

**PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN REDUCING LEARNER ABSENTEEISM
IN SELECTED PRIMARY SCHOOLS OF KAZUNGULA DISTRICT
IN THE SOUTHERN PROVINCE OF ZAMBIA**

**BY
PEGGY MUYABI**

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Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Award of the Degree of
Master of Education in Sociology of Education.**

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DECLARATION

I, **PEGGY MUYABI**, do hereby declare that this dissertation is my original work and has not been submitted previously by another person to the University of Zambia or any other Institution for the award of an academic qualification. The literature used in this research both published and not published has been acknowledged accordingly.

Signature..... Date.....

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

This dissertation of **PEGGY MUYABI** has been approved as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the Master of Education Degree in Sociology of Education by the University of Zambia.

Examiner 1

Name:

Signature: Date:

Examiner 2

Name:

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Examiner 3

Name:

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ABSTRACT

Parental involvement is an important component of children's early school success and is recognized as a significant ingredient in reducing learner absenteeism and improving the quality of children's education. To this effect, the aim of the study was to investigate the effects of parental involvement in reducing learner absenteeism in selected primary schools of Kazungula District. The objectives were to: establish ways through which parents are involved in reducing learner absenteeism, explore the benefits of parental involvement in reducing learner absenteeism, ascertain challenges that limit parental involvement in reducing learner absenteeism and establish interventions put in place by schools to improve parental involvement in reducing learner absenteeism in three selected primary schools. A sample of 15 learners, 15 parents, 03 grade teachers and 03 head teachers were purposively drawn from three selected primary schools in Kazungula district. A descriptive research design was employed for the study. Data was collected through face-to-face interviews and focus group discussions. The data was analyzed through thematic analysis which revealed emerging themes from the study.

The findings of the study revealed that there was parental involvement in the sampled primary schools as parents participated in PTA meetings, helping children with homework, paying school fees, attending open days, volunteering at school, providing school requirements, and food. With regard to the benefits of parental involvement in reducing learner absenteeism, the study revealed that parental involvement improved school attendance, brought about understanding of the importance of attendance and relieved teachers of duties that could be performed by parents. It also increased parent contact with school, made parents become more supportive of schools and improved positive behaviour among learners.

The study established that major barriers standing in the way of parental involvement as revealed by the study were lack of communication, busy schedules among parent, and non-parent invitation to involvement. Other barriers included long distance to school, poor relationships between schools, and poverty among parents. To address the barriers, schools put in place measures such as improving communication between home and school, becoming more welcoming to parents, and encouraging parents to serve in school committees. Other were inviting parent to volunteer in school activities and attend general meetings.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my late mother Salome Siabeenzu, who was my hero and source of inspiration.

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I would like to acknowledge the almighty God for giving me the strength, good health and wisdom during the period of study. I thank him for the many blessings on me without which this work would not have been a success.

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Many thanks to Kazungula DEBS for the permission to come for studies and allowing me to conduct research in schools in his District. I am also thankful to the Head teachers and teachers of schools where this research was conducted for working tirelessly to help me in the data collection process. To my student colleagues, thank you for the encouragement, support and sharing of information during dissertation writing.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

COPYRIGHT	i
DECLARATION	ii
CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL	iii
ABSTRACT	iv
DEDICATION	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	vi
LIST OF FIGURES	x
LIST OF APPENDICES	xi
ACRONYMS	xii
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Overview	1
1.2 Background	1
1.3 Statement of the Problem	3
1.4 Purpose of the Study	3
1.5 Research Objectives	3
1.6 Research Questions	3
1.7 Significance of the Study	4
1.8 Theoretical Foundation	4
1.9 Limitations of the Study	8
1.10 Delimitation of the Study	8
1.12 Summary	9
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	10
2.1 Overview	10
2.2 Ways Through which Parents are Involved in Reducing Learner Absenteeism	10

2.3 Benefits of Parental Involvement in Reducing Learner Absenteeism	13
2.4 Challenges Limiting Parental Involvement	17
2.5 Interventions Put in Place by Schools to Improve Parental Involvement	22
2.5 Summary of the Literature Review	27
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY	28
3.1 Overview.....	28
3.2 Research Design.....	28
3.2 Target Population of the Study	29
3.3 Sample size	29
3.4. Sampling Techniques	29
3.5 Research Instruments.....	30
3.5.1 Semi-Structured Interview Guide.....	30
3.5.2 Focus Group Discussion	30
3.7 Data Analysis	32
3.6 Reliability and Validity.....	32
3.9 Ethical consideration	33
3.10 Summary.....	33
CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS	34
4.1 Overview.....	34
4.3 Research Findings	34
Ways Through which Parents are Involved in Reducing Learner Absenteeism?.....	35
4.5 Benefits of Parental Involvement in Reducing Learner Absenteeism	39
4.6 Challenges that limit parental involvement in reducing learner absenteeism	41
4.7 Measures put in Place by Schools to Improve Parental Involvement in Reducing Learner Absenteeism in Primary Schools.....	43

4.8 Summary.....	45
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS.....	46
5.1 Overview.....	46
5.2. Ways Through which Parents are Involved in Reducing Learner Absenteeism.....	46
5.3 Benefits of Parental Involvement in Reducing Learner Absenteeism	51
5.4 Challenges that Limit Parental Involvement in Reducing Learner Absenteeism	56
5.4.1 Busy Schedules among Parents.....	56
5.4 Interventional Measures put in Place by Schools to Improve Parental Involvement Reducing Learner Absenteeism.....	59
5.5 Summary.....	63
CHAPTER SIX: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	64
6.2 Summary.....	64
6.3 Recommendations	66
6.4 Areas for Further Research	66
REFERENCES	67
APPENDICES	74

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Overlapping spheres of influence of family, school, and community on children's learning. External structure.....	6
Figure2: Overlapping spheres of influence of family, school, and community on children's learning. Internal structure.....	7

LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX A:	Consent Form for Participants.....	73
APPENDIX B:	Interview Schedule for Head Teachers/ Grade Teachers	75
APPENDIX C:	Parents' Interview Schedule.....	76
APPENDIX D:	Focused Group Discussion for Learners.....	78

ACRONYMS

CPD	Continuing Professional Development
DEBS	District Education Board Secretary
EFA	Education for All
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
MOE	Ministry of Education
PTA	Parent Teacher Association
UNZA	University of Zambia

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

This chapter presents the background to the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, objectives, and research questions. The significance of the study, theoretical framework, delimitation, limitations, and operational definitions of terms are also elaborated.

1.2 Background

Attempts to enhance parental involvement in education occupy educators across the world'. Al Sumaiti (2012) Research has consistently shown that the role of parents in education has become one of the crucial issues in educational policy and has in the recent past become a major educational issue. Attendance issues which are a predictor of many school problems are not only a school, but community problems as well. Learners are not only part of the school community, but the community outside the school grounds as well. Since schools do not exist in isolation, but are integral parts of the communities surrounding them, there is need to have strong parent and community collaboration (Smink, 2005).

Weinberg (1992) as cited in Sheldon (2007) observed that families are now being recognized as having important influence on learners' attendance and a resource for decreasing learner absenteeism. When educators make high-quality family and community involvement part of their overall school improvement strategy, students are more likely to attend school and there is an increase in their chances of succeeding academically. Additionally, children attend school regularly when parents are willing to work with school and are in agreement that they depend on each other to get children to school.

Henderson and Berla (1994) made an observation that it is not the income or social status of parents that determines the academic success of children through school attendance, but the ability of parents to become involved. Parents get involved with schools through a number of ways, such as; setting conducive home environment that supports learning, becoming involved in different activities at school, and in the community and expressing their expectations for education of their children.

Epstein and Sheldon (2002) asserts that a lot of parental involvement strategies have resulted in lower absenteeism regardless of the age of the child, the family's experience or situation

and parent education levels. Ongoing research equally shows that parental involvement not only reduce learner absenteeism, but also helps low income and minority children transcend the educational barriers, improves academic performance, improves behavior, and restores parents' confidence in their children's education. Learners whose parents or caregivers are involved with school are more likely to attend school regularly, less likely to engage in delinquent or destructive behavior and succeed academically (Sheldon, 2007).

As much as a lot of researchers associate parental involvement with a lot of benefits, a survey conducted by MetLife, (2005) found that parental involvement despite being an important component of every school continues to challenge educators and causing stress in their jobs. Many schools continue struggling to find best ways to communicate and work with parents but yet their efforts seem not to be successful. Liontos (1992) stated that parents still perceive barriers to getting involvement with school among them lack of time, lack of understanding of each other's communication styles, and teachers' misperceptions of parents' abilities. Limited family resources, tension in relationships between parents and teachers and teachers beliefs that parents didn't respect them are all cited as barriers to involvement.

In Zambia, the Ministry of Education realised the importance of parental involvement in education and made a pronouncement on the establishment of new and revitalised partnership between education providers, local communities and families (MOE, 1996). The policy document emphasises partnership to increase levels of access, participation in education, retention and completion of school among children. The Ministry of Education equally initiated the introduction of Parents-Teachers Associations (PTAs) to foster increased involvement of parents in school activities (GRZ, 1976).

However, PTAs through which strong working relationships can be built among parents, educators and schools to accomplish great things for children and ensure overall success in education continue to be problematic. A study by STEP-Up Zambia (2012) found that Community and parent participation through structures such as PTAs was nonexistent in some schools. In schools where PTAs were in existence, it was observed that not much was being done besides just having annual general meetings of PTAs.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Parental involvement is essential in reducing learner absenteeism and promoting good attendance because parents, ultimately, have the bottom-line responsibility for making sure their children get to school every day

In Zambia, parental involvement has been embraced through the current National Education Policy Document (MOE, 1996). In spite of the pronouncements and growing research on the importance of parental involvement and its social and academic benefits, learner absenteeism still appears rampant in some schools. Valley Districts such as Gweembe, Sinazongwe, Siavonga, and Kazungula still have high rates of learner absenteeism (STEP-Up Zambia, 2012). There are, however, many other factors that may be associated with learner absenteeism besides non-parental involvement, but are all subordinate to parental involvement in that they still require parents to intervene. Little seems to be known about the involvement of parents in reducing learner absenteeism in Kazungula. Therefore, this study aimed at investigating parental involvement in reducing learner absenteeism in selected primary schools in Kazungula District.

1.4 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to investigate the level of parental involvement in reducing learner absenteeism in three selected primary schools of Kazungula District.

1.5 Research Objectives

The study will be guided by the following objectives:

- i. To establish ways through which parents are involved in reducing learner absenteeism.
- ii. To explore the benefits of parental involvement in reducing learner absenteeism.
- iii. To ascertain challenges that limit parental involvement in reducing learner absenteeism.
- iv. To establish measures put in place by schools to improve parental involvement in reducing learner absenteeism.

1.6 Research Questions

- i. In what ways are parents involved in reducing learner absenteeism in selected primary schools in Kazungula District?

- ii. What are the benefits of parental involvement in reducing learner absenteeism in selected primary schools in Kazungula District?
- iii. What challenges limit parental involvement in reducing learner absenteeism in selected primary schools of Kazungula District?
- iv. What measures have schools put in place to improve parental involvement in reducing learner absenteeism in selected primary schools in of Kazungula District?

1.7 Significance of the Study

This study may help educators come up with strategies on how to get parents involved in reducing learner absenteeism in primary schools. The study may also add to already existing knowledge and literature on parental involvement in reducing learner absenteeism in primary schools. Furthermore, the findings of the study may add value to the existing literature, make recommendations and provide valuable information for further and future academic research because other researchers might build on the gaps and limitations of the current study.

1.8 Theoretical Foundation

This study used Epstein's School-Family-Community Partnership Model. The model redefines the relationship between schools, families, and communities as one of overlapping spheres of influence that share a concern about the success of the child (Epstein, 1995). The model being a framework for increasing parental participation in education recognises six types of involvement in education and encourages schools to develop activities that engage schools, families and communities within the six types. These include: parenting, communication, and volunteering. Others are learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community.

Figures 1 and 2 below illustrate how the external and internal models work.

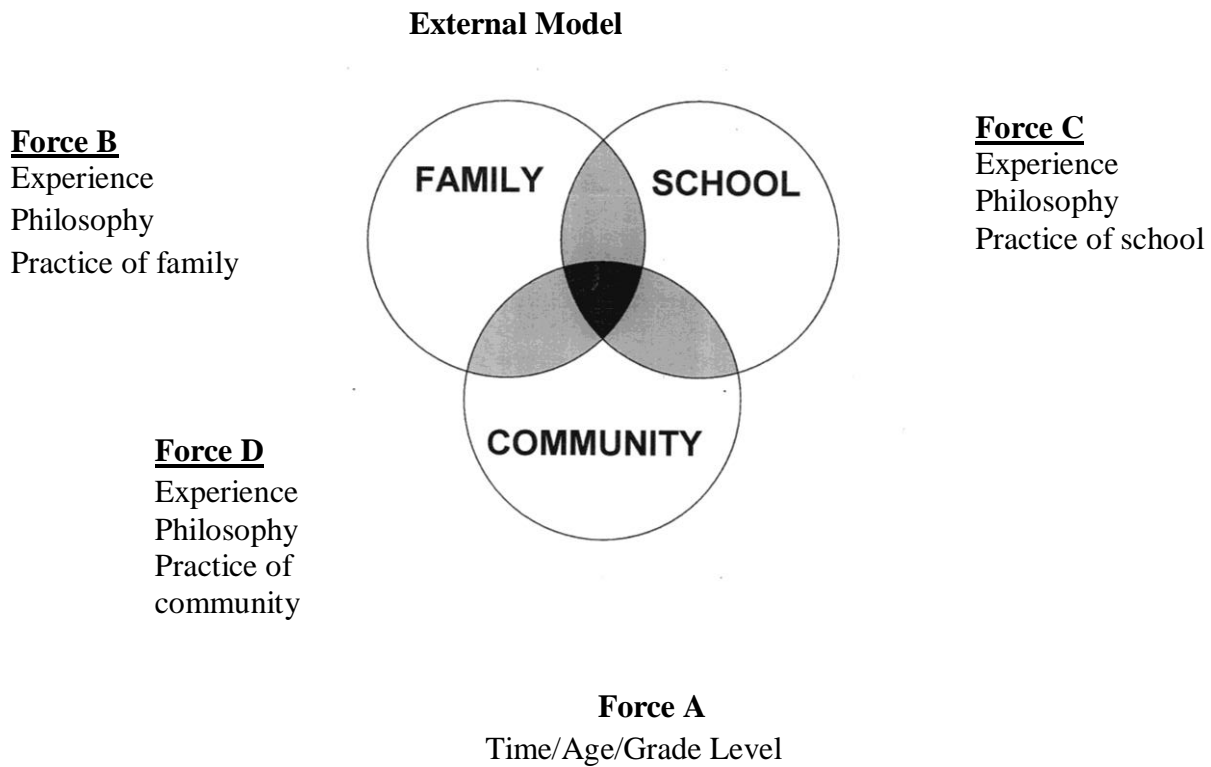


Figure: 1

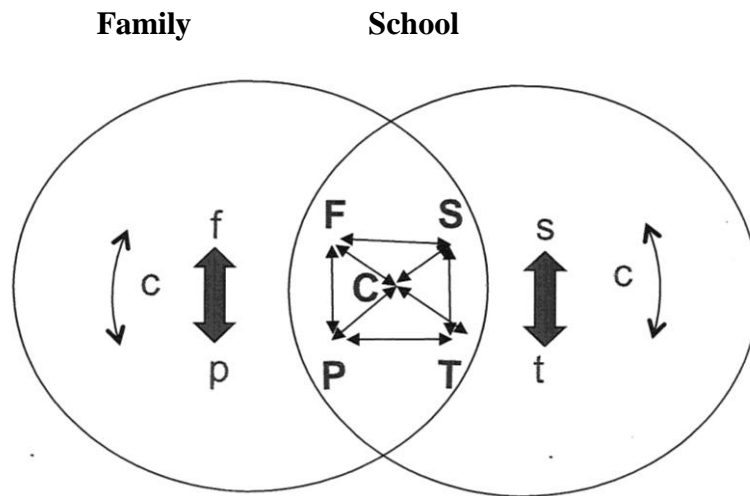
Theoretical Model

Overlapping Spheres of Influence of Family, School, and Community on Children's Learning

Figure 1 consists of spheres representing the family and school environments. The extent of overlap depends on three forces: A, B and C. Force A refers to changes in time, age, grade level and the historical influence on pupils, families and schools. Epstein 1987, P. 128).

Force B and Force C, on the other hand signify the experiences and demands placed on families and schools respectively, which can change the family-school partnership. For instance, when parents become interested and supportive of their Childs' schooling (Force B), there can be greater overlap of family and school spheres than would be expected on the average. When teachers make parents part of their regular teaching practices (Force C), they create greater overlap (Epstein, 2001). Force D on the other hand represents the community's influence on the family and school through its philosophy and practices.

Internal Structure



Intra-institutional interactions (lower case)

Inter-institutional interactions (upper case)

f/F =family

c/C =child

s/S = school

p/P =parent

t/T =teacher

Figure: 2

Theoretical Model

Overlapping Spheres of Influence of Family, School, and Community on Children's Learning

The partnership model consists of interpersonal relationships and patterns of influence that are most important in a child's education. The two types of interactions are: those within organizations, intra- institutional interactions and between organisations, inter-institutional interactions. In intra- institutional interactions, the teacher and a child interact within the school (s, c, t) and the child interacts with the parents within family (f, c, p). The interactions between organizations, (inter-institutional interactions) are interactions between the family

and school, (F, S) as well as parent and teacher (P, T). At the centre of the model is the child, who interacts with schools and the family. The child is both changed by the interactions and produces change in others (Epstein, 2001).

The primary shared interest of the Partnership Model is a caring concern that the child be successful. The model suggests that stakeholders' shared interests and influences can be promoted by the policies, actions, beliefs, attitudes, and values of the stakeholders. While the Partnership Model acknowledges that schools and families often do have more or less influence at certain ages, the model also suggests that the overlap between families and schools can be increased with concerted effort by one or more of the stakeholders (Epstein, 2001).

Epstein (2001) made an observation that one other important aspect of overlapping spheres of influence is that schools and families share similar characteristics. Epstein uses the terms "school-like families" and "family-like schools" to explain the behaviors of families and schools that believe in each other's importance. In school-like families, parents encourage, support and develop their children's academic skills. They may assist with homework or introduce educational activities as part of their regular family schedule. Similarly, they may use time in the same manner as the school or reward their children for accomplishments. These families teach their children to view school activities as part of the normal and natural rhythm of everyday life. Family-like schools, in a similar manner, take on the attitudes and characteristics of a caring family. Like families, they may individualize attention to meet the unique needs of each child.

Epstein's Model was selected for the current study because it is purely qualitative in nature and relied on the views of respondents. The study was anchored on this theory to determine whether there was parental involvement in selected primary schools. The involvement of parents in reducing learner absenteeism was measured based on the implementation of the six types of involved which include parenting, communication, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making and collaborating with the community. The study is in line with the concept of the theory used in that they are both about sharing a concern about the success of a child. Equally, the frame work help in understanding how schools can encourage greater parental and community involvement to get involved with school to reduce learner absenteeism

1.9 Limitations of the Study

This study investigated on parental involvement in reducing learner absenteeism in primary schools and was dependent on the three sampled primary schools. As such, the sample size was rather small to warrant generalisation of the findings. The other limitation was the inadequate literature on similar studies conducted in Zambia making the research to rely much on literature of studies conducted in other countries.

1.10 Delimitation of the Study

According to Orodho (2005), delimitations are choices made by the researcher describing the boundaries that have been set for the study. This study was confined to only three selected primary schools in Kazungula District and the focus was on parental involvement in reducing learner absenteeism. The choice of the study cite came as a result of rampant learner absenteeism as observed by STEP-UP Zambia (2012) which indicated that some Valley Districts still have high rates of learner absenteeism.

1.11 Definitions of Terms

Parental involvement: The participation of parents in every aspect of the education and development of children from birth to adulthood.

Parent: The significant caregiver, one who has primary responsibility for, and lives with the child. This can be a family member or guardian to the child.

Learner Absenteeism: A tendency by learners to be away from school without a good reason.

Learner: Somebody who studies at a school

School: An institution designed to provide the learning process and learning environment for the teaching of learners in different skills under the directions of teachers.

Teacher: One who helps others to acquire knowledge, competences and values

Head teacher: Someone in charge of a school, supervises teaching staff and overseeing day-today operations of a school

Educators: For this study, it refers to both grade teachers and head teachers

Community: A social unit or group of people that live in the same locality and share something in common such as norms, values or identity.

1.12 Summary

This chapter gave a background to the study on parental involvement in reducing learner absenteeism in selected primary schools. The chapter also presented a statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research objective and questions, significance of study, theoretical framework, delimitation, limitations and definitions of operational terms used in this study. The next chapter will review various literatures deemed relevant to the study based on Global, Africa and Zambian contexts.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Overview

This chapter deals with relevant literature documented on the effect of parental involvement in reducing learner absenteeism and will be reviewed in line with the research objectives for the study.

2.2 Ways Through which Parents are Involved in Reducing Learner Absenteeism

Parental involvement can take place at school, home or in the community away from children's homes. Emerson, Fear, Fox and Sanders (2012) described parental involvement as parents taking part in their children's education at school, at home, and in direct and indirect academic activities that benefit children. In all the categories of parental involvement, the level of involvement may vary among parents due to different factors such as education levels, economic status, social environment, and the family background.

McNeal (1999) contends that parental involvement encompasses three broad domains which are; 'parent-child relations, parent-school relation and parent-parent relationship'. In all the relations, parents invest their time with the expectation of yielding a tangible return such as better attendance, improved educational expectations and strengthened relationships with the school personnel and other parents in their community. Further, this idea was earlier supported by Epstein (1995) and Hara and Daniel (1998) who stated that parents that are involved with their children's education are those who consistently demonstrated good parenting skills by communicating with the school staff, volunteer their time in the school, or help their children learn at home. Equally, parents that took an active role in school related decision making, and also collaborated regularly with the school community are considered involved with schools.

Komakech (2015) in his study conducted in Uganda explored the effects of students' absenteeism on student academic and school performance. His study found that parental involvement took place when parents participated in any aspect of the education such as, being responsible for getting in touch with the school to get tips from teachers on how children could be motivated to attend school. The study further found that the educational success of children may not only be dependent on the quality of schools and what teachers can offer, but the extent parents are willing to get involved to carry out their responsibilities. This study was conducted at secondary schools and adopted descriptive cross-sectional survey design. A combination of stratified and purposive sampling was applied to

accommodate the variety of respondents from four districts. It is however, not known whether the findings of this study are applicable to the Zambian context, particularly Kazungula District, hence this study.

Sheldon and Epstein (2005) in their longitudinal study on thirty nine (39) schools on rates of chronic absenteeism and on specific family and community involvement activities found that parent-child discussion was one of the most predominant conceptualizations for parental involvement. Parents got involved by improving their children's attitudes and expectations through discussing school-related topics and the importance of attendance. The study further found that encouraging children to attend school, supporting their education and knowing their whereabouts were all ways through which parents were involved in reducing learner absenteeism. The study was however conducted in the USA and what is considered as ways of getting involved in reducing absenteeism there may be seen as mere disciplining of children in other contexts, hence the current study.

Kimu (2012) investigated parent involvement in public primary schools in Kenya with the target population of 141 primary schools and 1,307 teachers. The study found that participating or joining a parent-teacher group or several other school committees such as the Parent Teacher Association, the parent advisory committees, serving as school board members are all ways parents participate in the education of their children. The study further indicated that parents who join PTA committees have the opportunity to make personal decisions, take part in goal setting, development and implementation of programs and activities in the school. This study did not consider learners as vital participants bearing in mind that they are beneficiaries and major reason for parent involvement. The current study is therefore worth undertaking to get the learners views on the involvement of their parents in reducing learner absenteeism.

Cotton and Wikelund (1989) revealed that parental involvement can take the form of parents simply fulfilling duties of attending open days, monitoring children, and encouraging them to always attend school in order to succeed academically. Epstein (2010) adds that parental involvement could just mean reinforcing desirable, and sanction the undesirable behavior which is ultimately capable of affecting the child's attendance at school. It is the responsibilities of parents to prevent children from skipping school by not allowing them take time off school for minor problems. Equally, having interest in school matters by asking about school work and encouraging children to get involved in school activities are ways

through which parents get involved in reducing learner absenteeism (Attendance works, 2014).

Masseth (2007) conducted a study on parental involvement with homework and third grade student achievement in New York. The study found that setting a quiet place and time for children to do homework was a way of getting involved in ensuring that children succeed in their education and attend school. The study was Action research in nature and utilised home work and homework sheets as research instruments for the study. Contrary to this study, the current study is focused on parental involvement in reducing learner absenteeism and made use of Focus Group Discussions and interview guides to collect data from participants.

Rafiq, Fatima, Sohail, Saleem and Khan (2013) in their study whose aim was to explore the effects of parental involvement in the academic achievement of their children found that parental involvement meant checking the attendance of children in school, monitoring learner's activities, and checking how children were progressing academically. The study further indicated that maintaining supportive homes and making encouraging comments demonstrate that parents are interested in education and are supporting children's effort to progress in school. Their study was conducted in Pakistan and a total number of 150 students were sampled using simple random sampling and employed Survey questionnaires as a tool for data collection. In Zambia, it is not clear whether the involvement of parents is as revealed by their study. It is therefore imperative that the current study is conducted.

Parental involvement can be in form of parents monitoring out-of-school activities such as setting limits on television watching, reducing time of playing, and monitoring friends the children play with. Additionally, parents establishing daily routines for school work at home by keeping schedules for bed time and reinforce the importance of attendance by giving incentives to children. Yuguda (2014) conducted a study whose main aim was to discuss the role of parent participation in providing education quality in secondary schools in Nigeria. The study found that parents were involved in education when they encouraging children to stay on in education, helped them to be responsible in all aspects of life, and by just having positive general aspirations for them. This study however, did not use a theory, the gap the current one intends to fill.

According to Sheldom (2007), an integral part of the educational process is getting children to school safely every day. Parents that help children understand, and follow safety rules on

the road and get to school safely every day fulfill their responsibilities of getting involved in ensuring that their children attend school. The willingness and ability of parents to get children to school every day by whichever means of transport is a way of promoting attendance and reducing learner absenteeism.

The Family Health International Report (2002) as cited in Lishomwa (2013) revealed that parents get involved with school by actively contributing and supporting school projects such as putting up structures, improving sanitation, and acquiring new furniture for the school. Equally, visiting schools to meet their children's teachers as soon as the school year or term begins is an indication that parents want to help their children learn. Epstein (2010) stated that parents who are involved with school take part in school, family, and community involvement for the motivational and social strategies that improve student attendance. These include parenting, communication and volunteering at school. Others are learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community.

2.3 Benefits of Parental Involvement in Reducing Learner Absenteeism

Epstein (2001) state that decades of research point to numerous benefits of parent involvement in education, not only for students but also for parents, schools, and the wider community According to Clark (2005), parental involvement can yield desired results in reducing learner absenteeism which is among the key problems schools are facing today. Sheldon (2007) made an observation that parental involvement prevents learners from using harmful drugs and dropping out of school, which is usually predicted by learner absenteeism and low achievement rates.

Epstein and Sheldon (2004) conducted a study on getting students to school using family and community involvement to reduce chronic absenteeism in the U.S.A. Their study conducted in 29 primary and 10 secondary schools found that parental involvement could significantly decrease learner absenteeism and increase daily rates of attendance. In their study, data were drawn only from schools that were working to strengthen their programs of school, family, and community partnerships and that had set student attendance as a priority for their partnership efforts. However, this study was conducted in primary schools selected on the basis of having high rates of learner absenteeism, making the current study worthwhile.

Epstein and Sheldon (2002), in their study of 12 primary and 6 secondary schools on reducing learner absenteeism found that learner absenteeism is an indicator of disengagement

and precursor to dropping out which needed prevention. Therefore, improving parental involvement improved performance of learners and increase chances of learners completing school. The study also found that parents that were involved in reducing learner absenteeism gave their children self-confidence to navigate more easily when faced with challenges of growing up, such as bullying. The study further found that learners were more likely to pass their classes and go on to post-secondary education because of the support they receive from parents. The Edsource (2014) adds by saying that learners do not have behaviour problems, their schools report fewer discipline cases and they attach more importance to school when parents are involved with school in reducing learner absenteeism.

Henderson and Mapp (2002) postulate that when parents share similar goals with schools and have stronger ties; children do well in all aspects of school life. Children get higher grade point averages and scores on standardized tests or rating scales and enrol in more challenging academic programmes when they have the support of parents either at home or in school. Children of involved parents pass, earn good credits, have better social skills and easily adapt to school (Ames, Khoju, & Watkins, 2003). Parental involvement increases motivation, academic engagement and improves mathematics and science achievement as well as reducing retention rates and years some children may spend in special education classes (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002).

Epstein (1990) state that parental involvement enhances leadership skills and provides family services and support asserts that diffuses boundaries between parents and increases the flow of information from school to home and vice versa. Additionally, the collaboration between parents and teachers send a consistent message to children that education is important. Carter (2003) adds that learners have more positive attitudes toward school, consistently complete homework, and have higher enrolment and graduation rates in postsecondary education when parents are involved with the school.

Sheldon (2007) conducted a study on student attendance with School, family, and community partnership. The aim of the study was to investigate whether schools that implemented a school-wide program of school, family, and community partnerships demonstrated increased student attendance compared with similar schools that were not using this approach. The study was comparative in nature and made use of a quasi -experimental design to identify factors that help explain changes in average daily attendance from 1 year to the next. It was revealed that parental involvement equipped parents with greater knowledge of education

programs and how schools operated. The study indicated that involved parents gained knowledgeable of how to be more supportive of children, better understood their roles in partnership, and had greater confidence about ways to help children attend school. Besides that, they developed more positive views of teachers. However, the benefits of parental involvement may not be known in Kazungula District, hence this study may make it known.

In a study conducted by Agabrian (2007) on relationships between school and family to find out what perceptions adolescents had towards their parents' involvement in education and relationships between school and home. The study was conducted in Romania high schools with a sample size of 51 participants. The study found that parental involvement made educators accept and view families as partners not separate from the school. Further, the study revealed that a caring community formed around learners when parents participate in reducing learner absenteeism, improving school climate that supports attendance and learning. However, the study was conducted in Secondary schools, hence it is not known whether a study on Primary school may generate similar information on the benefits of parental involvement with school.

Tan and Goldberg (2009) examined parental involvement in school and educational activities at home in relation to elementary school-aged children's adjustment to school and grades. The study was conducted in 2 primary schools with a total sample of 91 families. The study revealed that parental involvement of either one or both parents was significantly more beneficial to children in that they enjoyed school more than when either of the parents was involved. Their study further reported that children whose parents were involved with school have lower levels of anxiety. Equally, the results of the findings support the position that high levels of parental involvement are positively related to children's adjustment to school and high quality school involvement of parents that may help them provide better assistance at home. This study employed convenience sampling and used post-hoc analyses. While this study unveiled good findings, It did not investigate parental involvement in reducing learner absenteeism, making this current study worthwhile.

Davis (2000) made an observation that parental involvement helped parents support and appreciate teachers, gain knowledge as well as understanding of what learners do after school and in their homes. Parental involvement also broadens teachers' perspective and increases their sensitivity on how to handle different parents with different circumstances. Edsource (2014) adds that when parents are involved, schools and teachers receive higher ratings from

parents and the community at large. This is because teachers who work at improving parental involvement are considered to be better teachers than those who remain cut off from the families of the learners.

Henderson and Mapp (2002) state that parental involvement improves parent-child relationship which lead to increased parent contact with the school. There is equally a better understanding of the child's development by parents and the educational processes involved in school. MacNeil and Patin (2000) as cited in Kimu (2012) state that parental involvement has the potential to motivate schools to function at higher levels by ensuring that teaching and learning practices are improved. It promotes equal opportunities for children from disadvantaged communities by lessening problems that they face in terms of educational, emotional and material deprivation because parents become better 'teachers' of their children at home.

Monadjem (2003) Fan and Williams (2010) as cited in Kimu (2012) made an observation that greater parental involvement lead to a reduced workload for teachers and a more positive attitude towards teaching. Sanders (2008) says that parental involvement is acknowledged as one of the strategies schools and governments are using to address challenges related to teaching and learning in the 21stcentaury. Parental involvement provides teachers with the required necessary support, build stronger schools, and accord parents an opportunity to participate in a more democratic manner that enhances students' success and well-being.

Davis (2000) revealed that parental involvement help schools acquire skills of working with parents, appreciate and give importance to what parents can offer in a partnership. The more parents are given a platform to give their opinions with regard to school matters, the more they are likely to support school policies and initiatives. The more parents get in contact with the school, the more they get to understand the difficulties associated with the running of schools and the more they get to support schools (Sheldon, 2005). Parents that are involved with schools become aware of available school policies on reducing learner absenteeism (Epstein & Sheldon, 2010). Kelly (1998) says parental involvement in the education of children is capable of helping schools come up with solutions to eliminate barriers to learning. Schools alone are not in a capacity to ensure that learners are accorded good education for everything that happens in school is dependent on whether parents who happen to be custodians of learners are in agreement.

Mubanga (2011) conducted a study which investigated the involvement of parents in their children's education in Zambian rural schools. A survey research design was employed for the study and 62 participants were selected using purposive and systematic random sampling. The study found that the involvement of parents in education has the potential to improve access to school requisites by all children regardless of their status. Further, the study revealed that parents that are in constant contact with school are always acquainted with information and understanding of the need and benefits of providing school requirements, as well as services available for parents that are not able to finance the education of children. The study however, was not specific on the area of involvement but studied education in general, hence the current study specifically on learner absenteeism.

2.4 Challenges Limiting Parental Involvement

Epstein (2005) made observations that involving parents in children's education seem not to be coordinated and is usually based on trial and error, rather than as an organized strategy to help learners succeed in education. While there appear to be many benefits of parental involvement in reducing learner absenteeism, some parents are unable to get involved due to barriers that originate either from the home environment of parents or those that are related to school policies and practices.

Horvatin (2011) reported that lack of time among working parents and those struggling to meet family needs is a potential limitation to parental involvement. Some parents have divided time and attention due to working long hours at one or more jobs, hence hectic daily lives do not leave them with time to be devoted to family involvement activities that can enhance school attendance. Carter (2003) adds that parents are sometimes too exhausted to get involved with school or wake up in the morning in time to get their children dressed, fed and taken to school because they are working night shifts and even have multiple jobs.

According to Van Velsor and Orozco (2007) observed that challenges such as poverty, single parenting and having multiple responsibilities make it hard for parents to get involved with the school. Parents living in poverty lack economic resources to communicate with the school. Chang and Romero (2008) add that poor families lack resources that make parental involvement and regular school attendance much easier. Barriers also include lack of reliable transportation, nutritious food and limited access to health care.

In a study conducted by Horvatin (2011) on perceived barriers to parental involvement in schools, it was revealed that parents living in poverty are less likely to participate in school events or their children's education than those living out of poverty. Meeting basic needs for the family take precedence over educational needs for parents that are living in poverty. As a result, such parents find it challenging getting involved in school matters. This study however, made recommendations that further research would yield other suggestions of how to get parents involved with the goal of increasing student academic success, hence the current study. Chavkin and Williams (2015) adds that:

“In order to be involved in their children's education, low-income parents must have some of their concerns met. These concerns often involve work schedules and training on how to be involved. In addition, there need to be support systems that not only allow low-income parents to meet with teachers and school officials but also provide low-income parents with the skills and the confidence to make a difference in their children's success at school (p.25)”.

Van Velsor and Orozco (2007) state that some parents that lack education may have doubts of their abilities and may refrain from getting involved with school due to inferior feelings that they are not suitable to work with teachers. Parents of low education background usually have low-income and fewer opportunities to meet and share information concerning their children with teachers because they may lack transportation, money or child care to get involved with school. Weiss et al. (2003) made an observation that such parents are less confident and cannot be effective in their partnership with the school. Some parents may have difficulties relating well with teacher who are different from themselves or may just have school phobia. On the other hand, attributions that parents and teachers make regarding parental involvement, specifically attributions made by parents and teachers of differing social classes act as a barrier to parental involvement.

Horvatin (2011) identified a number of barriers that prevent families from being involved with school and these include; school environments that do not support parental involvement, school policies and practices that don't accommodate diverse family needs, and doubts by parents as to whether it is necessary to get involved with school. The study further highlighted that inconsistent and irregular schedules by schools, lack of knowledge about the education system, and emotional well-being of parents are all barriers to sound parental involvement. Carter (2003) adds that school environment that do not accommodate diverse family needs and clear doubts of parents as to whether it is necessary to get involved with

school or not are all barriers to sound parental involvement. Equally, cultural barriers, differences in family structures, and time management for both parents and teachers are limiting factors to parental involvement.

Davis (2000) investigated supporting parent, family, and community involvement in schools and revealed that some parents shun involvement because of conflicting pressures, unmet expectations, and suspicions of school staff. On the other hand, many schools have deliberately decided not to involve parents due to the past experiences they have had with parents. Schools have at times gone to the expense and effort of planning a series of events for parents and community members to get involved but only a few attended, making the school staff to become disillusioned and begin to think partnership is not worth the effort.

According to Emerson et al. (2012) state that lack of trust, positive, and proactive relationships between parents and teachers acts as a barrier to sound parental involvement. Failure by teachers to secure the trust of parents and vice versa hinder parents from responding to invitations to be involved in school activities outside the school as well as activities that contribute towards their children's learning outcomes (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005).

Wanke (2008) made reference to the State of Iowa Department of Education (1996) which associates teacher attitudes to limiting parental involvement in school activities. With varying interests of teachers in relation to involvement of parents, their attitudes communicate different messages to parents. Some teachers feel schools should be left to run by professionals alone and that involving parents in reducing learner absenteeism consumes school time and place a burden on educators that already have too much work to attend to (Henderson, 1988). Such attitudes send messages to parents that they are not needed by the school. To support this assertion, Dodd and Konzal (2000, p.90) as cited in Gonzalez-DeHass and Willems (2003) observed that "educators view parents as problems that are best kept at a safe distance from the genuine work of the schools and who often have to be appeased when angry" On the other hand, parents equally begin to think educating children is the responsibility of schools and should be left to professionals.

A study conducted by Aschers (1988) whose focus was on investigating educational barriers that affect parental involvement revealed that Language spoken in schools alienate parents who may not understand or speak it because there are, in most cases not native it. The study

found that parents that were not able to speak English thought their educational skills were so poor that they could not be able to assist their children with school. Parents felt that their language skills are insufficient for involvement with school, hence their failure to take part in school activities.

In their summary of research on effects of programs that involve families to improve student attendance, Epstein and Sheldon (2010) found that parents found it challenging to become involved in reducing learner absenteeism because schools were not welcoming and made it difficult for them to be involved. They revealed that classroom and school could not maintain discipline, giving parents an impression that it was not worthwhile working with such schools. Equally, failure by teachers and students to respect parents and each other discourages parents to be involved with school.

Using a sample of predominately African American parents, (Kantahyanee et al. 2014) explored barriers and facilitators to school-based parent involvement for parents of urban public middle school students. The study indicated that some parents' failure to get involved is as a result of teachers' unfriendly and hostile interactions with parents. The negative quality of parents' interactions with teachers, children and other parents as well as work and scheduling challenges were factors limiting the involvement of parents. The long history of negative experiences parents have had with the school included; teachers disrespecting, ignoring and communicating to them inappropriately. Though their study was purely qualitative, it is not known whether the current study will have similar outcomes.

Gonzalez-DeHass and Willems (2003) states that while some research indicate that parents have interest in getting involved in the education of their children, others make it clear that some do not value education at all. Some parents believe that their participation in education is not necessary provided their children are doing well in school. On the contrary, other parents may not have the history of involvement and would not just see the reason to start Dwyer and Hecht (2001) and Gonzalez-DeHass and Willems (2003). This idea is supported by Chang and Romero (2008) who revealed that;

“Some parents may not have developed the skills, knowledge or beliefs that help them to support their children’s education, especially if they experienced school failure themselves. Parents may feel reluctant to send their children to school if their own personal experience with formal education was negative. They may find that schools evoke

memories of failure and alienation rather give rise to feelings of possibility and hope for a better future for their children (p.14).

The study further states that failure to get involved with school could be an indication that parents are grappling with serious problems such as substance abuse, domestic violence, child abuse, and involvement in the criminal justice system. Such challenges can deeply impair the healthy functioning of the family and interfere with the psychological and physical ability of parents to get involved with school. Parents may equally fail to provide their children with the guidance, nurturing, and skill building they need to be productive and responsible citizens.

Mandyata (2015) and Gonzalez-DeHass and Willems (2003) states that lack of teacher training in promoting parental involvement is one of the most voiced barriers in the schools. Both studies found that teachers' failure to coordinate efforts to involve parents in education are attributed to little or no formal training at all in setting up school, family and community partnerships. Teachers lack knowledge on how to effectively involve parents in working with the schools and rely on trial and error forms of involvement. As such, teachers do not know how to successfully engage parents in working with school.

Findings from a study by Mubanga (2011) revealed that illiteracy stand in the way of parental involvement. Illiterate parents find it challenging to contribute meaningfully in the education of their children because their inability to read and write makes them think they do not have much to offer in the partnership.

Mandyata (2015) assert that teachers' perceptions on parents as not having any knowledge about education processes also hinder parents to be fully involved with the school. Teachers feel the knowledge and experience they have is sufficient enough to manage the problems that affect children in and out of school without parents getting involved. They further revealed that lack of clear partnership policies and legislations both at school and national levels are a hindrance to parental involvement. Parents and teachers lack positive attitudes towards working with each other and are not knowledgeable of the roles each one of them is supposed to play in the partnership.

Nzala (2006) investigated the involvement of parents with intellectually challenged children in selected special units of Lusaka District. The study found that the prominent limitations to parental involvement which made schools sideline parents from getting involved was lacking

skills needed to take part in the education of their children.. Although this study was conducted in Zambia, it was focused on the involvement of parents in the education of intellectually challenged children with the study cite different to that of the current study. Ndhlovu (2005) adds that non-parental involvement in the education of children is as a result of long distances to and from school. In his study on involving parents in the education of visually impaired children, he found that most parents find it quite involving and tiring to travel long distances to and from school to get involved when they do not understand much about why they need to be involved and have other things to do.

2.5 Interventions Put in Place by Schools to Improve Parental Involvement

Parent and school partnership just like any other relationship is entirely dependent on how ready and willing each of the partners is to collaborate. Much of the responsibilities, however, lie on the schools. Unless schools are capable of making concerted effort to involve all families, parental involvement is more likely to occur in just some families and not others (Sheldon, 2003). According to Epstein and Sheldon (2010), parents are more likely to get involved with school to reduce learner absenteeism if schools take a comprehensive approach by implementing activities that support good attendance, conducting effective home-school connections, and remaining focused on the goal of improving and maintaining partnership.

Epstein and Sheldon (2010) states that improving student attendance requires a holistic approach that addresses learners motivation, school and classroom factors such as consistent attendance policies, quality teaching, and effective monitoring on attendance as well as school, family, and community partnerships. Sheldon (2003) state that many researchers recognise home-school connections as an important strategy to improve parental involvement to reduce learner absenteeism though most schools have not considered collaborating with families.

Epstein and Sheldon (2004) conducted a longitudinal study on rates of absenteeism and on specific family and community involvement activities that were implemented to reduce learner absenteeism. Data were collected from 39 schools and the study established that school, family, and community partnership practices increased levels of parental involvement and decreased learner absenteeism. In particular, provision of timely information about the value of getting involved with school to reduce learner absenteeism. Giving information about attendance patterns of children in good time improves parental involvement, prevent

absent students from getting into academic trouble and make parents become confident about their children's health and safety in school. Education Alliance (2008) adds that frequent and clear lines of communications such as face to face meetings, regular written communication and phoning parents of absent students is associated with improved parental involvement and reduction in learner absenteeism.

Davis (2000) and Epstein and Salinas (2004) states that parental involvement can be enhanced if schools are capable of putting in place well organised partnership programs. Such programs could be enhanced by putting in place the Action Team comprising of parents representing any major groups at school, such as the Parent-Teacher Association, community agencies, school managers, and members of staff. The team can identify priority areas, write annual plans for family and community involvement, implement and evaluate the activities. These first steps are necessary, but not sufficient to improve the participation of parents, thus schools need to recognize and meet the challenges that presently limit parents' involvement.

The Education Alliance (2008) states that schools can improve parental involvement by acknowledging the important roles, ideas and skills that can be infused into school by parents when they become partners. Schools need to come up with plans, timeline and resources that can increase parental involvement to reduce learner absenteeism. There is equally need for schools to create a climate of change where issues of improving parental involvement are taken seriously.

Attendance works (2014) and Cotton and Wikelund (1989) asserts that the earlier in a child's educational process parental involvement begins, the more powerful the effects will be. Parental involvement initiated while children are young is essential because children at early stages of their education are entirely dependent on their families to get to school and parents are easier to reach. Improving parent involvement equally becomes an opportunity to build relationships and a means of conveying information about the importance of attendance.

Attendance works (2014) indicated that it is important for schools to get to know parents of absent children and build trust and sound relationships with them. This is a way of winning parents respect, personalise relationships and make them feel important and more willing to contribute positively in the education of their children. School communities equally need to ensure that parents feel welcome in the school by making it a point to greet them and getting to know their names. Epstein and Sheldon (2010) revealed that building relationships with

parents at first meetings is most necessary and vital for improving parental involvement than talking about the number of school days a child missed.

Al Sumaiti (2012) investigated parental involvement in the education of their children in Dubai where primary school teachers interviewed revealed that building good relationships with parents is essential for improving partnership. Four primary school head teachers interviewed thought it particularly important to get to know parents who had difficult lives because they were more likely to have problems in getting involved with the school as well as getting their children to school regularly. One head teacher revealed how one parents' involvement in reducing learner absenteeism improved when this head teacher personally became involved by taking a box of biscuits to thank her for the improvement in the children's attendance.

According to Epstein and Sheldon (2010), parental involvement can be enhanced when schools get to know what makes it hard for parents to get involved in reducing learner absenteeism other than assuming that they do not care about their children's education and attendance. When parents are not able to surmount the challenges hindering their involvement, they need support from outside, thus schools that work towards meeting challenges are working to make involvement easier and more effective for more "hard-to reach" parents, families and communities. Epstein and Sheldon (2010) revealed that parental involvement improves when a school community offers an environment that engages students and families and offer enriching learning opportunities. When parents feel engaged and respected as important partners in their children's education, they are more willing to contribute and respond openly and positively to partnership.

Attendance works (2014) noted that checking for understanding of parents on the impact of absenteeism on their children's educational success and their roles in reducing learner absenteeism improves parental involvement. Parents are more willing to get engaged with the school when they understand how absenteeism can impact on their children's future success and how they can support the success of their child. Sheldon (2007) state that school communities can improve parental involvement by connecting with parents throughout the school year assuring them that the school is there to partner with them every day. Schools can consider integrating discussions about parental involvement in reducing learner absenteeism and improving attendance into regular school meetings and create on-going opportunities for dialogue with parents as well as invite them to partner in crafting solutions.

According to Davis (2000), improving parental involvement calls for shared leadership among parents to ensure that parent expertise are taken advantage of and meaningful collaboration is built. Schools therefore need to make way for new leaders from families and communities to make the partnership effective. It is important that school educators put in place strategies for successful partnership such as organising workshops and sending messages to parents that they are welcome. Schools are responsible for the provision of opportunities for families, schools and the community to work together to attain comprehensive partnerships (Sanders & Epstein, 2000).

Attendance Works (2014) state that communicating to parents in their primary languages makes it easier for them to understand the school processes and what is expected of them in the partnership. When the language used is alien to the parents, the school can consider finding a school interpreter to translate into a language parents can understand. Communication done through written materials needs to be done in the parents' home language taking into consideration their reading levels as well (Epstein, 1995).

Mapp (2002) and Epstein and Sheldon (2002) observed that there is need for frequent and higher quality interaction aimed at connecting parents to the school's learning goals and objectives if parent-teacher relationships are to become more supportive. Such interactions should benefit not only parents, who over time become more attentive to their children's learning, but also teachers, who can become more aware of parents' capacity to support educational activities. When the conversations between teachers and parents are positive in content and tone, parents can receive clear and consistent information from schools on how to get involved and effectively contribute to their children's learning.

Epstein and Sheldon (2002) investigated improving student attendance through family and community involvement. Their study suggests that schools should provide families with a school contact person such as the Home-School liaison officer that posses appropriate skills and commitment to work with parents that are difficult to reach or those that may be underserved by the school community. Schools can take greater responsibility for connecting with and involving family members in school issues by reaching out and connecting with the full range of diverse families at the school. The study further found that learners are more likely to attend school and increase their chances of succeeding academically when school educators make high-quality family and community involvement part of their overall school improvement strategy

Epstein and Sheldon's study further established that parental involvement is enhanced when schools refer absent learners and their parents to counselors to come up with support measures and programs that can help parents get involved with school and learners attend school. Schools should equally engage pupil services and attendance counselors to visit homes where students with attendance problems come from to assess the barriers that may be contributing to non-parental involvement. Counselors also help parents come up with strategies that can improve their involvement with the school to reduce learner absenteeism. Orienting parents to school policies, expectations for learner attendance, and on-time arrival also motivated parents to partner with school to help their children attend school regularly.

Attendance Works (2014) states that giving rewards and recognizing individual learners as well as whole classes for good or improved attendance enhances not only good attendance but parental involvement as well. Parents could become interested getting involved with school once they learn of how appreciative schools can be for parents' effort to send children to school. Schools can use their creativity to partner with parents and the community to find incentives that can be given to learners whose attendance has improved and even those that attend regularly. These could be simple and inexpensive prizes or certificates that can be given frequently to encourage good attendance.

Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2002) made an observation that preparing teachers for parental involvement has been overlooked in teacher education and yet it is an important area of professional development. He points out that schools improve parental involvement by developing in-service programs that enable them acquire knowledge and skills necessary for involving parents in education. In-service education program must be designed to increase school educators' invitations to parental involvement by strengthening teachers' sense of teaching efficacy, beliefs about parents' efficacy for helping their children learn, and attitudes toward parental involvement. Gordon, (2004) asserts that educators need to receive training on how to implement activities that can encourage parent involvement and that can create learning opportunities for their learners. Parents need to enhance their power of learning, teaching and decision making so that they can help the schools to improve their children (Gordon, 2004). In addition, teachers and parents must each play an appropriate role to achieve the goal of parent involvement in school activities.

In a study by Mubanga (2011), the majority of parent respondents interviewed indicated that the involvement of parents in the education of children could be improved by encouraging

them to serve as PTA members or attend annual general meetings and open days at school. The study equally revealed that making parents understand the importance of education and encouraging them to be checking learners' books are all ways of increasing parental involvement in the education of children.

2.5 Summary of the Literature Review

This chapter discussed the literature review which guided the study in line with the objectives which included to; find out ways through which parents are involved in reducing learner absenteeism in primary school, explore the benefits of parental involvement in reducing learner absenteeism in primary schools, ascertain factors that limit parental involvement in reducing learner absenteeism in three selected primary schools and suggest interventions schools put in place by schools to improve parental involvement in reducing learner absenteeism in three selected primary schools. Nevertheless, it has been observed that most studies on parental involvement in reducing learner absenteeism were conducted in other countries. In Zambia, particularly Kazungula District, the studies on parental involvement seem to be been inadequate. Besides having been conducted from other countries, the study methodologies, specific areas of interest and the sample sizes were different from that of the current study, a gap that this study intended to fill. The next chapter will give an insight and discusses the methodology applied in this study.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Overview

The previous chapter gave a review of some important literature on parental involvement in reducing learner absenteeism in accordance with the study objectives which included to; establish ways through which parents are involved in reducing learner absenteeism in primary school, explore the benefits of parental involvement in reducing learner absenteeism in selected primary schools, ascertain factors that limit parental involvement in reducing learner absenteeism in three selected primary schools and interventions schools put in place to improve parental involvement in reducing learner absenteeism.

The current chapter presents the methodology used in this study which included the research design, population, sample and sampling techniques employed in the study. The chapter further looks at the research instruments, data collection, and analysis procedures as well as ethical considerations.

3.2 Research Design

Kombo and Tromp (2006) define a research design as “glue like structure that holds all the elements in a research project together”. Orodho, (2003) defines it as the scheme, outline or plan that is used to generate answers to the research problem. This study employed a descriptive research design. The said design was used with the intention to conduct an in-depth investigation aimed at getting peoples’ views, attitudes, and perceptions concerning certain phenomena under the natural setting. Since the study focused on parental involvement in reducing learners’ absenteeism in primary schools, a descriptive design qualified to be utilised as it gives a precise description of respondents’ attitudes, views, and opinions.

The study was purely qualitative in nature. According to Kombo and Tromp (2006), a qualitative approach involves description; it seeks to describe and analyse the culture and behaviour of humans and their groups from the point of view of those being studied. It is often used as a means to collecting verbatim statements from respondents in view of the fact that open-ended questions allow respondents to offer responses within their unique context, and the value of the information provided can be exceptionally high.

Researchers who use qualitative methods seek deeper truth by aiming at collecting true feelings from the respondents in their natural setting thereby attempting to make sense of, or

interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them by using a holistic perspective which preserves the complexities of human behaviour (Black, 1994). This approach was appropriate for this study because it sought to solicit information and investigate the effects of parental involvement in reducing learner absenteeism in selected primary schools in Kazungula District.

3.2 Target Population of the Study

A population is generally a large collection or a well-defined collection of objects or individuals that have the similar characteristics or traits (Kombo & Tromp, 2006). This study targeted all the head teachers, all grade teachers, all parents and, all learners of Kazungula District in the Southern province.

3.3 Sample size

A sample is a subset of the population which consists of selected individuals or objects that a researcher chooses to participate in a study (De vos, 1998). It is a portion of the elements in a population that is studied in an effort to understand the population from which it was drawn. Webster (1985) as cited in Orodho and Kombo (2002) defines a sample as a “finite part of a statistical population whose properties are studied to gain information about the whole”.

The 36 participants in this study were distributed as follows: 3 Head Teachers and 3 Grade Teachers from the selected Primary schools, 15 Parents of frequently absent learners and 15 frequently absent learners.

3.4. Sampling Techniques

Orodho (2005) defines sampling as a technique of selecting a representative part of a population for the purpose of determining characteristics of the population. Sampling is essential because it helps researchers to generalize the findings to the population of interest. In this study, the researcher employed purposive sampling to select head teachers, grade teachers, and parents because of their experiences in matters of involving parents in absenteeism issues. Learners were sampled because of the experiences they have with schools and parents in relation to absenteeism.

Purposive sampling involves purposely handpicking of individuals from the population based on the knowledge and judgment of the researcher when it comes to selecting participants that

are to be studied (Msabila & Nalaila, 2013). The study used purposive sampling so as to focus on particular characteristics of a population of interest to enable the researcher answer the research questions. In this case, head teachers, grade teachers, parents and learners were familiar with parental involvement in reducing learner absenteeism in primary schools. Orodho and Kombo (2002) state that the power of purposive sampling lies in selecting information rich in cases for in-depth analysis related to the central issues being studied. Black (1999) supports the use of purposive sampling as it ensures that those people who are unsuitable for the study are already eliminated leaving only the most suitable respondents. Furthermore, the researcher applied purposive sampling to select the three primary schools.

3.5 Research Instruments

The study employed semi-structured interview guide and focus group discussion (FGD) guides to collect data. Focus Group Discussions were conducted with learners whilst Semi-structured interviews were administered to head teachers, grade teachers and parents.

3.5.1 Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Kombo and Tromp (2006) state that semi-structured interviews are based on the use of an interview guide which is a list of questions or topics to be covered by the interview. Semi-structured interviews are flexible because they consist of both open and closed-ended questions. They are important because they gather in-depth information which gives a complete and detailed understanding from both closed and open ended. One to one interviews were used to collect data from head teachers, grade teachers, and parents on the basis that qualitative inquiry usually produces in-depth data. It is from these interactive interviews that the researcher was able to understand head teachers, grade teachers and parents' views on the effects of parental involvement in reducing learners' absenteeism in schools. Therefore, using semi-structured interviews gave the researcher first-hand information on parental involvement in reducing learner absenteeism in primary schools.

3.5.2 Focus Group Discussion

The FGD method is designed to obtain information on participants' beliefs, views, attitudes and perceptions on a defined area of interest (Kombo & Tromp, 2006). Focus group discussions were used in this study to collect data. The rationale for choosing the FGD for learners was to help them feel comfortable to express their opinions in the presence of their

peers. According to Black (1999), a focus group discussion is a group discussion of 5-12 persons guided by a facilitator during which members talk freely and spontaneously about a certain topic. The purpose of focus group discussion is to obtain in-depth information on concepts and ideas of the group due to its open nature. After identifying suitable discussion participants (the researcher was flexible regarding the numbers and invited six to eight participants), they were invited to a meeting at an agreed place and time. A date for the interviews was scheduled at a convenient time and place that was accessible and was reasonably quiet. During each group discussion, the researcher attempted to create a positive atmosphere to enable the participants to contribute in this study willingly. The researcher endeavored to create an environment that enables it to collect subjective views from participants.

For this study, focus group participants were identified and informed about one week before the sessions. They were also reminded of the meetings a day prior to the session. After identifying suitable discussion participants, they were invited to meetings, each group on appointed days at an agreed place and time. Scheduling of meetings were considerate of convenient time and place that was accessible and reasonably quiet. During each group discussion, the researcher attempted to create a positive atmosphere to enable the participants discuss willingly.

3.6 Data Collection Procedure

Data collection is the gathering of specific information aimed at proving facts on how a researcher collects data and with what instruments (Ng'andu, 2013). Therefore, in trying to follow the data collection procedure, the researcher sought permission to conduct the research from the Ethics committee at the University of Zambia, District Education Board Secretary (DEBS) and respective school managers of the three primary schools selected. After the researcher was given permission to conduct the research, head teachers, grade teachers, and parents were interviewed. Three focus group discussions were conducted with learners, one at each school after they signed the consent forms. This was done so as to triangulate data sources and increase the quality of the data elicited.

Furthermore, semi-structured interviews with head teachers, grade teachers, and parents were conducted on different days. Semi-structured interviews allow both the interviewer and the person being interviewed the flexibility to discuss issues (Patton, 2002). In addition, semi-structured interviews allowed for in-depth to be achieved by providing the opportunity on the part of the interviewer to probing further when interviewees' responses seemed not complete.

A voice recorder was used to record the conversations to capture opinions and views of the respondents.

3.7 Data Analysis

Ng'andu (2013) and Valsiner (2006) defines data analysis as a manipulation of the collected data for the purpose of drawing conclusions that reflect on the interest, ideas and theories that initiated the study. The aim is to uncover the underpinning structures and extracting cardinal variables thereby testing any underlying assumptions. However, the appropriate methods of data analysis are determined by the data type, variables of interest and the number of cases. This study used qualitative technique to analyse data as the research typically relied on focus group discussion and semi-structured interview guide which are among other tools used by qualitative technique. Subjective responses from focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews were analyzed qualitatively using thematic analysis. The major themes were derived from the objectives of the study. Each theme was described, analysed, and interpreted critically and objectively. Data was equally examined carefully to ensure that there was uniformity and completeness.

3.6 Reliability and Validity

Reliability of a research instrument depends on whether questions can be responded steadily and sincerely using perceptions and attitudes Punch (2003). Validity refers to the meaning of results and deals with how well an instrument is capable of measuring what it is meant to measure. It is the extent to which results obtained are consistent over time (Lankshear & Knobel 2004).

To determine that the validity and reliability of research instruments, a pilot study was conducted before administering the instruments on intended participants. This was done with a view of testing the instrument for objectivity and clarity. Necessary adjustments were then made to the research instruments to ensure effectiveness. To strengthen the depth, validity and reliability of its results, the principle of triangulation was applied in this study. Keeves (1997) defines triangulation as “the application and combination of several research methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon”. Triangulation in this study worked very effectively in that data from focused group discussions was supported by data from semi structured interviews. This implies that the weakness of one instrument would be supplemented by the strength of the other.

3.9 Ethical consideration

Ethical issues were taken care of in this study. Ethical clearance was sought from the ethical committee of the University of Zambia and permission to conduct this study was given by District Education Board Secretary and Head Teachers in selected schools where the study was conducted. The consent for participants to take part in the study was sought from all the participants and those willing to do so were made to sign Informed Consent Forms. The participants were informed that they were free to either participate or withdraw from the study at any time and stage if they so wished. The researcher upheld the confidentiality of non- disclosure of the identities of the participants and schools. The information gathered was also kept in high confidentiality. As such, no names were used for identifying respondents. Instead, codes were used to identify the different categories of respondents.

3.10 Summary

This chapter discussed the methodology used and why it was chosen for the study. The chapter also looked at the target population and the sample size. It further established the sampling techniques, research instruments and data collection procedure that were used by the researcher. Data analysis and ethical issues were also looked at. Having presented the above, the next chapter presents the findings of the study from the three sampled primary schools in line with the research objectives as given by the respondents from the field.

CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1 Overview

The previous chapter outlined the methodology employed by the researcher to come up with the data by means of the said research instruments. This chapter, therefore, presents the findings of the study as were provided by the participants. The presentation of research findings will be guided by the research questions and appearing under themes derived from the research objectives. The study questions were as follows:

1. In what ways are parents involved in reducing learner absenteeism in primary schools?
2. What are the benefits of parental involvement in reducing learner absenteeism in selected primary schools?
3. What factors limit parental involvement in reducing learner absenteeism in selected primary schools?
4. What measures have schools put in place to improve parental involvement in reducing learner absenteeism in selected primary schools?

4.2 Coding of Participants

For easy identification of respondents, codes were assigned to participants as follows;

Head Teacher for school A (HT1), Head teacher for school B (HT2) Head Teacher for school C (HT3), Grade Teacher for school A (GT1), Grade Teacher for school B (GT2), Grade Teacher for school C (GT3), Parents for school community A (P1 -P5), Parents for school community B (P6 -P10), and Parents for school community C (P11 -P15). Others were Focused Group Discussions for school A (FGD1 L1-5), Focused Group Discussions for school B (FGD2 L6-10), and Focused Group Discussions for school C (FGD3 L11-15).

4.3 Research Findings

The research findings of the study were presented in line with research questions. The researcher took time to interact with the participants through interviews and focus group discussion to appreciate their personal views. Participants were asked whether or not parents were involved in reducing learner absenteeism in schools. In response to the question, the majority of participants from the three selected schools indicated that parents were involved in reducing learner absenteeism.

Ways Through which Parents are Involved in Reducing Learner Absenteeism?

Head teachers, grade teachers, parents, and learners were asked to give details on ways through which parents were involved in reducing learner absenteeism in selected schools. Below are the responses given by all the categories of participants

4.4.1 Serving in PTA and Attending annual General Meetings

When asked to establish ways through which parents are involved in reducing learner absenteeism, majority respondents indicated that parents were involved in different ways of which some were serving in school committees, the most pronounced one being PTA and attending the general meetings. In line with this, one head teacher (HT2) had this to say:

“Serving in PTA and attending meetings acts as a platform for discussing different issues pertaining to the education of children. It is important that those parents that are not serving as committee members could attend meeting every time they are asked to. It is during such meetings that discussing of various issues which include absenteeism are done. Equally, making decisions about programs that benefit learners, resolving conflicts that occurred in schools around controversial issues and getting information on involvement opportunities and how to help learners attend school are usually part of the PTA meetings package”.

Parents also contributed their views regarding their involvement in reducing learners’ absenteeism in schools. Parents got involved in reducing learner absenteeism when they took part in various activities that promoted school attendance. One parent, (P2) said:

“Teachers do invite us to attend open days and meeting of PTA where issues of school attendance are discussed. Knowing what goes on in my children’s education is very important to me. As such, I always attend meetings though not held regularly, to get more information on how I can help them succeed in education because investing in a child is the best investment one can ever make”.

Another parent (P7) had this to say:

“Although we are involved with school, I wouldn’t say PTA is not active. We are not very much involved in reducing learner absenteeism as parents because the school only invites us to attend meetings once in a year. This kind of involvement cannot make any impact at all because most of us lack information on how we can get involved in reducing learner absenteeism”

4.4.2 Attending Open days

It was said that parents were involved with schools to reduce learner absenteeism when they attended school open days to collect report cards for their children, tour the school, and talk to educators. To support this assertion, one Head Teacher (HT1) said:

“Our school organizes open days at the begging of every term for parents to attend together with their children. When parents attend open days, it makes them feel part of the school”.

A grade teacher (GT3) had this to say:

“It is important that parents attend open days to meet the members of staff and get information on how they can help their children attend school and their roles in reducing learner absenteeism”

One parent, (P6) added her voice and said:

“I get to talk to the teachers of my children and sometimes even school administrators during open days. However, a lot of parents do not attend due to busy schedules, lacking information on the importance of attending such events, and sometimes to avoid meeting educators whose attitudes towards parents was not favourable”.

4.4.3 Paying school fees and providing school requisites

It was established that parents paid school fees and provided school requirements for learners as a way of getting involved in reducing learner absenteeism. In line with this, a Head Teacher (HT1) said:

“Involving parents to ensure educational success of children is something schools cannot avoid whether or not it seem important. Regardless of their status and skills they possess, and whether or not they are invited to get involved with school, parents are involved in reducing learner absenteeism when they provide children with school requisites such as school uniforms and books to enable them attend school”.

One parent, (P12) from school community C said:

“One way I involve myself to ensure that my children attend school is through paying school fees. When I delay making payment, children stay out of school for fear of being sent away by educators. However, I still do not understand why I pay! What I know is that there is free education for children in primary school, but educators’ keeps saying this money is PTA fund and yet they send children away for non-payment of it”.

A learner from (FGD2 L8) at school B said:

“My parents buy me school requirements such as books, pens, uniforms and pay school fees to enable me attend school without worries of being sent away from school”.

4.4.4 Volunteering at School

The study noted that volunteering at school was another way parents got involved to reduce learner absenteeism. The study established that parents volunteered in various school activities to demonstrate how serious education meant to them. Parents took part in school projects such as infrastructure development. However, it was revealed that some parents were not aware of the volunteering opportunities that existed in schools. One parent, (P6) from school community B said:

“I always take part in different school activities and projects to set a good example in the community and encourage my children to always attend school and work hard. I am always interacting with educators and this has helped me become knowledgeable of what goes on in school. However, some of the parents say they are not invited to take part in activities and feel the school does not need them”.

Another parent, (P13) said:

Volunteering at school is one way I show children that have interest in their education and send positive messages that I considers school a worthwhile cause. When I volunteered at school were on a regular basis I am interacting with teachers and other parents, I build relationships with them and get to know what goes on in the school”.

4.4.5 Provision of Food to Learners

This study established that parents were involved in reducing learner absenteeism when they provided food for their children before they left for school or when they packed meals to have at school either for break or lunch. Food was found, to motivate learners to always attend school and take part in activities.

In attempting to elaborate on how providing food to children before school is parental involvement that reduces learner absenteeism, one grade teacher (GT3) of school C said:

“No child would enjoy attending school on an empty stomach on a daily basis. Besides that, food insufficiency is associated with poor

cognitive functioning, diminishing academic performance and decreased school attendance As such, ensuring that children eat before school is parental involvement enough capable of reducing learner absenteeism”.

Grade Teacher (GT3) has this to say:

“It is a requirement that parents ensure their children eat before school because children that are given food before school have better comprehension of school material, good memory, improved performance and attendance”.

Another grade teacher (GT2) said:

“Parents that always ensure that their children eat before coming to school may not realise that they are involved in reducing learner absenteeism and yet what they are doing is what every parents needs to do. Provision of food motivates learners to attend school and take part in all school activities”.

4.4.6 Helping Learners With Home Work

The study established that parents were involvement in reducing learner absenteeism when they helped their children with home work. It was established that parents helped children with reading, checked what children were writing to confirm learning was taking place as way of getting involved in reducing learner absenteeism. To support this, a head teacher (HT3) at school C said:

“Parents that help children with homework demonstrate their involvement that is capable of increasing daily rates of attendance and send strong messages to learners that school is important. It also keeps communication lines open and give children confidence to get to school knowing that the home work is done”.

A parent (P13) of school community C said:

“I would like to help my children with home work but like many other parents, I am unable to because I did not go to school myself. The school should do the work of teaching so that we also play the part we can manage as parents”.

A learner, (FGD2 L8) said:

“My parents always say they cannot help with home work because they are always busy. I always miss school for non-completion of home work for fear of punishment from the teacher”.

4.5 Benefits of Parental Involvement in Reducing Learner Absenteeism

To determine the benefits of parental involvement in reducing learner absenteeism, participants were asked for their views and the majority indicated that parental involvement was beneficial in reducing learner absenteeism. Below are the benefits of involving parents in reducing learner absenteeism.

4.5.1 Improved School attendance

The majority of respondents indicated that parental involvement reduced learner absenteeism and increased daily rates of attendance. In line with this, one grade teacher (GT2) of school B said:

“The major benefit of involving parents in reducing learner absenteeism is that it has increased the rates of daily attendance. Learner absenteeism reduces when parents are involved because they are the custodian of learners. If parents want their children to attend school, they do so, if not, they stay away. Most learners whose parents are always involved with school do not just miss school anyhow because they know that parents will still get information that they did”.

In line with what (GT2) said, one learner from Focus Group Discussion (FGD2 L6) added a voice by saying that:

“I have stopped missing school because my mother is now a PTA committee member. Instead of giving me chores like she used to when I am supposed to be in school, she cautions me never to miss school for no apparent reason”.

In a follow up question asked as to how much learner absenteeism had reduced, the majority of respondents indicated that they could not be precise on that one but that it was not difficult to tell that most children whose parents decided to get involved with school were always in attendance.

4.5.2 Relieving Teachers of Many Duties

From the head teachers’ and grade teachers’ perspective, it was revealed that parental involvement in reducing learner absenteeism relieved teachers of many duties. One head teacher, (HT3) narrated that:

“Involved parents get to learn better ways of parenting and supporting their children to become responsible learners. Teachers of well brought up and responsible classrooms do more teaching than getting learners to follow school rules”.

A grade teacher (GT2) indicated that:

“If there is anything that makes work difficult is not having well defined roles. As a teacher, am meant to play so many roles including reminding children to be clean in school, teach mannerisms, ask children to attend school, teach and many others. This however is not the case with learners whose parents are involved in reducing learner absenteeism because they play their roles well, as I concentrate on teaching”.

4.5.3 Enhanced Parental understanding of Importance of school attendance

The results of this study indicated that parental involvement enhanced parents’ understanding of the importance of school attendance for their children. The respondents indicated that involving parents in reducing learner absenteeism gave parents confidence to play their roles to ensure that there were no hindrances standing in their way of getting involved with schools to reduce learner absenteeism. To support these assertions, one parent (P9) from school community B said:

“Getting involved with the school has helped me realise how important school attendance is for my children to succeed in education”.

Another parent (P12) had this to say:

“I did not know that missing class even for a day has an impact on my child’s education. The more I attend annual general meeting and open days, the more I get to learn how important school attendance is”.

4.5.4. Increased Contact between Schools and Home

Contributing on how parental involvement in reducing learner absenteeism improved contact between parents and schools, one head teacher (HT2) said:

“The involvement of parents in reducing learner absenteeism has led to parents visiting our school whenever they need our help and vice versa. Involved parents become understanding that schools cannot be able to succeed in providing sound education to their children if they worked alone”.

A grade teacher (GT1) supported the earlier statement by saying that:

“Involving parents in the education of their children make them feel important and respected. As such, they become more willing to support the effort of school and learning of their children”.

4.6 Challenges that limit parental involvement in reducing learner absenteeism

In trying to determine the limitations to parental involvement in reducing learner absenteeism, respondents were asked whether there were challenges that stood in the way of parental involvement. The majority of respondents indicated that parents faced barriers to parental involvement due to a number of reasons one of them being poor communication between schools and home.

4.6.2 Busy Schedules

With regards to busy schedules among parents as one of the challenges that limit their involvement in reducing learner absenteeism, the majority of respondents indicated that it was not easy for parents to fend for families, provide all the requirements and still find time to get involved with issues to do with education either at home or school.

One head teacher (HT3) said:

“Some parents always give excuses that they are too busy to get involved in activities that promote learner attendance. It is difficult to work with parents that are never ready to support the education of their children.

One parent (P13) said:

“Most of the meetings and other activities at school are held during the week when my husband goes to work whilst I take care of our small business and the welfare of the home. We both can only find free time during weekend when he is not working and I get help from our school going children. Involving ourselves during the week is not possible”.

4.6.3 Non- invitation of Parents to Involvement

The study from the educators’ point of view established that parents were invited to get involved with school, but usually only a small number turned up and showed interest and willingness to work with the schools. Contrary to the views of educators, majority parents indicated that they were at times not invited to get involved with school on the basis that they were not skilled enough. To support this one Head Teacher (HT1) said:

The issue of working with parents requires understanding from both groupings, that of educators and parents because there is always finger pointing, parents accuse educators and vice versa. Parents and educators

are never appreciative of each other's efforts; hence there is need for training educators on working with parents and parents of the roles they need to play in the education of their children.

One parent, (P8) said:

It all depends on what type of involvement it is that the school wants parents to be engaged in. If it is work, all parents are welcome, but if it involves personal benefits such as attending workshops, they have specific parents that they would want to work with. Besides that, the attitude of educators is what discourages parents”.

4.6.4 Long Distance between School and Homes of Parents

In the quest to establish challenges that limited parents from getting involved in reducing learner absenteeism, it was indicated that long distance stood in the way of involvement of parents. However, from the educators' point of view, parents usually gave excuses that the distance from home to school is too long. Contrary to the earlier claims of giving excuses, one parent (P7) had this to say:

“The long distance from my home to school discourages me to get involved in school activities. I stay very far away from school, getting involved from school means I need to spend the whole day attending to school programmes when I have a lot other chores to attend to at home”.

During Focused Group Discussions (FGD3 L13) said:

“My grandfather cannot manage to walk from home to school because the distance is too long for his age”.

4.6.5 Poverty among Parents

It was noted from the study that parents had challenges getting involved in reducing learner absenteeism because of poverty. The study established that Parents that lived in poverty did not communicate with the school and were not educated making it hard for them to get involved in reducing learner absenteeism. In line with these finding, a grade teacher (GT1) said:

“Most of the parents in our school community are struggling to put food on the table and send their children to school because they are not employed. Because of that, some prioritise going to fend for families than getting involved with school”.

One parent (P6) was quoted saying that:

“I am a poor widow taking care of five (5) children, if I don’t work for long hours in the market, I cannot provide for my family. I therefore prefer taking care of important things first which in this case is feeding my children”.

4.7 Measures put in Place by Schools to Improve Parental Involvement in Reducing Learner Absenteeism in Primary Schools

To establish measures that are put in place by schools to improve parental involvement in reducing learner absenteeism, FGD were conducted with learners whilst Head teachers, grade teachers, and parents were interviewed. The study found that schools improved communication between school and homes of the parents, created welcoming school environments and encouraged parents to server in school committees and attend meetings. Other measures included encouraging parents to volunteer in school activities and assigning home work to learners.

4.7.1. Improving Communication

It was established that schools were improving communication between school and homes. The study established that allowing parents to communicate with schools at any time they wanted was one measure being implemented to encourage their involvement in reducing learner absenteeism. To support this, a Grade Teacher (GT2) of school B had this to say:

“Communicating to parents regularly is a sure way of motivating them to stay connected with the school to ensure good attendance

and academic success of their children. However, it is not possible for teachers to communicate to all parents regularly because of busy schedules and costs involved. We therefore only communicate to parents when there are serious matters that need their attention at school or anything concerning their child”.

Learners being the beneficiaries of parental involvement in reducing also had their own responses with regard to intervention measures schools were putting in place to improve parental involvement. A learner (FGD1 L4) said:

“Teachers do write notes to parents of children that are absent from school”.

4.7.2 Creating Welcoming Environments

Most respondents indicated that schools were opening doors to the schools by allowing parents visit at any time they needed to as well as showing them some respect. In line with this, a Head Teacher (HT3) was quoted saying:

“It would be good to see more parents getting involved in the education of their children. As a school, we are trying our best to be welcoming by showing parents that they are valued”.

4.7.3 Encouraging Parents Serve in PTAs and Attend Meetings

Head teachers and grade teachers indicated that schools encouraged parents to attend general meetings and serve in school committees of which the most common one is PTA. A head teacher (HT2) of school B said:

Parents are encouraged to serve in the PTA committee and attend PTA meetings. This is one way of giving them a platform to make decisions and discuss issues in relation to their involvement in reducing learner absenteeism”.

A parent (P15) said:

“Schools do send information about meetings through children, but i feel some parents are more invited than others because some are written to. Schools will do well to consider all parents important. It is discouraging to attend meetings of PTA or aspire to serve in the committee when the school has people they want to work with in mind”.

4.7.4 Volunteering at School

The study noted that parents were asked to volunteer at school as a way of improving their involvement in reducing learner absenteeism. The findings indicated that schools encourage parents to take part in school activities that support children's attendance, but were not willing to cooperate due to lack of interest and confidence. On the other hand, parents acknowledged the invitation to be involved but bemoaned the way it was done. One parent (P4) said:

“It is difficult to tell whether or not getting involved with school is necessary. I say so because we are only invited to volunteer when there are infrastructure development projects or any other work to be done”.

4.7.5 Assigning Home Work

Findings from the study revealed that home work was assigned to learners as way of ensuring that parents could be involved in reducing learner absenteeism. It was revealed that learners were at times given home work in form of projects to enable even, parents that did not go to school help. However, the majority of respondents indicated that assigning home work to learners needed to be done carefully because some parents did not know how they could help (P7) said:

Home work is always home work whether it only requires parents to have skills or education. Some work my child needs help in, I am not able to help because no one can master all skills.

4.8 Summary

This chapter presented the findings of the study on parental involvement in reducing learner absenteeism in selected primary schools using themes derived from the objectives of the study. It equally brought out the feelings of participants through direct quotations. The next chapter will look at the discussion of findings as presented in this chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.1 Overview

The previous chapter presented the findings of the study. The present chapter discusses the findings of the study. The discussion will be done under the following sub-headings which have been derived from the research objectives. For the sake of clarity, these included;

1. Ways through which parents are involved in reducing learner absenteeism in primary school.
2. Benefits of parental involvement in reducing learner absenteeism in selected primary schools.
3. Challenges that limit parental involvement in reducing learner absenteeism in selected primary schools.
4. Interventions put in place by schools to improve parental involvement in reducing learner absenteeism in selected primary schools.

5.2. Ways Through which Parents are Involved in Reducing Learner Absenteeism

The head teachers, grade teachers, parents and learners were asked whether parents were involved in reducing learner absenteeism in the three selected primary schools. During the focus group discussions with learners and the in-depth interviews with head teachers, teachers and parents, the majority of respondents indicated that parents were involved in reducing learner absenteeism in various ways. The ways of involvement as indicated by respondents are discussed below.

5.2.1 Serving in Parent Teacher Associations (PTA) and Attending Meetings

The current study revealed that parents served in school committees of which the most pronounced one was the PTA, as a ways of getting involved in reducing learner absenteeism. This is in line with Kimu (2012) who stated that serving in PTA committees was an important avenue for parents to take part in setting school goals, developing and implementing school programmes and activities that are capable of improving parental involvement. Kimu further revealed that parents that served in PTAs and attend meetings had the opportunity to make decisions with regards to improving the running of schools, dealing with challenges that affected the success of children in education and making suggestions on how best schools

could collaborate with parents. Parents that serve in PTA committees help in building strong relationships between teachers and parents as well as support learner's success in education.

The current study revealed that only a few parents were able to serve as PTA committee members at a time due to limited positions. However, each PTA executive had only one term to be office once elected, making it possible for most parents to serve as members at some point. Due to limited positions in the PTA executive and since the majority of parents were not members of the PTA committees, the study revealed that they were invited to attend annual General meetings held once every year. The majority of respondent indicated that PTA meetings were important because they served as venues for discussing various issues which include absenteeism. Equally, making decisions about programs that benefit learners, resolving conflicts that occurred in schools around controversial issues and getting information on involvement opportunities and how to help learners attend school were all at stake in PTAs. The study, however, found that PTAs were not much active as parents were only invited to attend annual general meetings once every year. Besides that, the study revealed that some respondents felt that the involvement of parents in attending meeting once in a year was not enough. It was equally revealed that majority of parents did not attend the meetings due to lack of information on how they could get involved in reducing learner absenteeism. It is, therefore, imperative that schools put in place measures to get more parents to attend such important meetings to enhance their involvement in reducing learner absenteeism.

5.2.2 Attending School Open Days

The study revealed that schools organised open days every first week of school term for parents to attend together with their parents. During open days, parents collected the report cards for their children and discussed issues that affect performance, of which learner absenteeism is one of them. Parents were also accorded an opportunity to have a tour of the school, listen to presentations about the school, observe classes in action, and speak to educators to get information on how best they could get involved in reducing learner absenteeism. These findings are in line with those of Cotton and Wikelund (1989) who revealed that parental involvement can take the form of parents simply fulfilling duties of attending open days, monitoring children, and encouraging them to always attend school in order to succeed in education.

The majority of respondents indicated that parents had a direct involvement with school and became well vested with the knowledge of what goes on in schools when they attended open days at school. Parents became aware of their roles in the education of children, particularly in reducing learner absenteeism which is key to success in education. Parents also got to meet teachers of their children and had the opportunity to ask questions with regard to attendance and education of their children. On the other hand, teachers had an opportunity to get to meet parents of their learners, which led to their becoming understanding of children's home background and the kind of support families required in order for them to get involved with school to reduce learner absenteeism. However, the study found that many parents were unable to attend open days due to different circumstances such as busy schedules, negative attitudes, and not knowing the importance of attending such events. Failure to attend open days did not only discourage children but also teachers whose morale dwindled as their effort of organizing for such events seemed to be in vain. It is therefore imperative that schools carry out sensitization campaigns to educate parents on the need to get involved and support the effort of schools as well as that of learners.

5.2.3 Payment of School Fees

Findings of this study revealed that parents paid school fees and provided school requisites such as books, uniforms and pens for their children. The study found that payments of school fees were every parent's responsibility. Children whose parents were capable of making payments of fees on time had their children attend school regularly and succeeded academically unlike those that were not able to do so. However, the study found that the majority of parents did not understand why they still needed to pay fees in form of PTA funds despite the pronouncement by the Government of Zambia that Primary education from Grades 1-7 was compulsory and free. To clarify this, one parent, (P11) said:

“One way I involve myself to ensure that my children attend school is through paying school fees. When I delay making payment, children stay out of school for fear of being sent away by educators. However, I still do not understand why I pay! What I know is that there is free education for children in primary school, but educators' keeps saying this money is PTA fund and yet they send children away for non-payment of it”.

The study revealed that the PTA funds could not be differentiated from school fees because non-payments of these funds led to children being sent away from school. Because low income families were less likely to pay the funds, it was found that pestering them to pay was

as good as asking them to get their children out of school. Children whose parents did not make payments on time were made to stay out of school up to the time the money was paid, or dropped out of school eventually. This may defeat the purpose of ensuring that Zambia achieves its pursuits on the Education for All (EFA) goal of achieving universal primary education.

However, it is a requirement that parents meet their obligations of providing school requisites and paying fees in order for schools to continue running. Parents, therefore, need to fulfill their responsibilities of meeting school requirements to ensure good attendance and reduction in learner absenteeism. If parents shun the responsibility of providing everything it takes for a child to attend school in the name of free education, schools may find it challenging providing quality education for they may not be able to purchase resources necessary for the running of schools as government grants were not received on time. In view of this, schools should always convince parents to pay the fees on time and provide necessary school requirements as the school term begins to ensure good attendance.

5.2.4 Volunteering at school

The study also revealed that volunteering at school was another way parents were involved in reducing learner absenteeism. Parents volunteered in different activities in schools and the most pronounced ones were: taking part in school projects such as infrastructure development and preparing meals for learners when organizations such as the World Food Programme provided food stuffs in schools. Epstein (2010) supports the findings of this study by saying that parental volunteering at a child's school improves attendance and reduces learner absenteeism. When schools train parent volunteers that can reach out to other parents with information on absent learner and how they can make up for the work missed on days they are absent, parents and their children are more likely to take school attendance as a serious matter, hence improved parental involvement and a reduction in learner absenteeism.

Parents volunteered in different ways depending on their area of expertise and interest. However, it was found that some parents were not aware of such opportunities and others had doubts if schools would need them in spite possessing skills required for involvement with the school. Volunteering at school was thought a great way parents could show children that they had interest in education and send positive messages that they considers school a worthwhile cause. Parents that volunteered at school were on a regular basis interacting with

teachers and other parents which did not only build relationships, but also equipped them with knowledge of what goes on in the school system. They equally came to know the daily activities their children are subjected to and how to motivate them to stay in school. Failure to volunteer at school by parents may lead to schools working in isolation and learners lacking encouragement to always attend school. Therefore, schools need to communicate to parents about the available volunteering opportunities in the school as well as considering parents important partners in the provision of education.

5.2.5 Providing of Food

Findings from the study revealed that parents prepared and provided food as way of getting involved in reducing learner absenteeism. The study found that providing food was a motivating factor to children to attend school regularly. The study established that providing food to children before school or packed meals was essential because food insufficiency is associated with poor cognitive functioning, diminishing academic performance and decreased school attendance. Further, respondents indicated that Children that were given food before school had better alertness, concentrated more, and were energetic enough to engage in school activities of the day. To support this assertion, one grade teacher (GT 3) has this to say:

“Children that are given food before school have better comprehension of school material, good memory and improved performance and attendance”.

During the interviews, the majority of educators indicated that children that were hungry rarely attended school, and if they did, they still did not show interest and their participation in school activities were significantly lower than the non-hungry peers that fed before getting to school.

In line with this, the Ministry of General Education in partnership with other stake holders came up with the school feeding programmes to help children that come from families that cannot afford providing decent meals. The programmes were put in effect to combat the hunger situation in most hunger stricken areas to encourage school attendance among children. Therefore, it is a plus on the part of government through the Ministry of General Education. Government however need to double its effort and reach out to all schools in need of the service, for such an initiative reduces learner absenteeism and promote academic

success, relieving schools of the burden associated with learner absenteeism and problems that are brought fourth.

5.2.6 Helping Learners with Home Work

The findings of the current study revealed that parents were involved in reducing learner absenteeism by helping children with home work and checking books to confirm if their children reached school every day. The study found that parents helped children in home work by tutoring and reading with them. Involvement of parents in home work was found to be a form of communication between school and families. It equally clarified to parents what was expected of learners and acted as a source of information to parents on what children were learning in school. The involvement of parents in home work was also found to motivate learners to attend school with confidence. However, the finding of this study is at variance with Kohn (2012) who argues that research has not been conclusive on assigning home work of any kind in any amount to learners in primary school. Kohn's study further indicated that parental involvement in home work interferes with learning and confuses learners because the teaching techniques used by parents are usually totally different from those used in the classroom. The current study established that non-completion of homework among learners whose parents were illiterate led to learner absenteeism and non-parental involvement due to inferiority complex. Besides that, learners whose parents were unable to help their children with home work were usually withdrawn out of embarrassment and feared to be punished by teachers if home work was not completed.

This study found that some parents did not help children with homework because they were not educated and lacked knowledge of how they could assist. Others felt that teachers needed to train parents on how they could help children with homework other than assuming that parents could manage regardless of their education levels. Teachers therefore need to acquire knowledge and skills of working with parents and train them to work with children in home work at home.

5.3 Benefits of Parental Involvement in Reducing Learner Absenteeism

The study established that there were benefits to involving parents in reducing learner absenteeism.

5.3.1 Reducing Learner Absenteeism

Regarding the benefits of parental involvement in reducing learner absenteeism, the study reported that parents, learners and schools all benefited from the involvement of parents. The majority of parent respondents revealed that they supported learners' attendance when schools involved them in reducing learner absenteeism because they became knowledgeable of the importance of school attendance. Epstein and Sheldon (2004) supports this finding by stating that there is a significance decrease in learner absenteeism when schools get into partnership with families and the community if they take a comprehensive approach by implementing activities that support good attendance. When schools work with parents and families to ensure children attend school every day and on time, it is likely that their effort will be successful if engaged in specific ways that promote attendance.

The majority of participants indicated that there was a reduction in learner absenteeism and increased daily rates of school attendance when parents got involved in reducing learner absenteeism. Since the study is purely qualitative in nature, the study did not seek to obtain figures in line with the information on the extent to which absenteeism was reduced when parents were involved in reducing learner absenteeism. However, participants confirmed of the reduction in learner absenteeism through their voices during the study and this is what one Grade Teacher, (GT3) said:

“The major benefit of involving parents in reducing learner absenteeism is that it has increased the rates of daily attendance. Learner absenteeism reduces when parents are involved because they are the custodian of learners. If parents want their children to attend school, they do so, if not, they stay away. Most learners whose parents are always involved with school do not just miss school anyhow because they know that parents would not like that to happen”.

It was established that parents being the custodians of children were key in reducing learner absenteeism. They had a choice, unlike the school to decide whether they wanted their child to attend school on a particular day or not. The study indicated that schools could only redeem itself of the problem of learner absenteeism by ensuring that all parents are considered important and involved in reducing learner absenteeism.

5.3.2 Enhanced parental Understanding of Importance of School Attendance

This current study established that parental involvement in reducing learner absenteeism enhanced parental understanding of the importance of school attendance for any child to

succeed academically. Parents that were involved with school in any ways had better understanding of the importance of why parents needed to work with school to reduce learner absenteeism. Such parents allowed their children to attend school unlike those that did not have any contact with school. This study further revealed that parents that were involved with school accorded their children ample time and some quite space to do their homework and study at home whilst communicating that school is important. However, the majority of respondents indicated that parents were at times the reason behind learner absenteeism. Findings from the study revealed that parents that were not involved in reducing learner absenteeism did not understand the importance of getting involved with school to reduce learner absenteeism assigned their children house chores or engaged them in income generating activities during school days.

The study indicated that parents that were not involved with school and going through economic hardships at the same time made children miss school more than the peers from non-poor families not out of their own will, but due to family circumstances surrounding them. What such parents lacked is knowledge that educating children was one way of breaking the poverty circle. Equally, parent's knowledge and understanding of their roles increased when they got involvement with school. Through interactions with other parents and teachers, parents that did not know their roles in the education of their children were enlightened of the same. Parents developed a sense of confidence especially those that doubted their capability to getting involved with school. Such parents showed interest in working with the school and other parents, which enhanced their involvement in reducing learner absenteeism.

Not until parents are enlightened on the importance of getting involved with school and their roles in reducing learner absenteeism and have their mind sets and attitudes changed, learner absenteeism may continue to be a challenge for many schools. Therefore, schools need to find better ways of collaborating with all parents regardless of the economic status and refer families in need of support to social services or organizations that may lender some support to enable parents find time to be involved in reducing learner absenteeism.

5.3.3 Relieving Teachers of Many Duties

The other benefit of parental involvement as established by the current study was that teachers were relieved of their many duties when parents got involved with school in

reducing absenteeism. The study established that the nature of the job of teachers is usually not well defined because they do even work which is supposed to be done by parents. Examples of such work are ensuring that learners get into class looking clean, putting on the rightful attire, have all school requirements and many others. This takes up time meant for teaching and adds on to the work load of a teacher. However, if parents are involved with school, they become aware of the processes off the school and ensure their children get to school as expected. the study established that teachers are relieved of duties and only concentrate on ensuring that task of ensuring that there is teaching and learning when parents play their roles.

The study further revealed that teachers are able to teach according to their planning if parents are involved in reducing learner absenteeism. They are able to cover work according to plan when all learners attend school, unlike having to revolve around same topic for the sake of absent learners or helping them catch up on missed work. . This finding is in line with Monadjem (2003) and Fan and Williams (2010) as cited in Kimu (2012) who stated that parental involvement is a sure way of ensuring that educators' roles are well defined and freed of many duties to focus more on the task of teaching learners.

As much as greater parental involvement relieves educators of the many responsibilities that could be handled by parents at home, learners spend much of their time in school, making it practically impossible for teacher to avoid other duties besides teaching. Besides that, some parents do not fulfill their responsibility of parenting their children into responsible people due to lacking knowledge, working long hours and engaging in delinquent behaviour. It is therefore important that teachers continue playing the role of a parent when children are in their custody. Parents equally need to understand roles they need to play to ensure that what children are being taught in school is in line with that of the home.

5.3.4 Increased contact between schools and Home

Parental involvement increased contact between school and home of children such that parents became more supportive of schools in reducing learner absenteeism. Parents became understanding of how challenging it is for schools to work alone to achieve its objectives without the help of families of children and the surrounding communities. These finding are supported by Sanders (2008) who stated that school community partnerships is an important way of addressing the many challenges that school are facing today and that many education

systems are resorting to embrace parents as key stake holders in education because much of the solutions to problems schools face lie either with the home or school.

The study established that involving parents in reducing learner absenteeism increased the contact between schools and the parents. The majority respondents indicated that getting involved in different aspects of school activities made parents have contact with school either by being there physically or through other means of communication such as phoning and note writing. Parents that were involved with school appreciated and supported what schools were doing because they became knowledgeable of the problems schools were facing.

Increased contact between school and parents of children made educators and parents appreciate each other's effort towards reducing learner absenteeism. It was revealed that involvement of parents built a cordial relationship between school and families of children. Parental involvement also lessened finger pointing or blaming of one another for any school failures such as poor performance of learners. Equally, the contact between home and school made learners realize that both teachers and parents had similar expectations of them, which is to attend school and succeed academically.

However, concerns were raised during the study that parents found it difficult working with educators that did not appreciate the effort they were making in supporting schools. Equally, the majority of respondents indicated that educators were not transparent in certain issues especially those involving money. Parents are however most likely to participate in school programmes and get involved with schools to reduce learner absenteeism when they are deemed important partners. It is therefore imperative that teachers treat parents with importance and build trust with parents to avoid suspicions standing in the way of sound parental involvement.

5.3.5 Improved Behavior of Learners

The study also revealed that parental involvement in reducing learner absenteeism improved behaviour of learners. Children behaved well at school, at home and in their communities when their parents worked closely with the school. The Edsource (2014) associates parental involvement to improved learner behavior leading to better attitudes about school work and attendance. The Edsource (2014) further states that most children just need adults who could understand them and capable of making changes in the way they react to situations and respond or interact with them to have their behavior changed. This however was not the case

with the this study for it was revealed that most children whose behavior affected attendance were found to lack supervision at home, had low self-esteem, and at times bullied, which could be decreased as parental involvement increased. The majority of learners that repeated one or more grades because of bad behaviour were mostly unable to acquire reading and writing skills due to missing lessons. Schools should therefore work with parents and set standard behaviour for learners, be it at home or school.

5.4 Challenges that Limit Parental Involvement in Reducing Learner Absenteeism

As much as the current study revealed that indicated that parental involvement in reducing learner absenteeism benefited schools, families, learners, and the community at large, parents still find limitations hindering from getting involved with schools.

5.4.1 Busy Schedules among Parents

With regards to challenges that limit parental involvement in reducing learner absenteeism, this study established that parents were too busy to be involved in reducing learner absenteeism in schools. It was found that parents failed to fully get involved in reducing learner absenteeism because they were too busy with their personal businesses. This implies that the absence of parents in running the affairs of schools might have in one way or another led to non-reduction of absenteeism in primary schools of Kazungula District. This finding is in line with Horvatin (2011) who states that working parents, those struggling to earn a living or those with one or more jobs do not have time to get involved in activities that promote school attendance either at home or school. Because of this and many other challenges, educators faced difficulties in executing their mandate of maintaining school attendance. However, this challenge is not peculiar to Zambian primary schools alone but also in the education systems of other countries across the globe. Schools, therefore, need to address issues of attendance with much importance and make plans to convince parents to find time to get involved with school regardless of their busy schedules.

5.4.2 Non-invitation to Parental involvement

The study revealed that educator did not invite parents to get involved with school due to negative attitudes towards working with them. It was found that educators did not consider parents adequately skilled to work as classroom helpers or help in extracurricular activities. Teachers also had negative attitude towards parental involvement because they did not see

the benefits of working with parents beyond that of paying fees and providing school requirements. It was apparent that teachers had no understanding of working with parents because their initial training did not equip them with skills and knowledge to do so. During the interviews, teacher respondents indicated that they had not attended any workshops to be trained on how to work with parents. The current study revealed that there was need to train educators in new strategies to work with parents in reducing learner absenteeism through CPDs to improve working relationship of schools and parents. On the other hand, parents shunned school activities because they found it hard working with educators that did not need them anywhere near the school activities.

It was reported that non-invitation of parents to get involved in activities that promote attendance made schools to work in isolation, hence failing in areas that required parental intervention. Handerson (1988) supports such a move by asserting that schools have too much work to do and feel engaging parents in education would only consume their time meant for teaching. Other advocates of the closed door position with respect to the school and community relations posit that parents would interfere with the smooth running of schools as they were emotionally attached to their children. Despite the fact that the aforesaid study was done in the USA, its findings and recommendations were applicable to this study. The majority teacher respondents indicated that even if they invited parents to get involved with school, they are never satisfied with what educators do. On the other hand, Parents felt certain kinds of involvement were imposed on them even when they did not have knowledge and skills to implement them. One such involvement cited was that of parents helping their children with homework and yet educators have not given information and training on how to go about it. Therefore, schools should convince parents to always be ready to learn where they lack knowledge.

5.4.3 Long Distance to School

The findings of this study revealed that long distances to school was another challenge that impeded parents from getting involved in school in reducing learner absenteeism. This came to light when respondents reported that long distances to school made it hard for parents to get involved even when they wanted to. It was revealed that covering long distances to and from school on foot consumed time that could be spent on other home responsibilities or working to support the family. The findings are in line with Ndhlovu (2005) whose study revealed that parents living far from school need transport to make their involvement easier.

The findings of the current study revealed that the issue of transport was a hindrance to sound parental involvement. Parents of low income status could not afford financing all the trips to get to school and back just to get involved in reducing learner absenteeism. However, a few respondents felt that failure to get involved due to long distance was nothing serious but just an excuse because children managed to cover similar distances to and from schools every day. They indicated that parents could also manage to do the same if they really were serious with getting involved. However, some respondents felt that even when they could cover the distances, they had other responsibilities that needed their attention at home. It is for such reasons that they suggested that schools could relieve parents of the burden of always visiting schools to get involved by conducting some meeting or parental involvement activities that improve attendance from the communities where parents live. One such activity cited was sensitization meetings on parental involvement.

5.4.4 Poor Relationships between Teachers and Parents

The study revealed that poor relationships between teachers and parents stood in parent's way of getting involved with school in reducing learner absenteeism. Parents indicated that they were not comfortable getting involved with schools in reducing learner absenteeism because they did not relate well with each other considering the treatment and blames they received for all wrongs done by children. This finding contradicts with Epstein and Sheldon (2010) whose finding reported that parents in California were very much respected and welcomed to school to offer their support to schools. This shows how much value schools in some countries attach to working with parents to ensure children succeed academically through the support rendered, unlike the findings of this study in which parents are neither welcomed nor respected by educators. Failure to relate well with each other could lead to lack of involvement in reducing learner absenteeism by parents. Therefore, schools and parents should work towards building sound relationships, acknowledging the importance of each one of them and become more accommodative.

5.4.5 Poverty

It was revealed that the majority of parents in the three school communities were unemployed and living in poverty. Van Velso and Orozco (2007) state that, it is hard for parents that are living in poverty to take part in school activities due to inadequate resources that would make their involvement easier. It was found that the majority of parents lacked economic resources

such as phones to communicate with school and could not meet school requirements for their children. Equally, parents living in poverty indicated that they had doubts if their abilities were sufficient enough to get involved with school for they did not obtain a certain level of education when they attended school. Additionally, parents living in poverty needed to work long hours to fend for their families and still needed to attend to other multiple responsibilities at home, leaving them with no time to get involved in school affairs either at home or school. Children from poor families were at risk of experiencing education hardships such as dropping out of school and grade retention due to absenteeism and lack of support from parents. Therefore, schools should link poor families and their children to social services to relieve them of burdens that affect school attendance.

5.4 Interventional Measures put in Place by Schools to Improve Parental Involvement Reducing Learner Absenteeism.

Developing programs that bring schools, families and the community at large together in a partnership is one way schools could enhance the involvement of parents in reducing learner absenteeism. Schools being at a centre of decision making can do a lot to encourage participation of parents in education by putting to good use their expertise and resources and reaching out to support them at the same time.

5.5.1 Improved Communication

Findings from the study revealed that schools were improving communication as an intervention measure to improve parental involvement in reducing learner absenteeism. It was found that improving communication between school and home was a sure way of enhancing parental involvement in reducing learner absenteeism. When schools communicated constantly with families about learner attendance using the appropriate channel suitable for individual parents, more parents became willing to become involved with school to support the education of learners. Epstein and Sheldon (2010) agrees with the findings and states that communication between school and home is a sure way of providing families with information on parental involvement opportunities that exists at school and the attendance goals of schools. It is equally a strategy schools were using to reduce learner absenteeism by sharing necessary information with parents.

The majority of parent respondents indicated that they would be more willing to get involved in reducing learner absenteeism and to support children's attendance if they were

communicated to regularly. From the teachers' point of view, the common forms of communication that improved parental involvement were those that engaged parents and educators in contact with each other. When parents were allowed to visit school at any time to approach educators over issues of concern, parents became involved with school unlike when schools put in place a closed door policy of not wanting to discuss problems with parents. However, teachers indicated that it is rare that majority of parents take advantage of such opportunities to visit schools to talk about issues affecting their involvement and child's attendance.

Respondents revealed that schools needed to be mindful of certain forms of communication if parental involvement was to be enhanced. The results of the study indicated that communicating to parents only when the school wanted them to pay school fees, give a donation, doing some work at school or when the child had a disciplinary case was quite discouraging. The study revealed that parents wanted to be communicated to even when the news was positive, such as improved performance or attendance. Communication is important in any partnership because it facilitates effective delivery of information and feedback to both parties. Schools need to improve communication in order to ensure that all parents are informed of any new developments in school. Schools should understand that parents depend on them for any information concerning their children. Therefore, if schools are able to enhance communication, so will parental involvement. Schools should therefore keep communication lines open and encourage parents to feel free to approach teachers every time they have problems that need to be discussed.

5.5.2 Creating Welcoming School Environment

To enhance involvement of parents in reducing learner absenteeism, schools according to the findings of the current study created welcoming school climate for parents. This was done by providing a personal greeting to all visiting parents and attending to them as individuals to show that they were valued and welcome at school. Attendance Works (2014) confirms that when teachers get to know parents of absent learners and personalise relationships with them, it sends messages that they are valued as important partners in the education of their children. It was revealed that improving parental involvement in reducing learner absenteeism calls for building opening doors of the school, having respect for each other as well as trust. However, it was stated that most parents have not had the opportunity to get to meet the teachers of their children to build personal relationships due to various reasons which include; not having

the confidence to face teachers, lack of time, non-invitation and lack of interest. On the other hand, it was found that teachers due to their perception of parental involvement and busy schedules did not conduct visits to homes of absent learners to meet the parents and find out what makes it difficult for them to get involved with school as well as sending children to school.

Teachers being at the centre of decision making with regards to education can improve parental involvement by creating opportunities to connect with families. This could be by simply inviting parents to school and take advantage of parental visits to school to showcase what children are learning and capable of accomplishing. This motivates parents to get involved with school for they get impressed to see children in action learning and sharing the products of their hard work. It is therefore important that relationships are maintained by promoting interaction between school and home and opening doors of schools. It is equally important that schools acknowledge the ideas and skills that parents bring on board to be infused into school.

5.5.3 Encouraging Parents to Serve in PTAs and Attending Meetings

The study found that parents were invited to serve in school committees as a way of improving their involvement in reducing learner absenteeism. Out of the many committees that were in existence, the most pronounced one was the PTA committee. It was revealed that serving in school committees and encouraging parents to attend meetings at school gave parents an opportunity to make decisions with regard to the education of their children. It equally enhanced the relationships of parents and educators and enlightened parents of their responsibilities towards the education of their children. This finding is in line with those of (Kimu, 2012) who assert that involving parents in school committees afford them an opportunity to take part in the governance of schools where they become part of the goal setting team. In school committees and during meetings, a lot is at stake because parents have the opportunity to discuss with educators the general running of school and how parental involvement could be enhanced to reduce learner absenteeism.

5.5.4 Volunteering

Encouraging parents to volunteer in different activities at school is one other way schools found useful to improving parental involvement to reduce learner absenteeism. The study revealed that schools created opportunities for parents to volunteer in different activities that

promoted school attendance. This is in line with Epstein (2010) who states that volunteering at school is one way of supporting learners' activities and their effort. From the majority respondents' point of view, schools gave opportunities to parents to volunteer in different activities depending on how much time they had and their individual capabilities bearing in mind they are potential partners in education. However, some parents did not volunteer in school activities due to factors such as busy schedules, thinking that they lacked knowledge and skills, and not having interest. On the other hand, having a belief that educators are supposed to run of schools without parents interfering was a hindrance to parental volunteering in schools. Other parents indicated that it was not necessary to volunteer at school when other parents were not doing it and yet they also had children attending school and benefitting from the effort of those that volunteered.

Volunteering at a child's school acted as a catalyst for parents to stay connected with teachers and share similar attendance and educational goals. Parents that could not volunteer in school related activities such as helping in classes and extracurricular activities because they did not attain any education could still take part in activities that did not require them to have an education back ground. Such activities included preparing meals for learners at school, taking part in school project and helping learners cross the busy roads when going and coming from school. It is therefore important that educators become more inviting of parents to volunteer in any way possible to get them closer to school as well as use initiative to get help of parents in all areas of children's education to improve their involvement. The more parents volunteer at school, the more they get to understand their responsibilities and those of teachers in ensuring that their children attend school.

5.5.5 Assigning Home Work

The study indicated that schools improved the involvement of parents in reducing learner absenteeism by assigning home work to learner, which required parental participation. Unlike giving learners home work which only literate parents could assist children with, it was indicated that teachers also gave home work in form of school projects that only required skills that are commonly used in the local area to accord all parents an opportunity to participate in school work. Examples of types of home work that motivated parents to participate included; making reed mats, drawing and naming of items in local names and coming up with stories to tell to the whole class. Parents are always encouraged to get involved with school when they realize they are capable of helping their child with school

even in a smaller way. The findings of this study were specific to the type of home work that is capable of improving parental involvement and take into consideration illiterate parents, unlike findings by Epstein and Sheldon (2007) which generally stated that checking children's home work and reading with them improves attendance and parental involvement minus stating what kind of home work is capable of doing so. This study therefore is not in agreement with these earlier findings for illiterate parents are not able to help with just any kind of home work.

Assigning specific kind of home work to learners has been found to improve parental involvement and the confidence of parents in matters to do with the education of their children. However, learners whose parents are not able to read and write are most likely to become illiterate adults as well if they leave school unable to read. Therefore, if the illiteracy circle is not broken, it will continue being a hindrance to sound parental involvement. Schools therefore need not to ignore parents who are illiterate because their involvement is capable of helping children navigate through school.

5.5 Summary

This chapter presented the discussion of findings of the study in line with the objectives. The next chapter presents the conclusion of the study and puts forward recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER SIX: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Overview

The previous chapter discussed the findings of the study. This chapter presents the summary of research findings, conclusion and recommendations of the study. It must be confirmed that this study was confined only to three selected primary schools in Kazungula District. In investigating parental involvement in reducing learner absenteeism, the aim of the study was to find out ways through which parents are involved in reducing learner absenteeism, benefits of parental involvement in reducing learner absenteeism, limitations to parental involvement in reducing learner absenteeism and measures put in place by schools to improve parental involvement in reducing learner absenteeism.

6.2 Summary

The findings of the study revealed that there was parental involvement in the sampled primary schools and that parents got involved in the following manner: serving and participation in PTA meetings, helping children with school-home works, paying fees and providing children with all the school requirements, attending school open days, volunteering at school, preparing and providing food for children before they left school.

Regarding the benefits of parental involvement in reducing learner absenteeism in school, the study revealed that there was improved school attendance, improves behaviour in learners, increase understanding of the importance of school attendance. Further, parental involvement relieved teachers of the many duties and improved contact between schools and parents.

The study equally revealed the barriers to parental involvement of which the common ones include: Parents being too busy, long distance to school, negative attitudes working, poor relationship between teachers and poverty among parents.

Furthermore, the study also came up with the interventional measures which included the following; improving communication between school and home, creating welcoming school environments, helping learners with home work, encouraging parents to volunteer at school and serve in school PTA committees as well as attending meetings.

The Ministry of General education realizes the need to work with parents in the provision of education in Zambia. The government through the current Education policy document, MoE

(1996) made pronouncements to recognize partnership in the delivery of education. In spite of this pronouncement, not much effort has been put by schools with regards to involving parents in reducing learner absenteeism. This study viewed parental involvement in terms of parents providing school requisites, paying school fees, attending meetings and open days, preparing children for school and providing food before children left for school. Due to such notions, parents are not involved with schools in many other ways as suggested by Epstein's (1995) Family-School-Community model which could be beneficial in improving parental involvement to reduce learner absenteeism.

Conclusion

From what has been established throughout this study, parental involvement is essential in reducing learner absenteeism, which happens to be among the problems schools are facing today. Although some sectors of society view learner absenteeism as a problem that only involves schools and learners, this study established that reducing learner absenteeism requires parental involvement. The involvement of parents in reducing learner absenteeism however can only be enhanced if schools conduct a wide range of involvement activities that engage families and community partners to encourage, monitor, and support student attendance.

The aim of this study was to establish ways through which parents are involved in reducing learner absenteeism, the benefits and barriers to parental involvement as well as measures schools were putting in place to improve parental involvement. The study was anchored on Epstein's (1995) School-Family-Community partnership model and parental involvement was measured based on the six types of involvement as suggested by the theory which include; parenting, communication, volunteering, learning at home, decision making and collaboration with the community. The study looked at types of parental involvement commonly used by schools to engage parents in working with schools to ensure children's success in education.

The study is in line with Epstein (1995)'s framework which indicates that parental involvement could be viewed in line with the six types of education involvement which include; parenting, decision making, volunteering, communication, collaboration and learning at home. However, the theoretical implications of this study in relation to Kazungula District are that schools have not engaged parents much in reducing learner absenteeism in accordance to the theory. For instance, types of involvement such as parenting and

collaborating with the community as they appear in chapter 2, table 1 of this document were not implemented by Schools. Even those ways of involving parents in reducing learner absenteeism that schools in Kazungula district implemented were not done extensively. Therefore, schools need to engage parents in reducing learner absenteeism using all the six types of involvement in line with the theory.

6.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Schools should introduce reach out programmes to the communities that they serve in order to encourage parents to get involved in the affairs of the school.
2. DEBS's office should encourage educators to design programmes that involve members of the community, for example community studies through the localisation of the curriculum.
3. Government should incorporate parental involvement issues in teacher training curriculum and workshops held on education matters.
4. Schools should be linking families of perpetual absent children to social services to ensure their needs are met.
5. School guidance committees should be conducting home visits to parents that are unable to support the education their children.
6. DEBS's office should initiate the training of teachers on how to work with parents through Continuing Professional Development.
7. Schools should strengthen and expand PTAs beyond just having the annual general meetings.

6.4 Areas for Further Research

For future research, the researchers should consider doing a quantitative study to measure performance and the morale of teachers. Researchers may consider carrying out survey in order to have a bigger sample.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS

THE TITLE OF RESEARCH: PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN REDUCING LEARNER ABSENTEEISM IN SELECTED RURAL PRIMARY SCHOOLS OF KAZUNGULA DISTRICT, ZAMBIA.

This consent form serves to give you an understanding of the purpose of this research and subsequently the procedure to be followed when undertaking it. Further implications for your participation are explained. Make sure you read the information sheet carefully.

1. Description; This study is purely an academic research undertaking. The researcher is a University of Zambia student pursuing a Master's degree in Sociology of Education. The research being undertaken is a major requirement to complete the Programme.

2. Purpose; The purpose of this study is to explore parental involvement in reducing learner absenteeism in selected rural primary schools of kazungula district, Zambia.

3. Consent: Participating in this study is voluntary, meaning that you are free to say so or withdraw at any time if you do not want to take part.

4. Confidentiality; All the data collected from this research will be highly confidentiality and participants are assured of anonymity in this research.

5. Rights of Respondent; The rights of the respondents will be protected and respected. Participants are assured that they shall suffer no harm as a result of participating in this exercise. Participants are free to ask for clarifications at any point during the exercise and to inform the researcher if they feel uncomfortable about any procedure in the research and may withdraw if they wish.

DECLARATION OF CONSENT

I have read through the participant information sheet. I now consent voluntarily to be a participant in this project.

Participant's Name.....

Signature.....

Date.....

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR HEAD TEACHERS/ GRADE TEACHERS

TITLE: PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN REDUCING LEARNER ABSENTEEISM IN SELECTED RURAL PRIMARY SCHOOLS OF KAZUNGULA DISTRICT, ZAMBIA.

I'm a postgraduate student in the School of Education, department of educational psychology, sociology and special education. I am carrying out a research on parental involvement in reducing learner absenteeism in selected rural primary schools of kazungula district. The information being collected is for academic purposes only.

Your cooperation is highly appreciated.

Peggy Muyabi

QUESTIONS

1. What is your position in the school?
2. How long have you been teaching/ administering school (in years)?
3. Do you involve parents in reducing learner absenteeism?
4. If your answer to question one is yes, explain ways in which you involve parents in reducing learner absenteeism?
5. Does the school arrange enough opportunities for parents to be involved?
6. How frequently do you invite to discuss school attendance?
7. Do you think the involvement of parents is important in reducing learner absenteeism?
8. What benefits are there when you involve parents in reducing learner absenteeism?
9. Do parents face limitations in participating in reducing learner absenteeism?
10. What limitations do parents face in participating in reducing learner absenteeism?
11. Do you think you need to do something to improve parental involvement in reducing learner absenteeism?
12. Would you suggest ways in which the school can improve parental involvement in reducing learner absenteeism?

APPENDIX C: PARENTS' INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

TITLE: PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN REDUCING LEARNER ABSENTEEISM IN SELECTED RURAL PRIMARY SCHOOLS OF KAZUNGULA DISTRICT, ZAMBIA.

I'm a postgraduate student in the School of Education, department of educational psychology, sociology and special education. i am carrying out a research on parental involvement in reducing learner absenteeism in selected rural primary schools of kazungula district. The information being collected is for academic purposes only.

Your cooperation is highly appreciated.

Peggy Muyabi

QUESTIONS

1. Gender
2. What do you do for a living?
3. How far have you gone in your education?
4. What is your occupation?
5. How would you describe your socio- economic status? Poor, rich or middle income?
6. Do you have children at this school?
7. How many?
8. Do you encourage them to attend school regularly?
9. Are you involved in reducing absenteeism?
10. If your answer to question 1 is yes, explain ways in which your school is involving you in reducing absenteeism
11. Does the school arrange enough opportunities for you to be involved?
12. If yes, what opportunities?
13. How frequently are you invited to discuss school attendance?
14. Do you think your involvement in reducing absenteeism is important?
15. What benefits are there when you are involved in reducing children's absenteeism?
16. Do you face limitations in participating in reducing absenteeism?

17. What limitations do you face in participating in reducing your children's absenteeism?
18. Do you think the school needs to do something to improve your involvement in reducing absenteeism?
19. Would you suggest ways in which the school can improve your involvement in reducing absenteeism by learners?

Thank you for taking part and your cooperation

APPENDIX D: FOCUSED GROUP DISCUSSION FOR LEARNERS

TITLE: PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN REDUCING LEARNER ABSENTEEISM IN SELECTED RURAL PRIMARY SCHOOLS OF KAZUNGULA DISTRICT, ZAMBIA.

I'm a postgraduate student in the School of Education, department of educational psychology, sociology and special education. I am carrying out a research on parental involvement in reducing learner absenteeism in selected rural primary schools of kazungula district. The information being collected is for academic purposes only.

Your cooperation is highly appreciated.

Peggy Muyabi

QUESTIONS

1. Do you attend school regularly?
2. If the answer to question 1 is no, give reasons why not.
3. Do you think your parents are involved in reducing your absenteeism from school?
4. If your answer to question 1 is yes, explain how your school is involving your parents in reducing learner absenteeism
5. Does the school arrange enough opportunities for your parents to be involved in reducing your absenteeism from school?
6. How frequently are your parents invited to discuss school attendance?
7. Do you think your parents' involvement is important in reducing your absenteeism from school?
8. What benefits are there when your parents are involved in reducing your absenteeism from school?
9. Do your parents face limitations in participating in reducing your absenteeism?
10. What limitations do your parents face in participating in reducing your absenteeism?
11. Do you think the school needs to do something to improve your parents' involvement in reducing your absenteeism?

12. Would you suggest ways in which the school can improve your parents' involvement in reducing absenteeism

Thank you very much for your participation