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Parental Involvement In Home Work For Children's Academic Success. A Study In The Cape Coast Municipality

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Introduction

Traditionally, parental involvement in education included contribution to their children's home-based activities (helping with home-work, encouraging children to read, and promoting school attendance) and school-based activities (attending Parent-Teachers' Association meetings, parent-teacher conferences, and participating in fun raising activities). Hixson (2006) explained that involvement of parents and families in decision making is often cited as one of the most important ways to improve public schools. Parental involvement makes an enormous impact on the student's attitude, attendance, and academic achievement and promotes better cooperation between parents and school. It also allows parents and teachers to combine efforts to help the children succeed in school.

Epstein (1995) identified six areas of parental involvement in their children's academic activities: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community. We perceive that if parents are actively involved in these areas, there is likelihood that it will stimulate children's interest in school and positively influence academic achievement. Families and schools have worked together since the beginning of formalized schooling. However, the nature of the collaboration has evolved over the years ([Epstein & Sanders, 2002](#)). Initially, families maintained a high degree of control over schooling by controlling, hiring of teachers and apprenticeships in family businesses. By the middle of the 20th century, there was strict role separation between families and schools. Schools were responsible for academic topics, and families were responsible for moral, cultural, and religious education. In addition, family and school responsibilities for education were sequential. That is, families were responsible for preparing their children with the necessary skills in the early years, and schools took over from there with little input from families. However, today, in the context of greater accountability and demands for children's achievement, schools and families have formed partnerships and share the responsibilities for children's education. We believe that parental school involvement could be largely defined as consisting of the following activities: volunteering at school, communicating with teachers and other school personnel, assisting in academic activities at home, and attending school events, meetings of parent-teacher associations (PTAs), and parent-teacher conferences.

It is well established that parental school involvement has a positive influence on school-related outcomes for children. Consistently, cross-sectional ([Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994](#)) and longitudinal ([Miedel & Reynolds, 1999](#)) studies have demonstrated an association between higher levels of parental school involvement and greater academic success for children and adolescents. This is where the present study becomes more imperative in the sense that for the Ghanaian school child to achieve a meaningful academic success parental involvement in pupils home work becomes very crucial or key in pupils academic performance. It is therefore interesting to note that Parental school involvement is thought to decrease as children move to Junior and Senior high school, in part because parents might believed that they cannot assist with more challenging high school subjects. ([Eccles & Harold, 1996](#)). In spite of this challenge few parents stop caring about or monitoring the academic progress of their

children within the high school age, and parental involvement continues to be an important predictor of school outcomes through adolescence.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to:

- i. investigate the extent of parental involvement in their children's homework.
- ii. determine the major challenges facing parental involvement in children homework.
- iii. find out the relationship between parents, teachers and the school.
- iv. find out the outcomes of parental involvement in their children's homework for academic success.

Research questions

- i. To what extent do parents assist their children's home work?
- ii. Is there any relationship between the school, parents and their children?
- iii. What is the impact of parental involvement in their children's home work?
- iv. What challenges confront parents and teachers in assisting and assigning home work to children?

Review of Related Literature

A research on parental involvement in children's homework by Hoover-Dempsey, K.V., Battiato, A., Walker, J. M. T., Reed, R.P., DeLong, J. M., & Jones, K.P. (2001) focused on understanding why parents become involved in their children's homework, what strategies they employ, and how such involvement contributes to student learning. The review supported theoretical arguments that parents choose to become involved in homework because they believe they should be involved, believe their involvement will make a positive difference in their children's learning, and perceive that their involvement is invited, expected, and valued by school personnel (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, 1997). The review suggest that parents engage in a wide range of activities in this effort; from establishment of basic structures for homework performance to a more complex efforts focused on teaching for the understanding and helping students develop effective learning strategies. This is why we believe conducting such a study among Ghanaian pupils is pertinent in present era where parents seem not to have adequate time helping their kids in their home work.

Impact of parental involvement in children home work for academic success

There are two major mechanisms by which parental school involvement promotes achievement. The first is by increasing social capital. That is, parental school involvement increases parents' skills and information (i.e., social capital), which makes them better equipped to assist their children in their school-related activities. As parents establish relationships with school personnel, they learn important information about the school's expectations for behaviour and homework; they also learn how to help with homework and how to augment children's learning at home (Lareau, 1996). We have the conviction that when parents are involved in their children's schooling and meet other parents with

information and insight on school policies and practices, they are more likely to take interest in assisting their kids with their home work. In addition, when parents and teachers interact, teachers learn about parents' expectations for their children and their children's teachers.

Social control is the second mechanism through which parental school involvement promotes achievement. This occurs when families and schools work together to build a consensus about appropriate behaviour that can be effectively communicated to children at both home and school. We share the view that parents' coming to know one another and agree on goals, both behavioural and academic, serve as a form of social constraint that reduce behavioural problems among kids. It is also our conviction that when children and their peers receive similar messages about appropriate behaviour across settings and from different sources, the messages become clear and salient, reducing confusion about expectations. Moreover, when families do not agree with each other or with schools about appropriate behaviour, the authority and effectiveness of teachers, parents, or other adults may be undermined. Through both social capital and social control, children receive messages about the importance of schooling, and these messages increase children's competence, motivation to learn, and engagement in school ([Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994](#)).

Other scholars such as LaParo, Kraft-Sayer & Pianta, (2003) documented that parents' involvement can have either a positive or negative impact on the value of homework.

Family and School Characteristics that Influence Parental School Involvement

Parent-school relationships do not occur in isolation, but in community and cultural contexts. One of the biggest challenges schools have today is the increasing diversity among students ([Lichter, 1996](#)). Demographic characteristics such as socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and cultural background, and other parental characteristics are systematically associated with parental school involvement. Overall, parents from higher socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to be involved in schooling than parents of lower socioeconomic status. A higher education level of parents is positively associated with a greater tendency for them to advocate for their children's placement in honours courses and actively manage their children's education ([Baker & Stevenson, 1986](#)).

Involvement in school sometimes varies across ethnic or cultural backgrounds as well. Often, teachers who are different culturally from their students are less likely to know the students and parents than are teachers who come from similar cultural backgrounds; culturally different teachers are also more likely to believe that students and parents are disinterested or uninvolved in schooling ([Epstein & Dauber, 1991](#)). Evidence from the work of Hill & Craft, (2003) suggest that parents who volunteered at school, valued education more than other parents. And this belief about parents' values was in turn associated with the teachers' ratings of students' academic skills and achievement. Apart from demographic factors, parents' psychological state influences parental school involvement. Depression or anxiety present barriers to involvement in schooling. Studies consistently show that mothers who are depressed tend to be less involved than non depressed mothers in preparing young children for school and also exhibit lower levels of involvement over the early years of school (Hill & Craft, 2003). From the above it more likely that among Ghanaian parents such problems are evident. The issue is if Ghanaian parents tend to exhibit such problems it is more likely to impact on pupils' performance negatively.

Self-perceptions and poverty exert direct effects on parents' mental health and self-perceptions through increased stress resulting from the struggle to make ends meet. Parents' own experiences as students

shape their involvement in their children's schooling. As a parent prepares a child to start school, the parent's memories of his or her own school experiences are likely to become reactivated and may influence how the parent interprets and directs the child's school experiences ([Taylor, Clayton, & Rowley, in press](#)). As this brief review suggests, homework can be an effective way for students to improve their learning and for parents to communicate their appreciation of schooling. Because a great many things influence the impact of homework achievement, expectations for homework's effects, especially in the earlier grades, must be realistic. Homework policies and practices should give teachers and parents the flexibility to take into account the unique needs and circumstances of their students. That way, they can maximize the positive effects of homework and minimize the negative ones.

More insight into the issue

While teachers and other school personnel agree that parental involvement leads to a better achievement, there is some controversy about how far that parental involvement should be extended. For example, most educators resist having parents involved in hiring teachers at home, paying teachers, and other educational issues. Moreover, choosing textbooks and developing curricula are seen by teachers as requiring expertise that parents and those hired teachers do not possess. This study therefore tried to investigate the extent and impact of parental involvement in children's homework in Ghana.

Methodology

Research Design

The design used for this study was descriptive survey. This design was considered appropriate for the study as it allowed the researchers to personally administer questionnaire and semi-structure interview schedules to elicit responses from participants.

Population

The target population for this study comprised all parents, pupils, teachers, and head teachers in the Cape Coast Municipality in the Central Region of Ghana. A total number of One hundred eighty (180) pupils, One hundred eighty (180) parents and One thirty (130) teachers were targeted for the study.

Sample and Sampling procedure

The sample for this study was limited to eight (8) schools out of the over fifty (50) schools in the Cape Coast municipality. The eight (8) schools were randomly selected from the municipality. Eighty eight (88) pupils and thirty two (32) teachers randomly selected to answer questionnaires. Thirty (30) teachers and parents were also interviewed to probe further on issues relating their involvement in children's homework. A stratified random sample was drawn with a probability proportional to the number of pupils randomly selected from each school. Eighty eight (88) parents were then chosen to answer questionnaires.

Instrumentation

The tools employed in the gathering of the data were semi structured questionnaire and semi-

structured interview. Three sample questionnaires with two sections each was used to collect the data. The first section elicited demographic information such as sex, age, marital status, occupation, number of children and occupational background. The second section gathered information based on the parental involvement in children's homework, impact of parental involvement and challenges facing teachers and parents with children's homework.

Procedure and Data Analysis

Nine (9) visits were made by the researchers to collect data from respondents. With regards to the type of data required, extraction was made from the school attendance records and pupils homework books. Aside the questionnaire, the researchers sought permission from the head teacher, to allow the researchers to visit some classes to glance through some of the pupils home work books. Pupil's homes were also visited by the researchers to appreciate the issues that were being raised in the open-ended questions by teachers, pupils and parents.

The questionnaire data was analyzed using simple percentages through the use of SPSS. Qualitative data such as interviews were analyzed by playing the tapes several times until we had the full transcriptions of the teachers, parents and pupils. We then went through the transcripts from each teacher, parent, and pupil noting and highlighting the differences and similarities among issues.

Discussions of results of the Study

Out of two hundred thirteen (213) questionnaires distributed to respondents, eight (8) representing 3.7% were not returned. Five (5) representing 2.3% were improperly completed and were therefore rejected. Two hundred (200) questionnaires were used for the analysis.

The results of the findings indicated that the ages of parents/guardians ranged from 19 to 75. The ages of the children ranged from 1 to 17 in which females represents 65% of the population. 50.8% representing half of the respondents (parents) were married couples living together, while 26.4% were guardians or grandparents with the remaining 22.8% divorced. Educational levels of parents ranged from no school to college graduate with 45.2% of the respondents having completed high school or higher education. 43.8% had educational levels ranging from basic to diploma, while the remaining 11% had no formal education. The study revealed that majority (55.2%) of the parents/guardians were gainfully employed, while 22.8% were part-time labourers, with the remaining 22% being either unemployed, housewives, or on retirement. Collapsing the data it is clear that 89% of the parents involved in the study were educated. The implication of this to the study is that most of the parents are more likely to support their kids at home all things being equal.

The study further indicated that homework assignments typically have one or more purposes. The most common purpose was to have students practice materials already presented in class. Practice homework is meant to reinforce learning and help the student master specific skills.

For example, a teacher indicated,

“ Because of the School Feeding Programme (SFP), enrollment has increased and that I am not able to teach children to my satisfaction, hence the home work becomes reinforcement”

It was also evident from the data that the homework that teachers gave was aimed to help pupils learn

new material better when it is covered in class. Only thirty two percent (32%) of the homework asks students to apply skills they already have to new situations. Forty three point five percent (43.5%) of Integration homework required the pupil to apply many different skills to a single task, such as book reports, science projects or creative writing. In particular, Maths and English homework were the most common and frequent type of home work given to pupils.

The data also suggest that continuous and consistent parent involvement in basic school shields and protects children from the negative influences of poverty, lateness, absenteeism and may be one approach to reducing the achievement gap between pupils. The study found out that fathers who observe children in the classroom, attend conferences, P.T.A meetings and meet with head teacher have children who experience educational success more often than their peers whose mothers are the only involved parents. This is consistent with the findings from the work of Keith et al (1995).

Family involvement is more likely to occur when schools are committed to it. The study revealed that only schools with formal parent involvement pro-grams reported higher academic achievement especially in schools with high income earning parents.

A Parent wrote;

“ I tried to visit the school at least once a month to have a chat with my child’s class teacher. What I want to suggest is that the school should invites us parents regularly to discuss our children’s academic and social progress”

On the contrary, a teacher indicated;

“ When you invite them (parents), they don’t come, those who come are parents whose socio-economic status are better and really understand the purpose of their children’s education”

The result of the research also consistent with the views expressed by LaParo, (2003) that parental involvement can have either a positive or negative impact on the value of homework. Parent involvement can be used to speed up a child’s learning. Homework can involve parents in the school process. It can give them an opportunity to express positive attitudes about the value of success in school. All the respondents (parents) agreed that getting involved with their children’s homework, has improved communication between the school and family. This has also clarified for parents what is expected of pupils and given them firsthand idea of what pupils are learning and how well their child is doing in school.

Furthermore, evidence from the data suggests that parental involvement may also interfere with learning. For example, sixty percent (60%) of the parents indicated that they had confused their children with different teaching techniques they used in teaching their children in Mathematics and English as it differs from those used in the classroom. Due to this, majority of the parents (75.5%) admitted their interference between teachers and themselves has caused a scare in school-family relationship. Contrary, all the parents expressed their desire that through home work and school related-activities, they have been able to established good relationship with the school personnel, teachers, parents and through that other important information about the school’s expectations for behaviour and home work are also communicated to them.

The result of the study further indicated that sixty five percent (65%) of the children experience difficulties with homework, because parents don't become involved by paying close attention.

A pupil indicated;

“ My dad always says he is not conversant with those Mathematic and English homework my teacher gives” Another pupil wrote;

“ I always get confuse with how my dad teaches me my mathematics home work, because it's different from what my teacher teaches”

Interestingly, sixty percent (60%) of the parents complained about new subjects and the modern way of answering mathematics questions as compared to their days at school. This and other reasons such as busy with work/business, too much house chores, lack of effective supervision were the main causes of their inability to support their children's home work.

In spite of the fact that parental involvement in children home work had had both negative and positive effects on children academic success, we believe parental involvement in children home work has contributed positively towards pupils academic achievement.

Concluding Remarks

Parental involvement in a child's education is an advantage that money cannot buy. All parents, regardless of economic status, race, or primary language, can do simple things like asking a child about school or attending a parent-teacher meeting. Being involved in your child's education not only helps your child to achieve more academically, but it also lifts teacher morale and provides you with the satisfaction of making a difference in your child's education.

We suggest that parents should endeavor to involve themselves in pupils home work. We say this because evidence from the literature and the findings suggest positive relationship between parental involvement and pupils academic performance. The issue even becomes crucial in Ghana where the pupils academic achievement seems to be declining. For example the daily graphic (2009) confirms that:

“Just a little over 50 per cent of the candidates who sat for this year's Basic

Education Certificate Examination (BECE) qualified for placement into Senior

High Schools and Technical Institutes. Out of 395,649 candidates who wrote the

examination, only 198,642 qualified for placement under the Computerized

Schools Selection and placement system (CSSPS).

(Thursday Daily Graphic, September2009, p.1).

We further conclude that parents are less involved in their pupil's home work and this does not auger well for the educational system in Ghana. Having reduced the educational system from four years to three years we perceive that parents are expected to play their role in helping their kids with their

educational activities for the realization of academic success.

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