Assessing The Effectiveness Of School-Community Relationship In Rural Ghana (A Case Of Asanda JHS)

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Abstract:
In school-community relationships, the school and the community share a responsibility for learning in a relationship based upon mutual respect and acknowledgment of the assets and expertise of both parties. The study was, therefore, undertaken to assess the effectiveness of such relationship in rural Ghana.
The following conclusions were arrived at: The low level of income did not deter parents from sending their wards to school. Though community members and the school had worked together for the improvement of the school, a large number of parents do not have any knowledge on broad educational issues due to the high illiteracy rate in the community. There is also a cordial relationship between teachers and parents. Parents do not only pay regular visits to the school but also attend PTA meetings regularly. The school has not celebrated any open day since its establishment. The performances of students in the school are above average.

Key words: Community, Relationship, School, Parents, Teachers

1.Introduction

When schools develop and implement strategies for promoting effective school-community partnerships, the result is improved learning for all students and strengthened schools and community relationships. Family involvement in schools increases pupils and student achievement (Agbo, 2004). Support for community involvement with schools begins with school administrators - in particular, with their willingness to engage parents and community members in school tasks, to listen to other people's views, and to share in decision making.

Effective school-community partnerships require professional development for teachers to acquire the necessary skills for working effectively with parents and families, such as collaborating with families, learning about family dynamics and non-traditional family structures, improving two-way communication between home and school, reducing perceived barriers to involvement and understanding diverse cultures (Creswell, 2005).

According to Burt (2004), every school should have three types of information about the community it serves. Information about the composition of the community, what the community opinion is, regarding both broad educational issues and the day to day operation of the school and some familiarity with the educational resources available in the community in order that they can be utilized to enrich and enhance the school's programmes. It is useful to develop a community involvement policy which reflects the school's commitment to school-community partnerships.

Community's involvement in schools in Ghana, though minimal, has imparted positively on the development of education in the country. Parents Teachers Association (PTA) and School Management Committees (SMC) contributions to the provision of educational infrastructure in many of the first and second cycle institutions have helped to solve some of the challenges confronting education in Ghana. Communities, over the years, have constructed and repaired school buildings with or without the involvement of government. The collaboration if strengthened could raise the fallen standards of education in Ghana. The study was, therefore, undertaken to provide answers to the following questions:

- What is the nature of the relationship between the school and the community?
- Is there any collaboration between parents and teachers?
- How can the relationship between the school and community be improved?

2.Methods

2.1.The Study Area
Asanda is one of the coastal communities in the Ellembelle District of the Western Region of Ghana. The inhabitants are mostly Nzema with few migrants who are Fantes and Ewes. The dominant language of the people is Nzema. The people are predominantly farmers with a few of them in fishing and other occupations. The Asanda Seventh Day Adventist (SDA) Junior High School (JHS) is one of the two basic schools in Asanda community. The school is located in the north eastern part of the community.

2.2.Instruments
The study utilized two data collection instruments namely, interview guide and questionnaire. An interview guide was used by the researcher to solicit the views of parents on community involvement in schools. This is because the researcher wanted to observe the body language of the respondents to ascertain the veracity of the information. Questionnaires were given to the staff to answer questions on how the community and the school can team up to improve the relationship between the school and the community.

3.Results And Discussions

3.1.Describing The Composition Of The Community
The study area is predominantly a farming community with the majority of the respondents living on low levels of annual incomes. According to the survey (Table 1), 80 % of parents were farmers. 55% of parents had annual incomes below GHc 500.00 per annum. This showed that more than half of parents were engaged in subsistent farming that produced mainly to feed the family and earned little income from the surplus that was sold out. The low level of income did not deter parents from sending their wards to school, a finding that contradicts a study that was carried out by Maguire, (1987) where low income earners do not send their wards to school. Despite the low levels of income, community members and the school had worked together for the improvement of the school. Oakes and Lipton (1999) are of the view that low-income parents lacked the confidence that would enable them to involve themselves in schools, an assertion which this study has sharply contradicted.

Responses from parents		Major Occupations			Total	Percentage
		Farming	Artisan	Fishing		
Income levels GHc per annum	Below 500	9	1	1	11	55
	500-750	6	0	1	7	35
	751-1000	2	0	0	2	10
Total		17	1	2	20	100
percentage		85	5	10	100	

Table 1: Parents Occupations And Income Levels
Source: Researchers' Field Work, 2012

The illiteracy rate among parents was very high, accounting for most of them lacking knowledge on broad educational issues. The survey revealed that (Table 2), 70% of parents did not have any knowledge on broad educational issues. This could be attributed to the fact that 60% of the respondents were illiterate. A study undertaken by Giroux, (2006) indicates that illiterate parents do not involve themselves in activities that would ensure the development of the school.

Responses from parents.		Knowledge based on broad educational issues			Total	%
		good	fair	none		
Educational background	tertiary	1	0	0	1	5
	secondary	2	1	0	3	15
	elementary	1	1	2	4	20
	illiterate	0	0	12	12	60
Total		4	2	14	20	100
Percentage		20	10	70	100	

Table 2: Educational Background Of Parents And Their Knowledge Based On Broad Educational Issues
Source: Researcher's Field Work, 2012

3.2.Examining The Relationship Between The School And The Community
The survey portrays a cordial attitude between community members and teachers as depicted by table 3. The school had a large majority of its teachers being professional teachers who had taught in the school for not less than five years. This affirms a study that was conducted by Darder, (1991) which indicates that schools with qualified and experienced teachers tend to have cordial relationship with the community.

Educational background	freq	%	No. of years of teaching	freq	%
SHS	1	20	1-5	2	30
Teacher Training College	4	80	6-10	2	50
Tertiary	0	0	7-15	1	20
other	0	0	Above 15	0	0
Total	5	100	Total	5	100

Table 3: Educational Background Of Teachers And No. Of Years Of Teaching In The School
Source: Researcher's Field Work, 2012

3.3.Assessing Parents And Teachers Collaboration
The collaboration between teachers and parents has been good as majority of parents pay regular visits to the school and also attend PTA meetings to express concerns about their wards' academic performances, P.T.A dues and students behavior at home. Table 4 indicates that about two-thirds of parents pay regular visits to the school and also attend PTA meetings of their wards.

PTA meetings	freq	%	Visits to the school	freq	%
Regularly	14	70	Regularly	13	65
Occasionally	4	20	Occasionally	5	25
Rarely	2	10	Rarely	2	10
Not at all	0	0	Not at all	0	0
Total	20	100	Total	20	100

Table 4: Parents' Attendance To PTA Meetings And Visits To The School
Source: Researcher's Field Work, 2012

The school often organizes PTA meetings to the neglect of open day celebrations. Table 5 shows that 80% of teachers attests to the fact that PTA meetings are organized regularly whilst all (100) of them claim that not a single open day celebration has been organized by the school. This is not surprising as many second cycle schools in Ghana rarely celebrate open day. According to Rosaldo (2003), open day celebrations are regular features among Canadian schools. The difference in culture and financial implications of organizing such programmes might have accounted for the contradiction.

PTA Meeting	freq	%	Open Day	freq	%
Regularly	4	80	Rarely	0	0
Occasionally	1	20	Occasionally	0	0
Rarely	0	0	Regularly	0	0
Not at all	0	0	Not at all	5	100
Total	5	100	Total	5	100

Table 5: The Frequency At Which PTA Meetings And Open Days Are Organized By The School
Researcher's Field Work, 2012

The results of the collaboration between parents and teachers have manifested in the improved performance of students in the school. Table 6 indicates that all (100) the teachers said the performances of students in class and at the BECE are always above average. It is, therefore, not surprising that the school has been scoring hundred percent in BECE over the past years. The improved performance of students can be attributed to parent involvement in school (Nieto, 2004)

Performance in class	freq	%	Performance at the BECE	freq	%
Excellent	0	0	Excellent	0	0
Above average	5	100	Above average	5	100
Average	0	0	Average	0	0
Below average	0	0	Below average	0	0
Total	5	100	Total	5	100

Table 6: Performance Levels Of Pupils In Class And At The BECE
Source: Researcher's Field Work, 2012

3.4.Investigating Community's Opinion About The School
The community's opinion about the teaching staff is very positive. According to table 7, none of the respondents rated two of the perception indicators namely fairness to student, and participation in the life of the community as poor. Just 5% of the respondents are not satisfied with instructional ability and discipline of the teaching staff. The implication is that the community members are absolute satisfied with the attitude of teachers in the community.

Instructional ability	freq	%	fairness to student	freq	%	Disci-pline	freq	%	Particip-ation in the life of the com	freq	%
Excellent	7	35	Excellent	7	35	Excellent	8	40	Excellent	10	50
Very good	7	35	Very good	6	30	Very good	6	20	Very good	4	20
Good	3	15	Good	4	20	Good	3	15	Good	4	20
Fair	2	10	Fair	3	15	Fair	2	10	Fair	3	15
poor	1	5	poor	0	0	poor	1	5	poor	0	0
Total	20	100	Total	20	100	Total	20	100	Total	20	100

Table 7: Parents' Opinion About The Teaching Staff Of The School
Source: Researcher's Field Work, 2012

The community's opinion about the administrators of the school is no different from that of the teaching staff. Table 8 shows that none of the community members sampled rated the four perception indicators (administrative ability, fairness to teachers, fairness to pupil and participation in the life of community) as poor. Between 60 and 70 percent of the respondents rated the four perception indicators as either excellent or very good. Thus the community's opinion about the administrators of the school is very positive. This probably explains why the community and the teachers co-exit peaceful. Peaceful co-existence is a vital ingredient for improved community-school relationship (CEA, 2004).

Administrative ability	freq	%	Fairnes-s to teachers	freq	%	Fairness to pupil	freq	%	Participa-tion in the life of the com.	freq	%
Excellent	7	35	Excelle-nt	7	35	Excell-ent	8	40	Excellent	6	30
Very good	6	30	Very good	9	45	Very good	6	30	Very good	6	30
Good	2	10	Good	2	10	Good	3	15	Good	6	30
Fair	3	15	Fair	1	5	Fair	2	10	Fair	2	10
poor	2	10	poor	1	5	poor	1	5	poor	0	0
Total	20	100	Total	20	100	Total	20	100	Total	20	100

Table 8: Parents' Opinion About The Administrators Of The School
Source: Researcher's Field Work, 2012

4.Appendices
Questionnaire For Parents Of Pupils
Section A
1. Sex:
    a. Male   (   )
    b. Female   (   )
2. Age:
    a. Below 26 (   )   b. 27 – 35   (   )   c. 36 – 46   (   )   d. 46 and above (   )
3. Educational background:
    a. Illiterate (   )   b. Elementary (   ) Secondary c. (   ) d. Tertiary (   )
4.   Occupation:
    a. Farming (   )   b. Trading (   )   c. fishing (   )   d. others (   )
5. Income level (GHS per annum):
    a. Below 500 (   ) b. 501-750 (   ) c. 751-1000 (   ) d. 1000^{+} (   )
6. Languages spoken:
    a. Nzema (   )   b. Akan (   )   c. Ewe (   )   d. Others (   )
7. Marital status:
    a. Single (   ) b. Married (   )   c. Widowed (   )

Section B

1. What is your knowledge base on broad educational issues?
a, excellent(   ) b, very good (   ) c,good(   ) d, fair (   ) e, none (   )

2. What do you think about the managers of education with regard to
(A) Faithfulness in attending meetings?
a, excellent (   ) b, very good (   ) c, good (   ) d, fair (   ) e, poor (   )
(B) Devoting time to the job?
a, excellent (   ) b, very good (   ) c, good (   ) d, fair (   ) e, poor (   )

3. What do you think about the teaching staff with regard to its
(A) Instructional ability?
a, excellent (   ) b, very good (   ) c,good (   ) d, fair (   ) e, poor (   )
(B) Fairness to students?
a, excellent (   ) b, very good (   ) c,good (   ) d, fair (   ) e, poor (   )
(C) Discipline?
a, excellent (   ) b, very good (   ) c,good (   ) d, fair (   ) e, poor (   )
(D) Participation in the life of the community?
a, excellent (   ) b, very good (   ) c, good (   ) d, fair (   ) e, poor (   )

4. What do you think about the administration of the school with regard to its
(A) Administrative ability?
a, excellent (   ) b, very good (   ) c, good (   ) d, fair (   ) e, none (   )
(B) Fairness to teachers?
a, excellent (   ) b, very good (   ) c, good (   ) d, fair (   ) e, none (   )
(C) Fairness to pupils?
a, excellent (   ) b, very good (   ) c,good (   ) d, fair (   ) e, poor (   )
(D)Participation in the life of the community?
a, excellent b, very good c, good d, fair e, poor

5. What do you think about the school buildings and equipment, their maintenance and use?
a, excellent b, very good c,good d, fair e, poor

6. How often do you visit your ward's school?
(a) Regularly (b) occasionally (c) rarely (d) not at all.

7. How often do you attend PTA meetings?
(a) Regularly (b) occasionally (c) rarely (d) not at all.

Questionnaire For Teachers
Section A
    1. Sex:
       c.   Male   (   )
       d.   Female   (   )
    2. Age:
       a. Below 26 (   )   b. 27 – 35 (   )   c. 36 – 46 (   )   d. 46 and above (   )
    3. Educational background:
       b.   Basic (   )   b.   Second cycle (   ) Training college c. (   ) d. Tertiary (   )

Section B
4. (A) How often do parents and community leaders visit the school?
   a, quite often (   )   b, not often (   )   c, do not visit at all (   )
   (B) What are some of the issues that bring parents and community leaders to the school?

5. What are the attitudes of community members towards the teachers?

6. Do you participate in the life of the community?
   Yes or No?
   If no, why

7. What is the performance level of the pupils?
   a. Excellent b. above average c. average d. below average

8. What has been the performance of students in BECE over the years?
a. Excellent b. above average c. average d. below average

9. Does the school participate in the life of the community?
   Yes or No?
   If yes, what areas?

10. For how long (in years) have you been teaching in the school?
    (a) 1-5 (b) 6-10 (c) 11-15 (d) more than 15 years

11.How often does the school have PTA meeting?
   (a) Regularly (b) occassionaly (c) rarely (d) not at all.

12. How often does the school have open day?
   (a) Regularly (b) occassionaly (c) rarely (d) not at all.

13. Does the community contribute to the development of the school?
    Yes or No?

14. If yes, what areas

15. Does the school have SMC?
    Yes or No?
    If yes, is the community well represented?

16. Does the majority of the teachers live in the community?

5.References

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