

Analysis of Interaction between Home and School for Adolescent Girls: A Case of Eastern Sierra LeoneJohnson Adlyn Omojowo¹ and Oladele O.Idowu²

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ABSTRACT: Interaction between the home and the school is essential in the school lives of participants. Adolescent girls are facing a lot of problems both academically and personal and need all the support they can get from both the home and school environment. Primary data was collected from 8% of the population of girls at the final level of Junior Secondary School in the Eastern Province of Sierra Leone. The study reveals that both of these important channels: the home and the school are not living up to expectations. The parents are abandoning their roles as most of them do not attend the Community Teachers Association (CTA) meetings and do not even go to the schools to check on their girls' progress. The schools personnel are also failing the girls as school counsellors are not present and where they are present they have not established their relevance to the girls. The study concludes by proffering suggestions that it is the schools that have to come up with strategies to get more parents to become involved in school activities.

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INTRODUCTION

Formal basic education, involving the first nine years in school, is now the rallying cry of educators. To provide a basic education for all children is a basic human right. Basic formal education as conceived by the Sierra Leone Education Sector Plan (2007) is aimed at equipping the child through the first nine years in schools with knowledge, skills and attitudes that will enable her to develop to her fullest capacity, derive maximum benefits from her membership of the society and fulfill her civic obligations. Basic education is seen as the most important level in the educational system, as it combines the primary level and the most important years in the secondary level. It is at this stage that the potentialities of childhood and actualities of adulthood are mediated upon. It equips its participants with the means of providing themselves with knowledge and understanding and the skills where by they can realize their ambitions. Schools have assumed the roles of preparing the young for their future adult roles and this responsibility has to be performed by teachers and guidance counselors.

Odaga and Henelved (1995) and Haq (1992) are of the opinion that school-related factors play an important role in motivating girls to enroll and stay on in schools. School based factors are viewed as driving demands to enhance girls' participation at the formal basic education level. If girls are to go to school, there must be more enhanced school related factors open to them. There must be more school places and a general commitment to compulsory, free basic education. In

certain cultures, a girl's chances of going to school may be directly dependent upon the availability of separate school facilities for girls and the presence of female teachers. Also, girls' enrolment rates improve and dropout reduce significantly with the presence of female teachers in schools and the nature of the curriculum.

Lockheed and Vespoor (1990) state that: home based factors are stronger determinants on female participation in school, than the characteristics of the school. They however admit that the relationship between the home and the school is frustrating and denies any easy method of remedy. Governments, donors and educationists have tended to think in terms of school based factors, assuming that with enough schools, teachers, textbooks, the educational system will produce the desired outcomes for increased participation of students, especially girls. Tilak (1989) state that it is rightly supposed by many that since education is desirable as a social good, its benefits at the private or individual level will be obvious to parents, producing a high level of private demand for educational services. They state that the reality is that insufficient quantity and quality of educational resources limit student access to the system, constraining the educational participation of girls who stand behind boys in the queue for rational school places.

Stevens (1999) working with secondary school girls in the Southern Province of Sierra Leone revealed that there is a direct relationship between the homes pupils comes from and their achievement at

school. In this regard, whatever the teachers attempt to do, they must start with pupils whose lives have been shaped by the educational offerings of their homes. Rihani (1993) opines that discrimination against girls in the formal school system is closely related to the dichotomy of the home and the school. In African rural areas especially, the school is seen as the opening of a gap between formalized labour and informal household work. Parents, the first and foremost educators of their children, and the teachers should work together in a partnership that is both positive and cooperative. Therefore, as students learn and develop, parental and teacher involvement is crucial for their success. Johnson (2010) is convinced that the presence of guidance counsellors in the schools will help promote communication between the home and school. Special efforts are continually made to increase and improve this important link. Parents and school personnel must act as a liaison between the school and the home, providing a channel of communication between the two.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The debate between the most important interactive forces in the lives of school children, including adolescent girls is a contentious one. This study was carried out using primary data to determine the extent to which adolescent girls' school lives are affected by their homes and schools. It was conducted in the three districts of the Eastern Province of Sierra Leone; Kenema, Kono and Kailahun. The Eastern Province is the furthest province from the capital Freetown and apart from the headquarters towns; the region is marked by its rural ness and its concentration on agriculture and mining. The principal sample group in this study was 8% of final year class of the Junior Secondary Schools (JSS 3) and this amounted to seven hundred and two girls. A null hypothesis was also advanced using the Regression analysis at the 95 % confidence level to find out whether there is a significant relationship between the support girls receive from the school and the home and their Regularity in school.

RESULTS

Table 1 and 2 shows the results of the study and stated Respondents' distribution based on school and Community Teachers Association (CTA) activities and Table 2: Determinants of Regularity in Schools by Home and School Support factors respectively.

Table 1: Respondents' distribution based on school and Community Teachers Association (CTA) activities

Variable	Frequency	Percentages
Attendance at CTA	169	24.1
Always	244	34.8
Sometimes	289	41.2
Never		
Visit to school by Parent / Guardian		
Always	27	3.7
Sometimes	127	17.7
Never	552	76.6
Discussion of school progress by Parent/Guardian		
Always	261	37.2
Sometimes	344	49.0
Never	97	13.8
Presence of Guidance counselors		
Yes	277	38.5
No	443	61.5
Private sessions with guidance counselor		
Always	17	2.4
Sometimes	63	9.0
Never	200	28.5
Non response	422	60.1
Private sessions with class teachers		
Always	126	17.9
Sometimes	177	25.2
Never	399	56.8

Table 2: Determinants of Regularity in Schools by Home and School Support factors

	B	SE	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	1.547	.340		4.544	.000
Attendance at CTA	-.035	.032	-.066	-1.090	.277
Visits to School	.053	.049	.065	1.072	.285
Discussion of School Progress	.023	.041	.035	.544	.587
Presence of Guidance/Counsellor	.004	.106	.002	.038	.970
Private Sessions with G/C	-.002	.044	-.002	-.034	.973
Private Sessions with Class teachers	-.001	.035	-.002	-.029	.977
Undesirable Sexual Advances from teachers	-.116	.080	-.106	-1.454	.147
Gender of teachers liked	-.048	.053	-.056	-.916	.361

DISCUSSIONS

Table 1 show that 41.2% of the parents never attend Community Teachers' Association; 34.8% sometimes attended CTA and 24.1% always attended CTA meetings. The data from Table 1 showed that parents have to show more interest in their girls' education by participating in CTA meetings where issues regarding their education are discussed. From the analyses based on Table 1, 78.6% of the parents/guardians of the girls never visited the school; 17.7% sometimes visited the schools and 3.7% always visited the schools. The responses continued to reveal that there is need for more interest to be shown by parents/guardians in the education of their girls. To

further find out the interest parents/guardians displayed in their wards' education, Table 1 was developed. From this table, 49.0% sometimes discussed the school progress of their wards; 37.2% always discussed the school progress of the girls and 13.8% never discussed their school progress. The information depicted showed that parents need to show more interest in the school work of their children. There is need for greater links between the school and the home. In order to probe the interaction from the school on the lives of adolescent school girls, questions were asked on the presence and work of guidance counsellors. From the responses of the girls to the question of whether there is a guidance/counselor in their school, 61.5% responded negatively whilst 38.5% responded positively. The table has shown that contrary to what the Education Sector Plan (2007) states that every Junior Secondary School must have a Guidance Counsellor; the majority of the girls did not have such an important personnel in the schools that would create more links between the home and the school.

In Table 1, 28.5% never used the services of the Counsellor; 9.0% sometimes consulted the counselors and 2.4% always made use of the guidance services in their schools. The role of Guidance and Counselling Services in schools cannot be underestimated. Findings that even when they were present in the schools, the majority of the female students, never made use of them were disturbing and a cause for concern. When these girls were asked whether they had private sessions or counseling sessions with their class teachers, 56.8% said that they never had these sessions; 25.2% said sometimes and 17.9% said that they always had regular private sessions with their teachers. The majority of the female respondents did not have private sessions with their teachers. Friendly teachers contribute a lot to the adjustment and mental health of the children in school. Unfortunately, in a situation where teachers and students do not have such interaction, schools tend to be harsh and unattractive to its participants. The importance of Guidance and Counselling Services cannot be overestimated. The majority of the female respondents did not have access to Guidance Counsellors or never made use of them. It was discouraging to note that most of these girls did not have private sessions with their teachers. Tilak (1980) is strongly convinced that the absence of a warm school climate negates against girls' participation in school. The lack of friendly interaction between pupils and teachers is detrimental to the creation of a friendly and attractive school climate which helps girls, especially adolescents to make a successful adjustment between school and home problems.

In Table 2, the results of the hypothesis testing using the multiple regression analysis showed that there is a relationship between home and school variables and the dependent variable, regularity of girls in schools. The following variables were statistically significant at the 95% confidence level: attendance at CTA meetings and undesirable sexual advances by teachers. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected and the alternative hypothesis was accepted. The research suggests that both in-school factors and home factors play an important role on the school lives of adolescent girls. The home and school are the two most important parts of their lives as what happens at one usually affects the other. School girls are barometers of their environment, and when things are going well in both environments, it is easy for them to do better in school. Parents have to be very conscious of their jobs as "first and subordinate teachers." Unfortunately for most parents, even the educated ones, once their children enter secondary school, they tend to abdicate this role. But the fact is, home life encourages school success. Parents must visit schools, have a good rapport with the teachers and ensure that they make the home an environment to make their children excel academically. School counselling barely exists in secondary schools in the region being studied. These teachers lack codes which will ensure that they do not wait for these children to seek them out to bring out their relevance in creating interactions between the home and the school. These school counsellors and even the school teachers are yet to honour the African values which makes every one's problems his own.

It would be very difficult for the students to succeed without the continual and enthusiastic support of the parent. The school has the responsibility in communities where most of these parents may be illiterate or are not fully convinced of the importance of education to devote time and energy to create links between these two important groups. It is important that more efforts be made to create and maintain links between the home and the school. CTAs provide a platform for meetings during the year where parents and the school officials review and discuss a variety of topics of interest and of concern to the school family. These meetings and other social events that are there, provide a platform for the families to meet, interact and learn of all the opportunities where they can volunteer their time and expertise to the school.

The schools have to make sure that programmes are instituted to help parents become more interested, involved and supportive of their daughters' participation in schools. CTA meetings have to be more interesting and Open Days should be held when parents and teachers interact in a friendly and non time conscious atmosphere. Special efforts have to be made to ensure that quality Guidance

Counselling services involving vocational, academic and personal counseling are available in the schools. Also, these teachers should be given half work load as the Policy demands so that they can work together with the girls to identify their problems and help solve these problems. These counselors must maintain regular contact with the parents of girls as well as the pupils themselves. They must also hold seminars for females as well as male teachers on the attributes of role models and the damaging effects of molestation and exploitation by teachers on the female pupils. Furthermore, an Annual Giving Fund and a yearly "Gala" to raise funds for the school can be held. These programs enable the teachers to plan many special activities with the help and cooperation of the parents to enhance the participation of girls' in schools. The government must provide the school with funds, materials, special events, and considerable expertise if they are to fulfill this mandate

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