

By Flavia Nakajjugo

Oftentimes, schools and parents blame one another for the way the children turn out. Many parents expect schools to instil values and spirituality in their children, teach them the basics of self-care and life skills, and enable them to excel academically.

Many schools, on the other hand, struggle with parents who pay school fees, but do not support their children.

Consequently, this turns into a blame game and a child's education suffers. The truth is that both parties play a crucial role in the success of a child. If we want our children to reach their full potential in school, then, parents have to work together with schools to support them. This is called parental engagement in education.

Parental engagement in schools is important for ensuring the holistic learning of a child. In fact, studies have shown that children whose parents are regularly involved in their education are more likely to achieve higher learning outcomes than those whose parents are not.

Additionally, parental engagement improves a child's self-esteem, improves social-emotional development and behaviour, among others. Schools need to, therefore, find ways of drawing parents in and getting them to be part of the school community and involved in their children's learning. I will try to explore some of the ways in which schools can

HOW SCHOOLS CAN ENGAGE PARENTS IN CHILDREN'S EDUCATION



A parent reviews her children's books during school visitation day

foster parental engagement.

REGULAR COMMUNICATION

Schools need to communicate with parents regularly. Regularly might mean weekly or biweekly. This draws parents in and allows them to become more interested in what the school is doing and in what their child is learning. This can be achieved in

many ways, including weekly newsletters, emails, WhatsApp messages, social media posts and websites, among others. This has been found to improve parental engagement drastically as compared to other strategies.

PARENT VOLUNTEERS

This concept sounds very foreign in many Ugandan

schools, yet it works and provides parents with a platform to get involved in schools. Schools have a wealth of social capital in their parents, and if well utilised, they would go a long way in not just solving the school problems, but also inviting parents to be part of the school activities. Parents can volunteer

in various ways, such as serving as classroom helpers, helping them appreciate the roles of the teachers, participating in field trips and fundraising activities, and conducting career guidance sessions, among others. Many parents want to get involved in school-related activities, but do not know how to do so.

Establish a welcoming environment

This would make parents feel invited and comfortable to be a part of the school community.

Schools can create a welcoming environment by introducing things like open houses (events that involve opening the school to families of students to learn more about the school and interact with parents) and parent-teacher conferences.

PARENT EDUCATION PROGRAMMES

These would equip the parents with the tools and information to support their children and the school. They can tackle various topics, such as academic support, behavioural management, child development, and parental engagement. Such programmes can promote confidence in the parent's ability to support their child's education.

DECISION MAKING

Schools that have parents involved in decision-making tend to have more buy-in from them than those that do not. This allows parents to own the decisions and support the schools more. We can achieve this by including them on school committees, inviting them to provide feedback on school policies and soliciting their views on school-related issues. A school with supportive parents is easy to manage and schools that work together with parents better support the children to reach their full potential. It is worth the investment.

The writer is an educator and teacher trainer

If education cannot level the playing field, what is it for?

By Modern Karema

Sustainable Development Goal 4 is worded in a very interesting and deliberate way – ensure inclusive, and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

By implication, therefore, you cannot talk about quality education without thinking about issues of equity and inclusion. This is very true for the education sector in developing countries like Uganda.

The vision of the Ministry of Education and Sports of Uganda is, quality education and sports for all. This vision statement is an acknowledgment of quality and equity as key measures of education performance. You cannot have one without the other. One could argue that equity is the 'how', while quality is the 'what' of education.

POINT OF VIEW...

We need to view education equity as the oil that keeps the wheel of education quality lubricated and moving. Nelson Mandela is quoted to have said that education is the great equaliser and that it is through education that the daughter of a peasant can become a doctor, the son of a mine worker can become the head of the mine and that a child of farm workers can become the president of a great nation.

Equity and inclusion in education may take up many versions. Yet, issues of equity are so broad that you can never be sure you are achieving all, especially in the context of developing countries, where public investment in education is low.

In this article, I delve into some of the types that are very relevant to developing country contexts. Gender inclusion is the most understood, and

also quite misunderstood type. In Uganda, it is defined as not leaving out boys and girls in education opportunities.

The emphasis is on the girl-child because of the specific challenges that have historically derailed the global and national efforts at closing the gaps in access to education by girls. But we need to take this analysis to a higher level and start

examining the bottlenecks that keep all children from accessing, completing, or transitioning to the next level of education.

What is the level of psychological safety at school for all children in spite of their gender? How do they relate with their teachers and school leaders? Do teachers and school leaders have the capacity and autonomy to create a safe teaching and learning environment for all children at school? Which pedagogy are we using in class that may potentially include or exclude some children – visual, audio, or kinesthetic learners?

What learning aids do we use in class? How are they targeting specific learner groups? Do we have facilities in schools to support children with special needs? Do teachers have the capacity to identify and support children with special needs to participate in the teaching process?

Do we have specific lavatories and other sanitary services for girl children that have hit puberty? Are there senior women to guide these children to be comfortable at school? It was never my intention to provide solutions in this article. My intention was to provide reflective questions that we can base on to start a discussion that can lead us to solutions.

We need to start candid discussions on whether the current education system actually gives a level playing field for all children everywhere to learn and grow into what they would like to be, in spite of the conditions they were born into or grew up in. If education isn't the great equaliser anymore, then what is it for?

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