

The Role of School Leaders in Promoting Community Partnership

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Abstract: This study is an attempt to identify the role of school leaders in promoting community partnership (CP) in public schools providing general education in Al-Kharj Governorate, Saudi Arabia, and exploring the ways to develop this type of relationship. For this purpose, a descriptive research method was utilized, recruiting 5,320 teachers of both genders as the study population. The results indicated the moderate role of school leaders in boosting CP in these public schools in Al-Kharj Governorate in Saudi Arabia. Overall, the respondents demonstrated a moderate level of appreciation. As well, the leaders had the visions to expand CP by involving the community in educational development processes. It was also recommended to increase the levels of participation by placing the community in the management of local public schools. The findings further implied that school leaders needed to form committees by engaging the community members therein in order to strengthen the educational process.

Keywords: Community Partnership, Educational Process, Saudi Arabia, School Leaders, School Management

1. Introduction

In the current era, education is confronting a set of developments, demanding continual renewal in its structure. Hence, educational institutions are in quest of building and even reforming relationships with all groups in different communities, through exploiting “community partnership (CP)” as a component of their desired developments (Al-Arifi, 2012; Sunardi, 2020). In this sense, CP refers to “a commitment between two parties that requires mobilization of cooperation and solidarity to achieve general societal goals, and it is a method that enables the two actors to be involved, each according to their real capabilities” (Qa’dan, 2014), which has thus far proven effective in improving educational processes. Undeniably, CP plays a vital role in educational circles, through its reciprocal relationships that exist between schools and members of society in general, and families in particular, and so much more schools are the first social institutions from which community reforms begin. This type of partnership is of utmost important since it significantly contributes to upbringing individuals through its educational curricula and activities (Ahmed, Ashour, & Al-Omari, 2013; Zulkipli, 2020).

According to Al-Ajez (2007), school administration with its elements is assumed as the main pillar on which the progress of societies depends. It is also obvious that the participation of school leaders (*viz.* principals) have occupied a major place within their multiple roles. Therefore, they must create a positive school climate based on psychological stability and tranquility, and good understanding and cooperation to achieve educational goals in schools and fulfill their social roles. As the desire to remain competitive in the world and the challenge to develop a competitive workforce increase, a sense of urgency is emerging for schools and communities to collaborate regarding educational issues (Wang

& Boyd, 2000). Therefore, authentic relationships and connections should be fostered between schools and the surrounding communities in order to build effective partnerships, meeting the goals of all partners involved. It is additionally imperative to understand relationships between schools and communities thoroughly, especially from the viewpoints of community partners.

School-CPs (SCPs) can thus bring about numerous benefits, including building a caring community, improving school curricula, supporting families, providing for student development, boosting behaviors, increasing attendance and education, as well as helping students succeed at schools and in later life (Epstein, 2010a, 2010b). The growing interest in SCPs can be also linked to a rich theoretical tradition in various fields of literature that encompass the social context of learning, including situated learning, social constructivism, as well as inclusive and learner-centered education.

In this sense, Ayudhya (2011) believes that the concept of CP works on strengthening ties, interests, and responsibilities, concerting efforts, coordinating between knowledge and money for the purpose of cooperation and exchange of experiences, providing material support to schools to achieve their goals, most notably educating students to become a productive force, improving school education, as well as understanding problems and obstacles facing education within society. Thus, education is assumed as a societal process that requires strengthening the roles of the private and the non-profit sectors and providing the necessary infrastructure to complete the goals that promote the integration of education with permanent developments and modernization movements in society, by reinforcing effective CP methods to ensure the quality of educational processes.

Correspondingly, Narwana (2015) points to the importance of CP in educational institutions, as some community participation programs have been devoted to enriching important aspects of educational institution management, such as school mapping, social accountability, curriculum design for studies, resource mobilization, etc. and then directed to stakeholders. As well, Green (2013) makes a note of seven tenants essential for school leaders in terms of building a collaborative school culture, namely, (1) having knowledge of emerging issues and trends that can potentially impact school community; (2) being able to recognize needs to involve stakeholders in school decision-making processes; (3) assessing whether stakeholders are highly visible; (4) evaluating whether stakeholders are actively involved; (5) reviewing stakeholders' effectiveness in communicating with a larger community; (6) judging whether stakeholders give credence to individuals and groups whose values and opinions may conflict with theirs; and (7) considering whether stakeholders are recognizing and valuing diversity or not.

1.1 Purpose of the Study

The Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia seeks to establish an effective partnership for schools with families and society through the *Irtiqa* initiative, as one of the national development programs in Saudi Vision 2030, to improve the educational process in this Kingdom. Raising and educating children, building bridges of cooperation between teachers and parents, and improving outlooks towards educational institutions are thus the main objectives of the given initiative (Ministry of Education, 2018).

Notwithstanding, several studies, including Al-Hameed (2018), have shown that the most important practices of school leaders lie in forming partnership committees and parent-teacher councils and school leaders' roles in this regard are represented in large administrative burdens, lack of training, and poor participation of leaders belonging to the local community. Accordingly, the present study was to address the following questions:

- What is the role of school leaders in promoting CP in public schools providing general education in Al-Kharj Governorate, Saudi Arabia, and ways of development?
- What are the main ways to develop school leadership for CP in public schools providing general education in Al-Kharj Governorate, Saudi Arabia?

1.2 Main Objectives

The main objectives of the study are as follows:

- Identifying the role of school leaders in promoting CP in public schools providing general education in Al-Kharj Governorate, Saudi Arabia
- Recognizing the main ways to develop school leadership for CP in public schools providing general education in Al-Kharj Governorate, Saudi Arabia

2. Literature Review

Several surveys have been thus far fulfilled in line with the main objectives of the present study. For example, Al-Osaimi, (2020) aimed to determine the reality of CP and the degree of practice in its fields at Taif University, Saudi Arabia, from the points of view of faculty members and to explore any statistically significant differences in the degree of practices due to some variables. Using a descriptive-analytical approach, a 50-item questionnaire divided into five domains was administered. After verifying its validity and reliability, the research tool was applied to a random sample of 210 members representing 18% of the total population. The results of the study revealed that the reality of CP at Taif University was at a moderate level in general (3.35), and its fields were arranged as cultural, educational, social, economic, and research-based. There were also statistically significant differences (0.01) in terms of the reality of CP and the degree of practices in its fields because this university was in favor of theoretical colleges and the male gender (Kireeva, Zavialov, Saginova, & Zavyalova, 2020).

As well, Harwin (2012) investigated participation in project management (two new projects) through an analytical study in Kenya using a questionnaire. The study results demonstrated that appropriate support had been provided by the project managers, indicating the exploitation of effective policies in decision-making as well as dialogues to discuss recent projects and their developments and needs.

Abdu (2013) similarly explored the role of CP in developing education programs in learning centers in West Java, Indonesia. The results of this study showed that CP had a great role in activating educational processes in schools and educational centers in a positive manner. The findings also revealed that the majority of individuals participating in these programs were young, and this was an evidence of the importance of the role of the youth in the community development. Therefore, there was a need to strengthen and develop the capacities of this age group to undertake and participate in the development of educational programs by adopting sustainable strategies to enhance their participation, cooperation, and interaction in the community and the school.

The study by Fitriah (2010) aimed to develop the role of CP in education and school management, employing a questionnaire-based method. The study results suggested that parents would participate in school administration to provide material support. The findings further showed that CP in schools was negative and weak, and the highest levels of CP had not been achieved to this point. Accordingly, the existence of material contributions was an important factor affecting the characteristics of CP. It was additionally concluded that the role of society in managing institutions and organizations needed to be strengthened.

In this respect, Sheldan, Saaymeh, and Barhoum (2011) reflected on the reality of communication between schools and the community institutions to identify ways to improve the school supportive practices in the field of communication with the local community, using a descriptive-analytical research design. The results of this study highlighted that the assessments by the principals and teachers with regard to the reality of cooperation between the school and the local community were by 61%, as an average percentage that needed to be reinforced. It was also concluded that providing the ways to improve the school supportive practices in the field of communication with the local community could give the school administration more space for having contacts with the community. Moreover, it was recommended to hold training courses and workshops for school principals and teachers to equip them with the basic skills to practice communication with the local community, to form parent-teacher councils, to follow up on the council's meetings in each period, and to appreciate teachers and students who participate in the media programs.

Besides, Record (2012) developed a successful CP program for schools to improve academic achievement, from the points of view of public primary school principals, teachers, and parents, and to identify obstacles hindering the development and implementation of this partnership, and its resulting benefits. For this purpose, interviews were utilized as the main research tool, applied to a sample of 25 public primary schools to activate CP between the school and the community. The study results as the common features of CP were high levels of student achievement, creation of positive and cooperative relationships, and availability of mutual benefits.

As well, Hogue (2012) identified how to build school-community relationships in light of CP and clarified the role that the school leader, support staff, and community members could play in activating CP, using a case study, wherein the existence of a strong basis for SCP was confirmed based on adhering to delegated policies and focusing on student-centered goals. Haeseler (2011), in a case study, similarly examined the barriers to advocacy, hindering communication between home, school, and the community. In this study, special solutions were further provided by educational professionals on how to bridge these three areas. For this purpose, 20 instructors working in a variety of educational roles from two high-income primary schools in the New York metropolitan area, United States, responded to a confidential quantitative and qualitative survey, whose results showed that a more integrated home, school, and community was beneficial to families, educators, and social service providers. The findings additionally implied that the educators needed to consult with the management by building more liaise between managers/assistants/community social service providers and parents or having more contacts with child-care providers in order to promote environmental sensitivity and support in at-risk schoolchildren.

3. Material and Methods

3.1 Study Population

The study population consists of 5,320 teachers working in public schools providing general education in Al-Kharj Governorate, Saudi Arabia.

3.2 Study Sample

The study sample was selected from the statistical population through the simple random sampling technique and the sample size reached 1,064 male and female teachers constituting 20.0% of the population. The total respondents included 1,039 male and female teachers, namely, 19.5% of the study population and 97.7% of the study sample. Table 1 illustrates the distribution of the study samples in terms of their school and gender.

Table 1. Distribution of study samples in terms of school and gender

Variable		Number	Percentage
School	Primary	219	21.10
	Intermediate	292	28.10
	Secondary	528	50.80
	Total	1039	100.00
Gender	Male	431	41.50
	Female	608	58.50
	Total	1039	100.00

3.3 Research Tool

A questionnaire was used as the main research tool; constructed and developed based on previous studies and the theoretical framework of the study as well as consultations with experts.

The respondents' answers to the questionnaire items were also classified according to a five-point Likert-type scale, wherein the responses were determined in line with their weights as follows:

very large degree (5 points), *a large degree* (4 points), *a moderate degree* (3 points), *a low degree* (2 points), and *a very low degree* (1 point) (Allen & Seaman, 2007; Durmus & Güven, 2020).

3.4 Validity and Reliability of the Research Tool

To ensure the validity of the main research tool, it was given to a number of faculty members as referees to verify the suitability of its items to the goals they were seeking to achieve, and its reliability coefficient was further measured according to the Cronbach's alpha method to ensure the internal consistency in its final form. The value of the reliability coefficient was reached (0.95), and it was 0.96 and 0.90 for the first and the second domains, respectively. These ratios were also high, indicating consistency between the research tool items.

3.5 Statistical Analysis

To address both research questions, descriptive and analytical statistical methods were recruited, using the SPSS Statistical software (ver. 20) and the following methods.

- Frequency and percentage (to describe the characteristics of the study samples)
- Arithmetic mean and standard deviation (SD)

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Results Related to the First Research Question

- What is the role of school leaders in promoting CP in public schools providing general education in Al-Kharj Governorate, Saudi Arabia, and ways of development?

It is evident from the results in Table 2 that the general arithmetic mean values of the respondents' answers to the items that measure the role of school leaders in promoting CP in public schools providing general education in Al-Kharj Governorate, Saudi Arabia, reached 3.24 with a SD of 0.691, representing a moderate degree of appreciation.

Accordingly, Item no. 2 (Parent-teacher councils are activated) occupied the first place with the arithmetic mean value of 3.56, followed by Item no. 5 (There are effective channels of communication between the school personnel and the local community) with the mean score of 3.55, and then Items no. 9 (School radio is used to introduce the concept of community partnership to its personnel) and no. 11 (Participation in organizing cleaning campaigns for public facilities such as parks and mosques is encouraged) came respectively in the last places with the arithmetic mean values of 3.08.

The results were also consistent with the findings reported in the studies by Al-Osaimi (2020), which concluded that the reality of CP at Taif University, Saudi Arabia, was at a moderate level, and Abdu (2013), suggesting that CP could significantly contribute to activating the educational process in schools and educational centers in a positive manner. The results of the present study also showed that the majority of the individuals participating in these programs were at a young age. The findings were correspondingly in agreement with the results delineated in the study by Sheldan et al. (2011), who found that assessments by the principals and teachers with regard to the reality of cooperation between the school and the community were valued by 61%, at a moderate level, as well as the survey by Hogue (2012), confirming the existence of a strong basis for the partnership between the school and the community. However, the results of the present study were at odds with the findings reported by Fitriah (2010), reflecting on the weaknesses in the CP in schools, which had failed to reach the highest level.

Table 2. Arithmetic mean and SD values to identify the responses of the samples to the questionnaire items measuring the role of school leaders in promoting CP in public schools providing general education in Al-Kharj Governorate, Saudi Arabia, in descending order

Item no.	Items	Arithmetic mean	SD	Sorting by mean	Levels by mean
2	Parent-teacher councils are activated.	3.56	0.89	1	Moderate
5	There are effective channels of communication between the school personnel and the local community.	3.55	0.93	2	Moderate
1	A community partnership committee is formed.	3.42	1.02	3	Moderate
16	The visions for the local community regarding cooperation with schools are clear.	3.36	0.83	4	Moderate
3	The organizational culture of the school in support of community partnership is encouraged.	3.33	0.88	5	Moderate
13	The school personnel are trained to activate the school-community partnership.	3.32	0.85	6	Moderate
10	The members of the local community are involved in exhibitions and workshops to serve the school and the local community.	3.26	0.90	7	Moderate
4	Sociocultural and humanitarian sessions are organized between the school and the local community members.	3.25	0.95	8	Moderate
6	The educational process is enriched by benefiting from the community's institutions.	3.19	0.84	9	Moderate
14	Extracurricular activities pay more attention to community partnership.	3.19	0.91	10	Moderate
17	The school personnel are allowed to develop cooperation with the local community.	3.19	0.85	11	Moderate
7	The school facilities are allowed to serve the local community.	3.15	0.91	12	Moderate
18	Supportive administrative personnel specialized in developing the relationship with the local community is available.	3.15	0.90	13	Moderate
19	The establishment of cooperative relationships with the local community institutions is allowed through the flexibility of laws and regulations.	3.15	0.84	14	Moderate
12	The students are encouraged to produce within the school to support the needs of the school and the local community.	3.14	1.01	15	Moderate
15	The role of local community members is highlighted in activating community partnership.	3.14	0.85	16	Moderate
8	Donors help to manage the educational programs.	3.12	0.89	17	Moderate
9	School radio is used to introduce the concept of community partnership to its personnel.	3.08	0.96	18	Moderate
11	Participation in organizing cleaning campaigns for public facilities such as parks and mosques is encouraged.	3.08	1.02	19	Moderate
-	The research tool as a whole	3.24	0.69	-	Moderate

4.2 Results Related to the Second Research Question

- What are the main ways to develop school leadership for CP in public schools providing general education in Al-Kharj Governorate, Saudi Arabia?

According to the results in Table 3, the general arithmetic mean values of the respondents' answers to the questionnaire items measuring the main ways to develop school leaderships for CP in

public schools providing general education in Al-Kharj Governorate reached 3.85 with a SD of 0.62, representing a high degree of appreciation.

Accordingly, Item no. 8 (The school investigates the community's urgent needs and problems) occupied the first place with an arithmetic mean value of 4.23, followed by Item no. 1 (The school's visions and missions include a clear direction towards activating the school-community partnership) with a mean score of 4.06, and finally Item no. 7 (A specialized center is established to provide advice to the local community) in the last place with a mean value of 3.61.

These results indicated a strong tendency to develop the performance of school administration regarding CP by the study samples, and highlighted the importance of this type of cooperation for the school to achieve its goals. The school leaders also seek to implement a number of methods to develop CP in an effort to improve the educational environment, establish communication with various community institutions, and implement what the Saudi Vision 2030 calls for, i.e., creating a safe and positive school climate by providing school facilities for the local community as well as accelerating school development through the external environment represented by the local community. This also implies that the school administration has an unconventional mentality to strive for the advancement of knowledge and the formation of a conscious and educated generation whose roles emerge in the local community.

The given results were thus consistent with the findings reported by Harwin (2012), reflecting on increased awareness of modern projects, higher levels of community participation, appropriate support provided to project managers, and adoption of effective policies in decision-making. This study also confirmed the use of dialogues to discuss. The results of the present study were similarly in line with the outcomes of the survey by Sheldan et al. (2011), in which the ways to improve the school's supportive practices in the field of communicating with the local community were underlined. Therefore, there is a need to equip school principals and teachers with the basic skills to practice communication with the local community, to form parent-teacher councils, to hold and to follow up on the council's meetings in each period, and to appreciate teachers and students participating in the media programs. A standardized connection between home, school, and community is beneficial as well, to include families, teachers, and community service providers, which was in line with the findings in the study by Record (2012), wherein the common features of CP were high levels of student achievement, creation of a positive and cooperative relationship, and availability of mutual benefits. As stated by Haeseler (2011), the educators need to consult with the management for building more liaise between managers/assistants/community social service providers and parents or having more contacts with child-care providers in order to promote environmental sensitivity and support in at-risk schoolchildren.

Table 3. Arithmetic mean and SD values to identify the responses of the samples to the questionnaire items that measure the main ways to develop school leaderships for CP in public schools providing general education in Al-Kharj Governorate, Saudi Arabia, in descending order

Item No.	Items	Arithmetic mean	SD	Sorting by mean	Levels by mean
8	The school investigates the community's urgent needs and problems.	4.23	0.93	1	High
1	The school's visions and missions include a clear direction towards activating the school-community partnership.	4.06	0.74	2	High
6	The school allows the exchange of experiences with the local community in order to achieve its desired goals.	3.97	0.77	3	High
3	The school has concluded agreements with the community institutions, caring for the students in all aspects.	3.95	0.83	4	High
2	The school formed a specialized committee to activate the community partnership.	3.91	0.72	5	High
4	The school prepares an operational plan to ensure that its facilities are employed to serve the local community.	3.84	0.81	6	High
9	The school provides programs and courses to raise the educational and cultural levels of the students and the local community.	3.79	0.81	7	High
5	The school implements the community service programs according to its strategic plans.	3.75	0.89	8	High
10	The school dedicates an open medical day to the local community in partnership with the competent authorities.	3.64	1.01	9	Moderate
11	Partnerships empty spaces of the school to be used for developments by the local community organizations.	3.63	1.04	10	Moderate
7	A specialized center is established to provide advice to the local community.	3.61	0.96	11	Moderate
-	The research tool as a whole	3.85	0.62	-	High

5. Conclusion

The present study aimed to identify the role of school leaders in promoting CP in public schools providing general education in Al-Kharj Governorate, Saudi Arabia, and exploring the ways to develop this type of relationship. The results demonstrated that the existence of a role for school leaders in improving CP in these schools through a set of practices undertaken by these individuals which were represented in their roles in terms of activating parent-teacher councils, providing effective channels of communication between the school personnel and the local community, forming committees for further cooperation with the local community, establishing the organizational culture in the school to support CP, and implementing other extracurricular activities in favor of the concept of CP. These results could be explained by poor selection criteria for the school principals or their lack of skills, as well as no importance of CP. In addition to decentralization in making decisions that would limit the establishment

of CP, school leaders will not show any interactions merely by proposing initiatives to form interactive partnerships between the school and the local community.

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