Parental Involvement with Education in Zimbabwe within a Total Quality Management Framework

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ABSTRACT This paper investigated the attitudes of Zimbabwean education managers and school governors towards Parental Involvement (PI) programmes in Bulawayo Metropolitan Province. The economic realities of the nineties necessitated the adoption by Government of the Total Quality Management (TQM) philosophy in the delivery of education. A survey design was used to gather data by means of a questionnaire containing thirty-three pre-coded items on attitudes towards PI and the management style employed in the process. The findings of the combined responses of ninety-eight education managers and school governors purposely sampled revealed that a sound alliance exists between education managers and parents. Success and failure were collectively celebrated and condemned respectively. The notion of continuous improvement embedded in the TQM orientation employed, enhanced the quality crusade pursued as flaws were modified before the final product was realised. Disheartening though was the exclusion of parents in the formulation of the vision/mission statement and in academic issues as demanded by the engagement theory.

INTRODUCTION

This paper investigated the attitudes of education managers and school governors towards Parental Involvement (PI) programmes in public schools of the Bulawayo Metropolitan Province in Zimbabwe. The post independence expansion of education delivery in Zimbabwean schools as propounded in its Election Manifesto of 1980 (Zimbabwe African National Union (Patriotic Front) (ZANU PF) 1980*)* was unsustainable. The ballooning of the participation rates was motivated by the eradication of segregation policies (The Education Act 1987). The escalating costs incurred in the provision of education which was brought about by the massive consumption of education by the disadvantaged Black majority were outstretching the fiscal purse. To reduce the financial burden which a young democracy such as Zimbabwe was facing by then, a Total Quality Management (TQM) framework was adopted by man-

agement to enhance the engagement philosophy. The major purpose of this paradigm shift in the provision of education was to tap the potentials, skills, resources and expertise parents were endowed with for the purpose of accomplishing educational goals. Schools in this respect were being called upon to recognise parents as the first teachers in pursuit of educational goals (Gaetano 2007). However, studies on PI indicate that the major barriers to parent-community-relationships are the attitudes of parents and education managers. In this regard, positive attitudes enhance the promotion and support of the changes brought about by this new dispensation, whereas, negative ones serve as gate-keepers (Gu 2008). Since literature abound has acknowledged that PI can be critical to a child's academic success, yet the education community still knows very little about the impact of such programmes, there is a need for education managers to contend with the conflicts which emanate from the engagement theory as these are inevitable. It is so because consumers expect high quality services all the time and the public sector, crippled by unavailability of resources, has a problem of producing these services.

Thus, the aim of this paper is to identify the attitudes of both parents and education managers towards PI and demonstrate how these affect the TQM management process in the en-

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gagement theory as alternative ways of tapping parental potentials are sought.

Background to the Research

The mammoth task of placing education within the fundamental rights of individual citizens, made the Zimbabwean government adopt a new paradigm shift in the management arena (Zvobgo 2004). Community participation was seen as a prescription to the financial challenges public schools were facing by then. In that view statutes to do with PI had to be put in place so that the anticipated type of engagement was within the law. The statutory instrument enacted for this purpose is very clear on the school managers' and school governors' partnership. Although the major reason advanced for this kind of engagement was that parents either by accident or design are involved in the child's learning process through paying fees, fund raising activities, infrastructural development, purchasing uniforms and assisting learners in homework (The Education Act 1987). However, the realities on the ground with time revealed that the government's purse was being consumed by the operational costs incurred. In that view the free compulsory education policy pronounced at independence (ZANU PF 1980) was no longer sustainable. Tuition fees had to be introduced in the majority of Black dominated schools although in rural ones it remained free. However, in the latter schools, despite this exemption, they still paid levies agreed upon at a meeting by consensus by the majority of parents present. For White dominated schools, converted to community schools (The Education Act 1979), although far ahead in terms of curriculum offered and PI programmes in place, the new dispensation was an effort by Government of trying to control and politicise the provision of education (Zvobgo 2004). These are some of the attitudinal sentiments education managers had to contend with when parents were brought on board by the new dispensation.

However, schools being dynamic institutions and wanting to move with the global competitive edge of the time took this paradigm shift head on. Since government had no adequate resources to be a sole provider of education, PI programmes were mandatory in public schools. In this light innovative education managers, after numerous workshops manned by the Educa-

tion Ministry, attempted to adopt the TQM framework which is a management philosophy and strategy designed to involve all members of the organisation in the processing and responsibility for producing quality products and services (Lestrade 2014). The focus was the parent and re-engineering strategies adopted were a departure from Taylor's Scientific School of Thought which was characterised by top-down mandates (Harris 2014). Informed by such literature on PI and at the same time acknowledging an avalanche of benefits which accrue to various stakeholders, education managers with this kind of mind set had to engage parents at all cost amid the negative attitudes highlighted in this paper.

Total Quality Management: A Theoretical Overview

TQM is a management philosophy which seeks to improve the internal processes of an organisation and increase customer satisfaction. When it is properly implemented it leads to decreased costs related to corrective or preventative maintenance, better performance and an increased number of happy and loyal customers (Harris 2014). In that way, it strives for zero defects. Quality controls and audits which are associated with Taylorism achieved through a rigorous inspection regime are viewed as boring and inaccurate quality guidelines as they centre on compliance (Lestrade 2014). Compliance from a quality perspective is viewed as a 'quick fix' to challenges bedevilling institutions, yet real quality needs to be a long term investment designed to find long term success (Harris 2014). In that view, this paradigm shift calls for proactive managers and autonomous subordinates who consistently engage for the purposing of ameliorating educational goals (Mehrotra 2009), hence this study.

Inspired by the above revolutionary thinking of the 1980's, many schools world over and Zimbabwe included, reformed their educational practices by the adoption of a TQM model. It was seen to be embracing synergistic relationships which suggest that performance and production are enhanced by pooling the talents and experiences of all stakeholders through a process of continuous improvement, either personally or collectively by introspection (Mehrotra 2009). Training and staff development and the

on-going process of in-built evaluation mechanisms which had the intention of removing the flawed processes without apportioning blame on any individual are the mainstay of this model. To that end, leadership had to work together with their subordinates so that the latter would achieve their best (Lestrade 2014). Such an organisational culture and climate would allow individuals to excel at the same time making institutions effective and efficient.

An aggregate of the above principles require that all stakeholders have a shared vision which is community driven as attempts are made to achieve competitive performance. The education manager with a TQM orientation and seeks to provide holistic education should endeavour to equip the child with the appropriate technology in this rapidly changing world in pursuit of excellence (Heystek 2006). The assumption here is that partnerships lead to collective endeavours. Such a thrust rationalises the use of resources and sparks off innovative ways of doing things (Mehrotra 2009). In that light, education managers need to be enterprising. It is against this background of events that although many success stories have been reported in the first world countries on PI, PI in Zimbabwean schools within a TQM framework is little known. Above all, increased citizen participation in education as advocated for in this paper is an aspect of decentralisation of education management. It is in that light therefore, that although the theoretical norms are educationally sound, this paper attempts to give an African perspective within a Zimbabwean context.

Parental Attitudes towards Involvement with Education

Extensive researches conducted in the USA have revealed that parents of high-achievers do not want to be involved in the education of their children (Berger 2007). Consistent with this view are the working-class parents who are less likely to attend to school events as compared to their middle-class counterparts. In both instances, parents claim that they do not have time to do so (Gu 2008). Although some scholars seem to agree with the time constraints which usually lead to disengagement by some working-class parents, they also criticise the cultural set up in schools which they think favours higher-socio-economic parents as compared to the lower ones.

Education managers with no background information to non-involvement may misconstrue this to mean that such parents neither care nor value the education of their children. Such careless remarks may have a ripple effect on the attitudes of parents towards PI. Education managers in this context need to be reminded that non-involvement may be caused by lack of resources such as transport, or school events could be coinciding with the parents' busy schedules which need to be taken care of if all parents are to be brought on board (Knopf and Swick 2006).

Similarly, some parents may not participate in school functions and parental programmes because of their past experiences with the school set up. With some, according to Long (2007), uncertainty and insecurity of subject matter and a dearth of educational materials in the home could be one of the deterrents to them reinforcing school instruction at home, while others could be traumatised by their bad experiences at school with their teachers. For instance, if their past school experiences were pleasant and successful, they are likely to enjoy visiting the school again, but if their experiences were filled with failures and disappointment, whether real or imagined, the thought of school to them is depressing. The latter group of parents will feel intimidated and uncomfortable due to their limited educational background (Long 2007). Such parents will even remain silent and alienated when it comes to parental programmes as they think that their inputs at conferences will not be considered (Berger 2007). They are also the same parents who will go further and complain that they are being sidelined and never consulted when important issues regarding their child's schooling and the family-teacher-relationship are discussed; yet in reality, they feel disempowered by the prevailing status quo. Parents of this nature would need a supportive environment and should be provided with assistance in order to navigate the intricacies of a school (Glanz 2006).

Mini-wars are likely to rage on in the school grounds caused by the adoption of this new dispensation. In that light, disengaged parents do not take kindly when they are called upon by school authorities to solve their children's disciplinary problems (Joshi et al. 2005). They argue that it is the responsibility of teachers and education managers to manage problematic be-

haviour independently, because for them that is what they are paid for. They further claim that if the child's behaviour is disruptive at school, it is the teacher's responsibility to manage that kind of situation and they will only take care of it if it arises at home. It is also such parents who will claim that they are already involved in the education of their children when they engage in parenting skills by virtue of being parents. To them, providing basic needs for the children and instilling discipline at home is some form of engagement and schools can augment the process by teaching the learners (Galloway 2006).

Apart from that, research evidence has also revealed that some of these parents claim that they are involved when they drop their children at school and pick them up at the end of the day without even having an informal discussion with their teachers. Galloway (2006) refers to such parents as 'dry-cleaner' ones who drop off their children expecting them to be 'cleaned up' by the time they are picked up after school. The most arrogant ones do not even bother to come out of their cars and they neither know the education manager of their school nor the teacher of their child (Long 2007). A sorry state of affairs in as far as school-family relationships are concerned, which needs prompt addressing by education managers.

On a positive note, there are parents who according to Knopf and Swick (2006), claim that it is their social responsibility and constitutional right to be involved in school activities by actually being present. However, others believe that high visibility in the school is a signal of disrespect or lack of confidence in their children's teachers. Teachers on the other hand are in league with the latter group but at loggerheads with the former one. In such situations, cases of parents being meddlesome in the teacher's professional responsibilities are chronicled. Such parents become so powerful such that they influence staffing at schools, the reassigning of a non-performing teacher and even go to that extent of suggesting the kind of curriculum to be adhered to (Gaetano 2007). They sometimes also go further to suggest the methodology to be used by teachers and the tests to be administered to their children. Although the thrust may be controversial, the TQM approach focuses on the customer who is the parent and acts on behalf of his/her child at an elementary level. TQM theorists who subscribe to this thought

argue that the customer must be listened to and his/her views should be accommodated, both in the formal mechanisms of the school choice and in the approaches to management within the school.

In extreme cases the so called 'meddlesome parents' suggest that their children be included in a gifted programme even if they do not merit such preference. School authorities, fatigued by these unsolicited interventions and unwarranted pressures succumb to such demands by making such pupils attend these noble programmes as guest pupils (Gaetano 2007). Little wonder that, education managers facing such a dilemma, develop apathy towards parental programmes. In most cases of this nature, literature reveals that parents and education managers will be pulling in different directions without necessarily being aware of the consequences of such behaviours (Joshi et al. 2005:12). At the centre of such controversy is the child who will be receiving one set of conflicting messages at home and at school (Joshi et al. 2005). The onus in this respect is incumbent on the education manager, who should reconcile these tone contradictions for the benefit of the child in a tactful and diplomatic manner (Gaetano 2007) as both parties have a wealth of experience to offer to the educative enterprise for the benefit of the learners.

Equally important in this respect, are the negative relationships between parents and teachers which if not checked can be disastrous and chaotic. Teachers informed by Piaget's pedagogical theories of acquisition of knowledge (Straw 2006) may advise that a particular child repeat a grade. Parents who lack this knowhow may perceive this action as a sign of educational failure and embarrassment on their part, while teachers informed by the learning theories may consider it as late maturity (Straw 2006). However, upper-middle-class families may consider this kind of approach as normal; whereas, the working-class families may be stressed up by such a development. It becomes worse when teachers view such backwardness as hereditary (Gaetano 2007). When such a potential situation for conflict is not well handled by the education manager, it can dampen the attitudes of parents to the detriment of their children's education. The situation is aggravated when both parent and teacher/education manager are not knowledgeable in the area of PI (Hung 2007). Worse than that is when education managers are of a lower economic-

status than the complaining parent (Straw 2006). Parents have a tendency of shunning such school authorities and despising them.

Education Managers' Attitudes towards Parental Involvement

Similarly, the already overburdened and fatigued education managers due to burnout find PI programmes equally taxing and limited by time constraints (Deplanty et al. 2007). They do not understand how paraprofessionals such as parents with limited educational background can be brought on board in issues of academic importance such as assisting in homework and skill acquisition (Berger 2007). Instead, they continue to see parents as problematic and an excess baggage schools can discard. This notion is corroborated by Berger's (2007) research which revealed that education managers were concerned by parents who used the 'grapevine' to peddle falsehoods which caused conflicts in schools. Finally, such education managers played the role of gate keepers and insulated their institutions by structuring them in such a way that they were not approachable (Gu 2008).

In addition to that, education managers make the life of illiterate parents unbearable by using professional jargon when communicating with them (Berger 2007). They go further to demand a 'professional-client relationship' with both parents and children. They view education as a round-the-clock experience in which parents can and should play a role in supplementing the classroom experience by preparing children for school, reinforcing the curriculum and attending to school events. Although, they seem to be acknowledging the interdependence which exists between the home and school, not the separation, such education managers prefer parents to be involved in peripheral issues of the curriculum such as fund raising activities, as compared to curriculum implementation (Gu 2008). In the process parents feel that education managers are marginalising them by virtue of their superior qualifications (Heystek 2006). Their lack of appropriate knowledge and expertise to provide appropriate learning activities for their children even compromises their existence in schools. In such a scenario, education managers therefore, believe that such parents only become vocal when there is an academic crisis involving their own child or when school funds

have been misappropriated by the school authorities (Galloway 2006), a ticking-time bomb administrators need to be wary of. These are some of the classical views which education managers should tolerate as they try to globalise the school community. In this context, involving parents in power-sharing activities and re-channelling their energies towards school goals, would level the educational field to a certain extent (Long 2007).

Besides that, education managers need to be wary of the social status of parents which may impact heavily on the perceptions of the classroom practitioner as they interact with the learners. Teachers in this context were found to discriminate interactions with their learners according to status. To a certain extent, this kind of thought somehow influenced the grouping of learners and the selection of methodology to be used. Some of these teachers went further to conclude that uncaring and negligent parents in their view were those who turned over to them the whole responsibility of educating their children (Berger 2007). Instead, they preferred those who played an active role in preparing children for school such as assisting them in homework and those who reinforced the curriculum at home (Gaetano 2007). They further argued that the deliberate ploy by parents to dump their children at school and forget about them until dismissal time, made them appear as if they were social workers not educators, a label they disliked (Berger 2007).

The teacher's plight was worsened by those parents who viewed teaching as a job which takes place during the week at specified times and the weekend was for resting, let alone a holiday (Gaetano 2007), hence the dire need of in-service workshops to address the predicament if partnership relationships are to be enhanced (Gu 2008). This notion is supported by Berger (2007), who claims that some parents with low-occupational and education status seem to be challenged by the fact that teachers are supposed to be their equals in the engagement process. The worst culprits are those who had distrust and fear of the school system that had failed them so badly in their own childhood. These negative perceptions by parents made them view schools as alien worlds and left everything to happen in the hands of teachers (Gu 2008). In this view, both formal and informal interactions need to be encouraged by

education managers so as to facilitate PI programmes. While the above referred to attitudes of both parents and education managers may be true to schools in the United States and other developed countries, this empirical research tries to confirm or reject the existence of such attitudes in Bulawayo Metropolitan Province in particular and Zimbabwean schools in general, as citizen participation is sought. In that manner, an African perspective of PI will be consolidated.

METHODOLOGY

In this paper the researcher sought to answer the question: What are the attitudes of school governors and education managers towards the management of PI programmes within the TQM framework in Zimbabwean Schools in general and Bulawayo Metropolitan Province in particular? Issues raised in this regard were the attitudes of both school governors and education managers towards PI and the ideal management style to be adopted.

To achieve the objective of this research, a survey design entailing thirty-three pencil and paper questionnaire items were administered to school governors and education managers who were conveniently sampled using the non-probability sampling technique due to the limited target population. Thirteen of these questionnaire items probed the attitudes of school governors and education managers giving a combined population of ninety-eight. Although research options of various aspects were worded somewhat differently within each group of questionnaire items, the questionnaire statements were all rated by means of a three-point Likert scale with options ranging from negative (disagree), to neutral (undecided), to positive (agree).

The fixed responses were meant to enhance the response rate of the respondents so as to facilitate the processing of the data collected. The questionnaire prototypes were pilot tested and modified accordingly to minimise ambiguity and enhance clarity.

For this study, the selected names of fifty-seven schools were enlisted in a register which was later used to distribute questionnaires to respondents within the jurisdiction of the Bulawayo Metropolitan Province and to collect them at a suggested date. Neither the respondents nor the schools used for this research were iden-

tified by name to ensure confidentiality and anonymity of data gathered. Descriptive statistics and frequency tables were used to describe each questionnaire statement included within each aspect as it was nominal in nature.

Respondents

Fifty-one and forty-seven sampled education managers' and school governors' questionnaires respectively, were included in the statistical analysis, thus resulting in a response rate of 93% and 85% apiece. Those not used were either incomplete or not returned at all despite several follow ups. Analysis of the data was undertaken by the statistician of the Research Support Unit of the Information and Communication Technology Centre (ICT) at the University of South Africa. The Statistical Analysis System software package (SAS, version 9.1) was used in the analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Attitudes of School Governors and Education Managers towards P1

Questions 1-13 of the questionnaire captured the respondents' attitudes towards PI. The frequency distribution of the various attitudinal variables is presented in Table 1.

Table 1 reveals that although the majority of the respondents indicated that parents assist their children in homework (98.98%), they contradicted themselves when they later said that parents lacked the much needed expertise to be informed assistants (65.30%), thus confirming the education managers' perceptions on thus attribute. With the absence of workshops tailored for this purpose, it therefore implies that whatever amount of assistance is taking place in these schools is haphazard, more so that, most of it is by invitation by the school authorities (Berger 2007). In that light, some parents may view homework as an intrusion in the privacy of their homes putting both parent and learner at perpetual loggerheads.

Encouraging though, was that both respondents do not perceive participation in school activities as time consuming (75.51%) which creates an enabling environment for engagement. Moreover, there appears to exist a good rapport

Table 1: Attitudes of school governors and education managers towards P1

No.	Parental involvement attitude	Agreement rating						Total
		Frequency			Percent			N=98
		D	U	A	D	U	A	
01	School participation waste of time	74	4	20	75.51	4.09	20.40	100
02	Participates because child performs well	40	9	49	40.81	9.19	50.00	100
03	Caring parents attend school events	22	8	68	22.45	8.16	69.39	100
04	Parents lack expertise in homework	21	13	64	21.43	13.27	65.30	100
05	Status is favoured	72	10	16	73.47	10.20	16.33	100
06	Parents who performed well visit the school	21	6	71	21.43	6.12	72.45	100
07	Bad experiences discourage involvement	29	21	48	29.59	21.43	48.98	100
08	Parents assist in homework	0	1	97	0.00	1.02	98.98	100
09	Illiterate parents not intimidated	54	25	19	55.10	25.51	19.39	100
10	Teaching a teacher's job	33	13	52	33.67	13.27	53.06	100
11	Schools treated as social welfare	61	8	29	62.25	8.16	29.59	100
12	SDCs cause conflicts	72	9	17	73.47	9.18	17.35	100
13	Parents and head have good rapport	35	7	56	35.71	7.14	57.14	100

between the parents and education managers in public schools investigated (57.14%) as parental bodies are not viewed as a source of conflict (73.47%) at all. Even when it comes to the actual teaching itself, decisions on methodology and subject matter are not influenced by status (73.47%). Little wonder that illiterate parents interact easily with education managers despite the differences in academic qualifications (55.10%). While this latter finding would seem to be rejecting literature reviewed on this attribute, managers should bear with those who do not engage easily. It might be due to material deprivation and lower social status as revealed in a research conducted by Berger (2007).

Although research findings confirm that parents who attend to school events could be the most caring ones (69.39%), this observation needs to be treated with caution if organisational conflict is to be averted. With some underprivileged parents, transport blues may be prohibitive, whereas, the busiest ones may be restricted by tight work schedules. A scenario which needed further probing using an interview approach.

What is discouraging though in this situation is that parents view teaching as a job done by teachers (53.06%), let alone those who are possessed with school phobia (48.98% agreed). This kind of mindset is destructive and needs to be attended to promptly. Solace can be derived from the fact that parents do not treat schools as social welfare organisations (62.25%), a label education managers dislike.

The conclusion emanating from this discourse is that organisational conflicts are minimal and school/community relationships are sound, as corroborated by the Provincial Education Director, who, when acknowledging the excellent 2013 Grade 7 results remarked that: "This is due to hard work by all stakeholders despite the economic hardships Zimbabwe is facing." (Mupandemo 2014). However, the parents' claim that they are able to reinforce curriculum at home through homework when such expertise lacks, calls for well-constituted orientation workshops to deal with all those aspects which negate a genuine alliance between parents and education managers as demanded by the TQM philosophy.

The Management Style Associated with Parental Involvement Programmes

Questions 14-33 sought to investigate the perceptions of both education managers and school governors on the appropriate management style between the two parties in their engagement experiences. The findings are presented in Table 2.

The data in Table 2 reveals that the guiding star of the management activities of schools in this province are based on the principle of excellence (90.82%) and their (schools') performances are benchmarked against those which are excelling as they engage in comprehensive reforms since the world has become a global village thus positively confirming some of the tenets of the

Table 2: Perceptions on the management style associated with PI programmes

		Style (Perception rating)						Total N=98
	Aspects of management style	Frequency			Percent			
No.	Frequency table	D	U	A	D	U	A	
14	Parental ideals incorporated	13	10	75	13.27	10.20	76.53	100
15	Opinions accommodated	10	8	80	10.21	8.16	81.63	100
16	Stakeholder's view considered	7	6	85	7.14	6.12	86.74	100
17	Get value for money	17	14	67	17.35	14.29	68.36	100
18	Failure of SDC projects a learning process	26	17	55	26.53	17.35	56.12	100
19	SDC and Heads monitor PI	13	8	77	13.27	8.16	78.57	100
20	Feedback is used to modify programmes	4	6	88	4.08	6.12	89.80	100
21	Parents viewed as forces of change	10	14	74	10.21	14.29	75.50	100
22	Both evaluate SDC programmes	8	7	83	8.16	7.14	84.70	100
23	Head consults SDCs first	45	5	48	45.92	5.10	48.98	100
24	Parents consulted on non-academic issues	31	9	58	31.63	9.18	59.19	100
25	Excellence, our guiding principle	4	5	89	4.08	5.10	90.82	100
26	Success, a collective responsibility	3	2	93	3.06	2.04	94.90	100
27	Parents fund educational resources	9	4	85	9.18	4.08	86.74	100
28	Parental body is monitored by Head	10	8	80	10.20	8.16	81.64	100
29	Parents visits viewed as fault-finding	82	9	7	83.68	9.18	7.14	100
30	Involved in conceiving vision and mission	37	27	34	37.76	27.55	34.69	100
31	Parents viewed as interested parties	4	5	89	4.08	5.10	90.82	100
32	Measure performance against other schools	3	2	93	3.06	2.04	94.90	100
33	No interference in school management	17	9	72	17.35	9.18	73.47	100

TQM movement as advanced in this paper. Success in this respect is viewed collectively (94.90%) and the inputs of various stakeholders are taken seriously (86.74%) and expectations as well (76.53%). Inspiring in this respect is the fact that opinions of parents are incorporated in the overall school plans (81.63%) and parents are also an interested party (90.82%), although education managers were not sure whether they consulted parents first or not before implementation of PI programmes (48.98% agreed), a situation which requires further probing.

Contrary to Swap's Partnership Model (Glanz 2006) which demands that participants be involved in the conception of both the vision and mission statement, respondents in this study were divided (34.69% agreed), although both were academically and professionally sound to do so. These are at the centre of any school business and constitute a TQM philosophy. However, a cross-check with their earlier observation when they claimed that their inputs were accommodated in the school plans triggers more questions than answers.

Of noteworthy in this scenario is the financial input parents make in the procurement of educational resources (86.74%), the collective evaluation (84.70%) and monitoring (78.57%) of SDC programmes, although for accountability sake, education managers further monitor the parental body constantly (81.64%) individually. In line with the never-ending improvement tenet embedded in the TQM framework, feedback from parents on how programmes fare is used to modify existing programmes (89.80%). Organisational conflict is further averted as parents' visits are not viewed as fault-finding (83.68%) nor meddlesome (73.47%), but as change-agents (75.50%). In that light, failure of projects is viewed as a learning process (56.12%) and parents do not feel that they are short-changed (68.36%) by the system they fund dearly. Disappointing though is the revelation that education managers consult parents on non-academic issues (59.19%) only, implying that a separation of functions exists as advocated for by Swap's Protective Model (Glanz 2006).

What the above data seems to be suggesting here is that Zimbabwean public schools in this province are quality conscious in line with the international trends of the moment and are operating within the dictates of the TQM initiative intimated in this paper as evidenced in those attributes rated positively. The "naming and shaming" game of the past management regime seems not to be tolerated in these schools as success and failure are celebrated or condemned collectively and stakeholders' inputs are rated

highly, thus, making schools 'conflict-free zones.' However, there is need for parents to be consulted on academic issues and be trained in the formulation of the vision and mission statement as suggested by Comer's Model (Glanz 2006) if the current involvement phenomenon is not to be viewed as being cosmetic. Such a thrust may be achieved by putting in place deliberate intervention engagement strategies not relying on spontaneous activities parents engage in willingly (Gu 2008).

CONCLUSION

The general view derived from this empirical research is that public schools in Zimbabwe in general and Bulawayo Metropolitan Province in particular have a sound relationship with their communities as pedagogical issues are not influenced by the educational levels of parents as is the case in developed countries. Such an alliance if well cultivated, leads to well-resourced schools. Parents in Zimbabwean schools do not interfere with the selection of subject matter, methodology and staffing of teachers as is the practice in the USA. Their inputs are regarded highly, thus making schools conflict free zones. The existence of such a culture in schools makes both players celebrate success collectively and condemn failure in the same vein like their European counterparts, thus, implying that the TQM initiative advocated for in this study is 'alive and screaming' in Zimbabwean schools. Further to that, schools in this Province have adopted a global view of academic excellence bordering on the TQM philosophy. They are not satisfied with mediocre achievements as they continuously benchmark their success against those excelling with the hope of gaining a competitive edge against their rivals. It is this symbiotic relationship which exists between schools and communities, the continuous feedback system accommodated in this paradigm shift and the schools' desire to deliver the best educational menu to the public which compels educational institutions to embark on a quality crusade as dictated by the TQM School of Thought.

Of concern though is the parents' non-attendance to school events, non-involvement in academic issues and the formulation of the school vision and mission statement, implying that parents, either indirectly or directly, are mar-

ginalised - yet they are not aware of it. This could be due to the fact that the colonial education which the bulk of them received before independence was that of non-involvement in academic issues. Teachers were regarded by the populace as highly educated and their views were taken as gospel truths.

RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of the above findings, orientation workshops and seminars at both school level and provincial level would be ideal for all stakeholders if the colonial legacy inherited from the past regime is to be done away with. This grass root approach involving the "collaboration of minds" should be a guiding philosophy to futuristic parental engagement programmes if the African cultural view of associating all formal education with teachers, is to be eliminated.

Similarly, negative attitudes revealed by this research towards the engagement phenomenon should be addressed at such forums. In that way, a genuine alliance between the school and the parents would be nurtured, thus, getting things right for the first time.

In addition to that, proactive education managers need to adopt the TQM philosophy in their quest for quality as it is aligned to modern trends of this era and is receptive to change. Its attempt to bring all stakeholders on board based on collective efforts by the various players and shunning blame in the process, facilitates the tapping of latent skills embedded in them.

Finally, since the research was based on a quantitative research design and confined its findings to Bulawayo Metropolitan Province in Zimbabwe, there is need, to view these revelations within those parameters. It is therefore recommended that a similar research, consisting of a combination of both quantitative and qualitative approaches characterised with in-depth interview sessions be conducted to either authenticate or reject these findings.

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