

Parent and Community Involvement in Education: A Rapid Review of the Literature

Momina Afridi, Stephen Anderson & Karen Mundy
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto
June 2014

A joint initiative between the Aga Khan Foundation Canada (AKFC) and the Government of Canada, through the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development (DFATD).



FONDATION AGA KHAN CANADA
AGA KHAN FOUNDATION CANADA



Foreign Affairs, Trade and
Development Canada

Affaires étrangères, Commerce
et Développement Canada



Government
of Canada

Gouvernement
du Canada

Canada

Parent and Community Involvement in Education: A Rapid Review of the Literature

Momina Afridi, Stephen Anderson & Karen Mundy
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education University of Toronto
June 2014

This rapid review of international literature on parent and community involvement in education was conducted for the Strengthening Education Systems in East Africa (SESEA) project sponsored by Aga Khan Foundation Canada and the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development (formerly CIDA). This is one of a set of rapid reviews on key dimensions of school improvement developed as input to a research agenda setting process for East Africa for the Learning and Dialogue component of the SESEA project. The complete set addressed the following themes: teaching and learning, teacher development, school management and leadership, parent and community involvement and early childhood education and development.¹

The rapid review synthesizes main findings in the literature internationally and more particularly in East Africa on parent and community involvement in education at the school and the system level, and also identifies the gaps to suggest areas for future research. The review is structured around three broad themes: (1) parent and community participation in school governance and management; (2) parent involvement in teaching and learning; (3) parent and community engagement at the system level (governance and accountability).

Rapid Review of the Knowledge Base

Parental and Community Participation in School Governance

The existing literature identifies parents and community members as key stakeholders in School Based Management (SBM) programs and decentralization measures in education. It is strongly argued that parental and community involvement is key to ensure access and quality education provision. However, formal opportunities for parental involvement and community participation are neither always implemented nor necessarily translated into influence (OECD, 2006). Dunne et.al (2007) refer to a review of decentralization policy and practice in six sub-Saharan African countries (Ghana, Mali, Nigeria, Uganda & Zimbabwe) and conclude that core education decisions are hardly ever decentralized in a way that encourages genuine local community participation in decision-making.

Several studies in different contexts, such as Indonesia (Chen, 2011), show that when accountability systems are weak at both the school and district level and there is little information shared with parents or parent awareness about how to hold schools responsible, decentralization measures through SBM are ineffective as a means to involving parents in improving the management and quality of schools (Kingdon et.al, 2014). A recent report based on case studies of community's role in transparency and accountability of educational initiatives in US, some South American and Asian countries, highlights the important role communities can play in the ownership of schools and in ensuring accountable practices, transparency, and compliance with policies (UNESCO, 2014). The report highlights that

community presence and participation in school display boards, local transparency committees, appeal mechanisms, social audits, and informal whistleblowing, are among key actions taken in the battle against corruption in education (UNESCO, 2014).

It is furthermore important to note that while parental and community involvement in school governance is widely promoted, little empirical evidence exists to show a direct relationship between parental involvement in governance and enhanced learning outcomes. Empirical studies in India and in Latin America suggest perverse or neutral effects (Banerjee et al., 2010, Mundy 2008).

In both developed and developing countries, there is also a gap between the structures that could in principle exist for parental participation and the extent to which they actually exist – a problem of implementation (OECD, 2006). In cases where such bodies and structures are created there are many barriers to effective participation for parents and community members, especially the poor. Research in various African and South Asian contexts has shown how there is unequal access to participation in bodies such as School Management Committees (SMCs) and Parent-Teacher Associations according to socio-economic status, race, caste, social class, location, political affiliation and gender (Dunne et al., 2007). In poor rural locales in countries such as Ghana, the local elite and relatively more educated community members tend to take on the role of being the new brokers of decision-making and, through their actions, close up the spaces for representation and participation by a more inclusive group of community members in the affairs of schools (Kingdon et al., 2014). In addition, lack of teacher and school leadership support in promoting parental and community engagement in school decision-making are also cited as significant barriers to effective participation. It is important to remove barriers at the most basic level and this means that all parents are informed about their rights and opportunities to have a say. The need for school leader training and teacher professional development in ways to encourage and facilitate parent involvement in school governance and in children's learning are emphasized in a few studies (OECD, 2006; USAID, 2011; Nielson, 2007; Save the Children, 2013).

Parent Involvement in Teaching and Learning

Parental involvement at the school level can occur in various ways. Based on the data from 12 cases, Neilson (2007) identifies some promising factors and some challenges of parental and community involvement at the school level. Among the promises are the involvement of communities in school construction (e.g. India, Yemen, Ghana) and positive influence on teacher attendance (Honduras, Peru). But in none of the cases is there any evidence that community empowerment has helped improve the quality of the teaching and learning in the classroom (Neilson, 2007). However, it is argued elsewhere that parents can support education quality and learning outcomes through their role as instructional partners. A small body of evidence shows that interventions that include parents to support their children's learning are promising and valuable (Nag et al., 2014). Parental involvement may also positively affect teachers, as research shows that people who have close contact with schools – such as parents who assist in classrooms – often have much more positive attitudes towards teachers than people with little direct contact. This suggests that building stronger links between the schools and the community can help to enhance the status of teaching and, indirectly, teacher

motivation and commitment (OECD, 2011).

Parent and Community Engagement at the System Level: Accountability and Governance

Parent and community engagement at the system level can be observed through NGO programs and civil society initiatives that are not limited to individual schools. Influential examples include the collection of student performance data and surveys at the household, school and district levels by civil society organizations such as ASER in India and Pakistan and UWEZO in East Africa (Save the Children, 2013).

UWEZO and ASER are both citizen led initiatives, where volunteers and parents are involved in gathering data on enrollment, annual assessments of numeracy and literacy that show learning outcomes, informing governments, ministries, teachers, parents and communities about the quality of education in their schools. These assessments and surveys can be used effectively as accountability and governance mechanisms by communities and civil society organizations to raise issues of education delivery and quality. However, using the case of such initiatives in India, (Banerjee et al., 2010) conclude that interventions that focused on simply on providing information to parents and other stakeholders did not result in the increased involvement in the public schools by any of the players (the parents, the Village Education Committees, the teacher), nor did they improve school performance (attendance of children, attendance of teachers or community participation in schools). Research in other contexts also show that information gathered through surveys and research alone is not enough and has to be met with effective accountability mechanisms that are accessible to parents and viable improvement options (Save the Children, 2013) for schools and school systems. Research on such initiatives illustrate powerfully the need to design contextually appropriate strategies to ensure parents are aware of their right to engage in the quality of their child's schooling and provide relevant information that allows them to do so in a meaningful way (Save the Children, 2013).

Evidence based on case studies from South Asia, South America and a select few from Africa suggests that strengthening local accountability routes (between empowered citizens and responsive education providers) could have significant impacts in catalyzing improvements in learning outcomes and efforts to leave no one behind (Save the Children, 2013). In a study of educational initiatives of community and parental engagement in some African countries, Kendall (2007) concludes that to ensure participation to significantly improve educational quality would require new models of education development planning and practices where parents and communities participate broadly, such as by partnering with state and international actors to set the agenda for what primary education is expected to accomplish and how such accomplishments should be measured.

Knowledge Gaps

Existing international research calls for a more comprehensive understanding of parent participation and its effects at the child, school and system level. Research on parent and community involvement is most extensive for South Asia, South America, and the OECD countries. In general, there is a dearth of literature and research studies that focus on

community and parent involvement in East Africa. Research on parent and community involvement is most extensive for South Asia, South America, and the OECD countries. In general, there is a dearth of literature and research studies that focus on community and parent involvement in East Africa. Kendall (2007), for example, notes that there is limited evidence available about complex measures of school processes or school-community interactions, from the complex relations among official language policies and assessments, classroom-based language usage, and school-community interactions, to student and parent expectations for educational outcomes, and the effects of changing monitoring and administrative practices in decentralizing education systems. This lack of information significantly constrains “evidence-based” arguments regarding parental and community role in quality improvement at the school and system levels. Some scholars of parent and community involvement in developing countries (e.g., Dunne et al., 2007) argue that there is limited research on how parent and community partners actually collaborate with schools to address issues of access, attendance, completion, and other local education problems, and with what effects.

This rapid review highlights the need for research on parental and community engagement in education, particularly as it relates to the East African region. In particular, there is a need for larger scale, empirical studies on:

- how can participation of the marginalized groups can be ensured in all dimensions of parent and community involvement (i.e., governance and accountability, facilities and funding, access, student learning and development)?
- how to effectively involve parents in improving teaching and learning through SMCs and more directly through widespread engagement of parents and community members in student learning at home, in the community and at school?
- parent and community influence on curriculum and how that affects curriculum relevance and student learning.
- comparative research on the merits of different types of parent and community involvement interventions (e.g., training, providing information) by schools and systems.

Some commentators involvement argue that further development is needed on methodologies for studying and evaluating parent and community involvement.

Notes

1. The series of rapid reviews utilized a strategic search method in order to identify key resources related to the review focus including existing systematic reviews, literature reviews, reports and other grey literature from well-known and reliable sources on school improvement in general as well as in the contexts of developing countries and East Africa specifically. To this end our team identified search terms for, conducted, and recorded more than 765 individual

searches (465 in Google and 362 in Google Scholar). We combed through and collected links to potential sources from approximately 4,135 pages of Google and Google Scholar search results. After the initial search was completed we identified 1) key sub-themes; 2) prominent authors and organizations; and 3) created a list of documents to be considered for the rapid review. We sorted through and summarized key resources making note of significant findings, the evidence-base supporting these findings, and any knowledge gaps identified in the literature. The final documents included in the series of rapid reviews focused primarily on knowledge from extensive systematic reviews of the literature related to the sub-themes of this series, supplemented by recent empirical studies of particular relevance to East Africa and other developing country contexts. The list of key documents synthesized for this review of teaching and learning appear in the references at the end of this review.

References:

- Action Aid (2010). Politics of participation: parental support for children’s learning and school governance in Burundi, Malawi, Senegal and Uganda.
http://www.actionaid.org/sites/files/actionaid/ilops_parents_final.pdf.
- Banerjee, A, Banerji, R, Duflo, E, Glennerster, R and S Khemani (2010). Pitfalls of Participatory Programs: Evidence from a Randomized Evaluation in Education in India. *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy* 2010, 2:1, 1–30.
- Chen D (2011) *School-based management, school decision-making and education outcomes in Indonesian primary schools*. Policy Research Working Paper Series 5809. Washington, DC: The World Bank.
- Dunne, M, Akyeampong, K and S Humphreys (2007). School Processes, Local Governance and Community Participation: Understanding Access. CREATE, Research Monograph, No.6 London: University of London. <http://sro.sussex.ac.uk/1836/1/PTA6.pdf>
- Kendall, N (2007). Parental and Community Participation in Improving educational Quality in Africa: Current Practices and Future Possibilities. *International Review of Education*, November 2007, Vol. 53, issue 5-6, pp.701-708.
- Kingdon GG, Little A, Aslam M, Rawal S, Moe T, Patrinos H, Beteille T, Banerji R, Parton B and Sharma SK (2014). A rigorous review of the political economy of education systems in developing countries. Final Report. Education Rigorous Literature Review. Department for International Development.
<http://eppi.ioe.ac.uk/cms/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=6fGaDXGZLBE%3d&tabid=3437>
- Mundy, K. (2008). “Civil Society and Its Role in the Achievement and Governance of Education for All.” Background Paper Prepared for the UNESCO *Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2009*. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0017/001780/178020e.pdf>

Nag, S, Chiat, S, Torgerson, C and MJ.Snowling (2014). Literacy, foundation learning and assessment in Developing Countries. Final Report. Education Rigorous Literature Review. Department for International Development.

<http://eppi.ioe.ac.uk/cms/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=2um7MFZAee8%3d&tabid=3437>

OECD. (2011). *Building a high-quality teaching profession: Lessons from around the world*. <http://www.oecd.org/edu/school/programmeforinternationalstudentassessment/pisa/buildingahigh-qualityteachingprofessionlessonsfromaroundtheworld.htm>

Neilson, HD (2007). Empowering Communities for Improved Educational Outcomes: Some Evaluation Findings from the World Bank. *Prospects*, vol. 37, no. 1, pp. 81-93

<http://www.springerlink.com/content/l81h1249r725m356/?MUD=MP>

OECD (2006). Chapter 4:Parent and Community Voice in Schools. In *Demand Sensitive schooling: Evidence and Issues*.

<http://www.oecd.org/site/schoolingfortomorrowknowledgebase/themes/demand/parentandcommunityvoiceinschools.htm>

Save the Children (2013). The right to learn: Community Participation in Improving learning.

http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/sites/default/files/images/The_Right_to_Learn.pdf

UNESCO (2014). Achieving transparency in pro-poor education incentives. International Institute for Educational Planning: Paris, France.

http://etico.iiep.unesco.org/fileadmin/user_upload/ETICO/Publications/PDF/Pro-poor_incentives.pdf

USAID (2011). Community engagement in Education programs.

http://www.equip123.net/docs/E1-FP_CommEng_Comp_Web.pdf