Learners' experience on parents' participation in their education

Accepted 7th April 2023

ABSTRACT

Parents’ participation not only enhances academic performance but also influences children’s behavior and attitude. Parents’ encouragement of their children’s education can also affect their attitude toward school, school conduct, absenteeism, self-esteem, and motivation. However, it appeared that most parents were unable to be involved as expected due to their busy schedules and some did not even know when and how to be involved. The study sought to investigate learners’ experience with parents’ participation in their education at secondary school in Amathole West District, Eastern Cape Province, South Africa. The study was underpinned by Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological framework. In this study, a qualitative approach was adopted and it is located within an interpretive paradigm. A case study approach was used with a sample size of 12 participants (learners) selected conveniently. Data was collected using focus group discussions and document review. It was shown in the study that most parents are unable to get involved as expected by the school due to some challenges such as poverty, unemployment, educational background, distance, and illiteracy. Consequently, the study recommended that parents must be more actively involved in school and collaborate with their children’s teachers to bring out the best in their children.

Key words: Education, experience, involvement, learners, participation, parent.

INTRODUCTION

Parents’ involvement in the education of their children has long been a topic of interest among governments, educationists, policymakers, and those concerned with the educational development of children (Charles and Shaoying, 2018; Fihla, 2018). Parental participation in children’s education is a way to invest in children’s education and has the support of all the members of society (Bartolome and Matmat, 2020). Parents’ involvement comprises activities such as assisting with homework, talking about school events or courses (home-based) and stepping up at school, attending school events (school-based) (Boonk et al., 2018).

Parental involvement is the conscious involvement of parents in their children’s well-being and learning while at school, and participation in the School Governing Body (Mncube, 2010). Children do not only achieve academic and societal growth when their parents get involved but also develop good behavioral skills, potential skills (Jaiswal, 2017), and emotional benefits (Munjie Mncube, 2018), while some challenges negatively affect the achievement of parents who are actively involved (Munjie Mncube, 2018; Durisic and Bunijevac, 2017).

Parents are too busy with their life issues and troubled with problems such as low income, late working hours, unsatisfactory financial resources, poor educational level, and low self-esteem, while others have no academic achievement (Durisic and Bunijevac, 2017). Parents also face problems of involvement because of structural issues at school. This can be informed by school organizations which may discourage parents from taking part in educational issues (Selolo, 2018; Okeke, 2014). Some school’s unclear programs confuse the parents who are unaware of the operational structures of the school and may not know who to approach on some issues and this may get parents discouraged (Selolo, 2018), but when the school is well structured,
parents see it as a positive environment (Selolo, 2018).

The relationship between parents and teachers has a massive influence on their children’s education (Ntekane, 2014). Involving parents in their children’s education is great as it improves school performance, makes children more focused on school (Kwatabana and Makhalemele, 2015) and motivates them not to give up easily (Ntekane, 2014). Even though parental participation in children’s education has contributed massively to the learning process, learners in high schools are still facing the challenges of parents not participating in their education. This may lead to absenteeism, poor performance, lack of concentration, and many more. Parents are faced with so many challenges nowadays which make them not participate as expected of them by their children’s school. Different perceptions of children have been recognized as children received different forms of involvement from their parents in their education as helpful while some see it as not being beneficial (LaRocque et al., 2011). In addition, research has shown that parents’ educational knowledge influences their children’s ability to learn at home and learning in school (Munjie and Mncube, 2018). Parents’ lack of knowledge may contribute to their limited participation, while some see it as a cover-up to avoid involvement, while this might be true of some elderly parents who have no education and therefore find it difficult to help at home (Burišić and Bunjievac, 2017). Therefore, this study sought to investigate the experience of learners on their parent’s participation in their education at secondary school in Amathole West District, Eastern Cape Province, South Africa.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was informed by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1986), an American psychologist who argued that children’s environment, at home and at school, has a major impact on their education. The model operates through a multifaceted approach, which centers on children. Children are active agents in their world. The character, qualities, nature, motivations, genetic inheritance, and dispositions of the child influence are, in turn, influenced by the other levels of the bioecological system. He views the levels from direct contact with someone else to beliefs and aspirations system. The model identifies four concepts that can be used to understand children’s learning and development. They are Process, Person, Context, and Time (O’Toole et al., 2019). Bronfenbrenner (1977) suggested that children’s environment has an impact on them. He identified them in order of impact on children, they are microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem (Downes, 2014; Guy-Evans, 2020). Microsystem: This is parents’ assistance at home such as helping with the assignment and making sure the children completed their assignments, talking to them about the school, paying children’s school fees, and showing them help emotionally (Ishihara-Brito, 2013). In the microsystem, ‘person’ characteristics are included such as parents, relatives, close friends, teachers, or whoever participates in the life of the child on regular basis (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006). Mesosystem: This is the school-based involvement, which includes parent-teacher relationships, interaction about the child’s progress at school, and attending school meetings. In the mesosystem, the person’s microsystem functions not alone, it influences one another (Guy-Evans, 2020). Exosystem: This does not contain the child but indirectly has influence over children; examples include the neighborhood, parent’s place of work, friends to the parents, and the mass media. These are environments in which children are not involved but affect them. For example, parents’ work influences the parents’ availability at their children’s school for parent meetings and other important events for children’s school (Hornby and Lafaele, 2011), this makes the exosystem relevant in the study of parents’ participation (O’Toole et al., 2019). Macrosystem: The macrosystem focuses on an element such as socioeconomic status, ethnicity, wealth, parents’ aspiration, and goals of parents; all of these can affect children due to the level of parents’ participation in their education (O’Toole, 2017; Kim, 2018). Chronosystem: The chronosystem constitutes the environment and transition of parents’ life such as getting a divorce, and moving to a new place (O’Toole et al., 2019; Guy-Evans, 2020). Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory was used in this study because the theory sees parents as the child’s first teacher which has a very important role in children’s education. Also, according to the theory, learners experience a lot from their environment, which in turn affects them positively or negatively at school, hence the school and the parents must have a good relationship and work together to benefit children. In addition, learners’ experiences within their neighborhood, and their parent’s socioeconomic status, affect them due to the level of their parent’s participation in their education. Schools must understand that parents might be facing different challenges which might hinder them from participating in their children’s education as expected of them.

Research design

This is a qualitative study located within the interpretivism paradigm. This allows participants to express their opinion/views on a subject using different explanations. Also, the interpretivism paradigm involves the use of ordinary methods of data collection such as interviews, which allow sufficient engagement between the researcher and the participants involved in the research (Bryman, 2016).

Case study design

A case study design can be explained as a methodical inquiry
of an individual, group, community, or some other unit whereby the researcher examines in-depth information relating to numerous variables (Heale and Twycross, 2018). The research design is a multiple case study exploring learners' experience with parents' participation in their education in two schools in Amathole West in Eastern Cape. The reason for using the multiple-case approach in this study is that this helps the researcher in establishing the understanding of the findings from the two schools or cases involved either for a theoretical replication or contrasting results (Creswell, 2014). Also, a case study design was used because it allowed the researcher to use several sources of data to promote the credibility and triangulation of the study (Yin, 2012). The case in this study was learners' experience with parents' participation in their education. The case focuses on learners in some selected schools.

**Research population sample**

The population is the entire figure of people, happenings, or groups to be used in data collection (van Rensburg, 2020). In this study, the samples were 12 learners from two selected urban schools (6 from each school) black races and different gender. The learners were selected conveniently to ease the researchers.

**Data collection instrument**

**Focus-group interview**

Focus groups can be explained as an assembly of people to be interviewed but do not depend on the question and answer but rather on the interaction within the group on a topic (Chilisa and Kawulich, 2012). A Focus group interview is a qualitative technique for data collection; usually consist of six to ten people brought together by a researcher to know their feelings, attitude, and opinion on a topic (Dilshad and Latif, 2013). In this research, 2 focus group interviews were conducted consisting of 6 learners from the selected schools. The researcher permitted the participants the opportunity to respond until each member has had an opportunity to say something or express a view. Participants were selected from grade 10 because they were senior pupils who could have more information and be able to withstand interviews. Learners were randomly selected to ensure that all potential participants were provided with likely opportunities to participate and intended to prevent individuals from feeling inhibited.

**Document review**

Document review refers to documents written such as textbooks, articles, records, notes, or minutes of meetings. It may also include pictures, illustrations, television programs etcetera (Nicola and Oliver, 2012). Here the researcher centered on written notes that expatiated on the topic under study both printed and unprinted materials such as parents and teachers meeting records, and SGB meeting records involving parents and their children's education. The principals of both selected schools were asked for these documents which are easily accessible to them.

**Data analysis**

Qualitative data analysis was used to analyze data with thematic analysis. Focus group interview was recorded to ensure proper capturing of information and participants' views. The information was then transcribed by the researcher. The English language was used during the interview as means of communication, and the responses were interpreted verbatim. Also, the meaning was found and understood thereby making sense of the data collected and noting the patterns. The data consisted of interviews and document reviews, and were transcribed and analyzed accordingly.

**Ethical considerations**

Permission was gained to embark on the research, by adhering to all the suggested procedures, and permission from all stakeholders to conduct the research. An ethical clearance certificate was obtained before contacting any of the participants and they were informed of the purpose of the research and the type of interview questions they would be subjected to, and their voluntary participation was sought. The participants in the study were protected by ensuring that the information supplied was treated confidently and their names were not linked to the identity of the participants.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

The study sought to investigate learners' experience with parents' participation in their education. As such, results and discussions are presented under the following subheadings:

- Learners' experience of their parent's participation in their education.
- How schools, promote parents' participation in their children's education
- What are parents' challenges in the education of their children?

Learners' experience on parents' participation in their education
Learners were asked “how do your parents participate in your education? The replies from the participants on how their parents get involved in their education showed the involvement of parents in various aspects of their children’s education. All the learners said one thing or the other about their experience of their parents participating in their education. As indicated by one of the participating students:

attending school meetings, assisting me with my homework, and ensuring I get whatsoever I need for school, for example, my stationaries, school uniforms, lunch, and supporting me (learner 2, school A, Focus group A).

Here, the participant understands the importance of assisting his homework with his parents. This is in line with the report of Núñez et al. (2019) that some students do their assignments to learn and strengthen the acquired knowledge from the school to solve problems while engaging in the assignment relating to what they have learned. In addition, parents’ involvement in education starts from home when parents provide a convenient environment, attend school meetings, provide stationeries, school uniforms, and lunch, pay school fees, make sure they are in school, assist with assignments, and support their children’s education (Sy, Gottfried and Gottfried, 2013; Durisic and Bunijevac, 2017).

Another participating student from the group added that:

My parents assist me to understand life better and when it comes to my education, especially if I do not understand the work she explains and explains to me until I get it right. She also visits me at school to check if all is going well with me and talks to my teachers about me (Learner 4, focus group A, School A).

Parents get involved in education by showing concern about their academic achievement, partnering with their learning, always being present during the school meeting, and understanding their performance (Ntekane, 2018; Kim et al., 2018). Also, involvement could be following up with their children’s educators for them to be aware of where their children are lagging behind and not hesitating to go to their educators when their children fail. Furthermore, Jeynes (2013) and Mncube and Harber (2013), suggest that the involvement of parents is an important part of education whereby parents can assist in listening to their children during reading, assisting with their assignments, and attending school meetings, this is also supported by the findings of the present study.

In addition, another participating student added that:

With no assistance from my parents, I find it difficult to do my homework at times because they do not know most of the subjects they only had grade 7 experience making them limited when it comes to my homework, but they provide everything I need for a school for me as long as I ask them (Learner 3, Focus group B, school B).

Similarly, one of the learners in group B added that her parents do provide everything needed for her education but could not involve when it comes to assistance during her homework. This agrees with O’Toole et al. (2019) and Hornby and Lafaele (2011), it is unfair to expect parents with a negative educational background to transmit helpful academic socialization to their children. Parents participating in their children’s education can benefit children socially and emotionally, but there are so many barriers, and challenges that are negatively affecting active parents’ participation, challenges such as job dynamics, unemployment, family structures, and poverty (Munjie and Mncube, 2018), poor timing of communication from the school which could be as a result of language, parents negative school experience (Baker, et al. 2016), parents level of education leading to parents not been able to help their children academically (Hornby and Lafaele, 2011), teachers’ attitude to the parents (Hornby and Lafaele, 2011).

What schools promote parents’ participation in the education of their children

Participants were asked: What do the schools do to promote their parents to participate in their education? Responses from the participating students show that schools are engaging parents in one way or order to be involved in their children’s education. Responses from the learner participants showed that efforts were made by the schools to promote parents’ involvement in education. For example, one of the participating students stated:

They give us letters for our parents to come to school maybe on Tuesday or Thursday though we do not know what they are talking about in the meeting (Learner 1, School A, Focus group A).

Several literatures have suggested the importance of the school and parents’ connection and how the connection between the parents and the school increases students’ success and supports school activities (Epstein, 2018; Jaiswal, 2017). Also, according to Epstein (2018), parents, schools, and the community need to partner in sharing responsibility at home, school, and community to help their children’s learning, share information, celebrate success, guide their children, and solve their problems. Of the learners who participated in a focus group, many stated that the school does give them letters to invite their parents to parent-teacher meetings at the school. This is in line with the finding of Epstein (1995) and Durisic and Bunijevac (2017), who argue that schools should send written information to parents through the children as they (children) are the ones to communicate the activities and programs organized by the schools to their parents. Research findings also suggest
that parents are involved in the school governing bodies (SGBs), and this is in line with the South African Schools Act of 1996 (SASA) which purposely involves parents by giving them power and voice in the school programs, ensuring school function optimally and a shared sense of accomplishment (Mncube and Mafora; 2013; Singh et al., 2004).

Also, another participant from the students specified that:

*Let me say whenever anyone does something wrong, they call the person’s parent and if the parent did not come the learners will stay outside. They always call for the parents’ meeting and if anyone has done something bad, they send it to the person’s (learner’s) parent. Also, when there is a parent meeting, they do not allow any learners that did not come with their parents to enter the class (Learner 5, School A, Focus group A).*

The student above confirmed that the school always calls for parents’ meetings and calls parents when any learner misbehaves at school. The above statement also involves the denial of rights to children’s education preventing learners from coming to classrooms because of their inability to come to their children’s school whenever they are called. A school must use their initiative to involve parents in the education of their children (Durisic and Bunijevac, 2017), while another participant stated that apart from the school involving parents in the parents-teachers meeting, they should also include extracurricular activities such as excursions and grade 12 camping. Kimu (2012), stated that schools involving parents in extracurricular activities such as sports, concerts, and so on promote children’s reading habits, general knowledge, skills, and mathematics.

Another participating student from the focus group stated her own opinion on the question as well and she stated thus:

*They call our parents to report to us if we misbehave at school and ask them to come to school to talk and to encourage us to behave well at school and to be more serious with our schoolwork. This is done during the morning assemblies (Learner 3, School B, Focus group B).*

At this point, the participants mentioned that apart from calling their parents when they misbehaved, the school also encourages them. Epstein (2001) and Durisic and Bunijevac (2017) stated that some schools employed people to coordinate parents’ involvement activities and programs in their schools to put an end to challenges between the school and the parents. Their role is to encourage parents to be actively involved in various aspects of the school (Durisic and Bunijevac, 2017). Also, the learners stated their views on how they think their schools are promoting parents’ involvement in education. The findings further suggest that despite all the teachers’ initiatives to involve the parents, they (parents) are not getting involved as expected by the school. When educators and parents come together to empower children with learning that can motivate and support them, the children’s educational achievement can be accomplished (Behr, 2016).

Given the above question, it can be said that schools are promoting and encouraging parents’ involvement in the education of their children in various ways such as involving them (parents) in the school governing board (SGB), parents-teachers meetings (PTA), updating them about the happening in the school, communicating with them about their children’s behavior but parents have not been actively involved in the children’s education. It was also noticeable that schools only invite parents to a meeting and when children misbehave but do not organize parenting workshops or training for parents to enlighten what involvement means, academic risk signs to look for in their children’s education and how they can positively improve learning habits at home.

When parents take cognizance of their children and what is happening to them, they will be able to convey it to the school. Okeke (2014) reported that most parents want to be involved in the education of their children, but they do not know how. Also, Munje and Mncube (2018) and O’Toole, et al. (2019) stated that schools are not initiating programs that are welcoming for parents to come to schools, this can be overcome by including initiatives that can enhance parents’ participation.

Furthermore, the document reviewed (minutes of the parents-teachers meeting document) from the school stated that parents were urged to always come to the school to check the progress of their children, monitor closely their children’s homework, and assist the learners with their homework. This will enable the parents to identify the learner’s weak learning areas and the learners can be assisted with remedial classes. In addition, the disciplinary committee book was also checked, and we (the researchers) could see that both schools have been involving parents in their children’s behavior at school to the extent that the school even asked the students to stay at home until their parents are ready to come to school. As a researchers, we believe that schools are using this measure to promote parental participation in their children’s education, as this will make them (parents) aware of their children’s behavior at school.

However, the documents reviewed suggest that some parents are not involved in the education of their children, despite various different calls made to get them involved. This finding is supported by Mncube and Mafora (2013) who stated that the school acknowledged the passive involvement displayed by parents in the education of their children. Teachers believe that parents do not support the school in disciplining their children, they only support their children if they are told or invited whenever their children have misbehaved at school, making the teachers to feel it is a waste of time to contact parents (Durisic and Bunijevac, 2017; Ucus et al., 2019).
To implore the appropriate information, participants were asked: What are the challenges to parents’ involvement in the education of their children?

The reactions from the participants (students) about their understanding of parents’ challenges in getting involved in their children’s education showed that while parents are involved in various aspects of their children’s education, they still encounter many challenges in this regard. A noticeable pattern of responses from the participants showed that there are a lot of challenges faced by parents. For example, a student in school A stated that:

*My mother’s challenge is that sometimes she is stressed because she does not have money to provide for us and does not even want to talk to anyone when you tell her about parents’ meetings at school. Also, my mother is facing a lot of challenges because she is the only one providing for all of us (Learner 5, School A, Focus group A).*

The participating student complained about her mother being the only one catering for them, this made her stressed and this is a challenge to her in getting involved in her education. Another learner from the group also pointed out that:

*"My mother cannot read very well so I think that is the problem, also her job is taking much of her time (student 6, School A, Focus group A)."

At this point, the student mentions her parents’ educational background as a challenge to her involvement in her education. Furthermore, it was stated by another participating student from the focus group:

*Am staying with my aunty and my mother is in Cape Town. So, my aunt always complains about money and the distance is very far for my mother to come to my school for any meeting (Learner 4, School B, Focus group B).*

Similarly, distance is a challenge to some of the parents as mentioned by one of the student, and this is in agreement with the finding of Mapp (2003) who stated that lack of transportation affects parents’ ability to get involved in the education of their children. Munje and Mncube (2018) and Bagadood (2022), added that poverty, depending on social grants contributes to parents’ hatred: the grants given to parents from the government are not enough to cater for their basic needs. From the findings also, it is stated by one of the participating students that the parents complain of lack of financial resources as their challenge in getting involved in their children’s education and this is in line with the finding of Mirza (2018) who stated that parents’ lack of finance makes them feel as if they cannot afford to pay for their children’s school needs or any other additional need from the school.

Also, from the documents reviewed by the school (PTA meeting and disciplinary committee meeting), the schools are encouraging the parents and giving them information about what is going on in the school but as stated by the principals, parents are still not getting actively involved as expected. Durisic and Bunijevac (2017) found that parents of today are unable to be actively involved in the education of their children or participate in their school activities regularly because they are engrossed with the issues of life, troubled by low income, inflexible working hours, financial constrain, lack of educational attainment, low self-esteem, lack of confidence to help their children as well as lack of knowledge.

In addition, as mentioned by one of the students her mother is always stressed because she is the only one taking care of them and does not even want to hear anything about school meetings at times. Single parents or large families may find it difficult to get involved due to their circumstances that require consideration and care responsibilities (O’Toole et al., 2019).

The findings from the focus group interviews conducted with the students support the findings from the interviews with the parents on how they get involved in their children’s education. Moreover, the students also supported the fact that their parents are involved by getting them whatever they need for school, helping them with their homework, understanding what they did not understand, and attending the school call or meetings when they are not busy. In addition, the document reviewed indicated also that parents are being called upon in the school to attend parent meetings and check on their children and their performances. All methods of data collection suggest that parents are involved in one way or another even though they are not actively involved. This is in line with the findings of Baker et al. (2016) and McKenna and Millen (2013) that educators consistently complain about that parental involvement is not enough.

**CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

Parents’ abilities, educational levels, skills, and interest in providing support vary and influenced the level of support provided by parents. However, when parents participate, a positive impact on children’s performance is achieved. The lack of parents’ participation in the education of their children is due to many reasons such as parents’ jobs, educational background, poverty, distance, time, and a lot more. Even though issues restraining parents’ participation in their children’s education are related to circumstances connected, parents’ lack of involvement is viewed differently by educators (Munjie and Mncube, 2018). It is helpful for schools and educators to try and involve all parents in the education of their children through effective partnerships and make the educational experience more positive for everyone involved. Based on the above findings, the following
recommendations are offered: Parents must participate fully in their children’s education and see it as a responsibility that no one can compensate them for, they should encourage their children to have confidence in themselves by motivating them through words such as “well done”, “you can do better”, good, you are getting there”, etcetera and discouraging words like “poor”, “lazy”, “dump”, etcetera must not be used. Furthermore, parents should supervise their children to complete their homework, have a good relationship with the educators to monitor how their children are making progress and parents should be more enlightened that their participation in their children’s education is associated with their academic achievement. Students should not see their parent’s participation as a hindrance to their social life but instead as a ladder to climb to their future. They should be happy whenever they see their parents being ready to assist them or when they ask about their school progress and their school teachers as their parents so that they will be able to open to their teachers when facing any difficulty or do not understand anything.

REFERENCES


Cite this article as

Submit your manuscript at
http://www.academiapublishing.org/ajer