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TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AMONG SELECTED SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN THE PINETOWN DISTRICT, DURBAN

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Abstract

Empirical studies have shown a positive correlation between learners' academic success and parental involvement. This notion is widely acknowledged by teachers and society at large as a remedy in addressing some of the most predominant educational challenges. A formidable alliance between schools and parents as a strategy to promote learners' educational success has been the highlight of different departmental policies. This advocacy equally possesses a long-standing basis in research. The purpose of this article is to investigate teachers' perceptions of parental involvement in selected underperforming secondary schools within the Pinetown District, Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. Arguably, parental involvement is seen as a crucial success factor in students' academic achievement, while the level of communication between the parents and schools can be perceived as influential in their communicative meetings. The challenge that emerges from a lack of parental involvement can be attributed to ineffectual or non-communication amongst parents and schools. Invariably, when a learner underperforms in school, parents and teachers blame each other for learners' poor performance. The study stresses the need for active involvement of parents in their children's education so necessary and timely interventions may be applied if need be. The findings also suggest that parents from underprivileged schools show less concern for learners' educational endeavors, while some are concerned and make concerted efforts to be involved in their children's academic activities, but their social and educational background limits their level of involvement. However, at the secondary school level, research evidence is less supportive. Lastly, teachers also assert that mutually beneficial collaboration between parents and teachers is of great importance in children's learning and success in school.

Keywords: Academic Achievement, Parental Involvement, Teachers, Absenteeism

1. Introduction

The learner's background is a critical factor that has an impact on the learner's academic achievement in school. The community establishes part of this background. In this article, the focus is on the teachers' perceptions of parental involvement in children's education. The influence of parent involvement on learners' achievement plays a vital role in learner's education. Researchers have studied parental involvement in children's education from a variety of angles. One of such is Bokhorst-Heng (2008) who explains that parental involvement evolves as learners' transit from primary to secondary education and addresses the teachers' perceptions of parental involvement among selected underperforming secondary schools, as well as the gap caused by the lack of parental involvement in children's academic achievement by exploring the teachers' perceptions of parental involvement, and how the lack of parental involvement affects the learners in their academic achievement. South African schools are occupied by a variety of learners, as well as teachers, who are faced with several concerns and demands emanating from the lack of parental involvement in academic achievement (Vandeyar and Jansen, 2008). Hence, teachers alone are unable to prepare students with personal and cultural understanding in becoming successful, since they are from different backgrounds (Rubaina, 2014).

This article's primary objective is to explore teachers' perceptions of parental involvement among selected underperforming schools. The involvement of parents in their children's education plays a vital role towards children's academic progress at school. It is supposedly believed that the majority of parents see to their children's education, wellbeing, and welfare. Through parents' involvement, learners gain positive attitudes towards school activities, results in improved academic performance, reduces the probability of a dropout, as well as improved behavior among learners (Page, 2016). Page (2016) used qualitative data sources to explore the level of parental involvement and participation in their children's education. Communication between the parents and school was investigated to identify all the aspects and skills used by schools to involve parents in children's education, as well as to determine the environmental factors that could influence or deter parents from being involved in their children's educational endeavors. Factors such as parents' expectations, parents' responsibilities, school support, and management as well as the nature and adequacy of communication have been proven to enhance parents' involvement in their children's education.

The factors that enable parental involvement are parents' roles and responsibilities, parents' expectations, the nature and adequacy of communication, and school leadership and support. Additionally, the paper identifies perspectives on parental involvement to be used when the Department of Education (DoE) introduces a new curriculum and some educational programs that assist learners who are struggling in their learning. At the heart of the investigation is an emphasis on the usefulness of involving parents in schools. However, many parents are less involved in the educational progress of their children of secondary school age and stop monitoring their children's education, while parental involvement remains a crucial aspect of school results throughout adolescence. Exemplifying with the study by Hill *et al.* (2004), the involvement of parents has closely linked to learners' accomplishment as well as their aspirations through middle and high school education.

The principal question that can be raised to justify parental involvement in learners' academic achievement and some researchers' debate on the involvement of parents in schools is, therefore: what are parents' perspectives on and expectations of parental involvement? More specifically, the investigation seeks to determine (i) What support do parents receive from School Management Teams (SMTs) in schools to help learners with their work? (ii) How frequently are parents required to be involved in schools? (iii) What are educators' and parents' interactions in terms of parental involvement in teaching and learning? and (iv) Is a school involving parents in children's education suitable for the learners' academic achievement? Pursuing these issues in parental involvement advances teachers' understanding of how parents contribute to their children's education. This study seeks to improve knowledge within the discipline of education by adding crucial empirical perspectives on the involvement of parents in education and draws attention to the DoE when introducing a new curriculum, as well as the importance of involving parents in schools.

The breakdown of the article is as follows: It begins by discussing parental involvement. It then provides the theoretical framework that was employed in analyzing the variables of the research. It sheds light on the history, trends, and contexts that are essential for parental involvement. The article ends by presenting empirical data, conclusions, and policy recommendations.

2. Understanding parental involvement

The concept of 'parental involvement' has been explored from a variety of perspectives. In Lareau's (2000) view, 'parental involvement' implies parents' obligation towards preparation for their children's school. Such preparation may entail fulfilling the educational request made by teachers, participating in school activities/events, or attending Parent-Teacher meetings. Teachers are often dissatisfied with parent's level of involvement in learner's education, as teachers continuously make concerted efforts to increase parents' level of participation (Lareau, 2000). Surveys regarding parent involvement suggest that teachers advocate for the involvement of parents, especially with the younger kids. Similar to Lareau's (2000) definition, Jeyne (2003), as well as Bower and Griffin (2011), describe 'parental involvement' as any educational activity either at home or school which includes assisting with child's assignment, playing a voluntary role in the school, participating in school events, or communicating with the teacher over students' academic activities.

As stipulated by the Department of Basic Education (DBE, 2012), principals, teachers, parents, and learners are responsible for learners' overall performance. Parental involvement impacts and determines the academic achievement of learners and the overall success of children. The role of parents is to develop an encouraging home atmosphere for learning so that learners participate in homework completion. Sclafani (2004) further states that the involvement of parents in their children's education improves the academic achievement of learners. Parents' involvement also serves as good communication between them and their children's teacher. According to Singh *et al.* (2004), the South African Schools Act (SASA), No. 84 of 1996, provides formal power in education to parents, as well as communities. It foresees a system where school-based educators would collaborate with parents to ensure quality education, including the curriculum. Parents who play a small or no role in their children's homework and study programs may contribute to the poor performance of their children in the classroom.

Hall and Engelbrecht (1999) also emphasize that parents need to be involved in their children's education. This involvement must include insight into their children's progress, participation in decision making, and being critical of information on educational issues. Fullan (1991) supports this by arguing that the role of parents in their children's education serves as a powerful instrument for children's improvement in school. Fullan (1991) adds that it is important for teachers and principals to communicate with the parents when initial conditions do not provide enough support since parents have better knowledge of their children. Parents are supposed to be fundamentally equipped with some multidimensional skills so that they will understand the psycho-physiological development of the child and provide a psycho-cognitive-stimulating environment for their children. In addition, Gama (2015) posits that parental involvement refers to either supporting learners' academic activities or being involved in school-related activities. More so, parental involvement transcends beyond attending to children's school-related work at home, but equally extends to those within the four corners of children's school. This parental involvement may also be in form of helping with school assignment, playing a voluntary role within the School Governing Body, attending school performance such as choir rendition amongst other educational related activities. The importance of involvement of parents in child's education is further amplified by Tigere (2016) who alleges that this improves learners' academic performance, enhances school attendance and equally gives learners a positive disposition towards learning.

Parents have the primary responsibility of instilling an ethos of hard work and educational achievements in their children. If all parents ensure the investments required in restoring our schools, then both parents and teachers need to revive their faith that every child can learn even though some may be slow learners. Furthermore, Zenda (2016) adds that parents play a vital role in revising and contributing to homework given to their children and have the capacity to meet the

learning expectations of the learners. Parents' involvement inspires and develops basic learning and teaching, which lead to excellent outcomes. Parents must nurture learners' talents and guide them to reach their potential and encourage and ensure that learner's study at home and assist them with their schoolwork. According to the DBE (2010), parents play a vital role in dealing with problems such as learner discipline to facilitate effective teaching and learning at school and in classrooms.

Zenda (2016) postulates that communication between teachers and parents is very important as it can influence parental involvement in the teaching and learning process. Goldring (1991) explains that what happens regarding parental involvement in a particular school is determined by the philosophies and priorities of the school principal. All teachers should understand the necessity for parental support in their children's education. Parents may accept the misconduct of their children (Mwamwenda, 2004). Zeldin (1984) states that parental involvement is about the ways in which parents can participate in the determination of their children's education. Parents are part of the learning community; therefore, they have a role to play in creating a functional school through developing structures within which the school operates, such as SGBs.

When parents attend prize-giving ceremonies, open days, or school meetings, this provides ample opportunity (for parents) to monitor, access, evaluate and discuss child's academic development. Parents ought to frequently enquire about children's academic progress in order to receive feedback on how well such learner is performing academically. Such feedback should equally be compared with standards obtainable in other schools. Further, it is essential that parent's corporate with their children's teacher in creating a conducive teaching and learning environment that could stimulate learner's academic success. This in particular is significant as parent's influence can impact the school environment, the type of products emanating from teachers, or even the instructional materials (DBE, 2012).

3. Parents' perceptions of their children's academic performance

Castro *et al.* (2015) believe that parents need to be active in all aspects of their children's social, emotional, and academic development. The parents need to be able to control their children's homework. The extent to which they become involved in helping their children to learn for school assessment tasks is important. It is also vital for the parents to contribute to the effectiveness of a school and the learners' achievement in their learning.

A reoccurring view amongst scholars is that parent-child discourse on school assignments not only reduces unruly behavior, but equally enhances learners' educational achievement (DePlanty *et al.* 2007). This demonstrates that involvement of parents in learners' education is a "treasured component". Furthermore, parents are required to provide basic input and necessities such as electricity and other relevant infrastructure to support learners' education. Also important is the need for parents to closely monitor learners' curriculum, check school attendance, review children's notes while making meaningful recommendations as a means to contributing towards their academic performance (DBE, 2012). The above discussion leads to the conclusion that parental involvement could have an impact on learner performance in secondary schools.

4. Theoretical frameworks

This study was guided by the background of section 24(1) (a) of the SASA, which endorses the involvement of parents in their children's educational activities. This research was further underpinned by Epstein's (1992) theory of parental involvement, which is pertinent to this study as it provides a relevant conceptual framework towards a better comprehension of learners' educational development. This theory further accentuates the nexus between families and schools, as well as the role of schools and parents in a learners' educational development (Deslandes and Royer, 1997). Deslandes and Royer (1997) further argue that in the Epstein model, two spheres that can be pulled apart or pushed together, depending on the extent of school and family collaboration, represent schools and families.

5. Research methodology

The study adopted a qualitative approach wherein the research instrument was used to investigate teachers' perception on parents' involvement in learners' educational success, while also accessing the impact of parents' non-involvement in children's schooling. The qualitative data in this article were generated through individualized interviews as well as focus group discussions. Qualitative research provides researchers with a better understanding on social phenomena, more particularly from interviewees' perspective (Mogashoa 2014). The adopted sampling method was purposive sampling. The participants were class teachers from Grades 10 to 12 in selected schools and five SMT members. Data-collection methods entailed in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. The solicited participants (target population) were ten teachers alongside SMT members from five (selected) secondary schools within the Pinetown District. The line of questioning in this interview was carefully crafted to align with the research aim and objectives.

6. Results

6.1. Research findings and discussions

This study revealed that parental exclusion from learners' schooling activities often results to poor performance. Such parental exclusion is more predominant amongst learners in public schools. This exclusion is often attributed to non-effectual communication between teachers and parents, insufficient time, work commitments, and inability by some parents to communicate in English.

Respondent 1 said:

"[W]e do not have parental support. It is essential for learners' parents to be actively involved."

Respondent 2 said:

"Yes, the school does involve parents in their children's schooling ... while some give much cooperation, some others do not. This will cause problems to us as educators, especially when we need their support."

Respondent 3 said:

"Parents are also encouraged to attend a scheduled meeting with the teachers so that they will monitor school and classroom activities for their children. But still, their attendance is very poor. This makes the results for their children to be poor."

Respondent 4 said:

"Yes, according to the progression policy, it is very crucial for the school to call a parents' meeting during "every term" to check the child's performance and provide support where it is needed. But still, this has proven ineffectual, as a number of parents ignored invitations to parent's meeting."

As implied from the above narrative, educators expect parents to provide necessary guidance to their children on school-related matters. Makgopa and Mokhele (2013) allege that parents' involvement in a child's education is a highly crucial component towards academic success. More so, they stress the importance of parents' involvement in schooling endeavors such as assistance with school work (homework). Such assistance goes beyond improving learners' academic performance, but equally reduces learners' unruly behavior in school. Invariably, the study does stress parents' involvement as a critical factor towards learners' academic success.

6.2. Communication between teachers and parents

Constant communication between teachers and parents has a positive effect on learners' daily schooling activities. Arguably, effective communication between teachers and parents can lead learners to a prosperous and promising future. Thus, this suggests that such constant and effectual communication can result in a transition of responsible adults. According to Adebayo (2018), professional communicators utilize strategies, learning theories, and technology to communicate effectively in the business world. Additionally, educators must call parents' meetings every term to brief them about learners' academic progress. It is also the parents' responsibility to enquire about children's academic performance. At parents' meetings, teachers and parents should suggest interventions to help learners with their school work. Amongst the interviewees was a teacher who suggested that home visits should be made (to learner's home) as a means to fostering a cordial relationship amongst teachers, parents, and learners. An excerpt from the interview is narrated as follows:

"Yes, we invited parents to a meeting in order to discuss learners' performance, but usually the parents' attendance is poor, they did not come. Sometimes you only see an elderly grandparent."

A significant justification to having parent-teacher communication is that such conversation makes challenges to be spotted in time, which gives ample opportunity for both the parent and teacher to formulate a realistic plan in addressing learners' challenges. An interviewee did state as follows:

"The parents should regularly attend all parents' meetings at school, and communicate often with the teachers. In so doing, learners' challenges are easily detected at an early stage. By doing that it will avoid some parents to attend the school at the end of the year just to confirm that their child may be retained, as is the case sometimes. In such circumstances, the learner will not have received the much-needed support. Hence, when a challenge is identified early, necessary steps and interventions may be applied in order for learner to advance to the next grade."

It is of the utmost importance that teachers should constantly communicate with parents, particularly regarding what specific role they should play in learners' education. Otherwise, parents may be ignorant on what necessary and helpful interventions may be helpful to their children.

Makgopa and Mokhele (2013) indicate that when parents actively get involved in school activities, they are able to provide more meaningful support to their children as they will likely know what is expected of them. More so, this will avail the parents the opportunity to learn practical approaches that are beneficial to learners' schooling.

6.3. Learner encouragement

The research participants unanimously stressed the significance of parental involvement in learners' education. Several learners need the involvement of their parents in order to stay motivated in school. This also enables learners to gain self-confidence. Hence, Makgopa and Mokhele (2013) are of the view that parental involvement is not only necessary when learners are facing difficulties in learning. Most participants explained that some parents do not show adequate interest in their children's education. Parents and teachers both collectively play crucial roles in learners' academic development. While parents nurture children at home and help with school assignments, teachers teach them in school. The responsibility of parents is to develop a conducive home atmosphere for learning so that learners can complete their homework. Sclafani (2004) argues that parental involvement enhances learners' academic success. Parents' involvement also serves as good communication between parents and teachers. However, a lack

of parental involvement in schools is an added factor in obstructing teaching and development in learners' school achievement. The participants felt that parents were not working together with the teachers and SMTs, which contributed to learner absenteeism from school. Learners did not perform their tasks, and the problem worsened as there was a lack of cooperation amongst parents and school.

One of the respondents recommended that parent's involvement in child's education provides an avenue for teachers and parent to collectively address learners' challenges. For instance, parents may encourage their children by advising them to do their assignments timeously while checking their assignments upon completion. Another respondent noted that involvement of parent in learners' education is a significant contributor to equitable access to education in South Africa. Moreover, the required level of educational standard to realize meaningful access remains a critical issue, particularly amongst the rural poor and other underprivileged communities. Policies that promote parental involvement at the school governance level must be complemented with policies that encourage parents to play complementary roles at the levels of learning and teaching in schools. The DBE's Schooling 2025 Action Plan promotes parents' participation as imperative to the learning process. This advocacy may be strengthened through the development of social platforms which can unite parents alongside community members in a bid to create a suitable, standardized, and conducive academic environment. The findings suggest that it is important for schools to invite parents to visit schools quarterly to check their children's performance. Moreover, it is expected that parents participate in children's schooling activities and monitor children's progress. Studies by Grant Lewis and Motala (2004) as well as that of Fleisch (2008) argue that involvement of parents in a child's education can compensate for the deficiencies in schools, particularly if parents create a suitable and conducive learning environment at home.

6.4. Lack of effective communication

Responses from the interviewees did indicate a lack of transparency and poor communication between the parents and schools. In communicating, teachers and SMTs predominantly use letters to convey messages to parents. To further improve communication, it is advised that the SMTs initiate a structured two-way communication channel amongst teachers and parents. Amongst the approaches that may be explored include school visitation by the parent as well as school-parent meetings.

6.5. Advantages of parental involvement

The involvement of parents in their educational careers has a multitude of benefits to both learners and teachers. Such involvement does foster a progressive childhood development in learners' educational careers (Griffith 2000). Griffith (2000) further mentions that the involvement of parents in their children's academic career is most notable in learners' educational performance. Squelch and Lemmer (1994) also emphasize the importance of parents' involvement when they allege that such involvement decreases delinquency, reduces school dropout, enhances learners' enthusiasm for education, and also improves learners' academic performance. In similitude to earlier assertions, Dekker and Lemmer (1993) affirm that, as an agendum to improving school standards, the role of parents who can offer sound and critical judgement, and who necessarily do not oppose the structural and constructive changes in the educational sector is of great paramount. Further, learners are greatly motivated when parents are informed of their academic successes. Thus, it becomes apparent that the intention is not to exclude parents from their children's educational endeavor, as learners (children) are perceived as main beneficiaries and clients in their respective schools.

The imperativeness of effective communication amongst teachers and parents cannot be overemphasized. The significance of such communication is that, learners' challenges are easily identified, while necessary mitigations are employed in solving these challenges. As articulated by one of the interviewed teachers:

*“We want parents to visit schools occasionally, and engage with their children’s teachers”
...this will enable us to identify red flags timeously and provide necessary interventions. Due to
parents’ non-involvement, learners’ challenges are often picked so late which is detrimental to the
learner.....”*

6.6. Learner motivation

The participants agreed that due to the implementation of the Progression Policy, learners are so demotivated that they do not see the value of working very hard to be promoted to the next grade. Motivation also influences learners’ achievement. This assertion is buttressed by Schofield (1981) who mentions that motivation is the driving force to a learners’ achievement. Thus, inconsonance learners are driven by their academic success, which invariably is an instigator to their high performance in school. Similarly, competent teachers who are passionate about their subject are likely to stimulate and inspire their students during class lessons. In similitude, incompetent teachers who show little passion for their subjects are likely to pass the negativity to their learners during classes. Such learners are likely to show disinterest towards learning. Hence, in order to actively engage learners in classrooms, learners must be eager to learn and excel even with classroom activities and subjects they are not interested in. This study revealed that for the learners to perform well, they need to be motivated and the teachers need to involve the parents to support their children. This buttresses the need for teachers to know their learners in the classroom for a better understanding of how learners learn at a given developmental level and have an awareness that learners have individual needs and abilities.

7. Conclusion

The involvement of parents in their children’s education is of paramount importance. To further engage parents, it is needful for schools to implement proactive measures as a means to soliciting parental involvement. Teachers are able to perform more optimally when parents become (more) involved by mentally, physically, and emotionally preparing their children for school. Further, it is believed that parents have an important role in instilling morals, so their children may be well behaved at school. Regular communication between teachers and parents is also paramount, as such communication practice will likely produce a more cautious and prudent learner. In consonance, it becomes imperative for the DoE to implement policies and conduct sensitization campaigns aligned to parents’ responsibility in providing their children relevant skills and competencies which may advance their academic career. Thus, the negligence of parents as regards their children’s educational responsibility within the four corners of their home is often neglected due to ignorance or lack of awareness of their role in their children’s educational endeavors.

The findings of this article apply only to the selected area and may not apply to other areas that were not researched. This article focuses on a particular district in the KwaZulu-Natal Province. There is a possibility that other teachers from other eleven districts may respond differently because it may happen that their expectations are not the same as Pinetown district. As an Office-Based Educator, the researcher’s bias and subjectivity may have been responsible for overlooking other factors that may impact the lack of parental involvement in schools.

Furthermore, this article is limited to secondary school educators. Other researchers may reveal different expectations from primary school educators only. Due to time constraints, responses during the interviews and focus group discussions were not substantial. The research could investigate parents’ views on how they perceive their involvement and what the Department of Education can do to break the obstacles and ensure that all parents are involved.

8. Recommendations

To address the non-involvement of parents in underperforming schools, the following recommendations are made:

- Parents should adequately provide support to their children since the Progression Policy needs parents to understand their children's academic performance.
- Parents should be regularly furnished with relevant information as regards their children's educational challenges; information on learners' subject preferences, amongst others.
- Teachers have the obligation to advise parents on approaches that could help learners.
- Teachers should notify parents of learners' academic performance in the first term, so necessary interventions may be applied in improving learners' grade.
- Educators should inform parents on ways to help their children. Academic progress must be distributed to parents very early in the first term (March) during the Second Chance Intervention programs whereby parents can support their children by making the necessary arrangements and plans for extra classes for their children.
- Schools and teachers should encourage parent attendance at school to support learners' performance in other school activities, such as sports and other extracurricular activities.
- Parents' and schools' communication should be encouraged when the learners face difficulties in their learning so that parents can provide the necessary support to learners.
- Schools should invite parents whose children often bunk classes and are absent from school for contact sessions.
- The school should make it compulsory for parents or guardians to collect learners' progress reports. Such an arrangement will assist both teachers and parents to discuss the academic progress of learners and other problems, such as learner absenteeism and learner discipline.
- Schools need to develop a clear policy that will address learner absenteeism and learner ill-discipline and ensure that this policy is clearly and effectively communicated to all parents, teachers, learners, SGBs, and other relevant stakeholders.
- Parents should take ownership of their children by serving as primary teachers. Through this approach, they are able to guide and monitor learners' academic progress.

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