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**Establishing the extent to which schools involve communities in the provision of education in Chirumanzu Central Circuit schools**

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Denias Muzenda

*Great Zimbabwe University***Abstract**

The aim of this study was to investigate the extent to which community involvement contributes to the promotion of high educational standards in Chirumanzu Central Circuit Schools in Zimbabwe. The population was made up of all the headteachers, teachers and parents in the 25 schools in the circuit. The respondents were selected using purposive sampling and were made up of (5) school heads, 15 teachers and 10 members of the School Development Committees (SDCs), giving a total of 30 participants. The gender composition of the participants was 55% male and 45% female. The study adopted the descriptive survey design and the questionnaire was used as the only instrument for collecting data. This contained both close-ended and open-ended questions. The study revealed that community involvement in educational issues was limited to parents or guardians of pupils currently attending school in the district. In other words, it leaves behind the rest of the members of the community. The study also established that schools are not exploiting the potentialities presented by their proximity communities in order to tap on the resources and knowledge from the community members. The study recommends that there be total involvement of the community towards the provision of adequate infrastructure, books, right culture and other learning materials.

**Key words**

Circuit, community promotion, educational provision and involvement

**Introduction**

The effectiveness and efficiency of the school is based on the extent to which the community is involved in the education of its children (Smith, 2022). Durišić (2017) for example, acknowledges that the local community's involvement is essential especially in infrastructural development in schools. Provision of labour and learning materials, as well as payment of fees are major contributions that a school can get from its community, (Gibbs, 2021, Park & Holloway, 2017). In Zimbabwe, Statutory Instrument 87 of 1992 which created school development committees for non-government schools and school development associations for government schools was a significant move. This instrument plays a pivotal role in schools (Moyo, 2012). Before independence, parents and communities in Zimbabwean schools operated in an ethos authoritarianism where the state regarded community involvement (particularly in schools for blacks) primarily as just a means of financing schools (Gibbs, 2021). Between independence and now, what has been happening on this important issue is that mutual cooperation within parties began to realise positive results. The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, through policies, has facilitated acceptable standards of schools-parents engagement in areas like building projects, learner and staff welfare, among others.

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From early 1994 to the current period (2020s), the level of community engagement and development of learning institutions in urban areas is extremely significant. In contrast, in many rural communities in Zimbabwe, community involvement has been virtually non-existent due to political turbulence, poor socio-economic conditions, teacher reluctance and community apathy (Chindova, 2009). It is a general trend that most parents tend to blame teachers for their children's poor performance not knowing that they too need to take an active part in the learning process of their children (Smith, 2022, Cairney, 2012). After independence (1980) to date, emphasis is on school-community engagement in all areas of the education of a complete child for the 21st century. It is against this background that this study investigated the extent to which community involvement can help to raise educational standards in Chirumanzu Central Circuit Schools.

### **Literature Review**

In this study, the researcher focused on the critical question, "What do these studies say about community participation and school outcomes?"

### **Conceptual framework**

#### **Communities**

From a conceptual framework, a group of people living in the same place or having a particular characteristic in common constitute a community (Smith, 2022). To contextualise this concept in the study, in Chirumanzu District there is a group of people living together and practising common ownership of the school education activities (Barton & Coley, 2019). Furthermore, these are parents with common interests in the schools that are situated in their geographical location. They are expected to contribute positively and sincerely to all the activities of the child's education. In the neighbourhood, the community supplies learners to schools which do not exist in isolation and the roles, values, and beliefs based on such interactions ought to be respected (Barton & Coley, 2019, Bishop & Pedro Noguera, 2019).

#### **Theoretical framework**

This study was guided by the community engagement theory by Dekker, (2022). Dekker's (2022) goal with the model was to help school authorities develop approaches for working in partnership with communities to enable equitable impact. From a theoretical perspective, we define school as a community within a community. As such, schools reflect community needs, both social and educational. Essentially, schools exist to enable learning and teaching to take place, which does not happen in a vacuum. If a school is to be inclusive, it will need to locate itself within society. In practical terms, the implication is that managers and practitioners will then need to consider their place within the broader context. Relationships with parents and the broader community are central to the effectiveness of schools. Members of the school will be members of the local community reflecting its beliefs and values, conveyed through the actions, behaviour and attitudes of the pupils, teaching and non-teaching staff, parents and governors.

Policymakers, educators and others involved in education have begun to acknowledge the significance and benefits of community participation in education as one of the strategies to improve educational access and quality (Rockel, 2013) To conceptualise this as Uemura (2009)

postulates, education takes place not only in schools but also within families, communities and society at large (Sanders, and Lewis, 2016). Parents and families cannot be the only group of people to be concerned with children's education as long as their children interact with and learn from the world outside their families and communities and society must support parents and families in the upbringing, and educating of their children (Uemura, 2009). As Rockel (2013) contends, schools are institutions that prepare children to contribute to the betterment of the society in which they operate by equipping them with skills important in society and therefore, cannot and should not operate as separate entities within society.

Rockel (2013) states that in the past, community involvement was characterised by volunteers, mostly mothers, assisting in the classroom, chaperoning students and fundraising; and today, the old model has been replaced with a much more inclusive approach. School-family-community partnerships now include mothers and fathers, stepparents, grandparents, foster parents, other relatives and caregivers. Also, on this list, business leaders and community groups are all participating in goal-oriented activities, at all grade levels, linked to student achievement and school success (Rockel, 2013, Mavis, Sanders, Karla and. Lewis, 2016).

According to Jeynes (2003) parent, family and community involvement in education correlates with higher academic performance and school improvement. When schools, parents, families and communities work together to support learning, students tend to earn higher grades, attend school more regularly, stay in school longer, and enrol in higher level programmes (Spillane et, al, 2004, Bishop & Pedro Noguera, 2019). Many researchers cite parent-family-community involvement as a key to addressing the school dropout crisis and note that strong school-family-community partnerships foster higher educational aspirations and more motivated students (Sanders, and Lewis, 2016). (; Henderson et.al, 2007; Madziyire, 2010 and Uemura, 2009). As Mortmore (2011) observes, too many policymakers, community leaders and even parents still view schools and student learning as the sole responsibility of educators. While educators take their professional responsibilities seriously, they also recognise that they cannot do it alone; they need and depend on the support from parents and community members (Mpofu, 2014).

Mpofu (2014) further argues that to promote student growth and school success at every grade and age, well thought-out parent-community-school partnerships linked to school improvement goals are needed in every community; and yet in many schools there are so many obstacles to community involvement in the schools. As Sanders and Lewis (2016) posit, communities encounter a lot of roadblocks to getting involved in their children's education. Some point to their own demanding schedules and say they do not have extra time to volunteer or even attend school activities, much less got involved in bigger ways (Marieke and Van Klaveren, 2016). Others reveal how uncomfortable they feel when trying to communicate with school officials, whether that is due to language or cultural differences or their own past experiences with school (Rockel, 2013, Colley and Binta,2005). Some parents complain that heads and teachers view them as strangers when they want to contribute to the development of schools. In some cases, school administrators view community participation as competition with professionals and thus, members of the community confine themselves to those areas defined by the school authorities as the preserve for parents (Mpofu, 2014).

Community participation can support teachers (Education Trust ,2021). As Uemura (2009) states, among various forms of community contributions, some are specifically aimed to support teachers, for instance, communities can provide or construct housing for teachers who are from outside of the community. In rural areas, lack of qualified teachers is critical, and preparing a safe environment and housing is necessary to attract teachers, particularly female teachers, who otherwise tend to stay in or go to urban areas (Uemura, 2009, Marieke and Van Klaveren, 2016). Community members can be a rich source to support teachers' practice in classrooms by facilitating children's learning. For example, as Sanders and Lewis (2016) suggest, local villagers can come to school to help students understand various species of indigenous trees and animals found in that locality. Community members can help students understand concepts which teachers teach in classrooms by having the students coming into the community, interacting with community members who are knowledgeable about village history and certain issues faced by the community (Chetty and Hendren 2018). Respected community members can become knowledgeable resources persons who can come to the classrooms and teach students on issues faced by the community (Uemura, 2009, Colley and Binta, 2005).

Mpofu (2014) adds that community members can support teachers by contributing their skills to speak the local language in cases where newly deployed teachers come from outside ethnic groups (Lyall and Scott, 2018). Community members can be invited into the classrooms as interpreters who not only translate languages, but also help teachers as well as students by bridging the gap that exists between cultural values of teachers and those of students (Harpaz and Yael, 2020). Furthermore, as Marieke and Van Klaveren (2016) state, parents and community members can contribute to teaching materials by providing teachers with knowledge and materials that are locally sensitive and more familiar to children. It is hoped that through this literature, school authorities have a better understanding of how power is or is not shared with different voices and how the skills they have gained can be applied in a variety of settings, organisations and communities.

### **Statement of the problem**

Community involvement in the promotion of high standards of education is very crucial (Barton & Coley, 2019). It is through the involvement of the community that children come to school prepared to learn. The community provides financial and material support to the schools. Furthermore, communication between the school, parents and community should be frequent, with the community having a meaningful role in school governance (Smith, 2022, Bishop & Pedro Noguera, 2019). Thus, schools have no option, but to fully engage their communities to achieve quality education. However, there is something happening right now in the district which does not align to the ideal. Schools are not fully involving communities in the provision of complete education in Chirumanzu Central. The ramifications of this situation are that schools become islands as communities view them as not being part of them.

### **Purpose of the study**

The study sought to establish the extent of community involvement in the provision of education in rural schools so as to come up with practical suggestions to improve on the participation of communities in the education of their children.

### **Research Questions**

1. How do schools involve communities in educational activities?
2. What roles can the teacher and the head play to bring the community to the school?
3. What can be done to promote more community involvement in the schools?

### **Significance of the study**

The study sought to expose the extent to which schools involved communities in the education of children and come up with practical remedies to promote more community participation in the affairs of schools. The study also hoped to conscientise school authorities and other key stakeholders in education about the need to constantly draw communities closer to development in the schools for collaboration and ownership of school programmes for the improvement of children's learning (Goodall, 2018).

### **Limitations of the study**

The study employed a relatively small sample and thus, generalisation will pose a challenge. The other limitation has to do with the descriptive method that was used in this study. As Ary and Razaviah (2010) argue, the descriptive method lacks predictive power; the research may discover and describe "what is" but is unable to predict "what would be". The respondents may also give false responses thereby affecting the validity of the findings. This was mitigated through triangulation within the method.

### **Delimitation of the study**

The study was delimited to establishing the extent to which schools in Chirumanzi Central Circuit involve communities in the provision of education of their children using a sample of 30 respondents made up of 5 heads, 15 teachers and 10 members from the School Development Committees. Views from other leaders from the communities were not solicited for.

### **Methodology**

The study used the quantitative methodology which was found useful due to its reliance on statistics which can provide a lot of information (Leedy, 2005). As Cohen and Manion (2011) state, quantitative research can be conducted on a large scale and give a lot more information as far as value is concerned. The study settled for the descriptive survey research design. The use of the survey research design enabled the researchers to gather widespread views of the respondents on the studied phenomenon (Anderson, 2012). The study used purposive sampling to arrive at a sample of 30 respondents. Ten schools (5 primary and 5 secondary) were selected from a total of 25 schools. From the ten schools 5 heads were part of the participants. Three (3) teachers and 2 members of the school development committees (the chairperson and secretary) were selected. Purposive sampling was used as Anderson (2012) observes because it was easy to get a sample of subjects with specific characteristics. Permission was sought from the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education before the researchers distributed the questionnaire. The questionnaire reassured respondents of confidentiality and anonymity. The questionnaires were collected after a week by the researchers which made sure that all were returned. Data collected from the questionnaires yielded descriptive statistics around the

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variables understudy. These statistics were computed and inferential implications from them derived and recorded.

### Findings and Discussion

The study set out to establish the extent to which schools involve communities in the provision of education in Zimbabwe rural schools. This section is presented in two parts; namely, presentation of data and discussion thereof.

#### Presentation of the data

**Table 1: Composition of sample by category (N=30).**

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Heads	5	17
Teachers	15	50
SDC members	10	33
<b>Totals</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>

The information in table 1 above shows that 50% of the respondents were teachers, 33% school development committee members and 17% heads of schools. These categories were perceived to be most crucial for this study.

**Table 2: Distribution of respondents by sex (N=30).**

Category	Heads		Teachers		SDC members		Totals	Percentage
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Male	3	60	9	60	7	70	19	65
Female	2	40	6	40	3	30	11	35
<b>Totals</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>

The information above shows that 65% of the respondents were male and 35% female.

**Table 3: Distribution of respondents by academic level (N=30).**

Academic Level	Heads		Teachers		SDC members		Totals	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Ordinary level	2	40	9	60	7	70	18	60
Advanced level	2	40	4	27	2	20	8	27
Degree	1	20	2	13	1	10	4	13
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>

Most respondents (63%) were in possession of an ordinary level qualification which is obtained after four years of secondary school education. Others had higher qualifications which implies that all the respondents possessed the necessary literacy to comprehend the questionnaire contents.

**Table 4: Responses to the question: “Who are invited to attend general meetings?” (N=30).**

**Discussion**

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Parents with children in the school	30	100
The whole community	0	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>

All the respondents (100%) admitted that when there was a general meeting only parents with children attending school were invited at the total exclusion of other community members.

**Table 5: Responses to the question: “Which type of meeting was most productive in raising educational standards?” (N=30).**

Category	Frequency	Percentage
General meeting	1	3
Consultation days	2	7
Open days/Prize and speech days	1	3
All the above equally	26	87
<b>Totals</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>

The majority of respondents (86%) indicated that general meetings, consultation days and open days or prize giving days were all equally important to raise educational standards.

**Table 6: Responses to the questions: “Community members voluntarily visit the school freely?” (N=30).**

Category of responses	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	3	10
No	25	83
Not sure	2	7
<b>Totals</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>

Community members did not voluntarily visit schools (83%) to contribute to the education of their children.

**Table 7: Responses to the question: “Do members of the donor, church and business community involve themselves in school programmes” (N=30).**

Category of responses	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	3	10
No	27	90
Not sure	0	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>

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The respondents indicated that key members of their communities like donors, churches and businesspeople were not involved in the programmes of their schools.

**Table 8: Responses to the question: “Does your school invite some members of the community to help deliver lessons for pupils?” (N=30).**

Category of responses	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	2	7
No	27	90
Not sure	1	3
<b>Totals</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>

Most of the schools did not involve members of their communities in the actual teaching process in the classrooms.

**Table 9: Responses to the question: “What do you think the community’s major role in the schools is?” (N=30).**

Category of responses	Frequency	Percentage
Provide labour and finance	1	3
Provide children for learning	29	97
Provide resource persons	0	0
All of the above equally	0	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>

Most of the respondents (95%) believed that the major role of the community is to provide children for schools to teach and not other roles.

The questionnaire had one open-ended question which complemented data from the close-ended questions. The question wanted to find out from the respondents what they thought are the challenges that led to less participation by communities in the school businesses. The most common responses were the following:

- On the expected roles of the community, participants stated that, from the onset, at the start of the year, joint-planning meeting is necessary on both parties yet this is not happening. The communities are not fully encouraged to play significant roles in provision of ideas, knowledge, skills, transport, material and financial support to schools. On special events it is unfortunate that they do not engage in catering services and to give morale support to the schools.
- Communities do not prioritise education as an important service within their community. One member argued that as an example, “*if the community were to receive funds from a donor and were asked to choose between the development of a dip tank or a school, they were very likely to spend the money on a dip tank*”, implying that the survival of their cattle was more important than the education of their children.
- Communities were made up of illiterate members who viewed schools as the properties of heads and teachers.
- Not all heads welcome community participation in “their” schools, since they tend to feel that they are losing authority as power is taken away by parents and communities.

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- On the third major question, the participants echoed that there is something that can be done to improve the community involvement levels. Educational policymakers and stakeholders currently do not have comprehensive policies that promote the involvement of the whole community in the development of their schools as schools are there for the current students and their parents and guardians. Local community leadership that includes chiefs, village heads, headmen, church leaders, the political leadership as well as other prominent stakeholders should work together with the school authorities to improve standards in their schools. Furthermore, staff development and induction courses are necessary to all SDCs and heads of schools on all possible areas of engagement.

### **Discussion**

Schools were selective in their invitations to school meetings as only those parents with children attending school were invited at the total exclusion of other members of the community who could contribute ideas and knowledge for use by the schools (Marieke and Van Klaveren, 2016). The development of schools should not be left just to parents of current pupils because one time or the other all members of the community may have a child, a relative or a grandchild attending school. As Sanders and Lewis (2016) postulate, parents and families cannot be the only group of people to be concerned with children's education. Therefore, society must support parents and families in the upbringing, socialising and education of their children. Rockel (2003) further adds that unlike in the past where community involvement in schools was characterised by volunteers mostly mothers of children at school, school-family-community partnerships now include mothers and fathers, relatives and caregivers, business leaders and community groups all working towards the success of the school (Harpaz and Yael, 2020, Colley and Binta, 2005).

Schools close out members of communities and other key stakeholders from voluntarily coming to contribute ideas or materials (Marieke and Van Klaveren, 2016, Chetty and Hendren, 2018). For example, business leaders, churches and other prominent members of the community find it difficult to approach schools directly to render support. As Uemura (2009) postulates, bringing key community stakeholders to the schools can support teachers as some members of communities can provide or construct housing for teachers who are from outside of the community and in rural areas in particular. Lack of qualified teachers is critical, and preparing a safe environment and housing is necessary to attract teachers particularly female teachers, who otherwise tend to stay away from these areas. Similar observations were echoed by Lyall, Scott, ed. (2018) and Sanders and Lewis, (2016).

Members of communities with expertise in various curricula areas are not engaged as resource persons to augment the efforts of teachers. Most communities are rich in that there are former teachers, church leaders and traditional experts who can be roped into the school academic realm and be asked to complement the efforts of teachers as resource persons. They may be invited to the classrooms to deliver lessons or information to the pupils (Goodall, 2018). Uemura (2009) argues that community members themselves can be a rich source to support teachers' practice in classrooms by facilitating children's learning, for example local villagers can come to school to help students understand various species of indigenous trees and animals found in that locality. Community members can help students understand concepts which teachers in classrooms are not familiar with by having the students coming into the community,

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interacting with community members who are knowledgeable about village history and certain issues faced by the community.

Communities face a number of obstacles which hinder their full participation in school activities. (Colley and Binta,2005, Chetty and Hendren 2018). These include lack of understanding of the role of education in the lives of their children due to illiteracy and some heads view the unlimited involvement of parents in the schools as a threat to their authority. This finding tallies with observations by Rockel (2013) who posits that communities see a lot of roadblocks to getting involved in their children's education. Some point to their own demanding schedules and cannot even attend school activities. Others reveal how uncomfortable they feel when trying to communicate with school officials (Rockel, 2013).

Similar observations were echoed by Sanders and Lewis (2016). Goodall (2018) argues that some parents complain that heads and teachers view them as strangers when they want to contribute to the development of schools and in some cases school authorities view community participation as competition with professionals. Under this discussion, it is important to indicate what this study adds to the current literature. The study puts emphasis on the fact that, community involvement can be effective, if the school mirrors the local community in sharing their beliefs, values and ownership as key players. Furthermore, schools become collective, as shared understanding of common beliefs and values will create a sense of community bound together by a recognisable identity and geographical location.

### **Conclusions**

Both theoretical and empirical data from this study converge on the fact that schools are not involving communities in the provision of education in Chirumanzu Central Circuit. It is concluded that not all members of the communities are practically harnessed together for the development of the schools. Full participation on speech and prize giving days, annual general meetings, consultation days and special events are examples whereby schools do not involve communities in educational activities. The ramifications of this situation are that schools become islands as communities view them as not being part of them. The schools only deal with a few parents who have children currently attending school and exclude other members of the community. On the second question, the study concluded that, from the onset, at the start of the year, joint-planning meeting is necessary on both parties yet this is not happening. The communities are not fully encouraged to play significant roles in provision of ideas, knowledge, skills, transport, material and financial support to schools. On special events it is unfortunate that they do not engage in catering services and to give morale support to the schools. School authorities also tend to view full community participation as a threat to their power and professionalism as community participation is viewed as interference. On the third major question, the study concluded that there is something that can be done to improve the community involvement levels. Educational policymakers and stakeholders currently do not have comprehensive policies that promote the involvement of the whole community in the development of their schools as schools are there for the current students and their parents and guardians. Local community leadership that includes chiefs, village heads, headmen, church leaders, the political leadership as well as other prominent stakeholders should work together with the school authorities to improve standards in their schools. Furthermore, staff development and induction courses are necessary to all SDCs and heads of schools on all possible areas of engagement. This situation calls for a fundamental mindset and operational

shift on the part of the schools if all community resources were to be optimally tapped for the betterment of the schools and quality of education.

### **Recommendations**

In this study, full consideration was given to the three key questions as follows,

1. How do schools involve communities in educational activities?
2. What roles can the teacher and the head play to bring the community to the school?
3. What can be done to promote more community involvement in the schools?

In light of the findings of this study, the researcher would like to make some recommendations:

- Heads of schools and teachers should understand that schools are part of communities and as such, all members of the communities should be practically harnessed together for the development of the schools.
- Full participation on speech and prize giving days, annual general meetings, consultation days and special events are examples whereby schools can involve communities in educational activities.
- There are significant roles teachers and the heads of schools can play to bring the community to the school activities. From the onset, at the start of the year, joint-planning meeting is necessary on both parties. The communities should be encouraged to play significant roles in provision of ideas, knowledge, skills, transport, material and financial support to schools. On special events it is recommended that they even do catering services and to give morale support to the schools.
- There is much that can be done to promote more community involvement in the schools. Educational policymakers and stakeholders should come up with policies that promote the involvement of the whole community in the development of their schools as schools are there for the current students and their parents and guardians. Local community leadership that includes chiefs, village heads, headmen, church leaders, the political leadership as well as other prominent stakeholders should work together with the school authorities to improve standards in their schools. Furthermore, staff development and induction courses are necessary to all SDCs and heads of schools on all possible areas of engagement.

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