01), positive correlation between parents involvement in

terms of collaboration with community on the correlation coefficient of 0.098 and statically significant since the Sig. (2-tailed) p-value is 0.001 (less than 0.01), positive correlation between parents involvement in terms of parenting on the correlation coefficient of 0.0877 and statically significant since the Sig.

(2-tailed) p-value is 0.000 (less than 0.01) . lastly there also is a negative correlation between parents involvement in terms of volunteering on the correlation coefficient of - 0.0632 and statically significant since the Sig. (2-tailed) p-value is 0.000 (less than 0.01) performance.

DATA COLLECTION THROUGH ANALYSIS DOCUMENTS

The researcher through analysing documents, analysed students' performance of Ordinary

level students in Mukama sector to find out the extent of performance of G.S.Bufunda under study. The findings are summarised in the following table.

Table 4: Students' performance level in 0'level schools of Mukama sector

SCHOOL	CANDIDATES	PASS	FAIL	%
G.S.HUNGA	26	24	2	92.30%
G.S.GIHEMGERI	29	26	3	89.6%
G.S.BUFUNDA	47	42	5	89.3%
G.S.GISHORORO	76	62	14	81.5%
G.S.NYAKAGARAMA	29	20	19	68.9%
TOTAL	207	174	33	84.09%

Source: Secondary data, 2022

Table above shows that G.S Hunga is the first performer at rate of 92.3%, G.S.Gihengeri is the second performer at a rate of 89.6% and G.S.Bufunda is the third performer at a rate of 89.3%.

There is a general low performance at G.S.Bufunda under study because it is on the third place and performs at a percentage of 89.3%.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This part presents the conclusions and then gives the recommendations of the study.

Conclusions

The study concludes that parents are somehow not doing very well on the issue of parenting as a good number of them did not play their role effectively, which may hinder the effective academic performance of the students. Parental role in communication with teachers is also not done well as a good

number of parents or never communicated with teachers to make follow ups regarding their students' education.

Furthermore, the rate of parents' volunteering in school development activities was very low and needs special attention. The rate of parental participation in supervision of students' learning at home was very minimal despite the fact that participating in learning at home is very important since it enables parents

to be closer to their children and at the end helps to improve children's academic performance. Parents participated in decision making regarding school related activities as majority of respondents admitted that the parents sometimes do participate.

Finally, parents are not doing well on issues related to community participation even though there are many things which parents should work together with the community which are related with academic performance of the students.

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Recommendations

Based on the conclusions of the study, it is recommended that since the rate of parental participation in enhancing children's academic performance is low, school authorities need to organize for seminars and workshops to parents on the importance of their participation in school related programs that enhance the academic performance of their children.

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