

The school community relationship



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Education is an important tool in the development of communities and nations at large. The provision and management of quality education lies not only at the heart of central government but remains a shared responsibility of all stakeholders and the building of good working relationship among these stakeholders with particular emphasis on improving the school-community relationship . This stems from the fact point that education is seen as a social enterprise requiring the support of all stakeholders so that its contribution can benefit the entire society. (Addae-Boahene et. al, 2001).

For the attainment of quality education, there is the need for the community in which the school is situated to work in collaboration and harmony with the school not only in the upbringing and welfare of the pupils but must go beyond that to offer support in the provision and maintenance of the school infrastructure as well as playing a critical supporting role in the effective management and administration of the school.

The school, similar to other facilities such as the community market, community borehole, is situated in the community belonging to the entire community members. The community therefore has a role to play in shaping the policies and finances of the school just as the school in turn must function to meet the social needs of the community by turning out a literate population and transmitting culture of the community to the youth.

Improving the school-community relationship is key because both bodies are interdependent and failure on the part of either body to play its role can lead to a collapse of the education system with its consequent effect on the society as a whole. Again, though formal education is said to have been

introduced in Ghana by the Europeans who provided not only the curricular but the infrastructure inclusive, the schools were not cited initially enough to cover all the communities in Ghana. It is against this background that some communities desirous of having formal education took it upon themselves and established basic schools, willingly recruited teachers and contributed to support them with the resources needed for their work including remuneration. As the process continued these schools were later absorbed into the public school system. (Addae-Boahene, et. al. 2001). The management and financing of these schools then shifted from the communities to the central government; this created a situation that witnessed less community involvement in the management of schools, hence the beginning of poor school-community relationship.

The Ministry of Education (MOE) and The Ghana Education Service (GES) recognized the importance of reciprocal partnership of school-community leaders and local school authorities in effecting changes in the school. Under the Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (fCUBE), MOE, and GES, who have committed themselves to building a systematic approach assisting community organizations (SMC and PTA) to play a major part in the regeneration of their schools. It is the belief of the MOE and GES that communities have an important role to play in enforcing standards, developing and maintaining school infrastructure, and creating partnership between teachers, pupils and the district authorities to bring about needed changes. In conclusion the school and the community rely on each other for mutual benefit. The need for both to operate on a cooperative atmosphere cannot therefore be overemphasized. (Addae-Boahene, et. al. 2001).

RESEARCH PROBLEM

It is very necessary that in all communities, both the community and the school operate closely and co-operate with each other as the ownership and management of the school is gradually becoming community-based, a situation in which the head teacher and the circuit supervisor should see the members of the community as partners in the educational development of the child. The significance of this relationship includes:

The motivation of the school to function with the interest of the wholesome development of the society.

Both the school and the community working in the same direction for the proper development of the children and the community supporting the school financially, among others.

However, the central government control and management of education delivery system over a long period has had an adverse effect on the relationship between the school and the community. The kind of relationship in which the school and the community exist as separate entities. Both are seen as performing different functions and hence need not interfere with each other. The school officials run the school while the Community look on. What happens by way of development or information flow in the community is not the concern of the school and vice versa. Members of the community do not care to find out what goes on in the school nor does the school develop interest in what goes on in the community. Each of them feels the other has nothing to offer, and no effort is made for cooperation. (Amofa, 1999). This kind of relationship also called the Closed System, is very

prevalent in rural areas, (Annoh, 2003). This has contributed to less community involvement and commitment in the quality management of education in Ghana and the Tolon/Kumbungu District of Northern Region in particular. These poor school-community relationships in the Tolon/Kumbungu District manifest itself in several ways including;

On August 1, 2009, the head teacher of Gbrumani Primary School was beaten by some community members citing the head teachers' effort at settling a quarrel between two pupils in the school as interference in community affairs.

May, 2010, Nyankpala community members turned Nyankpala D/A Junior High School classrooms into community toilet facility.

Again, Chirifoyili community encroached on the school land, turning it to a farm land in 2008 with the argument that they will not spare their land to the school and suffer insufficient farmland.(circuit supervisors' report). These incidents signal to the level of strained relationships that prevails between the school and the community in the district.

These acts are impacting negatively on the delivery of education in the district. quality of education continues to fall in the district as reflected in the BECE results released by WAEC year after year. (GES Tolon, 2006, 2008, 2009).

There is high illiteracy rate in the district, coupled with low enrolment and high drop-out rates in the schools. (Tolon/Kumbungu District profile; 2004). It is against this background that the researcher finds the research problem of

this study being, the lack of improved school-community relationship in the Tolon/Kumbungu District of Northern Region, as very necessary and worth undertaken.

MAIN RESEARCH QUESTION

Arising from the research problem stated as, the lack of improved relationship between the school and community, the main research question for the study is; what strategies can be put in place in order to build an improved relationship between the school and the community?

SUB RESEARCH QUESTIONS

What is the importance of building an improved relationship between the school and community?

What is meant by improved school-community relationship?

What are the causes of the lack of improved relationship between the school and community?

What roles can both the school and the community play towards promoting an improved school-community relationship?

What are the principles underlying school community relations?

MAIN RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

To recommend strategies that can be put in place to promote an improved school-community relationship.

SUB RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

To highlight the importance of building an improved relationship between the school and community.

To explain the concept of improved school-community relationship.

To identify the causes of the lack of improved relationship between the school and community.

To identify the roles both the school and the community can play towards promoting an improved school-community relationship.

To highlight the principles underlying school community relations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Framework

In this study the concepts that will be reviewed include; school, community, the school community, school management, community stakeholders, relationship, and improved relationship.

In the research process, the researcher will review literature from secondary sources as this will help the researcher to;

Make use of results of existing studies that are closely related to the study being conducted (Croswell, 1998: 20).

Locate methodologies previously used to conduct studies in phenomenon similar to this study and to identify contrary findings (Mcmillan, 1992: 44).

The researcher will employ the use of literature review in conducting this study since it will provide an understanding of the phenomenon of improved school-community relationship. It will also help to provide an analytical and theoretical framework for analyzing the findings of the research. In this; textbooks, published papers, newspaper publications, containing subjects related to the research problem will be reviewed.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This research design is basically qualitative in nature and to achieve the purpose of the study, the following methods have been employed; participant observation, interviewing, focus group discussion, review of secondary literature, interview guide, and purposive sampling. The tools that will be used to facilitate the data collection are field notes, tape recordings and manual recordings. The data analysis will involve the use of coding, transcribing tape recording, and decoding the data transcribed.

According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), qualitative research is a type of research whose findings are neither arrived at by means of statistical procedures nor quantitative means.

According to Nachmias and Nachmias (1996: 28), qualitative approaches facilitates our understanding of behavior through knowing the persons involved and their rituals, beliefs, values, and emotions. Qualitative approach is necessary in this study because it allows the researcher to typically investigate an aspect, thus, the lack of improved relationship between the school and the community, as it pertains to the Tolon/Kumbungu district.

Again, Mcmillan and Schumacher (1993), state that qualitative research presents facts in a narrative form with words and also concerned with understanding social phenomenon from the perspective of the participants.

Furthermore, the researcher will be able to gain first hand information from the people involved including head teacher/teachers, School Management Committees(SMCs), Parent Teacher Association(PTA), circuit supervisors, chiefs and assembly members, on their knowledge regarding the lack of improved school-community relationship in the district, why there is lack of improved relationship between the school and the community, the role they can play to improve the relationship, and the strategies to put in place to promote and sustain improved school-community relationship.

The use of multi-method strategies in gathering data is very necessary in qualitative research. For the purpose of this study, the methods to employ in gathering data are; interactive methods and non-interactive methods.

A combination of these two approaches presents to the researcher an advantage of systematically observing, interviewing, and recording processes as they take place naturally. The appropriateness of these activities to the researcher emerges from the point as explained by Miles and Huberman (1994), that they are carried out in close proximity to the local setting for a sustained period of time.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH METHODS TO USE FOR THE STUDY

Participant Observation

In participant observation, researchers join the group they intend to study and observe it from

inside (Legewie, 1991). Subjects usually change their behaviors when they know that they

are being observed, so researchers may take measures to prevent them realizing that they are

being studied, and hence eliminate the effects of reactivity (Sarantakos, 2005; 221)

Unstructured observation will be used in the study. Unstructured observation is loosely organized and

the process of observation is largely left up to the observer.

Participant observation will be used in this study. The researcher will visit the community

schools in the Tolon/Kumbungu District and participate in both school ceremonies and

community ceremonies and note all issues that reveal the lack of improved relationship between

the school and the community, including;

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SMC/PTA meetings.

The school annual open day ceremony .

The celebration of the annual Damba and Fire festival.

This approach will provide an opportunity for open discussion during which certain challenging issues will emerge.

Interviewing

In the perspective of Maykut and Morehouse (1994; 80), an interview refers to a discourse shaped and organized through the asking of questions and the supply of answers, through which the interviewer and the interviewee are able to talk about the study focus; and this brings out thoughts and perceptions.

On the other hand, Gillham (2000; 1) describes interview as a conversation that usually goes on between two people, the interviewer asks questions and seeks response from the interviewee.

Interviews can be conducted face-to-face, through the telephone, or other means, but according to Gillham (2000: 62), the overwhelming strength of face-to-face interview is its possibility of making the communication ' rich'.

Interviews, according to Bogdan and Biklen (1992: 96) are used to gather descriptive data in the subject's own words. Through this, the researcher is able to develop insights on how subjects interpret some piece of the world.

The researcher will employ semi-structured interview method for this study.

Semi-Structured Interviews

This method has been chosen for use for a number of good reasons.

According to Borg and Gall (1989; 452), semi-structured interview facilitates a more thorough understanding of the respondents' opinion and the reasons behind such opinions than what could be achieved if mailed questionnaire is used. Also, this method is good because it makes it possible for the expression of opinions by the interviewees. Again Robson (1993; 231) states that, when using semi-structured method, the interviewer has the advantage of being able to modify the order of questions based upon the context of the conversation, change the wording of the question, give explanations and can avoid particular questions that appear inappropriate with a particular interviewee.

Semi-structured interview has been chosen by the researcher because it has the ability to provide in-depth, objective information that account for the lack of improved school-community relationship. Though semi-structured interview will be used, the interview guide will still be used to keep the interviewer and interviewee on focus.

Focus Group Discussions

Focus group research can best be described as a loosely constructed discussion with a group of people brought together for the purpose of the study, guided by the research and addressed as a group. Due to the use of interviewing techniques, it is also referred to as “ focus group interviewing” (as e. g. Bergaddresses it because and ;(1995, the group rather than specific members, it is also known as ‘ group discussion’, (H. Kruger, 1983). Given that more than one group is usually included in the study, and each

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group constitute a separate sample of respondents, focus group can be seen as a multi-sample study.

In most common application, this method entails, first the selection of people with a particular interest,

expertise or position in the community, second, the formation of the group by bringing these people

together in the same venue; third, the introduction of the discussion topic by the researcher, who acts

as a facilitator and arbitrator, fourth, guiding the discussion so as to address the research topic, fifth,

encouraging discussion among the members of the group rather than between them and the

researcher, and sixth, observing and recording the discussion (sarantakos, 2005): The focus group

method appears in two forms, the unstructured or semi-structured form and the structured form, which

are employed by qualitative and quantitative researchers respectively (Stewart and shamdasani, 1990).

Focus group discussing is employed to bring about changes in the group and its members, as a result of

the direction and intensity of the discussion. It can further provide valuable information about group

processes, attitude changes and manipulation, the attitudes and opinions of group members, the group

or public, the effectiveness of certain methods and so on. It can also enable the testing of group

strategies in solving problems (flick, 1998). Finally, the study of focus group can generate diversity and

differences either within or between groups, and so reveal..... the dilemmatic nature of everyday

arguments; (Lunt and Livingstone, 1996: 96)

This approach will be used to promote brainstorming and debate among the participants on key issues affecting school-community relationship in the district. Again focus group discussions promote the sharing and learning of new ideas among participants. The researcher will be part of the group discussion and moderating the process as well to keep the discussion on track.

A total of 30 focus groups made of 15 people each will be engaged in the study (these are the PTA and SMC members of the 30 selected schools).

How To Collect The Data

For the purpose of data collection, the researcher will use the following tools; Interview Guide, Field Notes, and Recording.

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Interview Guide

This will be very useful in this study. According to Borg and Gall (1989; 451), interview guide is a list containing questions mostly asked in a desired manner in the interview process. It serves as a guideline to the researcher on what to say, as the interview commences and ends. It is regarded as a checklist of topics to be covered by Dooley (1990: 288), and it includes reminders of researchers interest arranged in an orderly manner to promote intercourse. In general terms, it is a guide but allowing actual questions to be framed during the interview to fit the natural tone of the intercourse between the interviewer and the interviewee. This helps to ensure that the interviewee remains unbiased in responses given. This also allows the researcher to select topics in advance but determines the sequence and wording of the questions during the interview process. (Mcmillan and Schumacher, 1993: 426).

The guide equally enables the researcher not to rigidly control the interview content such that the interviewee will not be able to tell the story in his own words. (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992; 97).

For the purpose of this study, the researcher will promote flexibility by allowing the respondents to explain issues in their own words and language. Again, there will be instances in this study that the interviewer will not follow a specific order of the questions, but will rather link one response to another question not necessarily next in order as the need arises.

Field Notes

This will be used for noting information that may not be captured by the tape recording. This will serve as a buffer to remind the researcher during data analysis. According to Mcmillan and Schumacher (1993; 418), field notes are written at the end of each observation and describes in details the settings and activities of each subject. This will only be used for the participant observation.

RECORDIING

The most common methods of recording are: writing down information verbatim, in summary or in key words; tape recording conversations; video recording events; taking photographs, (sarantakoss, 2006: 229). For the purpose of this study tape recording, manual recording and coding will be used

Tape Recording

Tape recordings will also be used. Tape recordings are easier and certainly more efficient. The tapes can be listened to as many times as required, using more than one observer if desired, and this produces more accurate and more valid records (Sarandakos, 2005: 229)

The researcher will employ tape recordings during the interview process to record the intercourse that occurs between the interviewer and interviewee. The recordings will be played back later and the words transcribed for the purpose of data analysis. The interviewees' permission will be sought by the interviewer before the use of tape recordings. The use of tape recording will help minimize possible errors that may result from forgetfulness on the part

of the interviewer during the interview process. It can equally minimize the time spent in the interview.

Manual RECORDING

Manual recording will equally be used, whereby two leaders will be used, with each of them

taking notes in turn or one recording the data and the other acting as facilitator

(sarantakos, 2005). This will be transcribed later.

Where circumstances do not allow for note taking, the observer will write down key words or phrases as a guide, and complete the notes after observation.

CODING

Codes serves as symbols, a shorthand recording, where actions and behaviors are replaced by numerals or keywords. This makes recording easier, particularly when there are many items to be recorded and many people to be observed. (sarantakos, 2005: 230).

SAMPLING

Under qualitative designs for example where unstructured or participant observation is employed, the

subjects are often chosen by means of purpose or theoretical sampling (sarantakos, 2005: 224)

The researcher acknowledges that the problem under study may be prevailing in other districts in the Northern Region; however the study will be limited to the Tolon/Kumbungu District of the Northern Region because there is high illiteracy rate in the district, coupled with low enrolment and high drop-out rates in the schools. (Tolon/Kumbungu District profile; 2004).

Sampling is used for the study because the district has a large population size of 132, 338 inhabitants (2000 population and housing census), therefore a focus on a small distinct group of participants (SMC, PTA, head teachers, circuit supervisors, chiefs, and assembly members), will enable the researcher to get an in-depth understanding of the problem of lack of improved school-community relationship in the Tolon/Kumbungu district.

Purposive sampling will be the main sampling technique to use in the study. It is also the expectation of the researcher that the selected participants will be information-rich, because they are knowledgeable in terms of the phenomenon being studied.

Purposive Sampling

The researcher will select and interview community stakeholders in education such as PTA and SMC members, head teachers, circuit supervisors, chiefs, and assembly members. Responses and contributions of these people can form a good basis for carrying out analysis and stating findings of study in the district. There has been consensus by Gillham (2000); Mcmillan and Schumacher (1993: 378); and Patton (1990: 169) that purposive sampling involves selecting people with in-depth knowledge of the problem being studied, while keeping the number of interviews to a minimum for adequate representation. The people that will be selected for

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this study should have good ideas regarding the problem being studied.

(Mcmillan and Schumacher, 1993; 378).

Sample Size

The district has 150 basic schools (Tolon/Kumbungu District Profile, 2004).

A total of 70 people will be interviewed. This includes; 30 head teachers drawn from 30 schools out of a total of 150 basic schools in the district, 30 assembly members of the communities where these schools are located and 10 circuit supervisors supervising these schools

. Study Area

Tolon/Kumbungu district is chosen as the study area. The district covers a land area of 2, 741 square kilometers and forms about 3. 9% of the total land area of Northern Region. The district is one of the 45 new districts created by the erstwhile Provisional National Defense Council (PNDC) Law 207 in 1988 and has Tolon as the Capital. The district is characterized by high illiteracy rate, coupled with low enrolment rates and high drop-out rate in schools. (Tolon/Kumbungu District Profile, 2004).

DATA ANALYSIS

Unlike quantitative research, where analysis is conducted after data collection, in qualitative research the timing of analysis varies. In some cases it follows the same path as in quantitative research, but in

most cases it is conducted during data collection. A combination of both models is also possible (sarantakos, 2005: 344)

For the purpose of this research, data analysis will be done both, during and after data collection. While

collecting data, the researcher will conduct some basic analysis, record the data, and further intensify

data analysis after completing the study and focusing on more specific aspects of the research question

as contained in the research.

In a number of cases, analysis during data collection serves to guide research in the right direction, and to facilitate a more effective treatment and coverage of the research topic. The actual analysis is conducted after data gathering is completed (sarantakos, 2005: 346).

Computer-Aided Data analysis (CADA) will be used to analyze data.

Computers can be, and are being used in qualitative research in the context of both pure qualitative research, where analysis is done the traditional way, and the so-called “ enriched” qualitative research (contrad and Reinharz, 1984; Fielding and Lee, 1998; Fisher, 1997, Richards, 1986; Richards and Richards, 1987, 1994; Weitzman and Miles, 1994). Computer aided data analysis (CADA) is used in many forms and allows the qualitative research to process data in a way parallel to that in quantitative research (Huber, 1991; Madron, Tate and Brookshire 1987; Ragin, 1987), (Sarantakos, 2005: 357)

A major data analysis instrument that will be employed in this study is concepts and indicators. Indicators are concrete data, such as behavior

patterns and social events, which are observed or described in documents or interview texts. They indicate the presence of a concept which the researcher develops, at first provisionally and then with more confidence. (Sarantakos, 2005: 347).

Analysis will be done by thoroughly examining the field notes of what will be observed by the researcher and the responses of every participant that will be interviewed. In line with Maykut and Morehouse (1994: 135), the following data analysis steps will be adopted for the study;

Recording the interview conducted, making a reflection of the process, and carrying out further observations and writing notes, comments, as well as memos.

Transcribing what has been recorded in the exact words. This will be done immediately after the interviews of the day. All additional comments will be placed in brackets.

Reading through the data that has been transcribed and stating clearly in writing, the meaning of the transcribed data.

Coding the data and identifying the code meanings in line with research question.

All key items or categories (the main ideas, words, or phrases) will be listed. The researcher will then go through the literature to find out whether responses of interviewees bear common grounds with the research topic as well as other respondents conclusions in similar research works. This is done for the purpose of testing the validity of the study.

Data presentation

Certainly, tables and graphs are useful tools of presentation in qualitative research, but the structure of presentation does not seem to adhere to any strict rules and procedures.

TIME FRAME

The researcher plans to spend a period of 5 months in carrying out the study including the compilation and presentation of the report.