

## Parental Involvement in High and Low Performing Schools in Gasabo District, Rwanda.

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The present study examined to what extent parents in the rural area are involved in the education of their children and whether this involvement had an influence on the school performance. The study used a causal-comparative design to compare parents' involvement in high performing schools and in low performing schools. A total of 326 parents participated in the study where they were requested to rate their own involvement in school on components such as having healthy children, participation in school management, parents as resourceful, support for learning, and gender sensitivity, care and protection. The results of the study indicated that parents were interested in the education of their children but their involvement was challenged by the socioeconomic status of overpopulated families and high illiteracy rate of parents among other factors. Contributions of parents to construction of classrooms, and the principle of equitable access for all children seemed well respected. Parents of children in high performing schools were significantly more involved than their peers in low performing schools particularly on concern for having healthy children, support for learning, and gender sensitivity, care and protection. Pupils whose parents care for the health of their children, are supportive of their children's learning, and who possess attributes such as gender sensitivity, care, and protection tend to perform better in school.

*Keywords:* Parents' Involvement, low performing schools, high performing schools, healthy children, school management, Rwanda.

### Introduction

This study purposed to investigate if there was a significant difference between parents' involvement in high-performing and low performing schools in respect to the following parents' involvement factors: *having healthy children, participation in school management, parents as resourceful, support for learning and gender sensitivity, care, and protection.*

In the African traditional society, parents were aware that at a certain age, children needed to socialize and do apprenticeship to adulthood. They were sent to traditional schools—mainly using only oral methods- to be initiated about adulthood responsibilities. "Indigenous African education was a process of becoming a full and active member of one's indigenous society or community" (Abagi, 2006, p. 23).

When the colonial administration came to rule, parents were a bit reluctant to send their children to the new schools, not trusting the kind of education being delivered by the foreigners. Their fear was justified as shown in the following paragraph:

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*The colonial system introduced the school, which was conducted by missionaries. Its objective was to evangelise and to train the administrators of the colonial power. Education in Rwanda was thus characterised by mistrust of traditional values and knowledge, and a literature which conveyed division of the people was extensively distributed. Historically, Rwanda's traditional education system was also characterised by gender imbalances. Women and girls had limited access to education and the education system was characterised by gender stereotypes. (Government of Rwanda, Education Sector Policy, 2003, p. 4)*

In these first schools managed mainly by missionaries, children were provided with all learning materials. Graduates from those first schools were considered civilized, intelligent, distant, belonging to another social class of people living like white people. In the worst case, many of those graduates would discriminate against their friends in the village, considering them as illiterate, non educated, and poor.

The first experience in schooling was uprooting and discriminatory. Involving parents and community in educational activities was not considered an issue. With independence, Rwanda and other African developing countries inherited the colonial education system with very limited human, material and financial resources. In Rwanda, the system was marked by adjustments and reforms in 1979 and 1981, which did not achieve the intended goals. Rather than correcting the errors of the colonial era, education remained very discriminatory and was not relevant to Rwandese society, culture and values, which resulted in the people losing their patriotism. This was one of the "contributing factors to the genocide of 1994". (Government of Rwanda, Education Sector Policy, 2003, p.4)

It was difficult to design a new education system tailored to Rwandan values and local resources as the first graduates were educated to obey, execute and implement the colonial plans, putting aside existing local values, resources and opportunities. Due to limited resources, parents were requested to contribute towards equipping schools with learning materials; yet most of them were illiterate.

In 1994, Rwanda was plunged in the worst genocide the world has experienced in recent times. The Ministry of Education had found itself in

confusion and utter bewilderment after the genocide. The nation was to be reconstructed, healed and unified. The Government of National Unity transformed the educational system, outlawing any form of discrimination. One of the major tasks ahead was to change the curriculum. The pre-1994 curriculum focused too much about Rwandan differences and too little about their similarities; too much about collective duty and too little about individual responsibility; too much about theory and too little about practice (Embassy of Rwanda to U.S.A, 2011)

Despite the untold havoc caused by the 1994 genocide, the Government of National Unity ensured that the education system recovered remarkably well with a tremendous enrolment increase in the shortest time possible. Immediately after the 1994 genocide, the numbers of children in primary and secondary schools surpassed the numbers that would have been enrolled had the system expanded at historical rates of increase. In secondary education, the number of students grew at 20 percent a year since 1996, which means that the system was nearly three times as large as it was previously. In higher education, enrolments had risen even more rapidly, from 3,400 students in 1991 to nearly 17,000 by 2001, increasing nearly four times in a decade. (Government of Rwanda, Education Sector Policy, 2003)

After the 1994 genocide, the Government committed itself to long-standing improvement of the education system, the recognition of the key challenges and specifically, the determination to improve the quality of teaching. The Government developed the first Education Sector Policy which affirmed the importance it attached to education which should be aimed at recreating in young people the values which had been eroded in the course of the 1994 genocide. (Government of Rwanda, Education Sector Policy, 2003)

From 2000 onwards, the Ministry of Education was already providing all children with the chance to completing primary schooling, which resulted into raising entry rates to primary one and providing opportunities for children to complete the primary cycle of 6 years. The Ministry of Education was able to bring down repetition and dropout rates, as well as improve learning outcomes to minimize the need for pupils to repeat, as large numbers of primary school children were now joining and completing the lower or ordinary level of secondary schooling, especially during the period 2000 – 2005 (Bureau

of African Affairs, 2012 & Embassy of Rwanda to U.S.A, 2011)

From 2005 to present day, the Government's educational policies have continued to affirm that education should be aimed at recreating in young people the values which had been eroded in the course of the 1994 genocide. Although the plan had been that Universal Primary Education would be provided by 2010, and Basic Education encompassing grades 1-9 would be provided for all by 2015, the Government fully implemented the Nine Year Basic Education program in early 2009 (Embassy of Rwanda to the U.S.A, 2011).

In Rwanda, basic education is regarded as what constitutes the minimum necessary for children to cope with adult life. After six years of primary education, a child is too young to access the kind of higher order cognitive skills for their survival and contribution to national development. Therefore the benefits of the Nine year Basic Education programme may be assessed through indicators such as the completion rate which has moved from 5% in 2008 to 76% in 2010. Also, repetition rates moved from about 16% in 2008, to less than 14% in 2010; and the dropout rate dropped from about 16% to less than 12% in 2010. In the meantime, national examination pass rate for primary school increased from 68% in 2009, to 83% in 2010. At the secondary school level, the pass rate increased from 80% in 2009 to 85% in 2010 (Embassy of Rwanda to the U.S.A, 2011).

Adequate community dialogue on education added value and how to get it tailored to the country developmental targets and cultural values and resources did not take place. Today, school fee is abolished but parents' participation and involvement in school effectiveness remain of paramount importance. Parents are contributing even more and more in building educational facilities, requested to co-manage with the head teacher through an elected Parents Teacher Committee (PTC) or as a member of a Parents Teacher Association (PTA) (MOE, 2009).

Parents should know that their contribution to school performance starts at home, in caring for the child's health and nutrition, securing, protecting, and listening to the child, respecting study time and homework, and supervising/facilitating it whenever possible (White, 1952; Weiss et al., 2006). In addition, they trust the school to build on societal goals, values and beliefs as social organization. Strong and fruitful links between parents and teachers

should be established to share useful information in the best interest of the child and to advance education benefits in the community. Parents should be made aware that the child succeeds in school when he/she sees the parents interested in the progress he/she makes. In any case, parents should not think that sending a child to school is delegating their responsibility to the educators in the school. It is rather a shared responsibility between the parent and the school.

Other studies report that increased parents' involvement in their children's education, starting at birth and continuing through secondary school, is the best way to improve academic achievement. These surveys have shown how daily reading, high expectations on academic success, management of television usage and checking homework and studying are four important aspects of parental involvement impacting on urban elementary schools. (Chapman & Friedman, 1988; Henderson, 1981; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Shumow & Miller, 2001)

Research has also found that demographic and psychological factors shaped the involvement of mothers in their children's education (Sanders & Herting, 2000; Scribner, et al, 1999; Vaden-Kieman & McManus, 2005; Kagitcibasi et al. 2001). The five demographic factors studied were family income, maternal education, family size, mothers' employment status, and sex of the child. In Rwanda, parents are involved in their children's education in many ways as they provide them with learning materials. They contribute to school development through fundraising for school construction and expansion, teachers' incentives, supplementary classes for lower achievers, or in preparation of end-cycle examinations. They sometimes volunteer to establish natural fencing for the school, to level playgrounds, or to facilitate extra-curricular activities such as clubs, sports activities, cultural events, etc. However, a timely provision of these resources and equipment, their effective use, follow up and maintenance, are still a big concern as most of parents consider these interventions as requests from the principal or from the government to keep their children in school (Pena, 2000; Henderson, et al, 1986). Very few are concerned about what the children learn, and what contribution is needed to improve learning outcomes; they leave it to the school to manage on their behalf (Children Summit, Preparatory Assessment Report, 2010).

In countries where family-school partnership programs have made some headway, the policy

agenda about partnerships reflects the advances in the understanding that all families need better information about their children education, the school, and the part they play across the grades to influence children's well-being, learning, and development (Epstein, 2001; Lopez, et al. 2004; Lopez, 2001). Parents play a key role in their children's career planning and have a strong impact on their career development (Downey, 2002; Epstein, 1987; Epstein & Sanders, 2000; Mapp, 2002).

Parents' involvement in education is about monitoring and accompanying their child's developmental process since the child is what counts most. In this context, they can contribute anything they have and what fits the need, at the required moment; from conception to later stages of the development of their child (Epstein, 2001). Other studies confirm that progress in research is done across disciplines, within and across academic specialities in such a way that both academic and professional boundaries have disappeared (Epstein et al. 1997; Epstein & Simon, 1997). Researchers, policy makers and educators are working together and learning from each other; the short time line between research and its application in practice, is a proof of interest in the field.

Researchers, educators, and parents have been working together to identify goals, problems, and potential solutions to create more successful partnerships to assist more students. The dual contributions of schools and families in educating, socializing and preparing children for life are recognized; they share responsibilities for children and influence them simultaneously (Epstein, 2001; Catsambis 1998; Chrispeels & Gonzalez, 2004; Anderson & Minke, 2007).

### **Theoretical framework**

This study used a theory on parents' involvement in school and family-school connections from a social organizational perspective developed by Epstein (1990). This theory is based on overlapping spheres of influence which focuses on the complex interrelationships of family, community, school, and peer groups as they affect student's well being and academic performance.

School, family, and community partnerships include practices initiated by parents, educators, or other community members. These practices may occur at school, at home, or in the

community and they reflect six different types of family involvement (Epstein, 1990, 1992; Epstein & Lee, 1995):

*Type I.* Refers to basic parenting obligations for the child's health, safety, and preparedness for school and for providing positive home conditions that support educational progress.

*Type II:* Refers to the basic obligations of schools to communicate with families regarding school programs and student's progress (such as communications through memos, notices, report cards, and conferences with parents).

*Type III.* Refers to parents' participation in volunteering at school (such as assisting teachers, administrators, or students in classrooms) and in participating in school activities and events (such as student performances, sports, and other events).

*Type IV.* Refers to parental involvement in student's learning at home, to parent-child-initiated requests for help, and to teachers' ideas about parents' involvement in home learning activities.

*Type V.* Refers to parental involvement in decision-making activities at school (such as participation in Advisory Councils, parent-teacher organizations, parent advocacy groups, and other school, district, or state level educational committees).

*Type VI.* Refers to school and parent collaborations with communities and other community

agencies that enhance the learning opportunities of children (such as programs for after-school care or health care, cultural events, and community services).

The significance of the theoretical perspective of overlapping spheres of influence lies not only in the identification of the different types of parental involvement, but also in the recognition that parents' involvement in children's education and family-school connections is not static, but is a complex phenomenon that is influenced by characteristics of the overlapping spheres of influence and the nature of the participants' interrelationships. Parental involvement may therefore vary by factors such as students' age and grade level, social background and experiences of families, and school policies (Epstein, 1992). This perspective points to the importance of expanding existing knowledge of how family involvement and student life change from the middle grades to high school, of what

factors influence any observed changes, and of their effects on student progress.

### Method

The study used a comparative design. It compared parents' involvement in the best performing schools and the least performing schools to establish relationships between parents' involvement and school performance. The study was conducted in Gasabo district, Rwanda. This district has 81 primary schools of which 51 are public or subsidised schools and 30 are private schools. The study targeted parents and students from 3 best performing schools and 3 least performing schools among public schools based on the ranking made during the 2009 National School

Campaign. All six schools are located in the rural area of the District.

To select the parents who participated in the study, stratified simple random sampling was done using the names of the children in a way that 10 parents for every grade were selected. Due to their full responsibility in ensuring the child's right to education is fulfilled, only biological parents participated.

Table 1 shows the demographic data for participants. A total of 326 parents took part in this study. Of the participants, 71.5 % of the parents were females. This coincides with the belief that mothers are more available for matters related to the education of their children and that mothers were more likely to be more involved with children (Williams et al., 2002).

Table 1

#### *Respondents Profile*

Description of Respondents	Sex	f	%
Gender	Male	93	28.5
	Female	233	71.5
Age	21-30 years	27	8.2
	31-40 years	118	36.1
	41-50 years	109	33.4
	51-60 years	49	15.0
	61 and above	23	7.0
Marital Status	Single	120	36.8
	Married	206	63.2
Level of Education	Never enrolled	120	33.4
	Elementary school	177	54.3
	High school and above	40	12.3
Occupation	Agriculture	290	89.2
	Employed	10	3.0
	Private business	25	7.7
No. of children in household	1 – 3	99	30.4
	4 – 6	161	49.3
	7 and above	66	20.2

With regard to age, 70 % of parents were aged between 30 – 50 years, an indication that they were still productive. On education, 87.7 % of the parents had either elementary school certificates, 54.3 % degree holders and 33.4 % never enrolled. There were 89.2% of parents who lived from agricultural activities. 69.5 % of parents had 4 to 12 children and only 51 % declared to belong to a family with 1 – 3 school- going children. The

fact that 49 % of children live in families with four and more school going children shows that Rwandese parents are sending their children to school.

The primary data collection was done using four-point scale type of questionnaires that participants filled themselves or through interview if the selected respondent was illiterate. Five questions were developed for each sub-variable

(factor) of parents' involvement on: (i) *having healthy children* - what parents should do from conception, birth, early childhood, through the school age to ensure that the child is born and grows healthy and equipped to develop up to her/his potential, (ii) *school management* - parents' role both as individual and through representation in supporting the school management to fulfill educational duties effectively and efficiently, (iii) *being resourceful* - contributing all kind of resources for the school development and children's achievement including money, in-kind assets, skills, ideas, etc., (iv) *support for learning* - parents' attitude and actions that encourage allow the child to learn in school and at home such as providing time and space to learn at home, setting high expectations for child, follow up on homework and reading, rewarding good performance, etc., and (v) *gender, care and protection* - parents' attitude and actions to ensure equitable access to education for all the children, especially girls and other vulnerable children through gender sensitive family practices, mentoring and counseling for vulnerable children, fighting child abuse and supporting community-based mechanisms to care for the most vulnerable. All these questionnaires were translated into Kinyarwanda to facilitate the understanding of all the participants since some of the respondents could not fully understand English or even French while responding to the questionnaires.

A pilot study was conducted in one subsidised primary school located in the rural area to establish the reliability of the questionnaire. The researchers took the opportunity of the Parents General Assembly meeting organized on the last day of the academic year when majority of parents come for the closure of the academic year and get the reports and grades for their children. Before the announcement of the end year results, the principal and the PTA chairperson held a meeting with the parents. At the end of the meeting, the researchers were introduced and given time to explain to the assembly of parents the purpose of the visit. Thirty six parents volunteered to participate: thirty by filling the questionnaire and six through interview. The reliability of the questionnaire was checked through calculation of Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient for each subscale measuring the factors of parents' involvement: (i) 0.658, (ii) 0.645, (iii) 0.713, (iv) 0.627, and (v) 0.540. The low values of the Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for each subscale is due to the

fact that each subscale has only 5 statements. Reliability coefficients tend to be deflated for short questionnaires composed of homogeneous statements.

A preliminary visit to the selected school to meet the principal and the chairperson of the PTA was organized. A brief presentation on the research was given to them and respondents were randomly selected. The day for data collection was agreed upon and invitation for parents was sent by the principal through their children. On the set date, respondents met the researchers at the school. Briefing was held with respondents before the questionnaire was distributed to them. Time was given to the participants to ask any question or seek any clarification. A maximum of 45 minutes was enough to fill the questionnaires.

The Mann-Whitney U test, a non-parametric statistical test, was used to compare the ratings on the factors of parents' involvement by parents of pupils in the high performing schools and in the low performing schools. Results of the statistical analysis are presented in table 2. The level of significance was set at 0.05.

## Results and Discussion

This study purposed to investigate if there was a significant difference between parents' involvement in the high-performing and low performing schools in respect to the following parents' involvement factors: *healthy children, participation in school management, parents as resourceful, support for learning and gender sensitivity, care, and protection*.

The following null hypothesis was tested, "There is no significant difference between the ratings of parents in high and low performing schools on their involvement in school." The decision rule was: if the p-value is less than alpha of 0.05, we reject the null hypothesis and if the p-value is greater than 0.05, we accept null hypothesis. The statistical results on the t-test for independent samples are shown in table 2.

### Having Healthy Children

On concern for having healthy children, parents in high-performing schools had a mean self-evaluation of 3.36 (mean rank = 186.34) while those in low-performing schools had a mean of 2.99 (mean rank = 137.99). The Mann-Whitney U test yielded a z-value of 4.66 (U = 9315.00) which is significant at 0.05 level. Therefore, there was a significant difference between the self evaluation

ratings of parents in high and low-performing schools in terms of having healthy children.

Parents in high performing schools had a more

Table 2

*Comparison of Parents' Self-Evaluation*

	Type of School	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean Rank	Mann-Whitney U	Z	p-value
Healthy Children	High performing	172	3.36	0.49	186.34	9315.00	4.66	0.000*
	Low performing	154	2.99	0.72	137.99			
Participation in School Management	High performing	172	2.65	0.72	164.85	13012.50	0.27	0.784
	Low performing	154	2.63	0.67	162.00			
Resourcefulness	High performing	172	2.707	0.58	162.81	13124.50	-0.14	0.888
	Low performing	154	2.710	0.69	164.28			
Support for Learning	High performing	172	3.57	0.40	175.40	11197.00	2.44	0.015*
	Low performing	154	3.38	0.60	150.21			
Gender Sensitivity, Care and Protection	High performing	172	3.38	0.43	178.43	10676.50	3.04	0.002*
	Low performing	154	3.10	0.71	146.83			

\*significant at 0.05 level

committed attitude towards having healthy school children than parents in low-performing schools. Parents from high performing schools differ significantly with parents from low performing schools in promoting healthy practices such as washing hands and cleanliness starting from home to school (3.65 vs. 3.27) and preventing children from being hungry during school time (3.18 vs. 2.51). From the difference in means shown, it was concluded that parents from high performing schools understand better that the child cannot perform well if he is hungry during school time. Therefore, it was the responsibility of the parent to provide food for the child.

A better understanding is recorded as well in terms of promoting hygiene practices that parents from high performing schools promote from early age at home and on which the school builds further health education. In its quality conceptual

framework, UNESCO highlights that a quality learner is the corner stone. The learner must enjoy good health from a balanced diet and a healthy and welcoming environment that enables her/him develop the full potential. Poor health and malnutrition are important underlying causes for low enrolment, absenteeism, poor academic performance and early school dropout (WHO, 2003.)

In its recent publication entitled: *Rethinking School Health: A Key Component of Education for All* (2011), the World Bank puts forward a strong education rationale for ensuring good health and avoiding hunger at school age. Evidence is given on how good health is both an input and condition necessary to learn and an outcome of effective quality education.

#### **Participation in School Management**

In their self-evaluation of their participation in school management, parents in high-performing schools had a mean self-evaluation of 2.65 (mean rank = 164.85) while those in low-performing schools had a mean of 2.63 (mean rank = 162.00). The Mann-Whitney U test yielded a z-value of 0.27 (U = 13012.50) with a p-value of 0.78, meaning that the null hypothesis was accepted as p-value was greater than 0.05. Therefore, there was no significant difference between the self evaluation ratings of parents in high and low-performing schools in terms of participation in school management. Both parents in high performing schools and parents in low-performing schools rated as average their participation in school management.

The fact that parents in high performing schools do not differ significantly from their peers from low performing schools in terms of participating in school management suggests that parents from high performing schools do not identify themselves with the good performance of their school more than their peers in low performing schools. From this observation, participatory management has a long way to go before it becomes a reality even in the best schools.

As pointed out in recent researches, there is a wish to see increased parent and community participation in education in general and in school decision-making in particular (Suitor et al., 2008; Garg et al., 2007; Constantino, 2007). Today, school-based management committees (SBMC), PTO, PTA, PTC, and other similar structures, as they exist in many countries, show evidence of this new trend. Experience has shown, however, that parents and community engagement in education is not just a straight forward thing. It is a partnership process. This means that educators are still reluctant and find it difficult to involve parents in educational decisions.

Parents' participation seems to fit better at the informal level in social meetings, excursions at the school or class level, alternative educational initiatives, etc. The inclusion of parents in school decision making means developing parent leaders and representatives and improving the knowledge and attitudes of all the parents about the school. Decision making is just a process of partnership, of shared views and actions toward shared goals and mission, not just a power struggle between conflicting ideas (Berns, 2007).

### **Parents as Resourceful**

Parents in high-performing schools had a mean self-evaluation of their resourcefulness of 2.707 (mean rank = 162.81) while those in low-performing schools had a mean of 2.710 (mean rank = 164.28). The Mann-Whitney U test yielded a z-value of -0.14 (U = 13124.50) with a p-value of 0.89 which is greater than 0.05. The conclusion was that there was no significant difference between the self evaluation ratings of parents in high and low-performing schools in terms of parents as resourceful.

Parents from high performing schools do not differ significantly from parents from low performing schools and even the insignificant difference is in favour of low performing school. This may suggest that being resourceful and volunteering become factors of success when they provide learning opportunities to reach specific, well-defined, and measurable educational outcomes (National Network of Partnership Schools, 2006).

For both categories of schools, the only statements of which parents seem to be most aware are: *I contribute to construct/rehabilitate the school infrastructure* and *I volunteer some work such as school gardening, levelling playgrounds, fencing, and others...* and those are usual requests from local and central government to them. They are more of contributions than involvement factors.

Financial contribution to support vulnerable pupils is sometimes an initiative of the school management as well. For the last two statements, about providing in-kind assets and volunteering time and skills to facilitate extra-curricular activities, this is the area where most parents, especially those from low income communities, shy away about their abilities to be involved unless the school authorities build confidence in them and show them that everyone counts. Nevertheless, when it happens, it is an opportunity for socialising and networking among parents, to sharpen their skills and transfer them to their children, thus enhancing confidence in themselves and making their children proud of their families.

### **Support for Learning**

On support for learning, parents in high-performing schools had a mean self-evaluation of 3.57 (mean rank = 175.40) while those in low-performing schools had a mean of 3.38 (mean rank = 150.21). The Mann-Whitney U test yielded a z-value of 2.44 (U = 11197.00) with a p-value



of 0.015 which is less than 0.05. Therefore, there was a significant difference between the self-evaluation ratings of parents in high and low-performing schools in terms of support for learning. Parents in high performing schools show more commitment towards supporting their children's learning than parents in low-performing schools do.

Parents from high performing schools differed significantly from parents from low performing schools especially on two statements: *I accord my child the time for study, homework, and other learning tasks at home* (3.67 vs. 3.42) and *I set high learning expectations with my child every term* (3.37 vs. 3.12).

Researchers have shown that frequent discussions about academic achievement and setting high expectations on academic success, the regulation of time allowed to play, watch television at the expense of intellectual activities, the provision with a suitable place to study at home and monitoring the study time, and daily reading were family practices that have proven to be effective on academic achievement of the students. In fact, these practices make the child understand that his/her academic success is a priority for his/her parents and that they put effort in monitoring progress towards this end. (Chapman & Friedman, 1988).

#### **Gender Sensitivity, Care and Protection**

Parents in high-performing schools had a mean self-evaluation of 3.38 (mean rank = 178.43) while those in low-performing schools had a mean of 3.10 (mean rank = 146.83). The Mann-Whitney U test yielded a z-value of 3.04 ( $U = 10676.50$ ) with a p-value of 0.002 which implies that the finding is significant at 0.05 level. There was significant difference between the self-evaluation ratings of parents in high and low-performing schools in terms of gender sensitivity, care and protection. Parents in high performing schools were more aware and committed towards gender sensitivity, care, and protection than parents in low-performing schools.

Parents from high performing schools differed significantly from their peers from low performing schools on three statements: 1) monitoring care, security and protection of the children, 2) providing equal educational opportunities for girls, boys, and children with special educational needs, 3) providing sanitary pads to their daughters so that they do not miss classes during menstruation period. This illustrates a more committed attitude

towards security and protection for their children on the way to and from school; in addition, they agreed more on equitable access to education for all children.

Parents and families have the responsibility to provide equal educational opportunities to every child (MOE, 2008). They should take the lead in fighting violence against children and in denouncing all discriminatory practices that can hinder either regular school attendance or school enrolment. Studies have found that violence in homes and communities was a critical area of concern in Rwanda and worldwide, as violence is often deeply rooted in cultural, economic and social practices (Kanyangara, 2005.) As put in the Rwanda early childhood policy, for children to develop their full potential and grow into productive citizens who will lead their country to wealth and prosperity, it is important to ensure that all children enjoy a peaceful, safe and protected environment (MOE, 2009).

#### **Conclusions**

The assumption may be made, as Epstein (2001) observes, that all parents, both better educated and less educated look for good education for their children and are requesting or requiring schools to keep them informed about and involved in their children's education.

If both parents and children 'only tend to agree' on all six components of parent involvement, this leaves one to think that there is still a long way to go as far as parents' involvement is concerned. According to this study, there is a more serious gap to be filled in terms of communication with the school, participation in school management and parents as resourceful. This may be due to insufficient information and guidance from the school, reluctance of the school to involve parents in these areas or parents' underestimation of their abilities to be involved in education (The Free Library, 2010).

High performing schools tend to have more involved parents except in two factors; participation in school management and parents as resourceful. It may be understood that these schools try to inform and encourage parents' involvement about having healthy children, support for learning, and gender sensitivity, care and protection. However, efforts should be made to allow parents to have a voice in school management and mobilise them to contribute more resources, time and skills for school activities. It is also important to note that some

researchers highlight lack of evidence linking parent involvement in governance and student achievement. Such research identifies other benefits such as the elimination of misconceptions that parents and school educators may hold about one another's motives, attitudes, intentions and abilities, the increase of parents' own skills and confidence, and the role modelling for their children (Cotton & Wikelund, 1989). Definitely, all types of parent involvement are beneficial to the establishment of good family-school relationships.

Thick description is described by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as a way of achieving a type of external validity. In addition, thick description refers to the detailed account of field experiences in which the researcher makes explicit the patterns of cultural and social relationships and puts them in context (Holloway, 1997). By describing a phenomenon in sufficient detail one can begin to evaluate the extent to which the conclusions drawn are transferable to other times, settings, situations, and people. In this context, parental involvement in some regions might not be easily attainable due to cultural readiness and economic conditions available at the time.

### **Recommendations**

From the findings and conclusions drawn from the study, some recommendations may be formulated with the aim of encouraging educators and parents to develop teacher-parent partnership programs. This will result in the involvement of a high percentage of parents and family members in education and parents' positive attitudes and skills in helping their children succeed in school (NCREL, 1996). This study, confirmed that even parents and pupils from high performing schools achieved what NCREL (1996) stipulates at average only "tend to agree".

Awareness campaign should be conducted to inform all stakeholders in education about their specific and complimentary roles in education, and their obligation to support parents' involvement since their roles set the foundations and facilitate other stakeholders' roles in the work of education.

School administrators and teachers should not content themselves by having parents coming and participating in general assembly meetings or by sending academic reports for their children, but in consultation with them, effective family-school partnership programs should be developed to

engage parents in full and meaningful participation in education. These programs should address all parent involvement types and target all parents so that no child is left behind, with the belief that every parent wants his/her child succeed in school and must be helped to find the way to contribute to the education of the child. They will offer a variety of ways parents can participate based on the fact that parents differ greatly in their willingness, ability, and time for involvement in school activities (Cotton & Wikelund, 1989). The school leadership has a central role in making the school effective for children achievement; therefore, it should look for all necessary resources which can be mobilized by parents (Chance, 2002).

The school administration should also initiate and promote extra-curricular activities as they present the advantage of being problem-based, situation related, strategic complements for the curriculum, and opportunities for parents to contribute time, skills and other assets for learning activities (Ellis, 2005).

Parent-school partnership programs should focus especially on setting variety of a two-way, multiple ways communication mechanisms between the parent and the school and between parents and families themselves and ensure effective parent participation in school management. The provision of a parent information center can serve to help interested parents learn more about the school, to exchange and share knowledge and information on any number of topics (Tanner & Lackney, 2006).

Children should also be included as part of the parent-school network. This way they will be kept aware of their own progress and of action needed to improve their learning outcomes. Local authorities and government should develop guidelines and policies to encourage and support family-school partnerships programs. Policy makers should think about bringing the issue of parents- schools and community partnership to be understood as a social strategy to succeed in education.

Finally, a study should be undertaken to assess the resources parents have available to them in order to create a specific plan for including all parents at the school.

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