Promoting Healthy School Climates in Public Secondary Schools in the South West Region, Cameroon: Role of Parents' Participation in Decision Making Process

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Original Research Article

ABSTRACT

Maintaining healthy and facilitating school climates constitute one of the greatest challenges faced by educational authorities in recent times. In Cameroon like others countries in the world, the government and education partners have been investing enormous energy to ensure that school environment are safe for all and conducive for teaching and learning. This study investigated the impact of parents' involvement in decision making process on the health of school climates of public secondary schools in the South West Region of Cameroon. This study utilised the correlational research design. Data was collected through cross sectional survey of a sample of 31 schools and

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135 parents whose children attend the schools. A structured questionnaire was used to collect relevant data after being subject to validity and reliability checks. The ANOVA statistics was computed to predict the overall effect of parents' participation in decision making process on school climate. The findings showed that: H1 = parents' involvement in decision making process has a very significant and positive impact on school climate ($R = 0.276^{**}$, $P < 0.001$, far < 0.05). This positive signs of the correlation value implies that parents' involvement in the participatory decision making will lead to healthy school climate and this is supported by a high explanatory power of 89.1%. On the bases of the above, we conclude that there is a positive and significant relationship between parents' participation in decision making processes and a healthy school climate. A major recommendation was for the Ministry of Secondary Education to establish enforcement structure to ensure that all secondary schools comply with the policy guidelines that provides for the involvement of stakeholders in decision making process in schools in Cameroon.

1. INTRODUCTION

"Parents play key roles as educational stakeholders. Their interest is to ensure that their children receive quality education which will enable them to lead productive rewarding lives in the society. Parents as educational stakeholders provide additional resources for the school to assist with students' education and to enhance a sense of community pride and commitment which may be influential in the overall success of the school" [1]. "It has been noted that nothing motivates a child more than when learning is valued by schools and families/community working together in partnership as a result of explicitly strategic intervention" [2]. "However, it is not clear the extent to which the parents have been involved especially in school activities. Although it is important for schools and parents to share the responsibility for education, no clear cooperation exist between schools and parents and parents are hardly involved in their children's school work" [3]. In addition, parents' responsibility is limited to providing economic resources: buying school uniforms, books and other necessities. Also, Abdi and Cleghorn [4] observed "the wrong notion of parents that the responsibility of running schools solemnly lays in the hands of the education authorities. They recommended the need for support from parents and community members".

"School climate has been considered as one of the factors that indirectly affects the success of the school" [5]. For a school to be effective, an appropriate atmosphere for education is essential. The leadership of the principal is the key factor in the formation of school climate of which parents' participation in decision making of paramount important. The greatest challenge for principal should be that of creating and nurturing a healthy school climate and school culture that are open to diversity of opinions and ways of doing things [6].

Parental involvement in the education of students begins at home with the parents providing a safe and healthy environment, appropriate learning experiences, support, and a positive attitude about school. Several studies indicate increased academic achievement with students that have involved parents [7] (Whitaker & Fiore, 2001). "Studies also indicate that parental involvement is most effective when viewed as a partnership between educators and parents" [7]. By examining parents' and teachers' perceptions, educators and parents should have a better understanding of effective parental involvement practices in promoting student achievement. Androniceanu [8] says "decision making is an essential process of modern management representing, in every field, the core function for the manager. After 1990's, the secondary educational system has faced important changes beginning with decentralization and transforming schools in self-managing systems continuing with the development of different stakeholders' initiative and improving the decision making process".

In his report, Kindzeka [9] mentioned an official with the Cameroon Teachers Trade Union in Yaounde who said attacks by students on teachers intensified in 2015 when Cameroon prohibited teachers from beating or severely punishing students. "When a minister says that teachers are not supposed to administer corporal punishment to students, the student will now see that the minister has the right to bring disorder because there is nothing the teacher can do in class". The ministerial text referred to by the above official prohibits teachers and other

stakeholders from taking prompt decisions to square wrong attitudes of student. This in turn creates resistance in the students, thereby prompting unhealthy school climates. In September 2018, Cameroon announced its endorsement of the Safe Schools Declaration – an international political commitment to protect education in times of conflict and violence. In June, in response to the gravity and number of attacks on schools, the killing and maiming of children, and the recruitment and use of children, the UN Secretary-General added Cameroon as a situation of concern for the UN's monitoring and reporting mechanism on grave violations against children during armed conflict (Cameroon Tribune, 2018). Despite this pointer, the internal stakeholders still find it difficult to come together to take decisions that can improve the above situation which is a call for concern.

Durisic and Bunijevac (2017), in their research on "parental involvement as an important factor for successful education argue that to comply with the system of integrated support for their students', schools need to build partnership with parents and develop mutual responsibility for children's success in the educational system. In this way, parental involvement is increased, parents' efforts to support schools is encouraged, and they directly make a positive impact to a successful educational system".

Theoretically, Maslow Hierarchy of Needs Theory by Abraham Maslow (1954) which is composed of five human motivational needs: namely, physiological needs, safety/security needs, belonging and love needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization needs. This theory accurately describes many realities of personal experiences. It is believed that humans strive for an upper level of capabilities, which means that, humans seek the frontiers of creativity, the highest reaches of consciousness and wisdom. This has been labeled "fully functioning person", "healthy personality", or as, "self-actualizing person. Therefore, only needs not yet satisfied can influence behaviour and when such needs are satisfied the person will be motivated to pursue the next higher need in the order. Our need comes up the moment one need is satisfied. This theory is related to this study in that school principals try to create more supportive school climates by paying attention to the social or belongingness needs of other educational stakeholders. This is done in a variety of ways as they try to satisfy both the parents and students need. Create activities which help to build relationships between staff members, parents and satisfy belongingness needs, which in turn lead to a more supportive climate.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

It is observed that schools are not effective in terms of conducive environment for achieving objectives of quality education. Healthy school climate is very important in all educational systems even though an elusive concept. A healthy school environment facilitates a productive teaching and learning process. The school has rules and regulations and yet unconducive school climate. Good results both academic and morally can be achieved where school climate is healthy. The need to render school environment conducive and effective is very urgent especially at a moment when the fight against poor academic performance, indiscipline, violence, moral decadence, poor hygiene, bribery, corruption, and embezzlement, is being intensified by the government.

From a macro perspective, one of the most important recommendations of the 1990 Jomtien Declaration of Education for All (EFA) is that "new and revitalized partnership at all levels" should be built in order to achieve EFA goals. In Cameroon, the 1998 education law no. 004/98 of 14 April elaborates the concept of educational community in its Part IV. Specifically, Section 33 of the law states that members of the educational community shall be involved, through their representatives, in the consultative and management bodies set up at the level of educational, as well as at each level of the decentralized territorial authorities or of the national educational set-up. The authorities, administrative and support staff, teachers, parents and pupils, students, persons from socio-professional, regional and local authorities comprise the educational community. Government intention in providing the above mentioned law is to ensure effective participation of all stakeholders including parents in decision making towards school effectiveness. Contrary to the above, the parents and other stakeholders as external bodies of school are not really involved in decision making. In schools, goals are set at all levels of education and assumed to be determined by very rational and logical process. The school is mostly grounded by norms of rationality. Hierarchy is strictly followed. There is strict instruction on how work is been

done. External stakeholders have little or no say in the decision making process in the schools more especially public secondary schools. This leads them to experience difficulties in contributing more to the achievement of educational goals and objectives hence unhealthy school climate. In spite of the continuous government funding, support to schools in form of teaching workforce, materials in public schools, and parents supports in the provision of students needs, the country have continued to register poor school attendance, poor performance and unhealthy school climate every year.

1.2 Aim

This study sought to evaluate the relationship between parents' involvement in decision making process and the health of school climates of public secondary schools in the South West Region of Cameroon. The researchers transformed this statement of research aim into hypothesis (in the null and alternative forms) as shown below. The findings should help educational authorities at all levels better appreciate the importance of inclusive decision making in the enhancement of school climates.

> Ho: There is no significant relationship between parents' involvement in decision making process and the health of the climate of secondary school in the South West Region of Cameroon
>
> Ha: There is a significant relationship between parents' involvement in decision making process and the health of the climate of secondary school in the South West Region of Cameroon

2. METHODOLOGY

This study utilised the correlational research design. Data was collected through cross sectional survey from a sample of 135 parent participants randomly drawn from 31 public secondary schools in the South West Region of Cameroon that were selected through the cluster sampling technique. A structured questionnaire was the instruments used for data collection. To ascertain the reliability of the research instrument, the Cronbach Alpha test was used on a coefficient value of 0.7. Furthermore, the ANOVA statistics was computed to predict the overall effect of parents' participation in decision making process on school climate in the study area.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the parent opinion on their involvement in decision making process, 85.5% (112) of them agreed that many parents attend PTA meetings where most of the matter concerning their children discussed. Also, 49.6% (65) of the parents accepted that parents participate in community and family social activities at school. In similar trend, 48.9% (64) of the parents agreed that parents communicate with school staff to check on things that concern the child. Furthermore, 45.8% (60) of the parents agreed that solving administrative problems with parents improves the school climate of the school. 32.1% (42) of the parents equally indicate that they participate in the planning process of the school their children study. Also, 30.5% (40) of the parents agreed that parents are consulted before making decisions that affect the welfare of their children in school. The findings also showed 26.0% (34) of the parents talk about their personal matters and life that affects their children studies in school. 22.1% (29) of the parents also agreed that parents are engaged in addressing administrative matters to the school authorities. Finally, all the parents 131 (100%) indicate that parents are involved in making school programmes. In overall, the findings showed that 37.8% of the parents agreed that parents are involved in decision making of the school while 62.2% of them disagreed. This is also presented on the Fig. 1.

As indicated on the Fig. 1, majority of parents 62.2% indicate that parents are not involve in decision making of the school while 37.8% of them state that parents are involve.

3.1 Hypothesis Test

Statistically, the findings showed parents involvement in decision making processes has a very significant and positive effect on school climate (P <0.001, far < 0.05, R= 0.276**) and, this effect is also supported with a high explanatory power of 89.1%. The positive sign of the correlation value implies that the school administration is more likely to experience a healthy school climate when they adequately involved parents in decision making processes. Therefore, the hypothesis that states that parents' involvement in decision making process has a significant effect on the health of the climate of secondary school in the South West Region of Cameroon was accepted.

Table 1. Showing parents' opinion on their involvement in decision making process in secondary schools

| Items	Stretched				Collapsed	
	Strongly Agree (SA)	**Agree (A)**	**Disagree (D)**	**Strongly Disagree (SD)**	**SA/A**	**D/SD**
Many parents attend PTA meetings where most of the matter concerning their children discussed.	61 (46.6%)	51 (38.9%)	16 (12.2%)	3 (2.3%)	112 (85.5%)	19 (14.5%)
Parents participate in community and family social activities at school.	18 (13.7%)	47 (35.9%)	51 (38.9%)	15 (11.5%)	65 (49.6%)	66 (50.4%)
Parents communicate with school staff to check on things that concern the child.	15 (11.5%)	49 (37.4%)	42 (32.1%)	25 (19.1%)	64 (48.9%)	67 (51.1%)
Solving administrative problems with parents improves the school climate of the school.	17 (13.0%)	43 (32.8%)	46 (35.1%)	25 (19.1%)	60 (45.8%)	71 (54.2%)
Parents participate in the planning process of the school their children study in.	15 (11.5%)	27 (20.6%)	74 (56.5%)	15 (11.5%)	42 (32.1%)	89 (67.9%)
Parents are consulted before making decisions that affect the welfare of their children in school.	6 (4.6%)	34 (26.0%)	70 (53.4%)	21 (16.0%)	40 (30.5%)	91 (69.5%)
Parents talk about their personal matters and life that affects their children studies in school.	9 (6.9%)	25 (19.1%)	67 (51.1%)	30 (22.9%)	34 (26.0%)	97 (74.0%)
Parents are engaged in addressing administrative matters to the school authorities.	4 (3.1%)	25 (19.1%)	67 (51.1%)	35 (26.7%)	29 (22.1%)	102 (77.9%)
Parents are involved in making school programmes.	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	97 (74.0%)	34 (26.0%)	0 (0.0%)	131 (100%)
Multiple Response Set (MRS)	145 (12.3%)	301 (25.5%)	530 (45.0%)	203 (17.2%)	446 (37.8%)	733 (62.2%)

n=131
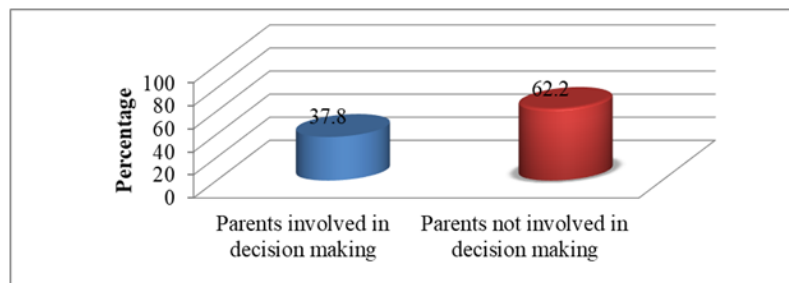
Fig. 1. Showing parents opinion on their involvement in decision making process

Table 2. Showing hypothesis test on the effect of parents' involvement in decision making process on school climate

Test	Statistics	Parents involvement in decision making process	Healthy school climate	Explanatory power of the effect in terms of %
Spearman's rho	R-value	1	.276**	89.1%
	P-value	.	.000	
	N	250	250	

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). P< 0.001 far< 0.05

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDA-TIONS

This study provides an overview of the link between parents' involvement in participatory decision making and secondary school climate in public Secondary Schools in South West Region, Cameroon. The findings showed there is a significant/ positive relationship between parents' involvement in participatory decision making and secondary school climate in public secondary Schools in south west Region, Cameroon (R = 0.276**, P < 0.001, far < 0.05). This positive sign of the relationship implies that parents' involvement in the participatory decision making will lead to healthy school climate and this is supported by a high explanatory power of 89.1%. Despite the results, in perspective, it is not only parents' involvement in participatory decision making which can influence secondary school climate. Factors such as governance in schools, teachers' behaviour and personality, teaching methods, resources management, strategic planning, family instability, curriculum, information and communication technology may have positive influence thereby necessitating the need for further research to ascertain their level of influence on school climate.

From the foregoing, it is recommended that the Cameroon Ministry of Secondary Education should establish enforcement structures to ensure that all secondary schools comply with the policy guidelines which require the involvement of all educational stakeholders in school decision making process. In the same light, school administrators and teachers should actively involve parents in the making of decisions which affect the lives and wellbeing of children in school.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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Peer-review history:
The peer review history for this paper can be accessed here:
https://www.sdiarticle5.com/review-history/96831