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Adopt a School Programme: What the Doctor has Ordered to Remedy Education?

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Abstract

This paper investigates the impact of the “adopt a school initiative” at a primary school that has been adopted by a private organisation in a small village in the vicinity of the university at which the researchers are based as employees. The government of Botswana through its Education Hub embarked on an initiative to involve private sector in the development of Education in the country. This was after realizing that Government cannot do it alone; also, because the Education Hub’s mandate was to position Botswana as a “Regional Centre of Excellence in Education, Training and Research (Education Hub flier).” As a result, a number of private sector organisations, including private individuals, responded to the call and established relationships with various public schools across the country. The data for the study were collected qualitatively through questionnaires in the form of oral interviews. The participants of the study were the school management and the management of the private organisation involved. The results showed that the “Adopt a school Initiative” seemed to be the right remedy that the doctor has ordered to cure some of the educational ailments at this school as it improved the school’s facilities and learners’ academic performance. This translated into a positive teaching and learning environment which impacted on the school’s academic outcomes. It is recommended that the Initiative should be further publicised country-wide to sensitise the communities about the value of this noble idea.

Keywords: Adopt-a-School, Initiative, Private Sector, Hub, Impact

1. Introduction

The adopt-a-school (AAS) initiative was launched in 2011 after the Government of Botswana realised that they cannot continue to solely provide quality education at all levels. The initiative was aimed at inviting individuals, private companies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to work closely with schools to provide support which could be in the form of any of the following: Provision and Maintenance of Information Communication Technology (ICT) and equipment for schools such as: computers, printers, photocopiers and others. In addition, support could be in the form of sponsorship of Academic Excellence Awards (AEA) for top achievers at all levels of education or sponsorship of prize-giving ceremonies for both core and co-curricular activities such as excellent performance in school subjects and in sports respectively. The collaboration can also be in the form of provision of training for school management, teachers, or even coaching or mentorship, provision of feeding

scheme for the school, improvement of sports in the form of buying sports uniform, providing coaching clinics or even availing facilities to the school to utilise, such as gymnasium and even volunteering service to the school. Other forms of support could be in the form of provision of learning and teaching materials such as books or teaching aids for the school. The adoption is open to all educational institutions, from pre-school, primary school, secondary schools, brigades, technical colleges and colleges of education.

In response to this call, a number of individuals, private and non-governmental organisations took part in the initiative. However, this paper focuses on the partnership between one primary school in the Tswapong North and a private organisation. This partnership is of special interest to the authors of this paper because the university at which they work is also based within the same vicinity.

2. Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework for this paper is derived from the behaviourist theory (Skinner, 1961) which believes in reinforcement of positive behaviour. The behaviourist theory asserts that rewards are effective in learning. Skinner did not believe in intrinsic drive or desire because it was unobservable; hence he did not believe in intrinsic motivation. He simply focuses on observable behaviour and what increases it. For Skinner, behaviour that is followed by reinforcement in the form of a reward is increased. Therefore, if you want behaviour to increase, you must reinforce it. The researchers found this theory appropriate for this paper because the school performance increased as a result of the rewards that it received.

3. Methodology

The data for the study were collected qualitatively through oral interviews. The participants of the study were the school management and the management of the private organisation involved. Therefore, the results from the interviews of the school and company management are covered in the present paper. The data were collected through three main research questions:

1. Which areas of collaboration have been chosen?
2. What have been the successes of the partnership?
3. What have been the challenges and how can they be overcome?

4. Data Analysis

The results were analysed qualitatively to give a vivid picture of the type of relationship the school and the said company had. The analysed data were then used to answer the three research questions stated above.

5. Results Discussion

The data revealed that the partnership between the school and the company started in 2012 and was due to end in 2017. A formal agreement was signed by the two parties and the collaboration was open for renewal. The adoption covered all the areas that are articulated in the “adopt a school” programme (Botswana Education Hub, 2008). These are:

- Provision and Maintenance of Information Communication Technology equipment for the school
- Training
- Sports
- Feeding
- Academic Excellence Awards
- Learning and Teaching Material

The results are discussed under the three research questions. The first question was: “Which areas of collaboration have been chosen?” In answering this question, both the school and the sponsor reported that the

school was adopted in 2012 in response to the Ministry of Education's call that private sector should assist in the provision of education to ease the burden on Government. Previously, the company had supported one primary school in the capital city before Government called for partnership in education. After the call from the Government, the adopting company assessed where they could make a greater impact. They identified this school as more in need than the school they previously assisted. The former solely depended on government for financial support while the latter was assisted by several companies (in addition to government support) because of its location in an urban centre. This was consistent with one of the pillars of Vision 2016 "A compassionate, just and caring nation" P.19 (Vision 2016).

Since the inception of their relationship, the company provided assistance to the school under all the areas of possible collaboration. For instance, under Provision and Maintenance of Information Communication Technology equipment for the school, the company bought computers, a printer and a giant photocopier, as well as stationary. They had also pledged to provide toners for the printers and the photocopier whenever the stock was depleted, and also to maintain the equipment. According to the school management, the equipment donated greatly eased the job for the school as all their photocopy requirements – for example, tests - are done in-house. The donated equipment also benefitted neighbouring schools as they did their photocopying of tests and other learning material at this school. Overall donated equipment assisted the school and the management team to do their job better. Up-to-date facilities greatly enhanced the performance of the learners. According to Adaramaja and Adeyemi (2018) conducive school environment enhances effective and efficient teaching and learning. Penn State University (2017) reiterates that school facilities affect teacher retention, commitment, and effort; that the quality of school facility is an important predictor of teacher retention and student learning.

The company also donated a refrigerator, office furniture (because there was shortage of furniture) and school uniform for the disadvantaged learners in the school. This went a long way in instilling confidence among the learners as they could also fit in. In further improving the performance of the learners, the company also employed two retired teachers on part-time basis to offer remedial lessons to some of the slow learners identified in the school. The purpose was to improve the performance of the learners concerned. Remedial teaching is very important because it involves identifying slow learners and their areas of difficulty, then providing them with the necessary help and guidance to help them overcome their problems. It is meant to improve a learning skill or rectify a particular problem area in a student after identifying their areas of difficulty. It can be conducted through individualised teaching of learners (as individuals or in groups) who are experiencing difficulties in specific subject areas. The company also engaged, with a monthly allowance, three volunteers who assisted as librarian, gardener and a receptionist. To further enhance the learning environment, the company also sponsored learning and teaching material. This was in the form of purchasing computers for use in the school office and constantly supplying office stationary. In addition, a classroom was identified for conversion into a library and or a computer room. Other assistance rendered to the school was in the form of Feeding, that is the provision of food during school events such as the "Day of the African Child" held on the 16th June annually by many countries in sub-Saharan Africa. The day was set aside by the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) to honour the young people who participated in the Soweto Uprising in 1976 against apartheid on that day in South Africa. The Day of the African Child is celebrated on June 16 every year since 1991.

The company also funded school trips and met expenses associated with feeding of both teachers and learners on the trip. This is a noble gesture as food is the fuel for the body and mind. Well-fed learners excelled in activities they participated in, be they academic or extra-curricular. School feeding programmes motivate children to go to school. They increase enrolment and reduce absenteeism; they contribute to learning because they enhance cognitive abilities. According to World Food Programme (2019), for poor families, the value of a meal in school is equivalent to about 10% of their monthly income. Therefore, for this private company to provide meals for school children during educational or extra-curricular activities, the company was substantially contributing to the health and mental well-being of these children. Furthermore, depending on the needs of the school and the financial status of the company in a particular year, the annual budget set aside to assist the school could be exceeded to meet the exigencies of the school.

Furthermore, the company embarked on hands-on training for the school management. For instance, the company conducted leadership workshops for the school management, notably budgeting and book-keeping. Some of the workshops were hands-on as the school and the company jointly worked on the annual school budget that was submitted to the company for disbursements of funds. This greatly empowered the management team as some of them even translated the skills into their personal lives; for instance, the management of books for their private group-saving schemes known as 'motshelo'. After the inception of the partnership, the company also funded two trips undertaken by teachers on a benchmarking exercise to other schools in other regions. These were schools whose learners excelled academically. The idea was for this school to learn from others so that they could borrow useful ideas to implement at their school with the objective of improving learners' performance. Benchmarking is defined as "the process of comparing one's business processes and performance metrics to industry bests or best practices from other companies. Dimensions typically measured are quality, time and cost." (Wikipedia, 2015). Benchmarking with those who are doing better in the same business is important as it allows an organisation to out-perform other organisations within the same industry. The benchmarking trips proved valuable as upon return, the teachers implemented the ideas they learnt and from then onwards, the school's performance grew from year to year.

The company also bought sporting uniform for some of the sporting codes in the school as a way of improving extra-curricular activities (sports and athletics), and also sponsored prizes for excellence. In cases where parents through the Parents-Teachers Association (PTA) were unable to pay fees for their children to partake in school trips, the company also stepped in to assist financially such learners. The assistance greatly enhanced the school performance in sports and different sporting codes won awards nationally; for instance, one of the netball players won a gold medal. Sports and athletics complement academic excellence. According to ChildFund Australia (2019), Sport and physical activity have a positive impact on academic performance as it encourages the enhancement of brain function and cognitive development by increasing blood flow to the brain. This stimulates the brain to engage in core skills being; to think, read, learn, remember, reason and problem solving. Furthermore, sports and athletics have other added benefits to a learner's self-confidence, self-esteem and self-worth (ChildFund Australia, 2019). By supporting extra-curricular activities, the company also gave learners who were weak academically an opportunity in sports or athletics to identify their talent which they could use for personal benefit and sustenance upon completion of formal schooling.

To enhance academic achievement at this school, the company also sponsored events for recognising excellence both in academics and in co-curricular activities. The sponsorship included awards in the form of prizes for best achievers. This greatly motivated learners because during the first prize-giving ceremony 67 learners were eligible for prizes. By 2016, the number of best achievers had grown to 200; both academic and sporting achievements. The school had to raise the minimum achievement mark from 80% to 90%. Excellence awards serve as extrinsic motivation for learners. Pink (2018), defines extrinsic motivation as the use of external rewards to encourage a certain behaviour. For instance, if a teacher gives out extra credit to learners for bringing in things to the classroom, such as donations to the needy, the learners will be motivated to bring more. Pink's view was based on Skinner (1961)'s theory of operant conditioning. According to Skinner (1961), behavior is determined by its consequences, be they reinforcements or punishments, which make it more or less likely to recur. Skinner believed that learning is a function of change in overt behavior which is the result of an individual's response to stimuli that occur in the environment; hence his belief in extrinsic motivation. Because learners received tangible rewards, they were motivated to learn. Consequently, each year the number of high achievers increased, and the school's academic achievement rose to become number four nationally in 2015. From the areas discussed above, it is clear the company fulfilled its mandate as provided for in their collaboration agreement with the school.

The second research question was "What have been the successes of the partnership?" The successes of the partnership are visible as the school is better resourced and the learning and teaching environment have become better for both the learners and their teachers. Furthermore, the teachers and the learners were motivated as evidenced by the improved Primary School Leaving Examinations (PSLE) results from 2015. For the first time in the history of the school, it was among the top four achievers in PSLE results in the region. Furthermore, the company indicated that they received maximum cooperation from the school and its management. For instance,

they planned together in advance on what needed financial support in each year and worked on the budget together. They also gave the school targets of what to achieve each year in terms of learners' performance and the school strived to achieve the set targets. The success story of this partnership is a clear demonstration that in a developing country like Botswana, collaboration between Government and private sector can go a long way in improving the quality of education in the country under the model of Public Private Partnership (PPP). Such collaboration is important in a human development sector like education, which is also regarded as a universal human right (Tilak, 2016).

The positive spin-offs of the partnership were also felt by the company as their profile was enhanced not only in the village in which the school was situated, but also regionally and nationally. Their participation at the school's events such as prize-giving ceremony also gave them further publicity as such events were covered by media. Participation at these events also enhanced their visibility as leaders of the village, region and senior government representatives attended. Above all, as the company was giving back to this community by supporting the school, they were meeting one of their social responsibilities of uplifting the disadvantaged, consistent with one of the pillars of the country's long-term vision (Vision 2016) which espoused that Botswana should be a compassionate, just and caring nation (Vision 2016). Similarly, the country's Vision 2036 advocates for a society that will be knowledgeable with relevant quality education that is outcome based (Vision 2036 Presidential Task Team, 2016). The company viewed their support to the school as a small contribution that went a long way in improving academic performance at this school and, by implication, education in the country consistent with the long-term vision that Botswana should be an educated and informed nation as espoused in Vision 2016 (Botswana National Vision Council, 1996). As a result, there was a plan to renew the partnership for another three to five years when the partnership period expired in 2017. The partnership was extended for a further two years; and it officially ended in November 2019.

The third question was "What have been the challenges in the partnership and how can they be overcome?" In response to this question, both the school and the company indicated that even though their collaboration was a great success, there were some challenges that they both faced. The main challenge was that of lack of support from the community through its Village Development Committee (VDC). Before the company came on board, the VDC was active in the school's activities. Now the feeling was that improvement of education and the learning environment at this school was the sole responsibility of the company. However, community involvement in education was fundamental to avoid discouraging the company, which may lead to discontinuing their adoption. The resource and financial assistance provided by the company to the school had positively impacted education at this school. It was reported that both the teachers and pupils were highly motivated. The teachers were results-oriented; the pupils were determined to achieve high marks so that they could receive awards. For instance, to encourage competition, learners were grouped according to their village wards. Village wards are similar to suburbs in a city location. The ward that had the highest number of achievers was awarded a prize that could be beneficial to the ward. The prize could be chairs that the ward could use during its public meetings. This initiative encouraged parents to be interested in their children's education. They encouraged their children to learn and participate in school activities. The improvement of the PSLE results annually was a testimony of the positive outcome of this partnership. The partnership began in 2012 when the pass rate at PSLE was 59%, and the school was in 11th position regionally. By 2015, the school had moved to fourth place with a pass rate of 85%. The table below shows the schools performance from 2012 to 2016, the period that the research on which this paper is based.

Table 1. School's PSLE Performance From 2012 to 2016

| Year | Pass rate for PSLE (%) |
|------|------------------------|
| 2012 | 59% |
| 2013 | 66% |
| 2014 | 69% |
| 2015 | 85% |
| 2016 | 81% |

As noted in Table 1 above, the school's performance in the PSLE grew up steadily and reached its peak in 2015 when the school achieved a pass rate of 85%. In 2016, when the research started, the school's performance slightly dropped to 81%, but it is still an impressive performance. Furthermore, the school's performance in the subsequent years, (2017, 2018 and 2019) were outside the ambit of this paper, therefore were not included. The school continued to strive to be the best in the region to fulfil the aspiration of their private sponsor that as "number one security provider in the country, the school they support should also be number one in the region and eventually in the country." This partnership fulfilled one of the pillars of Vision 2016: Botswana should be an educated and informed nation (Botswana National Vision Council, 1996).

6. Conclusions

The paper has shown that the "adopt a school" programme was an effective initiative in improving education if both partners in the programme were committed to it. The programme produced desired outcomes in the form of good school results as evidenced at this school. The programme reduced the burden of funding education from the government, and it gave private sector an opportunity to play a role in educating the future leaders of this country. The initiative increased community participation in the education of their children. It also promoted a sense of ownership amongst all stakeholders – pupils, teachers, private sector and the community. Consequently, it created a bond between all stakeholders (school, private company, learners and the community) to work towards a common goal of ensuring that the school-leaving results were among the best in the country, if not the best.

The partnership also promoted visibility of the concerned private company. For instance, the sign board of the school bore the name of both the school and the organization concerned. The company also enjoyed free publicity as events that it sponsored were covered by media both private and public, print and electronic. The collaboration encouraged the school to strive for academic excellence because the company in question desired to be associated with a high performing school.

7. Recommendations

Based on the above, it is recommended that more companies should come aboard to participate in this noble initiative. However, the schools should not wait to be adopted, they should seek adopters and ensure commitment to the adoption. A school seeking adoption should come up with a clear plan of their needs which would convince the potential adopter that they are a deserving case. The schools that have not yet been adopted should benchmark with those that have been adopted to learn how AAS programme can help them to improve their performance. The researchers observed that the school did not have a website, therefore, it was recommended that either the government or the company should assist the school to be online to increase its visibility. This could be through a web page and even social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram. In fact, the government should ensure that all its schools, like private schools, have websites for easy access online and for visibility. This would allow potential partners to know more about the schools. A partner company like this one would benefit by advertising itself on the school website, perhaps without any charge. By so doing, its visibility would increase. The internet plays a very crucial role in advertisement. For instance, it has promoted online advertising, also known as digital advertising. Online advertising is a key instrument for reaching marketing and business goals for many companies. It has enabled companies to expand fan bases, promote company culture, and engage in communication with current customers (Semerádová, & Weinlich, 2019). It is further recommended that beneficiaries of this programme should ensure that the resources received are well-looked after and should guard against misuse as this could scare away future sponsors. It is equally very important that school facilities are well-managed and maintained (Adaramaja & Adeyemi, 2018). Furthermore, the government should continue to support a school that is adopted to guard against creating an impression that they were leaving the entire burden to the organisation that heeded the call to adopt a school. If a private organisation is in partnership with a school, by implication, that organisation is in partnership with government as the custodian of education in the country.

In conclusion, the research has shown that Adopt a School programme is one of the ways of fostering education in the country. If properly managed, the programme can add value to the lives of the learners concerned, the school and the nation.

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