

Social Responsibilities of Schools in Botswana: The Role of Teachers in the Activities of the Community

By

Philip Bulawa and Mavis B. Mhlauli

Department of Primary Education, University of Botswana

Abstract

The overall objective of the study was to examine the extent to which primary and secondary school teachers in Botswana participate in community initiatives. The study is in line with Botswana's Vision 2016 and the Revised National Policy on Education (RNPE, 1994) in providing quality education. The study was descriptive in nature and adopted a survey design where the questionnaire was used to collect data. Probability sampling was used to select the participants. The sample comprised of Primary and Secondary school teachers in the South East region of Botswana. The results of the study have shown that teachers both in primary and secondary schools are conversant with their social responsibilities and fully participate in them. However, teachers lamented on the work load that they are faced with which sometimes acts as a barrier towards their participation in community activities and initiatives. The results of the study further provided useful insights on the importance of collaboration and consultation between the school and the community for the attainment of quality education. The study provides recommendations that are useful to the school management teams, teachers, policy makers and parents on the need for social participation.

Keywords: *Social responsibility, community initiatives, teachers, primary schools, secondary schools, Botswana.*

Introduction

The extent of the partnership between teachers and the community in education has always been a global issue for debate. Botswana has not been left behind in this debate, as reflected in some government policies on education. Much of the debate has mainly been on the contribution parents should make in the learning of their children, than on the reciprocal role that schools and teachers should play in community activities. For instance, the Revised National Policy on Education has emphasized the need for community participation in the development and management of education through such bodies as Board of Governors and Parents Teachers Associations (Republic of Botswana 1994), without stating the role that teachers themselves should play in community activities. It is in this context that a study on teachers' social responsibilities to the community becomes imperative. The Report on the National Commission on Education (Education for *Kagisano*) (1977) has highlighted the significance of active teacher participation in community committees to assist in the planning of community development or recreational activities (Republic of Botswana 1977). This arose out of the concern that there was minimal teacher participation in community activities. This

is in tandem with Botswana's Vision 2016 which advocates for the need for leaders at all levels to take responsibility for the problems of society (Presidential Task Group 1997), and teachers being leaders in their communities have an obligation to take heed of this expectation.

The Problem Statement

Increasingly schools and the general public have emphasized the need for parents to actively participate in the learning of their children. Parents have been under pressure not only to take interest in their children's work while at home, but also to be in the habit of visiting schools to get an insight of how their children are performing. In some of the communities many parents have responded positively to this call, by regularly attending such important school activities as prize giving day and visiting schools not just to collect children's reports, but also to discuss their children's performance with the teachers. Parents, irrespective of their socio- economic status have also continued to make financial contribution towards the education of their children, some of them under the most difficult conditions. It is however, difficult to ascertain the extent to which teachers on the other hand have been reciprocal by having to make attempts to attend community activities outside the school itself. Communities have several activities they engage in, some of which they try to perform without any skills or expertise to address them effectively. These activities include, '*kgotla*' meetings called specifically to address community initiatives or specific meetings to engage in some community projects. It is against this background that this paper examines the extent of involvement of teachers in the activities directly affecting the community and their willingness to offer their expertise to such community initiatives.

Research Questions

The primary questions that the study sought to investigate were:

1. What do teachers understand as their social responsibilities?
2. How are teachers involved in community activities?
3. What is the extent of their involvement in community activities?

Literature Review

Research on teachers' social responsibilities to communities in Botswana is quite scanty, in comparison to literature on the role that parents play in the education of their children. In reviewing the literature, it is significant that this study first looks at the parents' contribution in the learning of their children in relation to the extent of the teachers' involvement in community activities.

Social Responsibilities of Schools to the Community

“Few issues enjoy such universal support as the idea that family and community involvement are essential for successful school and learning. Research over the years has shown that there is nothing more important to success in schools than the quality of relationships between and among children, parents and teachers. Studies of effective programs for children identify parent involvement as a key component” (Hughes, 2000, p. 117). Hughes sees the partnership and collective responsibility of these three major stakeholders in the learning of the child as complementary in the development of education. The pivotal role that parents play in the education of their children dictates that there should be “more research into parental effects on children’s education and more narrowly on schooling” (Macbeth and Munn 1990:1). Macbeth et al further identify broad areas for research which include; “the extent to which in their daily professional lives, teachers recognize the educational impact of parents, and the practical steps which can be taken to increase parental involvement” (p. 3). While research on this area continues, there is ample evidence suggesting that parents and home circumstances generally have a greater impact on children than does school (Louis and Marks, 1998; Alfred-Hess, 1999). According to Martin and Pear (2000), parents face the challenging and daunting “task of not only meeting their children’s basic needs, but are also responsible for the children’s initial behavioral development. In doing so, they share their responsibility with teachers and others as the children mature through the early school years, adolescence, and into adulthood” (p.14).

According to Hughes (2000), parents are the first and primary educators, as well as children’s most important teachers. He sees cooperation between parents and teachers as vital in the learning of the child, and that this cooperation doesn’t just happen, but something that has to be worked at, hence the need for good communication and interpersonal skills. Kaperu (2001) citing Munn (1993) perceives parental involvement as an important variable associated with effectiveness in general and with attainment in particular. Further still he argues that, the more involved parents are with their children’s schooling, the greater are the chances of children doing well. Traditionally, schools tended to keep parents away from school, arguing amongst other things, that a professional skill such as teaching must be carried out free of interruption and interference (Farrant, 1980). Similarly, parents whether educated or not also had their own common attitude, perceiving the school as a place for book learning which had nothing to do with them. Over the years this attitude has drastically changed as schools are now in the habit of encouraging parents to take a more active role in the education of their children, and get a better understanding of what goes on in the classroom. However, partnership will simply be a fashionable buzzword unless it is founded on mutual interest and trust and also focuses on clear objectives. Genuine partnerships should not just be about parents’ financial obligations, but should include commitment to improve pupils’ attendance, retention, and the quality of learning. Communities should be given a greater say in the planning, running and monitoring of education (http://www.finarticles.com//articles/mi_m1310/is_2000_March_61202187).

Social Responsibilities in Botswana

The call for more and active parent participation in schools continues to increase globally, especially to play a supporting role and leaving teachers to decide the best ways to teach (Dodd and Konzal 1992). Parents in Botswana are from time to time consulted on issues affecting their children's education, in line with Botswana's Vision 2016 call for leaders at all levels to take responsibility for the problems of society, and consult people accordingly (Presidential Task Group 1997). The opening of the school to the community has the potential to enhance good relationships between parents and teachers; a situation that could result in the improvement of children's learning outcomes. This relationship is further critical given the ever increasing social problems perpetuated by the high prevalence of the HIV/AIDS pandemic and other societal problems. Whilst education has been free in Botswana, the parents are still expected to assist by making a range of contributions as documented in the National Education Policies of 1977 and 1994 respectively. In line with government policy, The Revised National Policy on Education (1994) recommended that, as much as possible the community should participate in the development and management of education through consultations with Boards of Governors, Parents Teachers Associations (PTAs) and other relevant bodies in the community. PTAs were viewed as providing an effective forum for schools to keep in contact with the communities they served and also to ensure parents took interest in, and contributed to the education of their children (Republic of Botswana 1994). Also in appreciation of the role of parents in the education of their children, Adams (1987) argues that they want the best for their children and that they can be useful allies in view of their influence on the governing body, and the fact that they can take concerted effort through their PTA. Typical of schools in Botswana, Adams further makes the point that, parents' activities would mainly take the form of money raising, however, cautioning that support from parents would only be forthcoming provided they have confidence in the school and its head.

Dodd and Konzal (1992) state that, teachers' wish is that parents could trust their professional judgment, while they, parents should talk to their children, visit the school, visit classrooms and ensure that children do their homework and support the teachers' decisions. Furthermore, Dodd et al argue that improved schools require more active parent participation. Increasingly, parents are now being asked to share in school decision making, including a say about what should be taught in schools. On the other hand parents themselves demand that their voices be heard in the learning of their children. Although there is sufficient evidence to suggest that parents have positively responded to the call to actively participate in the education of their children, the teachers' social responsibilities to society remain a concern. From the industry point of view (Dessler 2000) defines social responsibility has been defined as "the extent to which companies should and do channel resources toward improving one or more segments of society other than the firm's own stakeholders" (p.82). Increasingly in recent years business firms have been called upon to bear substantial social responsibility (Beach 1980). Social responsibility in this case might include involvement in such activities as controlling pollution, supporting educational facilities or cultural events. Some companies make being socially responsible the core of almost all their decisions.

One would of course argue that the fact that teachers teach, provide care and counseling as well as other responsibilities to children while at school is in itself a huge social responsibility. While this is undeniable, the issue here is that teachers' participation in activities organized by the community could be perceived as reciprocal, and therefore go a long way into motivating parents to be even more pro-active in the education of their children. Fullan (2001) recognizes the significance of the partnership between teachers and parents, arguing that teachers cannot do it alone. He emphasizes that parents and other community members are crucial and largely untapped resources who have assets and expertise that are essential to the partnership. The Report of the National Commission on Education of 1977 notes with concern, weak community aspects of secondary education in Botswana, both in terms of the social life in the school and in terms of the link between the school and the community in which it is located. The Commission found among other things, that there was little interaction between school and the neighboring people (Republic of Botswana 1977).

Research findings by Tsayang (1998) indicate that schools appeared to be too elitist with very little to do with community life. She further points out to that teachers have always found it difficult to extend their roles beyond the classroom to community services partly because this aspect of school/community linkage is not incorporated into their initial training programs. Fullan (2001) stresses however, the importance of the relationship among parents, communities, and their schools, emphasizing the need for teachers and principals to reach out to parents and communities. Fullan (2001) makes this conclusion following a study of parent-school collaboration in poor neighborhoods that "Educators have to go out into their communities with empathy, and interact meaningfully with their constituents. Being professional can no longer mean remaining isolated in the school" (p. 199). Kaperu (2001) further stresses that, "schools can involve parents by creating a forum for opening a dialogue advising parents on how to help, and by keeping in touch with the parents" (p132). Another study conducted in science classrooms found that science education allows for students to participate in legitimate ways in community life and therefore provides a starting point for an uninterrupted lifelong learning across the presently existing boundary separating formal schooling from everyday life outside schools (Roth and Lee, 2004). In an attempt to link the schools with community concerns in Botswana, The National Commission on Education emphasized the need for students and teachers to offer their services to tutor out-of-school youth and adults in literacy, or to help the handicapped. In addition, teachers could participate in community committees to plan development or recreational activities for the area. Essential to the development of links between the schools and communities was the need for a genuine policy commitment to reorient the schools towards their communities (Republic of Botswana 1977). Whether or not such a deliberate policy is in place, and if it's in place, it is operational are critical issues for debate to be explored and hopefully answered in this study.

Research Methodology

The study used a descriptive approach and adopted a survey design. Survey research is used to gather information about peoples' beliefs, opinions, characteristics and behavior (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh and Sorenson, 2006). Since this study examined the teachers' views, beliefs

and attitudes towards community involvement, a survey design was seen to be appropriate for the study. The sample of 100 teachers was drawn from primary and secondary schools in the South East region of Botswana. Probability sampling procedures through the simple random sampling technique were used to select the sample for the study. Probability sampling is the kind of sampling where every element of the population has an equal chance of being selected (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh and Sorenson, 2006). Data were collected through a questionnaire that comprised of closed and open-ended questions. The nature of the questionnaire allowed for the participants to express their views and opinions freely. The questionnaire was pilot tested among ten teachers in the central district to check its reliability and validity. The purpose of conducting a pilot test was to check for ambiguity, confusion and poorly conducted items (Wiersma and Jurs, 2005). The feedback from the pilot check was used to finalize the data collection instrument.

The questionnaire was administered to both the school management team (SMT) and teachers in both primary and secondary schools in the South East region in Botswana. The SMT were included because they are the instructional gatekeepers in their schools hence, their opinions helped to corroborate the teachers' views. A total of 100 questionnaires were distributed among the ten (10) schools, five (5) of which were primary while the other five (5) were secondary schools. A total of sixty-six (66) questionnaires were returned and were fully completed. Data were analyzed using SPSS and presented descriptively using percentages and frequency tables. Variables identified were treated as independent variables because of the openness of the questionnaire. Survey research designs allow for the results to be generalized to the whole population (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh and Sorenson, 2006) therefore, the results of this sample may be generalized to the whole population of primary and secondary schools in Botswana because the schools that were investigated are public schools and run by the government of Botswana hence they all have the same characteristics.

The Results and Discussions

The results of the study are presented descriptively through the use of tables where necessary. These findings generally indicate that that teachers are aware of their social responsibilities and do partake in community activities and initiatives within communities they teach in. The results are presented below in themes that are derived from the questions that the teachers were asked to respond to.

Table 1: Perceived teachers' social responsibilities in school

	Molding students		Act as parents		Inculcate discipline in students		Ensure link between parents		Awareness of good behavior		Guidance & Counseling	
	Fr	%	Fr	%	Fr	%	Fr	%	Fr	%	Fr	%
Responded	44	66.6	22	33	11	16.6	55	83.3	33	50	55	83.3
Not	22	33.3	44	66.6	55	83.3	11	16.6	33	50	11	16.6

responded														
Total	66	100	66	100	66	100	66	100	66	100	66	100	66	100

Table 1 above reflects how teachers perceived their social responsibilities in schools. Teachers identified several areas as their social responsibilities. Among those identified, most teachers saw guidance and counseling, and insuring a link between parents as their major responsibilities as reflected by 55 (83.3%) responses of each one of them. The third prominent perceived social responsibility was identified as molding students with 44 (66.6%) responses. These results are a clear indication that are aware of their responsibilities and regard certain responsibilities as more important than others. However, a critical analysis of the responsibilities chosen as their priority, it was evident that teachers chose those that were directly part of the daily activities and expectations such as guidance and counseling and molding students which are perceived as their duty as teachers.

Table 2: Engagement in social responsibilities

	Staff development committee		Aids sensitization committee		Funerals for teachers & students		Day of the African child		Outreach program		Prize giving		Parents/Teachers conferences	
	Fr	%	Fr	%	Fr	%	Fr	%	Fr	%	Fr	%	Fr	%
Responded	22	33.3	46	69.7	66	100	21	31.8	55	83.3	19	28.8	20	30.3
Not responded	44	66.6	20	30.3	–	–	45	68.2	11	16.6	47	71.2	46	69.7
Total	66	100	66	100	66	100	66	100	66	100	66	100	66	100

Table 2 shows the social responsibilities that teachers were engaged in. Although different variables emerged from the schools, it was clear that attending funerals of teachers and students was perceived as the main social responsibility of teachers. This was shown by all 66 (100%) teachers' positive response. These findings may be attributed to kinship relations that *Batswana* (People of Botswana) in general are well known for and the notion of *Botho* which is a national principle born out of the idea of being a compassionate nation. The two other important social responsibilities were outreach programs with 55 (83.3 %) and teachers' involvement in HIV/AIDS committees with 46 (69.7%) teachers' response respectively. These results are therefore, an indication that teachers understand and participate in their social responsibilities.

Engagement in community activities

Teachers were asked to indicate community activities in which they participate. The results indicated that most of the teachers participated in the following activities: litter picking, sponsored walks, church activities, funeral ceremonies and HIV/AIDS sensitization campaigns. These activities appeared in all the six schools. These results are indicative of

teachers' awareness of the spirit of volunteerism and self reliance in the community. This also goes to show their sense of compassion for their communities.

Specific roles teachers play in community activities

Teachers were asked to list specific roles they play in community activities. The results indicated that in almost all the schools teachers participated as coordinators, participants as well as counselors for sick people in hospitals and community. These results are a reflection of teachers' professional abilities and leadership qualities which eventually become beneficial to the communities they serve.

Table 3: Allocation of community activities

	Mandatory		Teachers' volunteer		School head advice	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Responded	21	31.8	66	100	55	83.3
Not responded	45	68.2	-	-	11	16.6
Total	66	100	66	100	66	100

The results in table 3 show that three (3) variables emerged out of all the schools. The results indicate that 21(31%) responded that allocation of community activities was mandatory, while 45 (68.2%) did not respond. All the 66 (100%) teachers responded that teachers volunteered their services. Finally 55 (83.3%) teachers responded that allocation was through the school head's advice, while 11 (16.6%) did not respond to this item. The results showed that in the majority of cases teachers volunteered to participate in community activities. The results negate the research findings by Tsayang (1998) that indicated that schools appeared to be too elitist with very little to do with community life, and that teachers have always found it difficult to extend their roles beyond the classroom.

Barriers to involvement in community activities

Teachers listed a number of common factors as barriers to their participation in community activities, and the following appeared more prominently than others. These were:

- Teachers' work load
- Community activities viewed as an extra burden
- Age, depending on the nature of activity
- Time and financial constraints
- Distance between the school and the community
- Parents lack of cooperation and interest in working with teachers

Despite the fact that teachers are willing to actively participate in community activities, they are , however faced with a lot of challenges that constrain the extent to which they participate.

If these barriers could be attended to, the teachers' participation in community activities could be enhanced and harnessed effectively.

Improvement in working relationship between teachers and parents

The results revealed that teachers' involvement in community activities improved their working relations with the community. They listed the following as indicators of such working relationships.

- There was more cooperation
- Teamwork spirit improved
- Parents' interest in children's work improved
- Teachers moral and confidence were boosted
- Helped teachers and parents to understand the students problems
- Increased the bond between teachers and parents
- Developed friendship between teachers and parents.

These findings capture the ideals of the National Commission on Education (1977) popularly known as *Education for Kagisano* which emphasized the need for teachers to offer their services to the community by participating in committees to plan development or recreational activities.

Suggestions for further improvement in relations

Several suggestions emerged from the study on how to further improve working relations between teachers and parents. Out of a wide range of suggestions the following featured more prominently than others:

- Schools should promote more regular PTA meetings
- Parents should attend fund raising activities schools should open more avenues for parents' participation in school activities
- Teachers should be encouraged to join more committees in the community
- There should be improved consultation and communication between teachers and parents
- Community leaders should invite teachers for community activities
- Teachers should be given more time to participate in community activities
- Plan of community activities should be drawn for teachers to be able to participate.

Conclusions and Recommendations

From the findings of this study it is evident that both primary and secondary school teachers in the South East region in Botswana understand their social responsibilities both in school and to the community. They also recognize that they have an obligation to play a role

in fulfilling these social responsibilities, and that their participation has some benefits for both the community and the school. The results indicate the importance of teachers' involvement in community activities to improve working relations with parents, a situation that could translate into attainment of quality education. This is in line with the assertions reflected in Fullan (2001) that educators have to go out into their communities as being professional can no longer mean remaining isolated in the school.

In spite of this understanding, the study showed that, in some cases teachers are not able to actively fulfill their social responsibilities due to several reasons, some of which are beyond their control. For instance, issues of time constraints and heavy work load were cited as impediment to teachers' participation mainly in community engagements. Nevertheless, a few teachers felt that their social responsibilities were only confined to the school, and that community activities were not part of their job description. Based on the findings of this study some inferences and recommendations are made:

- There is need for more research on teachers' social responsibilities to the community as this study lacked sufficient research to inform it.
- Schools should create more time to be able to actively participate in community activities. In view of their expertise in various areas, teachers should provide technical advice to projects that would empower communities. For example teachers of agriculture could use their expertise to assist members of the community to have vegetable gardens in their backyards, while design and technology could provide the unemployed youths with basic carpentry skills that would enable them to earn a living. Teachers could also train parents such that they understand their role in education better.
- The government should give recognition to teachers' involvement in communities through some rewards as this would bring them closer to one another, and therefore benefit the education of the child.

References

- Adams, N. (1987). *Secondary school management today*. London: Hutchinson.
- Alfred Hess (Jr), G. (1999). Community participation or control? From New York to Chicago. *Theory into practice*, 38(4), pp. 217-224.
- Ary, D., Jacobs, L.C., Razavieh, A. and Sorensen, C. (2006). *Introduction to research in education (7th ed.)*. Belmont: Thomson Wardsworth.
- Beach, D. S. (1980). *Personnel: The Management of People at work (5th ed.)*. New York: Macmillan Publishing.
- Dessler, G. (2001). *Management: Leading People and Organizations in the 21st Century*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Dodd. A. W. and Konzal, J. L. (1999). *Making our high schools better*. St. Martin's Press: New York. http://www.finarticles.com/articles/mi_m1310/is_2000_March_61202187

- Hughes, P. (2000). *Principles of Primary Education: Study Guide*. London: David Fulton Publishers.
- Louis, K.S. and Marks, H.M. (1998). Does professional community affect the classroom? Teachers' work and student experiences in restructuring schools. *American journal of education*, 106(4), pp. 532-575.
- Macbeth, A. and Munn, P. (1990). *Parents and education: Priorities for research*. Edinburgh: Scottish Council for Research in Education.
- Republic of Botswana (1977). *Education for education: Report of the National Commission on Education*. Gaborone: Government Printers
- Republic of Botswana (1994). *The Revised National Policy on Education*. Gaborone: Government Printer.
- Roth, W.M. and Lee, S. (2004). Science education as/for participation in the community. *Science education*, 88(2), 263-291.
- Southworth, G. and Lofthouse, B. (1990). *The study of primary education: School organisation and management*. London: The Falmer Press.
- The Presidential Task Group (1997). *Vision 2016: Towards prosperity for all*. Gaborone: Associated Printers.
- Tsayang, G.T. (1998). *Evaluation of school partnership policy in Botswana: A qualitative approach to six case studies*. Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press.
- Wiersma, W. and Jurs, S.G. (2005). *Research methods in education: An introduction*. Boston: Pearson