

# Parental Involvement and Pupils' Welfare in Government-Aided Primary Schools in Kalongo Sub-County in Nakasongola District - Uganda

Dr. Serunjogi Charles Dickens (PhD),

Dean School of Education, Bugema University (Uganda)

**Abstract:** *The study investigated the role of parental involvement towards the provision of children's school-based welfare needs in Kalongosub county, Nakasongola district –Uganda. The following objectives guided the study; (i) To examine the extent to which parents contributed towards the provision of children's school-based welfare needs in Kalongo sub-county (ii) To assess factors affecting parents' contribution to children's school-based welfare needs in Kalongo sub-county. The study employed a descriptive survey design using mixed methods approach. The study population included parents' representatives, head teachers and teachers from 17 government-aided Primary Schools in Kalongosub county in Nakasongola district. The study sample comprised of 51 School Management Committee (SMC) members, 17 head teachers and 119 class teachers from the 17 government-aided Primary Schools in Kalongosub county. To collect qualitative data, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and interviews were held with the SMC members and head teachers respectively while quantitative data was got using closed-ended questionnaires administered to teachers. The results showed that parents' contribution to children's school-based welfare needs was very minimal in Kalongo sub-county. This was revealed by the majority of respondents who disagreed with the statements in the questionnaires and those who participated in FGDs and interviews. The study also showed that the leading factors which affected parents' contribution to children's school-based welfare needs were; low levels of income among parents, low literacy levels and poor administration by school leaders.*

**Keywords:** Parents, Involvement, Contribution, Pupils, Welfare, Needs

## 1. Introduction

This study set out to investigate the contribution of parental involvement towards the welfare of children in government-aided primary schools in Kalongo Sub County, Nakasongola district. This was premised on the fact that parent involvement accentuates the shared responsibility that educational institutions and families have towards the welfare of children (Anusha-Jha & Melirusha, 2019). Parental participation to enhance children's welfare in schools involves high level interaction between parents and the school. Through routine parent-school interactions, children's needs are identified and communicated effectively. Such interactions could vary from school to school but studies have identified some of them to include; periodic Parent Teacher Meetings (PTMs), attending school events such as cultural programmes, intra-school competitions, award ceremonies, educational trips, exhibitions and public discussions (Anusha Jha & Meliru Sha, 2019). All these initiatives provide a favourable platform for parents to clearly understand the crucial issues that affect the wellbeing of their children while at school. It is noted that if children are to maximize their God-given abilities, their welfare should be catered for. In many developing countries, schools are struggling to achieve success in education because children lack scholastic materials, mid-day meals, sanitary towels, etc. Above all, they also travel long distances to access schools on daily basis notwithstanding the lack psychosocial support to provide a conducive learning environment (OE, 2017).

Sanders and Sheldon (2009) postulate that schools become successful when a strong and positive relationship among students, parents, teachers and community has been established. This is important in ensuring that children's

school-based welfare needs are catered for. Nonetheless, according to Epstein (1987), parents' involvement is multidimensional and includes providing a home environment that supports learning; and communication between parents and teachers. It is also believed that effective schools with positive climate have made real effort in reaching out to learners' families in order to bring about good cooperation (Durisic&Bunijevac, 2017). Yet on the other hand, it is averred that four areas present serious barriers to parental involvement –lack of access, lack of financial resources and lack of awareness (William & Sanchez, 2011). Research also points to low esteem among parents, pre-occupation with basic necessities, feelings of inadequacy, limited school background and therefore lack of knowledge and confidence to help their children as key barriers to parental involvement (Davis, 1996). To overcome these barriers, schools need to provide a welcoming climate where the school staff is receptive and responsive to parents (Durisic&Bunijevac, 2017).

Government of Uganda (2010) in the Basic Requirements and Minimum Standards for schools and institutions in Uganda (BRMS) clearly points to the provision of meals in schools, safety and security, school health and hygiene, psychosocial support as some of the important welfare aspects that parents and schools should provide to children to enhance effective teaching/learning processes in schools. To effectively put in place sufficient mechanisms to address the crucial welfare needs of children, there must be a very strong linkage between parents and the school (Baker & Soden, 1997). Nevertheless, since the introduction of Universal Primary Education (UPE) policy in Uganda, the issue of children's welfare in government-aided primary schools particularly in Nakasongola district has continued to attract intense criticism – specifically, lack of mid-day

meals, inadequate scholastic materials and personal effects, lack of sanitary materials, insecure school environments and lack of psychosocial support have been highlighted among the leading hindrances to effective learning and teaching in schools (Serunjogi, 2018). The contribution of parents in assuaging these challenges is not clearly articulated and no independent study has been undertaken to suggest a blueprint to improve the welfare of learners in schools. This study therefore, seeks to carry out an empirical investigation into the aforementioned phenomenon particularly in Kalongo Sub County, Nakasongola district.

**Research Objectives**

- 1) To examine the extent to which parents contributed to the provision of children’s school-based welfare needs in government-aided Primary Schools in Kalongo sub-county, Nakasongola district.
- 2) To assess factors affecting parents’ contribution to children’s school-based welfare needs in government-aided Primary Schools in Kalongo sub-county, Nakasongola district.

**2. Methodology**

The study employed a descriptive survey design using a mixed-methods approach. This was due to the fact that descriptive surveys describe the characteristics that exist in the population in terms of conditions, beliefs, processes, relationships or trends (Best & Kahn, 2006). The study population included parents’ representatives from the 17 primary schools in Kalongo Sub County, headteachers and teachers. From each school, three members of the School Management Committee SMC were selected using convenience sampling technique, 17 headteachers and 7 class teachers from each school were selected purposively. Convenience sampling was preferred for selecting SMC members because it is inexpensive and the members were readily available (Ackoff, 1953). Purposive sampling was used to select the head teachers and class teachers because of their expertise in handling issues related to parental involvement and children’s welfare in schools. The sample size was derived using Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table and comprised of 185 respondents. To collect qualitative data, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and interviews were held with the parents’ representatives and head teachers respectively while quantitative data was got by administering a closed-ended questionnaire to class teachers.

**3. Findings**

**Table 1:** Responses on Parents’ Contribution towards Children’s School-based Welfare needs

Responses	Level of agreement or disagreement	Frequency	Percentage
Parents contribute towards the feeding of their children	SD	30	25.2%
	D	40	33.6%
	A	30	25.2%
	SA	19	15.9%
Parents provide their adolescent daughters with sanitary pads	SD	30	25.2%
	D	35	29.4%
	A	30	25.2%
	SA	24	20.1%

Parents provide their children with enough scholastic materials	SD	25	21.0%
	D	36	30.2%
	A	15	12.6%
	SA	43	36.1%
Parents contribute towards the travel expenses of their children to and fro school	SD	50	42.0%
	D	30	25.2%
	A	10	08.4%
	SA	29	24.3%
Parents provide their children with school uniforms	SD	08	06.7%
	D	18	15.1%
	A	70	58.8%
	SA	23	19.3%
Parents participate in school counseling and guidance activities	SD	23	19.3%
	D	70	58.8%
	A	10	08.4%
	SD	16	13.4%
Parents pay for children’s leisure activities	SD	56	47.0%
	D	33	27.7%
	A	10	08.4%
	SA	20	16.8%

In table 1 above, majority (58.8%) of the respondents disagreed that parents contributed towards the school feeding programme while 41.1% agreed. It is important to acknowledge that school feeding is one of the crucial aspects of children’s welfare which requires critical attention if children are to stay happily and learn with vitality. Failure to act on this crucial concern may impact momentarily on children’s stay in school and lead to a significant drop in the retention rates and learning achievements. In a FGD with members of the School Management Committees (SMCs) who convened at Mayirikiti primary school, majority (60%) noted that many parents were still finding difficulties in paying for children’s meals. Parents still expressed their inability to make financial contributions towards school feeding and as a result, individual schools were using different approaches in ensuring that the school feeding programme was actually successful. A review of the SMC/PTA minutes of the different schools showed that the alternative measure in the majority of schools in Kalongo was to ask parents to make their contributions in kind – that is, by a resolution of the Parents Teachers’ Association (PTA), each parent is requested to contribute a specific amount of food (maize grains and beans) on the basis of the number of children from each household. The collected food is then placed under the control of the School Feeding Committee (SFC) which ensures that the food is efficiently utilized as revealed by one member of the School Management Committee (SMC) of Kalongo R/C primary school, “when we receive the food from the parents, the School Feeding Committee takes control of the food and the head teacher ensures that the food is cooked in the right quantities and quality.” World Bank (2012) emphasizes that school feeding programmes can help to get children into school and help to keep them there, through enhancing enrolment and reducing absenteeism. UNICEF(2007) also notes that school health and nutrition initiatives like school feeding, evidently contribute to the child rights framework as enunciated in the convention on the rights of the child inclusive of the right to food, the right to health and the right to education.

Regarding the provision of sanitary pads to the adolescent girl-children by parents, majority of the respondents (54.6%)

disagreed while 45.4% agreed. The criticality of sanitary materials to girl-children cannot be overemphasized especially in developing countries where many girls are forced to leave school because of the unfavorable sanitary conditions. In one FGD at Kalongo primary school, majority of the discussants admitted that it was really absurd to realize that many parents had abdicated their role in as far as the provision of sanitary materials to their daughters was concern. They showed that this was a regrettable act which required a swift response from the district leadership. In an interview, one head teacher observed, *“It is true, some of our children suffer a lot. The parents don’t bother to give them sanitary towels for use while at school.”*

As to whether parents provided their children with adequate scholastic materials, the majority (51.2%) of the respondents disagreed while 48.8% agreed. It should be noted that scholastic materials are some of the most vital school requirements which children must possess to enhance their learning abilities. These include but not limited to exercise books, pens, pencils, mathematical instruments, supplementary readers and other text books. However, results show that majority of parents still fail to avail their children with this very vital necessity. During a FGD, it was acknowledged by majority of discussants that many children report for the beginning of the school term with inadequate exercise books, pens, pencils and text books. This was attributed to the fact that some parents don’t consider education as an essential undertaking as far as the prioritization of their family needs is concern. This was also echoed by one chairperson of SMC during an interview, *“You find some children sitting without doing any class activity just because they either lack exercise books, pencils or pens. Our parents still need to be sensitized from time to time so that they place enough emphasis on the education of their children.”*

Majority of respondents indicated that most parents did not facilitate their children’s travel to and from school. Observations on children’s routine travel in selected schools in the Sub County showed that majority of them (96%) walked on foot and a small number (4%) used bicycles. There was no evidence of instances where parents paid for vans to take or pick their children from school –this was the case for both children in the infant section (P.1 – P.3) and those in the upper primary section (P.4 - P.7). Failure by parents to provide transport means for their children’s daily travel often resulted in late coming among those who came from distant places. During a FGD, SMC members also revealed that most parents in low income rural settings did not have the capacity to meet the transport costs of children’s daily travel – they added that such practices were mainly common in urban areas. In an interview with one chairperson of SMC, it was revealed that *“Failure by most parents to facilitate the travels of their children to and from school had an adverse effect on children’s learning achievements.”*

Furthermore, majority of respondents agreed that parents in Kalongo Sub County provided their children with school uniforms. School uniforms are meant to provide children with a sense of belonging and identity, smartness, discipline and self-esteem. This helps to enroll and maintain more

children in schools. However, results from FGDs show that although most parents provided their children with school uniforms, it was not easy for children to maintain personal hygiene in a situation where most of them had only one piece which they wore throughout the week. There was need for children to be supplied with more than one piece so that they got time to take the dirty ones for laundry. In an interview, one chairperson of SMC noted that *“Atleast with the case of uniforms, parents have tried their best. But the problem is that most of them buy only one pair.”*

Majority of respondents also revealed that most parents did not participate in school guidance and counseling sessions. According to views solicited during FGDs, this anomaly was attributed to the negative attitude parents had about counseling. Traditionally, parents delegated the task of counseling children to their aunts and uncles – more especially when it came to issues of sexuality. Members revealed that culturally, it is obscene and highly explicit for biological parents especially the fathers to talk to their children on issues of sexuality. In one school where observations were taken, out of the 56 parents who were invited to participate in the guidance and counseling session, only 14 appeared and all were female. This was an indication of the poor attitude parents had about guidance and counseling of children especially the fathers. Views from interviewees also expressed similar sentiments as one of them noted, *“Men don’t want to participate in the school counseling sessions –it is mainly the mothers who participate in such activities.”*

On the issue of paying for children’s leisure activities, majority (47%) of respondents disagreed. Leisure activities are meant to give children the opportunity to explore their talents, have entertaining moments, eliminate boredom and relax their brains. Results from FGDs indicated that most parents did not pay much attention towards excursions and children’s leisure activities and as a result, many children remained unexposed to external environments in addition to the stress inflicted on them by the rigorous academic activities. Through interviews, it was revealed that the issue of children’s excursions and leisure was peripheral to most parents as one head teacher noted; *“Parents seem to have a lot of responsibilities and sending children for excursions and leisure is seen as a luxury.”*

**Table 2:** Factors Affecting Parents’ Contribution to Children’s School-based Welfare needs

S. No.	Responses	Counts	Percent
1	Low income levels among parents	26	50.9%
2	Low literacy levels among parents	10	19.6%
3	Poor administration by school leaders	09	17.7%
4	Large number of children in households	03	05.8%
5	Negative cultural beliefs	02	04.0%
6	Polygamous practices	01	02.0%
<b>Total</b>		<b>51</b>	<b>100</b>

In table 2 above, it is evident that the leading factor which affected parents’ ability to provide for children’s welfare needs in schools was the low level of income at household level. This was echoed by the head teachers when one of them opined that *“at times parents even fail to avail their children with the very basic school requirements such as*

midday meals, exercise books, pens and pencils.” The head teachers stated that “majority of the communities in Kalongo sub-county are subsistence farmers whose livelihoods depended on the little income derived from small-scale crop harvests and rearing of a few animals”. The widespread income disparities among the communities in Kalongo have crippled the education sector so much so that children’s welfare needs are not prioritized by parents. This is in consonance with the information available at Nakasongola district headquarters which reveals that majority of households in the district (76.6%) depend on subsistence crop growing which is not adequate enough to sustain meaningful livelihoods (Nakasongola District Local Government, 2020). However, 19.6% of the respondents pointed to the low literacy levels among parents. Participants in the FGDs attributed the failure by parents to cater for their children’s welfare needs to the lack of awareness on education related issues. According to them, if the literacy level of an individual is low, then they may not easily appreciate the importance of education. According to statistical abstracts of Nakasongola district, the literacy rates of people aged 18 and above in the district according to the 2014 census was 28.5% (Nakasongola District Local Government, 2020). This partly explains the poor capacity by parents to adequately facilitate the educational needs of their children. Correspondingly, results also showed that the poor administration by school leaders (17.7%) also affected parental support towards children’s school-based welfare needs. The respondents reiterated the fact that school heads are “sometimes ineffective and lack mobilization skills”. They noted that the school heads at times don’t provide adequate sensitization to parents. And “sometimes the little that parents contribute is not put to proper use by the administrators –this greatly discourages parents.” Other factors included large number of children in households (5.8%), negative cultural beliefs (4.0%) and polygamous practices by parents (2.0%).

#### 4. Recommendations

Basing on the above results, the following recommendations are suggested;

- 1) Nakasongola District Local Government should empower communities to increase household incomes so that people are able to cater for the educational needs of their children.
- 2) There should be a deliberate move by Nakasongola District Local Government to increase the literacy rates in the district so that people can have the capacity to perceive and analyze developmental issues that affect their livelihoods.
- 3) The education department at the District Local Government should strengthen the monitoring and inspection activities to ensure that head teachers perform their roles effectively and efficiently.

#### 5. Conclusions

It can therefore be concluded that parents’ involvement in the provision of children’s school-based welfare needs in Kalongo sub-county in Nakasongola district is still low. Therefore, there is need for government to initiate programmes that are deliberately aimed at empowering

communities through increasing household incomes and capacity building to eliminate the economic and social barriers that impede children’s welfare endeavours in schools.

#### References

- [1] Ackoff, R.L (1953). *The Design of Social Research*: University of Chicago Press.
- [2] Baker, A.J.L., and Soden, L.M (1997). *Parent Involvement in Children’s Education: A critical Assessment of the Knowledge Base*: Eric.
- [3] Best, J.W and Kahn, J.V (2006). *Research in Education*, Pearson.
- [4] Davis, D (1996). *Partnerships for Student Success*. New Schools, New Communities, 12(3), 13-14.
- [5] Durisic, M and Bunijevac (2017). *Parental Involvement as a important Factor for Successful Administration*, C.E.P.S Journal 7(3), 1-7.
- [6] Epstein, J.L (1987). *School Policy and Parent Involvement: Research Results*; Educ.
- [7] GoU (2020). *Statistical Abstract*, Nakasongola District Local Government.
- [8] GoU(2001). *Basic Requirements and Minimum Standards for Schools and Institutions in Uganda*; Ministry of Education and Sports.
- [9] Johnson, V.R (1994). *Connecting Families and Schools through Mediating Structures*. The School Community Journal 4(1), 45-51.
- [10] Krecie, R.V and Morgan D.W (1970). *Determining Sample Size for Research Activities*; Educational and Psychological Measurement.
- [11] OE(217). *Developing Countries usually do not have an advanced Education System*; www.outpoteducation.com
- [12] Sanders, M.G and Sheldon, S.B (2009). *Principles Matter: A guide to School, Family and Community Partnerships*. Corwin; A SAGE Company.
- [13] Serunjogi, C.D (2018). *Management Development and the Quality of Education in Public Primary Schools in Uganda with Specific Reference to Luweero and Nakasongola Districts*: Unpublished PhD Thesis, Nkumba University.
- [14] William, D (1996). *Partnerships for Student Success*. New Schools, New Communities 12(3), 13-21.
- [15] World Bank (2012). *School Feeding Programmes and Development; Are we Framing the Question Correctly?* Washington D.C, World Bank Observer.
- [16] UNICEF (2007). *Implementation Handbook for the Convention on the Rights of the Child*, Geneva, United Nations Publications.