A STUDY OF PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT ON SCHOOL PERFORMANCE IN NYARUGENGE DISTRICT (2014-2019)

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Abstract: Primary school years present crucial opportunities for children's development and learning. Parents' engagement in their children's education is thus important since they are the first educators of their children. Most importantly, parents' engagement in the children's education enhances their academic outcomes. The purpose of this study therefore was to assess the impact of parents' engagement in their primary school children's education as influenced by: their socio-economic status, level of education, teachers' perception on parents' engagement and the strategies used by schools to promote parents' engagement in their children's primary school education. The study was guided by Epstein's Model of parents' engagement which describes six types of parents' engagement including: parenting, communication, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community. The study employed the descriptive research design and specifically used the survey method. The sample size constituted 4 primary schools, a similar number of head teachers, 12 students, 11 teachers, and 16 parents. The data collected from respondents, comprising students and teachers, was analyzed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages were used to analyze the data Interviews were also conducted with head teachers, students, education sector officials and parents. The results were presented in the form of tables and graph. Findings indicated that parents always participated in activities that required them to support their children financially. However, they moderately participated in other activities relating to education due to daily business engagements which paused a challenge to them thus limiting their capacity to engage themselves fully in their children's education. The study recommended to school Head teachers to involve parents in their children education by inviting them regularly in various school-based or school-related activities at time. It was recommended to teachers also to provide to students the homework regularly and request to children to ask to their parents for helping them while they are doing them.

Keywords: Primary school, children's education, children's development and learning.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. 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

Parents engage in their children's education in many ways in the home, the community and in schools. Good parenting in the home includes many different kinds of engagement including: providing a secure environment, providing intellectual stimulation and conversation, modelling constructive social and educational values, shaping the child's self-concept as a learner by fostering literacy and problem solving and encouraging high aspirations, both personally and socially.

In addition, parents may be engaged in their children's education in school contexts in a range of different ways – both formally and informally. Engagement is more than involvement. Some writers use the term family engagement while others speak of parent engagement. We use the term parent inclusively here to encompass caregivers and other family members. Regardless of which term is used, it is important to recognize that engagement is at the more active end of a participation continuum than is involvement and may be qualitatively different. Pushor and Ruitenberg (2005, p. 12-13) suggest the essential difference is that engagement implies: "...enabling parents to take their place alongside educators in the schooling of their children, fitting together their knowledge of children, teaching and learning, with teachers' knowledge. With parent engagement, possibilities are created for the structure of schooling to be flattened, power and authority to be shared by educators and parents, and the agenda being served to be mutually determined and mutually beneficial"

Harris and Goodall (2007) conclude that many schools focus on involving parents in various school-based or school-related activities, but emphasize that this constitutes parental involvement rather than parental engagement. Nonetheless, much of the research literature uses the two terms interchangeably.

Through engagement, rather than involvement, parents more strongly influence their children and promote the value of education through their leadership in the educational context. Educators who engage parents provide them an opportunity to step out of the roles that society ascribes to them, and re-write a new identity; modelling to their children new possibilities for their identities. Pushor & Ruitenberg (2005) highlight parent engagement as a transition from marginalization to leadership: "Everyone has the potential to be a leader"

Pushor & Ruitenberg (2005; Pushor & Murphy, 2004) have identified a clear distinction between involvement and engagement. Parent involvement includes activities such as helping their children with homework, chaperoning field trips and school events, volunteering at the school library, and reading with individual or groups of students, helping with bake sales, raffles, and assisting with the coordination of events or trips. Whereas involvement positions parents at the service of the school and the goals of educators, engagement enables them to take on a collaborative role alongside educators (Hands, 2013; Pushor & Ruitenberg, 2005), influencing the educational context through their relationships and potential contributions to policies, instruction and programming (Pushor & Murphy, 2004; Pushor & Ruitenberg, 2005). With this model, parents are recognized and respected as first and primary educators of their child (Pushor & Ruitenberg, 2005). As collaborators, parents share power, authority, and agenda with educators (Pushor & Ruitenberg, 2005).

Ongoing research shows that family engagement in schools improves student achievement, reduces absenteeism, and restores parents' confidence in their children's education. Students with involved parents or other caregivers earn higher grades and test scores, have better social skills, and show improved behavior.

Statement of the problem

Each student lives a different school life than he or she does at home. Some students find more structure at school than at home. A strong home base can have a significant impact on the student's academic performance. Students whose parents regularly participate in their learning generally have better academic results. They see that education is something to take seriously and do their best. Theoretically, a student whose parents are pushed to do his best at school will encourage his students at home and at school. These are the same parents who will help their children with homework and will be interested in what they are doing of course. If a child sees that his / her parents do not give or do not show importance to the school, the children, they will not also give value to the school. Some students do not receive this support and may need special attention during their studies to be able to follow their schoolwork and understand its importance.

Actualy, the things have changed. To feed their children, parent is being forced to work hard, long hours and spend less time with their children, and some time they go back home too later and spend day and night at work. The parents pass whole day and return home very tired and they don't offer any time their children. This leads to student being forced to teach themselves proper study techniques and work ethics. Teachers can only do so much to develop these habits, but they are much less likely to stick if they are not reinforced at home. Students need help with school. Homework is not the only task or things where students need help.

Today, the children don't benefit enough the support of their parents. The teachers cannot give all the support required on their own. Parents need to be part of the teaching, grooming, counselling process needed for students to perform and reap from education. The children are alone at home, their parents are in the business and don't think to the engagement in

their children education. The parents should get engaged in parent –teacher Association, school management committees, and many others, as these are the major decision making organs of school.

During this research, we will examine the relationship between parental engagement and student performance (achievement). This study will discover what constitutes a parent engaged and what effect this engagement has on a student at school and his daily life at home. This study will attempt to determine whether parents' participation in student homework, meetings, and regular visits to their elementary school children improves student achievement in general.

Specific objectives

i. To identify the parental engagement in their children education

ii. Find out teachers' perception on parents' involvement in Nyarugenge District

iii. To find out the barriers to parent engagement in primary schools

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Theoretical Review

There are many theories that relate to the subject matter. Research has been performed by many on the subject of parental involvement and its correlation to student achievement. In their article *Exploring Effects of Parental Involvement on Student's Achievement*, Tokac and Kocayörük (2012), outline many of the positive effects parents can, and do, have on their students. They believe that parental involvement is critical during the middle school years. The relationships young people form with their parents need to be positive in order to ensure a healthy development. The parents play possibly the largest role in helping young people become competent and achieve the ability to perform at a high level in school. (Tokac et.al, 2012) Parents have a profound effect on their student's ability to value school.

If parents don't find school to be of importance, it is likely that their child will echo their thoughts. According the article, *Why Parenting Is More Important Than Schools*, Paul (2012) cites studies performed by North Carolina State University, Brigham Young University, and the University of California – Irvine that indicate that "parental involvement – checking homework, attending school meetings and events, discussing school activities at home – has a more powerful influence on students' academic performance than anything about the school the students attend." (Paul, 2012, p. 1).

Schools will find themselves in a constant battle with their students if they can't enlist the help of the parents. Parents aren't always going to be the birth parents of the children. Parents are often considered to be primary caregivers for the student. (Kim, 2012)

In the article, *Parent Involvement and Family-School Partnerships: Examining the Content, Processes, and Outcomes of Structural versus Relationship-Based Approaches*, two models a parent can use to assist their children and become more involved are described. They listed various practices that parents can do at home to increase student performance called parent involvement models. They include things such as home literacy practices, communication, expectations, and rules and routines. Another model presented by was the family-school partnership model which is defined as "child-focused approaches wherein families and professionals cooperate, coordinate, and collaborate to enhance opportunities and success for children and adolescents across social, emotional, behavioral, and academic success." (Kim, E. M., Coutts, M. J., Holmes, S. R., Sheridan, S. M., Ransom, K. A., Sjuts, T. M., & Rispoli, K. M., 2012)

There are many ways for parents to become involved in their student's educational success. According to Tokac et.al (2012) "discussing children's progress with teachers on a regular basis, checking homework every night, reading to preschoolers, encouraging students to take the challenging courses." (Tokac et.al, 2012, p. 261) This is especially important in middle school as they are being prepared for high school where there is more freedom of courses and less of the teacher checking up on everything. The students with parents who perform these simple tasks are the ones who will be better suited for high school and beyond. (Tokac et.al, 2012)

Parents are the child's first teacher. They are an invaluable resource. However, when children enter school many parents begin to ask themselves how they can be positively involved in their children's education. They question the value of their involvement. Those who research school-community partnerships report that when the school welcomes parents and shows them how to improve their child's learning at home, they are far more likely not only to increase their student numbers but also to (Epstein, 1991:102)

Parents are the ones who give their children their views on school. Many things parents may not even consider to be influential are having lasting impacts on their children. Tokac and Kocayörük (2012), attest that when a parent has a positive attitude about school, it has been found that their children perform well based on that attitude. The main place a student obtains their attitude about school is out of school. The way their parents act about school usually translates through to student performance as well as their relationship with their teacher.

Model 1: The Parent Engagement Process

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1995; 1997; 2005; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Walker, Shenker, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2010) model takes the psychological perspective in explaining the process of parent engagement. This model explains why parents become involved in their children's education and how it influences student achievement and it illustrates the dynamics of why parents become engaged in their children's education and how it influences student achievement. It consists of five sequential levels.

Level 1 illustrates three factors that influence the type and frequency of parent engagement: personal, parents' perceptions of school openness and life context variables. **Level 1.5** shows four different forms of engagement that parents partake in, namely, expectations, home-based activities, home-school communication and involvement in school activities. **Level 2** demonstrates how parents contribute to their children's learning through encouragement, modelling, reinforcement, and instruction. **Level 3** expresses how children perceive their parents' actions. These perceptions need to be in line with their parents' intentions in order for their beliefs and behaviours to be felt and internalized. Thus, children need to reciprocate their parents' actions and intentions for the positive impacts of engagement to be achieved. **In Level 4,** children successfully acquire attributes that may lead them towards student achievement objectives at **Level 5**.

Model 2: Effective Parent Engagement

Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) identify two distinct types of parent engagement: spontaneous initiatives by motivated parents, and organized interventions by professionals to enhance spontaneous parent engagement. They designed a model that illustrates the dynamic process of effective spontaneous parent engagement and its interaction with school initiatives (see Figure 2). Resembling some aspects of Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler's (2005; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005) framework, this model illustrates the dynamic interactions among parents, students and school in a feedback loop rather than as a linear, unidirectional process. However, it does not explicitly recognize the importance of a trusting relationship between parents and schools.

Model 3: An Ecological Systems Model of Parent Engagement

The Bronfenbrenner's socio-ecological model of development recognizes multidimensional and multilevel influences on human development and their interconnections. Every level is interconnected as in an ecological system – represented visually as a set of concentric circles surrounding the child – and there is reciprocal influence across levels and systems.

The *microsystem* refers to a child's relationship with his/her immediate social environment, which includes settings such as day care, home and school. The *mesosytem* involves interactions between and among individuals (e.g., parents and teachers) and settings (e.g., afterschool programs, and/or schools) that comprise the *microsystem*. The *mesosystem* captures the connections and interlinks across a child's microsystems. The *exosystem* represents the contexts that influence the child's development indirectly (e.g., parents' workplace demands which reduce the time of parent-child interaction). At the broadest level of influence is the *macrosystem* comprised of the institutional patterns of culture, economy, political and social policy and dominant beliefs. Finally, the *chronosystem* captures the element of time both in the child's life trajectory and the influence of changes and continuities in the broader contexts surrounding the child. This model suggests that the child's well-being is the responsibility of not just families or schools, but also of the entire community. Weiss et al. (2010) present case studies of parent engagement occurring in each of these systems.

The above models have explained the factors–personal, school and socio-cultural–which influence parents' decision and quality of engagement, and how these correlate with the student's achievement and adjustment in school. They have also described the types of parent engagement possible. Ho and Kwong (2013) have proposed a more nuanced conceptual framework which captures the interplay of principals, teachers and parents in shaping diverse forms of school-home partnerships, and their overall impact on student achievement and engagement in the Hong Kong context. These schemas are helpful in mapping the international and local practices of parent engagement, which is the subject of the following two sections.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework clarifies the variables and establishes the relationship between them through analysis of their respective attributes. The two key variables in this work are Parental engagement and SP, being the independent and dependent variables respectively. This conceptual framework shows the impact by PE to SP in primary schools. There exist however other intervening or extraneous factors which contribute to academic achievement in primary schools.

Figure : Conceptual framework of the study variables:
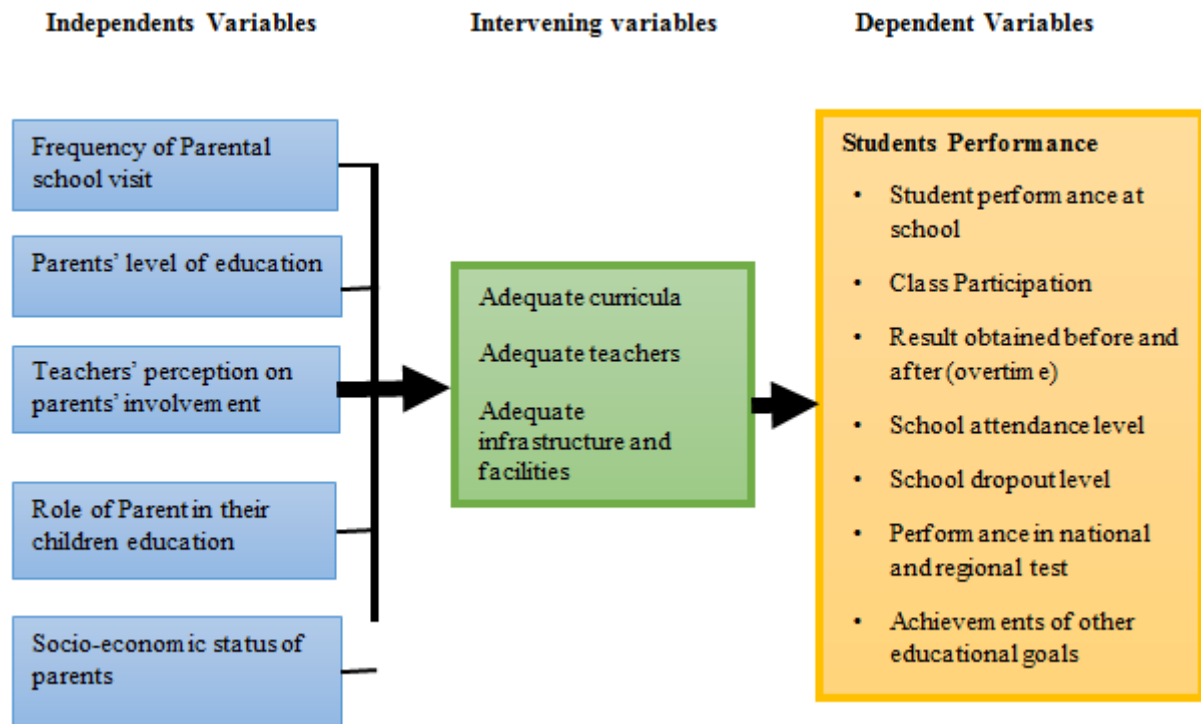
Source: Researcher 2019

Gap Analysis

Studies indicate that there are positive academic outcomes stemming from parental involvement with benefits beginning in early childhood throughout adolescence and beyond (Loomans, 2014). Parents' engagement in academic's benefits children and parents. Being actively involved in a child's education journey gives them motivation. Active engagement also gives parents a better understanding of the school curriculum and activities, which makes them more comfortable with the quality of education their child is receiving. In addition, children of involved parents tend to exhibit higher educational aspirations (Alba, Sloan, & Sperling, 2011).

Scholars have articulated that family and community participation in the education process can significantly have an impact school and student success (Fan & Williams, 2010). According to US-based online portal Education.com which empowers parents and teachers to help their children build essential skills and excel, parents' engagement in their children's activities helps children achieve more regardless of their background or parents' education level.

Parental involvement is a key element of children's success in learning both at home and at school. In addition, research studies on parental involvement in school show that some combined factors such as parents 'socio-economic status, educational level, teachers' perceptions of parental involvement, and strategies used by parents are important to improve parents' participation have been crucial to the level of parental involvement in their children's education.

It's known that students who have parents that are involved in their learning usually perform better in school. Theoretically, a student that has parents who push them to do their best in school will encourage their student at home as well as at school.

However, although various strategies have been documented to promote parental involvement, parental participation in Rwandan schools remains low. At present they are spending all day at work looking for food for the family. When they come home at night, they are so tired and have no time at all to ask the children how was school. Children are getting along themselves. Not only do parents not help their children to do homework, to revise homework, but they do not participate as they do in parent meetings organized by the school. They take the initiative to go to their children's teachers to see how children behave at school or how they study in class. In additional some families live in conflictual situations which lead to misunderstanding between parents. In this situation, only children are victims because they are left alone, no parent doesn't take time to be engaged in their children education some students don't have this support and might require extra attention during their time at school in order to keep up with their schoolwork and understand its importance

As for teachers, they say that parents have abandoned their children to teachers. Their perception of parental involvement is negative. This negative perception has provoked antagonistic reactions between parents and teachers.

Additionally, the issue is worsened by parents' beliefs about their engagement in education. There are some parents who believe that their role is only to get children to school, which then takes over responsibility for their education, will not be willing to be actively involved in either school-based or home-based parental engagement. This attitude is more prevalent in some communities and national cultures than others, but that there is considerable variation within these (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 1997).

The research studies conducted in Rwanda focused on primary school parent-teacher relations and socio-economic factors, but no study was conducted to study the impact of parent's participation on the students' performance in school. Therefore, this study will attempt to assess the parental involvement in Rwandan education and its impact on children's academic performance. The study will assess different factors affecting parents' engagement, involvement, understanding, and roles in raising children's academic performance. (McWayne & Melzi, 2014). This study will also examine perceptions around the issue and gather different views from educational stakeholders, including parents, teachers, educational authorities and children as well

3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Research design

As the survey research design was employed for the study, the researcher used unstructured and semi-structured interviews as well as questionnaires and document analyses to gather the required data from respondents. The design also involved using statistics available from other material sources. These data are analyzed and findings are presented thereafter.

Study population

The study population refers to the people, objects and events from which the study sample is drawn. The choice of study population will be justified in relation to variables studied in this section. According to Polit & Becks (2008), a research population comprises all individuals or objects with common defining characteristics.

The researcher selected respondents from different PS in Nyarugenge District to get relevant information on how parent involvement contributes to students' academic performance. Respondents include students, teachers, principals, parents and educationists all involved in primary school's education. The study focused its attention on the impact of parent involvement to SP of students of PS in Nyarugenge District. Therefore, the study population consists of 536 people.

Sampling

Sampling is the process of selecting a sample and serves to give accuracy to the research results. This section describes the sampling frame used in the study. The description shows the sample size and sampling techniques used in the study and their justification. The probability sampling technique used is the simple random sampling, especially on questionnaires. This sample technique enabled the researcher to select respondents based on the objectives of this study and their responses were sufficient for the purpose of making valid deductions. Also, purposeful sampling technique was used in selecting respondents for interviews.

Sample Size

The sample size of a survey refers to the number of units selected from the population, of which data is gathered. In determining the sample design, the questions specific to the targeted population were considered. In this study, the

calculation of the sample was done using the Taro Yamane Formula (Yamane, 1973): each entity of the population has a definite, non-zero probability of being incorporated into the sample, also known as a probability sample. Probability samples are selected in such a way as to be a representative of the population. Below is the mathematical illustration of the formula:

$n = N/(1+N(e)^2)$ where:

n= signifies the sample size.

N= signifies the population under study.

e= signifies the margin error (it could be 0.10, 0.05 or 0.01).

Taken from the above formula, the sample size from the given population of 536 people is calculated below:

$n = 536/(1+536(0.05)^2)$

n= 536/ (1+536(0.0025)

n= 536/ (1+7.5)

n= 536/8.5

n= 63.06

n= 63

Consequently, a sample of 63 respondents from the population of 536 people will be considered and issued questionnaires.

Data Collection Methods and Tools

Prior to the administration of questionnaires, a supporting document was obtained from the UoK that enabled the researcher to solicit approval to conduct a study at PS in Nyarugenge District. The methods of data collection to be employed are as follows Field Method, Interview, Questionnaire

4. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of findings for the first specific research objective

The first specific research objective was aimed at identifying the parental engagement in their children education in Nyarugenge District.

The findings in this key area shows that majority of the parents agreed that they always bought pre-school materials for their children which means that parents in urban areas have high expectations and are always committed in supporting their children's pre-school education. The findings show that majority of parents always bought school materials for their children which mean that parents in urban areas had good income to be able to provide resources required by their children. They also have high expectations and are always committed in supporting their children's school education. The findings show that the majority of parents always gave presents to their children for good performance. Generally, parents in urban areas are educated and have good monthly earning and they know the importance of motivation and thus the provision of positive reinforcement for their children through presents.

On parents telling stories to their children, the findings clearly show that the majority of them rarely did so. This could be as a result of over engagement in work activities and fatigue after work. The findings also show that majority of the parent respondents confirmed that they rarely commented on their children's progress while majority of them confirmed that they always disciplined their children. This means that parents considered commenting on their children's progress and disciplining them to be their major responsibility. School teachers can involve parents in learning when they share children's progress and growth using best assessment practices. Thus, families and teachers can work in partnership to ensure that children continue to receive appropriate instruction and related experiences to further their development

The findings also indicate that quite a good number of parent respondents confirmed that they rarely taught their children how to read or helped them to do homework or checked if the school work was done by the child. There were a small percentage of respondents who confirmed that parents did not perform the above listed activities at all. This implies that parents were either very busy or they left those activities to be performed by the teachers.

On praising their children for good performance, the findings indicate that majority, 81.25% of parents always praised their children for good performance. This implies that when parents are involved in reinforcing their children, this motivates the minors to work harder (Ondieki, 2012).

The findings also indicate that the majority of parent respondents confirmed that they listened carefully to their children when talking to them. This percentage represent the parents who were aware of the importance of listening to their children when they talk to them. However, a relatively small percentage of 12.5 % of the parent respondents confirmed that parents rarely listened carefully to their children when talking to them. The reason could be because they were always busy and tired with other activities to sustain their families.

The findings show that majority of the parent respondents reported that they always answered their children's questions effectively. This finding show also that he parents pay attention when their children ask them questions.

The results show that the majority of the parent respondents agreed that they always ate together with their children. This could be as result of cultural beliefs development or a family's decision that children may eat together with their parents. It could also imply that parents shared supper with their

Summary of findings for the second specific research objective

The second specific research objective was aimed at finding out teachers' perception on parents' involvement in Nyarugenge District.

The findings show that majority of teachers confirmed that parents participated in PTA because they have considered PTA to be important on their children' learning thus their motivation to participate in PTA activities. If not, they might have attended PTA meetings even though they did not wish to due to the fact that the meetings were mandatory for parents or because nonattendance attracted penalties. Mwirichia (2013) noted that children of parents who had responsibilities in the school performed better than those whose parents had no responsibility at all. However, a small percentage of teachers revealed parents did not participate at all in PTA activities probably because they were always busy with their daily activities including their jobs or PTA did not exist in their children's pre-schools.

The findings from teacher's further show also that majority of parents always attended meetings. This is because they valued their provision of moral support towards their children's education or because it was compulsory to attend the meetings. The small percentage of teachers reported that parents rarely attended meetings because they envisioned that their house maids could attend on their behalf since the parents were full time workers. Chowa et. al. (2012) reveal that some parents do not voluntarily participate in school activities. Parents for instance only attended PTA meetings because such meetings were often mandatory and also to avoid penalties that come with failure to attend

In relation to the strategies that could promote parents' involvement, it was suggested that primary school should organize the meetings in order to sharpen parents' minds about their responsibilities in their children's primary school education such as establishing regular communication with parents and organizing school activities like workshops where parents would play a key role.

1.2. Recommendations

Based on the objectives coupled with the findings of the study, the following recommendations are provided

1. The findings on teachers' perception on parents' involvement showed that a number of parents did not participate in some home and school activities because they did not know it was their responsibility to do so. It is therefore recommended that the Ministry of Education in collaboration with the Ministry of local Government should reinforce adult literacy programmes in the city where parents would be sensitized on their roles and responsibilities.

2. The findings on parents' involvement revealed that students school performance is impressive when their parents are involved in their education. Therefore, there is a need to increase the parent's engagement by involving them in various school based activities and in awarding the best performers, pointing out that if a child is recognized in the presence of their parents, it motivates parents to continue supporting such children in their academics

3. The parents have to be in touch with teachers at school, most importantly the class teacher, because the class teacher is the one who can give a clear assessment to the parent on how their child is fairing.

4. The Headteachers and teachers should seek to establish friendly and cooperative relationship with parents and helps parents to have a role in decision-making in school matters, especially when it comes to setting the standards they want for their children.

5. For engaging the parents effectively, the school Headteachers have to come up with periodic reporting, where parents are invited to come and share with learners and teachers whatever is happening.

6. The present study focused on parents' engagement in primary school education. There is need to extend the study from primary school to the secondary school to find out whether the situation is similar or different.

7. The study targeted urban and rural settings of Nyarugenge District. A specific study on parents' engagement in rural and remote areas could be conducted to see the real image of their engagement.

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