Parent’s perception of E-learning during COVID-19 pandemic in Nzinze circuit, Kavango West region

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to determine how parents in the Nzinze circuit of the Kavango West region perceived E-learning during the covid-19 pandemic. During the COVID-19 lockdown in Namibia, schools adopted online teaching and learning to maintain social distancing and other public health interventions. The teaching and learning processes are dependent on the digital platform. Despite this, parents are resistant to technology for a variety of reasons. The study used a qualitative approach where three hundred participants were interviewed using Focus Group Discussion (FGD) interview guides which were presented through content analysis to analyse qualitative data. Furthermore, the study employed the Bronfenbrenner’s Bio-Ecological system theory to examine the relationship between home and school. The findings of the study showed that illiteracy among parents, which results in misconception about E-learning methods, accounts for 80% of the major problem. Internet connectivity problem within the circuit was also revealed in the study. The study recommends that parents should establish a close working relationship with the school and create peer groups with the assistance of the teachers.

Keywords: E-Learning, parents’ perception, COVID-19 pandemic, technological devices.

INTRODUCTION

Many people's lives have been impacted by the COVID-19 epidemic. Virtual learning has become the norm in many Namibian schools, and many extracurricular activities have been eliminated. COVID-19’s global impact implies that schools and prospective students and teachers are in a state of panic. Both are confronted with unprecedented challenges and difficulties as they attempt to navigate their destinies in the face of ongoing pandemic ramifications (WHO, 2020). However, teaching and learning should remain inclusive, courteous, and supportive of all students.

In March 2020, the coronavirus (COVID-19) was declared a global pandemic due to the increased danger of its impact on several industries (Ciotti et al., 2020). COVID-19’s ramifications have touched on economics, agriculture, manufacturing, tourism, and especially education (Nicola et al., 2020). Furthermore, the pandemic presents a new set of challenges for numerous countries' education systems (Daniel, 2020). Closure of schools is one option for interrupting virus transmission by decreasing social contact among learners (Bayham and Fenichel, 2020). Apart from that, educational institutions should anticipate students' demands in terms of administration, process, system, curricula, and resources.

Namibia, one of the countries hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, implemented a policy that temporarily suspended traditional education in favour of online education (Pujilestari, 2020). E-learning has been chosen to assist in the learning process throughout the COVID-19 pandemic (Mailizar et al., 2020). However, E-Learning is not handled efficiently due to a lack of resources, a lack of expertise and knowledge, and a lack of preparedness on the part of many institutions and schools for online learning.
(Zaharah et al., 2020). Despite this, many teachers and students are compelled to embrace technology as a tool for learning when social distancing is arranged (Khasanah et al., 2020). As a result, parents play a critical role in their children’s E-Learning usage. Positive parental attitudes regarding e-learning, such as understanding, encouragement, and monitoring, are regarded to increase learners’ learning processes (Lubis and Lubis, 2020). Parents are pressed to submit to their children’s complete control rather than retaining traditional learning (Zaharah et al., 2020). Thus, it is critical to ascertain parents’ perceptions of their children’s use of E-Learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Furthermore, parental engagement has long been recognized as important in student education. Parents are essential stakeholders in their children’s education in Namibia. The Covid-19 pandemic halted some parents’ involvement in their children’s academic education. As a result, most parents have challenges with E-learning during the Covid-19 pandemic. When Namibia was confronted with Covid-19, the Ministry of Education, Arts, and Culture produced a national ICT policy (Ministry of Education, 1995). This document outlines the goals for building an ICT policy in education and discusses critical topics related to enhancing and utilizing ICT courses in schools. Despite this policy, lack of infrastructure and parental support has led to inadequate introduction and usage of e-learning in schools, especially those in the Nzinze Circuit. Therefore, it is crucial to determine the parents’ viewpoint while E-Learning is used by their children during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Research objectives

The study’s main aim was to:

1. Assess the understanding and perception of parents’ support and their role in E-learning.
2. Assess factors that hinder parental involvement in the successful support of E-learning technology implementation.
3. Possible strategies to promote parental involvement in E-learning

LITERATURE REVIEW

Parents’ perception of e-learning

As a result of the transition to learning at home, parents became partners in the educational system and the learning process during the COVID-19 period. The COVID-19 crisis has demonstrated that boundaries and dichotomy are artificial, as class boundaries and the schedule were "breached." To provide a holistic response to the student’s needs, the various areas and settings should indeed complement one another. During this time, students were separated from the school and studies were conducted at a variety of sites, all of which had value for the students such as the home, the personal activity site, and the site for social gatherings (Garbe et al., 2020).

Literature contends that parental involvement in their children’s online studies is more crucial than parental involvement in traditional studies (Iivari et al., 2020). In addition to mental, moral, and pedagogical support, online students need a technological infrastructure, a quiet study environment, and disciplinary supervision at home (Rasmitadila et al., 2020). A study conducted by Kong (2018) in Hong Kong on parents’ perceptions of e-learning revealed a strong correlation between parental understanding and support for e-learning. These results also revealed the need for a partnership between schools and parents, with parents implementing a proactive e-learning policy at home to monitor, support, and inspire e-learning. Furthermore, to gain support, schools should develop a comprehensive policy to address parents’ concerns responsively and proactively. Through school-parent communication and parent-to-parent support, schools can enhance parents' pedagogical understanding of e-learning and address parental concerns.

The results of a survey conducted by Mirza and Al-Abdulkareem (2011) at Zayed University to determine the perceptions of parents regarding the implications of e-learning revealed that e-learning enjoys high social values and expectations. According to the parents of Zayed University students, e-learning has created a new and enhanced learning path. Another study conducted by the Israeli government in education, based on a survey of parents of students in grades 1-12, found that the majority of parents reported that remote learning was utilized in their time and that the majority or all of their children participated in online sessions (NAME, 2020a). The presence of many people at home, making it difficult to find ICT solutions and form conditions for all the children; problems with motivation and/or emotional space among students; and a lack of parent availability to assist children were cited by parents as reasons why some children had difficulty adapting to the learning format. According to the findings of the NAME study, the majority of parents of students felt that the necessary conditions for remote learning existed: end devices, internet connections, home conditions, and student skills in using ICT systems. In addition, disparities based on socioeconomic status (including education level) and the number of children were evident, suggesting that the remote learning format has the potential to generate or exacerbate inaccessibility to education if and when schools close their doors and transition to remote learning.

According to a report (Hamutenya, 2020), the Ministry of Education, Arts, and Culture was aware that not all parents can afford the devices required for their children to access
online content. On the other hand, parents felt they could not afford to purchase all of their children’s digital devices to keep up with online tutorials. They indicated that university students are superior because they are at least capable of managing their data for online classes. In addition, parents thought it was a good idea to have online classes so that their children could continue their education, but that it would be costly for them (Tjimbundu, 2020).

E-Learning style and traditional challenges

Along with the evolution of time and the development of new technologies, teaching strategies have evolved into a variety of forms. In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic compelled numerous schools to implement distance learning and online education (WHO, 2020). This was also the case with the Nzinze circuit schools. Regrettably, this requires a greater degree of learner self-direction and motivation, which appears to be a challenge for many learners. Quality E-learning has also compelled educators to generate high-quality online learning materials, which appears to be costly for many educational institutions (Shikololo, 2020). As such, it is sufficient that sharing new approaches in the creation, delivery, and accumulation of online learning resources between learners and institutions can aid in reducing costs and optimising resource utilisation. As the creators of pedagogical environments, educators are expected not only to possess Information and Communication Technology (ICT) proficiency but also to utilise ICT to enhance teaching and learning.

Several institutions worldwide have asserted that E-Learning is a valid learning method (Lubis and Lubis, 2020), which is a new paradigm of education that utilizes ICT as the means for educators and students to deliver or share knowledge and communicate with one another. During the COVID-19 pandemic, educators were in a dilemma in facilitating student learning outcomes by controlling student learning assessment and curriculum, which involves interpreting student online written texts, and recognising group-work activities with individual needs (Daniel, 2020; Iivari and Ventä-Olkkonen, 2020). However, many parents expressed ambivalence about the efficacy of ICT, arguing that traditional learning gives the educator complete control over the students (Kibuku et al., 2020). As a result, students and teachers engage in non-physical activity due to the implementation of E-Learning, which contributes to their lack of interaction. Therefore, it is sufficient to say that E-Learning is incapable of enhancing students’ interpersonal skills. Despite this, E-Learning is superior to conventional learning in terms of cost and repeated access to learning content (Iivari and Ventä-Olkkonen, 2020).

E-learning is one of the modes of study utilised during COVID-19, and its implementation has been challenging for both teachers and students in the Nzinze circuit. Due to obvious reasons, such as a lack of computers for students to access lessons and complete assessments, parents do not favour this learning and teaching approach, which contributes to this difficulty. Those who reside in remote areas, such as students, are particularly susceptible to connectivity issues. Moreover, not all students are self-motivated, so they require parental assistance. Nonetheless, the ICT technology utilised for e-learning mode poses considerable difficulties for parents. Parents, students, and educators were all caught off guard, and we all knew very little (Lubis and Lubis, 2020). Yet they are expected to provide learners with the financial resources necessary to participate in e-learning.

In addition, it appears that parents from the Nzinze circuit are perceived to be illiterate and unfamiliar with IT equipment. As such, it is safe to say that parents lack the financial resources to purchase the devices for their children. Anderson and Gronlund (2009) note that teachers are similarly unprepared to utilise IT resources and assume that they do not even have access to or exposure to IT.

When learning technologies are introduced in educational environments, it is assumed that the educational environment is culture neutral; for instance, all educational environments have the same challenges, problems, and cultural norms (Andersson and Gronlund, 2009). However, it can be observed that cultural factors can influence the successful implementation and use of learning technologies.

COVID-19 presented numerous obstacles, some of which were cultural. Parents view ICT and e-learning differently because they are only familiar with the traditional teaching and learning methods that have been used over the years, pre- and post-independence such as chalk and blackboard and textbook learning (Kaisara and Bwalya, 2020). Furthermore, in many other professions, traditional "chalk and talk" teaching techniques are considered superior for various reasons. Some teachers prefer traditional teaching delivery using chalkboards (Boulos et al., 2007), whereas some researchers argue that technology such as mobile learning, laptops, and tablets can yield greater academic returns (Kong, 2018; Lubis and Lubis, 2020).

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Namibian Ministry of Education has adopted a blended model of teaching and learning that combines e-learning and traditional methods (Shikololo, 2020). Some parents believe that e-learning and similar modes of education are ineffective and that their children are not receiving the best education as they did in the past.

**METHODOLOGY**

The study employed a qualitative approach to obtain a full comprehension of parental viewpoints on E-learning. The researchers opted for the qualitative approach due to their
goal of obtaining a comprehensive knowledge of the study’s description, comprehension, and interpretation. This approach enabled the researchers to delve deeply into the perspectives of the participants on the integration of learning approaches. Moreover, participants were involved in semi-structured interviews with Focus Group Discussion (FGD).

**Population and sampling procedure**

The study was conducted in the Kavango West region’s Nzinze circuit. Nzinze circuit has a population of approximately one thousand four hundred and fifty (1450) inhabitants. The majority of learners in this area reside in rural areas where mud and glass are used to construct dwellings. According to the population and housing census report, the male population is 49.7% and the female population is 50.3% (CENSUS, 2011). Hence, according to the data from the 2011 census, women constitute the majority in the circuit. In addition, a total of fifty (50) participants were picked in a random manner from the pool of parents and learners inside the Nzinze circuit. The sample consisted of 30 participants who were classified as uneducated parents, 20 individuals who were a combination of previous and current educators, and 10 participants who were learners. The sampling methodology employed in this study was characterised by its inherent convenience and voluntary nature.

It is important to note that the primary objective of the study was not to generalise the findings to a larger population but rather to gather a sample size that would be adequate for conducting advanced statistical analyses. Additionally, the study relied on data and documentation obtained from reputable sources such as published journals, publications, websites, and newspapers. The utilisation of diverse data sources facilitates the investigation’s capacity to offer significant understanding into the perspectives of parents on E-learning and their anticipated perceptions of it in the future.

**Theoretical framework**

The study's core term, which serves as a theoretical buffer for the study, is Bronfenbrenner’s (1977) Ecological system theory, which has been defined by deep thinkers as the relationship between home and school (Nikiforou et al., 2013). This study employed Bronfenbrenner’s Bio-Ecological system theory to examine the link between home and school. The value of this theory lies in its synthesis of numerous methodologies; interdisciplinary, multicultural, and multidirectional; to comprehend the developing child (Rilley et al., 2007). As per this theory, environmental systems influence how parents and other stakeholders participate in, interact with, and support children's education. Additionally, societal and cultural influence how people behave and think. As a result, children's behaviour is influenced by their environment, as defined by Bronfenbrenner's ecological system, and the interactions that exist within it (Bartolome et al., 2017).

Rilley et al. (2007) assert that Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory views child development as a complex system of relationships affected by multiple levels of the surrounding environment, from immediate settings of family and school. This theory looks at a child’s development within the context of the system of relationships that form part of the environment. The ecological theory underscores the need for working partnerships between early childhood programs, the parents they serve, and the children of the social structure need to grow (Nikiforou et al., 2013). The values of the community influence social conditions and in turn, be influenced by teachers or children’s families, Therefore, factors affecting parental involvement should be approached from the ecological theory perspective.

**Data analysis**

The study utilised primary data distributed directly to all respondents via Focus Group Discussions (FGD). Randomly, 30 questionnaires were distributed to parents and educators in the Nzinze circuit who volunteered as research participants. All participants volunteered and remained anonymous in this study. Furthermore, the researchers coded and extracted themes from the collected data. Each Focus Group Discussion (FGD)-specific Word document contains a transcription of the audio-recorded data. Open coding was used to code data for analysis; this was accomplished by reading every word in the documents to identify common themes, which were then filtered out and labelled with codes that summarised their meanings. The descriptive comments were highlighted and underlined in the margins of this data analysis. Due to the qualitative nature of the study, interview data were manually categorised and then synthesised into themes that addressed the objectives of the study.

**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

**Parents’ perception of e-learning**

Based on the results, the study revealed that 90% of parents feel anxious about their children using E-Learning as a replacement for traditional learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Parents concur that E-Learning has advantages for enhancing their children’s technological skills and the accessibility of learning resources, but they feel that E-Learning has also harmed the overall learning process. They asserted that E-Learning is ineffective at
arranging learners, supporting their emotions, delivering learning materials, and helping learners focus on learning. Furthermore, parents also stated that traditional learning is more beneficial than E-Learning. This became evident when the combined responses of 200 uneducated parents from the FGD revealed:

“With computers, our children are not learning anything. They cannot see the teachers in the classroom, and the teachers cannot see the schoolchildren, so no teaching is taking place. Our children have the opportunity to interact actively with teachers and peers in a more realistic classroom setting. Where have you witnessed a child learning through a teacher’s voice without seeing him or her?”

From the quote above, it is worth mentioning that 90% of the uneducated participants agreed that E-learning is not a sufficient method of teaching their children. Moreover, this indicates that parents cannot be responsible for their children’s E-learning activities, particularly if they are too young, hence the need for adult supervision from parents or family members. However, the responses from former educators and current educators have diverse opinions. Despite the gradual shift from traditional learning methods to online learning, they emphasise that parents’ roles and responsibilities toward their children remain unchanged.

“As parents, we should not evade our responsibilities by hiding behind the E-learning teaching method. We must fulfil our parental responsibilities by participating in our children’s education. Even though teachers can instruct students to create projects at home, they may not be able to see the results promptly as it is difficult for them to assess, guide, and provide immediate feedback. Therefore, it is the parent’s responsibility to monitor this process”.

Factors that hinder parental involvement in e-learning

Educators and learners who were interviewed revealed that a variety of obstacles prevent parents from successfully supporting e-learning. The lack of Internet access and learning devices seems to be the greatest obstacle to parental involvement with E-learning implementation. 80% of learners revealed that;

“Some parents rarely support e-learning, and the majority of parents lack knowledge about the use of technology and resources to support e-learning. Fewer parents can afford e-learning and maintain its use”.

This is supported by the 50 participants, most of whom were educators, who believed that a lack of education in technology and a language barrier among parents appear to be the most significant obstacles to parental participation in E-learning.

“Some parents are raised in remote rural areas and are therefore unaware of e-learning. “The generation gap is also a contributing factor. For example, generation X parents have limited knowledge of e-learning because they are not required to use technology. They lose interest in e-learning as a result of Generation Y’s misinformation about technology.

Based on the educator’s observations over the years, it appears that parents are not exposed to the actual nature of any educational development, let alone e-learning operations. In addition, the study revealed that most parents are unaware of the true nature of e-learning platforms, which are widely promoted despite the lack of technological tools and facilities. Some parents are illiterate and unable to read and write English and other languages taught in schools, making it difficult for them to provide for their children in full. Motivation and E-learning implementation are interconnected concerning individual characteristics. The success of E-learning may be impacted by a lack of motivation from educators and parents. Positive learning outcomes are more likely to occur when educators are highly motivated and have a high level of acceptance of E-learning.

Ten former educators revealed that the challenges faced by e-learning users were not only technology-related but also social factors that had an impact on how they experienced e-learning.

“Nzinze circuit is one of the circuits in the Kavango-west region with poor Internet connectivity. Since 2010, we have requested that the MTC tour be included in this circuit, but nothing has been done to date. In addition, parents need training in computer literacy to comprehend how E-learning works. Financial support to purchase materials, Internet and computer illiteracy is one of the most significant contributing factors for parents here”.

Parental concerns about e-learning

70% of parents lack understanding and support for e-learning, and parents expressed numerous concerns about the potential dangers posed by e-learning to their children. Several parents were concerned about the weakening of their children’s interpersonal skills as a result of their excessive use of digital devices, which could serve as a substitute for oral communication.
we fear that the substitution of printed homework would weaken our children’s handwriting skills and word recognition skills. Our children would be addicted to the Internet for non-educational purposes.

Possible strategies to promote parental involvement in E-learning

Given the strong positive relationship between parental understanding and the support of their children, it is essential to improve the understanding of parents with e-learning, particularly from an educational standpoint. Studies revealed that parents care about their children’s education; therefore, schools should organise activities to improve parents’ understanding of e-learning to maintain parental involvement. This is evident when two educators emphasise that:

Our senior parents are interested in our children’s e-learning. Therefore, to the ministry can establish a comprehensive policy to address parental concerns, schools should arrange for parent classroom observations. Parents can learn more about e-learning and ICT learning by observing their children’s lessons.

Five (5) former educators think that acceptability from parents is one of the key elements that contribute to the success of e-learning. It is also essential to alter educators’ and parents’ perceptions of E-learning.

If both teachers and parents see E-learning as beneficial to their children, then they will accept it. For example, schools in the Nzinze circuit can inform parents through workshops or digital communication tools about the applications used by children in school to help children’s learning transition between home and school. This type of communication would allow parents to learn about e-learning and improve their use of ICT in education, which can facilitate parental involvement and help parents set up a home e-learning policy.

The quote above suggests that parents should have peer support to make E-learning easier to learn and comprehend. Since teachers are expected to devote their time and energy to educating learners and cannot devote too much time to assisting parents, peer support among parents would be an effective means of easing parental concerns. Establishing a close working relationship between the school and the leaders of parent-teacher associations is one approach to achieving this objective.

Conclusion

The research examined the implementation of e-learning in school education from the perspective of parents. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the use of e-learning in schools has gained popularity (WHO, 2020). Despite its benefits for learners, implementing E-Learning in the Nzinze circuit has several flaws, particularly from the perspective of parents. The findings revealed that parental understanding and support are crucial for the successful implementation of e-learning in school settings. A partnership between the school and the parents is proposed to enhance parents’ knowledge of e-learning and address their concerns. According to the findings of this study, a productive school–parent partnership should distribute e-learning responsibilities between parents and schools and facilitate communication between them to provide a seamless e-learning environment at home and in school. At home, parents should be responsible for developing a proactive e-learning policy. This allows parents to become effective facilitators of e-learning for their children at home. Schools should be responsible for implementing a comprehensive policy to address parental concerns. This allows schools to be both responsive and proactive in addressing parental concerns. Communication and peer support should be encouraged among parents to promote collaboration and responsibility-sharing between schools and parents in the implementation of e-learning in school education. This forecast is now closer to becoming a reality. To promote e-learning, parents must monitor, encourage, and support their children’s use of ICT for educational purposes.

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