

Parental Participation in Children's Education: Experiences of Parents and Teachers in Ghana

Çocukların Eğitiminde Aile Katılımı: Gana'daki Ebeveynlerin ve Öğretmenlerin Deneyimleri

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ABSTRACT: The engenderment of children's education requires the interplay of several factors with parental involvement as a key ingredient in the educational experience. However, some parents' participation in their children's education has been found to be low in both rural and urban communities alike. This has led to the loss of the positive effects attributed to parent's participation in their children's education. A qualitative research was therefore conducted with parents of pupils in the University of Ghana Basic School as well as the teachers of primary classes four, five and six, to interrogate factors that motivate and inhibit parents' participation in children's education. Participants were purposively sampled due to their experience and knowledge in issues related to parents' participation and non-participation in their children's education. Findings revealed that parents' belief that their participation in their children's education is part of the training they are supposed to give them has motivated them to participate. Barriers to parental participation in their children's education include the high cost of living which keeps parents preoccupied with economic ventures, and low self-esteem due to some parents' illiteracy which makes them feel they cannot offer much besides paying their children's school fees.

Keywords: Parents' motivation, parental participation, school, supervision, teachers.

ÖZ: Çocukların eğitiminin sağlanması, eğitimsel deneyimde temel içeriklerden birisi olarak aile katılımıyla bazı etmenlerin birbiriyle etkileşimini gerektirmektedir. Öte yandan bazı ebeveynlerin çocuklarının eğitimine katılımları hem kırsal hem kentsel topluluklarda benzer olarak düşük bulunmuştur. Bu, ebeveynlerin çocuklarının eğitime katılma atfedilen olumlu etkilerin katılıma yol açmaktadır. Bu yüzden Gana Üniversitesi Temel Okulu'ndaki çocukların ebeveynleri ve ilkököl dört, beş ve altıncı sınıf öğretmenleriyle çocukların eğitiminde aile katılımını motive eden ve kısıtlayan etmenler üzerinde tahkik etmek için nitel araştırma yürütülmüştür. Katılımcılar çocukların eğitiminde katılım sağlama ya da katılım sağlamama durumlarıyla alakalı bilgi ve deneyimlerine göre amaca göre seçilmiştir. Bulgular velilerin çocuklarının eğitimlerine katılımlarını onlara vermeleri beklenen bir eğitimin parçası olarak görme düşüncesi onların katılımını motive ettiğini gösterdi. Ebeveynlerin çocuklarının eğitimine katılımının önündeki engeller, ekonomik sebepler dolayısıyla onları meşgul eden yüksek yaşam maliyetleri ve bazı ebeveynlerin onları sadece çocuklarının eğitim masraflarından fazlasını yapamayacağını düşündüren bilgisizlik dolayısıyla yaşanan düşük öz güvendir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Velilerin motivasyonu, aile katılımı, okul, denetim, öğretmenler.

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Pupils in the same class usually exhibit differing levels of academic performance even when they are being taught the same subjects by the same teachers. The disparities in the academic performance among pupils are attributed to several factors. Ali, Haider, Munir, Khan, and Ahmed (2013) cite a child's age, socioeconomic status of parent/guardian and hours committed to studies whiles Ong, Chandran, Lim, Chen, and Poh (2010) cite individual intelligence of pupils, behavioural problems, delinquency, health of pupils and pupils' attitude towards their education as determinants of children's academic performance. However, an issue that has proven to be very important in the education of children and yet not much talked about in some parts of the world is parental participation in their wards' education. Dempsey (1987) (cited in Watson, Sanders-Lawson, & McNeal, 2012) explain that parental participation can be best put in two forms: the activities or chores that are performed by parents at home but concerns their children's education such as helping a child solve homework and supervising a child to read a book; and activities that parents undertake in their children's school such as attending Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) programmes and volunteering in schools. Makgopa and Mokhele (2013) also define parental participation as roles played by parents to facilitate their children's academic performance and their involvement in activities in their children's schools.

Increasingly, the involvement of parents and significant others in children's education has been touted as a prerequisite for high academic performance, without which children's performance in school could be compromised (Castro, Exposito-Casas, Lopez-Martin, Lizasoain, Navarro-Asencio, & Gaviria, 2015). Wang and Sheikh-Khalil (2013) add that parental participation in children's education has had as much important impact on their education as socioeconomic and family factors. According to LaRocque, Kleiman, and Darling (2011), parents' involvement in their children's education creates the platform for both parents and teachers to work together, breaches the gap between the home and school, and affords teachers the opportunity to better understand the cultural background of their pupils. It is noteworthy that the positive result attributed to the involvement of parents in the education of their children is not specific to children of particular ages and races, but to all children (Andrews, 2013; Chowa, Ansong, & Osei-Akoto, 2012; Makgopa & Mokhele, 2013).

Whiles parental participation in children's education has taken many forms in Ghana, just as in other countries, the main form beside financial support is attendance to PTA meetings (Chowa, Ansong, & Osei-Akoto). Nyarko (2011) also opines that many parents in Ghana assist their children in doing their homework. The above-stated reports show that parental participation in Ghana is not different from what is done in other countries, as parents assume roles in their children's education both at home and in school. Regardless of the enormous importance of parents' participation, the issue has not been paid much attention in Ghana especially in academia, creating a gap in literature on the subject. This study therefore focuses on interrogating factors that motivate and inhibit parental participation in children's education in the Ghanaian context. It is based on the experience of the University of Ghana basic school, an educational institution that has children from both high and low socioeconomic backgrounds. The relevance of this study is situated in the fact that it will provide information to the various stakeholders of children's education in Ghana, on ways to engender parental participation in education. This is because upon reading this paper,

both teachers and parents will understand how both parties can collaborate in establishing relationships and interactions that can motivate parents to play more active diverse roles in their children's education.

Literature Review

The increased attention that has been paid to parental participation in children's education has culminated in some studies being conducted on the matter. According to Grolnick (2009), one of the key reasons behind parents' participation in their children's education is to motivate the children to work hard towards achieving good grades and other goals of their education. This is a psychological aspect of children's growth and development which is crucial to various aspects of their lives including their education. Another study that has revealed children's psychological and emotional growth as a motivation to parental participation in children's education was conducted by Pomerantz, Moorman, and Litwack (2007). Some parents in striving to boost the confidence of their children, make frantic effort to actively involve themselves in their children's education (Pomerantz, Moorman, & Litwack, 2007). In such instance, the parents engage themselves in various activities and programmes in their children's schools such as sports, drama, trips and others (Mo & Singh, 2008; Turney & Kao, 2009).

Beside the aforementioned motivators, some parents' perception of the invaluable role they can play in their children's education has motivated them to participate in their education. According to Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, and Sandler (2007), some parents' active involvement in their children's education is motivated by their view that it is part of their responsibilities in nurturing their children into responsible adulthood. Such parents accept the role as partners of their children's teachers in the educational endeavours of their children. Yamamoto, Holloway, and Suzuki (2016) elucidated the crucial role assumed by some teachers in motivating parents to participate in their children's education. Some parents are able to assume the responsibility of playing more active roles in their children's school both at home and in school premises when their participation is sought by the teachers of their children (Yamamoto, Holloway, & Suzuki, 2016). This gives parents the impression that their involvement in school activities is not viewed as distractions but is welcomed and appreciated by the teachers and school authorities.

In their study which involved focus group discussions with urban black American families, Huang and Mason (2008) viewed parents' source of motivation to actively participate in their children's education from three sources. These are parents need to establish relation with their children's school environment, their need for the power to be able to influence their children's lives, and their belief that education is a vital tool with which their children can be successful in life (Huang & Mason, 2008). This shows that some parents need to have relationship with the elements in their children's school environment such as teachers, parents of their children's classmates and schools' administrators, has motivated them to be actively involved in the activities and programmes executed in the school. Such activities include parents-teachers association (PTA) meetings, educational trips and sporting activities. With regard to parents' need to influence their children's lives, considering that children spend many

hours of their childhood engaging in activities related to their education, it is a key aspect of their lives through which their decisions can be influenced.

Regardless of the crucial impact of parents' involvement on their children's education as shown by studies, some parents have been passive in involving themselves in their children's education especially in ways beside the payment of school fees. In their study which was based on a review of literature on parental participation, LaRocque, Kleiman, and Darling (2011) and Sheng (2012) found that busy schedules and stressful life situations of some parents encumber their ability to actively participate in their children's education. Brock and Edmunds (2010) also added that whiles parents with busy schedules can send emails to their children's schools if they have access to computer and internet, their ability to visit the schools in person is constricted. Gordon and Cui (2014) in their study on community poverty's effect on parental participation also added that this situation is usually faced by poor parents or people in poor communities who have to engage in multiple jobs during both day and night, in order to be able to provide the needs of the children.

Parents' perception about schools and teachers as the primary responsibility bearers in their children's education has also been found as a source of barrier to some parents' active participation in their children's education. According to Levine-Rasky (2009), some parents' limited participation in their children's education stems from their views held concerning their roles in the education of their children. Some parents assume minimal roles in their children's education which are mostly played at home, due to their perception of not having much to do in their children's schools (Sheng, 2012). Such parents therefore assume the primary responsibility of paying fees, while they shove most of the other activities to the schools and teachers. This view is also shared by Reed, Jones, Walker, and Hoover-Dempsey (2000) who asserted that as parents begin to view their children's education as the responsibility to be shouldered mostly by school and teachers, their participation in children's education reduces.

Some parents' limited participation in their children's education has also been attributed to their perception of not being wanted in their children's school environment. This is especially associated with parents of low socioeconomic status. In their study with immigrant households in in US, Turney and Kao (2009) observed that some low-income parents were not able to play active roles in the activities of their children's schools because they were marginalized. This marginalization was experienced in the teachers' hesitation to engage them as parents and limited communication about issues related to their children's performance and activities in school. This observation was also found by Jasso (2007) and Hornby and Lafaele (2011), who asserted that some parents play limited role in their children's education especially in the schools' premises due to their perception that they are not needed in the schools.

Some immigrant parents have also experienced certain structural barriers in their involvement in their children's education especially at the initial stages of their settlement in their new host environments. In some studies (Altschul, 2011; Smith, Stern, & Shatrova, 2008) which engaged Spanish-speaking immigrants whose children attended English-instructed schools, it was found that such parents experienced language and cultural impediments in their efforts to participate in the activities of their children's schools. These are key barriers because they inhibit or distort communication between the parents and their children's teachers especially in situations where there are

no language translation facilities available (Altschul, 2011). Beside the language and cultural barriers, Altschul (2011) added that some parents are encumbered by social and economic factors in their efforts to participate in the education of their children. On the economic issues, Jasso (2007) cited poverty as a key impediment in parents' ability to participate in their children's education.

It is worthy of note, however, that some barriers of parental participation have emanated from the actions and inactions of the schools. As reported by Okeke (2014), although parental participation is overtly talked about and encouraged by schools, there have been structures and practices in some schools that have impeded parent's participation. This coincides with Watson, Sanders-Lawson, and McNeal's (2012) observation that some schools involve parents in issues of the school in an untimely manner such that parents do not have much say and role to play in school activities. Some schools instead of engaging parents as partners in the education of their children in timely fashion, only engage parents when there is a problem involving their children in the school, limiting the roles such parents can play in their children's education (Watson et al., 2012).

The importance of parental participation has manifested in literature on its role in the improved academic performance of children from various geographical backgrounds. Additionally, both motivating factors and barriers of parental participation in children's education have been scrutinized from the viewpoints of upper and lower socioeconomic classes of society. However, the issue has been seldom researched into in Ghana. This study therefore sought to contribute in filling the literature gap identified.

Method

This study was conducted with the qualitative research design which afforded the researchers the opportunity to gather detailed data regarding parents' and teachers' perception about parental participation in children's education. The qualitative research design was also crucial in helping the researchers build trustworthy relationship with participants based on which detailed information would be obtained from participants (Creswell, 2013). Specifically, the phenomenological approach was used as my primary goal was to gain understanding of which factors motivate and impede parents' active involvement in their children's education.

It was conducted at University of Ghana Basic School, which is located within the University of Ghana campus in Legon, a suburb of Accra. This is a mixed day school which comprises of kindergarten, primary and junior high schools. Specifically, two classes – primary five and six- were the target of the study. These two classes were selected for the study because there was an easy identification of pupils whose parents actively participated in the activities in the school and those whose parents rarely involved themselves in such activities. This was a crucial characteristic of these classes which distinguished them from the other classes. However, this is not to say that the other classes did not have pupils whose parents did not participate in the school activities. Having such characteristic enabled the teachers of those classes to extensively express their views on parental participation in school activities. There are four classrooms for each of the two classes, with two teachers in each of the classrooms. This means there are 16 teachers in the target population. This school was selected for

the study because upon initial visits and communications with the management of the school it was realized that there are children of parents with high and low levels in both economic and educational statuses. It therefore suited the study as the researchers were interested in understanding how parents' economic and educational statuses influence their participation in their children's education.

Purposive sampling was adopted because it offered the researcher the opportunity to select participants who were knowledgeable about the roles parents can play to support their children's education and how such participation affects children's academic performance. It also enabled the recruitment of parents who rarely participated in their children's education in order to understand the reasons behind their low involvement. The sample for this study consisted of 16 people comprising of eight parents and eight teachers. With the selection of teachers, one was selected from each of the eight classrooms of primary classes five and six, with the help of the school's administrator to whom the researchers were introduced. The school administrator and teachers then assisted in recruiting eight parents of some of the pupils in the target classes.

Primary data which were used for the study were obtained through semi-structured interviews with participants in English and Twi depending on participants' proficiency in any of the two languages. These interviews were conducted at places convenient and comfortable for participants and data collection such as the homes, classrooms and offices of participants. The convenience of venues and comfortability of the participants were important because it aided them to freely express their views on issues discussed, so that detailed data could be gathered. The interviews aided the researchers to obtain detailed information through further probing into issues that were raised by participants. Also, in order to ensure that data were collected on the same issues, the interviews were aided by an interview guide which consisted of specific questions which all participants were asked. Furthermore, the interview guide assisted the researchers to avoid the digression of the interviews into issues that were not important to the study.

Data were collected through note taking and voice recording after permission had been sought from participants. Generated data were analysed using Creswell's (2013) data analysis spiral which comprises of five steps, namely, organizing data, reading and reporting, describing and classifying data into codes and themes, interpreting data and presenting data. Data was organised by converting the collected audio recordings into word format through a process called transcription. Generated transcripts were read thoroughly for familiarization, through which codes and themes were generated, described and classified based on the goal of the study. Through this process, information that were similar were grouped under distinct themes so that the findings could be differentiated from each other. This means that themes that have been presented as findings represent amalgamations of similar information on the issues researched into, as provided by the various participants. Consequently, findings have been presented and interpreted. In order to create a vivid picture of the situation found by the study, quotes from participants have been presented. Ethical issues observed include informed consent, voluntary participation, anonymity and confidentiality and avoidance of plagiarism.

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

In order to understand the dynamics among the participants of the study, to facilitate the clear depiction of the nature of parental participation in the study population, demographic characteristics have been presented below. Also, in order to clearly show the difference between the dynamics of parent and teacher, their characteristics are presented separately.

Regarding the age of the parents, four out of the eight were aged between 31 – 40 years, three were between 41 – 50 years and one was between 51 – 60 years range. This shows that all parents were in the productive years and as such have commitments in the jobs, which could inhibit their ability to devote more time to their children's education. There were five male parents and three female parents. Considering that these males have been traditionally considered as the primary breadwinners of their families, their commitment to activities in their children's school beside paying fees and providing school materials could be compromised. Also, five of the parents are university graduates, two of them only had secondary education while the remaining one parent had no formal education. With many of the parents having had appreciable levels of formal education, they have a clear understanding of what is entailed in their children's education and the essence of their involvement. Another factor that could impact the time parents devote to their children's school is the number of children they have in the school. In this study, three of the parents interviewed had a child each in the University of Ghana Basic School, four of them had two children and one had three children. Regarding the job of the parents, three of them worked in the University of Ghana as lecturers, three were in the corporate or business sector, one was a petty trader and one engaged in menial jobs.

The characteristics of teachers whose conduct also influence parental participation have been presented in this section. Regarding their ages, three of them were between 21 – 30 years range, two of them were between 31 – 40 years range, two of them were 41 – 50 and one was between 51 – 60 years range. As teachers in the University of Ghana Basic School, all of them are university graduates. Furthermore, some teachers had children in the school and as such had knowledge and experience as parents and their roles in the school. Two of them had a child each while one had two children in the school. However, they were not recruited as parents but as teachers, although they expressed their views on their experiences as parents.

Findings

It was revealed that parental participation in activities in the University of Ghana Basic School is high. Their participation was found in ways such as paying school fees, supervising children to do their homework, supporting children during sporting activities, attending meetings meant to discuss the welfare of their children and the school as whole, responding to invitations by teachers, and also making random visits to the school. However, it was also revealed that the participation of some parents is discouraging. Factors cited for their active participation and low participation are subsequently explained.

Factors That Enhance Parental Participation in Children's Education

The most cited source of motivation is parents' internal conviction about their role in their children's education. As revealed by the data, many parents actively participate in their children's education as a result of their intrinsic motivation to give their children quality education. According to some parents, it is very important that they participate as actively as possible in their children's education as a sign of their seriousness about their children's education. As it can be seen in the demographic characteristics of the parents, many of them by virtue of their enlightenment, appreciate the role they can play in their children's education. Such parents consider education as a lucrative investment in their children:

My parents were not rich, but they managed to educate me... I firmly believe that it is my responsibility to educate my children. I must do more than just paying their fees and buying books. I must attend meetings, try to support them in the various school activities. This is an investment that parents make in their children for both their present and future (Parent, university lecturer).

With their investment in their children's education beyond paying fees and providing requisite materials, they can communicate their seriousness to the teachers. With such communication, many teachers have become more committed to their job of teaching the children. The children upon seeing the commitment from both their parents and teachers, have also become serious with their studies, thereby developing themselves.

Some parents also participate in their children's education because they want to keep positive image. With such parents, they want the wider society to see them as 'good' parents who are well invested in their children's education. Such parents would play roles that do not require much resource, such as attending PTA meeting and honouring teachers' invitation concerning their wards. This reason was mostly cited by some participant teachers who felt some parents are not very enthused about their children's education but try to create false impressions. They added that such parents are reluctant to pay monies such as school fees and buying the requisite materials such as books for their children. This observation was mainly associated with parents whose educational background is low, and have low appreciation for their role in their children's education:

Some parents are not really doing much to help their children in their education. They show up sometimes when you call them and then make promises just to look good. But you can tell they are not much committed to being active in their children's education. They are reluctant to pay fees on time and buy the needed materials that would help their children in their academic work (Teacher).

Although this finding is seldom captured in existing findings, it was revealed to be a key motivating factor. In such instances, as explained by two teachers, both the school and children do not get the true involvement of these parents in the roles that other parents are participating.

Another factor is that some parents consider their active participation in their children's education as part of the training being given to children. Thus, some parents consider the education of their children as an integral part of their responsibilities as parents and hope to inculcate such attitude into their children. Some parents were adamant about the fact that without education, whatever a parent gives to his/her child is not enough because the child misses out on school experiences which are valuable in

their lifetime. This therefore motivates them to educate their children and play diverse roles to help the children to get the best out of their education. Many parents also expressed the need for parents to be active in their children's activities in the school, since that is an important part of children's lives considering the hours they spend in school. A parent who was a businessman expressed how his presence in his children's lives in school helps his family in raising the children:

... If our goal is to help them build positive characters, we cannot do that only at home. They spend many hours in their school doing various activities so we try to be as present as we can... We try to attend meetings, support them in their sporting events and all that. My son was so happy that I was there for his poem recital about a month ago and this a special moment in his life.

Findings also indicate that some parents are motivated by their intention to keep an eye on the conduct of the teachers and also protect their children from unfair treatment from the teachers. Parents with such intention randomly visit the school to check on how their children are faring in class. This they said sends the message that such parents are closely monitoring what is going on in the school. Although some teachers expressed their discontent about such random visits, others explained that it keeps both teachers and the children upright. A teacher who expressed his mixed feelings about such random visits had this to say:

Few parents come to this school uninvited to see their children and sometimes talk to me about their children. I think some do it in a way which seems like they are sniffing around to catch a teacher not treating their children well... However, I think the children of such parents usually comport themselves both in class and on the playground.

A parent who has randomly visited his child's school thinks such unexpected calls to the school helps his child to be upright and take school activities seriously. He therefore thinks it is a technique that should be employed by other parents, although he also mentioned that while such visits should be unexpected by the children, the teachers and school's administration should be notified in advance:

Sometimes my daughter's teachers invite me through a phone call, so I go to the school to see what the call is about. However, I do not tell her about such calls as I want to see how she acts in school when she does not know I am around. And after doing this for about three times, I hear she tries to be active in all school activities.

Although this is not a common motivation for many parents' participation in their children's education, it has been adopted by some parents who believe it helps to mold their children in an upright manner in their school. This then has served as a motivating factor for some parents to go beyond paying fees and providing items needed for their children's education, to making their physical presence felt in the schools.

Barriers to Parental Participation in Children's Education

A common barrier cited is the high cost of living and its effect on many parents. Some parents expressed that due to economic hardship, they are unconsciously separated from their children especially in their education, in their quest to make enough money to improve their economic situation. They stressed on the need to work hard in order to raise funds so that they can cater for their children's education needs among others. Such parents' participation is therefore seen to be limited to ways such as paying school fees and providing education materials. They added that they find it hard to visit

the school of their children and engage in activities. Based on the demographic characteristics of the parents presented earlier, it can be deduced that some parents struggle to earn enough income to provide for their children's needs including those required for their education. Two participants explained that their busy schedule and erratic in-flow of income have compelled them to spend long periods of time working to raise enough finances. Consequently, they are unable to make time to assist their children with their homework and actively engage in activities in their children's school. A parent who was a petty trader at the time of data collection had this to say:

I would have liked to attend PTA meetings in her school, but it is not easy. I am always moving from one market to the other just to be able to make money to take care of her and her younger brother. I only get to spend some time with them on Sundays, so I try to make the best out of it.

This shows that although some parents genuinely want to participate in their children's education in diverse ways, their quest to provide the needs of the children has limited their ability to do so. Some parents also attribute their inability to play more active roles in their children's schools to poor coordination from some teachers and changes in the school programmes. According to them, some teachers look down on some parents especially the illiterate ones. That deters some parents from seeing the teachers who they perceive are disrespectful, especially when the teachers have not invited them. Other parents also explained that sometimes the notices and invitations from their children's school are sent too late that it becomes difficult to respond to them. Additionally, some participants explained that changes in the schedules for programmes in the school such as PTA meeting and Speech and Prize-giving days also pose a challenge to them. This is because they sometimes find it difficult to factor such changes into their itineraries:

I think parents cannot be blamed entirely for missing some programmes in our children's schools... Sometimes notices are sent too late, and this makes it difficult to factor them into my plans. I cannot say I am busy and so I will not be there to make decisions that concern my children's education... the teachers and administrators need to let us know in advance so that we can also plan (Parent, businessman).

Inferring from the above quote, it can be understood that structural changes and lapses in the schools programme forecast has inhibited some parents' ability to honour some invitations from the school although they would have wanted to be there.

Another factor that impedes parental participation is their attachment to other things other than education. Some teachers indicated that some parents spend time and resources on other things rather than their children's education. They cited that some parents eagerly sew clothes for funerals and other social functions at the expense of providing for their children's educational needs. This, they attribute this to the fact that some parents are not serious about their children's education and hence accord importance to other things. This shows that some parents leave the education of their children to the teachers and the schools who they believe are responsible for playing such roles. It was revealed that some parents find it difficult to make sacrifices to attend programmes like PTA meeting and others, although decisions made during such meetings affect their children's upbringing and welfare in general in the school:

I find it difficult to understand some parents, who can never make time to attend our calls and meetings. Some of these parents are always busy looking for money, travelling all over the country and abroad, but they always have excuse why they cannot attend meetings... You write notes and they do not write back or even call to discuss the issue at hand... and some of these

parents are educated themselves and you would expect them to help us to train their children (Teacher).

As intimated by some teachers, some parents equate their participation in their children's education to paying school fees and providing materials needed by the children. Such parents, upon paying the fees and providing material needs, leave the remaining responsibilities to the school.

Low self-esteem on the part of some parents was also found to be a factor that has inhibited some parents' participation in their children's education. It was found that some parents as a result of their illiterate statuses feel they do not have much to offer in their children's education. Some parents explained that they cannot help their children do their homework because they do not have the knowledge and expertise required to do so. This feeling of low self-esteem has also discouraged some parents from attending PTA meetings because over the years, they have not been able to share their views on issues discussed especially when the English language dominates discussions. They therefore limit themselves to paying school fees and providing the needs of their children, while they encourage their older children to assist their younger siblings in ways such as doing homework. A parent participant who did not have any form of formal education explained that she has limited her role in her children's education to paying fees and encouraging her child to work hard. Although she attends few meetings, especially those that involve only her and a teacher, she is averse to attending PTA meetings:

English language is mostly used in these meetings, so I did not understand many issues discussed... So, I stopped attending PTA meeting... I go to see the teachers to discuss some issues, but that is between us so I can freely speak about my concern... I think I could have done more if I had formal education myself.

The educational background of many parents has been a determinant of their participation in their children's education. Besides helping them understand the essence of playing active role in their children's education, it boosts their confidence and ability to do so. Illiterate parents in some instances, as captured above, are incapacitated to fully engage in certain activities. However, the appreciable level of education attained by many parents of children in the University of Ghana Basic School has limited the instance parental non-participation as a result of their illiteracy.

Discussion of Findings

This study sought to identify factors that motivate parents' decision to actively participate in their children's education and factors encumbering their participation. A key factor that has motivated parental participation has been some parents' admission of their participation being part of their responsibilities in raising their children. Such parents who are mostly enlightened enough to understand that school is one of the main agencies of socialization, go beyond paying fees and providing requisite materials for their children's education. They make their presence felt in their children's schools in ways such as attending meetings, supporting their children's sporting activities and helping school administration organize educational trips for children. This role played by parents in their children's education has also been found in other parts of the world beyond Ghana, as reported by other studies. For instance, this finding corroborates Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, and Sandler's (2007) argument that some parents' motivation to actively participate in their children's education stems from their innate

view that they have a crucial role to play in their children's education. It also lends credence to Grolnick's (2009) argument that some parents use their participation to inspire their children to work hard in school and safeguard their future through their education.

Surprisingly, it was also found that some parents only make the impression of participation in various facets of their children's education without eventually doing much. This has been done by parents who are interested in gaining a positive image from their children's teachers and schools' administration. While such parents readily promise to their children and the teachers to provide their children's needs and attend meetings and other programmes, they end up giving excuses to refrain from fulfilling their promises. Although this is not a very prominent problem, it has been identified with multiple parents regardless of their economic situation.

Parents' conviction that their presence in their children's education is a major way of training them has also inspired some parents to participate in their children's education. Acknowledging that children spend many years of their lives in school, parents try to influence their school environment. As unequivocally explained by both parents and teachers, children tend to be more interested and focused on their academic and extra-curricular activities when their parents are actively involved. Hence, their general attitude to education improves with their parents' increased participation. This confirms Turney and Kao's (2009) observation that children's attitude to education has a positive relationship with parental participation, seen in ways such as limited absenteeism and high scores in examination. Although many parents have busy schedule as portrayed in the demographic characteristics of participants, some parents' intrinsic motivation to train their children through their education find time to collaborate with the school in training their children. This supports Pomerantz et al.'s (2007) observation that some parents consider their involvement in their children's education as one of the ways of training and instilling confidence in them.

It is also worth mentioning that some parents' participation has stemmed from their intention to keep an eye on the conduct of their children and the teachers during school hours. These parents have the proclivity to visit their children's schools uninvited or unannounced. In their view, such surprise visits to discuss their children's conduct with the teachers encourages both the children and teachers to exhibit their best selves. Such comportment they believe, leads to the development of positive attitudes which are crucial for their children's academic progress and overall development. While this is not a common finding in existing studies and has been explained by some teachers as problematic, some teachers and parents seem to have no discontentment with it. According to them, for as long as the integrity of the teachers, schools' activities and children's progress are not compromised, it is not a problematic motivating factor.

While parental participation has been encouraged by the above-stated factors, it has not been absolute. This is because some impediments have led to limited participation by some parents, especially in activities undertaken in the school. The financial burden on some parents and its accompanying high cost of living has prevented some parents from spending much time on their children's education. This is as a result of some parents' preoccupation with their jobs in order to raise money which is needed to pay for children's school fees and other needs. This challenge has usually been faced by parents who are not in stable jobs and as such have limited funds. Parents

who engage in menial jobs and small-scale sectors which are not very lucrative have been compelled to work for extra hours, which limits their ability to help their children with their homework and also participate in school activities in which parents' involvement is needed. This observation supports Sheng's (2012) assertion that parents' busy schedules impede their ability to support their children's education beyond the payment of fees. Beside the high cost of living, some parents' heightened compulsion to work extra hours has been necessitated by the high school expenses and the various materials required by children for effective learning coupled with their erratic income-earning capacities. This finding is also in line with Gordon and Cui (2014) observation that the working poor parents usually have less time within which they can participate in children's education.

Additionally, some parents are unable to actively participate in their children's education due to some factors being existent in the schools' environment. These factors are the negative attitudes shown by some teachers to parents and late notification of parents about changes in school programmes. Some teachers' negative attitudes have discouraged some parents from having direct communication with them, although the welfare of their children is of interest to them. This observation supports LaRocque, Kleiman, and Darling's (2011) position that the attitudes shown by some teachers towards their students' parents influence their level of involvement in school activities. Furthermore, in instances where changes in the planned programmes in schools are not communicated to parents in a timely manner, some parents are unable to attend such programmes due to their inability to factor such changes in their itineraries. This problem is exacerbated by the busy schedules which some parents are compelled to endure due to the high cost of living. Structural barriers to parental participation in schools have also been found in other countries (Okeke, 2014; Watson et al., 2012).

Some parents have been found to play limited role in their children's education as a result of their relegation of this responsibility to other activities that are of high priority to them. As explained mainly by teachers, parents who play limited role blame their passiveness on various excuses such as travels and ill-health. This attitude has not been shown by only poverty-stricken parents but wealthy ones as well. Such attitudes have usually been shown by parents who believe the responsibility of training children in the school rests on the shoulders of teachers who have been paid for that role. Consequently, upon paying their children's fees and providing materials needed, their physical appearance is rarely felt in their children's school. This belief held by such parents is not an isolated issue as it has also been reported by Levine-Rasky (2009) that ideological differences between parents and teachers concerning parents' role in children's education limit some parents' participation in activities undertaken in their children's schools.

Finally, although some parents have keen interest in their children's academic performance and welfare in their school, their participation is inhibited by their low self-esteem as far as dealing with issues related to formal education. Some parents are reluctant to involve themselves in their children's education due to a feeling of inadequacy in helping as a result of their illiteracy. Such parents have usually been hesitant to participate in activities undertaken in the school, such as PTA meetings, social group events with parents and direct individual meetings with teachers. This supports Okeke's (2014) view that the fear of being victimized on academic issues

compromises some parents' willingness and ability to participate in their children's education. Furthermore, parents with low or no formal educational background feel they have limited role to play in helping their children in doing homework at home. This shows that parents' educational attainment is a crucial determinant of their participation in their children's education, confirming observations by Dor (2012) and Mncube (2010) that some parents feel they have limited role to play in their children's education. However, it contradicts Chowa, Ansong, and Osei-Akoto's (2012) position that parents who have low educational qualification play more roles on their children's school compound than those with high educational background. This contradiction could be explained by the population of this study. Considering that University of Ghana Basic School is in the premises of the university, educated parents who work in the university are able to spend some time in their children's school, compared to the wide range of sparsely located schools chosen for Chowa, Ansong, and Osei-Akoto's (2012) study.

Conclusion

Parental participation refers to the extent to which parents or guardians devote their resources such as time, finances and knowledge to help their children in their educational endeavours. It comprises all activities that are undertaken by parents regarding the education of children such as supervising children to do their homework and attending P.T.A programmes in their schools. Several factors are responsible for the level of parents' participation. This includes busy schedules of parents, poor cooperation from some teachers and the feeling of low self-esteem on the part of some parents.

An issue that comes to the fore in the discourse of parental participation in children's education is inequality of various forms of opportunities. As extensively explained, a key barrier to parental participation emanates from poverty and low standard of living by some parents. As a result, they are unable to devote much time to their children's education due to the long hours of work. This shows that income inequality among its numerous consequences, to an extent translate into inequality in parental participation. Considering that income inequality is high in Ghana as a developing country, the persistence of such developmental anomaly will continue to inhibit some parents' ability to play active roles in their children's education.

Considering that studies have shown that parental participation contributes to improved academic performance by children, it is crucial that efforts are made by parents, teachers and schools' authorities to overcome the barriers that impede parents' involvement. The achievement of this will promote communication and resultant healthy collaboration among parents and teachers as partners in children's education. Such healthy communication and relationship would encourage high parental participation.

Implications

In order to promote parental participation, the following recommendations have been made. It is, however, noteworthy that promoting parental participation is not the sole responsibility of parents but teachers and school administrators as well. On the part of teachers and school administrators, they should encourage parents to actively participate in children's education during PTA meetings. This is because although some parents may be interested in getting more involved in their children's education, they

may not know how best to do that. This is especially on the part of illiterate parents who did not experience the education process for themselves and as such have limited information on it. By encouraging them, they get to understand the various ways through which they can be actively involved in children's education.

School administrators should also try to include some parents in the planning of programmes and activities in which parents' attendance is expected. This will motivate parents to show more commitment and interest in such activities. Teachers and school administrators should also send invitations of school programmes and activities to parents in advance. When this is done, parents will be able to include such programmes into their schedules. Hence, more parents will be able to attend these programmes. It will also make parents feel that they are considered important participants in school activities.

Teachers should do their best to report the conduct of their pupils to their parents. This will keep parents informed about issues and be able to assist their children to desist from bad conduct and motivate them to repeat the good ones. Additionally, it communicates to the parents that their inputs are needed not only at home but also in school. It is also incumbent that teachers and school administrators accord all parents respect irrespective of their educational background and economic status. This will help some parents especially those with low educational qualification overcome their inferiority complex, thereby being motivated to actively participate in their children's education, both at home and in the school.

On the part of parents, they should endeavor to pay their children's school fees on time and provide the basic items they need for school. When children's fees have not been paid, they become uncomfortable in class because they are at times called to the front of the class and asked the reason for their failure to bring the fees, although it is not their responsibility. They should also find time to supervise children to do their homework and ensure that they study at home. Parents should also show interest in children's education by visiting the school to talk to their teachers and attending P.T.A meetings and other programmes. Additionally, they should support children not only in their academic work but also in extracurricular activities.

Parent should also take notices sent to them from their children's school seriously and respond to them accordingly. These notices could be meant for reporting a child's conduct to parents or inviting parents to school. Parents should therefore respond to such notices accordingly so that the purpose for which they were sent can be achieved. Parents should also consider their children's teachers as their partners in their children's education and respect them irrespective of their age and sex. Every school-going child spends a lot of time with his/ her teacher. This means that the teachers have immense influence on the child. Furthermore, parents can only demand respect from teachers if they respect them.

The problem of income inequality and its associated economic hardship faced by some families should also be paid attention by the government through economic and educational policies. It is important for the government to create more opportunities through which people can improve upon their financial situation. Ways through which this can be achieved include raising the minimum wage, creating more jobs and providing subsidies on basic goods. Through such means, families' economic situation

can be improved, and parents will not be compelled to work for extremely long hours, and thereby miss out on participating in their children's education. It is also incumbent on the government to regulate the fees charged by the various educational institutions especially in the private sector, through educational policy. This would relieve some parents of the pressures associated with high school fees.

Statement of Responsibility

Jamal Appiah-Kubi; conceptualization, methodology, validation, investigation, resources, data curation, writing- reviewing & editing, visualization, supervision, and project administration. Emmanuel Owusu Amoako; methodology, validation, investigation, resources, writing – original draft, and visualization.

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