Parental Involvement in the Teaching and Learning of Their Children in Disadvantaged Schools

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ABSTRACT Parental involvement in the teaching and learning of their children seem to be a neglected research area especially in South Africa's previously disadvantaged schools. Parental involvement as envisaged by Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana (2006) for purposes of transformation cannot be overemphasized from both black and white teachers in schools. Based on the above, parents have a great influence on the teaching and learning of their children in schools. As teachers, we therefore need to work actively in our classrooms to dispel stereotyped perceptions of members of different groups and resulting behaviours that tend to demean any human being. The purpose of this article is thus to explore the involvement of parents in the teaching and learning of their children in disadvantaged schools. The research method used in this study is qualitative and this method is described in the proceeding section. The method would facilitate detailed understanding of parental involvement in the teaching and learning of their children in disadvantaged schools. From this study, it is evident that there is a lack of parental involvement in the teaching and learning of their children in schools. This will thus contribute to a lack of successful academic achievement of children in schools.

INTRODUCTION

Before the advent of democracy in South Africa, disadvantaged parents, especially in rural areas did not play a role in the formal education of their children.Disadvantaged parents in this study refers to rural localities. In other words, remote areas excluded from urban classification. This idea of disadvantaged parents playing a role in the formal education of their children, is evidenced by the South African Schools Act, Section 16(2) (1996) which came into effect in January 1997, placing increasing emphasis on creating schools which are responsible to those who are linked to them from outside. This statement means that parents were not very often involved in the work of their children nor even considered an integral part of the school. Democracy brought about changes in the education arena and parental involvement has been almost a catchword, as official documents stress the role of parents in the new educational world of the 1990's. This opinion is supported by Morgan (1996) when mentioning that the concept parental involvement means parents and teachers are working in a close partnership for the benefit of the child. Takanishi (1993) writes that parental involvement in the school forms a critical factor in a learner's educational success in all the school grades. Kinsler (2001) supports the preceding

statements by saying that when parents are involved with their children's learning they do better in schools.The Education White Paper 6 Department of Education (2001) further states that parents provide opportunities for learning in homes and also have critical role as social partners in education.

The above statements are relevant to the South African schools because parents and teachers can make an important contribution to their children's academic achievement if they are working together. The study is demarcated in the proceeding sections as follows: theoretical framework, background of the study, the life of the child-in-Education, parental involvement in the teaching and learning of their learners in disadvantaged schools, research methodology, research design, data collection, findings and discussion, conclusion, recommendations and references

Theoretical Framework

The framework within which this article is based on is Vygotsky's, which is the socio-cultural (social interaction) theory. Vygotsky (1978) states that every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first on the social level, and later on the individual level that is, (first, between people (inter-psychological) and then inside the child, (intra-psychological). This

theory plays a fundamental role in the cognitive development through mediation and is therefore relevant to this article as it focuses on the social interaction between individuals within a complex society embroiled by various factors. Its relevance is further seen when parents are expected to mediate and interact with their children during school activities such as parent, sports, learners' progress report and finance meetings. Vygotsky (1978) further mentions that the educational process leads the child's cognitive development, but does not coincide with it.

Vygotsky's theory is complementary to the model of combination and adaptation of frameworks for parent involvement as developed by Epstein (1995) and Hornby (2000) (See the model in Table 1).

It can be emphasized that the preceding theoretical framework and model are important and relevant to this article as stated in the previous sections. We are in the currently changing education system that needs constant positive interaction between the developing child and the experienced knowledgeable adult. The adult who is capable of producing in the child the appropriate life and learning skills that will enable him/her to gradually gain control over real life activities. This implies that parental involvement in teaching and learning of their children can be viewed as an important concept that has a positive connotation, as it leads in most cases to the successful mastery of tasks jointly done by the teacher, learner and parent. The concept parental involvement in this study implies that chances are given to parents to support the school and teachers, making them more effective in reaching learning goals Barton and Drake (2002).This means that parental involvement includes collaborative contributions. One can further say that parental involvement between individuals through relevant diverse tools such as language and communication media, in complex levels of system such as families, schools and communities plays a significant role in the development of learners.

Background of the Study

The researcher feels it fit to describe the location of the school with an aim of understanding, supporting or opposing the argument within this study. School C with a total number of forty grade twelve learners (pseudo name) is the poorest school in as far as the Grade 12 results are concerned in the Makapanstad Area Project Office (circuit office). Over the consecutive period of five years the school has been performing poorly as far as grade 12 results are concerned (below fifty percent) as the bench mark of the Provincial Department of Education is fifty percent. The school is situated in a remote dry area in South Africa, more than 28 kilometres away from a small town in Hammanskraal. This small town is in the borders of two provinces called North-West and Gauteng, of the nine provinces of South Africa. In this school there is no sign of better infrastructures. For example, this school is very far from the tarred road, post office, shops, churches and bus stops. The environment is not conducive to teaching and learning as it is characterised by inadequate furniture, poor toilets and old buildings.

Parents in most cases in that area are not staying with their children, as they are working far away from their homes and returning only during the weekends or monthend.

Table 1: Model of combination and adaptation of frameworks for parental involvement in the teaching and learning of their children in disadvantaged schools

(a) Parents' contribution based on their children's	Parents' needs based on their communication with schools
-strengths and challenges	-written reports
-likes and dislikes	-verbal reports
-and their developmental history.	-Homework diaries
(b) Collaboration	Liaison
-for example,creating a physical and emotional space for doing set tasks at home, helping with reading, being a partner to-the teacher in support programmes.	-for example, meetings, both formal -and informal with teachers
(c)Resources	Education
- for example, fundraising -giving support to other parents *Policy*	-for example, parent workshops-various forms of adult education *Support*
-for example, being involved in decision making as members ofschool governing body	–for example, general support and being welcomed into the school

The Life of the Child –in-Education

The life of the child-in-Education needs to be also discussed because without the child, no teaching and learning will take place especially in the classroom situation. Therefore, the life of the child-in-Education in this study refers to the child's initiatives and active participation in learning, teaching and development. It is important to answer the question: Who is the child as stated by Bender (1994), because this determines the viewpoint of parents for the choices of approaches to make in order to improve their involvement with their children. It is, therefore, important to note that parents play an important role in the life of their children-in-Education because, without their teaching and support, children would not actualise proper potential nor develop into fully responsible adults. This is supported by Wood (2003) when mentioning that there is correlation between parental involvement in the lives of children and their academic achievement.

Parents from disadvantaged areas are responsible adults who also want to see their children supported educationally, but because of their low economic status, they are unable to do so. For example they are always bussing to and fro work daily, coming back late when their children are asleep, leaving their children's schoolwork unsupervised. Their lack of support will in turn encourage the child to withdraw from learning tasks and this paves ways for their inadequate cognitive development.

Parental Involvement in the Teaching and Learning of Their Learners in Disadvantaged Schools

Based on the discussion above on the life of the child-in-Education, I am convinced that parents should also extend their involvement beyond the basic teacher/parent level. Meaning that they should take an active part in the activities such as School Governing Bodies, parent councils, raise funds for the school and act as teacher-helpers in the classroom. In these ways, the focus of their involvement will widen and embrace also other children from other communities. This is important as such children will gain more knowledge and be aware of parental involvement in any educational setting as mentioned by Wood (2003).

Contrary to the above views, it should not be forgotten that parental involvement is still a prob-lem especially in most of disadvantaged areas where there is a high rate of illiteracy and poverty. This is further evidenced by the existence of single parenting and child-headed families. The government is also aware of, as President Thabo Mbeki (*Sowetan,* 9 April, 1998) was reported saying that we cannot lay all blame for our failure on society and past occurrences while we ignore our own responsibilities to learn and teach. Three years after President Thabo Mbeki's speech (*Sowetan*, 19 March, 2000) during the African National Congress's 90th anniversary, he repeated that we should engage ourselves in voluntary community service in order to improve our children's education standards. In this context this means that parental involvement plays a role in the teaching and learning of children in disadvantaged schools. This is also substantiated by the research findings obtained by Munn (1993) when claiming that children whose parents are involved in their educational matters are more successful. Maden (2001) further states that if parents and children could work closely together and if parents could support their children, then this would help to raise their achievement. The statement implies that parental involvement has a positive effect on different learners' attainment of their goals. Borich (1996) writes that when parents and teachers become partners, not only can students' achievement increase but also parents learn about you and your school. This, according to my view, appears to be a positive shared decision-making, partnership and involvement in schools' related matters. Meaning that schools have moved away from what is described as the monastic tradition of pre-war education where the concept of external relations was hardly relevant.

In support of the discussion above, Meintjies (1992) maintains that parents should contribute to creating an optimum educational environment at home, at school and in the community. Parents are an integral part to schooling and their parental dimension is central to the teacher's professional performance. Therefore, it is reasonable to state that parents are responsible for home learning whilst teachers are responsible for school learning. It should also be noted that there are parents especially in the disadvantaged areas, who due to occupational demands are always away from home or due to marital problems create an inhibiting educational climate causing a feeling of insecurity and anxiety to

their children. This behaviour might cause some stumbling blocks that can lead to children's poor performance at school.

It is apparent from the above statement that parental involvement plays an important role in the teaching and learning of their children, therefore their involvement should further include mutual trust, love and co-operation between the school and home (parents). The school should consult with the parents through the governing body, as mentioned in the preceding section, informing them about values and norms of the teaching and learning in the school setting. Kelly (1990) argues that parental involvement in schools has long been heralded as an important ingredient in children's academic success. Meintjies (1992) further suggests the following areas of involvement, namely that parents should participate in school governance, attend classes and school meetings, keep up to date with their children's progress, monitor homework and instil discipline. In supporting the above ideas, it can be claimed that parental involvement in education is crucial. A claim supported by the South African Schools' Act, Section 20 (1996) when advocating that parents serve as elected members of governing bodies, see to it that learners attend school from the first school day of the year, until the last day of the year and must see to it that a high standard of education is provided by schools.

This means that different learners are presented with united and uniform skill of learning when teachers and parents work together. The suggestion presented above is important but one wonders as to whether it can be applicable to the disadvantaged parents in the rural areas with low qualifications and economic background. These parents are in most cases away as they work far away from home, coming during weekends, fortnightly, monthly and quarterly.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this study the researcher opted to to use a qualitative approach because the researcher wished to obtain a more detailed understanding of parental involvement in the teaching and learning of learners in disadvantaged schools. It is, thus, important that the researcher finds out what learners in the disadvantaged schools know and think about parental involvement in the teaching and learning situation.

The above information is supported by Neuman (2000) when stating that qualitative report is preferred because of its descriptive nature, colourful details whereby its characters are unique rather than formal and neutral to the statistics. Mertens (1998) adds that qualitative research studies the phenomenon in its natural state and tries to make sense out of it. Strauss and Corbin (1990) describe qualitative research as any type of research that produces findings or results by not using statistical methods.

Data Collection Method

In qualitative research a number of data collection methods can be used. For the purpose of this study, interviews were used. This data collection method in this study is important because it enhances the trustworthiness of the data. This is supported by McMillan and Schumacher (2001) when stating that data collection method may yield and increase the credibility of findings. Data was thus collected by means of focus group interviews.

Interviews

Gillham (2000) describes an interview as a conversation between people where one person seeks responses for a particular purpose. Patton (2002) adds that we interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe. MacMillan and Schumacher (2001) define interviews as flexible, adaptable and it involves direct interaction between individuals. In this study focus group interviews were used as the main data collection strategy. The researcher therefore, conducted open-ended focus group interviews with grade twelve learners (each group consisting of 5 learners) with an aim of discussing and developing ideas from the participants on parental involvement in the teaching and learning of their children in disadvantaged schools. Parents were not included in the interviews because in most cases in that area they are not staying with their children, as stated in the previous section when the research location was described. According to Krueger and Casey (2000), a focus group interview is a special type of group in terms of purpose, size and procedures. In this study participants were selected based on common characteristics they have and such characteristics were related to the topic of this study, which is parental involvement in the

teaching and learning of their children in disadvantaged schools. The focus group in this study consisted of 8 groups derived from all 40 grade twelve learners, with each group consisting of 5 learners.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are an extremely important aspect of qualitative research, and it is therefore necessary to engage in ethical practices in this study. Based on this statement, The researcher adhered to the following ethical measures:
- Permission to conduct the research was obtained from the North-West Provincial and Department of Education and the Moretele Area Project Office (circuit office).
- Permission to conduct the research was also obtained from the School Governing Body (SGB), the Principal and School Management Team (SMT) of the school where the research was conducted.
- Assent forms, together with an information letter which included detailed information on the purpose of the research and how data will be collected was given to the grade twelve learners involved in the research.
- All reasonable measures were implemented to ensure that the participants were protected from harm as a consequence of this research.
- The anonymity of the school and all participants were protected.
- Audio recordings were made with the permission of the participants in order to capture their responses during the process of interviews.
- Participants were informed that participation was voluntary and that they can withdraw from the study at any point, without any penalty.

Each group was asked to share their ideas with regard to the following main questions: What is your parents' highest educational qualifications? Do your parents assist you with schoolwork/

homework? If yes how do they do that and if no why do they fail to do so? Are your parents staying with you at home? if no why? Interviews were then transcribed and an analysis of data collected was made.

Data Analysis

The process of data analysis adapted from Terre Blanche et al. (2006) was followed and is described as: the data consisted of transcribed focus group interviews, data was constantly reviewed for new emerging points, important points were highlighted, codes were allocated to relevant points, codes were then sorted into categories and these categories were then interpreted in the proceeding section.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSSION

Content analysis as described by Dey (1993) is the categorizing of the primary patterns in the data. This means that categories or themes are developed from qualitative data. In this study, I thus presented the categories of parental involvement in the teaching and learning of their children in disadvantaged school (Table 2).

Biographical Information

According to Houser (1998), biographical information is important because it influences the outcome of the study thus lays the foundation for the discussion of data. With regard to the parents' qualifications, it was indicated that no parent in that particular school has a Bachelor degree and majority have not passed even standard 8 (grade 10). This could be an indication that most parents fall below Grade 12 with their qualification, thus they are poorly qualified. This is a problem and it needs an urgent attention by both the National and Provincial Department of Education. This statement is supported by The Quarterly Review of Education in Training in South Africa (2001) when pointing out that South

Table 2: Categories of parental involvement in the teaching and learning of their children in disadvantaged school

Categories	Sub-categories
• Biographical information	Parents' qualifications
• Parental involvement	assist their children with school work attend meetings organised by the school
• Parents' socio-economic background	Parents are working far from home parents only come during the weekends or month end children are always hungry

Africa still has a considerable number of unqualified and under-qualified parents.

Parental Involvement and Their Socio-economic Background

Parents are unable to assist with their children's homework .They are also unable to attend meetings organized by the school because they are not staying with their children. They are working far from home and only coming home during the weekends or month end as mentioned in the preceding section under the background of the study. This means that these learners are from poor socio economic background and thus likely to perform badly as they would lack concentration. Dalin (1993) concurs with the above statements by stating that research has shown that the socio economic status of the family has a major influence on student learning.

From the above discussion, it can be mentioned that the absence of parents at home leads to lack of parental involvement in their children's education as stated by Allen (2010). Furthermore parents are viewed as providers of security and they should therefore always protect their children by staying with them at home, and also make sure that they are also well-dressed in school uniform when they go to school; as this could contribute to the comfortable, happy child, thus enhancing their academic achievement. This means that the absence of parents at home and also their lack of supervision and guidance can lead to their children's mischief. Parents should therefore not leave their children alone at home.

Furthermore on the point of poor socio-economic background, learners have indicated that they in most cases go to school being hungry. They are not even provided with food as a basic need before going to school. Based on this idea, how can good teaching and learning take place when learners are hungry?

The above statement is strengthened by the Gauteng Department of Education (2002) during a conference held in Warmbath, when stating that many of the learners are on the verge of starvation as school feeding schemes are insufficient. Difficulties such as these mentioned above are serious matters as learners could lose concentration and it may become difficult for them to learn, thus yielding poor academic achievement. In most cases learners who do not get a balanced diet, under-perform academically. This is supported by Bishop (1989) when stating that

nutrient deficiency produces damage to the central nervous system and this will adversely affect the child holistically.

On this note the researcher feels that children from such disadvantaged family backgrounds are likely to perform badly as they would lack concentration because of poverty, thus an adverse impact on their academic achievement.

CONCLUSION

It is evident from this study that there is a lack of parental involvement in the teaching and learning of their children in schools. This will therefore contribute to a lack of successful academic achievement of their children. On this note I therefore believe that parents who do not provide a stable and stimulating home background lay the foundation for an unhealthy, chaotic learning environment in schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Pre-service and in-service training be strengthened where development of strategies will be established with an aim of developing competency in human resource management that promotes parental involvement in the teaching and learning of their children.
- Establish Professional Development Schools, i.e. PDS." This means there should be collaboration between education department, unions, teachers, communities, schools and higher education institutions where the partnership personnel share decisions on teaching and learning in schools

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