

Parental and Community Involvement in Kenya's Primary Education

An exploratory study on the vision and practices of Formal Non-Parental Adults concerning parental and community involvement in primary education of children in Kisumu County

Master thesis



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Abstract

To improve the access to quality primary education in Kenya, parental and community can be used as a cost-effective mean. Little is known about the vision and practices of Formal Non-Parental Adults (NPAs) towards parental and community involvement in Kenya. Insight in this topic can contribute to the further development of Edukans' tool for parental involvement in terms of cultural sensitivity and a community-based approach. In-depth interviews were held with nineteen Formal NPAs of six primary schools in Kismu County. The results indicated that the vision (attitude, perceived social influence and self-efficacy and skills) and experienced barriers of Formal NPAs prevented them from involving parents in participation and establishing partnerships with the school. In contrast, it was found that Professionals were regarded to contribute positively to the education. This study recommends to promote the protective factor *social networks of schools* and to *align the practices at school with the upbringing at home*. This is expected to contribute to the formation of an educative civil society in which children can enjoy an optimal development.

Keywords: Parental involvement, community, primary education, Kenya

Samenvatting

Betrokkenheid van ouders en de community kan ingezet worden als een kosteneffectieve manier om de toegankelijkheid en kwaliteit van het Keniaanse basisonderwijs te verbeteren. Over de visie en praktijken van Formele Non-Parental Adults (NPAs, Niet Ouderlijke Opvoeders) betreffende de betrokkenheid van ouders en de community in Kenia is nog weinig bekend. Inzicht in dit onderwerp kan bijdragen aan het verder ontwikkelen van Edukans' tool voor ouderbetrokkenheid op het gebied van cultuursensitiviteit en een aanpak gericht op de community. Diepte-interviews zijn gehouden met negentien Formele NPAs betrokken bij zes basisscholen in Kisumu County. Uit de resultaten bleek dat de visie (attitude, ervaren sociale invloed en eigen effectiviteit en vaardigheden) en ervaren barrières van Formele NPAs hen weerhield van het betrekken van ouders in participatie en partnerschap met de school. Dit in tegenstelling tot Formele NPAs en andere professionals, hun bijdragen aan het onderwijs werden als positief beschouwd. Aanbevelingen zijn gedaan om de protectieve factor *de sociale netwerken van de school* te bevorderen en de *praktijken van school overeen te laten komen met de opvoeding thuis*. Verwacht wordt dat dit bijdraagt aan het creëren van een pedagogische civil society waarin kinderen zich optimaal kunnen ontwikkelen.

Sleutelwoorden: Ouderbetrokkenheid, community, basisonderwijs, Kenia

Parental and Community Involvement in Kenya's Primary Education

International attention has been given to access and quality of primary education because it is perceived to bring great social benefits. Education is believed to give people better economic prospects, improved health and greater control over their lives as well as benefitting the society (Ansell, 2005). In order to reach the goal Education For All act with the aim to provide access and quality education for all children, the Kenyan Government introduced Free Primary Education and made education a fundamental pillar in its social transformation plan Kenya Vision 2030 (Government of the Republic of Kenya, 2007). According to a report of UNESCO (2014), Kenya is struggling with overcrowded classrooms and high dropout rates. The most recent net enrolment rate of 85% in 2012 (The Worldbank, 2017) indicates that Kenya is making progress but more work needs to be done. Parental involvement is one of the most cost-effective means to improve quality education (Van der Werf, Creamers & Guldemont, 2001). Positive effects of parental involvement are found in the areas of cognitive, social, emotional and academic growth in children (Desforges, & Abouchaar, 2003; Driesen, Smit, & Slegers, 2005; Fan & Chen, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

Besides parental involvement, schools can be orientated towards the community. Community organising can contribute to resources, facilities and funding for school programs and family support to enhance the child's learning opportunities (Sheldon & Epstein, 2005; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Community involvement in the education of children has recently received more attention (e.g. De Winter, 2012; Epstein & Salinas, 2004) but has not yet been investigated in Kenya's primary education. More insight in the vision and practices of parental and community involvement can contribute to the scientific knowledge in this area. Obtaining information on this subject is of social relevance because it can contribute to the development of substantiated interventions to increase parental and community involvement. This is currently being addressed by Edukans, a Dutch non-governmental organisation (NGO) that aims to offer quality education in developing countries (Edukans, 2012). A tool to increase parental involvement has been developed, based on earlier studies for Edukans by Nijboer (2016) and Hofman (2016) in Suriname. More research is needed to further develop the tool in terms of a community-based approach and cultural sensitivity. In line with De Winter's (2012) concept of the 'educative civil society', Edukans tries to enhance mutual relationships between organisations and citizens to support the upbringing of children. Although parents are the primary caregivers, Non-Parental Adults (NPAs) can play a compensatory as well as an additional role in the lives of children (Kesselring, De Winter,

Horjus, Van de Schoot, & Yperen 2012). Three forms of Non-Parental Adults can be distinguished, based on levels of proximity and degree of professionalism. The first category, the proximal Informal NPAs concerns adults that are closely connected to the child and his or her parents through a nonprofessional bond, for example extended family members and friends. The distant Informal NPAs, such as neighbours and parents of classmates, comprise the second category. The third category concerns proximal professionals: Formal NPAs such as teachers, childcare workers and sports coaches. Distant professionals are not referred to as NPAs because they are not naturally part of the child's or the families' social environment, however they can play a part as source for support (Kesselring, Van Yperen, De Winter, & Lecluijze, 2016). This study focuses on Formal NPAs as they can fulfil a direct role in supporting children and parents or an indirect role by creating opportunities for parents to meet and exchange experiences with other parents and NPAs (Kesselring, 2016).

Development of cultural sensitivity of the tool by Hofman and Nijboer (2016) is needed because the practices and attitudes towards the universal concept of involvement may show culture-specific elements (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Literature and theories on parental and community involvement mostly derive from Western countries (Desforges & Abouchar, 2003; Huntsinger & Jose, 2009). When exporting these models Ansell (2005), stresses to take in account the differences in cultures. Instead of oppressing schools, parents and communities by imposing the Western models and ideas of involvement, Freire (1971) calls for raising consciousness through dialogue as a first step in empowerment. This is especially of importance to Edukans because they cooperate with local partner organisations such as Pamoja Child Foundation in Kenya. The aim of this research is two-folded: to gain insight in the parental and community involvement in Kenya's primary education and to further develop Edukans' tool in terms of cultural sensitivity and a community-based approach. Therefore this study aims at answering the following question: What are the vision and practices of Formal NPAs concerning parental and community involvement in the primary education of children in Kisumu County? Vision is operationalised as the intention of Formal NPAs to involve parents and community members in primary education. Risk and protective factors influence executing the intended behaviour for involvement before putting this into practice. Practice is operationalised as the behaviour displayed to involve parents and community members. To provide a complete view, a parallel study was carried out addressing the perspective of the parents and Informal NPAs regarding the vision and the practices of their involvement in primary education. The results of Vermeulen (2017) contributed to legitimate recommendations for the further development of the tool.

Vision

The first research question posed is: what is the vision (attitudes, perceived social influences and self-efficacy and skills) of Formal NPAs towards parental and community involvement in primary education? To answer this question the conceptual framework of the ASE-model, derived from the theory of planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991), is used. This model is helpful to identify personal and environmental factors that influence individuals to show certain behaviour. Moreover it can contribute to the systematic accountability when determining an approach to achieve the desired behaviour (Lechner, Kremers, Meertens, & De Vries, 2008). In accordance with the ASE-Model, vision is operationalised as attitudes, perceived social influence and self-efficacy. Background variables such as historical, social and demographical factors are only expected to influence behaviour through these determinants of behaviour (Fishbein & Yzer, 2003).

In this study attitudes are based on affective or cognitive beliefs and include outcome expectations, judgements of the pro's and con's and appreciation (Lechner et al., 2008). When it comes to outcome expectations teachers will promote involvement to a greater extent when they recognise the importance of involvement for the academic success and wellbeing of the child (Epstein, 1995; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Kim, 2009). Teachers may think of involved parents as an advantage when this gives them the opportunity to gain more insight in the needs of child (Laroque, Kleiman, & Darling, 2011). The advantages of involving community members are the contributions they provide to the school's resources and knowledge (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Teachers fearing that parents and community members gain too much power and exert more influence on school matters than teachers do could be a disadvantage (Addi-Racah, & Ainhoren, 2009; Baeck, 2010). Another disadvantage could be that teachers think they need to invest too much time to involve parents (Bakker, Denessen, Dennissen, & Oolbekkink-Marchand, 2013). Appreciation concerns the assessment of the behaviour of parents and the community. Several studies in the review of Bakker et al. (2013) indicated that teachers generally assess the involvement of parents in education as low. Especially parents with a low social economic status (SES) and parents speaking another language at home than is used at school are considered to possess less competence to be involved (Bakker, Denessen, & Brus-Laeven, 2007). It is predicted that a negative view of parents applies to the context of Kisumu County where most parents and informal NPAs live in poor circumstances and received little education. In contrast, Formal NPAs perform jobs that require higher education and are more stable. The expectation is that this gap between the SES statuses leads to a more negative attitude of Formal NPAs towards

parents and Informal NPAs.

The factor of perceived social influence consists of social pressure and support from others, and subjective norms (Lechner et al., 2008). Several studies indicate that high aspirations and concerns for the success of the child are not bound to culture or income (Boethel, 2003; Epstein & Sanders, 2012; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). This may lead to parents and community members either supporting or putting pressure on teachers in order to make the child perform. The perceived social norm concerns role that teachers feel they should perform in the education of children; this norms vary per culture (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Kenya has a more collectivistic culture compared to the more individualistic culture in Western societies (Eldering, 2011). Part of the collectivistic set of beliefs is the separated role distribution between teachers and parents (Trumbell, Rothstein-Fish, & Hernandez, 2003). Parents and extended family members are responsible for sustaining the child and preparing them for an adult social life. Teachers are responsible for the transfer of knowledge and good morals (Eldering, 2011). It is predicted that the perceived subjective norms are in line with the more collectivistic culture in Kenya.

The third factor in the vision of Formal NPAs is self-efficacy and skills; the expectations individuals have about their performance of behaviour. Self-efficacy is generally related to skills but these could be over- or underestimated (Lechner et al., 2008). To involve parents, teachers require knowledge and skills to effectively communicate (Epstein, 2005). Positive communication can serve to build better relationships not only with individual parents but also with the broader community (Graham-Clay, 2005). Frequent communication expands parental involvement and increases the child's engagement in education (Kraft & Dougherty, 2012). A lack of communication or miscommunication can make parents feel unsupported, misunderstood and overwhelmed by the demands placed on them (Graham-Clay, 2005). Miscommunication is more likely to occur when teachers and parents have dissimilar backgrounds (Bakker et al., 2013; Kim 2009). Most parents in the communities surrounding the school have a low SES background. It is therefore expected that teachers feel less competent to involve parents from lower SES backgrounds.

Barriers and Protective Factors

The second research question is: what barriers and protective factors do Formal NPAs experience in involving parents and the community in education? Even though teachers may have a positive vision to involve parents and the community, they may not act on it. It is suggested this discrepancy is due to the presence of environmental constraints (Fishbein,

Hennesy, Yzer, & Douglas, 2003). Intervention to reduce barriers perceived by Formal NPAs may be an efficient and effective way to improve involvement (Kim, 2009). In line with the method of Edukans to promote good practices, and the concept of the educative civil society that has its roots in the positive psychology (De Winter, 2012), this study also focuses on positive factors promoting parental and community involvement. Within the ecological system model of Bronfenbrenner (1977) the following barriers and protective factors are expected:

At the microsystem, family circumstances such as caretaking responsibilities in single-parent families or large families can also make it difficult for parents to get involved (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). On the other hand, family structure can play a protective role when extended family members are concerned about the upbringing and education of the child (Ansell, 2005).

At the mesosystem, the interactions between parents, teachers and community members can play a role as both protective factor and barrier. The social network of schools is expected to serve as a protective factor. Collaboration with community liaison can improve families' access to health services, social services, food, housing, adult education, and employment training (Kim, 2009). Moreover schools and communities can work together to develop programs that engage parents in the education of their children, thereby enhancing their self-efficacy for involvement. To create more connections between schools, parents and community members, technology can serve as a protective factor for efficient communication (Grant, 2011; Patrikakou, 2016). However schools need to consider that not all parents and community members have access to these resources.

Social settings at the exosystem may influence the involvement of parents and community members. Educational policies on involvement have a strong impact on teachers' views and actions towards parents and the community (Kim, 2009). Policies serve as a protective factor as they help teachers to accept involvement of parents (Desimone, 1999). Initiatives on a national level can encourage schools, families and community partners to follow new directions (Epstein, 2005).

The macrosystem concerns the cultural context including the barrier of poverty. As Kisumu County is situated in the subordinate western part of Kenya it is expected that a lot of families and community members experience economic barriers preventing involvement. Families living in poor circumstances experience a hard time to involve themselves in the education of their child in terms of resources to provide for the child and time to spend on education both at school and at home (Lee & Bowen, 2006; Peña, 2000).

Practice

The third and last research question is: what are the practices of Formal NPAs concerning parental and community involvement? In the literature many different definitions of parental involvement can be found (Bakker et al., 2013; Desforges & Abouchar, 2003). In this study parental and community involvement is broadly defined as partnership and participation (Smit, Sluiter & Driessen, 2006).

Participation. Participation is the involvement of parents and community in formal or informal activities at school (Smit, Sluiter, & Driessen, 2006). Formal participation has a democratic purpose and aims to include parents and community members in school decision-making processes such as a parent counsel, advisory board or the schools' board of management. Informal participation has a social and practical purpose and aims at recruiting and organising help and support, for example in assisting teachers in the classroom, on class trips, or during sport or cultural activities. Within participation, parents and community members can 'sympathise together', 'think together', 'act together' and 'decide together' (Prins, Wienke, & Van Rooijen, 2013). Sympathise together refers to the involvement in academic development of the child on the side of parents and showing interest in parents' childrearing conditions on the side of teachers. When parents, schools and community members think together they are engaged in mutual conversations about activities and tasks to come up with solutions for the problems each group is facing. Act together refers to parents, school and the community helping each other in activities concerning the upbringing and education of the child. Schools, parents and community members decide together when they are involved in decision-making processes. Realisation of participation at all levels requires trust on all sides involved (Bakker et al., 2013). In both forms of participation, parents and community members are more likely to participate when the school appeals to their talents (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). It is expected that teachers involve parents and community members to a small extent little in both forms of participation resulting from a low appreciation towards parents' competences.

Partnership. Partnership exists of cooperative relationships between schools, parents, and the community to align practices in didactics and pedagogy at school and at home (Epstein, 1995; Smit et al., 2006). Schools can put didactical partnership into practice by providing information and strategies on how children can be helped with homework and other curriculum-related activities (Sheldon & Epstein, 2005). In pedagogical partnership, teachers and parents can show involvement by establishing appropriate guidelines for children both at school and at home; talking with children about their interests, activities and friends and

explain hopes and goals (Epstein, 1995). Partnerships can be of several natures: 'meeting', 'dialogue' and 'support' (Van Dijk & Gemmeke, 2015). Meetings offer opportunities to create social networks as parents, teachers and community members get acquainted to one another. Dialogue on childrearing may lead to recognition and confirmation and may help to put their parenting questions into perspective. Teachers, parents and community members can give each other support on an emotional, informational and instrumental level. Henderson and Mapp (2002) state that all parent, regardless of income, education or cultural background, are concerned about their children's education. In the Kenyan context this statement can be extended to grandparents, aunts, uncles, peers and neighbours that are traditionally involved in the socialisation of children (Prochner & Kabiru, 2008). However in line with the previously mentioned collectivistic culture in Kenya, it is expected that teachers are concerned with the education of the child but not with the upbringing at home.

Method

Type of study

An exploratory study was carried out using a qualitative method to acquire detailed descriptions of experiences, situations and interactions (Baar, 2002). This inductive way of researching contributes to sense-making in which participants give meaning to their stories and experiences (Baarda, De Goede, & Teunissen, 2013). A holistic approach allowed for investigating parental and community involvement and context of Kenyan primary schools as a whole (Baarda et al, 2013). Observations were made during the visits at the schools, a class meeting and a meeting of head teachers in the office of Pamoja. Conversations with three key informants, all employees of Pamoja, gave more insight into the context. Theory triangulation was used by comparing the results obtained in this study from the perspectives of formal NPAs with those of parents and informal NPAs studied by Vermeulen (2017) in the discussion.

Participants

The six participating primary schools in Kisumu County were submitted by Pamoja and therefore formed a convenience sample (Baarda et al, 2013). The schools were located in a semi-rural area; the largest school consisted of 466 pupils and the smallest of 285 pupils. Participants were recruited using purposive sampling to get a complete understanding of the topic (Lewis & Ritchie, 2003). At the schools, two categories of participants were included: class teachers and deputy teachers. Class teachers are responsible for the welfare of the children in their classes and believed to be more frequently in touch with parents than subject

teachers. Deputy teachers are also responsible for the management and policies in the school. For three schools an exception was made with respect to the recruitment of the participants. At school D and F both the deputy teacher and head teacher were included, as deputy teachers were just transferred the schools and could provide little information about the specific school practices. At school E two class teachers participated, one being the youngest teacher of the school and the other being the senior teacher. The seven class teachers, three females and four males, plus six Deputy teachers, two female and four males, plus two male head teachers brought the number of participants at the schools to a total of 15 with a mean age of 46.33 years and mean teaching experience of 19.33 years. The Formal NPAs participating in this study were selected after being mentioned in the interviews with teachers or parents and Informal NPAs in the parallel study of Vermeulen (2017). A total of four non-teaching Formal NPAs, two female nurses and two male priests, participated.

Instrument

In this study, in-depth interviews were used as they are suitable for acquiring a detailed view of experiences, attitudes and opinions of participants regarding specific topics (Boeije, 2010). To maintain the reliability of this study, the topics of the interviews were directed to answer the three research questions about vision, barriers and protective factors and practices of formal NPAs: (1) The vision of Formal NPAs including attitude (e.g., outcome expectations of involvement, advantages and disadvantages of involvement, appreciation of parents and NPAs), perceived social influence (e.g., support and pressure from parents and community members, subjective norms on responsibilities of parents and teacher) and self-efficacy and skills (e.g., skills needed to involve others, communication, effectively of these skills); (2) Protective factors and barriers perceived by Formal NPAs in the involvement of parents and NPAs (e.g., family structure, social network, policies, technology, poverty); (3) Practices of Formal NPAs concerning didactical and pedagogical partnership and formal and informal participation (involvement in decision-making processes, activities at school, content of meetings, communication with parents about child, support provided).

Procedure

The data were collected during five consecutive weeks: four weeks in which each of the six schools was visited for three days to interview teachers, and one week of interviewing other Formal NPAs. Prior to the visits Pamoja informed formal NPAs about the purpose and necessities. Before conducting the interview the content and goal of the study was explained and a verbal agreement was made with the participants to take part in the study. The

participants were requested to give their informed consent to record the interview after being assured of the anonymity of both the school and the individual (Boeije, 2010). To ensure all relevant issues were addressed, a topic list was used as guideline, contributing to the reliability and internal validity (Baarda et al., 2013). The interviews with teachers, deputy teachers and head teachers were conducted on the school grounds at their convenience. On average these interviews took 51 minutes. Interviews with other Formal NPAs took place in their offices or workplaces and took on average 30 minutes. The recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim, which contributed to the reliability of the study.

Analysis

The transcripts were analysed manually by using an inductive analysis method to find common themes and regularities that gave answers to the research questions (Lewis & Richie, 2003; Boeije, 2010). To maintain the internal validity the descriptive labels approximated the wording of the participants as closely as possible. The reliability of this method is assured through the transparent and systematic process of sorting and composing the labels into dimensions and core labels that formed the results of this study (Baarda et al., 2013).

Results

The result section will be presented per research question. The core labels obtained from the qualitative analysis are indicated with italics. They are illustrated with explanatory quotes from participants and information from observations and key informants. A distinction is made between quotes of the seven teachers [T], six deputy teachers [D], two head teachers [H] and four NPAs [N]. It should be noted that not every participant named the same visions and practises. Therefore when numbers are mentioned these only give an indication of the support of statements.

Vision

Attitude. Teachers expressed great outcome expectations of parental and community involvement. Involved parents would *enhance the discipline of the learners*. Likewise the child would become more *motivated to do the schoolwork* when parents show interest. With parents supporting their children in education a *decrease in the level of absence* was expected. This would lead to *improvement of performance*. Not only children but also teachers themselves were expected to get higher motivation and to perform better with more involvement. In the more distant future *parents and the community would benefit from educated children* as they were expected to improve the standard of living.

Let us have a teamwork so that we have our children do well (...). Because after ten

years you find that this children who have been taught here they go to secondary schools, they go to college maybe they are being employed by the government, they will change the world. The community, the life of the community will change. [D12]

Teachers recognised that working together with parents and the community had the following advantages: it *makes work easier*, it *contributes to alignment* and it increases the *knowledge about the child*. Also they acknowledged certain disadvantages: involving parents *takes much time*, *involved parents can oppose teachers*, *involvement gives parents too much power* and involving parents could *disturb the trust relationship* between teacher, parents and children. However, all teachers recognised the *need to work together with parents and the community*:

In our traditional African society there is this thing that we use for cooking. It has three stones...The three stones are the teachers, the pupils and the parents. This things, if one of these things is away then the cooking will not take place. [D8]

Teachers assessed *parents to be little involved* regarding to appreciation. Most teachers mentioned that *parents do not know the benefits of education* and *do not possess the necessary skills and knowledge* to be involved. Language differences were not perceived to play a role as most teachers and parents belonged to the same tribe and used English, Kiswahili and vernacular to communicate to each other and the children. Teachers did experience *educated parents to be more involved than low-educated parents*:

You know some people did not go through all the system of education so you must understand that it is difficult to convince such a person maybe if you tell him to do this and this. He will say that it is too much for the child. [T11]

Five of the teachers admitted *not to put effort into uninvolved parents* whereas two teachers *wanted parents to be educated about their roles*. This shows that teachers generally have cognitive beliefs about the benefits of parental and community involvement but have negative affective beliefs about parents.

Perceived Social Influence. Teachers experienced pressure and support from parents, community members and the government. They felt that *high expectations of parents* regarding their children's performance put a lot of pressure on them:

They always come when the child performs well in class. They come and tell you work well, very good. But if they (children) perform poorly they will be harsh on you. [T11]

Also the government was perceived to put pressure on teachers by assessing the quality of the schools solely based on the achieved results. Moreover teachers felt pressure to *be good role models*. One teacher explained that she had to show good morals inside and outside the school

as she perceived to be constantly watched by the community. Teachers mentioned that parents could support them more by *coming to meetings* or *showing appreciation by bringing gifts* such as sugar tea.

When asked about the subjective norms on the responsibilities of teachers and parents, teachers indicated that parents were *responsible for the behaviour* of children and the *care of children* in terms of basic needs such as health and food. According to four of the teachers *mothers are responsible for taking care of the children* whereas it should be *the role of the father to be involved with their education*. However, the observed meeting was mostly attended by mothers. All formal NPAs mentioned that parents *neglected their duties*, they were often *away from home* to work and left the *children to take care of themselves*. The lack of parental supervision and the abolishment of corporal punishment by the government made teachers believe that *children are undisciplined*, especially *adolescents caused problems*. Therefore teachers felt obliged to *mould the child's behaviour*:

“We are handling them as we are also parents. So we look to their academic and social upbringing. So if there is any problem that needs our involvement we should just go in.” [T5]

Although most teachers were concerned about the behaviour and upbringing of children, they felt that the *main role of teachers should be teaching* in order to make the children pass their exams. However, a *conducive environment at school and at home* was perceived to be crucial for the learning of children as the *upbringing affected the child* in school. The desired role-distribution of teachers seems not to be consistent with the actual distribution because teachers experience a lot of pressure and little support.

Self-efficacy and skills. Formal NPAs pointed out that *clear communication* and *listening* are skills needed to reach *mutual understanding*. Even if parents would become angry, teachers insisted that they should *stay calm and friendly*. In guidance and counselling sessions teachers spoke with parents and their children to 'see a way forward'. They perceived parents to take their advice seriously. This convinced the majority of teachers of the *effectiveness of guidance and counselling*:

It's effective because the child will know back at home somebody thinks about me, school people also think about me. I mess at school and I mess at home and this just has to change. [T1]

Teachers stated that, in contrast to themselves, *stakeholders and community members convinced parents to come to school*. It is not clear to what extent teachers are able to reflect on their own skills and self-efficacy as they gave superficial answers such as 'being a teacher

is a call' and 'experience comes with the years'. It seemed that teachers felt they had the right skills and blamed parents for not cooperating with them.

Barriers and protective factors

Teachers and Formal NPA's experienced barriers and protective factors to involve parents and the community in various systems. At the microsystem the *structure of families* was found to be a barrier for involvement. According to a nurse, HIV/AIDS has a great impact on family structure. Teachers agreed that the involvement of single parents or relatives taking care of an orphan was little:

Some kids that are orphans they stay with the grandparents, although the grandparents are old (...). They just provide food and maybe a place to sleep but you know grandparents they don't know how to read and maybe write. They see the kid is going to school that is enough for them. [T15]

Teachers mentioned that children being raised by single parents or originating from big families were more often engaged in child labour or domestic chores to assist in the maintenance of the family. Teachers knew little about the role of Informal NPAs. According to a key informant the role of the extended family was reduced, as job opportunities are increasingly found further away from the family home.

At the mesosystem all schools had *support from organisations and community*. NGOs assisted schools in dealing with subjects as health and parenting. Teachers believed that this help would result in some form of reciprocity:

“So when they provide the child with mosquito nets, the child will now be protected, so that it is not infected by malaria. And this one is helping the child, and doing so the parents will feel encouraged to work with school because some of the problems are taken up.” [HT7]

Formal NPAs supported the schools as well. Teachers contacted nurses in case of sick children and church representatives gave pastoral lessons. Informal community members and members of the ministry offered financial support. During the meeting at Pamoja several head teachers stated that they wanted to *increase the use of phones and the Internet* to improve contact with parents and expand their social networks. .

At the exosystem national policies served as both a protective factor and barrier. The policy of *free primary education* was mentioned as a barrier. According to the teachers the government is not providing enough and parents are no longer involved because they assume that the government is taking care. The government obliging the schools to involve *parents*

and community members in the decision-making processes was mentioned to be a protective factor; all schools adhered to this rule. Teachers experienced that parents of children in the higher grades were more involved since the government increased the *possibilities to access high school* by providing sponsorship for the pupil with the highest marks. According to a key informant it is seen as a form of prestige for parents and the school when their children attend secondary education.

Teachers experienced *parents being busy to provide daily needs* as a barrier in the macrosystem. Since the food prices went up, parents are struggling to earn enough money. Mothers usually sell on markets and fathers work in the field or search for a job outside of their own residence.

Practices

Participation. At the formal level *parents, pupils, teachers and stakeholders are represented* in the schools board of management (BOM). They perform on the level of 'decide together' by *giving their input* on topics as the infrastructure, performance and funds and finances. The *group of stakeholders* can differ per school but mainly existed of representatives of the church, NGO's and the ministry. In addition to sponsoring the school, stakeholders 'think together' with teachers in their role as advisory body. Teachers stated that the involvement of parents sometimes caused problems:

Now you know some of our parents they are not all that, they have not learned management, they don't have the knowledge of management, and when you involve them in decision making, maybe if you are not careful they can take you the wrong direction. [D4]

Now that the schools carefully selected parents on their attitude, skills and knowledge, representatives of the parents took their role of *convincing parents* and *calling on them to support the school financially* more seriously. They functioned as a bridge for parents to 'sympathise together' with the school. Parent class representatives were asked to monitor conversations with pupils and the teacher when problems occurred; they played a role on the level of 'think together' by proposing solutions. At the informal level teachers rarely asked for participation of parents in terms of services. Only two schools made use of parents' skills and talents but they did not 'act together' in joint activities:

“Like we have the school farm behind. Sometimes they come in to assist in the farm. Some come in with their bulls to plough.” [T9]

Teachers said they did *not want to involve parents* in activities as they felt they were too busy.

However, it was observed that a lot of parents attended a sports day at one of the schools to support their children. Representatives of the church, which were mostly also parents, were involved by *giving pastoral lessons* for the spiritual nourishment of the children. The priests regarded this as an important link between the school and the church:

“Once a week they bring the kids together and talk about religion because as you know the child is born *tabula rasa*, plain on the mind. It is what you put to this particular kid that is recorded. When you do that program every week that will stick to the mind of the child.” [N4].

According to the teachers these lessons were an effective method to development good morals. Informal involvement seems not to occur because teachers do not ask parents to be involved. Status may motivate parents to participate at school as teachers mentioned that parents were proud to be representatives in the board.

Partnership. To establish pedagogical or didactical partnerships teachers pointed out that *parents have to come to school*. Most of the schools *allowed relatives* to replace parents but *preferred the parents or legal guardians to come*. Teachers experienced that parents rarely came to school voluntarily.

When they (parents) are required to come, we call them they come to school or when they feel they should come and look for, they should come to ask to know the performance of the children, they should just come, come over. They should come over to see the classes where the children are learning. Whether they are good enough, there are enough chairs, or even to greet the teacher, to know the teachers. [H13]

Schools *sent parents messages through the children*. Teachers experienced that *meetings were poorly attended*. This was also observed during a class meeting, out of a class of more than fifty pupils only twenty-four parents showed up. During the class meeting, listed results were released to *inform parents about the performance* of the children. Likewise parents got *information about matters of indiscipline*. Subsequently both teachers and parents got the *opportunity to give their opinion*, meaning that they were asked to propose solutions for problems concerning the behaviour and performance of children. A dialogue did not occur because the teachers and community stakeholders mainly informed parents on what should be done. In so-called *guidance and counselling sessions* the teacher talked with the parent and the child to look for a way forward in individual matters. Problems regularly discussed are absence, performance, and adolescence. Only two teachers stated to *ask children and parents about their home situation*. Two of the schools reported to have a good relationship with nurses. Nurses would like to cooperate more with schools to support them in *taking care of*

children's health:

They (teachers) normally come here; they come like reproductive health topics. They can come and get some few facts from me (...). There is a place where I used to work and there was a neighbouring school. They would come and request on such a topic. You can come with our teenagers; you can do some guidance and counselling. But unfortunately I am just working alone, so I don't have much time to do that. [N1]

Schools often *invite role models*, such as former pupils, priests, NGOs and exemplary parents to *sensitise parents*. *Informational* support was given about *monitoring the child's homework, providing learning material*, and arranging a *learning environment at home*. The schools offered support on an instrumental level by allowing community members to *use the school facilities* in cases of funerals, weddings and meetings. On a more regular basis schools permitted the community to use the water access point and the sports fields. This form of support exceeded the definition of pedagogical and didactical partnership. Partnerships between teachers, parents and community members are mostly established when problems occur. It is possible that this contributed to a negative attitude of parents leading to reduced involvement. Teachers had the perception that parents were barely involved in the learning process of children at home. However it is not clear whether this image is correct as teachers had little personal conversations with parents in- and outside the school.

Discussion

The aim of this research was two-folded: to gain insight in the vision and practices of Formal NPAs concerning parental and community involvement in the primary education of children in Kisumu County, and to give recommendations to further develop Edukans' tool in terms of cultural sensitivity and community approach. Per research question the results will be compared with the expectations formulated beforehand based on literature. The current results are compared with the results of the study of Vermeulen (2017) to identify differences and similarities in perspectives of Formal NPAs, parents and Informal NPAs. In addition it is examined whether the good practices of the tool 'Parental Involvement in Practice' emerging from studies from Nijboer (2016) and Hofman (2016) can also be applied in the Kenyan context. Recommendations are given to further develop the tool in terms of cultural sensitivity and community approach and where necessary to conduct follow-up research.

Vision

Firstly, the attitude of Formal NPAs towards parental en community involvement is examined. In line with many studies, teachers expected great outcomes of involvement in

terms of behavioural and academic gains (Epstein, 1995; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Kim, 2009). Conform the expectation teachers experienced a disadvantage in the increased power of parents that would lead to a reduction in their own influence. To overcome this disadvantage a balance of influence must be reached in which both teachers and parents are empowered and collaborate in areas of mutual interests (Addi-Racchah, & Ainhoren, 2009). This already seemed to be the case with for Formal NPAs, whose involvement was regarded to be advantageous. The results of this study confirmed the expectation that Formal NPAs had a negative appreciation of parents with a low SES background. However, the study of Bakker et al., (2007) showed that teachers' perceptions related weakly to the involvement reported by parents. It is important that teachers get a realistic view of parents' involvement because a distorted view can lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy (Kim, 2009). This process had already started; results from Vermeulen (2017) indicated that parents withdrew from involvement due to the experienced negative attitudes of teachers. Parental involvement can be stimulated when teachers show a friendly attitude towards all parents (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). To achieve this, the good practice of *open and inviting atmosphere and motivated teachers* can also be applied in the Kenyan Context. According to Epstein and Sanders (2007), all parents can become involved in education if schools reach out to them, regardless of their income and educational level or any other home situation. This leads to the second good practice of *schools initiating the contact*. Teachers should see it as part of their professional role to take the first step in approaching parents who are not yet involved and gain their trust.

Concerning the factor of perceived social influence, it was expected that parents and teachers would have a separated role distribution deriving from the collectivistic culture (Trumbell et al., 2003). However this did not fully apply to the Kenyan context. Teachers believed that shared responsibilities could contribute to a conducive environment of the child at school and at home. This shows once more that cultures cannot be classified into the framework of collectivism or individualism; rather they exist of a unique combination of both characteristics (Eldering, 2006). More research is needed on differences in cultural characteristics in non-Western countries that can influence parental and community involvement. Furthermore this subjective norms in role distribution may be different between teachers and parents, this seemed to be the case at some points after comparison with the results of Vermeulen (2017). This probably led to teachers experiencing a lot of pressure and little support. More aligned practices can contribute to the motivation of teachers as pressure decreases and support increases.

To align the roles of teachers and parents, information about didactics of the child at

school is crucial to the parents' role and information about the pedagogy of the child at home is crucial to the teachers' role (Graham-Clay, 2005). Communication can contribute to shared goals and mutual interests. When asked about the factor of self-efficacy and skills, teachers endorsed the good practice of *importance of communication*. However, it is possible that teachers overestimated their efficacy (Lechner et al., 2008). This seemed to be the case since they did not reflect on the effectiveness of their own behaviour but attributed the poor cooperation to parents' knowledge and skills. For further research on the self-efficacy of Kenyan teachers it is recommended to search for a more cultural-sensitive method to expose their beliefs. Supportive interaction skills can be learned and a sufficient level is reached quickly (Desforges, & Abouchaar, 2003). It is recommended to retrain current teachers to expand their communication skills, as current courses on this topic do not yet exist in regular teacher trainings (Kimu, 2012). Communication can create or change beliefs that determine the positive vision needed to engage in the desired behaviour. If people have formed a positive vision but do not act on it, interventions should be directed at removing environmental restraints (Fishbein et al., 2003).

Barriers and protective factors

Schools are positioned in the mesosystem and can affect the nearby micro- and exosystem. At the microsystem, family structure was experienced as a barrier for involvement. Involvement the child's education both at school and at home can be increased when cooperation between families and informal NPAs is promoted (Kesselring et al., 2016). Parents in the study of Vermeulen (2017) said to be willing to offer friends and extended family members assistance. Schools can play an important role in this by facilitating meetings that bring these groups into contact (Van Dijk & Gemmeke, 2010). In contrast to informal NPAs, schools did involve Formal NPAs. Formal NPAs, priests and nurses were positive about cooperation with the school; this leads to opportunities to further promote the protective factor of social networks at the mesosystem. However, from the interviews it occurred that the group of Formal NPAs involved in the education was small. Possibly Formal NPAs are a more Western concept emerging from increased access to leisure and care organised by professionals. In subsequent research the roles of Formal NPAs in other contexts should be further explored. In addition it can be interesting to pay more attention to the distant professionals because the results supported the idea of their indirect contribution to parental and community involvement (Kim, 2009). The found protective factor of integrating technology can promote contact between parents and teachers. To reduce the barriers and

promote protective factors at the micro- and the mesosystem, the good practice of *community involvement* can be applied in Kenya to contribute to the establishment of 'an educative civil society' as described by De Winter (2012).

At the exosystem policies at the national level did influence parental and community involvement but not always in the positive manner as was expected. In line with Desimone (1999), the policies concerning the management of schools did encourage the schools to involve community members and parents in the decision-making processes. However, it seemed that schools did not translate national policies into school policies. This led to frictions regarding the roles of members included in the board of management. To enhance parents' and community members' participation the good practice of using a *bottom-up approach* can be used to create school policies with a wide support. Following the idea of Epstein (1995), action teams consisting of teachers, parents and community members can be formed to guide the development of a program for involvement. In this way national policies can be better matched to practice and become a positive influence. Surprisingly access to high schools was found to be a protective factor at the exosystem. An increased change on a well-paid job seemed to reinforce parents' involvement. Children are expected to ultimately contribute to their families' and communities' welfare. However most children did not have the possibility to follow secondary education and formal education does not guarantee employment, as Kenya's economy is not capable of absorbing higher educated workforces (Kimu, 2012). Possibly the availability of vocational schooling can benefit these students and prepare them to work in sectors of the economy where the demand for labour is high (Ansell, 2005). Further research has to prove whether this form of continuing education does promote parental involvement in primary education.

The barrier of poverty at the macrosystem is a systematic problem that is difficult to be influenced by schools directly. However, changes in the lower systems could reduce barriers in higher systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1997). Therefore the limited resources of parents and the community should be taken into account but not be an excuse to refrain from their involvement (Lee & Bowen, 2006; Peña, 2000).

Practice

The expectation that teachers involved parents and community members to a little extent in participation proved only to be true for informal participation. Teachers generally had a low appreciation of parents' competences and expected them to be too busy, which prevented them from asking parents to participate in informal activities. However, the practice

of two schools and the study of Vermeulen (2017) indicated that parents were willing to 'act together' with schools when asked for. Schools did ask parents to take part in formal participation to 'decide together'. At the formal level parents were chosen according to their appropriate skills and knowledge. This good practice of *using parents' talents* could also be applied on the informal level to motivate parents of various SES backgrounds to participate (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Informal participation can greatly contribute to the quality of education because it reduces the workload of teachers and offers opportunities for better guidance of pupils in the crowded classrooms. Participation of formal NPAs and distant professionals was much appreciated by teachers therefore the good practice should be extended to *make use of parents' and community member' talents*. The involvement of professionals could be expanded by focussing on capacity building of parents in terms of skills and knowledge for example on childrearing topics or agriculture. This could be done by organising workshops that make use of dialogue to empower parents and community members in line with the ideology of Freire, (1997). In addition, the school can encourage parents and community members to come up with initiatives, this will empower them to participate in all the forms of sympathise together, think together, act together and decide together (Prins et al., 2013).

Contrary to the expectation, teachers were concerned with both the didactic and the pedagogic aspects of the child at school and at home. However the partnerships were one-sided because parents were only involved to achieve the goals of teachers but were not acknowledged in their concerns (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). It is recommended to create equal dialogues between parents, teachers and community members. This can offer emotional support in terms of recognition and confirmation of concerns in the upbringing of the child (Van Dijk & Gemmeke, 2010). Parents were mostly approached when problems arose in both behavioural and academic matters. Contact can become a source of tension when it is only made to share concerns about the child. Positive communication can serve to build better relationships not only with individual parents but also with the broader community (Graham-Clay, 2005). The good practice of *positive, frequent and personal contact* is therefore expected to be suitable to improve parental and community involvement in the Kenyan context. Making use of letters, take home messages, and phone calls can enhance positive and frequent communication (Graham-Clay, 2005). During meetings more attention could be paid to aspects that are already going well. Besides didactical and pedagogical aspects, schools could support parents in their livelihood. This will indirectly contribute to the performances of children in poor health, which are less likely to attend education (Ansell, 2005). Further

research in other contexts can elaborate the definitions of partnership and participation towards more cultural-sensitive concepts.

In sum the negative attitudes of teachers towards parents prevented them from involving parents and Informal NPAs in both practices of partnership and participation. The involvement of Formal NPAs and distant professionals shows that a positive vision towards involvement is of great importance. In addition, interventions need to pay attention to the environmental factors. Especially barriers and protective factors at the micro- and mesosystem can be influenced by the practices of schools. The definitions of partnership and participation gave insight in the Kenyan practices but can be expanded to fit to various cultural contexts. The good practices of Edukans' Tool seem to be applicable to the Kenyan context and are expected to improve involvement in Kenya's primary education.

Limitations

Several limitations have to be taken into account when interpreting these results. All participating schools cooperated with Edukans' partner organisation Pamoja. It is very likely that their presence at the school influenced the vision and practices of Formal NPAs concerning the involvement of parents and the community. Although in this study good practices are mentioned to fit the Kenyan context it must be taken into account that the results of this study cannot be generalised to other schools in Kisumu County or other parts of Kenya. Kenya is a versatile country with many tribes all having a different culture and this study included only one of them. Furthermore this research is conducted in a semi-rural area in the subordinate western part of Kenya. According to the study of Roscigno, Tomaskovic-Devey, and Crowley (2006), caution has to be paid to the inequality of places before generalising findings from rural to more urban settings. The findings of this study can be generalised to the schools that participated in this study because teachers from different classes and with various years of experience were included. However, it could be possible that teachers gave socially accepted answers to the questions, as they did not want to make a bad impression by sharing their vision and practices. To avoid social desirability all participants were assured that their statement would be used with respect for their privacy and only for academic purpose (Boeije, 2010).

Prior to conducting this study, the researcher had limited interviewing experience and little knowledge of interviewing techniques. Therefore, it is plausible that not all opinions and experiences of the participants were retrieved. A cyclic approach could have contributed to a more complete view of the vision and practices (Baarda et al., 2013). The use of this method

was planned but turned out to be impossible due to time constraints.

Limitations inherent to the cross-cultural bias could not be avoided completely and could have affected the interpretation of the answers from the respondents. To reduce this risk as much as possible a method for qualitative analyses was used that stayed close to the wording of the participants. In addition a holistic approach with observations and conversations with key informants was used to gain more insight into the context. Theory triangulation with the findings of Vermeulen (2017) concerning the vision and practices of parents and informal NPAs and the observations at the schools and trainings of Pamoja made it possible to verify assumptions.

Implications

In this section recommendations will be given to Pamoja and Edukans. The recommendations for Pamoja can contribute to reach access to quality education for all children in their work field. Recommendations for Edukans are given to further develop the tool in terms of a cultural sensitivity and a community-based approach.

Pamoja. Pamoja is currently working with the STAR-model of Edukans (2012), which includes attention for the parental and community involvement to improve the quality of primary education. The trainings on child rights are a step into the right direction to make parents, teachers and children aware of their roles in the education and upbringing. Capacity building of teachers and parents in the BOM responds to the expressed needs in the decision-making process. The negative attitude of teachers towards parents and Informal NPAs is a topic that should be addressed even more by promoting the protective factor of 'social networks of the school'. Pamoja is in perfect position to facilitate meetings between parents, teachers and other community members as they already have positive contact with these parties. Increased opportunities to interact with parents can contribute to a positive view of parents and community members as collaborators (Bakker et al, 2003). Activities during the meetings should be informal and positively formulated to encourage parents, teachers, Informal NPAs and Formal NPAs to cooperate and get to know each other. Sports seemed to be a common interest and could be used to bring the community together. Religion also plays a major role in the lives of parents and teachers. Pamoja could intensify the already existing bonds with priests to organise meetings in which dialogue could be used to raise the awareness of parents as a first step in empowerment in accordance with Freire (1971). The established positive partnerships will contribute to the pedagogical and didactical development of children and a better future for the community.

Edukans. Firstly, the good practices of the tool are perceived to be applicable in the Kenyan context of both parental and community involvement. From the current study, and the study of Vermeulen (2017), it appears that *connecting school and home culture* can be added as a good practice to improve parental and community involvement in primary education. Parental involvement depends on the comparability between the culture at home and at school (Kim, 2009). When these two contexts are too far apart, parents and teachers will not be inclined to work together. Additionally the development of the child can be hindered when teachers, parents and community members have conflicting expectations (Epstein & Sanders, 2005). The overlap between the spheres of school, parents and community can be enhanced by the practices of teachers, parents, community members and children (Epstein, 1995). Edukans also aims to improve the quality of education by introducing child-centered education and active learning methods in Kenya, which is described by Pluijmen (2017) and Van der Wal (2017). These didactics will be more effective when teachers are supporting parents to align with these practices in the upbringing at home.

Secondly, the tool could focus more on strengthening the ties between formal NPAs and schools. For example it could be suggested to invite Formal and Informal Community members to take part in the proposed activities of the tool. Further research is needed to evaluate whether the use of the tool and the good practices do contribute to parental and community involvement. It is expected that the enhanced shared responsibilities and social networks contribute to the formation of 'an educative civil societies' in which children can enjoy an optimal development.

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