

Types of parent involvement in schools in the Omusati education region of Namibia

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Abstract

Little research has been conducted in the areas of parental involvement in education in Namibia. In this article the views of parents regarding their involvement in education were investigated. Data were collected using a questionnaire which was administered to a systematic sample of one hundred and fifty six (156) parents of learners in grades eight to ten from a random sample of ten (10) combined and junior secondary schools. It is clear from the study that parents are involved only in some activities such as feeding and dressing the children for school, attending parent -teacher meetings, discussing school matters, voting in school board elections, helping children with homework, ensuring that children behave well both at home and at school, providing a quiet place for homework, teaching children the alphabet and that they attend school functions. However, parents were less frequently involved in activities such as attending parents' evenings, helping elsewhere, helping with special groups such as sport and drama, , limiting TV viewing, helping the school to set challenging academic grades, discussing the child's progress, and checking homework every night.

Introduction

There is a growing body of research providing convincing evidence that improving partnerships between schools and parents has a positive impact on the educational achievement of young people at all stages in education. The input of parents makes critical contributions to learner achievement from preschool through high school. Henderson and Mapp (2002) argue that when parents get involved in the education of their children, learners go to class more regularly, do their homework, perform better, behave better at school and go to post-secondary institutions. Home-school relationships are therefore no longer a luxury and an urgent need for parents and community to support the education of children should thus be recognized (Lemmer, 1999).

The most effective types of parent involvement activities are those that engage parents in working directly with their children on learning activities at home. Parents can be involved in their children's education either at home or at school, or both. For example, there are three kinds of parent involvement at home that are consistently associated with higher learner achievement, namely: actively

organizing and monitoring a child's time, helping with homework and discussing school matters (Cotton & Wikelund, 2002).

Similarly, research (Cotton & Wikelund, 2001; Munn, 1993) showed that active types of parent involvement produce greater achievement benefits than passive ones. Active types of parent involvement at the school level include: monitoring attendance, attending parent-teacher meetings, volunteering in their child's classroom and observation of classroom, helping with and participating in school fundraising and getting involved in decisions related to the education of their children (Munn, 1993).

These activities motivate learners to take their education seriously, work harder, hence enabling them to achieve higher grades at schools (Cotton & Wikelund, 2001).

Before Namibia's independence, not many children attended school. Most of those who attended, did not engage in further studies. This was exacerbated by the apartheid education system, which was once a privilege of the few and, in fact, was not democratic (Ministry of Education (MEC, 1993). For instance, the majority of the black population was denied access to quality education and parents did not have the right to participate in education matters (MEC, 1993).

In the apartheid education system, parents were not considered as partners in education. They were, furthermore, not considered in most decisions made with regard to their children's education (Ministry of Basic Education, Sport and Culture (MBESC, 2004). This led parents to believe that it was the responsibility of the government to educate their children, and they felt that they were not part of the school, even after independence (Kaperu, 2004).

At independence in 1990, the new government made education one of its priority areas and, consequently, many changes were made (Ministry of Basic Education and Culture (MBEC, 1999). One such important change was the enactment of the Education Act 16 of 2001. The Act, in accordance with the Namibian Constitution, seeks to address the past imbalances and practices in the education system such as inequality, segregation, inequity and fragmentation, to mention a few. Among other goals, the education act strives to develop democracy in Namibia's education system by allowing adequate parent and community participation in education (MBESC, 2004).

In January 2001, the Ministry of Education developed a customer service charter for primary and secondary schools in Namibia. This Charter sets out and explains clearly the duties and responsibilities of schools, parents and the community.

While schools are providing education to learners, it is also expected from learners and their parents to play their part in fulfilling their obligations (Customer Service Charter for Primary and Secondary schools in Namibia, 2001). The Charter clearly states that parents are expected to ensure that their children are fed and properly dressed, attend school every day, have enough rest needed for their overall development, do their homework as instructed by their teachers and have a quiet place to study. The Charter further states that parents should study their children's school reports, attend parent meetings at schools, advise their children on career choices and contribute to schools in kind when asked.

Based on the above discussions, there is a clear indication that parent involvement plays an important role in enhancing children's learning and improving their behaviour. The purpose of this article will be to generate some views of Namibian parents regarding the types of involvement of parents in education.

Method

Research Design

Due to its nature, this study renders itself to descriptive quantitative design research. Quantitative research occurs in two forms: experimental and non-experimental designs. In experimental design, the researcher is free to manipulate research conditions. In a non-experimental design, there is no manipulation of conditions. Rather, the investigator makes observations or obtains measures from subjects in order to describe something that has occurred (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997). In this study, it was not possible for the researchers to directly manipulate the independent variable (parents' views), because it was assumed that the parents' views regarding their roles in the education of their children were already formed, hence a non-experimental design was used.

Population and Sample

The desired population of the study was all the parents of learners in grades eight to ten from all combined and junior secondary schools in the Omusati region. The random sampling method was employed to draw up the sample. Ten percent of combined and junior to secondary schools constituting 10 schools, were selected from the defined schools to serve as a sample. At each school, 10 percent of learners were systematically selected from the class lists of grade eight, nine and ten classes. Parents/guardians of those learners formed a sample of 156 parents.

Instrument

Data were collected through a structured questionnaire made up of scaled, checklist, open-ended, and yes or no questions. The questionnaire was translated into Oshindonga. Only a few were in English for non-Oshindonga speaking parents and other parents who could read and write in English. The parents' questionnaire was divided into five sections.

The first section was used to collect biographical information such as gender, age, language, marital status, level of education, name of employer, occupation, employment status income category, distance from school, means of transport to and from school, and number of children attending school.

The second section asked about the types of parental involvement in their children's education as well as the types of communication between school and home. The third section collected information on parents' views regarding their roles in their children's education. The fourth section asked questions on the factors that influence parental involvement. Finally, the fifth section of the questionnaire asked for information on the strategies to improve parental involvement in their children's education.

Procedure

The questionnaires were administered to the parents whose children attended the sampled schools. To protect the respondents' right to privacy and voluntary participation, written consent was obtained from the participants to participate in the study.

In addition, to observe the issue of participants' anonymity, their names were not used in the questionnaire. Respondents were further assured that the information given in the questionnaire would be treated with confidentiality. Respondents were also assured that data would only be used for research purposes and that no other unauthorized person would have access to the raw data.

Data Analysis

Data were prepared for computer entry, cleaning and processing at the University of Namibia's Statistics Department by using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive analysis such as frequencies and percentages were used to compare the proportions of the responses from parents.

Additionally, the chi-square test was used to determine whether there were significant relationships and/or differences or not in responses based on the variables of gender, age, language, marital status, level of education, employment status, name of employer, occupation, income, distance from school, means of transport to reach the school, and number of children attending school.

Results

In this section the authors presented the views of parents regarding the different types of involvement in education. An assessment of the relationships and differences between biographical variables and the types of involvement will also be given.

Views of parents towards the different types of parent involvement

There were seventeen statements on the views of parents towards the different activities in which parents can involve themselves in the education of their children. The results are summarized in table 1. Considering the trend of all the responses it seems as if the majority of the parents agreed not to be involved in school-related activities (activities 1, 2, 3, 5,6, 8, and 9) whereas the minority of the parents agreed to be more involved in such activities (activities 4, 7, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15,16, and 17).

Table 1: Views of parents towards types of involvement

ACTIVITIES	Never/ Sometimes		Often/ Very often		No response	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
1. Attending parent evenings	107	87.0	13	10.6	3	2.4
2. Helping elsewhere in school	83	67.5	37	30.1	3	2.4
3. Helping with special groups such as sports and dramas	83	67.5	36	29.2	4	3.3
4. Providing a quiet place for homework	40	32.5	82	66.7	1	0.8
5. Checking homework every night	64	52.0	58	47.2	1	0.8
6. Discussing child’ progress	78	63.4	44	35.8	1	0.8
7. Voting in school board elections	26	21.1	95	77.3	2	1.6
8. Helping school to set challenging academic grades	79	64.2	42	34.2	2	1.6
9. Limiting TV viewing	81	65.8	40	32.6	2	1.6

10. Feeding and dressing child	9	7.3	113	91.9	1	0.8
11. Attending school functions	32.8	30.9	78	63.4	7	5.7
12. Helping the child with homework	31	25.2	90	73.2	2	1.6
13. Paying school fees	7	5.7	113	91.9	3	2.4
14. Ensuring the child behaves well both at home and at school	36	29.3	86	69.9	1	0.8
15. Teaching children the alphabet	42	34.1	79	64.3	2	1.6
16. Discussing school matters	29	23.6	92	74.8	2	1.6
17. Attending parent-teacher meetings	10	8.1	110	89.5	3	2.4

Note: Total N is less than 123 because of missing values

A perusal of table1 reveals that between 60% to 92% of the parents agreed that they feed and dress children (91.9%), that they pay school fees (91.9%), that they attend parent-teacher meetings (89.5%), that they discuss school matters (78.4%),that they vote in school board elections (77.3%), that they help children with homework (73.2%), that they ensure that the child behaves well both at home and at school (69.9%), that they provide a quiet place for homework (66.7%), that they teach children the alphabet (64.3%) and that they attend school functions (63.4%). About 50% and 87% of the parents disagreed that they attend parent evenings at school (87.0%), that they participated in the activity of helping elsewhere (67.5%), that they help with special groups such as sport and drama (67.5%), that they limit TV viewing (65.8%), that they help the school to set challenging grades (64.2%), that they discuss the child’s progress (63.4%) and that they check homework every night (52.0%).

The relationship between biographical variables and the types of parent involvement

A chi-square analysis of these data revealed that there were significant differences in parent’s views with respect to gender, age and distance from school (see tables 2-6).

Table 2: Parent’s attendance of parent evenings, by gender

GENDER	Frequency of extent of use									
	Never		Some-times		Often		Very often		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Male	10	8.1	6	4.9	5	4.1	0	0.0	21	17.1
Female	86	69.9	5	4.1	5	4.1	3	2.4	99	80.5
Total	96	78.0	11	8.9	10	8.1	3	2.4	120	97.6

Note: Chi-square=4.437; df =1; p<0.05

Table 2 shows that significantly more female parents (74%) disagreed that they attended parent evenings at school than the male ones (13%). This difference was found to be statistically significant.

Table 3: Whether parents discuss their children’s progress, by age

AGE	Frequency of extent of use									
	Never		Sometimes		Often		Very Often		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
20-24	1	0.8	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	0.8
30-34	0	0.0	1	0.8	2	1.6	3	2.4	6	4.9
35-39	1	0.8	1	0.8	1	0.8	0	0.0	3	2.4
40-44	7	5.7	4	3.3	4	3.3	6	4.9	21	17.1
45-49	8	6.5	2	1.8	8	6.5	2	1.6	20	16.3
Over 50	20	16.3	33	18.6	10	8.1	8	6.5	71	57.7
Total	37	30.1	41	33.3	25	20.3	19	15.4	122	99.2

Note: Chi-square=12.822; df =5; p<0.05

Table 3 indicates that more parents in the age categories of more than 50 years (34.9%) disagreed that they discussed their children’s progress at school compared to parents in the age categories of 45-49 years (6.5%), 40-44 years

(5.7%), 35-39 years (0.8%), 20-24 (0.8%), and 30-34 years (0.0%). The difference was found to be statistically significant.

Table 4: Whether parents vote in school board elections, by Distance from school

SCHOOL DISTANCE	Frequency of extend of use									
	Never		Sometimes		Often		Very Often		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
0-500m	1	0.8	5	4.1	10	8.1	5	4.1	21	17.1
501m-1km	3	2.4	2	1.6	30	24.4	14	11.4	49	39.8
1.1km-1.5km	4	3.3	2	1.8	10	8.1	3	2.4	19	15.4
1.6km-to 2km	1	0.8	0	0.0	8	6.5	1	0.8	10	8.1
2.1km-2.5km	4	3.3	0	0.0	3	2.4	2	1.6	9	7.3
2.6km-3km	3	2.4	1	0.8	2	1.6	3	2.4	9	7.3
3.1km or more	0	0.0	0	0.0	3	2.4	2	1.6	5	4.1
Total	16	13.0	10	8.1	66	53.6	30	21.6	122	99.2

Note: Chi-square =13.320, df =6; P<0.05

According to Table 4, more parents who lived within the distance of 501m-1km (35.8%) agreed that they voted in School Board elections at school than the parents who lived within the distance of 0m-500m (12.2%), 1.1km-1.5km (10.5%),1.6km-2km (7.3%), 2.1km-2.5km (4%), 2.6km-3km (4.1%), and 3.1km or more (4.1%). This difference was found to be statistically significant.

Table 5: Whether parents help the school to set challenging academic grades, by Income category

INCOME CATEGORY	Frequency of extent of use									
	Never		Sometimes		Often		Very often		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
No income	50	40.6	1	0.8	20	16.2	7	5.6	78	63.4
N\$450-N\$900	18	14.6	4	3.3	1	0.8	5	4.1	28	22.7
N\$901-N\$1350	1	0.8	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	0.8
N\$1351- N\$1800	1	0.8	1	0.8	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	1.6
N\$1801-N\$2350	2	1.6	0	0.0	3	2.4	2	1.6	7	5.6

Over N\$2351	1	0.8	0	0.0	2	1.6	2	1.6	5	4.1
Total	73	59.3	6	4.8	26	12.1	16	13.0	121	98.3

Note: Chi-square =12.370; df =4; P<0.05

Table 5 indicates that more parents with no income (41.4%) disagreed that they helped the school to set academically challenging grades than the parents in the income categories of N\$450-N\$900 (17.9%), N\$1801-N\$2350 (1.6%), over N\$2351 (0.8%), N\$901-N\$1350 (0.8%), and N\$1351-N\$1800 (1.6%). Also, more parents with no income (21.8%) agreed that they helped the school to set academically challenging grades than the parents with income (78.2%). The difference was found to be statistically significant.

Table 6: Whether parents limit television watching on school nights, by Gender

GENDER	Frequency of extent of use									
	Never		Some-times		Often		Very often		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Male	10	8.1	0	0.0	7	5.7	4	3.3	21	17.1
Female	57	46.3	14	11.3	20	16.3	9	7.3	100	81.3
Total	67	54.5	14	11.4	40	22.0	13	10.6	121	98.4

Note: Chi-square=4.287; df =1; p<0.05

According to table 6, more female parents (57.6%) disagreed that they limited their children’s time of watching TV on school nights as compared to their male counterparts (8.1%).

Yet, the females parents who agreed that they limited their children’s time of watching TV on school nights (23.6%) were more than the male ones (9%). The difference was found to be statistically significant.

Discussion

An attempt was made in the preceding section to analyze and report the results. The objective of this section is to interpret those findings. The interpretation of

results will be done in the order in which they were presented in the preceding section.

The activities in which parents involved themselves were arranged in terms of parents' ranking. The first two ranks were occupied by feeding and dressing the child properly for school and paying school fees. The activity of feeding and dressing the child properly for school is in line with the Ministry of Education Customer Service Charter (Ministry of Education, 2001) which encourages parents to ensure that their children are fed and dressed properly for school. This could mean that the majority of parents understand the negative effects of learners going to school hungry, and that the parents do not want their children to be trapped in such a situation. A child who is hungry would be preoccupied with thinking about how to satisfy his/her hunger or may fall asleep during lessons, instead of concentrating in the classrooms.

The activity of paying school fees is supported by Kaperu (2004) who carried out an investigation on perceptions of parents, teachers, and learners on parents' involvement in education. Kaperu found that parents believed that it was the responsibility of teachers to educate their children.

They (parents) also indicated that parents' involvement was only when parents were involved in some aspects of education such as sending children to school and paying school fees. This is a clear indication that some parents are still not well informed about other activities that they can be involved in to assist their children in school.

The third rank of the activities investigated in this study was occupied by attending parent-teacher meetings. This finding is consistent with those observed by Cotton and Wikelund (2001).

They found that the involvement of parents in education included reading to the child, checking homework every night, discussing the child's progress with teachers, voting in school board elections, helping the school to set challenging academic grades, establishing a TV watching schedule that does not interfere with their homework and studies and limiting TV viewing on school nights. This could mean that the majority of parents have the knowledge and understanding of the importance of attending parents' meetings.

In the fourth rank of the investigated activities for parent involvement, was voting in school board elections. This finding is consistent with those of Lareau (1989), who found that parental involvement entails preparing children for school,

teaching children the alphabet, voting in school board elections and talking and reading to children in order to promote their language development. This could mean that the majority of parents benefitted from the roles that the school board played in the education of their children.

The data further showed that significantly more parents who lived within the distance of 501m-1km than those who lived within the distance of 1.1km-1.5km, 1.6km-2km and 3.1km or more agreed that they voted in school board elections at school. The deduction that could be made is that parents living far from school were not involved in voting in the school board elections. This could be due to a lack of transport to reach the school.

The fifth rank was occupied by discussing school matters. The study revealed that the majority of parents agreed that they discussed school matters with their children.

The deduction that could be made is that parents discuss school matters with their children in order to make right career choices. In doing so, parents can make sure that their children select the right subjects that will lead to good career prospects.

The activity that occupied the sixth rank was helping the child with homework. The study revealed that the majority of parents agreed that they helped their children with homework. This finding is in line with the findings reported by Munn (1993) who found that the involvement of parents in the education of their children entails many aspects such as parents ensuring that the child does homework after school. It could therefore be deduced that all parents want their children to succeed in school.

The seventh rank of the activities was occupied by ensuring that children behave well both at home and at school. This could be that parents want to ensure that their children are disciplined because disciplined children are less likely to have behavioural problems that can interfere with school performance.

Providing a quiet place for doing homework occupied the eighth rank. This means that parents want to improve the focus and the concentration of their children. They have an understanding of the importance of doing the homework in a quiet place where the child will not be disturbed by other siblings or by daily household chores.

Teaching the child the alphabet was ranked ninth. This explains that parents want to provide their children with a solid foundation to understand their work and be able to read.

The tenth rank was occupied by attending school functions. Parents attend school functions in order to know the people important to their children's success; to discuss the importance of educational issues of their children; and to become well-informed about school matters such as school board elections, and curriculum expectations.

The eleventh rank which received lower rates of agreement was checking homework every night. The results revealed that less than half of parents disagreed that they checked their children's homework every night. These parents might not be able to read and write.

The twelfth rank was occupied by discussing the child's progress in school. This finding is contrary to those by Cotton and Wikelund (2001) who found that the involvement of parents in the education of their children included reading to the child, discussing the child's progress with teachers, helping the school to set challenging academic grades. This implies that parents do not demonstrate their involvement in the education of their children by engaging themselves in educational discussions with their children.

With regard to age, the study revealed that more parents in the age categories of 50 years and above than parents in the age categories of 45-49 years, 40-44 years, 35-39 years, 20-24 years and 30-34 years disagreed that they discussed their children's progress in school with teachers (see table 3 above). It could imply that these parents do not understand the importance of parents' involvement in the education of their children or that these parents are a product of the apartheid system that purposefully kept parents out of their children's education.

The thirteenth rank was occupied by helping the school to set challenging academic grades. The study also revealed that 34.2 percent of the parents disagreed that they help the school to set challenging academic grades.

This finding is contrary to those reached by Cotton and Wikelund (2001), whose findings showed that the involvement of parents in education includes helping the school to set challenging academic grades. The message here could be that more parents were not provided with the opportunities for technical support in the curriculum and assessment of the education of their children.

Further analysis of the data revealed that significantly more parents with no income compared to those with an income disagreed that they helped schools in setting challenging academic grades.

This could imply that the majority of parents with no income were the parents with little or with no education at all. As a result, these parents might not be able to help in setting challenging academic grades for the school.

The fourteenth rank was occupied by limiting TV viewing. This finding is contrary to those of Cotton and Wikelund (2002) who found that parent involvement in school-related activities included reading to the child, establishing a TV watching schedule that does not interfere with the children's time to do homework and study and limiting TV viewing on school nights, among others. The deduction could be that since the majority of parents in the Omusati region do not have TV in their homes, they indicated that they did not limit their children's time to watch TV.

The data also revealed that significantly more female parents than male parents disagreed that they limited their children's time of watching TV on school nights. This could mean that the majority of male parents understand the negative effects of TV watching on the academic achievement of children while the female parents might not have this understanding at all.

The fifteenth rank was occupied by helping elsewhere in school. The message that could be communicated is that some schools do not ask parents to help in school activities such as extra-curricular activities. Another deduction that could be made here is that some parents with negative experiences are hesitant to participate in school-related activities.

Also some parents get discouraged from participating in schools because school administrators and teachers undermine the roles they can play in school activities.

The sixteenth rank was occupied by helping with special groups such as sports and drama. The results revealed 29 percent of the parents agreed that they helped with special groups such as sports and drama in school.

The deduction that could be made is that parents want to gain specific skills of sports and other school related activities. They might also gain self-confidence in their ability to work with teachers and learners.

The seventeenth rank was occupied by attending parents' evenings. The results of the study revealed that the majority of the parents disagreed that they attended parent evenings at school.

This finding is contrary to that of Lareau (1989) who observed that parents' involvement activities entailed preparing children for school, attending parents' evenings, attending and fulfilling any instructions given by teachers to parents such as helping the children with homework. This could be because of lack of time that many parents do not attend parents' evenings. The data furthermore reveal that significantly more female parents than male parents disagreed that they attended parents' evenings at school. The deduction could be that a major impediment to female parents to attend parents' evenings was, as said earlier, the lack of time. Working female parents might not be able to attend parents' evenings.

Conclusion

The research findings indicated that parents in the Omusati region of Namibia are only involved in some aspects of parent involvement activities, and leave the rest as responsibilities of teachers. This does not necessarily mean that parents do not want to be involved in education, but that limited knowledge regarding parental involvement in the education of their children is the problem. Therefore, for effective parent involvement to be achieved, it is important for directors to encourage schools to establish and maintain good relationships with parents. It is furthermore recommended that school authorities in the Omusati region should train parents on parental involvement activities. This will enable parents to get a broader understanding of what parent's involvement in education is all about, and to learn different ways in which they can possibly get involved in the education of their children.

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