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Research Article

INSIGHTS OF TEACHERS AND PRINCIPALS INTO EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES IN THE POST-FUNDAMENTAL SCHOOLS OF BURUNDI

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Abstract

Educational practices are imperative to any educational system. This study delves deeply into the complex landscape of Burundi's post-fundamental schools. The purpose of this study is to assess the opinions of educators and principals regarding curriculum, pedagogy, assessment procedures, school infrastructure, human resources, and community engagement in Burundi's post-fundamental schools. The study employed a random sampling technique and a descriptive survey design. The study sample consisted of 345 teachers and 37 school principals. The study used perception scales to gather data, which were analysed using percentages and frequencies through SPSS. The intensity index and its average were also calculated to demonstrate the strength of the corresponding statements. The findings indicated that teachers encouraged students to participate actively in co-curricular activities. They also revealed that teachers lacked ICT in their teaching activities, and the school infrastructure was found inadequate. However, they consented to change the teaching strategies based on the student's assessment results even though they insisted on the insufficiency of their salaries.

Keywords: Educational practices, Post-fundamental schools, Intensity index, Average intensity index, Insights in Education.

INTRODUCTION

Educational practices are core to the success of an education system and play a vital role as the motor does to a locomotive. Educational practices demonstrate large-scale, beneficial learning effects for students under a wide range of conditions, and educators may find a wealth of references helpful in determining how applicable the practices are to their specific situation (Rao, 2003). Educational practices include curriculum and its content, pedagogical methods, evaluation techniques and processes, management of a human resource intervening in a teaching-learning situation, and the intervention of community, i.e., parents, associations of alumni, parents-teachers association, the local administration interventions in schools for the sake of success in the school activities. Adopting practices that benefit learners is the goal of school districts and school building teams across the nation, but these practices also need to "fit" the local community of students, families, and staff (Horner *et al.,* 2017). These educational practices differ depending on the context and field of application. As an illustration, in a context where the subject matter is history, the most indicated method would be exploratory. In science subjects, the experimental method would be the most preferred. According to Horner et al. (2017), increasing the accuracy with which we first define and validate practices is a crucial first step in developing and putting evidence-based and contextually compatible practices into practice. In a context where these educational practices do not find a smooth application, they affect not only the students' achievement but also the overall school accreditation and the country's development. In that perspective, Emiliani (2004) stated that higher levels of student satisfaction are the result of more precise expectations, less uncertainty about lectures and assignments, standard assignment formats, smoother individual and team assignments throughout the semester, and better time management of students both in and out of class. Thus, thoroughly investigating which educational practices teachers implement and how they implement them should broadly concern principals, parents, and local administration for the sake of the learners and the country. Burundi, a nation in East Africa, is cited as standing under the average level of development, where the population lives below the life necessities standards. The researcher conducted this study in Burundi to investigate which educational practices are being implemented in post-fundamental schools and determine the practitioners' opinions regarding these practices as problems with infrastructure, limited interaction, and equipment scarcity are some remarkably unfavourable views about educational activities (Hebebci *et al.,* 2020).

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LITERATURE REVIEW

Educational practices, once they are well implemented, can give shape to a given education system. From teachers' activities to students' interventions, all are part of the school environment, which defines the overall outcomes for students and teachers. Pettigrew, Miller, Kannan, Raj, Jun, and Jones (2022) said that most respondents expressed concern about current levels of students' misbehaviours, whereas around half reported negative outcomes relating to mental well-being, social/peer interactions, and school performance. Some education stakeholders point out the illegal legalisation of some activities and a lack of prevention measures in place at their schools. There is a need to monitor and address students' behaviours in schools and provide staff with more significant support to prevent the negative consequences associated with them by children at school and beyond. Among others, evaluation is a crucial part of educational practices. In a study titled the attitudes and perceptions of school principals about the contribution of evaluation to the efficient operation of schools both at the administrative and educational levels,

Brinia, Vasiliki, Christos, Gkouma, and Ioannis (2023) found that principals recognised the need for the evaluation process in education and agreed on the importance of their roles and responsibilities for the effective functioning of their units. Regarding pedagogy, Shure (2023) conducted a study on student and principal perceptions of social pedagogy for immigrant students and found that immigrant students prefer educators willing to provide clarifications until concepts are grasped, a practice they attribute to the challenge of language barriers.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A descriptive survey method was used throughout this investigation to analyse the perceptions of teachers and principals in Burundi's post-fundamental schools about curriculum, pedagogy, assessment protocols, school infrastructure, human resource management, and community engagement.

Participants

Post-fundamental school principals and teachers of Burundi constituted the population in this study. As a representative sample, the researcher randomly chose 37 post-fundamental schools dispersed across four regions: north, south, east, and west, where 20% of the total schools in each region were selected. The study sample comprised one principal and ten educators from each chosen post-fundamental school. The final sample included three hundred forty-five (345) post-fundamental teachers and thirty-seven (37) principals.

Material

The researcher developed a perception scale to gauge the perceptions of teachers and principals in Burundi's post-fundamental schools. The perception scale comprised 30 statements, with five representing each studied aspect. The perception scale was a five-Likert scale.

Data Collection and Analysis

The researcher consulted the school's principal beforehand for prior permission and approached the sampled participants to ensure appropriate data collection. Each participant in the study received a perception scale to fill out intending to measure their perceptions of given statements. The researcher distributed the perception scale in 37 post-fundamental schools containing 345 teachers and 37 principals in the study. The researcher collected the filled perception scales once they were completed.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to perform all statistical analyses. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, intensity index, and average intensity index, were employed by the researcher to explain the findings about the perceptions of teachers and principals of Burundi's post-fundamental schools regarding curriculum, pedagogy, evaluation procedures, school infrastructure, human resource, and community participation.

The following tables and lines show the results displayed aspect-wise, the findings and the relevant discussion. The average intensity index of 3.90 showed that teachers had a favourable perception towards understanding the curriculum's aims and objectives, basing the curriculum objectives on societal needs, students' interest in the curriculum, continuity of the subject from one stage to another, and active participation of students in co-curricular activities. This high rating indicates general confidence among educators regarding their comprehension of curricular goals and dedication to fostering student engagement in co-curricular activities (Fang & Ngee, 2013). Despite their grasp of the curriculum's goals, teachers highlight significant shortcomings. The average intensity index of 3.47 showed that teachers had a favourable perception of the lack of ICT-integrated pedagogy to make learning situations joyful and that the teaching method met the requirements of the latest pedagogy. However, they had neither a favourable nor an unfavourable perception; they were undecided about the pedagogy covering the essential content, the methodology preparing students for real-world challenges, and the appropriateness of the pedagogy. This indicates a critical need for updating pedagogical approaches to integrate ICT effectively and address current educational challenges (Stensaker *et al.,* 2007).

The average intensity index of 3.68 showed that teachers had a favourable perception of the fairness and justness of assessments, encouraging students to focus on their studies, modifying teaching methods based on assessment results, and evaluating the effectiveness of the teaching methods. However, they had neither a favourable nor an unfavourable perception; they were undecided about the regularity of formative assessment. This underlines the importance of implementing more frequent, fair, and comprehensive formative assessments to inform instructional practices better and ensure equitable student evaluation (Leung, 2004). The average intensity index of 2.94 showed that teachers had neither a favourable nor an unfavourable perception; they were undecided about the use of library facilities, the effectiveness of guidance and counselling centres, the quality of the mid-day food provided to students, the large number of students in classes, and inadequate school infrastructure. Parbie, Phuti & Barfi (2021) found that, while the infrastructure and support services are viewed positively, the limited use of library facilities suggests enhanced resource utilisation to support and enrich the educational experience.

The average intensity index of 3.40 showed that teachers had a favourable perception of timely recruitment, appreciation of the teacher's performance, recognition of non-teaching staff in schools, and teachers' satisfaction with their salaries. However, they had neither a favourable nor an unfavourable perception; they were undecided about active participation in professional development programmes. The low perception of non-teaching staff recognition further underscores the need for comprehensive professional development opportunities and improved compensation to enhance teacher morale and effectiveness (Makki & Kandil, 2023). The average intensity index of 3.43 showed that teachers had a favourable perception of community contribution in decision-making, parental involvement in school activities, regular meetings of the parents-teacher association, and parental involvement's contribution to students' development. However, they had neither a favourable nor an unfavourable perception; they were undecided about the inactivity of the school-industry interface.

Table 1. Perception of Teachers on Curriculum

Statement / N=345	SA (%)	A (%)	UD (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Intensity Index	Average Index
The stakeholders understand the curriculum's aims and objectives clearly	49 (14.2%)	259 (75.1%)	1 (0.3%)	30 (8.7%)	6 (1.7%)	3.91	3.90
The objectives of the curriculum are not based on societal needs.	56 (16.2%)	10 (2.9%)	16 (4.6%)	63 (18.3%0	200 (58.0%)	3.99	
The curriculum is interesting to students.	75 (21.7%)	197 (57.1)	13 (3.8%)	54 (15.7%)	6 (1.7%)	3.81	
The curriculum does not ensure the continuity of subjects from one stage to another.	65 (18.8%)	12 (3.5%)	12 (3.5%)	94 (27.2%)	162 (47.0%)	3.80	
Teachers encourage students to participate actively in co-curricular activities	123 (35.7%)	158 (45.8%)	18 (5.2%)	30 (8.7%)	16 (4.6%)	3.99	

SA= Strongly Agree; A= Agree; UD= Undecided; D= Disagree; SD= Strongly Disagree

Table 2. Perception of Teachers on Pedagogy

Statement / N=345	SA (%)	A (%)	UD (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Intensity Index	Average Index
The pedagogy implemented ensures that essential content is covered systematically.	71 (20.6%)	145 (42.0%)	29 (8.4%)	79 (22.9%)	21 (6.1%)	3.04	3.47
The teaching methodology prepares students for real-world challenges.	94 (27.2%)	177 (51.3%)	15 (4.3%)	46 (13.3%)	13 (3.8%)	3.36	
The pedagogy implemented is appropriate.	71 (20.6%)	171 (49.6%)	26 (7.5%)	63 (18.3%)	14 (4.1%)	3.18	
Teachers lack ICT-integrated pedagogy to make the learning situations joyful.	23 (6.7%)	15 (4.3%)	25 (7.2%)	127 (36.8%)	155 (44.9%)	4.09	
The teaching methods do not meet the requirements of the latest pedagogy.	59 17.1%)	32 (9.3%)	21 (6.1%)	76 (22.9%)	157 (45.5%)	3.70	

Table 3. Perception of Teachers on Evaluation Procedures

	SA (%)	A (%)	UD (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Intensity Index	Average Index
The student's assessment is fair and just.	75 (21.7%)	176 (51.0%)	14 (4.1%)	66 (19.1%)	14 (4.1%)	3.67	3.68
Formative assessment in the school is conducted regularly.	48 (13.9%)	191 (55.4%)	10 (2.9%)	75 (21.7%)	21 (6.1%)	3.49	
Teachers encourage students to focus on their studies by grading their assignments.	79 (22.9%)	188 (54.5%)	11 (3.2%)	52 (15.1%)	15 (4.3%)	3.77	
Teachers modify their teaching methods based on students' assessment results.	116 (33.6%)	147 (42.65)	7 (2.0%)	65 (18.8%)	10 (2.9%)	3.85	
The assessment style adopted informs educators about the effectiveness of their teaching methods.	90 (26.1%)	154 (44.6%)	9 (2.6%)	65 (18.8%)	27 (7.8%)	3.62	

Table 4. Perception of Teachers on School Infrastructure

Statement / N=345	SA (%)	A (%)	UD (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Intensity Index	Average Index
Students well utilise the library facility.	14 (13.3%)	154 (44.6%)	29 (8.4%)	77 (22.3%)	39 (11.3%)	2.80	2.94
Guidance and counselling centres are not effectively working in my school.	27 (7.8%)	165 (47.8%)	28 (8.1%)	79 (22.9%)	46 (13.3%)	2.86	
The quality of the mid-day meal given to students is good.	51 (14.8%)	149 (43.2%)	11 (3.2%)	87 (25.2%)	47 (13.6%)	3.20	
My school has more students than it can accommodate.	65 (18.8%)	129 (37.4%)	19 (5.5%)	72 (20.9%)	60 (17.4%)	3.19	
School infrastructure is lacking, which is the primary aspect of an effective learning environment.	48 (13.9%)	164 (47.5%)	28 (8.1%)	67 (19.4%)	38 (11.0%)	2.66	

Table 5. Perception of Teachers on Administrative Practices

Statement / N=345	SA (%)	A (%)	UD (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Intensity Index	Average Index
Recruitment is done regularly whenever a post-vacancy is announced.	67 (19.4%)	177 (51.3%)	16 (4.6%)	55 (15.9%)	30 (8.7%)	3.57	3.40
Teachers are appreciated from time to time for their excellent performance.	73 (21.3%)	170 (49.3%)	15 (4.3%)	59 (17.1%)	28 (8.1%)	3.58	
Teachers do not actively participate in professional development programs.	69 (20.0%)	143 (41.4%)	32 (9.3%)	70 (20.3%)	31 (9.0%)	2.57	
Non-teaching staff get due recognition in the school.	85 (24.6%)	140 (40.6%)	14 (4.1%)	81 (32.5%)	25 (7.2%)	3.52	
Teachers are not satisfied with their salaries.	19 (5.5%)	68 (19.7%)	18 (5.2%)	109 (31.6%)	131 (38.0%)	3.77	

Table 6. Perception of Teachers on Community Participation

Statement / N=345	SA (%)	A (%)	UD (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Intensity Index	Average Index
The school is inactive in interfacing with the community.	62 (18.0%)	168 (48.7%)	20 (5.8%)	74 (21.4%)	21 (6.1%)	2.49	3.43
Community participation in schools actively contributes to decision-making processes.	116 (33.6%)	130 (37.7%)	23 (6.7%)	63 (18.3%)	13 (3.8%)	3.79	
The parents actively involve themselves in school activities.	81 (23.5%)	160 (46.4%)	13 (3.8%)	77 (22.3%)	14 (4.1%)	3.63	
The parent-teacher association meetings are conducted regularly.	94 (27.2%)	136 (39.4%)	18 (5.2%)	60 (17.4%)	37 10.7%)	3.55	
Parental school involvement significantly contributes to a child's development and academic success.	96 (27.8%)	149 (43.2%)	20 (5.8%)	57 (16.5%)	23 (6.7%)	3.69	

Table 7. Perception of Principals on Curriculum

Statement / N=345	SA (%)	A (%)	UD (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Intensity Index	Average Index
The curriculum is interesting to students.	10 (27.0%)	22 (59.5%)	4 10.8%)	1 (2.7%)	0 (0.0%)	4.11	3.77
The curriculum ensures the continuity of subjects from one stage to another.	14 (37.8%)	13 (35.1%)	3 (8.1%)	7 (18.9%)	0 (0.0%)	3.92	
The objectives of the curriculum are not based on societal needs.	3 (8.1%)	4 (10.8%)	3 (8.1%)	27 (73.0%)	0 (0.0%)	3.46	
The stakeholders understand the curriculum's aims and objectives clearly.	2 (5.4%)	14 (37.8%)	11 (29.7%)	10 (27.0%)	0 (0.0%)	3.22	
The participation of students in co-curricular activities leads to their holistic development.	12 (32.4%)	21 (56.8%)	1 (2.7%)	3 (8.1%)	0 (0.0%)	4.14	

Table 8. Perception of Principals on Pedagogy

Statement / N=345	SA (%)	A (%)	UD (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Intensity Index	Average Index
The pedagogy implemented at the post-fundamental school is appropriate.	3 (8.1%)	25 (67.6%)	5 (13.5%)	4 (10.8%)	0 (0.0%)	3.73	3.43
The teaching methodology adopted by teachers is innovative.	1 (2.7%)	23 (62.2%)	5 (13.5%)	4 (10.8%)	4 (10.8%)	3.35	
Teachers lack ICT-integrated pedagogy to make the learning situations joyful.	3 (8.1%)	26 (70.3%)	1 (2.7%)	5 (13.5%)	2 (5.4%)	3.62	
The teaching methods meet the requirements of the latest pedagogy.	5 (13.5%)	10 (27.0%)	7 (18.9%)	12 (32.4%)	3 (8.1%)	3.05	
The teaching methodology prepares students for real-world challenges.	5 (13.5%)	19 (51.4%)	6 (16.2%)	0 (0.0%)	7 (18.9%)	3.41	

Table 9. Perception of Principals on Evaluation Procedures

Statement / N=345	SA (%)	A (%)	UD (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Intensity Index	Average Index
The student's assessment is fair and just.	4 (10.8%)	23 (62.2%)	2 (5.4%)	5 (13.5%)	3 (8.1%)	3.54	3.92
Formative assessments are held in the school regularly.	17 (45.9%)	14 (37.8%)	3 (8.1%)	2 (5.4%)	1 (2.7%)	4.19	
Teachers encourage students to focus on their studies by grading their assignments.	9 (24.3%)	20 (54.1%)	1 (2.7%)	6 (16.2%)	1 (2.7%)	3.81	
Teachers modify their teaching methods based on students' assessment results.	10 (27.0%)	24 (64.9%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (8.1%)	0 (0.0%)	4.11	
The assessment style adopted informs educators about the effectiveness of their teaching methods.	12 (32.4%)	17 (45.9%)	2 (5.4%)	6 (16.2%)	0 (0.0%)	3.95	

Table 10. Perception of Principals on School Infrastructure

Statement / N=345	SA (%)	A (%)	UD (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Intensity Index	Average Index
The library facility is well utilised by students.	7 (18.9%)	19 (51.4%)	4 (10.8%)	4 (10.8%)	3 (8.1%)	3.62	2.85
The school infrastructure is inadequate.	13 (35.1%)	12 (32.4%)	6 (16.2%)	5 (13.5%)	1 (2.7%)	2.16	
Guidance and counselling centres are not effectively working in my school.	8 (21.6%)	10 (27.0%)	7 (18.9%)	8 (21.6%)	4 (10.8%)	2.73	
The quality of the mid-day meal given to students is good.	3 (8.1%)	15 (40.5%)	8 (21.6%)	3 (8.1%)	8 (21.6%)	3.05	
My school has more students than it can accommodate.	2 (5.4%)	14 (37.8%)	3 (8.1%)	6 (16.2%)	12 (32.4%)	2.68	

Table 11. Perception of Principals on Administrative Practices

Statement / N=345	SA (%)	A (%)	UD (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Intensity Index	Average Index
Teachers are appreciated from time to time for their excellent performance.	7 (18.9%)	10 (27.0%)	5 (13.5%)	10 (27.0%)	5 (13.5%)	3.11	2.97
Teachers do not actively participate in professional development programs.	8 (21.6%)	16 (43.2%)	6 (16.2%)	6 (16.2%)	1 (2.7%)	2.35	
The teachers at the post-fundamental school are effective.	5 (13.5%)	21 (56.8%)	5 (13.5%)	3 (8.1%)	3 (8.1%)	3.59	
Non-teaching staff get due recognition in school.	6 (16.2%)	19 (51.4%)	8 (21.6%)	4 (10.8%)	0 (0.0%)	3.73	
Teachers are not satisfied with their salaries.	10 (27.0%)	19 (51.4%)	4 (10.8%)	3 (8.1%)	1 (2.7%)	2.08	

Table 12. Perception of Principals on Community Participation

Statement / N=345	SA (%)	A (%)	UD (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Intensity Index	Average Index
The school is actively involved in interfacing with the community.	2 (5.4%)	9 (24.3%)	5 (13.5%)	12 (32.4%)	9 (24.3%)	2.54	3.43
Community participation in schools does not actively contribute to decision-making processes.	9 (24.3%)	13 (35.1%)	2 (5.4%)	12 (32.4%)	1 (2.7%)	2.54	
Parents involve themselves in school activities actively.	11 (29.7%)	21 (56.8%)	2 (5.4%)	2 (5.4%)	1 (2.7%)	4.05	
Parents-teacher association meetings are conducted regularly.	12 (32.4%)	14 (37.8%)	10 (27.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (2.7%)	3.97	
Parental school involvement significantly contributes to a child's development and academic success.	14 (37.8%)	14 (37.8%)	7 (18.9%)	1 (2.7%)	1 (2.7%)	4.05	

This implies that while teachers appreciate community and parental contributions, there is significant room for improvement in strengthening these partnerships to foster more dynamic and effective collaboration between schools and their communities (Panahi, 2015). The average intensity index of 3.77 showed that principals had a favourable perception of a curriculum that is interesting to students, subject continuity in the curriculum, basing the curriculum objectives on societal needs, understanding the curriculum aims and objectives, and student participation in co-curricular activities. This indicates a pressing need for greater alignment between curriculum objectives and societal expectations (Watermeyer, 2011). The average intensity index of 3.43 showed that principals had a favourable perception of the appropriateness of the pedagogy implemented and the lack of ICT-integrated pedagogy to make the learning environment joyful. However, they had neither a favourable nor an unfavourable perception; they were undecided about the effectiveness of the teaching methodology, the teaching methods meeting the latest pedagogy, and students' preparedness for real-world challenges. This highlights a critical developmental area: integrating modern pedagogical practices and technological tools. According to Li (2018), addressing these gaps is crucial for modernising teaching methods and equipping students for future challenges by adopting contemporary instructional strategies and technologies. The average intensity index of 3.92 showed that principals had a favourable perception of the fairness and justness of students' assessments, the regularity of formative assessments held, the encouragement of students to study, the modification of teaching methods after assessments, and the effectiveness of the teaching methods. However, formative assessments are valued for evaluating and improving teaching practices (Bennett, 2011). The perceived lack of fairness and supportive engagement highlights the need for improvements. The average intensity index of 2.85 showed that principals had neither a favourable nor an unfavourable perception; they were undecided about the adequacy of the school infrastructure, the functioning of guidance and counselling centres, the quality of the mid-day meals provided to students, and the large number of students in schools. However, they had a favourable perception of the use of library facilities.

The average intensity index of 2.97 showed that principals had a favourable perception of the effectiveness of teachers and the recognition of non-teaching staff. However, they had an unfavourable perception of the non-participation of teachers in professional development programmes and satisfaction with their salaries. Also, they had neither a favourable nor an unfavourable perception; they were undecided about the appreciation of teachers for their performance. These insights point to a need for more robust professional development initiatives, better recognition practices, and improvements in teacher compensation (Merchie, Tuytens, Devos & Vanderlinde (2018). The average intensity index of 3.43 showed that principals had a favourable perception of parents' involvement in school activities, the parent-teacher association conducting meetings, and parents' contribution to students' academic development. However, they had neither a favourable nor an unfavourable perception; they were undecided about the inactivity of the school-industry interface and community participation in schools' decision-making. Parental contributions are valued, but an opportunity remains to strengthen community involvement and foster more robust school-community partnerships (Lazarides *et al.,* 2015).

Conclusion

As stated, educational practices are the core content for any successful educational context. The more these educational practices stand on a solid basis, the more users find them easy to use, and therefore, they generate robust results. Educational practices are more effective once novel approaches are integrated with established and productive programs to highlight the effectiveness required for long-term implementation. According to (Horner *et al.,* 2017), in addition to producing worthwhile results, educational practices must be implemented with appropriate policy, consistent, sufficient funding, embedded professional development, coaching, distributed team-based leadership, capable school administrators, and effective decision-based data systems to be sustained over extended periods. The study implemented a descriptive survey research design, and the study participants were teachers and principals from the post-fundamental schools of Burundi. They shared their thoughts about the curricula they use, the instructional strategies they employ, and the evaluation practices used in their schools. The scale also included community involvement in school activities, human resource management, and school infrastructure. The results demonstrated that the instructors urged their students to concentrate more on extracurricular activities and acknowledged the deficiency of ICT-integrated pedagogy in their activities. Even though the school's infrastructure was deemed inadequate, they consented to continue modifying their methods of instruction in light of the assessment results, even if they declared that the salary did not cater to their needs. The participants acknowledged collaborating with the school interface, including the parents-teachers association in the school projects, and having a say in the decision-making process.

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