

Barriers Educators Face in Involving Fathers in the Education of their Children at the Foundation Phase

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ABSTRACT This study investigated the barriers that educators faced in involving fathers in the academic development of their children in the foundation phase education in South Africa. The study adopted the qualitative case study approach and followed the interpretivist paradigm to investigate the participants in their natural setting. The sample size comprised six educators who were purposively selected to respond to semi-structured interview questions. All ethical procedures were observed and respondents completed the consent forms. Data collected was thematically analyzed. The findings revealed that lack of knowledge, absent father syndrome, migrant labor, educational poverty and political will were the main barriers to father involvement. The study concluded that effective fathers' participation in the education of their children is necessary to achieving the goals of early childhood education. The study recommends that programs should be tailor-made to suite all categories of fathers in order to encourage father participation regardless of their economic status.

INTRODUCTION

Children learn from three contexts, which are the family, community and the school. Studies show that the family represents an essential part in the development of the physical, emotional and social wellbeing of children (Potter 2012; Okeke 2014; Wilson 2015). Prior to formal schooling, parents were the primary educators whose responsibility was to provide religious, moral and cultural education so as to promote social development and teach their children the basics of reading, writing and counting albeit informally. In other words, 'homeschooling' was the order of the day and children were taught by the parents, aunts, uncles, grandparents, sisters, brothers among others, and the community at large, so that they could be responsible and socially conscious adults. With the advent of formal education however, parents began to send their children to the school for formal academic instruction and that practice is at its advanced stages today. Formal education opened a new venue of collaboration between schools and parents, but in many instances the family renegades the responsibility of education to the school, with little or no input. In the cases where families participate in the schooling of their children, women are at the forefront, with fathers rarely featuring in the education process mak-

ing it necessary for educators to try and include fathers. Linn et al. (2015) commenting on father's involvement in learning say, "Besides teaching children, educators are tasked with the responsibility to invite and involve fathers in promoting social, emotional and academic development of children in the early childhood development programs". With educators trying to bring fathers on board in the education process of their children, the question is, what barriers do educators face in involving fathers in the academic development of their children in the foundation phase education in South Africa? In answering this question, the researchers will hopefully highlight possible avenues of collaboration between educators and parents—in this instance fathers. The benefits of parent-teacher cooperation are strongly supported by research, which has gained momentum over a number of decades now (Henderson and Mapp 2002; Okeke 2014; Change 2015). The quality and nature of the interactions that children have with teachers, neighbors, peers, extended family, siblings and other parents contribute to shaping the academic developmental outcomes of the child. In view of this notion, Morin (2013) advises that the best tip for school success is to make sure that parents and teachers are working together as allies.

Even though there is amply documented evidence of the benefits of parental involvement (Richter and Morrell 2006; Kim and Chung 2011; Potter 2012; Jorosi-Tshiamo 2013; Okeke 2014; Holcomb et al. 2015; Linn et al. 2015; Wilson

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2015), it has not been enough to impact education policy in South Africa in influencing fathers' involvement in early childhood programs. Literature on fathers' influence in the early education of their children in South Africa is limited and existing ones commonly portray fathers in a negative light (Marcisz 2013). However, studies show that fathers have a positive attitude about getting involved in early childhood programs (Fagan 2007; Potter 2012; Okeke 2014). Bringing parents and fathers to the education table will provide a context for them to learn more about how they can get involved in their children's education. Although participatory decision-making by parents in the South African schools has been mandated through the South African Schools Act (Act 84 of 1996) (Department of Education 1996), there is dearth of research showing the efficacy of these efforts. The existing literature shows that parental involvement in the schools is limited to the duties carried out by the school governing bodies (SGBs) while early childhood centers are not covered by the SISA 84 of 1996 (Brown and Duku 2008; Mncube 2009; 2010; Nojaja 2009; Mbokodi and Singh 2011; Makgopa and Mokhele 2013). Against this background, the researchers investigated the barriers that educators face in soliciting fathers' involvement in the early education of their children in the foundation phase in schools in one Education District of the Eastern Cape in South Africa.

Research Questions

To enable this investigation, two research questions were posed,

1. What barriers did educators experience in involving fathers in the education of their children in the foundation phase?
2. What strategies can educators use to increase the level of participation of fathers in the early childhood education of their children?

Objectives of the Study

The above research objectives of the paper lead to the following research questions:

1. To explore the barriers educators face in involving fathers in the education of their children.

2. To identify strategies that educators can adopt to improve fathers' involvement in the education of their children in the foundation phase.

Theoretical Framework

This study is underpinned by the theory of overlapping spheres of influence developed by Epstein (2000), which regards the family, community and school as the three major sources that influence learning and development in children. The theory recognizes that these three contexts influence each other and are affected by the decisions they make with regards to nearness or disconnectedness. Education centers can initiate the collaboration of the three spheres through repeated and high-quality collaborations with families and communities through community engagements (Green 2003). Even though they may have limitations, parents can make concerted efforts to be involved and actively participate in the learning of their children. The equal importance of the three learning environments cannot be disputed, as one cannot be completely isolated from the others. The theory has been adopted for its suitability in unpacking the barriers that hinder fathers' participation in early childhood education. Doing so would enable one to understand the roles educators play in engaging fathers in the education centers.

Extensive research based on the Epstein's framework emerged with six types of involvement namely, parenting, learning at home, communicating, decision-making, volunteering, and cooperating with community (Epstein et al. 2003). Educators then have the obligation to ensure effective partnerships even though Epstein recognizes that each sphere plays a crucial role in nurturing a progressive learning environment for children. Notably, it is the foremost belief that greater collaboration between the spheres leads to positive benefits for learners, parents and teachers (Epstein 2001; Epstein et al. 2003), which corresponds with the credence that fathers' involvement leads to academic success, which makes students, teachers and parents happy. According to Epstein (1995: 702), overlapping of school, family and community produces "family-like schools" and "school-like families". The atmosphere in family-like schools is such that families welcome individuality, and

special traits of children are recognized while in school, and in families the importance of school work, homework and learning activities are emphasized thereby increasing the completion rate. In this research, it is assumed that when teachers know and understand the children's background, cultures and unique strengths, they are in a better position to involve fathers. In this study, the Epstein's theory was adopted to enable the researchers better understand the barriers that educators face involving fathers in the academic development of their children and what strategies these educators can adopt to encourage fathers' involvement.

Review on Fathers' Involvement in the Education of Children

A plethora of studies have consistently been established that there is a positive relationship between the level of parental involvement and children's academic success during the school-age years (Henderson and Mapp 2002; Okeke 2014; Change 2015). The following paragraphs present thus a scholarly overview of the importance of involving fathers in the education of their children.

An involved father is defined as a father who has a relationship with his child and at the same time is described as being sensitive, affectionate, warm, nurturing and encouraging, close, friendly, supportive, intimate, comforting and accepting (Goldman 2005). Fathers are also classified as being involved when their children have developed a strong, secure attachment to them. In this respect, fathers' involvement with children from an early age plays a critical role in ensuring positive outcomes, and has been found to equate with better cognitive development. It has also been realized that higher levels of father involvement are linked with learner excellence in grades and test scores (Jorosi-Tshiamo 2013; Holcomb et al. 2015), improved attendance, greater rates of homework completion, positive learner attitudes and behavior, greater enrollment rates in post secondary education leading to higher graduation rates (Henderson and Mapp 2002; Okeke 2014; Wilson 2015). Similarly, Goldman (2005) says that fathers' interest and participation is critical in the learning of their children as it is statistically connected with improved educational outcomes, higher exam results, accelerated progress at school, higher education-

al prospects, more optimistic attitudes and upright behavior. Therefore, the activities undertaken by parents at home tend to be more essential for the intellectual and social development of children than parental education occupation or income (Melhuish et al. 2004).

Studies in the United States that assessed the special effects of different types of parental involvement in homework also found that different forms of support such as for children's autonomy correlated with higher test scores (Flouri 2006; Duckworth 2008). Studies equally show that when fathers are involved, being nurturing and playful with their children from an infant stage, their children present with higher intelligence quotients (IQs), as well as enhanced linguistic and cognitive capabilities in school (Rosenberg and Wilcox 2006). Education for sustainable development therefore implies that educators and parents collaborate in making important decisions about educational alternatives and to ensure improvement in schools (Parker and Leithwood 2000). Taking into cognizance all the scholarly evidence in support of father involvement, it then becomes imperative to stimulate comprehensive partnerships between schools, parents and communities, that is, schools must provide a variety of opportunities for schools, families, and communities to work collectively (Rutherford and Billing 1995; Okeke 2014; Change 2015). In its endeavor to increase parental involvement in schools, the government of South Africa mandated the establishment of School Governing Bodies (SGBs) in order to create a healthier and stronger relationship between schools and communities (DoE 1996). The question is, are fathers also assuming responsibility and working hand-in-hand with teachers in promoting education in the foundational phase?

According to Fagan (2007), one way of increasing the involvement of men in the lives of their children is to involve fathers, other male relatives or family friends into the early childhood education programs. In this way these fathers would be made to feel welcome (Change 2015). However, as much as educators have to involve parents, one cannot assume that these educators will spontaneously know how to stimulate effective parent or family involvement. At the same time, the SASA No. 84 of 1996 (DoE 1996) does not show how educators invite all fathers to participate in the academic development of their children in the foundation phase.

Professional and in-service training for teachers that focus on work in partnership with families is not yet widely available, nor do numerous pre-service programs across the country offer training for future teachers in the development of school-family relationships (Statham et al. 2010). In their opinion, Heystek and Louw (1999) posit that parents as stakeholders in schools have minimum contribution in the school governance, and as such a partnership-oriented approach is essential to permit them to be more proactive in the education of their children. The suggestion is that programs must be grounded upon the individualized needs of the families, teachers, students, and community members that are involved (Christenson and Sheridan 2001). It is against this backdrop that this study was carried out to find the barriers and challenges educators face in trying to induce fathers' involvement in the academic development of their children in the foundation phase.

Challenges Confronting Fathers' Participation in Childhood Education

While cooperation between educators and parents is viewed as an essential component that leads to academic success, good behavior and high completion rate, there are barriers that hinder educators from inviting fathers and these are discussed in this literature overview. According to Green (2003), Kaye (2005), Palm and Fagan (2008), possible barriers to fathers' participation include staff and teacher attitudes, mothers' attitudes toward involving the father, societal views regarding male involvement in childcare, stereotype family and cultural beliefs, educational level of the fathers, irregular work schedules, and insufficient knowledge on the part of fathers on how involve themselves.

Earlier, Epstein and Dauber (1991), and Epstein and Van Voorhis (2001) assert that teachers' attitude and behavior towards the parents has been considered as a significant determinant in parents' decision to become involved. Sharing the same view is Shearer (2006:13) who advances some of the challenges confronting fathers from becoming entirely involved in the education of their children as lack of knowledge on childcare, inflexible work schedules; lack of finance and transportation to partake in school programs and occasions, lack of self-confidence in relating to a culture and/or language dissimi-

lar from their own, parental shame of their own educational failure, lack of mastery in written literacy skills, inadequate information on home-school partnership, different expectations about the role of the school, embarrassment in higher-class settings, and fear that they are not educated enough to be supportive in the classroom or to their own children.

However, it should be noted that the challenges identified might affect fathers differently depending on the social background and culture. Corroborating this notion are Sapungan and Sapungan (2014) who pronounce that the major impediments that constrain the parents' ability to actively participate in the education of their children include teachers' attitudes. While research acknowledges that involving fathers in the education of children has a positive influence on their academic development (Lemmer 2009; Miedel and Reynolds 1999; Studsrød and Bru 2009; Makgopa and Mokhele 2013; Okeke 2014), their involvement is dependent on teacher ability and willingness to involve them. In order for teachers to have positive relations with the fathers, the prerequisite is that teachers personally invite fathers to their classrooms. Hence, the first major challenge confronting fathers' participation is the lack of willingness on the part of educators to invite fathers in their classrooms (US Department of Health and Human Services 2010).

Another obstacle that is confronting fathers as noted above is the way schools communicate with parents. The means by which schools communicate and interrelate with parents affects the extent and quality of parental involvement with their children's learning. For example, using English in rural areas such as the Eastern Cape can be a barrier to some of the fathers to understand due to illiteracy. It is therefore imperative that educators use a language that is understood by fathers and the channel of communication should be such that the message is received by the fathers. Research has established that when parents are earnestly involved, their self-confidence in their ability to help their children with school assignments increases (Nistler and Maiers 2000).

Family resources have also been identified as a critical determining factor to fathers' involvement in schools. When fathers cannot adequately provide for the family, they tend to shy away from the school. Lee and Bowen (2006) reiterate

that without transportation and childcare, fathers are likely not to get involved in schools. Lack of time possibly due to inflexible work schedules has also been identified as a major barrier to fathers' participation in schools. In as much as fathers may want to be involved in schools, the issue of financial provision for the family becomes a priority to fathers. There is a need to identify ways of eradicating these barriers so that better avenues of collaboration between schools and fathers are created and the subsequent section identifies these strategies.

Strategies to Strengthen Fathers' Participation in Childhood Education

Prior studies have shown that when precise efforts are made to include fathers and father figures in the early childhood programs these men are more likely to participate (Green 2003; Okeke 2014; Change 2015), and when fathers participate in the education of their children, they have a better understanding of what is being taught in school and of teaching and learning in general. However, getting fathers involved in the academic progression of their children is not automatic but a habit and culture that calls for initiatives from the schools and following are strategies that have been identified by different scholars.

First and foremost, in order to involve fathers in the education of their children, meetings may be called to create a platform for collaboration. Sarkadi et al. (2008) explain that parents can be called to a meeting where the term "father" is broadly defined to embrace father figures such as stepfathers, uncles, grandfathers and other male family friends that are respected in the family. In the meetings, fathers can be educated on the importance of their presence in the educational programs and they may also be given an opportunity to state how they can contribute to the education of their children. An open forum based on respect and transparency can lead to a healthier relationship between fathers and educators. When common ground has been reached, a team of highly motivated educators can engage with fathers in developing programs that are tailor-made to suite the working and non-working fathers integrating father involvement into core targets and activities of the school (McAllister et al. 2004).

Even though female educators may be able to involve fathers, it is often contested that the best method to engage fathers is by recruiting male workers who are able to make men more visible (King 2005; Change 2015). Mentor learning groups facilitated by men can be formed where they share common experiences and boost each other's morale in terms of getting involved with children in the foundation phase. Another strategy would be to use community resources of existing male dominated clubs such as the Rotary, Kiwanis, Lions clubs and men's fellowship groups in religious institutions. King (2005) also suggests the use of a strengths-based approach, which adopts solution-focused philosophy and strives to develop men's desire to have a protective and loving relationship with their children. While the use of this framework usually assists in curbing gender violence, it will also develop general parenting skills and increase men's confidence and competence as caregivers.

Raising the awareness and importance of fathers' involvement is a strategy that educators can use by engaging with fathers through incidental contact like when the father collects the child from school, through community events and through word-of-mouth campaigning in existing community networks (King 2000). King et al. (2004) further advances that the staff has to be willing to try every possible approach such as adopting a community-based attitude to identify fathers' needs and connect with them through existing services. It is through this approach that educators can then share with fathers literature (print media) that shows traditional male roles, carefully selected books that are within the father's literacy levels and create an environment that encourages an open dialogue where fathers share their positive literacy experiences (Karther 2002:193)

According to Yeung (2004), starting a "fathers' club" can promote reliable male participation in a school. These clubs may be tasked with fundraising activities, enhancing the school's infrastructure, organizing parent community involvement occasions and other activities as suggested by the fathers. Events such as the Family Fun Day can be organized though these clubs where family photos can be taken. Of great impact would be "Me and My Dad" photos that may be displayed in the classrooms. These volunteer organizations will serve well as an exten-

sion of the school's Parent-Teacher Association/Organization in supporting efforts to creating a rich and comfortable learning environment for their children. This educational approach focuses on parents' strengths, accentuating consistent decision-making on prioritizing events and projects over time rather than quick fixes. It is through this educational approach that parents realize the importance of high quality interpersonal relationships for any learning to take place (Daro and Donnelly 2002). In addition, Green (2003) suggests that steps can be taken to enhance fathers' participation in early childhood programming including creating a culture of involvement with father friendly environments, assessing needs and stimuli to encourage fathers' buy-in, and providing diverse prospects for engagement at many levels, that is, individual, family, programs, and the community.

Getting fathers' involvement is a task that does not come naturally but needs skilful training and motivation. Hence, in order to increase father participation, there is need to provide educators with training on including fathers, and creating staff positions devoted to involving fathers in the educational activities (Raikes et al. 2005). Whilst many studies have been carried out on how to involve fathers in the education of their children the world over, none has focused on the Eastern Cape, hence the importance of this study. The Eastern Cape in South Africa is a unique area with distinctive challenges making it necessary to specifically identify the barriers to fathers' involvement in the education of their children.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The qualitative approach was adopted as it entails discovering unanticipated discoveries and the possibility of altering plans in response to accidental outcomes. A qualitative study is defined as an investigative process that seeks to understand social or human problems, based on structuring a complex, holistic picture, that is formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting (Creswell 2014). The qualitative approach ensured a proper understanding of the phenomenon under study beyond the surface, which could not otherwise have been gained with the use of a quantitative approach. This made the application of the case study necessary. Data

was collected through the semi-structured interviews from six (one male and five female ECD educators) purposively selected participants. The instrument was preferred for its premise in gathering firsthand information and based on the assumption, the researchers could obtain extensive empirical in-depth data from ordinary conversations with the participants (Maree 2007). Qualitative data was analyzed through a descriptive step-by-step approach that involved reading, re-reading and coding (Creswell 2014). Reading data obtained enabled the researchers to discover topics and individual aspects, which were then used to formulate various analytical categories described under the heading findings.

Credibility and Trustworthiness of Instruments

In order to guarantee trustworthiness, which means there is substance in the inquiry's findings to take cognizance of (Creswell 2014), there is need for factual accuracy of the account to be maintained. In the current study, this was obtained by using mechanically recorded data and presenting verbatim interpretations of respondents. Member checks on transcripts and analyzed texts were also done to ensure credibility of data (Creswell 2014). The use of a tape recorder enhanced the credibility and reliability of the study (Creswell 2014).

Ethical Requirements

In this study the researchers adhered to ethical considerations such as obtaining informed consent from participants, minimizing the risk of harm to participants, protecting and respecting their anonymity, confidentiality, and eluding deceptive practices (Creswell 2014). The researchers gained access to the research site and respondents through the gatekeeper in this case the principal of the school using the clearance letters from University Ethics Committee and the Education District Office where the study site was located. Participants were made to sign informed consent forms as a way of ensuring that they understood what it meant to participate in this particular research. Informed consent thus, gave the participants the freedom to participate and the leeway to withdraw at any stage. Pseudonyms were then used for the sake of confidentiality and anonymity in the reporting of the findings of the study.

FINDINGS

Participants' Views on Fathers' Involvement

The study set out to investigate the barriers that educators face in involving fathers in the academic development of their children in the foundation phase. Before finding about the barriers that prevented fathers' participation, the study sought to know if educators understood the concept of fathers' involvement in schools. The study found that educators in this particular school understood the concept of father involvement in the education of their children although they lamented that mothers are dominating in the lives of children. The participants in this study acknowledged that fathers' involvement meant the father being physically and emotionally present in the child's life and showing interest in their schoolwork. However, contrary to expectation many fathers were absent despite the increasing body of research indicating that fathers make a substantial contribution to the lives of their children (Katz et al. 2007; Sarkadi et al. 2008; Jorosi-Tshiamo 2013; Change 2015; Linn et al. 2015).

Teachers' Attitudes to Fathers' Involvement

While the concept of fathers' involvement has gained momentum and educators in this study understood the concept of father involvement, teacher attitudes towards fathers prevented fathers from becoming involved with their children's education. For instance, Grater stated, *"I think it has to do with my mindset or all educators that make us not to invite fathers"*. This sentiment was echoed by other participants in this study suggesting that their attitude towards fathers prevented them from inviting fathers to partake in the education of their children. The assertion by participants in this study confirm the claims by Kirkland and Sutch (2009), and Change (2015) about what they called the 'second order' barriers, which were based more on the perceptions and attitudes of people involved in any change. Educators may have the desire to include fathers in the education of their children, but in most schools parental involvement is usually limited to activities such as volunteering, fundraising, and helping children with homework, and these mainly involve women.

Types of Fathers' Jobs as Barriers

Even if teachers are ready to involve fathers in the education of their children, research shows that there are many dynamics that prevent fathers from being involved in the academic development of their children. In the Eastern Cape, it was noted that some fathers do not participate in school activities because of work commitments. Viviane considered *"job related issues because some fathers work far from home, while some work shifts"*. While fathers may want to be involved, some were prevented from doing so by the type of job they were engaged in, leaving no opportunity for them to be with their children more often. This corroborates the findings by Desmond and Desmond (2006) that in South Africa income was largely a determining issue for people to live together as families. Similarly, Henwood and Procter (2003) established that frequently men confess that they are not involved because of lack of time as a result of work commitments. Indeed, the role of being a provider remains a powerful source of identity predominantly for working class men (Warin et al. 1999).

The Absent Father Syndrome

Another major finding of this study was that while teachers may want to involve fathers they could not do so because the majority of them were absent from their families. Even when reference was made to the admission forms the columns requesting detailed information about the fathers were usually left uncompleted. This scenario appears to suggest that fathers did not take part in the education of the child or may not even be a part of the child's life. The study revealed that fathers were not involved because some families were broken due to divorce or death, the father never married the mother, or the father refused paternity of the child, which is a common scenario in South Africa. These findings corroborate that of Richter and Morrell (2006) who earlier observed that many children grow up without a father's presence in their homes or in their lives. Expressing the same sentiments was Ramphele (2002) who alleged that some men deserted their families and children out of frustration at not being able to satisfactorily look after them. Consequently, as Kaufman et al. (2010) had noted, large numbers of chil-

dren in South Africa live apart from their parents for longer or shorter periods.

Barriers Associated with Lack of Information on Child's Paternity

Another interesting revelation regarding barriers that confront teachers when trying to involve fathers was that the paternity of some of the children remains in doubt. Viviane, one of the participants, commented, *"I think fathers are not involved because some families are broken due to divorce or death, father never married the mother, father refused paternity of the child which is common in South Africa, father is married to the other woman or due to different reasons the mother does not want the child to associate with the father. Some fathers work far from home and only come home during weekend or after a very long time. Some fathers do not come because they work shifts that don't give them chance. Some fathers are never told about the child who is a result of rape, one night stand or illicit affairs. These things are now common in this society, and hence names of such fathers are not recorded on the child's documentation."*

The school cannot trace such fathers, as they were not present in the lives of children at home. In such cases fathers were never given the chance to right their wrongs by being present in the child's education. Posel and Devey (2006) ascertained that the level of paternal absence in South Africa exceeded the estimates elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa.

Barriers Informed by Economic and Educational Poverty

Last but not the least, research found that poverty and low level of education were constituting barriers to teachers involving fathers or even for fathers themselves willingly participating in school activities. Mike, one of the interviewees stated that, *"unemployment is very high in the area and most of the people live in the squatter camps that surround the school, most of the people have very little or no education and crime is high in the area. We have so many break-ins as you can see most of our fence has been destroyed"* (Possibly they just shy away from school because of the state they are in). Confirming this state of affairs, the United Na-

tions Development Program (UNDP) (2003) identifies unemployment as one of South Africa's prime challenge and mentions that almost half the country's population (48.5%) of over 44 million lives in extreme poverty, mainly as a result of the high unemployment rate. Lack of employment and services that empower people to maintain family life are one of the main culprits in the breakdown of families within poor communities (Amoateng and Richter 2003). This particular finding corroborates the assertion by Katz et al. (2007) that due to lack of education for parents to help their children, language variances and the alleged safety of the neighborhoods around the school were the major barriers to parental involvement in underprivileged areas.

DISCUSSION

The challenges that came out of this discourse were the teachers' attitudes to fathers' involvement (Kirkland and Sutch 2009; Change 2015), types of fathers' jobs as barriers (Henwood and Procter 2003), the father-absent syndrome as barriers to teachers (Richter and Morrell 2006), barriers associated with lack of information on child's paternity (Posel and Devey 2006) as well as barriers informed by economic and educational poverty (UNDP 2003).

The importance of fathers in the lives of their children cannot be underestimated as confirmed by the findings of this study where educators acknowledged fathers' roles as pillars, providers and protectors of their family. However, in this research setting, fathers had not been involved because the educators had not taken the initiative to involve them. This finding is in line with Sapungan and Sapungan's (2014) observation that major obstacles constraining the ability of parents becoming actively involved in their children's education may include the attitudes teachers have towards parents. Educators in this setting confessed that the thought of sending a special invitation to fathers had never crossed their minds as they were used to addressing their communication by saying *"Dear parents"* apparently because they were of the assumption that most children lived with both parents or did not live with their fathers.

Data also revealed that job related issues hindered fathers from participating in the academic development of their children. It was established that some fathers work shifts while

others work very far from home, which meant they had less contact with the school. While numerous studies have attested to how father-death has adversely affected many children who have been left fatherless (Ngobeni 2006) due to incarceration (Morrell 2001) and divorce (Hunter 2010; Posel et al. 2011) not much has been said about fathers who do not reside with their children by choice because they have to fend for their families in faraway places. Such fathers are more likely to become involved with their children when opportunities to do so are available for them (Cohen 1993). However, high unemployment in certain areas drives people into migration and urbanization, and hence absent fathers are often described by labor migration (Mboya and Nesengani 1999; Morrell et al. 2003).

Another barrier that was presented is unemployment. When the father is unemployed the whole family suffers. Within the South African context, the impact of the apartheid policy on unemployment created inequalities with regard to the distribution of opportunities, income, wealth and land ownership (Rabe 2006). It is these situations that become push factors for men to move away from their families in search of economic freedom.

The study also uncovered that many children did not live with their fathers confirming the results coming from Statistics South Africa (Republic of South Africa 2011), which stated that only one third of children in preschool in South Africa lived under the same roof with their fathers and mothers. In the absence of fathers, educators in this setting tend to invite mothers to school events more than fathers. Rabe (2006) ascertained that while it may not be their intention to abandon their families, some men are driven by the shame of not being able to provide for their families due to unemployment. Richter et al. (2012 and Roy 2008) support this assertion by saying that the absence of fathers from the lives of their children is on the rise in many societies nowadays evidently due to poverty that goes hand-in-hand with the virtually permanent absence of biological fathers from many homes. Men's economic contributions in a family could make a real difference by pulling children out of poverty, and yet in this study, the poverty cycle goes on as the father-absent syndrome continues.

CONCLUSION

The study set out to explore the barriers educators face in involving fathers in the educa-

tion of their children in the foundation phase. A qualitative research approach was adopted and data was collected through semi-structured interviews. The findings of the study revealed that fathers were not keen to participate in the education of their children. It is therefore concluded that effective father participation in the education of the child is necessary in achieving the goals of early childhood education. Research with educators struggling to engage with fathers can shed new light on pathways by illuminating and refining understandings of ecological factors that promote change that enable schools to continue to seek better ways to ensure that fathers participate in the education and the overall social development of children.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the above findings, this study recommends the following:

1. Professional training should be afforded to educators on how to design programs that encourage and include fathers in the education of their children.
2. Schools should organize family fun days where the fathers are invited, and made aware of the benefits of their involvement in the child's education.
3. Male educators should be recruited in the phase to serve as role models to both fathers and their children in the school programs.
4. Programs should be tailor-made to suite all categories of fathers in order to encourage father participation regardless of their economic status.
5. Further research should be carried out into the challenges educators face in involving mothers in the education of their children in the foundation phase.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The researchers would like to highlight that the over sensitivity of the study made participants reluctant in sharing their experiences on involving fathers in the education of their children. At first contact participants were nervous to respond to issues relating to father involvement. Given this, it is possible that participants may have withdrawn some very useful information that may contribute to better strategies of

involving fathers in the education of their children. Readers are therefore cautioned on how inferences may be drawn from the findings of this study.

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