

Activities in Team Work Among Head Teachers and Parents for The Improvement of Inclusive Education in Regular Public Primary Schools in Meru County

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Abstract

Through appropriate activities in teamwork among head teachers and parents, inclusive education is improved. The purpose of the study was to analyse activities in team work among head teachers and parents for the improvement of inclusive education in regular public primary schools, in Meru County, Kenya. The objective of the study was to examine activities in team work among head teachers and parents for the improvement of inclusive education. The significance of the study was to inform education policy makers, who need the study results to evaluate the current policies on inclusion and formulate appropriate ones for promoting head teacher-parent collaboration to improve the status of inclusive education for all learners. The study was guided by Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological systems theory and Peters' input-process-outcome-context framework of Inclusive Education. Qualitative research approach method was predominantly used. The target population was 101,612. Through purposive sampling, 24 participants were selected. The study instruments used included; questionnaires, interview schedules, focus group discussion guide, observations and documents' analysis schedules. Qualitative data analysis was done with the help of computer package, ATLAS. ti. The study findings were presented using narratives within themes generated from the collected data. It was found that, though, many head teachers carried out numerous activities, as a team with the parents, challenges contributed to minimal improvement of inclusive education. It was recommended that, the school stakeholders should be well sensitized on the collaboration for the improvement of inclusive education.

Key words: Activities, head teacher-parent collaboration, inclusive education, Meru County.

1. Introduction

Parents should be informed and empowered to team up with schools for various activities, such as, in making decisions affecting education of their learners. Xu and Gulosino (2006) observe that the teacher-parent collaboration within teamwork is more important to improving student achievement than any other measure. Cowan (2003), assert that the role of the parent is not just fund raising or attending an occasional student function, but the active participation in all aspects.

Schools need to recognize the primary role of the family in education and advocate for families and schools to work together as a team. Sanders (2009) argue that different structures in school and family relations developed in the early 20th century. He further points out that separate tasks and responsibilities were delegated to the school and the home. This teamwork is believed to contribute to improvement of learners' academic performances, as well as, their wellbeing at school. Barbour (2009) recognizes that the parent is the child's first teacher and the home serves as the first classroom, therefore, the continued support by the parent at the learner's school is crucial. For continued support, Henderson, Mapp, Johnson and Davies (2007) concluded that parents' interests should be put into consideration when head teachers are managing their partnerships with parents of learners with special needs. Marsh and Vorbeck (2009) agree with other scholars when they observed that, there is need for understanding between the teacher and the parent concerning the learner's learning ability and behaviour for effective learner development. They explain this kind of teamwork as a dance, a subtle communication of letting each other know what other's needs are and how they can help each other. Today, due to socio-cultural and economic changes, many parents have abdicated their roles to the teachers and mass media whereby teachers may sometimes find it difficult to correct some anomalies that may have been learnt from mass media, or from peers.

It should be understood that teachers or parents on their own cannot adequately address all the needs of the learners in regular public primary schools. Family-school teamwork contributes to maximizing success for learners (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001). Epstein (2010) further elaborates on a comprehensive view of collaboration where the family, the school and community interacts, as a team to meet the needs of the learners.

In contemporary societies studies carried out have revealed the value of head teacher-parent teamwork. Ssewamala, Bannon & Ismayilova (2009), found a strong relationship between parents' involvement in decision-making and performance of learners. Mwanza (2010), observed that, parents of learners with special needs lacked adequate sensitization on the same, which negatively affected the way the head teachers worked together with the parents.

In view of the above the role of the parent and teacher teamwork cannot be underpinned, especially in this technological error and changes as stipulated, for example, in Kenyan Education Act of 2013 which spells out the role of teacher and parent in schools (Republic of Kenya, 2013). By the time of this study, little research had been carried out to analyse activities in team work among head teachers and parents for the improvement of inclusive education, a gap that this study sought to address.

2. Statement of the Problem

Appropriate activities in teamwork among head teachers and parents improve inclusive education. In Meru County, Kenya, there appeared to have been ineffective school-home activities, which was linked to poor status of inclusive education. There seemed to be ineffective head teacher-parent teamwork activities that resulted in poor status of inclusive education in public primary schools in Meru County (Meru County Director of Education Office, 2016).

Activities in teamwork among head teachers and parents, is what this study sought to analyse to address the low improvement in inclusive education. Addressing low improvement in inclusive education through

head teacher-parent team work activities may result in all learners having opportunities to develop socially and economically, making it easy to achieve the sustainable development goals. It was for this reason that the researcher decided to carry out a study on “Activities in teamwork among head teachers and parents for the improvement of inclusive education in public primary schools in Meru County, Kenya”.

3. Significance of the Study

The study findings are of great use to education policy makers, who need the study results to evaluate the current policies on inclusion and formulate appropriate ones for promoting head teacher-parent collaboration to improve the status of inclusive education for all learners. The study findings give crucial information to leaders and managers of inclusive schools on the need to have appropriate teamwork activities to enhance head teacher-parent collaboration for the improvement of inclusive education.

4. Methodology

The study was guided by Bronfenbrenner’s bio-ecological systems theory and Peters’ input-process-outcome-context framework of Inclusive Education. Qualitative research approach method was predominantly used. The target population was 101,612 (772 head teachers, 6,840 teachers and 94,000 parents). Out of the target population, there was a unique population of 218 (77 head teachers, 68 teachers and 73 parents) who were actively involved in inclusive education in 77 inclusive public primary schools in Meru County (Meru County Director of Education Office, 2016). Through purposive sampling, a number of eight (8) regular public primary schools and a sample size of 24 participants were selected from the population. Creswell (2009), suggest for sample size in the range of 5-25 as being adequate for collecting qualitative data. The researcher adopted the Creswell (2009) recommendation to select the 24 participants. The study instruments used included; questionnaires, interview schedules, focus group discussion guide, observations and documents’ analysis schedules. The tools were piloted for reliability and validity in Isiolo County, Kenya. Data was collected by the researcher through meeting with the participants face-to-face, which ensured whole response return rates. Qualitative data analysis was done with the help of computer package, ATLAS. ti. The study findings were presented using narratives within themes generated from the collected data.

5. Findings: *Activities in teamwork*

The results revealed that, most of the head teachers and the parents of learners with special needs were involved in working together as a team and accomplished various tasks. Such tasks included; decision making, admissions, communicating, guiding and counselling, meeting basic needs of the learners, meetings, assessment, co-teaching, sensitization, establishing feeding programmes, modifying school environment, taking care of learners’ health, sourcing for assistive devices, participation in seminars and special games competitions, as well as, paying school levies. It was found that teachers supported the head teacher-parent collaboration. Although some parents were involved in the head teacher-parent

collaboration, they were not sure of what their specific roles were, in the education of their children with special needs, in the school. Some parents claimed that, no one involved them, not even in decision making concerning their children with special needs in the regular schools. They claimed that, some head teachers did not invite them for meetings.

The findings also indicated that, many participants felt that, most parents lacked knowledge about head teacher-parent collaboration for the improvement of inclusive education. There was need for sensitizing the school stakeholders about the collaboration for the improvement of inclusive education. Participants observed that, there was lack of adequate sensitization to the parents of children with special needs which made some parents not to be well involved. Mwanza (2010), observed a similar scenario where parents of learners with special needs lacked adequate sensitization on the same, which negatively affected the way the head teachers worked together with the parents.

The findings revealed that, some parents were not given the opportunity to give their interests in what they could have done best to support the head teacher-parent collaboration. A participant Parent D was quoted as stating:

We parents of learners with special needs are marginalized by head teachers. They give us tasks which do not reflect the crucial role we could otherwise play in support of inclusive education for our children with special needs. Our interests and opinions should be considered.”

This finding was in agreement with Henderson, Mapp, Johnson and Davies (2007) who concluded that parents’ interests should be put into consideration when head teachers are managing their partnerships with parents of learners with special needs.

The results indicated that, some parents of children with special needs were stigmatized by some school stakeholders, including head teachers who should be advocating for them. One participant parent C reported:

I stopped visiting the regular school of my child with autism because I feared being laughed at. One time my head teacher told me in a school parents’ meeting to go back home with my child because other parents would not tolerate the nuisance from my child that day. The parents who heard this laughed. Would he really expect me to attend another meeting? Further, if I learn there is a meeting in school, I do not allow my child to attend school on that day.

Stigmatization of parents of learners with special needs was confirmed and emphasized during parents’ focus group discussion. The discussion indicated that, there were challenges, such as marginalization of parents that interfered with active participation in school activities. This implies that, school stakeholders were not sensitized on the equal rights of individuals to participate in the education activities concerning their children. Though, many head teachers carried out numerous activities, as a team with the parents, the challenges contributed to ineffective collaboration and thus, to minimal improvement of inclusive education.

6. Conclusion

Though, many head teachers carried out numerous activities, as a team with the parents, there was minimal improvement of inclusive education. The school stakeholders were not sensitized on the equal rights of individuals to participate in the education activities concerning their children.

7. Recommendations

The school stakeholders should be well sensitized on the collaboration for the improvement of inclusive education. The MoE should seriously create awareness about teamwork inclusive education activities to all education stakeholders.

8. REFERENCES

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