One Purpose, Multiple Realities: Parental Involvement in Two Malawian Private Secondary Schools[1]

Josephine E. Katenga[2] and Larry D. Burton[2]

[1]Asia-Pacific International University, Thailand; [2]Andrews University, USA

Abstract

Parental Involvement has been associated with better academic achievement. However, some studies indicate that parental involvement diminishes during adolescence. The purpose of this qualitative descriptive case study was three-fold: to explore the nature of parental involvement in children's education at the secondary level, to determine types of involvement, and to examine parents' and educators' attitudes towards parental involvement in private schools in Malawi. Grounded theory, an inductive methodology that uses a constant comparative data analysis process, was used to make generalizations and discover emergent themes from the data. The cross-case analysis portrayed a package of contrasting ideologies held by proprietors, educators and parents. These ideological influences resulted in the formation of perspectives and attitudes, which in turn translated into the schools' practices and participants' actions. Based on the findings, recommendations were developed with the intention of improving Parental Involvement in the two Malawian private secondary schools.

Keywords: *Parental involvement, academic conversation, alliance, alienation, proprietors*

Introduction

Parental involvement during high school has been associated with better academic achievement (Jeynes, 2007, 2012). Empirical studies show that parental involvement impacts high school learning specifically in the following areas: homework habits (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2001), dropout rates and school attendance (Simon, 2001), and motivation for learning (Chowa, Masa, & Tucker, 2013).

Recent studies have shown that parents' participation in children's education does not diminish during the teenage years, it simply takes on different forms (Chowdhury & Ghose, 2014; Costa & Faria, 2017). A variety of issues may contribute to the seeming lack of parental participation in high school. The complexity of the curriculum is often beyond the parents' capacity to help their child, especially if the parents have little education (Costa & Faria, 2017). The presence of many subject teachers, unlike the one-teacher classrooms in elementary school, is daunting. Even the communication process at the secondary school differs from the face-to-face parent-teacher interactions in elementary school (Costa & Faria, 2017).

Students' psychological development is the most important reason for the decline in parental involvement as children grow older. Adolescence is a period of transition (Bornstein, Jager, & Steinberg, 2013). It is marked by identity crisis, and role confusion (Erikson & Erikson, 1998). The manifestations of these behaviors are a result of hormonal changes during this adolescent development period. Many teenagers become egocentric and focus on their emotions.

A meta-analysis study conducted by Shellenbarger (2016) provides psychological reasons why scientists have changed their understanding of parents' role during adolescence. These studies show that adolescents have under-developed problem-solving abilities until they are 17 to 18 years old. Therefore, they vacillate between wanting their parents to take interest in their education and wanting their privacy (Nebel-Schwalm, 2006). However, strong evidence implies that adolescents rely on teachers for academic achievement and believe the school is a determinant of their success (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003).

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[2] Corresponding author email address: jkatenga@apiu.edu

Two Categories of Parental Involvement

Parental involvement falls into two categories: school and home involvement. School level parental involvement gives opportunity for parents to get involved in parent-teacher conferences, and decision-making processes in parent-teacher associations (PTA). Other roles include volunteering as substitute teachers or taking on responsibilities assigned by the school (Epstein, 2011). In some instances, parents and communities have been involved in education by providing infrastructure. Writing about parent's participation in education in Gambia, Colley (2005, p. 38) states,

> Family and community involvement in the education of children is seen as a plural multifaceted activity. For instance, the building of a school is a major community event . . . local leaders, families are asked to provide accommodation for teachers.

As important as school involvement is, studies have confirmed home involvement is more significant than the school-based parental involvement (PI) for impacting and determining high school students' success (Biedinger, 2011). The most important elements of home involvement for motivating high school students include the parents' discussions of school-related issues (Jeynes, 2007), monitoring after-school activities and assisting with homework (Wimberly & Noeth, 2004) and helping children understand parents' educational expectations and aspirations for them (Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005; Perkins, 2008). However, some studies indicate that in the developing countries the school environment affects students' outcomes more than parental involvement (Van der Werf, Creemers, & Guldemond, 2001), because many of the parents are semi-illiterate.

Parental Involvement differs from culture to culture (Rowley, Kurtz-Costes, & Cooper, 2010) and it is practiced by parents of different economic status (Henderson, Mapp, & Averett, 2002). Parents in some countries go into financial debt to ensure that their children get an education. They believe that children should reach educational standards beyond their parents' achievements (Adeyemo, 2001; Sharma, 2013). Unfortunately, most parents do not know how to academically translate their desires into assisting the children to do better in school. A study conducted in Mangochi District, Malawi, concluded that parents' willingness to get involved was hampered by their inadequate education (Hyde, Kadzamira, Sichinga, Chibwana, & Ridker, 1996).

The Problem

Malawi parents have had a history of providing secondary school infrastructure and educational resources. Despite their involvement to increase accessibility to secondary education in communities, the need to improve the learning environment and the quality of education in Malawi is apparent (World Bank, 2010). Teachers alone cannot adequately ensure that all students, especially day scholars, pass secondary school examinations. Day scholars do not benefit from the services given to boarders. They are unable to go for evening study periods where they can avail themselves of library resources.

Social cognitive theory stresses the importance of social factors that influence children's development (Vygotsky & Luria, 1994). Parent-teacher relationships with children enables students to develop self-regulation skills which are a catalyst for learning. Therefore, instead of delegating all formal education to teachers, parents' involvement in monitoring children's academic progress and assisting with homework helps in improving day scholar's academic outcomes.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this multiple case study was to describe, analyze, and evaluate the nature of parental involvement (PI) in education in Malawi private schools in order to do the following: a) assess the complex dynamics of PI in students' education in Malawi private secondary schools; b) understand the types of involvement that exist; and c) examine parents' and educators' attitude towards PI in children's schools.

Research Questions

      1.   In what ways are parents involved with their children at the school and at home?

      2.   What are the enablers and barriers to parental involvement in Malawian private secondary schools?

      3.   What are the attitudes of educators towards parental involvement in Malawian private secondary schools?

      4.   How does the relationship between the school personnel and the parents define the parents' role in Malawian private secondary schools?

Significance of Study

Although it is common knowledge that parents and communities in Third World countries participate in parent-teacher associations (PTA) and many parents are involved in providing school infrastructure, little has been researched in Malawi on PI as a variable for increasing students' academic outcomes at the secondary school level (Hyde, Kadzamira, Sichinga, Chibwana, & Ridker, 1996). Hopefully this study will contribute other PI constructs from a cultural perspective. The findings may provide private school proprietors the evidence for developing policies that would effectively establish partnerships between schools and parents. In addition, private secondary schools that have already implemented PI will use these findings and recommendations to develop interventions directed towards extending the functions of their programs.

Methodology

Participants

Combinations of purposeful sampling strategies were used for selecting schools that would yield maximum relevant data for the study. Using criterion sampling, three private secondary schools (A, B and C) were chosen. The following criteria were used.

      1.   Private secondary school with both day scholars and boarders.

      2.   Private secondary schools situated in the main cities situation in the southern, central and northern region or Malawi.

      3.   The schools' proprietors were once teachers in the government secondary before operating their own schools.

      4.   The schools employed qualified high school teachers.

In addition, parents of Form 3 students were selected as participants because their children had already been in the school for almost three years, time enough to have developed an understanding of the school and its policies.

In our quest for "information rich" (Patton, 2002, p. 230) participants, we used "snowball sampling" – sampling made possible when participants or key informants recommend other individuals they perceive as having specific knowledge about the phenomenon (Patton, 2002, p. 237). At school B, we also used the "opportunistic sampling" method. This has been defined by Patton (2002) as sampling strategies that "take advantage of unseen opportunities after field work has begun" (p. 240). In this case, an invitation from the headmaster to attend parent-teacher conferences resulted in data collection.

Unfortunately, it was necessary to discard data from one private secondary school (C) because of a long-standing dispute between the school and parents. Consequently, 90 individuals from two schools participated in the study (Table 1).

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

As a descriptive multisite case study design, data collection methods included interviews, focus groups, observation, open-ended questionnaires and document analysis. A team of two researchers were the primary instruments for collecting and analyzing data. The initial phase of data collection began in November 2006.

Table 1. Research Participants Distribution in Two Secondary Schools

Participant Identity	Secondary School	
	A	B
Student body	1,200	1,000
Study participants		
Parents	40	22
Administrators	3	3
Proprietors	2	1
Teachers	10	9

The data were analyzed using two separate processes: Grounded Theory (GT) procedures and cross-case analysis. Although not designed as a GT study (a research design that generates theory from data), GT processes were adopted for the systematic approach for collecting, examining and categorizing data. GT offers objectivity and consistency to avoid bias due to the interpretive nature of qualitative designs. GT demands simultaneous collection and analysis of data (Charmaz, 2006).

As an inductive methodology, GT is an iterative approach that requires constant comparative data analysis; comparing incidents with other incidents, passages with other passages, codes with other codes until emerging theoretical categories have been realized (Birks & Mills, 2011; Charmaz, 2006). Initially, we conducted line by line coding (Charmaz, 2006) with the aim of understanding participants' responses and views on PI. Coding is a classification process that helps identify patterns and concepts in the data (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaňa, 2014). Focused coding, also called 'axial coding' (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), followed the line-by-line coding. This step involves creating categories and grouping concepts with similar meanings into categories. The coding process led to data reduction and the identification of gaps in the data, which resulted in developing more questions and choosing particular interviewees for in-depth clarification of emergent findings, a process known as theoretical sampling (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 45). In addition, we carefully considered participants' discrepant accounts for the purpose of confirming or disconfirming the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Memo writing defined as "records of thoughts, feeling, insights and ideas in relation to a research project" (Birk & Mills, 2011, p. 40), was especially useful for organizing our thoughts during focused coding and as we attempted to look for relationships between the data. Some of these memos specifically guided us in conceptualizing a PI model in Malawi.

Once we reached theoretical saturation, a point at which no more concepts emerged, the GT processes presented multidimensional factors that affect PI. This was the case, even though both parents and teachers had the same purpose of improving children's academic outcomes, they had disparate understanding of PI. Hence, the overarching proposition was "One Purpose, Multiple Realities"

Identifying similarities and differences between the two Malawian private schools was critical to understanding PI in Malawi. Accordingly, each bounded case had to be analyzed separately. Stake argues, "Individual case studies should be studied to learn about their self-centering, complexity and situational uniqueness. Thus, each case should be understood in depth, giving little immediate attention to the quintain" (Stake, 2006, p. 5), the phenomenon being studied. The cross-case analysis therefore, provided each school's content and contexts as well as participants' responses to the research questions. This process was made easier by the use of NVivo, a qualitative data analysis computer software program for organizing and managing large quantities of data.

Findings and Discussion

The cross-case analysis of these two schools produced within-case similarities but dissimilar across-case findings. We identified four thematic clusters across cases that shared patterns. These thematic clusters included: Ideologies and Perspectives, Busy Parents, Significance of PI to Educators

and Families, Adolescent Development and Psycho-sociological Issues. These themes respond and are aligned to the research questions. Consequently, the cross-case analyses are organized according to the research questions instead of emergent themes.

Research Question 1: *In what ways are parents involved with their students at the school and at home?*

Similarities

The data revealed two most salient cross-cutting PI similarities in the two school: Parents' financial investment into their children's education, and Academic socialization

a) Parents' financial investments into their children's education. Parents overtly or subtly suggested that financing their children's education was a major contribution to children's education. This study confirms findings from other studies conducted in Malawi which revealed the high cost of secondary education and how it affects family finances (Chimombo, 2005; Dizon-Ross, 2014. The issue of school fees in secondary school is unique to developing countries whose funding for their education systems is inadequate. This is especially true of private schools that are self-supporting.

b) Academic socialization. Although parents were engaged in a gamut of PI strategies such as monitoring and providing structure for studying, the data shows that academic socialization formed the basis of most home-based PI. Most parents discussed school with children, communicated their expectations and aspirations, and encouraged their children to ensure better academic outcomes. This finding validates previous findings on the importance of academic conversation between parents and children (Dufur, Parcel, & Troutman, 2013).

Differences

The data revealed dissimilar findings of School-based Involvement in the area of Parental Visibility at school.

At School A, there was a lack of parent visibility. School-based involvement at school A was mostly relegated to school-initiated invitations to discuss disciplinary issues. The reason for lack of PI at the school is three-fold: a) the intentional decision of proprietors to isolate parents from the school and the subsequent absence of school policies, b) educator's attitude toward parents' involvement and c) parents' own social contexts (cultural values, time constraints, and lack self-efficacy for interacting with teachers).

School B presents a different paradigm. Parents were present at most of the school organized academic related conferences and extra-curricular activities. Parents substantively contributed to the school through parent-teacher conferences and the parent-teacher association (PTA). Because of the school's welcoming environment, parents visited the school when invited and at their own initiative to discuss their children's performance. In addition, parents advocated for curriculum changes and contributed to the development of infrastructure at the school. This type of partnership is consistent with other PI strategies in some schools (Murray et al., 2014; Patrikakou, 2008; Swap, 1993).

Research Question 2: *What are the attitudes of the educators towards Parental Involvement?*

Educators in both schools perceived that PI in children's education is important. Unfortunately, the School A educators viewed parents through deficit ideological lenses (Parker, Reid, & Gans, 2017). They blamed parents for dumping their delinquent children at the school and shirking their responsibility expecting the school to perform academic success miracles. In one of the focus group sessions, there was constant referral to put children in the dormitory if parents wanted their children to pass, implying that parents had limited skills for parenting their children. Previous studies associated deficit thinking to parents' poor environment for fostering educational outcomes (Valencia, 1997).

School B educators on the other hand valued parents' involvement in both disciplinary and academic issues. While understanding that teachers' main duty is to teach the curriculum, they valued parents as partners and appreciated their contribution in monitoring and encouraging their children

to study in order to improve academic performance. Although educators expected parents to instill the value of education and principles of discipline at home, they also believed educators had a part to play in the behavioral development of children. The educators' open-door policy that allowed parents to discuss their concerns about their children's performance, along with the planned end-of-the-term teacher-parent conferences, facilitated valuable relationship building processes. These findings validate extant findings that show educators' positive attitudes and the sharing of values are conducive to the development of parents' trust as well as parents' increase in self-efficacy for involvement (Hornby, 2011; Minke, Sheridan, Kim, Ryoo, & Koziol, 2014).

Research Question 3: *What are the barriers and enablers to Parental Involvement?*

Busy schedules and communication problems were a detriment to PI at both schools. Busy parents considered time in their employment more important for children's education (money for tuition) than responding to schools' requests for their presence or visiting the school to discuss students' performance. Therefore, some parents at both Schools A and B sent surrogate parents in terms of—siblings, relatives or house workers to collect school reports and discuss students' performance (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Patrikakou, 2008). The communication system at both schools needed improving. However, School A had greater difficulty in communicating with parents due to its policies and lack of resources.

In addition, child development and psychosocial issues were discussed by parents in terms of the difficulties they faced in monitoring their adolescents, and the problems arising from adolescents' quest for autonomy, negative peer influences and their misunderstanding of the value of education. These findings are universal to adolescent development and adolescents' behaviors (Tilton-Weaver & Marshall, 2008).

Barriers at School A

A unique finding to this study was the proprietors' ideologies and their influence on educators' attitudes towards PI at the school. The School A proprietors believed in isolating parents. They perceived that parent involvement had no effect on children's academic performance. Consequently, PI policies were non-existent resulting in educators and parents conflicting perspectives and disparate understanding of PI. Educators held the belief that parents' involvement is home-based, while parents expected educators to shape their children's characters and provide academic instruction. Previous literature suggests the presence of tensions between educators and parents when schools lack PI policies (Bull, Brooking, & Campbell, 2008).

However, the misunderstanding of PI was further exacerbated by the lack of teachers' PI training. In addition, the expansiveness of the school hampered communication. Parents decried the lack of grade reports, which apparently were communicated through the children who often failed to deliver the documents to their parents. Planning for PI for large schools is difficult (Ouimette, Feldman, & Tung, 2004) and communication between schools and parents is a major barrier to PI (Holt, 2011; Kraft, 2015).

Furthermore, the extent of parents' participation in children's education is contingent on parents' social context, such as level of education, socioeconomic status and socio-cultural values and beliefs. The type of parent employment determined whether there was time to academically socialize with their children. Consistent with previous studies, PI at home is often hampered by a variety of parents' characteristics (Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, & Sandler, 2005; Patrikakou, 2008). Included in these parents' contexts are the traditional beliefs regarding the futility of supporting female children, orphans, or social orphans (Samati, 2013). While believing thus, parents still enrolled girls and orphans in schools in response to the country's promotion of girls' education (Chirwa, 2002; Shimamura, 2016).

Barriers at School B

Change of management affected the implementation of PI at School B. While parents and the school had a workable relationship in 2006, by 2011, educators affirmed they no longer participated

in PTA meetings. The new headmaster focused more on parent-teacher conferences and less on PI in the PTA. It is vital to communicate policies, strategies and training to the schooling agent to ensure they share the school's vision of partnership. Commitment to a common purpose is only achieved if all participants understand how to implement the vision (Senge et al., 2012).

PI Enablers in Both Schools

Educators and parents in both schools (A and B) recognized the importance of PI and perceived that PI was beneficial for day scholars. PI had potential for improving academic performance, curbing misbehavior, and curtailing truancy, especially for day scholars who did not have the same restrictions and resources as their peers in boarding facilities. This finding supports conclusions of a survey of 150 Zimbabwean teachers that showed PI as one of the strategies for curbing learner misconduct in Zimbabwean secondary schools (Mugabe & Maposa, 2013).

Parents in both educational institutions (A and B) trusted the schools to matriculate their children into college, although the percentage of children passing the national examination was miniscule compared to the intakes. In addition, parents were eager to learn from educators how they could assist their children. The fact that School A day scholars' parents had many questions during the focus group sessions, and School B parents asked teachers for strategies they could use in assisting their children, is indicative of the critical dialogue required between the parties to aid parents in acquiring social capital to benefit their children. The importance of providing parents with strategies for assisting their children and the need for the improvement of communication between the school and the home is well documented (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001).

Although these were private educational institutions, parents inquired how they could cooperate with the school for their children's sake (Kraft, 2015). The data does show that School B had already established itself as a parent-friendly school. The School B proprietor believed in the inclusion of parents in the education of their children. The proprietor's ideology was manifested in the school policy and practices resulting in explicit parent encouragement to get involved both at school and at home. The administrators and educators following the proprietor's mandates provided a welcoming environment for parents to participate in their children's education. In addition, educators understood that they were catalyst to PI.

The establishment of a PTA and the welcoming atmosphere portrayed the value the school placed on parents' contributions. Furthermore, parents' willingness to formulate a PTA and their participation in parent-teacher conferences motivated others to get involved.

Research Question 4: *How does the relationship between the school and the parents define the parents' role?*

The two schools differ significantly in their definition of PI. School A on one hand believed in intentionally preventing parents from actively supporting the academic endeavors. The school disregarded parents' contributions and failed to communicate essential information that would have educated parents on how to assist their children. School A educators and administrators believed parents should only offer home-based support. As a result, the relationship between parents and educators was negative.

On the contrary, School B valued parents' contribution to the school. The educators believed in shared responsibility, allowing parents to participate in the education of their children in a variety of ways. Policies of the school guided educators and administrators in developing a school ethos that was conducive to a welcoming environment for parents. Hence, parents contributed to and participated in the school infrastructure development, curriculum decision- making, and worked with educators to improve students' academic performance with educators' guidance**.**

Comparison of PI Models to Extant PI Models

The study reveals critical factors that promote or hamper PI as identified by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1995). Three factors influencing parents' involvement are: parents' perceptions of

invitations to get involved (invitations from the school, educators and children); parents' motivators (their role construction and self-efficacy); and their social contexts. The open-door policy at School B and invitation for participation increased parent's self-efficacy in PI that led to an alliance between parents and the school. On the contrary, School A's reluctance to involve parents resulted in alienation of parents. Despite the institutions policies and their effect on educators and parents, the schooling agents' (proprietors, administrators, teachers and parents) understanding of their PI roles also influenced their own attitude towards PI. In addition, parents own social contexts were the determinants of their home or school participation.

In addition, the two schools present different models of PI similar to PI models proposed by Swap (1993), specifically "Protective Model," "Home to School Transmission Model" and the Partnership Model."

School A adhered to an "Alienation Model" similar to Swap's (1993) "Protective Model" aimed at isolating parents from school and keeping parents and teachers' roles separate to avoid conflict. One significant difference is that the proprietor alienated the parents not only to avoid conflict with parents but also to build the school's reputation through an impressive pass rate and thereby increase school enrollment.

School A provides a negative example of schools that choose to isolate parents from getting involved in their children's education (Swap, 1993). Parents had little knowledge of the school and felt unwelcomed at the school. Communication was one of the major problems at the school resulting from the educator's deficit thinking regarding parents and the disparate understanding of PI and parents' role in their children's education. In addition, parents were reluctant to assist the school in improving its infrastructure. Although parents may have wanted to collaborate with the school, they understood that School A was a private school that was providing much needed educational services to the society. Therefore, it was not worth disputing with the owners when they mandated policies that were not in the parents' favor (Ugwulashi, 2012).

School B, on the other hand, believed in forming alliances with parents. This "Alliance Model" is a cross between Swap's (1993) "Home to School Transmission Model (p. 29), which focuses on what parents can do at home to support the child's learning and to reinforce the school culture, and the "Partnership Model (p. 47), that supports PI in all areas of child's schooling including decision making. School B provided the environment for partnership. The communication channel and programs established by the school were the factors that improved the school-family relationships.

The positive attitude exhibited between educators and parents at School B was a result of the proprietor's vision and the purposeful planning to include parents in their children's education. The open communication lines instituted by the school and manifested through the PTAs open-door policies, parent-teacher conferences and newsletters provided parents with a welcoming atmosphere and a sense of belonging. The partnership resulted in intergenerational closure in which parents and educators shared their mutual goals to work together for the academic success of their children. Consequently, through the collaboration, infrastructure improvements, curriculum changes and other educational projects were undertaken, and parents were empowered to assist their children. The experience at School B portrays the benefits of school-family relationships and supports Ugwulashi's (2012) study that delineated the value of a PTAs and collaboration between the school and the home. This type of partnership is critical to school-family partnership models described in literature (Epstein, 2011; Minke et al., 2014; Swap, 1993).

While previous findings reveal principals' and teachers' attitudes toward PI (Patrikakou, 2008) and school districts' role in promoting PI (Westmoreland, Rosenberg, Lopez, & Weiss, 2009), these studies do not address the influence of proprietors' ideologies. As revealed in this study, proprietors of private schools had decision-making autonomy and control over all school operations. This is unlike public or parochial schools that are controlled by boards of governors.

It is important to note that while proprietors have the upper hand in establishing the relationship between parents and the educators. Their interactions depend on several elements: communication and the discussion of expectations each group has of the other; strategic planning;

availability of resources; willingness and commitment of educators to set up appropriate environment for PI; creating time to implement the strategies; and the willingness of parents to accept the strategies and to collaborate with the school (Patrikakou, 2008, Christenson & Sheridan, 2001). In sharing values and expectations, educators and parents can have a shared vision resulting in a collaboration that positively influences student educational outcomes (Senge et al., 2012). However, communication between educators and teachers is the key to successful relationships.

Furthermore, PI could have been more effective if the institutions had made efforts in developing comprehensive policies and procedures for involving parents. The lack of PI and communication policies at School A resulted in misunderstanding between parents and educators. School A needed to develop and communicate its policies, and spell out its values and goals to provide a welcoming atmosphere, even if they did not have intentions to involve parents at the school.

On the other hand, School B educators intentionally created an environment of inclusion through policies such as the parent-teacher conferences and PTAs. The PTA was an avenue for building social networks and improving the relationships between parents and between parents and educators. The literature indicates the importance of school PI policies and practices for developing a strong partnership between schools and parents (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001; Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Patrikakou, 2008).

Conclusions

The cross-case analysis portrayed a package of contrasting ideologies held by proprietors, educators and parents, which formed the bedrock of the type of partnership that existed between parents and educators. However, because of their position and ideological dispositions, the proprietors exerted greater influence on the type of PI model, policies and practices at the schools. While in one school, the educators held a deficit thinking ideology against parents resulting in implementing an Alienation PI model, the other school valued parents' contributions and sought to collaborate with them, thus it implemented an Alliance PI Model.

Furthermore, most of the educators and parents from both institutions appreciated the concept of partnership and the importance of working together for the sake of improving students' educational outcomes. At the fore is educators' recognition that PI is significant even if it means involving parents for disciplinary purposes.

Parents in this study were involved in their children's education at different levels. Academic socialization (discussions pertaining to children's schooling experiences, conversations about parents' aspirations and expectations) was the most significant home-based PI strategy. Notwithstanding, the evidence also suggests that some parents considered their financial investment as the most meaningful involvement in children's education because secondary education in Malawi is not free.

Recommendations
Recommendations for School A

Although the proprietors at School A believed in isolating parents, they need to reconsider their ideology for the sake of improving relationships with parents. The study reveals that parents have little power for establishing relationships with the educators. The onus falls on the school to initiate the partnership. The following suggestions address some of the major issues revealed at School A. a) The school should assess the viability of PI with the focus of developing policies for PI that address the findings brought to the fore in this study. b) Since many of the educators' harbor deficit thinking towards parents, the school should consider building teachers' PI capacity. c) Many School A parents had negligible involvement at the school, and some had no clue regarding their PI responsibilities. These factors call for planned scaffolding for parents including the sharing of school policies, expectations and guidelines. d) The school should invest in establishing a welcoming atmosphere that includes better communication lines between the school and parents.

Recommendations for School B

The involvement of parents in children's education had bolstered relationship between School B and parents. Although some of the functions of the collaboration needed improvement, parents and teachers valued each other's contribution to the education of the children. To further advance the partnership and improve some of the functions that were being undermined for lack of follow through, the following suggestions could address the problems the institution faces.

Firstly, an evaluation should be conducted to identify the effectiveness of the relationship. Specifically, this evaluation should concentrate on two aspects: improving the program and capacity building. The investigation would focus on ascertaining schooling agents' opinions of changes needed for viable partnerships, identifying immediate and long-term actions, resources needed for the venture, and clarifying roles and responsibilities of participants.

Secondly the institutions should facilitate schooling agents' capacity building beginning with assessment of best practices from organizations that have successfully implemented PI then providing a comprehensive professional development program to strengthen the operational capacity of all members. Educators must be trained in a variety of strategies for PI. A significant step would be that of sharing and clarifying the institution's vision, goals, objectives and PI policies to reduce disparity in understanding of PI.

Suggestions for Further Studies

PI studies in Malawi have concentrated on parents' contributions in PTA and in school development. A few studies have been undertaken to explore parent involvement at the primary school level, but there is paucity of PI studies at the secondary school level. This study highlights the positive relationships arising from the institution's intentionality in involving parents in their children's education, and the misperceptions that surface when PI policies are non-existent or when the institution isolates parents. This research contributes to literature and provides an analytical framework for viewing PI in private secondary schools in Malawi. Since this study focused on private secondary schools in the cities where social relationships are impersonal, further studies should be conducted to determine whether these findings are true in other private school settings.

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