Cultural Practices and Education in Ghana: The Effects of Traditional Culture on Parental Involvement in Education

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to understand parents' perception of the value of education, and the level of parents' involvement in their children's education. The study was guided by preparing and using semi-structured, informal, and focus group interviews as well as documents (written reports, memoranda, meeting notes) that describe parental values of education; reviewing pertinent literature on parent values of education, identifying and summarizing concepts that help explain factors associated with parental support for their children attending school. Participants' (i.e. community elders, parents, teachers and school administrators) perspectives were examined for the purpose of developing a set of propositions. The study confirmed that norms, values, and beliefs held by a group influences behavior. It revealed that the dominant factor that inhibits parents' support for their children's education in the community school was related to traditional culture. In sum, strong cultures may be rigid and thus be a liability when adaptation is essential. Understanding gained from this exploratory study will be relevant to the economically developing nations in Sub-Saharan Africa and even beyond.

Keywords: Parental perception, parental involvement, parental support, cultural capital, parental value.

1. Introduction

Parents' perspectives on the efficacy of education and their relations with schools, particularly with regard to supporting their children's learning, has a powerful effect on the academic success of their children. According to a study by Wilson, Cordry, Notar, and Friery (2004), teachers concur that they cannot do it alone, and for effective educational processes to occur in classrooms, parental help in partnership with educators is needed. Epstein and Salinas (2004) state that a school learning community includes educators, students, parents, and community partners who work together to improve the school and enhance students' learning opportunities. The home, school, and community connections make school subjects more meaningful for students. In addition, to learn at high levels, all students need the guidance and support of their teachers, families, and others in the community. Nonetheless, there are several inhibitions to parents' involvement in their children's education in many parts of the world. There is the need to identify and address those factors that pose as obstacles to parental involvement in their children's education. For instance, the government of Ghana introduced a new educational reform program dubbed "Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education" (FCUBE). This was an effort to boost education, yet many children still do not have access to basic education. Based on the information gathered from forums and conferences of heads of schools in the country, it is evident that the few children who attend schools do not have adequate parental support.

This study took place at a community school that was established as a local initiative, born out of the local value system and moral values of the village. It was set up to directly meet the immediate and compelling needs of the community: To care for and educate children of working parents. The school helped to improve the living conditions of the people of the community (with high illiteracy rate and low-income population) and surrounding areas by providing support and education for their children. Students of the school have little support from parents. For example, a child may come to school with only one exercise book for lessons in about eight different subjects, as well as assigned homework. In addition, few students come to school with text books. During a reading class, more than six children often crowd over the one textbook owned by a single student. The effect of the unfortunate lack of textbooks is compounded by the inability of students to practice reading at home, which inhibits the students' learning and achievement. This also makes things difficult for teachers and the

school administration. Although parents are responsible for providing books and school supplies, they often blame teachers for their child's poor academic performance. Ironically, parents who claim to be too poor to afford school supplies and books often dress up in elegant clothes on special occasions, such as parties, and funerals.

The objective of this exploratory qualitative study is to understand parents' perception of the value of education, and the level of parents' involvement in their children's education. The essential characteristic of the Ghanaian social system is its accommodation of traditional cultures, customs, and practices with demands of contemporary life. Relationships within traditional society are based on family membership, inherited status, and ancestral beliefs. Contemporary society is grafted onto traditional roots, and although traditional social relationships have often been partially transformed to fit the needs of modern life, they continue to endure.

The questions that need to be addressed in this study are: If parents of the community school have priorities to allocate their resources, what are they? What are parents' family values or what is most important for their children?

2. Research Method

This study was guided by several research objectives such as preparing and using semi-structured, informal, and focus group interviews as well as documents (written reports, memoranda, meeting notes) that describe parental values of education during the bounded period from 2011 to 2013; reviewing pertinent literature on parent values of education, identifying and summarizing concepts that help explain factors associated with parental support for their children attending school. Participant interviews served as one of the primary data sources for the study. The researchers used two types of interviews that Creswell (2003) views as acceptable in conducting qualitative research studies, including individual or one-on-one interviews and focus group interviews. The three primary sources of data include observations, interviews, and documents. The researchers selected a representative sample of sixty parents, who served as key informants. They formed six focus groups of ten members each. One focus group comprised of all of the fifteen teachers. In addition, there was a focus group composed of three staff members. The first parent focus group interview took place at the beginning of the research study to provide direction and refinement of interview questions. Subsequent focus group interviews were conducted throughout the study period from 2011 to 2013. Individual interviews with ten community leaders provided a different perspective on parental values and parental involvement in education. Analysis of pertinent documents proceeded concurrently with focus group and individual interviews and they facilitated triangulation of data and added to confidence in its accuracy. The researchers reviewed school documents, including parent contributions (financial and personal time) to support their child's education and their participation in Parent-Teacher-Association meetings. These data indicated the level of parental involvement in their children's education. These data also provided some insight into parent value of education. Four groups of individuals, including community elders, parents of children attending the community school, teachers and administrators were interviewed to more fully understand parent perceptions of the value of education. Data collected were reported separately under these four headings.

These interview data were analyzed and a number of categories emerged from the data, but for this paper the researchers decided to highlight "the influence of parental conformity with cultural norms, values, and beliefs on the allocation of resources for education," because it was the dominant factor of the study, that was mentioned by all groups of research participants. The category provided an organized framework for analyzing data. Relevant data were summarized under the category followed by synopses of relevant literature. Findings were discussed and a set of (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) propositions were presented at the end of the analysis section that summarizes findings (Zetterberg, 1965). Finally, the authors reflected on findings with regard to implications for future research. Approximately eighty-eight participants took part in focus group and individual interviews.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Cultural Capital Theories and Education

In the analysis of the processes of cultural reproduction, which is how the various forms of capital tend to transfer from one generation to the next, Bourdieu (1993) claims that education represents the key example of this process. According to Bourdieu, educational success entails a whole range of cultural behavior. He describes culture to include competences, skills, or qualifications, and symbolic capital as prestige, honor, and the right to be heard, as a crucial source of power. Furthermore, he asserts that the difference between the culture of humans and the behaviors exhibited by others is that humans cannot survive without culture. He claims that everything humans see, touch, interact with, and think about, is cultural, and that culture does not mean civilization. It is not necessary to have cities in order to have a culture. Every society does the best it can with its circumstances. Any

given social group, and therefore the culture that reflects it, is therefore neither more advanced nor more backward than any other; it is simply the way it is because that way works. If the circumstances should change due to environmental change, population pressure, or historical events, then the culture changes. Culture has been used by some to refer to a wide array of human activities. It exhibits the way that humans interpret their biology and their environment. According to this point of view, culture becomes such an integral part of human existence that it is the human environment, and most cultural change can be attributed to human adaptation to historical events.

Researchers have reiterated the importance and benefits of cultural capital as catalysts for creating a level playing field in a society. Blasko (2003) has drawn on the work of DiMaggio (1982) with the model of cultural mobility. The idea here is that cultural capital does indeed play an important role in shaping social inequalities, but it does so by improving the opportunities of those from lower classes rather than by promoting upper classes to inherit advantageous positions. Though Blasko (2003) confirms Bourdieu's thesis of cultural reproduction, Blasko's model does not necessarily imply that it is the upper classes that can benefit the most from the cultural assets. He states that cultural assets have both helped the upper classes to maintain their existing positions, but they have also provided a possible source for those occupying lower positions in the social hierarchy to support their children going forward. It is obvious that cultural capital could play a role in both cultural mobility and reproduction (Blasko, 2003). The former is what may be helpful to the community school and the community it serves, because Blasko (2003) argues that cultural capital plays a more important role in the mobility of lower status children than it does in the status reproduction of the upper classes. In other words, cultural capital can have a bigger impact on the status-attainment process of those from the lower classes.

Furthermore, promoting social mobility through cultural resources can be especially efficient since it can be a way to reduce the symbolic distance between the family, where the parents have low education levels and therefore find the values and expectations of school strange, and the school. By providing their children with the necessary cultural resources, parents can make the language, the way of thinking, and the relation to books (which is expected and also rewarded by the school), more familiar for them. Applying Merton's theory to the idea of cultural mobility, families that invest more in their children than families of otherwise similar social standing do, are in fact helping anticipatory socialization of their offspring. Consciously or unconsciously, these parents select a reference group of higher social position than their own and adjust their cultural activities to them. For the child, such a preliminary adjustment can not only make it easier to enter the selected status group, but it might also help integrate into the new group, to stabilize his or her position in it. By the time of the entry, the newcomer has assimilated to the group in at least one very important dimension in this way (Merto, 1980, as cited in Blasko, 2003). According to Blasko (2003), it is possible that upward-looking, uneducated parents who realize the importance of cultural activities will motivate their children's cultural activities rather than change their own habits in the first place. He strongly believes that cultural capital plays a notable role in shaping the educational career of the offspring in every segment of the society.

4. Review of Literature

4.1 *The Relationship Between Parental Support and Academic Success of Students*

When creating the highest-quality instructional environment is a shared goal, parents transform from passive supporters to active members of the educational community. When children see the support, excitement about learning, and teamwork between home and school, they too become excited. They sense the value in learning, and their intrinsic motivation for learning grows (McLoughlin et al., 2003). Research findings indicate that when parents are involved in the education of their children, student achievement, attendance, health, and discipline show marked improvement (Boal, 2004). In addition, inviting parents, members of the business community, and service organizations to identify academic goals and standards and quantify measures of progress sends the message that what students learn and how well they learn it isn't an issue just for teachers and administrators but is a real priority for the community as well (Wright and Saks, 2000, as cited in Cunningham, 2004). Trotman (2001) states that whether it is a routine task or a task that seems to be insurmountable, collaboration among parents, teachers, and other school personnel promises positive outcomes. In addition, where there is empowerment, there is positive student and parent response as well as improvement in motivation and self-confidence. Fullan (1997) recognizes the value of these efforts and notes that "nothing motivates a child more than when learning is valued by schools and families/community working together in partnership. These forms of (parent) involvement do not happen by accident or even by invitation, but they happen by explicit strategic intervention" (pp. 42-43).

Researchers have examined the effects of parent behavior on academic achievement, particularly with regard to the effects of parental perception, aspiration, and expectation on children's academic achievement (Goldenberg, Gallimore, Reese, & Garnier, 2001). Recently, ethnographers have been concerned with children, who against

the odds, manage to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty. Their evidence indicates that success in school among poor children of all family types is related to deliberate efforts on the part of parents to inculcate discipline and good study habits in their children (Clark, 1983). For example, Peng and Wright (1994) found that regardless of other variables, parents' high expectations were a powerful predictor of student achievement. For immigrant children and their parents, education is functional and is often seen as an avenue to middle-class occupational status and upward socioeconomic mobility. The responses to a questionnaire by students of Chinese parents about their expectations of their children's future were centered on going to the university and becoming contributing members of the society. To many Chinese parents, these two things are interrelated because Chinese culture values education for the well-being of the society, as well as for personal advancement (Chen, 1989). Other research has shown that parental beliefs and expectations about their children's learning are strongly related to children's beliefs about their own competencies, as well as their achievement (Galper, Wigfield, & Seefeldt, 1997).

It is generally believed that without family support for their children's learning, it is hard for teachers to devise academic experiences to help students learn meaningful content. Research has shown that an increase in parental involvement correlates with an increase in student achievement (Ballen & Moles, 1994; Benjet, 1995; Center on Families, Communities, Schools, and Children's Learning, 1995a; Epstein, 1991). Trotman (2001) asserts that not only do children perform better academically and behaviorally when parents are involved, but teachers' behaviors have been affected as well. Bever (1994) found that when parents become involved, teachers normally exhibit positive attitude changes as well as improved their personal work habits.

Parental involvement in school activities as well as direct communication with teachers and administrators is associated with greater achievement in mathematics and reading (Griffith, 1996; Reynold, 1992; Sui-Chu & Williams, 1996, as cited in Fantuzzo, McWayne, Perry, & Childs, 2004). Higher levels of parental involvement in their children's educational experiences at home (for example, supervision and monitoring, daily conversations about school) have been associated with children's higher achievement scores in reading and writing, as well as higher report card grades (Epstein, 1991; Griffith, 1996; Sui-Chu & Williams, 1996; Keith et al., 1998, as cited in Fantuzzo, McWayne, Perry & Childs, 2004). A report of research findings by Fantuzzo et al. (1999) indicate that home-based involvement dimension was regarded as superior to other dimensions in its relationship to pre-school competencies for children participating in urban Head Start programs. These findings concur with those of Henderson (1987) and Henderson and Berla (1995), who found that the more extensive the parent involvement, the higher the student achievement. Several researchers have looked at the relationship between parental involvement and student academic achievement among pre-school children in vulnerable groups, such as low-income children. Research findings from students in these groups indicate that parent involvement programs focusing on improving the home learning environment (through parent education, provision of materials, etc.) increases children's motivation and self-efficacy (Dickinson & DeTemple, 1998; Mantzicopoulos, 1997; Parker, Boak, Griffin, Ripple, & Peay, 1999, as cited in Fantuzzo et al. 2004).

Henderson (1987) and Henderson and Berla (1995) found that when parents are involved, students achieve more, regardless of socioeconomic status, ethnic/racial background, or the parent's education level. When parents are involved, students exhibit more positive attitudes and behavior, are more likely to graduate, and are more likely to attend post-secondary education. Henderson and Berla's findings have helped in dealing with some assumptions on why some parents seem to not value education. Henderson (1987) speaks to the assumption or thought that poverty is the reason why some parents do not value education. She notes that when parents are involved, students achieve more, regardless of socioeconomic status, ethnic/racial background, or the parent's education level. Her work dissipates the beliefs held by some educators (Trotman, 2001) that poverty leads to deficiencies in acquiring academic skills and that many poor urban students are often forced to deal with adverse conditions, which in turn lowers their self-esteem as they begin to internalize the notion that they cannot achieve. It is understandable that an acceptance of schooling would be found in most households regardless of distinctions in wealth. The benefits of involved parents are not confined to the early years; there are significant gains at all ages and grade levels. But here is the case whereby adolescents often fight for autonomy. The most accurate predictor of a student's achievement in school is the extent to which that student's family is able to: (a) create a home environment that encourages learning, (b) communicate high, yet reasonable, expectations for their children's achievement and future careers, and (c) become involved in their children's education (DuFour & Eaker, 1998).

5. Perspective of Community Elders on Education

The community elders interviewed in this study represented various groups in the community, including men and women, educated and illiterate individuals, members from various tribes, Christians and Moslems, and political leaders of the community. During the interview sessions, the community elders expressed their different

views about the value of education in the community, as well as impediments faced by residents that made attaining an education difficult. According to the elders, the general level of education attained by many people in the Weija community was up to the Middle School Leaving Certificate, popularly known as *Form 4*. They affirmed that many people did not attend school to higher levels. They asserted that those whose parents were wealthy were able to support their children's efforts to advance in education. They stated that many people in the Islamic Zongo community did not go to school at all, and that even the few who went to school in that part of the community did not attain higher levels of education because they had to work at a young age to provide funds for their education. The elders observed that the majority of the people in the community are not educated.

All elders interviewed concur that education is important, especially in contemporary society and for the world economy. Their views are based on personal experiences and observations in the community and beyond. They hold the view that in the past they did not value education, but these days the benefits of education are crystal clear to everyone. They claimed that if an illiterate and a literate person are engaged in a trade or any kind of business these days, one can see a very big difference in the management of their businesses. They alleged that the literate person does better in the management of the business than the illiterate person because of the educational background of the former. In addition, they contend that, for example, the illiterate may easily shop for new clothes at the shopping center without giving much thought to it, but the educated will give it a second thought before doing that, and may even prefer using old clothes similar to the ones worn for an occasion like a funeral or a party. They also related that they believe that uneducated persons are often inclined to follow the crowd. Other community elders emphasized the fact that education was not valued in the past. One of these elders is Rukaya of the Zongo community , where a majority of the inhabitants are illiterate. She stated that "In the past, we did not have enough knowledge about education, but now we know the essence of education. So if your child is now in school, you need to help the child. The usual practice of buying ornaments and other things at the expense of our children's education should be discontinued so that the children will become prominent figures in the future. If we don't prioritize our choices in support of our children's education, our children may turn out to be like us mothers, who are now suffering for lack of education" (Personal Communication, May, 2012). They agreed that in the future, individuals who are not educated may not be able to secure decent jobs.

However, they argued that not all parents value education or support their children in school. Such people have their own reasons for this behavior. They also asserted that when children approach their parents and talk about school, they are often ignored because some parents see such requests as a bother to them, as they have never been to school themselves. Some of the elders observed that children love school, but in most cases it is the parents who discourage them. They claimed that some parents may ask their children to sell merchandise or go to the stone quarry with them instead of going to school. Sometimes they may even threaten their children who prefer to be in school by saying they will withdraw their financial support if they fail to comply with their orders. When children obey their parents in these instances, they miss many lessons at school, which has a negative effect on their academic performance. They emphasized that most of the problems rest with the parents and not the children.

In the discussion about how parents support their children, the elders said that there are many things that parents need to do to help their children, but due to financial or economic difficulties they are not always able to help them. They argued that parents know they need to provide help for their children's studies at home, but not much of such activities are seen among parents of the community, and that is not helpful to the children's education. They affirmed that parents are unable to assist their children in their studies. Some elders believe that other parents work very hard so they can get money to take care of their children's school needs. They said that about 20-40% of parents who have made up their minds to send their children to school are doing their best or making some effort. They said that some parents, however, make sure that their children study at home. They also pay their children's school fees on time, buy their books, and watch their children's progress on daily basis. In addition, they maintained that parents need to visit their children's schools to understand their children's performance, as well as to be aware if there is anything going wrong with their children. This way, the parents can discuss it with the teachers or try to solve any problems together. They alleged that illiterate parents who care about their children's education seek the assistance of the educated people in their neighborhood or community. They said that parents who care about their children's education do employ part-time teachers at home to help their children with their homework. According to the elders, the other 60%, who have not made up their mind to send their children to school do not care about their children. Thus, parents who do not care about their children's education will not make any effort for any assistance. They were critical of parents' negligible involvement in children's education.

Furthermore, community elders talked about parental inhibitions about providing support for their children's education. The elders noted that an attitude that inhibits parents from supporting their children's education emanates from their belief that one should honor the dead rather than cherish life. They shared how many people

in the community may ignore the daily needs of people, including the young, old, and sick, but then go to extreme lengths to honor the dead. They claimed that such practices inhibit the support that parents provide for their children's education because parents may deny their children school fees, but buy dresses to attend funerals. They asserted that it is a problem with which their government is currently battling and it frequently surfaces in the community, as well as in national newspaper stories.

6. Perspectives of Parents on Education

Parents' views on their family values emerged from discussions about what is most important for their children. All of the parents interviewed mentioned that education was very important with only a few mentioning moral values (training). Many of the parents claimed that they want to educate their children so that they could receive assistance from them during their old age. Some of the parents see the responsibility to educate their children as a moral obligation. They said that they sent their children to school because God has given the children to them as gifts. With reference to the Holy Bible, they maintain that if they do not take good care of their children, God will curse them. They stated that their goal is to be obedient to God's commandments so that God will love them and bless them. Although the parents interviewed had similar views on the value of education, they had a wide variety of reasons as to why they held these opinions. They agreed that the lack of education caused them to suffer a great deal during their lives and they do not want their children to suffer like them. Some parents said that they resented being illiterate. Many agreed that their feelings emanated from embarrassing situations encountered throughout their lives. For example, several said they were arrested by law enforcement agents and consequently humiliated for going in the wrong direction because they could not read street signs. Because of these experiences, they resolved to educate their children so they could avoid similar embarrassing situations. Ms. Laame said, "I was born here, but my mother did not send me to school. I was sent to the northern region and I suffered a lot there before coming back to Accra. When I got married, I had two children and I decided to send them to school. I can neither read nor write, so I do not even know what the messages on billboards mean and I always become a victim of warning signs wherever I go. That is very embarrassing. I sent my children to school so that they will not also fall victim to such embarrassing situations in the future" (Personal Communication, May, 2012). They admit that education is a great investment and that it can pave the way for their children to have a better life in the future. They maintained that education provides knowledge to the extent that even if one wants to be a farmer, education can give an individual knowledge about farming to improve crop yields. They affirmed that all occupations require an education because it provides more knowledge to improve their performance. They agreed that if they compare lifestyles of educated and uneducated people, they could see a vast difference in how they lived. They were optimistic that if their children attained high levels of education, they will be open-minded and become useful citizens in the society.

Some parents admitted that their perception toward education in the past was different from their present views. In the past, many parents did not know the value of education. Some parents said that they did not attain higher levels of education because they were stubborn and resisted their mother's desire for them to attend school. But before they realized that education was important it was too late. Now they regret not getting an education because it has diminished their chances to have better life. With their new understanding of the value of education, the parents emphasized the importance of education in the life of an individual, a family, a community or a society as a whole. They have realized that, in this contemporary world, if one does not educate his or her child it is not worth giving birth to that child. They claimed that in this contemporary world, education has become central to living and working in society. They believe that without education one cannot achieve as much as one wants. Parents were quick to point out that the only obstacle of parents in the community to support their children's education is money. But since they now realize the importance of education, they are committed to do their best to support their children's education at higher levels. Parents were unanimous in their belief that the greatest and most worthwhile legacy they can give their children is to give them an education. Some parents said that they took advantage of their present location in the community to send their children to school. Many related that they were born and raised in rural villages where education was not important. But when they moved closer to Accra, they began to realize the importance of education. Ms. Serwa, emphasized this point: "you cannot see anyone working in an office here that is not educated" (Personal Communication, May, 2012).

In discussions about the kind of support parents provide for their children at school, many of the parents claimed that they support their children's attendance at school by paying school fees, providing food, textbooks, exercise books, and other materials. In addition, they pay part-time teachers to provide after school tutoring for their children in their homes. These parents said that they knew what materials are required by the school to enhance teaching and learning and provided them. Unfortunately, what these parents said they did, did not accurately reflect what they actually did, as evidenced by observing their children's classrooms. For instance, in an environmental studies class of about 37 students, only six of them had textbooks. Furthermore, the children did

their homework on a small exercise book, which was divided into two parts. One section was used for class work and the other for homework. In an English language class, only four out of the 17 children had textbooks. Many parents said that in their community, people value naming ceremonies and funerals and they spend much of their resources on these activities rather than on paying for their children's education. Although some parents claim that they have intensified their control over the rate at which their children watch the television in their homes, many of the parents routinely ask their children to run errands and do household chores rather than monitoring or providing assistance with their homework.

7. Perspectives of Teachers on Education

Teachers' interaction with parents helped to understand the level of their support for their children's education. Teachers indicated that they played a dual role in their jobs, which involved educating both parents and their children. They said that they worked to educate parents both through interactions at school and at home regarding the importance of education in the future lives of their children. Many also said that they frequently go to the community to talk with parents about many school-related issues, including the need for their children to do their homework, to buy books, pay school fees, etc. Most teachers agreed that the educational level of many parents in the community is low and they presumed that it affected parents' understanding in matters related to their children's education. They acknowledged that although some parents provided items for their children's education, most do not make efforts to assist them in their studies at home. Teachers said that the most common problems with regard to parental support of their children's education in the Weija community include: their inability to provide educational materials like books, working long hours outside their homes, lack of supervision at home, and unwillingness of parents to make school visits. Many teachers complained that few parents had visited the school after the first day when they brought them to the school. Most agreed that parental value of education is still in a transitional stage and that their lack of involvement reflected it. Although Mr. Abed, a teacher, said, "Weija is a place where education is now gaining grounds" (Personal Communication, May, 2012), teachers expressed concern that there was a wide gap between what parents said about the importance of education and what they did to support their children in school. Teachers' perspectives on the relationship between the school and the community varied. They noted that while some parents showered praises on their performance, others were disrespectful. In most instances, teachers reported that parents who showed disrespect to them are parents who believed the teachers are too young to educate their children or that they are untrained and thus not qualified to teach their children. In addition, some parents occasionally criticized them on trivial matters. In this regard, some teachers feel as though they do not have a free hand to work with the children. These teachers however affirmed that the PTA meetings have brought about some improvement in the relationship between teachers and parents as they have served as a forum in which parents and teachers may openly exchange ideas about the well being of students, as well as on other matters that impact the school and the community as a whole.

Teachers concur that a widely held belief among parents of children who attend the school is that all one has to do is to pay school fees and provide school uniforms and not be involved in any other aspects of their education. Teachers, on the other hand, expressed that parental support should not be limited to financial support alone. They asserted that some parents were not aware how family structures may influence support of their children's education. For instance, a number of teachers observed that marital problems, like divorced mothers marrying new husbands and fathers having several wives living in separate homes, contributed to a lack of parental support. They noted that some children do not have specific homes to go to after school and frequently are shuttled from grandmother to grandfather or from aunt to uncle. Most teachers agreed that this is a peculiar problem in the community. For example, many children may go to their grandmother to get something small to eat after school, then go to their grandfather, before staying with an aunt for the evening. The next day, children take their bags and go back to school. They believe that the lack of parental support in situations like this has a negative effect on the children's learning. Mr. Andy said, "I think there should be one mother and one father all staying in the same home to ensure the child's proper supervision or proper care of the child. Here lies the case whereby the child is living between two to three homes. Sometimes he goes home and does not see his mother or he goes home and does not see his father. I do not think even when they are asked to buy books he or she will be able to get the appropriate person to buy the books, so the child will not even say it at all. I think that is the very picture that we have in this community" (Personal Communication, May, 2012).

8. Perspectives of School Administrators

Administrators at the community school believed that parents are interested in sending their children to school, however, they do not believe parents are equally committed to providing basic needs of their children to succeed in school. In their view, the basic needs include school fees, books, school uniforms, and lunch money. This has

proved to be a difficult problem for administrators to resolve. School administrators recognize that they play multiple roles in their job. For example, they are responsible for educating teachers, students, parents, and the community as a whole. Some of the things they do to accomplish this include writing letters to parents, inviting them to the school for conferences about their children, and sometimes going to their homes to talk with them about their children's educational progress or problems. The administrators observed that by the very nature of their work each morning when children arrive, or in the afternoon when they leave, they talk to many parents about their children. At the PTA meetings, they discuss issues affecting the children and the school with parents in a group, as well as individually. Anytime they identify problems, they follow up with visits to their homes to discuss them with the parents. They observed that some of the problems that children face in school may have roots in their homes.

They reflected that in many instances parents give their jobs top priority, but at the expense of their children's education. For instance, many children go to school with worn-out uniforms, unkempt hair, and on an empty stomach. Mr. Michael, a school administrator, said, "You can imagine how a child who comes to school without eating anything can cope with his or her studies" (Personal Communication, May, 2012). They claimed that some parents do not even care about whether their children will come to school or not, because some of the children could be seen roaming about in the community without their parents' knowledge. They stated that the parents may be thinking that their children were in school, but in reality they are not. They said that parents do not follow up to make sure that their children go to school. They also observed that many parents come to school with a negative attitude. When they see a parent coming to the school, it often means that they were coming to quarrel with either a teacher or the school administrator. Administrators believe that because the school is within the community, parents have easy access and often visit to berate teachers and administrators over trivial matters. They maintained that these unfortunate parent behaviors make it very difficult to work at the school. They said that some parents don't give the teachers the freedom to educate their children. Rather, they always try to take the teachers to task over minor issues. Administrators try to find solutions to their dilemmas. For example, Ms. Rose Mary, a school administrator said, "We are trying to cope with all this and hope to find solutions to them. We hope, that things will change in future" (Personal Communication, May, 2012).

Administrators recognize that the school does not have adequate resources because their primary source of income is from the children's school fees. They use fees to pay their teachers' salary and buy teaching and learning materials for the school. They realize that teachers' salary is not adequate, but note that they are pleased with the little that they receive. Administrators observed that getting parents to remit payment of school fees by parents is a Herculean task. They stated that even though the fees are small, most parents are in arrears and it makes it very difficult to pay teachers' salary on time. Administrators recognize that because of the children's poor and illiterate family background, teaching and learning is also very difficult. They commented that teachers mostly work with them and train them as they grow. The administrators' view about the relationship between the school and the community suggest that working with parents is particularly difficult. For example, they commented that although parents attend PTA meetings, listen and agree to what is discussed, they often do not want to follow through during implementation stages. This frustrates the school's administrators. In addition, they also said that the relationship between the school and the community is very complex. For example, Ms. Rose Mary said, "If you offend one person, you offend the whole village. When one person withdraws the child from the school, the rest of the people in the community will also withdraw their children from the school. So if one person gives a bad report about the school, the whole community does the same" (Personal Communication, May, 2012). Administrators related an instance when a child went to a different home after school. They said that on one occasion, after school was dismissed, a child went to a different home. She did not go straight to her own house as expected and the parents came to the school with a mob and attacked the school administrator with insults. They did not listen to reason or accept any explanation that the administrator tried to give. Fortunately, the child was found at her aunt's house. Ms. Rose Mary, a school administrator, said, "Before then I was already tired from the day's activities and this attack by the parents made things worse for me that day. I even regretted establishing the school in this community" (Personal Communication, May, 2012). They said those experiences were just a few examples how difficult relations are between them and the parents in the school community.

Mr. Michael, school administrator stated, "Looking at the support that parents provide for their children, one may wonder why those children were born to such parents? Was it by an accident or was it a planned thing? I ask this because it is clear that there is no planning for the children" (Personal Communication, May, 2012). The school administrators commented that it appears that it is even a bother to some parents that they have brought their children into the world and thus they are not willing to provide for their basic needs. They believe that some parents don't know what to do as parents. In many instances, the school administrators have to work with parents to help them understand their responsibility. The administrators said that if they graded parents on their level of support for their children's education they would only give them 10 percent. According to administrators, it is

obvious that parents give their children only things that will help them survive. They stated that the children of the school were not *living*. They claimed that parents do not want to provide support, but expect them to succeed in the future. They related that in some instances parents would prefer to buy expensive clothes for parties, weddings, funerals, and other occasions rather than spending their money on school fees, books, lunch money, or even food for them at home. They know that some of the children come to school without eating breakfast because during lunch break those children could be seen begging for food from their friends. In some instances, when their friends have refused to give them food, they have taken it by force because they were hungry. The school administrators observed that there were three categories of people in the community: those who have interest in education but cannot afford it, those who do not know the importance of education, and those who do not value education at all.

9. Data Analysis

Community elders related that cultural expectations contributes to parents' unwillingness to support their children's education, because parents have the belief that one should honor the dead rather than cherish life. Community elders, parents, and school administrators further discussed how many people in the community frequently ignore the daily needs of the young, old, and sick, yet go to extreme lengths to honor the dead. School administrators confirmed this and said that some parents would prefer to buy expensive clothes for parties, weddings, funerals, and naming ceremonies rather than spending their money on school fees, books, lunch money, or even food for their children at home. They recognized that these practices used much of the family's discretionary resources and diminished their ability to pay for their children's education.

Schein (1985) defines *culture* as the norms, values, and beliefs held by a group that influences behavior. This shared orientation helps to maintain group cohesiveness and contributes to a sense of belonging. Informal norms guide behavior of members of the group and those who conform receive significant rewards (Hoy & Miskell, 1996). Schein (1985) also notes that basic assumptions and beliefs of the group operate unconsciously. Hanson (1991) notes that although culture may be viewed as an asset, it may also prove to be a liability in times of rapid change. In those circumstances, deeply ingrained values, beliefs, and norms may prevent adaptation to new circumstances. In sum, strong cultures may be rigid and thus be a liability when adaptation is essential.

There are many factors that contribute to or influence the choices that people make in life. Some of those factors are based on culture (Blasko, 2003; World Bank, 2002). Cultural factors reflected in how parents of the community school used their scarce financial resources, are deeply rooted in the culture and social practices of individuals in the community. Although the school attempted to engage parents in school activities, counsel, advise, and empower them to assume greater responsibility for supporting their children's education, these efforts proved only marginally effective. Their spending on funerals, naming and other ceremonies, while antithetical to their stated desire to educate their children, may reflect a more compelling social need. Although Blasko (2003) posits that cultural capital plays an important role in the social mobility of lower socio-economic families, the process through which it may be enacted is often elusive. On the one hand, many parents with low education levels may find the values and expectations of an education strange, however they endeavor to provide their children with the necessary financial resources, encouragement, and supervision, as well as participate in school-related activities. On the other hand, parents in the same community with a similar background do not. Merton's theory of cultural mobility suggests that families that invest more cultural capital in their children than others with similar social standing engage in anticipatory socialization of their offspring. Consciously or unconsciously, these parents select a reference group of higher social position than their own and adjust their cultural activities to emulate their values, beliefs, and practices. For the child, such a preliminary adjustment can not only make it easier to enter the targeted status group, but it might also help integrate them into the new group and stabilize his or her position in it. Blasko (2003) suggests that adoption of new social conventions takes time and that persistence of the school to involve parents in its activities may contribute to changes in parents' behavior. In a modest way, the school serves as an agent in changing cultural norms, values, and beliefs of some parents. Blasko (2003) suggested that persistence is an essential characteristic of cultural change and social mobility.

10. Summary of Research Findings

The purpose of this exploratory study was to understand factors associated with the value parents with low education and low income levels value education and influence their support for their children attending the community school in Ghana during the "bounded" (Stake, 1978, p.7) period from 2011 to 2013. The study identified, reviewed, and summarized concepts in the literature to explain factors that influence parental value of education and support for their children's schooling. Participants' perspectives were examined for the purpose of developing a set of propositions or "naturalistic generalizations" (Stake, 1995, p. 85) that support explanation of

the phenomenon. These propositions delineate what was learned from the study of parental value of education as it relates to their providing support for their children's schooling and contribute to a limited, yet "grounded" explanation of the phenomenon.

10.1 *Propositions:*

1. The more willing parents are to support their children's education, the more likely the hegemony of the dominant culture will be weakened.
2. The greater the level of parents' participation in school affairs, the greater the likelihood that they will develop a more positive attitude toward educating their children.
3. The greater the influence of culture, the more likely parents will conform to traditional social practices.
4. The greater the desire to conform to cultural norms and social practices, the greater the likelihood that individuals will reproduce traditional culture and affirm traditional social practices.

The study has confirmed studies of scholars like (Blasko, 2003; Schein, 1985, Hoy and Miskell, 1996), who have acknowledged that the individual behavior in Western societies are influenced by traditional cultural norms.

11. Discussions and Implications

This exploratory study has contributed to the literature base on parental values of education in Sub-Saharan Africa. Research findings suggest that further inquiry may be pursued in developing a more thorough understanding of patterns of influence on parental values towards education in developing nations. There is the need to examine the process of how low income, illiterate parents in developing nations in Sub-Saharan Africa may adopt norms that alter their value towards education and influence behavior that support their children attaining a higher level of education than their own. This gap in the international literature with regard to adoption of new cultural norms, beliefs and values in developing nations may contribute to the extant literature on cultural change as well as offer insight into how education leaders and policy makers may more effectively work with low income, poorly educated parents.

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