Students' Academic Achievement: Whose Responsibility and Accountability?

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Abstract

This position paper explored the role played by the different stakeholders in the education of students and the extent in terms of responsibility and accountability, these influence students' academic achievement. The exploration was located within the systems theory which postulates that the coordinated effort of all stakeholders is more powerful than the sum of the strengths of the individual groups. School heads, as official 'captains' of the school, have an overriding oversight of curriculum implementation. The buck stops with them at the school level with regard to students' performance. Teachers, because they have no expressed contract with the employer to deliver, cannot be held accountable for the students' performance. However, the fact that they are on payroll makes their position in the accountability framework unclear and therefore difficult to place. The Minister for Education, who is mandated politically to see to the provision of quality education in schools, is ultimately accountable. The parents, the students, and other politicians other than the one for education, have only a social and moral responsibility involvement and not a legal requirement demanding their accountability. The paper recommends that higher authorities in education should continue their efforts to encourage parents and other significant stakeholders to take interest and participate in education matters at schools.

Keywords: system theory, team work, students' achievement, accountability, responsibility

Introduction

"The quality of schooling . . . appears to be under attack from all sides . . ." (Caldwell & Millikan, 1989:45). The question that arises thereof is, who is the attack directed to out of the many stakeholders in education? This is a problem of many hands which creates a dilemma for responsibility and accountability to individuals or groups (Mastop, 2010). As so often, in the globalized world of education of our times, when students do not reach required levels of mastery of state-imposed curriculum as measured by state tests there is naming and blaming (ibid).

In Botswana when students' performance at school falls asunder, as it often does, it triggers a naming and blaming game between those who have a stake in education. Foremost, the blame is directed at the school and at the external national educational leadership, herein referred to as the internal and external leadership respectively. This is because leadership at these levels has an important role that requires it to mobilize an alliance among other stakeholders, who have a lesser stake in education, in a collaborative educational responsibility (The Botswana Gazette, 2014, Hart & Bredeson, 1996). However, a good leader and students' good performance are orthogonal. The presence of one does not imply the presence of the other. This is the reason why other players other than leaders at the school and national levels have been factored into the discussion of this paper. School leadership would blame parents for their weak participation in their children's education and teachers for focusing more on activities that are of secondary importance at the expense of the core business of teaching. That is, for example on the unionization of the teaching profession. Teachers on the other hand would blame school leadership styles that exclude them from participative decision making that can improve school achievements (Duke & Salmonowicz, 2010). Conditions of service relating to low salaries and housing is common justification by teachers for the declining students' performances (Rari, 2014). Politicians from the opposition parties would use poor performance in schools to attack the education system and/or the minister responsible for education of not steering education in the right direction (The Botswana Gazette, 2014, Staff Writer, 2014). The Minister would rebut in defense, accusing his/her detractors for politicking and politicizing education, thus using education to gain political mileage (Rari, 2014). Students do not escape the blame. They are blamed for not showing commitment to their school work (Moswela, 2004, Hymel, Henderson & Bonanno, 2005).

In this finger pointing game, protagonists are focusing on themselves rather than focusing on the big picture, the goal and not the individual role (Maxwell, 2001). "In some states in the USA, specific blame for the continued poor performance in state tests may lead to teacher and administrative dismissal . . . and salary freezes" (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2002:44). Be that it may, the truth is that education is a corporative that involves the different stakeholders working together as a team towards a shared purpose. If success is to be achieved in a team, each member must be willing to subordinate their personal goals to the good of the team (Maxwell, 2001). The hinge pin in this cooperative is collaborative educational responsibility by all the stakeholders who are classified here into two forces thus; those within the school (heads, teachers and students) and on the one hand those outside the school (parents, community members and Ministry of Education leaders and officers). The degree of responsibility however, would vary. Students as the recipients of education cannot be required to be as responsible as the providers and facilitators of education. The latter are trained specialists in different subjects and therefore their involvement would require more influence on students' learning. Others such as parents though they have no defined official role in education the same way teachers and administrators have, they nevertheless are significant players whose involvement cannot be overlooked.

This situation begs the question, who exactly is responsible and accountable for the poor performance of students? This paper exhorts the argument that there are many forces that influence students' academic achievement, namely; internal and the external forces and that these forces need to work as one for the common good. Overall, togetherness and common purpose must be the guiding principles to all the stakeholders irrespective of level of responsibility and accountability if success in the education of students is to be realized. All the stakeholders, the paper argues, are responsible but in varying degrees. However, some are also accountable but the degree of their accountability also varies. The argumentation of the paper is located within the systems theory framework. The purported decline in students' performance in Botswana schools is shown in Tables 1 to 3 at the end of the paper.

The Systems Theory

The general and fundamental property of a system is the interdependence and an orderly relationship of parts (Hanson, 2003). The parts can be things such as the parts in a living thing or non-living thing. They can also be subjects such as teachers in a school in a social interaction, and hence we can speak of a social system. The social systems theory purports that a school is a dynamic interrelationship between its organizational structures and the people who populate it having characteristics of a collectivity of individuals who are bound together by common bonds or purposes, work to be done being divided into subtasks and assigned as official duties (Owens, 2004; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2002). Schools by their nature - despite attempts by some of their leaders to limit the influence of outside stakeholders - are open social systems. "It is difficult to envisage a social system such as a school that is not interactive with its environment. A fully closed system would obtain no human or material resources for its production system nor distribute a finished product into the environment, and therefore could not exist" (Hanson, 2003:121-122).

This theory suggests a symbiotic relationship between stakeholders where there is a give and take exchange. One gives and in turn benefits from the other and for this to happen it needs team work in an interactive environment. The schools benefit inputs from society in the form of students, knowledge, value systems, material and financial support. The society, working collaboratively with schools, in turn gets outputs in the form of changed individuals (Campbell, Corbally & Nystrand, 1983; Hanson, 2003). The open social system is exemplified by the harmonious working relationship of lions. Tasks or roles in a pride of lions are divided. The older female lions bring the superior strength, maturity and experience to the hunt. The younger ones contribute speed, agility and energy and the male lion protects the whole pride against any intruder at all times. This synergy puts the pride in a win-win situation where the success of each individual is the team's success (Thomas, 1992). As Owens (2004) and Sergiovanni and Starratt (2002) suggest, in an open social system, responsibilities are shared, divided and allocated as official duties. There is interconnectedness and people in the organization are clear as to who is to do what, how, why, when, and to what extent (Cummings & Worley, 2001). This approach has the potential to promote collective responsibility and accountability. In a school situation teachers would know the framework within which their responsibilities reside and the school head would know that he/she has overall accountability.

Education System of Botswana in Brief

The education system of Botswana is modeled against the British system partly because Botswana was a British protectorate.

The system at both the primary and secondary school levels embraces the philosophy of social harmony and creates an opportunity for communities to have inputs into how education in their localities should be provided and run (Republic of Botswana, 1977). Communities have such opportunity and access to the school through parents' teachers associations (PTAs) and boards of governors (BoGs). The latter have since been abolished. Schools now only work with the PTAs in matters of schooling. When BoGs were still in operation, they were part of the school management. Their role included generating and managing the school finances. The involvement of communities in education, for a long time now has, however, been limited to the less academic activities such as students' discipline and fund raising. The more academic issues such as teaching still remain the teachers' preserve (Moswela, 2007). Unlike in the past where parental participation was more an exception than the rule, schools now are becoming increasingly aware and understand more, the need and nature of parents' involvement and the risk of not involving them in schools. Parents then tended to push every student's social problem to schools (Gabathuse, 2003). What has changed, albeit not to a large extent, is that schools are more welcoming and receptive to parents' visits than before. Parents on the other hand have not changed their trend to leave everything else to schools as evidenced by the statement; "school results are declining and where are the parents is all this" (The Botswana Guardian, 2014:20).

Purpose

The aim on this paper is to argue that the improvement of students' academic achievement is the result of a platform of collaborative engagement between schools, their communities and the education authorities outside the school and that each of these partners has a useful contribution to make that can raise the standard of school outcomes

Responsibility and Accountability in a Social System

In a social system such as a school, the relationship between the leader and the lead is of considerable importance. The leader has not only to communicate clearly the needs of the organization but also to educate and influence those under his/her subordination (Brooksband & Anderson, 1989). The leader's influence however, should be such that it produces the harmony of purpose and action requisite for success in the organization's objectives, and should be a liberating and not limiting influence (ibid). In a school setup the advice of the senior management team and the contribution of the students should be genuinely sought in a give and take spirit and relationship. This is statutory responsibility by leaders to provide efficient leadership that meets the needs of the school including improved academic outcomes (Ministry of Education, 2000). The public and the teachers' employer expect school leaders to fulfill this obligation (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2002). Such obligation implies not only responsibility on the part of the school leader but also has implications for accountability on the same for the academic outcomes of the students. Accordingly therefore, the school leader carries both the responsibility and accountability frameworks. This is responsibility and bureaucratic accountability that is statutory (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2002).

Mastop (2010) defines accountability as being called upon to account or answer for the omission or commission of something which may result in one suffering the consequences. Sergiovanni and Starratt (2002) asked the question: In this age of standards, high-stakes testing, and results, should teachers not to account for students' performance? They and Hanson (2003) are quick to say but teachers cannot because they do not have much control over the resources that can improve students' performance. A similar response can be made in the Botswana situation. Teachers do not have complete influence over the learning conditions of students and therefore cannot be held accountable for non-performance of students. These are teacher-student ratios, remote areas conditions, the teaching resources among other things, have a direct bearing on the students' effective learning, are outside the teacher's control. At best, Sergiovanni and Starratt argue that teachers have a professional and a bureaucratic or administrative requirement. The latter can be growth oriented, enforced through continuous evaluation of the teacher by the supervisor ensuring that the teacher measures up to teaching standards, whereas the former grows out of morality which is not binding. Teachers are therefore responsible for the students' performance but are not accountable to the extent of suffering ultimate consequences. They can be held responsible for the poor performance of students which is referred to as moral accountability by Sergiovanni and Starratt (2002) and which is not the same as being answerable (http:/transformed.teachingquality.org/blogs/future-teaching/01-2013/accountability-v).

The different stakeholders' roles and positions are discussed below using the systems theory. The stakeholders are divided into two broad groups as forces within and forces outside the school.

The Forces within the School

The School Leader's Role in Students' Academic Achievement

"In schools where achievement was high . . . invariably the principal made the difference" (Hart & Bredeson, 1996:191). Generally, it is often said that a school is as good as its leader. Indeed school leaders have an important role to fulfill in the provision of education. Their chief mandate is to drive the school curriculum such that students' achievement is realized through good teaching (Ministry of Education, 2000). Theirs is a supervisory role that demands a special relationship between them, the teachers, students and the parents if stellar academic results are to be achieved. The quality of interpersonal relationship determines how well the leader is able to motivate followers (Smith, 2002). Leaders who always remember that they are accountable for the academic achievement of students will establish a supportive culture of participatory decision making that encourages intellectual stimulation and holds high performance expectations (Sillins, 2002; Sushila, 2004). The leader initiates and maintains the kind of atmosphere where followers feel safe, supported, recognized, involved and wanted (Hensley, 2013; Kaagan, 1998) and where staff has a reason to embrace the vision of the leader (Wekesa, 1993). He/she sets the pace by providing direction, monitoring, evaluating, and together with the staff, determining where they want the school to go (Leithwood, 2000). Such leaders can make the difference between success and failure of a school, as long as they set clear visions to the community, teachers and students. If they do this, other stakeholders will do the job for them (Millet, 1998). Williams (2012:293) sums up the sense of leadership thusly "a process of influencing others to achieve group or organizational goals".

Fritz and Miller (2003) and Leithwood (2004) underscore the importance of leadership as coming second only to teaching among school influences on students' success and sees its greatest impact where the leader creates a situation of camaraderie with followers. School leaders therefore occupy a unique organizational role that is defined by the location of the position itself and the social and organizational status that comes with it (Kwaka, 1973). This unique role requires them never to sit idly, even in the most successful scenario. They need to study and become more effective leaders as their competence and mastery of tasks related to knowledge and skills would put them in good stead in the performance of their leadership functions, hence improving academic performance (Dean, 1999). Beside the main responsibility of overseeing effective curriculum implementation, school leaders have other responsibilities that demand their attention. These other responsibilities support engagements to the curriculum which include among others, diarized and non-diarized visits, a teacher who has brought a habitually problematic student or group of students, a contentious parent accompanied by his/her child complaining about how the teacher has ill-treated the child; a long telephone conversation with the regional Director, and other day-to-day administrative routines. Up to this point, the school leader's responsibility dimension is clear.

However, the dilemma the school leader faces is being required to account for the students' achievement without control over the things that support it. The school leader has no control over students' discipline problems that may start at homes; teachers' unhappiness that stems from poor remuneration and work conditions; poor and insufficient teaching resources; and lack of parental support. This section concludes that by all accounts, the school leader's requirement to account for the performance of students is ill-perceived and a mismatch as long as the things that support effective teaching and learning are absent.

The Central Position of the Teacher in Students' Academic Achievement

 A teacher sits in a very influential position in the education of the children. He/she plays both a pedagogical and a leadership role in the classroom. He/she spends more active time with the students at school during teaching/learning activities than the school head and even the parents (Moswela, 2010). In this regard, the teacher is in a position to have better knowledge of the student than any of these others. He/she is almost entirely responsible for what kind of knowledge, content, and skills to be imparted to learners (Smith, 2002). Teachers decide on the methodology when delivering content or subject matter because they have pedagogy which most do not have. Education officers and school leaders may have pedagogy but they do not practice it. Teachers and not these others have direct access to the syllabus and therefore they stand in good position to design students' learning activities that progressively engage students in the active production and performance of knowledge (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2002).

Put another way, "teachers engage in their professional interaction with students, this is called 'teaching' and the range and variety of activities by which students learn are usefully conceived as 'learning'"(Beare, et al., 1989:197). That is why teachers' performance is measured through students' performance (Wideen & Grimmett, 1995) and why students' failure is generally blamed on the teacher.

Community looks up to a teacher as a guide, comforter, parent, counselor (even though the majority of them are trained to teach and not trained to be counselors, child psychologists, social workers or ministers of religion), all in the interest of intellectual growth and role modeling to learners. During the period when the student is at school he/she is under the *regis* of the teacher. The teacher is therefore a proxy parent to the student and as such unlike left 'wingers', teachers have rules and standards for students. The teacher establishes an activity system that creates order in the classroom in order for the teaching activity to take place in an orderly manner (Moswela, 2007). This leadership role of teachers has in it a hidden accountability dimension. Also, since the school leader can require the teacher to answer or account for the poor performance of a group of students, in a sense the teacher has some accountability which Sergiovanni and Starratt (2002) referred to as professional or moral accountability as opposed to bureaucratic or administrative accountability. Perhaps the difference in accountability between the teacher and those above him/her lies in the word 'ultimate'. At the school level the teacher can be morally accountable to the school leader and the school leader can be responsible and accountable to the Minister. The Minister is ultimately accountable at the higher national level. The teachers' important role therefore needs deliberately involving them in decision-making because as Moswela (1995) pointed out, a deprived teacher involvement in the decision-making process of a school can lower his/her morale, wane his/her enthusiasm and can make him/her unhappy in the job, thus adversely affecting the performance of his/her work and consequently those of his/her students. Here I argue that happy students are the products of happy teachers and both of them creating a 'happy' school environment that can result in improved performance.

And what makes teachers happy in the job? Perhaps the answer can be found in answering the question, what makes teachers unhappy? Firstly, the leadership style that excludes teachers from decision making that affects them, and the leader's poor working relations with the teachers can be a source of their unhappiness at work. People do not desire to be lead by one who tries to achieve personal glory by managing them using force (Machiavelli, 2008). They want to be part and parcel of the social system or process that leads to the school's glory, even if the glory ultimately goes to the leader (ibid). Secondly, the poor working conditions, purportedly created by the employer, teachers often complain about is another source of teachers' discontentment at the work place.

If given the necessary involvement in decision making, proper support, and resources in sufficient amounts, teachers can perform to their optimum and more likely to take more responsibility for the students' performance. In some American States, students' failure is treated as failure by the teachers and administrators to do their job and if the under-performance persists they can be removed from these schools (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2002). This is because teachers get the necessary support they need to improve school performances. In Botswana the educational playground in schools is not level. Some schools enjoy better resources than others in terms well-resourced libraries and access to the educative media. Circumstances in remote rural areas force junior secondary schools to admit academically inferior students, who have performed poorly in the primary school examinations, to those in towns. Despite these disparities all schools are put in the same basket and their performance judged the same. Also, as pointed out by Moswela (2004) the more mature and experienced teachers resist transfers to rural and remote schools. For as long as these disparities exist, I argue, no amount of conviction can be objectively sustained to hold the teachers accountable for the students' failure rate. This is similar to requiring a carpenter to produce quality piece of furniture without the proper tools. To do that, would be unfair by whoever insists upon a quality product.

Students' Role in Their Own Learning

Literature abounds on the generality that most of the students' academic achievement needs the intervention of the teachers, school leaders, and the parents. This is an undisputable truism about this tripartite relationship. Each has skills and knowledge about the student which the others partners do not have. Such intervention in students' academic work is more effective when made as preventive measures, in that problems can be caught and dealt with before they exacerbate (Topping, 1996). A student's poor performance is not only due to his/her low IQ or something encoded in DNA. There are several and varied reasons, in my view, that are within the control of the students that hinder academic performance or contribute towards students getting bad grades.

Chief among these are, truancy, peer pressure, attitude towards school work and towards teachers, misconduct, drugs, theft and alcohol abuse (Kome, 2013). "Truancy or unexcused absence from school . . . is a problem among students which may be an early warning sign of delinquency or gang activity or substance abuse and has negative effects on the overall learning environment" (http://www/ehow.com/info 8093435 truancy effects.html). Students' negative behaviour and their disengagement are amongst the many reasons why students perform poorly . . . do not study hard on their own, waste time on things that do not contribute to their academic performance. They do not stay with their books for long but rather engage in watching videos, browsing the internet and face-booking. This interferes and wastes the time for them to do homework. . . (http://voices.yahoo.com/info why students-bad-grades-506944.html. Drug abuse in schools hinders academic performance (http://www/ehow.com/info 8013137 problems-secondary-schools.html). There is increased substance abuse such as ecstacy and marijuana in schools because teenagers face peer pressure and the desire to belong to a certain group. For instance in 2003 in one senior secondary school in Botswana, students broke into a biology laboratory and stole ethanol. The incident resulted in the death of some of the students (Garegae, 2007).

"Acquiring academic skills is the key ingredient to success so the ability to read comprehensively, write effectively and to communicate clearly are the key areas in which a student must be proficient as this will make the student to shine academically hence school excellence (http://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/how to become a good student). These attributes can come about only if the student refrains from the hindering factors and social ills pointed out above. To all extents, the will to succeed is squarely in the hands of the student alone and not the parent or the teacher because there is a limit to the amount of persuasion these other people can do. It is a case of one taking the horse to water and impossible to make it drink. No one can hold the student by the neck towards doing school work. The student therefore has a responsibility towards his/her academic success that warrants him/her a share of the blame on his/her poor academic achievement. This responsibility can be enhanced by parents and teachers both taking an interest in the student's schooling.

The Forces outside the School

The Role Parents Play in Students' Academic Achievement

Bad students' behaviour is escalating in Botswana schools. Within a period of less than one month, several incidents of secondary schools students' bad behaviour have been reported. At one school, "Operations at . . . Senior Secondary School went back to normal following recent chaos where a number of boarding students who had vandalised the school's electricity supply . . ." (Botshabelo, 2013:3). At another, a confrontation between a teacher and a student resulted in "a lot of fighting between the students and the teachers and the police and soldiers were called with guns to rescue the situation" (Mosarwe, 2013:4). These situations can no longer be effectively handled by schools singly.

The academic life of the student cannot be disconnected from the student's home environment. It takes the school and the home to raise a child. Home circumstances and not genes are the first and most important influences of school a child will ever have (Dreikurs, Grunwald & Pepper, 1998). The home provides structure, support, care, guidance, love, discipline and comfort before the child's school going age. Such support helps the student to focus on schooling and guards against social ills. That is why successful students come from homes where parents provide structure, support, guidance, and where there is emotional support and promotion of health behaviour (World Bank Report, 1997; Topping, 1986). All things being equal, the kind of care shown to a child at home can be more effective than that shown to the child at school because it is more personalized. The old adage 'charity begins at homes' applies here. Gannan (2012) held that the greatest determining factor in the academic success of students is parental involvement and parental encouragement. The author concluded in his study that: "Good schools make a difference, but parental involvement better predicts a child's performance than the qualities of the school he or she attends" (ibid: 1), a similar view widely held in the 1960s and the early 1970s, was that the home environment variables and not the school environment variables were the most important in a child's achievement level (Beare et al., 1989). These views are at variance with that held by Leithwood (2004) who sees 'leadership as the second only to teaching among school influences on students' success'. However, parental involvement has an unquestionable role to play in helping schools attain excellence in academic performance (Uemura, 1999; Gabathuse, 2010:1). Parents are the most knowledgeable people about their own children and have specialists' skills, knowledge, and experiences which can be made available to children through their involvement in both classroom and outside to enhance school learning processes (Topping, 1986; Kindred, Bagin & Gallagher, 1984).

When parents limit their involvement in schools they also limit educational opportunities for their children as well as limiting the school's academic performance (Woolfork, 1997). Schools can benefit from qualified adults and former teachers and reach agreement with teachers on plans for attaining common goals (Kindred et al. 1984). In Botswana, educationists and educated others are retiring from their employee to villages and these can play a role in enhancing quality education in schools.

The interrelationship between the school and the parents involves careful understanding of the influence of one upon the other (Musaazi, 1982). The home bridges the gap that schools are not normally able to fill. Perhaps the argument by Beare et al. (1989) that the home and not the school environment variables were the most important in a child's achievement level was based on such argumentation. A strong partnership is important in this regard. If the partnership is weak and not coordinated enough, the student can take advantage and cause conflict between the two parties. Parents behave differently towards their children and their schooling. Some are strict, some are lax, some hyper-involved while others are mellow. A parent who is lax for example can reinforce the child's disapproval of school demands on such things as good discipline, home work and proper dress.

The parents may have a smaller part to play in education than the teachers or school leaders, but they should play their small part fully. If they are asked to ensure that their children do homework or come to school early or in school uniform, they should respond positively to the schools' cry for support. Decrying parents' participation in schools, the Assistant Minister of Education and Skills Development said "Quality education can only be attained through stakeholders' collective efforts . . . parental support was not evident . . . it would be difficult for the government to reach its intended goal if parents continue to show negativity (Baitlotli, 2013:5). Perhaps this is the case because of history. Traditionally, the teacher is the sole educator of students. In England, Parenting Orders are used to reinforce parents' responsibility for dealing with children's behaviour. Where parents fail to take responsibility for their child's unruly behaviour, then it is right that action is taken to ensure that they do, through these Orders administered by the courts (Kelly, 2005). This is an accountability dimension to parents because there are consequences to be suffered (Mastop, 2010) if they fail in their responsibility. In Botswana however, the situation is different. Failure by parents to support schools can only be bemoaned as there are no legal obligations and sanctions against such failure. In more advanced educational systems, parents, largely because they are themselves now better educated, are taking a greater interest than ever before in the nature and quality of schooling their children receive (Beare, et al.,1989).

Allen (2012:1) summarizes the importance of parental participation thus: "Behind a school that performs incredibly well, one will also see parents directly involved in the education of their children"). Collaboration between the two critical partners (teacher and parent) that can reveal other aspects of the child's behaviour not known by the other partner is therefore necessary because it can work for both. From this argument, parental involvement in schools is a compelled social responsibility that parents need to understand.

Ministry of Education as Chief Custodian of Education

The Ministry of Education has a political mandate to provide quality education which will enable individuals to achieve their full potential by participating, and contributing to the country's social, cultural and economic needs (Botswana Government, 1967). To this extent, the ministry is a policy formulation body that plans education that is relevant to the personal, social, cultural and economic needs. It directs the activities of education through the regions, thus indirectly contributing to students' learning and performance. Once policies have been decided upon, drafted, enactments made, the curriculum set, and delivered to schools, the ministry is supposed to monitor, evaluate, and provide support implementation resources. It is therefore the architect and chief custodian of education in Botswana. Over and above, as the employer of teachers, it sees to the professional development of teachers and the conditions of their work. In Botswana, the Ministry of Education has committed itself to this important aspect of quality education thus: " . . . in-service training of teachers and other professionals in education . . . as an aspect of general philosophy set forth . . . to the strengthening and renewing the education system through the development of teachers' competence and sense of professional development" (Botswana Government, 1977:158). Since then, unqualified and qualified teachers continue to be sent to upgrade their qualifications to colleges or universities (Tebogo, 2013; Abosi & Murangi, 2005).

Well-structured educational radio broadcasting programmes and educational material complement each other in educational provision to people. These programmes and materials are particularly helpful in improving children's knowledge in remote primary schools that have little access to both the print and electronic media.

The Ministry of Education represented by the minister has a big responsibility to the development of education and inevitably this makes the minister accountable to the academic achievement of students. The buck stops with him/her. However, despite the efforts made to improve educational standards, students' performance continues to decline. Between 2010 and 2012, the Primary School Leaving Examination results dropped from 69.4% to 64%. The Junior Certificate students' performance for the three years 2010, 2011, and 2012 dropped from 75.45 to 41% and for students who obtained a C grade or better in the Botswana General School Certificate Examination performance fell from 86% to 65% ((Botswana Examination Council, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012).

This scenario has triggered a blame game between the different stakeholders in education. Teacher unions, despite initiatives by the Ministry of Education to improve school performances, blame the ministry for neglecting teachers' welfare issues such as poor housing, poor pay, high teaching loads, and an unstructured leave system. These conditions, as argued earlier, have a bearing on the quality of instructional delivery and students' learning. It can be seen from the above that the challenges to Ministry of Education are escalating and as they do, the need for teamwork with other stakeholders becomes more imperative. Thus suggesting that the hinge pin for students' success is for education authorities to become continuously aware of the extent and importance of involving teachers in a collaborative educational responsibility (Campbell, Corbally & Nystrand, 1983) and for them to establish a social educational alliance with the teachers for the purpose of achieving school curriculum objectives (Hanson, 2003). This is the sense of the systems theory, to involve others who matter.

How Politics Impact on Students' Performance

It has become a truism that education cannot be separated from politics. In Botswana politicians participate in the budget allocation to the different ministries. Education has been getting the lion's share of the national budget every year. In the past two financial years (2012/13 & 2013/14) the budget for education alone stood at 23% and 21 % of the national budget respectively (Botswana Government, 2012/13 & 2013/14). In the current financial year (2014/15), Education has been allotted a hooping 29%. Non delivery of the Ministry's promises such as the provision of housing, teaching support resources and teacher allegations of Ministry's failure to improve work conditions are sources of conflicts between teachers and the employer (Tebogo, 2013). Such conflicts can affect students' academic achievement and as they often do, politicians have not failed to exploit them for political mileage. A politician of the opposition party decried: "A demoralized teacher cannot deliver . . . instead of addressing challenges that confront the education system, the minister's focus is on engaging in the silent war with the teachers and announcing ill-conceived programs that could popularize the government in a short term" (Saleshando, 2013:10). One is inclined to support this opinion. When teachers are at 'war' with the employer the core business of teaching suffers. Students in turn can also lose focus on their learning as they become interested third parties in the rivalry between the two. When this happens, invariably students support their teachers' course.

Beare et al. (1998:235-236), describe clashes in public between teachers' unions and their employer as:

". . . breaking one of the basic tenets of professionalism and just as damaging, cynical and destructive about their professional colleagues in management positions and often disparage in public the reputation of the system of schools to which they belong and of which they are essential parts. It is no wonder that the image of the education is bad when its own members are unthinking about its public standing. This begets political attention . . . it is not a secret that some politicians choose to cut public education funding, balance the budget on the back of students and slash the education workforce, inflicting the tremendous harm . . . to our students and risking our children's future. We have to understand that politics will always play a part in our education, we have to tolerate that. On the other hand, education needs to be free enough and independent enough so politics cannot abuse it".

Teachers can interpret Beare et al.'s perspective above as meant to intimidate them. Politicians and teachers' unions, although they can sometimes unduly interfere with the good intentions to improve education, they have the social obligation to question how education is provided to the students. This is because politicians represent the people (parents) who are directly affected by the education system provided to their children. Politicians provide checks and balances by insisting to know how the budget they have approved for education is being spent. A member of parliament asked: ". . . which equipment has been delivered so far, at which schools and which equipment was still to be delivered, and to which schools (Tebogo, 2013:3). Politicians can be intermediaries between parents and teachers. In a primary school where parents were not attending school activities, politicians intervened and attendance and school results also improved (Botswana Government, 2013).

On the other hand, the views of the teachers' unions, who represent the teachers' interests, should not be unduly throttled and dismissed as militant against the government. Teachers have a democratic right to express themselves on issues that affect their employment.

Recently, in 2013, the Ministry of Education introduced in schools an initiative referred to as 'back to school' where students at both the primary and secondary education sectors who for whatever reason have been unable to proceed to the next level of education are given the opportunity to go back to school. There have been mixed feelings about this initiative. Its critics view it as a political strategy by the ruling party to attract votes in the forth coming elections in 2014. A teachers' union called 'BOSETU' describes it as pre-mature as teachers still needed to be consulted. An opposition party parliamentarian held: "The back to school initiative, though noble in appearance, is nothing but a gimmick that is going to throw our education system deeper into crisis . . . strained resources that are collapsing will be stretched more by the back to school initiative, leading to high failure rate" (Correspondent, 2013:10). On the other hand, the Minister of Education accuses politicians for politicizing education matters. This war of words between the teachers and their employer and the game of politics between politicians of the opposite sides, which has become a blame culture, has the potential to contribute to a further decline in students' educational standards in the country. It is said when elephants fight, it is the grass that suffers, students in this respect. In 2005, the minister said, school results started dropping drastically and one of the factors is that a number of politicians were holding rallies with teachers' unions and this has adversely impacted on our education system. It is sad to note that unions are conniving with politicians to politicize education matters, she further lamented. These politicians and unions are running the schools and such habit is adversely impacting on our education system (Ontebetse, 2013). These arguments demonstrate that politics and education, as argued early, cannot be divorced from each other. The bickering between the different stakeholders in education also demonstrates how each party tries to abdicate its social responsibility to support an education system that can improve students' achievement. Though politicians have an influence in education, they are not answerable to the poor school achievement of the students. Like parents, their role is limited to the social and moral involvement only.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that there are many players in the provision of quality education of children. The different sets of knowledge from the different stakeholders need synergy. It is wisdom if two people who have different opinions on some issue to listen to each other. If students fail to achieve academically, as it often happens in Botswana, it does not help for the different players in education to tear each other down and point fingers of blame because everybody will start defending their position and no progress will be made. Collaboration between people who have a common stake would clarify roles and positions and this has the potential to eliminate naming and blaming. The need for collaboration is summed up in Maxwell's (2001:4) statement that: "There are no problems we cannot solve together and very few that we can solve by ourselves" and in the example by Thomas (1992) of how a pride of lions cooperate in the hunt. This sense is also summarised in the statement: "Clearly there is a problem. It is too easy to call for the resignation of the minister. The reality is that the problem goes far and beyond the minister. This should not be taken to mean that she should not be questioned and be required to answer for the state of affairs. She clearly has to take up a lot of responsibility for this. The point really is that teachers, parents, leadership,(political, religious, and traditional) must also lend an honest dialogue devoid of finger pointing and blame shifting and engaging in real debate that will result with measurable strategies to save our education system and our economy our future . We owe it to ourselves" (The Botswana Gazette Wed. 26 Feb-04 March 2014:2). There is something the parent knows about his/her child which the teacher does not know about the child. There is something the teacher knows about the child which the parent does not know about the child. The Ministry of Education has and can do something to improve students' academic performances which other stakeholders do not have and cannot do. The student knows things that he/she cannot tell the teacher or parent or anybody which affect his/her performance. Politicians have something to offer that can improve school performances. A caution to the education authorities; if politicians particularly from the opposition feel they are not involved in matters pertaining to education, they will involve themselves and their involvement will not always be constructive and reasonable. Whereas the different groups have a part to play, others such as the Minister of Education is answerable to the students' failure. The buck stops with him/her.

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Overall Students' Performance

Table 1: Percentage of Grades Which are C or Better in the Primary Leaving School Examinations Results for all Candidates and in all Syllabuses

Year	Percentage of grades C or better
2010	69.4%
2011	64%
2012	65%

Source: BEC 2010, 2011, 2012

Table 2: Percentages of Grades Which Are C or Better in the Junior Certificate Examinations Results for all Candidates and in all Syllabuses

Year	Percentage of grades C or better
2010	75.4%
2011	74.7%
2012	41%

Source: BEC 2010, 2011, 2012

Table 3: Number of Grades Which are C or Better in the Botswana General School Certificate Examinations Results for all Candidates and in all Syllabuses

Year	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007
No. of grades C or better	65, 303	69, 827	80, 857	83, 246	86, 202
% change compared to previous year	-6.48%	-13.64%	-2.80%	-3.43%	+13.90%

Source: BEC 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011