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Review

Enhancing pre-K-12 student learning outcomes: The need for synergies of policy-makers, school administrators and parents

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Building strong synergy among policy-makers, school administrators, teachers and parents in the execution of their roles is very important to improve student learning outcomes. It helps to lay a firm educational foundation for children from Pre-K-12 and facilitates life-long learning in order to assist learners to acquire knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that empower them to contribute to sustainable development. As a remedy to deteriorating student learning outcomes (exemplified in Liberia), this paper examines and discusses synergic alignment of education stakeholders' roles towards the primary goal of better learning outcomes for students from pre-primary through high school, focusing on the need for combined efforts. It highlights why synergic alignment matters in spite of their traditionally ascribed roles and pinpoints some challenges and benefits of building synergy among stakeholders. Finally, this article offers suggestions aimed at improving student performance, particularly in developing countries through collaborative partnership. It sees synergy in group roles as one of the most effective solutions to cultivating better student learning outcomes and condemns children's education as the sole responsibility of school workers (administrators and teachers). It was concluded that the survivability of social institutions and continuity of human existence hinges on synergy built to support children's learning.

Key words: Pre-K students, learning outcomes, synergic alignment, education stakeholders.

INTRODUCTION

Policy-makers, school administrators, teachers and parents are at the centre of Pre-K to 12th education. They are believed to be core stakeholders in the education sector with collective responsibility for students' learning and development (Epstein and Sheldon, 2006). According to Jimenez and Sawada (1999), learners'

educational outcomes are products of their interactions in the schooling process. Pre-primary through high school education is seen as the first necessary step to put children on the right path to becoming knowledgeable. It helps to make them become skilful individuals and ensure they fulfil their full potential in the future (Fasina, 2011). Particularly for early years, Hopkins et al. (2014) and Knaus (2015) observed it is key to children's success later in life. It is through high quality learning experiences at either home or pre-school setting the development of children can be boosted. Thus, it acts as 'protective' factors (Sylva et al., 2011). Experiences children encounter significantly contribute to economic development and growth (Sahlberg, 2006). Besides, it is associated with better cognitive skills in reading, mathematics and science (Pholphirul, 2017), and improvement in social skills (Nokali et al., 2010). But the contrary may have serious negative consequences on children (Moore et al., 2014).

Educators around the world are interested in better solutions to promote effective schools for improved learning outcomes (Jimenez and Sawada, 1999) as education systems, especially in sub-Saharan Africa are faced with vast challenges (Jones, 2016). For instance, as country emerging from a decade plus civil war, Liberia faces countless constraints including implementing its free and compulsory basic education policy (Waydon et al., 2016), covering grades 1-9. Consequently, raising the quality of education to facilitate student success is a matter of concern for education stakeholders (Singh et al., 2015; Jones, 2016; Adolfsson and Alvunger, 2017). Stakesholders are interested in necessary ways that improve students' learning and development (Singh et al., 2015), amidst increased enrolment at various levels in view of global policy instruments to provide education opportunities for all (UNESCO, 2017).

As part of efforts to deal with poor learning outcome challenges (Nishimura et al., 2009; Jones, 2016; Waydon et al., 2016), particularly in Liberia, this review article looks at one aspect that blends all synergies toward the ultimate goal of better student learning results from Pre-K-12. It focuses on the need for combined efforts of policy-makers, school administrators, teachers and parents to facilitate the much desirable transformative education. Swartz and Triscari (2011) noted that collaborative partnership concentrates on the interplay of education stakeholders and all their many aspects. In fact, building synergy supports social constructivist approach to learning, emphasizing that social context of learning and the idea that knowledge is mutually built and constructed (Santrock, 2011). Santrock (2011) believe involvement with others creates opportunities for students to evaluate and refine their comprehension. This can be created both at home and school with stakeholders working together collaboratively.

There is a glaring need for concerted efforts to deal with various challenges facing the education sector

because through working hand in hand, individuals can harmonize for the good of the whole capabilities, thus providing various opportunities for student success (Andrews and Abawi, 2017). Andrews and Abawi (2017) noted that collaborative partnership helps to promote shared individual strengths, as well as build capacity in areas of challenge. However, how synergy of education stakeholders can be aligned and fostered has been sparsely considered in the literature; consequently, very strong sense of isolationism and individualism is still widespread (Mifsud, 2015; Silva et al., 2017). Exploring this aspect is critical and it cannot be over-stated in remedying the current situation of somehow poor learning outcomes of students. It is important because synergy among influential role groups can directly and indirectly result to academic and personal success (Epstein and Sheldon, 2006) and competitiveness can be stimulated and improved by fostering cooperation and interaction at three levels in education: schools, teachers and students (Sahlberg, 2006). According to Mifsud (2015), the main aims of collaboration include the sharing of professional expertise, the enrichment of learning opportunities for students and the breaking down of barriers between the schools and individuals.

Masino and Niño-Zarazúa (2016) identified bottom-up and top-down participatory and community management strategies, via decentralisation reforms, and with involvement of communities in the school system management as one of three best drivers to improve education quality and student learning in developing countries. The other two relate to supply-side elements of education systems, through the provision of additional material and human resources; and the supply-side and demand-side factors influence behaviors. However, this paper argues that the latter two proposed remedial drivers can be achieved through sturdy synergy among education stakeholders as their collective efforts can affect both supply and demand in education.

In line with its purpose, the remainder of this article focuses on the following. Firstly, it justifies why children's education is a shared responsibility and discusses traditionally ascribed roles of policy-makers, school administrators and parents. In addition, it highlights the need for the alignment of their synergies as well as pinpoints some challenges and benefits of synergic alignment aimed at enhancing student learning outcomes. Finally, suggestions geared towards improving student learning outcomes from Pre-K-12 through synergy among education stakeholders are proffered.

CHILDREN'S EDUCATION AS A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

There is a popular saying that it takes the whole village to raise a child. Though it may sound fascinating, it is practically true. One family can give birth to a child, but

the holistic growth and development of the child needs everyone in the environment that comes across him or her to influence the prospect of 'whom' the person becomes (Knaus, 2015). This is also reflected when one dissects the saying that no man or country is an island, stressing interdependence among individuals and countries (Gbollie and Gong, 2013). It is widely recognized that there is strength in unity; hence, combined efforts with one collective purpose most often lead to achievement of a target goal, in this case, better learning outcomes for students.

Though it is highly required for all stakeholders in the education sector to work together to guarantee optimal improvement in students' performance (Hornby and Lafaele, 2011), many policymakers, community leaders, and even parents still consider schools and student learning as the singlehanded obligation of educators (Roekel, 2008). As a result, some shift blame on government for poor quality of education (Mashau et al., 2014), instead of joining hands to assist in promoting children's education.

Considering the fact that whatever happens in the education sector negatively or positively affects every aspect of the society in terms of sustainable growth and development, it is strongly argued that children's education must not be the sole responsibility of school workers (administrators and teachers), but a shared obligation for all education stakeholders to provide quality education (Mashau et al., 2014). The authors believe that collaboration of policy-makers, school administrators, teachers and parents is one of the best and most effective solutions to improving student learning outcomes, especially in developing countries. Roekel (2008) suggests that there is no appropriate partnership to assure all students from Pre-K through high school have support and resources they need to succeed in school and life than those from parents, families, educators and communities.

Collaboration is important because school-community engagements can serve many goals ranging from improving student achievement to community development (González and Jackson, 2013; Casto et al., 2016) and education stakeholders have a collective duty for students' learning and development (Epstein and Sheldon, 2006). Sergiovanni et al. (2011) intimated that local passions, beliefs, participation and support are critical to school effectiveness. Singh et al. (2015) found collaborative engagement as the most important predictor of management competency, whereas both individual and collaborative engagements were found to be significant predictors of indirect learning outcomes. On the other hand, Sam and Dahles (2017) asserted that limited collaboration among stakeholders has the tendency to impede educational advancement. Accordingly, Adams et al. (2009) advise that cooperative relationships between parents and schools are very vital and must not be left to exist by chance.

Parents are widely considered as children's first teachers because children begin learning where they live with their families, neighbours and other community members (Mogollón et al., 2011); therefore, parents need to continue as their involvement has impact on parenting knowledge and efficacy (Fasina, 2011; Popp and You, 2016). Bower and Griffin (2011) found parent involvement to be a successful strategy that assisted African American families in promoting their children's achievement. However, this critical role of parents is habitually forgotten, sometimes as a result of misconception that the school is responsible for what a child becomes educationally, which is somehow far from reality. It is maintained that policy-makers, school administrators, teachers, and parents are the nucleus of children's education and their combined efforts are imperative to bring about positive change in the lives of children educationally, in spite of perceived and anticipated roles.

SOME ASCRIBED ROLES OF POLICY-MAKERS, SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS AND PARENTS

Our increasingly globalized world has shown how much interconnected and interdependent we are. But at the same time, it has stratified and ascribed roles and responsibilities in various forms. The education sector is no exception. Even when one speaks of a school principal, teacher or student it is a portrayal of these roles. Notwithstanding with all of the diverse roles that exist in the education sector, there is one main goal, which entails assisting learners to acquire knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that empower them to contribute to sustainable development (UNESCO, 2017). Against this background, it is important to briefly highlight some prescribed roles before emphasizing their interplay to promote synergy and improved student learning outcomes.

Policy-makers

In the education sector, who makes policies and how they are made seem to be very critical. No doubt, it is crucial because it sets the tone and leads the way educational programs and services would be rendered. In many countries, when one speaks of policy formulation for the education sector, the Ministry of Education is brought in the limelight as this role is often enshrined in the Constitution or Education Law (New Education Reform Act, 2011). The MoE is to improve or cause improvement of the management and delivery of education efficiently with respect to process, policy and procedure (New Education Reform Act, 2011). Though, this mandate of policy-making is squarely laid in the hands of the MoE, there is always a need for other

stakeholders' participation to accomplish this role.

School administrators

After policies are made at central level (MoE) and triggered down to county and district levels, the next layer is the school. According to Sergiovanni et al. (2011), school administrators' good deal of work entails the implementation of policies that have been developed and adopted. On the other hand, it is expected that the school administrator plays role as the main instructional leader working collaboratively with teachers and community to develop the culture and climate of the school in order to improve students' learning (Sergiovanni et al., 2011; Andrews and Abawi, 2016) as well as forging educational partnerships, which require assertive and effective leadership (Schroeder, 1999). At the same time, the school administrator is to provide mentorship, coaching and assistance to teachers to become highly skilled and effective in the performance of their duties.

Parents

The root of students originates from the family (parents) who begin to teach children mostly in an informal way when they are born, assuming the role of children's first teachers (Mogollón et al., 2011). They normally decide, particularly for children set to enrol in pre-primary to lower basic school and underwrite the costs of school fees, uniforms, books and other necessities to enable them to go to school. This responsibility extends to ensuring that children's enrolment, retention and completion are not hindered. Additionally, parents ought to be involved fully in their children's learning, which relates to parenting and learning at home, and volunteering and parent-teacher communication, and supporting children's progress (Nokali et al., 2010; González and Jackson, 2013; Strier and Katz, 2016; Cetin and Taskin, 2016). Epstein's Framework on Involvement underscores that parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community are important roles of parents (Roekel, 2008; Cetin and Taskin, 2016), and visitations by members of the parent association made to classrooms (Jimenez and Sawada, 1999). Besides, Millennium Cohort Study's indicators related to parenting have shown a strong impact on factors such as children's development in the family environment, children's health, resilience and readiness for school (Owen and Anderson, 2017).

The involvement of parents is very essential for efficiency and quality of education and achievement (Nokali et al., 2010; Fasina, 2011; Center on Education Policy, 2012; Cassen et al., 2015; Cetin and Taskin, 2016), because it gives a clear picture of the school atmosphere and their involvement in school activities helps to build strong bonds. In a meta-analysis of 52 studies, Jeynes (2007) found that parental involvement in school increases grades overall and in particular standardized test results. Nokali et al. (2010) concurred and stressed that accumulating evidence suggests that parenting practices are associated with higher academic success in the early grades.

WHY SYNERGIC ALIGNMENT MATTERS

As highlighted, policy-makers, school administrators and parents do have some traditionally assigned roles in the education sector. Considering the fact that they share a common purpose, which incorporates ensuring better learning outcomes for students, the need for synergic alignment of their roles cannot be overstated as it is an appropriate education practice. Hence, consultation with key stakeholders during policy formulation and implementation is vital for the success of interventions in the sector (Nishimura et al., 2009; Casto et al., 2016). Kiddle Quarters argues that even teachers cannot be successful without parental cooperation and participation, noting that parents are an integral part of the classroom community (Santrock, 2011). Adam et al. (2009) contended that parents are not directly responsible for teaching, but their expectations and obligations cross into the teaching and learning environment. It is contended that when one group of the whole (policy-makers, school administrators, teachers, and parents) is ineffective, it affects the entire whole. For this reason, school administrators need to take part in policy-making because they would eventually lead the implementation, while parents should be concerned about school administrators' actions, which affect their children's learning; and policy-makers ought to be interested in happenings at both ends of the device. In short, they are tied to guarantee better learning outcomes for students.

Furthermore, to facilitate a more secured future for children and the society, it would be more meaningful to have each stakeholder fully participate in whatever is being planned and implemented in the education sector. Administrators, teachers and parents must be a part of policy-making and policy-makers must also be involved or concerned about what happens at school and in homes. This is an appreciation of diversity, an essential element in collaboration (Swartz and Triscari, 2011), which often fosters unity and leads to success in every aspect of human endeavour including children's learning. Synergy among group roles is meant to encourage stakeholders' collaboration to build a much stronger school system as understanding their interconnections is key (Hopkins et al., 2014). According to Lee et al. (2012), development of networks has a positive correlation with instruction and subsequent learning. In other words, the proposed synergic alignment aims to re-echo the glaring inevitability of collaboration and partnership among

education stakeholders because everyone has a stake in what is done at each end. More of how advantageous this concerted effort in group roles can impact children's learning would be discussed under the benefits of synergic alignment after we have highlighted some potential constraints.

SYNERGIC ALIGNMENT CHALLENGES

Arguably, to achieve every worthwhile endeavour, there are always challenges. Hence, development of sustainable collaborative partnerships between different role players is not void of challenges (Schroeder, 1999; Nel et al., 2014; Silva et al., 2017), especially in the world where the pursuit for power and supremacy is obvious. Thus, the following challenges are identified and discussed based on the authors' experience in the sector.

Presumed superiority and inferiority in roles

Presuming that one group role is more important than the other is harmful for the unity of the whole. It is often a recipe for confusion and ineffectiveness. This can happen through dominant posture (Schroeder, 1999), and by not giving the fullest respect and recognition to a segment of the groups. Oftentimes, it is tempting for those in a certain group role like policy-makers to think of being superior, and considering others as inferior, thinking that other groups are meant to comply or be forced to do so. This is a form of dictatorship in education, which can lead to failure in policies and programs implementation. To avoid this, Schroeder (1999) suggested that forging effective partnerships to promote learning entails overcoming this tyranny of custom. It is, therefore, germane to foster collaboration, coordination and cooperation in every aspect of students' education, void of exercising one's perceived authority at the expense of others.

Arbitrary policy formulation and decision-making

As a show of exercising power and control, some policies and decisions are made without considering the inputs of other stakeholders in the sector. This is contrary to participatory and community management interventions, which entail bottom-up and top-down policies in policy development (Masino and Niño-Zarazúa, 2016). Rather, Masino and Niño-Zarazúa suggested that policy formulation must be done by diffusing knowledge among local communities, parent-teacher associations, and parent committees, raise awareness, and increase participation and involvement in the management of education systems. In contrast, arbitrary policy

formulation and decision-making in the education has prompted other stakeholders such as school administrators, teachers and parents to sometimes revolt, directly or indirectly against said policies and decisions through a non-compliant attitude. One of the ways this can be portrayed is by those who are perceived to have been neglected refusing to give their best towards achieving these arbitrary policies and decisions, thus undermining their true essence and implementation, leading to failure in the implementation of policies and programs in the education sector.

Inconsistency and political interference in enforcement of policies

It is often difficult to detach education from politics. Many educators have opined that the implementation of educational interventions should be left solely with educators. Advocates of this proposition believe that the interference of politicians in educational matters tends to dent the healthiness of the school system. Without probing into the pros and cons of the debate, it is argued that constant inference of political leaders in various affairs of the education system often undermines efforts to implement policies (Nishimura et al., 2009), which Hornby and Lafaele (2011) claim can limit parent involvement as well. This can lead to lack of credibility, mostly in MoE heads to execute their mandate as required. For instance, if school X in violation of a policy is sealed as a result of interference by a politician, it makes the work of the ministry more difficult as it would lack the moral rectitude to prosecute another school that violates such policy.

Limited capacity of stakeholders

In order to ensure effectiveness of schools, it is important for each group to be capacitated because limited resources and lack of administrative capacity can hamper policy implementation and school maintenance and performance (Nishimura et al., 2009). Further, Epstein and Sheldon (2006) observed that parents care about their children; nonetheless they need good and clear information from educators in order to remain involved in their children's education from preschool through high school. It is also critical for policy-makers and school administrators to have the much needed capacity including knowledge, skills, passion and resources required to bring about positive change in the school system.

High illiteracy rate

No doubt the high illiteracy rate among parents has

negative implication in students' learning outcomes. Roekel (2008) noticed that some parents feel uncomfortable to communicate with school officials due to language or their own past experiences with the school; while some uneducated ones may feel inferior (Hornby and Lafaele, 2011), which could be averted and confidence rekindled through collaborative partnership. Because one of the ascribed roles of parents entails guiding and assisting with their children's homework and other materials that may seem challenging to their children, if a parent is not literate it is more challenging for him/her to fully execute this role. Besides, some parents lack the necessary awareness that even though they are not educated, it is possible to provide some motivation to their children to learn more.

Disconnect between school teaching and home-based practices

Reinforcement is an important construct in understanding and promoting learning whether it is positive or negative. It enables an increase or decrease in the probability that a behavior will occur (Santrock, 2011). Whether illiterate or not, parents can still execute this task by helping to stimulate learning environment at home (Center on Education Policy, 2012); and they possess skills and knowledge to transmit information to their children consciously or unconsciously (Mogollón et al., 2011). In fact, Feiler (2005) established the possibility of home-based practice influence on the school literacy curriculum. Especially, pre-schoolers and basic education students, a disconnect between what is taught at school and home-based practices must be consistent to avoid conflict in young learners' minds as to whom they should believe, teachers or parents? On the contrary, students may face the recurrent daily problems of adjusting between the worlds of home and school (Wrigley, 2014). Undoubtedly, learning sometimes becomes much more confusing if such divide exists, thus making it more abstract and futile as children do more of what they see others do in comparison with what they hear others say. It is argued that one of the contributing factors for young learners underperform is because of this harmful divide, which could be lessened through collaboration.

Low engagements

Synergic alignment of group roles requires collaboration. Parent-teacher associations (PTAs) are often established, some by default and everyone who has a child in a given school is an automatic member, in supportive of partnership. However, most PTAs are dormant and ineffective. This is not, however, to insinuate that there are no effective PTAs, but it is a wakeup call due to strong need for increased collaboration among

education stakeholders because low participation of parents seems to create mistrust and poor relationships in schools, especially between teachers and the community (Nishimura et al., 2009). Cetin and Taskin (2016) suggest that in order to intensify the involvement of parents in education, there is a need for functional guidance services at schools, and these coordinated services can be beneficial to schools and communities (Casto et al., 2016). This helps to strengthen parents' confidence and participation in school activities as it is essential to build relationship with parents in a purposeful and planned manner (Adams et al., 2009).

High poverty rate

McKinney (2014) pointed out that child poverty is a global issue that negatively impacts around half of the word's children and it is tied to poverty their parents and families experience. According to Wrigley (2014), it has adverse impacts not only on health and nutrition, but also on social development and self-esteem. Many countries, specifically sub-Sahara Africa including Liberia, are among the poorest countries in the world, defined as less than $USD1.25 per day (BTI, 2016), making poverty to remain a considerable socioeconomic issue for Liberia (Liberia Ministry of Education, 2016). As a consequence, it seems challenging for many parents to fulfil their various duties of educating children properly as they have to struggle to make ends meet. Unfortunately, some school going children are constrained to join parents to fend for daily bread (Gbollie and Keamu, 2017), contrary to the advice to keep children free from economic activity (Wrigley, 2016), because it is gradually becoming an obstacle to children accessing education (McKinney, 2014). On the other hand, evidence has revealed that socio-economic status of parents and other characteristics plays an important role in promoting quality education and better learning outcomes for students (Fasina, 2011; Center on Education Policy, 2012; Cetin and Taskin, 2016; Pholphirul, 2017).

Low budgetary support for education

One of the biggest challenges confronting the education sector is inadequate financial support. Compared with other sub-Saharan African countries, Liberia remains on the lower end relative to the allocation of government resources to the education sector (Liberia Ministry of Education, 2016). According to the MoE, it is operating on a fragile budget with 94% of funding allocated to the ministry used for compensating employees in 2014/2015 budget. Practically, this means funding for operations and programs is very little and it is plausibly impossible to undertake tangible interventions to revamp schools. As a result, many schools operate under difficult circumstances ranging from poor learning facilities to unqualified teachers. To change the trend requires more practical and

action-oriented financial and moral support from government to resuscitate the sector (Gbollie and Keamu, 2017; Pholphirul, 2017).

BENEFITS OF SYNERGIC ALIGNMENT

The synergic collaboration of policy-makers, school administrators and parents has numerous benefits for the education of Pre-K-12 students including the following.

Strong bonds and unity

As it is often said 'in union strong, success is sure', diverse roles of policy-makers, school administrators, teachers and parents must be viewed as a great necessity and an urge for building strong bonds for better collaboration and partnership. In a research-based framework for organizational alignment, Andrews and Abawi (2017) reported the LRI team suggested cohesive communities as part of alignment process. It is the various contributions and expertise that are brought on board that help to create better schools and in return result to better learning outcomes for students. This can only be done through the effective and functional execution of roles from each group void of strife for supremacy and control.

Success in policy and program implementation

When policy-makers, school administrators, teachers and parents hold together or work collaboratively, much can be achieved by learners. In view of this, Iddings (2009) warned educators to no longer neglect to attend to the wealth of resources that families bring to schools, but rather utilize them to the fullest. This needs to start from the inception of every major activity or decision that has the tendency to positively or negatively affect the school system through group role representation. It is highly vital to ensure each stakeholder group is in the know or indirectly participates before policies are formulated and disseminated for implementation. This would prevent any form of non-compliance posture from a particular group. One obvious evidence is the apparent non-compliance posture by some schools to the Liberian government's policy on WAEC results before 12th graders' graduation. In a united front, this could have been avoided even with a simple resistance from parents not to comply with school authorities' request to pay graduation fees in contravention with government/MoE's regulation.

School/children education ownership

Unarguably, the school is the light of the community,

country and the world in general and one of the most important needs of the community as it educates its citizens (Carpenter, 2006), serving as a significant contributor to how well children develop (Feiler, 2005; Hopkins et al., 2014). Accordingly, education is widely considered a pathway out of poverty (Sarvi et al., 2015), because it equips individuals to act in complex circumstances in a sustainable manner, which may need them to strike out in new directions; and to partake in socio-political processes, moving their societies towards sustainable development (UNESCO (2017). Thus, every individual has a stake and is affected by what happens to children at school and outside the school environment (home). Therefore, stakeholders, especially policy-makers, school administrators, teachers and parents need to take full ownership of children's education. In other words, no group of individuals must think that the other is more responsible and should be held solely accountable for better student learning outcomes. Rather, each must see it befitting to take total ownership of every child's learning as their own to edification.

Education becomes enjoyable and fun for children

Teaching and learning to read and write can be fun, natural and meaningful through collaboration of stakeholders (Mogollón et al., 2011). The synergic alignment of policy-makers, school administrators, teachers and parents can help to make education more enjoyable, impacting and fun for children because they would be able to experience goodness at every point of the educational ladder (at school and home). This can be achieved by education stakeholders rallying efforts to address various challenges of students, especially at school. Mogollón et al. (2011) remind school authorities to respond to the interests and expectations of children´s families, who the authors think are often forgotten as it has proven to be a successful strategy (Bower and Griffin, 2011)

Improved student learning outcomes

Literature on this subject has revealed that collaborative involvement of stakeholders leads to better academic performance of students (Epstein and Sheldon, 2006; Nokali et al., 2010; Bower and Griffin, 2011; Sergiovanni et al., 2011; Andrews and Abawi, 2017). When schools, parents, families, and communities work collaboratively to support learning, students tend to earn higher grades, attend school more regularly, stay in school longer, and enrol in higher level program (Roekel, 2008) as well as receive better results in other areas including language literacy (Iddings, 2009). This is because children need complementary support from policy-makers, school administrators, teachers and parents to thrive in their

academics.

Win-win benefits

As mentioned earlier, it takes the whole village to raise a child; hence this applies to educating children to become productive future leaders they ought to be. In view of this, when a child succeeds educationally, gets out of poverty and contributes to a better world, everybody (policy-makers, school administrators, teachers and parents) benefits. This is because the good of each child is not only the good of the family, but the entire society evident by a onetime child, but now grown up adult's impact on the international stage; a discovery from such person could even change the face of the world. This signifies how beneficial collaborative partnership is and the returns thereof. Therefore, kudos must be given to all for students' success as a result of concerted efforts.

SUGGESTIONS FOR STRENGTHENING EDUCATION STAKEHOLDERS' SYNERGIES

It has been clearly articulated from the literature why synergic efforts of education stakeholders matter in spite of some challenges. Moving forward, it is essential to proffer some suggestions geared towards enhancing this all-important inevitability.

Recognizing urgent need for collective efforts to educate children

The changing world calls for increased collaboration and partnership among policy-makers, school administrators, teachers and parents because they are crucial for the school, students and teachers (Silva et al., 2017). Thus, the importance of recognizing that it is only through concerted efforts that the goal of educating children holistically for future tasks can be fully met cannot be overstressed; it is a sine qua non. This means working together supportively during the planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and feedback stages for each intervention must incorporate every group's inputs. In a nutshell, there must be total involvement of all at every step of the way. No group should sit back and watch or be denied the opportunity to get involved. It is therefore advised that MoE takes the lead in ensuring this 'everyone has a stake' phenomenon in the Liberian education system is guaranteed and nurtured.

Strengthening parent-teacher-associations

Parents' organizations can make crucial decisions for the school (Mogollón et al., 2011). The idea of having PTA in each school is highly welcoming, but many PTAs ineffectiveness has weakened its real intent. PTAs must be a strong vehicle to support synergic alignment of stakeholders as it comprises of school administrators, teachers, and parents. According to Barton (2003), Child Trends Data Bank reports that students whose parents are involved in their school tend to have fewer behavioral problems and better academic performance, whether their parents are living with them or not. MoE must be actively involved through education officers for the smooth operation of PTAs. Additionally, the division at the Ministry that has oversight on PTAs must be capacitated and empowered to be more robust in working with PTAs to make them more effective and efficient.

Joint monitoring and evaluation (M&E) exercises

In a study in the Philippines, Tan et al. (1999) demonstrated the feasibility of monitoring and evaluating interventions in the education sector. Additionally, Nishimura et al. (2009) proposed the need for an effective system of monitoring and tightening accountability to ensure the success of universal education policy. As part of building bonds and confidence, it is necessary for stakeholders' assessments of schools in order derive, plan and implement programs (Kuru and Taskin, 2016). Additionally, Popp and You (2016) found that family involvement in service planning was significantly and positively correlated with their satisfaction. Collaborative initiatives are crucial to creating an enabling learning environment of trust and supportive relationships as families feel valued and respected in the process (Adams et al., 2009; Popp and You, 2016), which can help move individuals from being independent agents to dependent partners. According to Jimenez and Sawada (1999), similarly-strategy was crucial for improving students' achievement in El Salvador's EDUCO Program. In the study, the authors found that enhanced community and parental involvement in EDUCO schools improved students' language skills and diminished student absences, which may have long-term effects on achievement.

Using research evidence to enhance synergic collaboration

Roekel (2008) stresses that research helps to determine educators and families' needs, interests, and ideas about partnering. Evidence from systematic research can go a long way in improving collaboration and student learning outcomes when pieces of evidence thereof are applied in practical situations. Similar suggestion was offered by Gbollie and Keamu (2017), noting that interventions in the education sector must be backed by empirical evidence to enhance possibilities of programs success.

Gbollie and Keamu believe evidence-based interventions are more effective and efficient as they are backed by facts, rather than mere intuitions. Moving forward, enhancing collaboration among policy-makers, school administrators and parents need more research to deal with challenges. This would help to curtail the countless number of pilot projects, many of which failed because they are not evidence driven, and are, therefore not sustainable.

Vigorous national awareness and sensitization campaigns

To promote intense collaboration, particularly with parents, there is a need for vigorous nation-wide campaigns focusing on the importance and benefits of education, parenting styles, helping children to learn, individual and collective roles and actions, school programs, policies, and loyalty and commitment to quality education by all. The message of educating a child as 'everyone's business' must be preached and practiced at all layers of the country, using different means including jingles, flyers, bill-boards, town hall and religious meetings, dramas, music, radio/TV programs, among others. This would help to curb the considerably low attention being given to children's learning and strengthen parent involvement, thus limiting the disconnect between happenings at school and home. Roekel (2008) suggests the development of outreach strategy as one of the ways to boost parent involvement. Cassen et al. (2015) agree that parents only need to know what they need to do to assist in their children's learning. Even if they do not have requisite formal education, Center on Education Policy (2012) asserts that they can still play pivotal role in their children's learning through positive reinforcements.

Aligning education funding with priorities and cost effective programs

It is prudent to certify that the already scarce resources are aligned with priorities and programs that have proven to be reliable, cost effective and sustainable to tackle the challenge of maintaining both access to and quality of education (Nishimura et al., 2009). Tan et al. (1999) found partnerships with parents to be a contributing factor to cost effectiveness. With innumerable needs in the sector, ensuring the value for money and parents' physical, moral and material contributions could ease burden on projects implementation as parents bring a wealth of resources to the school (Iddings, 2009). Further, producing furniture at a close proximity of the school rather than at the capital city to avoid huge transportation costs and other issues should be carried out as well as ensuring decentralized, equipped and accountable leaderships, some which can be used to empower parents.

Motivation mechanism for high performing stakeholders

Motivation plays a key role in stimulating and consolidating performance. Thus, it is suggested that there should be annual public recognition of high performing stakeholders (policy makers, school administrators, teachers and parents) to strengthen commitment and foster competition in getting the best in the school system. For example, identifying and awesomely rewarding best (highly performing) school administrators, teachers and parents (like best PTA or parent) would stimulate others to work harder and remain committed to building and maintenance of quality learning institutions.

Enabling political will

To ensure tangible gains in the education sector, national government has a pivotal role to play. For instance, Colombia's national voucher program is a clear demonstration that a central government can effectively mobilize local government resources and private providers to alleviate constraints to public provision of education (King et al., 1999). Further, government interventions in socially disadvantaged schools in the UK have offered good examples for success (McKinney, 2014). Governments must, therefore, demonstrate fervent political will through budgetary allocation as well as instituting radical and practical steps to promote quality education. This must be void of mere pronouncements, but rather taking action oriented dispositions, such as ensuring that the Ministry of Education's budget graduates from salary-based to program-based, non-interference, and upholding other signed international protocols.

CONCLUSION

For any country to move forward, it requires a solid educational foundation for children from Pre-K-12. As countries, especially those in the development process, strive to reform their education systems, building strong synergy among policy-makers, school administrators, teachers and parents in the execution of their roles is very important to improve student learning outcomes. As Coleman (2011) rightly puts it, collaborative working is an unavoidable feature of the 21st-century school. In this article, the vital nature of education stakeholders' collaboration is demonstrated in order to improve student learning outcomes, by providing an enabling and friendly learning environment at home and school, which can lead

to academic and personal success (Epstein and Sheldon, 2006). Based on available literature, we have emphasized why synergic alignment matters and argued that robust synergy among education stakeholders is one of the best and most effective solutions to cultivating student learning outcomes, particularly in developing nations, and Liberia in particular. The paper objected the consideration of children's education as the sole responsibility of school workers (administrators and teachers), while affirming that deeper co-operation and open sharing of ideas at all levels in education helps to strengthen economic competitiveness (Sahberg, 2006). It is suggested that stakeholders will appreciate the diversity of the partners as critical, valuing the relationship as subject and emergent object, requiring physical presence, and bringing confidence and curiosity in a spirit of openness (Swartz and Triscari, 2011) in collaborative partnerships in education.

Further, some conventionally ascribed roles of policy-makers, school administrators and parents were reviewed and highlighted, and the interplay among them and why building synergy matters was underscored. Besides, it identified challenges and benefits of synergic alignment as well as advanced series of suggestions to foster synergic collaboration among education stakeholders. Future efforts at strengthening synergy among education stakeholders should focus on constructing model to harness potential areas of collaboration. Besides, a study that empirically investigates challenges, benefits and feasibility of suggestions offered to improve student learning outcomes is recommended. In a nutshell, Pre-K-12 education of children is unequivocally beneficial both to learners and nations in order to promote sustainable growth and development and poverty alleviation (Gbollie and David, 2014; Sarvi et al., 2015; UNESCO, 2017); hence it must be collaboratively supported by all education stakeholders as the survivability of social institutions and continuity of human existence hinged it.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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