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An Ecological Panorama on How Parental Involvement Affects Academic Achievement of Secondary School Pupils in Masvingo

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the influence of an ecological perspective on the parental involvement on secondary school pupil's academic performance. It was influenced by Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. A qualitative research was adopted through an interpretivist paradigm. The research participants comprised of two teachers and five parents. The research instrument used was the one to one interviews with the both the teachers and the parents. A thematic data analysis was used to analyse data solicited from the research participants. Findings from the teachers revealed that some parents were partially involved in the learning of their pupils and some pupils were found not to be doing their homework. Ultimately, this derailed the whole learning process. In addition diverse sentiments were outlined by the parents including the claim that it was the teachers' obligation to ensure that children were consistently assisted by the teachers. Their argument was based on the understanding that parents are paying full fees, therefore they expect the best out of their money. Some parents indicated that, as much as they would want to assist their children, they are to some extent incapacitated. The researcher recommended that if the parents are unable to assist their children, they should find other means to do so. The same applies with teachers who are encouraged to reconsider ways of assisting children who cannot get parental assistance.

Background

The development of a nation is subject to the edification of what its citizens has attained. Muhammad, Tehsin, Muhammad, Muhammad & Muhammad Ali (2013) carried a study in Pakistan on parental involvement and academic achievement. They found that parental involvement has significant effects in better academic performance of their children. The analysis further revealed that parental involvement was superior in enhancing achievement by the learners. Mafa and Makuba (2013) carried out a study in Matabeleland and found out that levels of parental involvement were low due to the limited time they had with their children. Another study by Chindanya (2011) also reveals that there is compelling evidence that parental involvement positively influences children's academic achievement. The researcher has noted that the pass rate in some rural schools is dwindling. This has prompted the researcher to carry out the study to ascertain whether parental involvement was not a contributory factor to this academic quandary.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory.

This study is guided by Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory. In Bronfenbrenner's model, the individual is the hub of a system which includes five environmental systems that range from close interpersonal interactions to broad based influences of culture (Santrock 2004:68). The systems recognised were the microsystem, the mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem (Keenan, Subhadra and Crowley, 2016). The inner most level is the micro system which include the immediate setting in which the child lives and refers to the family, peers school as well as activities, roles and relationship in their immediate surroundings (Keenan, Subhadra and Crowley, 2016, Berns 2013 and Santrock 2004). As such, the relationship between a child and the parents tends to have a stable and enduring effect on the child's acquisition of knowledge and morals.

Mesosystem involves the relationships among micro systems such as home, school and neighbourhood (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana 2010). This involves the connections which bring together the various contexts in which the child learn (Keenan, Subhadra and Crowley, 2016 : 37). Thus, there is need to ensure that there is good relationship between the school and home. The two are supposed to work as a team so that the child will benefit from the teachers and the parents. Parental involvement in a child's education along with environmental and economic factors may affect the child (Hafiz Muhammad, Tehsin, Malik Muhammad, Muhammad & Muhammad Ali 2013 : 210). The parents should ensure that they assist their children with homework. Homework can also give parents an opportunity to see what's going on in school, serving as a link between the school and home (Tina and McComb 2008:4). The close ties between the school and home assist in boosting the confidence and moral of the learners. Hence, parental involvement in schools is linked with academic achievement. (Hafiz Muhammad, Tehsin, Malik Muhammad, Muhammad & Muhammad Ali 2013

: 210). Supportive or unsupportive parental can affect the academic performance of the learners. Khajehpour and Ghazvini (2011 :1205) have noted that, the greatest barriers to academic achievement for a good number of students are attributed to lack of parental involvement in children's education. Parents are therefore obliged to invest both time and money for the development of their own children.

Exosystem involves the social settings and institutions that do not directly involve the child yet they can have a profound impact on their development (Keenan, Subhadra and Crowley 2016, Mangal 2002 and Santrock 2004). The way the parents use their time and money have a long- lasting outcome on the development of their children. Social status of the parents affects the children not because poor families have less money to invest in their children, but because low income reduces the parent's ability to be good (Tina and McComb , 2008) . They fail to be good by not giving the social support to their children. Due to being economically underprivileged these parents wrestle for the survival of their families. On the other side of the coin the privileged families also affect their children. , Parents may not have quality time with their children due to work constraints. The chronosystem emphasises more on environmental factors and their role in the development and learning of the children (Santrock, 2014). The ecological theory emphasises environmental factors as playing a major role in human development.

Research Methodology

A qualitative research approach was adopted. Fischer (206: xvi) noted that qualitative research is reflective, interpretive and usually reflexive effort to describe and understand actual instances of human action and experience from the perspective of the participants who are living through a particular situation. In this instance, views were derived from the parents to validate their level of interaction with their children as to how it affects the academic performance of the learners. Research designs are types of inquiry within qualitative, quantitative or mixed methods approaches that provide specific direction for procedures (Creswell 204:41). In this study a narrative design was used. Through a narrative design the researcher studies the lives of individuals and asks one or more individuals to provide stories about their lives (Riessman, 2008). The researcher solicited data from parents on the roles they take a role in the learning of their children.

Sampling is choosing a smaller and more manageable number of people to take part in the study (Dawson, 2007. The participants for this study comprised of five parents and two teachers in Masvingo. These were purposively sampled.

Data was solicited through the use of interviews. These were administered to both the teachers and the parents. Interviews enhanced the researcher to get an in-depth opinion from the participants (Dawson 207:16). The researcher made sure that the interview questions were not too long because long questions generally increase the burden on the respondents which may lead to increased reluctance to participate (De Vaus 2002:112.

Findings and discussion

The findings revealed that parental involvement has adverse effects on the academic achievement of the learners. Some parents indicated that they wanted well out of their children. As a result, they indicated that they devoted most of their time and resources to their children. One parent was quoted, *'I need to work flat out for the future life of my kids. These are the ones whom I am working for. I need to ensure that I have the firm foundation for them. Do you think if I die anyone will look after my kids? It's high time I forget about the extended family because it does not pay at all. You can only waste time and resources rather than channelling them towards the development of your our kids.*

The other parent was supportive of the idea of investing in children by engaging tutors for extra lessons. The parent pointed out that, *"I realise that the future of my children lies in my hands therefore I am sacrificing to ensure that my children get tuition home and away. My parents were struggling but they really sacrificed for me to be where I am. I want to ensure that with all the*

blessings I have my children are going to enjoy to the fullest. I have a policy that I will provide my children with all the textbooks they require so that they are not stuck when they are at home”.

The data solicited also indicated that, there are some parents who are partially involved in the learning of their children. Through data, it emerged that some parents are of the view that their primary role in education was to ensure that they pay the school fees required that's all. They fumingly indicated that it was not their role to get much involved in what is being done at school. One parent made reference to the e new curriculum's demands and suggested that, 'new blood' should Mann it. The argument was that by allowing parents to indulge or engage in day today running of school, this might end up creating confusion to the children. The parent jokingly said, *There is no need to mix old wine with the new one.*

The research findings also noted that one of the parents was ignorant of what is taking place at school. I do not even know what is taking place at school. I know is that I am struggling to make ends meet. I have four months rental errors. My kids also have fees arrears for last year. The whole of last week they were send back from school for non payment of fees. At the same time I am not in a position to assist with homework.

Findings have shown that some parents support their children financially, socially and emotionally. A child who has support at home has the propensity to do well at school. Banda, Chivore, Zindi, Muchenje, Hapanyengwi, Nenohwe and Chikoto (2014) highlighted that a child's aptitude is affected if the basic needs are not provided to the learners. Therefore, the parents should strive to provide the necessities for the learning of their children.

The two teachers interviewed had varied views. One of the teachers was quite motivated and perplexed by the way parents were involved in the education of their children. Working with parents was a joy for they were providing their children with whatever the teacher requested to support the learning of their children. The teacher indicated that parental support is boosting children's confidence.

The other teacher was mumbling towards the non supportive behaviour of some parents. This included parents who simply 'dump' their children. Such behaviour proved to be retrogressive in an environment where both the teacher and the parent are supposed to work together towards the development of the child academic. Consequently, it will be upon the teacher alone to determine the whole learning process yet the parents are expected to have a buy in as well. The responded was arguing that there is need for team work in the learning of their children. Suggestions were that there is need to ensure that the children are assisted with homework to alleviate the challenges faced by the learners.

Recommendations

The researcher recommended that there is need to ensure that the parents and the school work hand in glove to boost the academic performance of the learners. Parents should ensure that they pay the fees on time so that the learners will not be deprived the opportunity to attend the lessons. Teachers should also ensure that all the disadvantaged are assisted to the fullest.

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