

Art. #2329, 8 pages, <https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v43ns2a2329>

Narratives of parents' participation in their children's education

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Parents are an important part of any educational progress, and they are recognised as of key importance in children's learning. In addition, fruitful parents' participation in children's education has been reported to facilitate the development of learners' values, positive attitudes, and behaviour in which their emotional balance and maturity have also been reported to be supported and boosted. With this study, we sought to investigate narratives of parents' participation in their children's education at a secondary school in the Amathole West district of the Eastern Cape province, South Africa. The study was underpinned by Epstein's theory of parental involvement and the ecological framework. A qualitative approach was adopted in this study, with a sample of 8 participants (parents), and data were collected through interviews. The findings reveal that parents who were fully involved in their children's education could track and monitor their children's progress at school and such parents quickly knew about any problems and talked to their children's teacher about it. Consequently, we recommend that parents must be more actively involved in their children's education by collaborating with their children's teachers to bring out the best in their children.

Keywords: children; education; narrative; parents' involvement; participation; school

Introduction

Many researchers in the field of education have long been interested in the positive effect of parents' participation on their children's academic performance and achievement (Đurišić & Bunijevac, 2017; Munje & Mncube, 2018). Hence, this perception has led to an ample body of literature about parents' participation (Duman, Aydin & Ozfidan, 2018; Howard, 2015; Tshabalala, 2013). Likewise, policymakers, school administrators, teachers, parents, researchers, and children themselves seem to agree that parents' participation is a critical element for youngsters' academic excellence (Đurišić & Bunijevac, 2017; O'Toole, Kiely, McGillicuddy, O'Brien & O'Keeffe, 2019; Selolo, 2018). Parents who are actively involved in their children's education are believed to promote children's academic, emotional, and social development (Boonk, Gijsselaers, Ritzen & Brand-Gruwel, 2018; Munje & Mncube, 2018).

Parents' participation in their children's education involves a variety of actions that parents involve themselves in for the benefit of their children at school. Parents' participation includes activities of parents at home and school. Home-based involvement includes activities such as helping with homework, setting standards or expectations, and socializing children in school behaviour (Kigobe, Ghesquière, Ng'Umbi & Van Leeuwen, 2019; Selolo, 2018). School-based involvement includes volunteering at school, parents' involvement in school governance, and attending parent-teacher conferences (Selolo, 2018).

Such involvement includes activities such as engaging children in discussions about school, helping them with homework, visiting the school to get to know the teachers to be informed about their children's performance in school, and getting actively involved in the school's policies (Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). These involvements have been reported to have a positive impact on children's learning outcomes and academic success (Lavenda, 2011). It has been reported that children perform better, have better attitudes towards school, and have more expectations from school when their parents participate in their education (O'Neil-Kerr, 2014). Parents and teachers are the two main educators in a child's life because they influence the child's learning throughout school and beyond (Parveen, Hussain & Reba, 2016). Parents play an important part in any educational progress, and they are recognised as key to children's learning. In addition, fruitful parent involvement in children's education has been reported to facilitate the development of learners' values, positive attitudes, and behavior in which their emotional balance and maturity have also been reported to be supported and boosted (Jaiswal, 2017; Munje & Mncube, 2018). To understand the narrative of parents in the education of their children, with this study, we sought to investigate how parents participated in the education of their children and why they participated in the way they did.

Literature Review

This study indicated that there was a need and a demand for increased parent participation in their children's education. Research done in the African context also highlights that parents' participation is critical if children are to succeed (Dotterer & Wehrspann, 2016; Kigobe et al., 2019). It has been observed that the nature and level of parents' involvement, such as parents' commitment and monitoring of their children's education was lacking (Ezati, McBrien, Stewart, Ssempala & Ssenkusu, 2016).

In Ghana, it was observed that there was little involvement of parents in their children's education (Fihla, 2018). Parent participation appeared to be historically limited to activities at home such as the completion of homework while some parents lacked interest in their children's education resulting in low parent participation

in some schools (Chowa, Ansong & Osei-Akoto, 2012). Likewise, parental participation in Botswana was minimal, especially in rural and remote areas of the country (Pansiri & Bulawa, 2013). In four countries in Northern Africa parent participation in the lives of their children was very low in Morocco, very high in Tunisia, and in-between in Libya and Egypt (Abdirahman, Fleming & Jacobsen, 2013). In Africa, the major factor affecting parents' participation in the education of their children is the reconfiguration of living brought about by the current economies. Many parents spend more time at work, having little or no time to spend at home with their children. Some middle-class families have left their duties in the hands of housemaids and nannies who not only attend to the children's physical and educational needs, such as helping with homework (Uusimäki, Yngvesson, Garvis & Harju-Luukkainen, 2019).

In Nigeria, most parents do not understand the importance of parent participation in their children's education, and policymakers do not understand how to facilitate and encourage parents' participation in schools (Selolo, 2018). In Nigeria, it is common to see children of school-going age hawking after and during school hours. As parent participation is very low, this brings about failure, absenteeism, bad behavior, and poor academic performance in schools.

In Zimbabwe, parental participation is understood as buying uniforms, paying fees, choosing the best schools for children, and only communicating with teachers and school administrators upon request (Nyemba & Chitiyo, 2018). Also, statutory Instrument 87 of 1992 which is for non-governmental schools, and 70 of 1993 for governmental schools involves parents with the support of legal power to foster tolerance, collective decision-making, and discussion in the education system hoping to bring rehabilitation to the school system. The amendment pronounced in the 2006 Act, calls on parents to bridge the gap between what the government provides and what the schools in the communities want (Samkange, 2016).

In South Africa education has also significantly changed since the election of 1994 (Munje & Mncube, 2018; Selolo, 2018). Transformational documents such as White Papers I and II on Education and Training (Department of Education [DoE], 1995, 1996); the South African Qualifications Act (Republic of South Africa [RSA], 1995); the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 (RSA, 1996b); the South African Schools Act (No. 84 of 1996) (RSA, 1996a); and other documents stipulate the state's expectations regarding parents' participation in their children's education. The South Africa Schools Act (SASA) gives parents the authority to act on behalf of the school and for the benefit of the

school and the community (Haines, 2012). In terms of the SASA, the school governing body (SGB) is the government of the school mandated to set policies and rules that govern the school's functions and implement the rules (Mncube, Harber & Du Plessis, 2011).

Furthermore, to increase parents' participation in South Africa, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) developed a booklet on how parents can contribute meaningfully to the education of their children, guiding them on how they can be involved both at home and in the school to improve their children's education. Also, parents are expected to contribute to the education of their children by deciding on the school policies that affect the education of their children (Mncube, 2010). These reforms have created an environment more conducive to parents' participation in schools, however, actual parent participation remains weak (Lemmer & Van Wyk, 2004). Therefore, we sought to investigate narratives of parents' participation in their children's education.

Theoretical Framework

Joyce Epstein, a Director of the Centre for School, Family, and Community Partnerships at Johns University in Baltimore developed the theory of parental involvement, a broad theory of partnership. Epstein's theory redefines the relationship between schools, families, and communities as overlapping spheres of influence that have a common concern about the success of children. Epstein (1995) first developed a theoretical theory; the main tenet of this theory was to explain parental involvement from three perspectives, namely, (a) separate responsibilities of families and schools, (b) shared responsibilities of families and schools, and (c) sequential responsibilities between the school and families. Epstein (1987) argues that the distinct goal of parents and teachers is considered to yield positive results when teachers maintain their professional standards and decisions for children in their classrooms while parents maintain their standards and decisions for their children at home. Concerning shared responsibilities of families and schools, Epstein (1987) posits that the school and parents should work together in a coordinated, cooperative, and complementary manner. Both the school and parents share a responsibility towards the socialisation and education of children, and this can be achieved when they work together. The third perspective, sequential responsibilities between the school and families explains how teachers and parents are involved in children's education and what their contributions to children's development are. The sequential perspective emphasises that children's early years are critical for future success and by the time the child is in kindergarten or Grade 1 (5 and 6 years), the

attitudes and personalities to learning are well established (Epstein, 1987). We, therefore, sought to establish how and why parents participate in their children's education based on the three perspectives.

The theory of shared responsibilities of families and schools was the core perspective of this study. The theory emphasises families and schools working together in oneness. When parents and teachers share their duties, children's educational needs are met and performances are improved (Munje & Mncube, 2018). When parents and teachers collaborate, children achieve effectively, and this collaboration supports the generalisation of skills required by the teachers and parents to produce successful children (Haines, 2012). The theory argues that the relationship between school and home can enhance children's progress and reinforcement in the two-learning environment (Chen & Gregory, 2009; Epstein, 2018). Epstein argues that teachers who work with parents understand their learners better; they can do exceptionally better and can reach a shared understanding with the parents and learners. According to Epstein's (1987) overlapping spheres of influence, the school and parents share goals and a mission, and this can be an external and Internal structure. The external model (school, community, and parents) identifies major contexts in which children can learn and develop and they can be practiced separately or jointly to support children's learning (Epstein, 1995). The internal model shows how the relationship between parents, school, and community is complex and essential, and brings about influence between individuals at home, school, and the community (Epstein, 1995, 2018).

Furthermore, Epstein (1995) developed a yardstick about parents' involvement into six major types claiming that parents, community, and school should work together as partners to assist their children to succeed in their education and life. The first type of involvement comprises parents' duties: suggestions for parents about home conditions that support children's learning and education, training and educating parents on support programs to help their children with health, and nutrition, and meetings to help parents understand schools and schools understanding parents. Haines (2012) advises that schools must consider parents and the situation of their home circumstances when they plan ways of assisting parents and getting information from them regarding their children. The second type is school obligations: parents communicating with the school and the school communicating with the parents concerning school programs and the children's progress, conferences/meetings at least once a year with the parents, phone calls, newsletter/report books/children's folders sent home monthly and other innovative communications with parents. Van

Wyk and Lemmer (2009) posit that good communication includes, among others, meeting with parents to suggest ways to improve grades, sending learners home with work for parents to review, regular delivery of notices about extra-mural activities, clear communication of school policies and regulations, and delivering of report cards. The third type is volunteering: organising a programme to help and support teachers, parents, administrators, and learners; establishing a center for volunteering work for parents, a telephone tree, or other structures to provide all parents with the required information. Haines (2012) advises that to get a strong volunteering program going, schools should recruit parent volunteers widely so that all families know that their talents are useful and appreciated. The fourth type is home learning: providing information to parents about how to help children with their homework, discussing schoolwork at home, and how to assist children in improving skills in class and school assessments.

The fifth type is decision-making: including parents in school decisions, parent-teachers' associations, parent leaders, representatives, and committees for participation and leadership. Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009) suggest that the benefits of involving parents in decision-making are far-reaching. Parent leaders can provide input into school policies on both local and national levels. They develop a sense of ownership in the school and the decisions taken by the school.

The sixth type is collaborating with the community: strengthening the community through school programs, student learning, family practices, and information on activities that link to learning. Haines (2012) asserts that parents love their children and children love their parents. If the teacher feels the same love, then a healthy working relationship will exist between parent and teacher, and teacher and child.

The parents' involvement theory was used in this study because it encourages parent participation in their children's education and how and why parents participate in their children's education. Furthermore, parents' roles are multidimensional, given the benefits of parents' involvement in the education of their children. Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994) explain that parents participate in the education of their children in different dimensions and explain parents' involvement in three dimensions, namely, parents' behaviour, cognitive-intellectual involvement, and parental involvement. Parents' behaviour involves attending parent-teacher conferences, school events, helping with homework, and asking about school at home. Cognitive-intellectual involvement involves parents exposing their children to motivating academic activities such as going to the library and talking about current events. Personal involvement is about parents caring for their

children, engaging in conversations surrounding schools, and finding and resolving learning challenges that their children may face at school.

Methodology

This was a qualitative study located within the interpretivist paradigm. The interpretive paradigm is concerned with understanding the world as it is from the subjective experiences of individuals (Günbayi & Sorm, 2018) through the use of meaning-oriented methodologies, such as interviewing or participant observation, focus groups, and the analysis of existing texts (Amory, Bialobrzeska & Welch, 2018). This paradigm assumes a subjectivist epistemology, a relativist ontology, and a naturalist methodology. We adopted the use of the interpretive paradigm because it allows each participant to express their perceptions of a subject applying their different interpretations (Haines, 2012).

In understanding parent narratives on their participation in the education of their children, participants were engaged by way of individual interviews. A case study was adopted to capture comprehensively the feelings, views, thoughts, and emotions about parents' participation in the education of their children. The case study design was used because we delved deeper into how and why parents in the two selected secondary schools participated in their children's education. A case study was used because it offers the best platform to examine how and why certain occurrences happen the way they do, rather than just articulating what the occurrences are (Saldaña, 2018).

Eight black female participants (parents) from different categories were conveniently selected by us for easy access – four participants from each sample high school located in the urban area of the district. The vision behind the selection was also to be able to assess the information received by investigating what individuals thought should be done, what was being done by participants, and how individuals at different levels had perceived it. Parents were conveniently selected because we believed that they would provide a comprehensive picture of parents' narratives in their children's education. The schools were selected conveniently because they were located within the Amathole West district – regarded as among the underperforming districts in the Eastern Cape province. It was expected that the information, evidence, and data collected would help to improve parents' participation in their children's education. Interviews were used as the data collection method in this research study. Maree (2015) highlights that an interview is a two-way conversation in which the interviewer asks the interviewees questions to gather data and to learn about the interviewees' ideas, views, beliefs, behaviour, and opinions.

Results and Discussion of the Findings

With this study, we sought to investigate how parents participated in the education of their children and why they participated in the way they did. Results and discussions are presented under the following sub-headings:

- Narratives of how parents participate in the education of their children.
- Reasons for parent's participation in the education of their children.

Narratives of how Parents Participate in the Education of Their Children.

Parents were asked: "How do you participate in the education of your children?" The responses from the participants on how they got involved in the education of their children revealed that parents were involved in various aspects of their children's education through various activities. This participation could be home-based or school-based participation depending on their views and understanding of participation. For example, a parent stated as follows: "*I attend school meetings, helping the children with their homework, and providing whatever they need for school such as stationery, paying for school uniform, getting them their lunch, and encouraging them often*" (Parent 1).

Here, the parent acknowledged her participation in the education of her children in so many ways in her capacity. According to Kim, An, Kim and Kim (2018) and Ntekane (2018), parents can be involved in the education of their children by showing concern about their academic performance, being part of their learning, and always being available during parent meetings in their school and having an understanding about their children's performance. Also, they can be involved by following up with their children's teachers to know in which areas their children are lagging and not hesitate to contact their children's teacher when problems occur.

This narrative was seconded by another parent: "*By assisting them in their schoolwork, sitting with them with their textbook to look at the work they will do in the next day at school, doing their research with them and in helping with their homework when necessary*" (Parent 2).

The above statement concurs with Đurišić and Bunijevac (2017); and Sy, Gottfried and Gottfried (2013), who state that parent's participation in the education of their children starts at home where parents provide a safe environment, support, and good behaviour towards their children's education. The parents get involved by getting whatever their children need for school, going to school to check on their performances, attending school meetings, helping with homework, paying school fees, getting them lunch, buying school uniforms and stationery, ensuring that their children go to school and helping them with their schoolwork.

Another parent stated thus about her involvement in her children's education: "*I do visit her at school occasionally to check if all is going well with her and talk to her teachers about her*" (Parent 4).

Given the above, Epstein's theory of parents' involvement which includes parents' duties, school obligations, volunteering, home learning, decision-making, and community collaboration are all in support of this finding. Furthermore, parents' roles are multidimensional given the benefits of parents' participation in the education of their children. Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994) posit that the cognitive-intellectual involvement of parents can be achieved by exposing children to motivation and academic activities such as going to the library and talking about current events.

Reasons for Parents' Participation in the Education of their Children

Parents were asked why they participated in their children's education. The participants revealed that parents had several reasons for their participation:

We get involved to build the future of our children, to build the nation by providing different services to the community both physically, economically, and spiritually, to eliminate poverty as a whole, to promote self-esteem, and to eliminate inferiority complexes among peers. (Parent 1)

The above parent participated for her children to have a bright future and to promote self-esteem in their children. Parental involvement also reduces school dropout, enhances good academic performance, and improves writing and reading ability (Mncube, 2009; Mncube et al., 2011), improves children's self-esteem, school attendance, and good school attachment by the children (Lara & Saracostti, 2019).

Ugwuegbulem (2018) states that parents might be prompted to participate in their children's homework and offer any assistance to eliminate their children's academic problems. One of the participating parents pointed out the following:

I got involved because I wanted her to get good marks so that she could go to the university. Because during my school days, I struggled a lot with a lot of subjects and did not have any support. I got bad results and did not study what I wanted to study at the university because of low points and that affected my career, the job I am doing is not paying much and not inspiring. (Parent 2)

Around the world, scholars recognise the value and significance of parental involvement in the education of their children in one way or another and parents aspire to ensure that their children do well at school (Munje & Mncube, 2018). Likewise, parents who participate in the education of their children are appreciated for their participation. A parent stated as follows: "*I believe that it is my responsibility to get involved in the education of my children through my involvement; I can positively*

influence my children's academic success" (Parent 3).

Parents participate in the education of their children because of their children's future. Đurišić and Bunijevac (2017) suggest that educational and occupational aspirations are associated with how parents shape their children's activities, time, and learning environments. The aspirations bring about an increase in their children's academic performance and better school attendance (Erdener & Knoeppel, 2018).

Discussion

Among all the sources of influence on parents' choices of getting involved in their children's education three most influential psychological constructs characterising parents' lives support our findings, namely, (a) parents' role construction, (b) parents' sense of efficacy for helping children succeed in school, and (c) parents' perceptions of the invitations and demands for involvement presented by children and their schools (Đurišić & Bunijevac, 2017).

Parents' role construction (role theory) is described as parents' beliefs about child-rearing and beliefs about their role in supporting their children's education at home. Parents' sense of efficacy in helping children to do well in school is parents' beliefs about ability, effort, and luck as causes of children's school success, as well as parents' understanding of intelligence. Parents' perceptions of the invitations and demands for involvement from children and their schools develop from characteristics of children as they interact with parents and from teachers and the school to create an inviting environment (Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2007). All the following support this finding. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) developed a parents' role construction which includes involvement because they have a positive sense of efficacy for helping their children to do well at school, and because they perceive demand and invitations for involvement from their children and their children's schools. From the model, the parents need to first decide to become involved in the education of their children and then choose the forms of involvement activities (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995).

In summary, parents' participation includes practices and behaviour patterns such as parent aspirations for their children's success, how the parents share the aspirations with their children, communication between parents and teachers, between parents and children, involvement at school functions, and rules that support academic achievement at home (Heaton, 2016). Selolo (2018) mentions that parents' involvement brings about positive progress in children's academic performance, school satisfaction, improved

behaviour, and effective school administration. Munje and Mncube (2018) mention that parents are expected to play a vital role in their children's cognitive, social, and emotional development, but they are unable to assist due to family dynamics, absence of mothers, jobs, incapability, or unwillingness.

Conclusion

Parents' involvement is recognised by the learners, parents, teachers, researchers, and other educational stakeholders as important in the education of children and is regarded as a predictor of children's success and total functioning. The participants indicated that they wanted the best education for their children. In addition, parents' abilities, educational levels, skills, and interests in providing support are different and influence the level of support that parents provide. Also, when parents are involved, a positive impact on children's performance is achieved, children's behaviour improves if well managed and it could be achieved if proper measures are put in place by the parents. To ensure their proper involvement, the parent must not only help with homework regardless of their busy schedule but by attending all the school meetings and going to school to check on their children's behaviour and performance. All this cannot be achieved by the teachers alone but by the integrative or complementing effort of parents being actively involved in their children's education.

Based on the above findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are offered. Parents must be fully involved in their children's education and must regard participation as a responsibility that no one can compensate them for. Parents should be encouraging their children to have confidence in themselves by motivating them through encouraging words such as "well done", "you can do better", "good", "you are getting there", et cetera. However, discouraging words like "poor", "lazy", "dump", et cetera must not be used.

Furthermore, parents should supervise their children to complete their homework and develop good relationships with the teachers. This would help in monitoring the academic progress of their children. Also, parent should be educated on the benefits of their active involvement in their children's education. In addition, schools need to educate teachers to have high expectations regarding their learners' education. When school leaders maintain high expectations, teachers will emulate their school leaders, parents will emulate the teachers and the children will emulate their parents. In addition, schools should increase awareness programs among parents to assure them that the school is always open and that they are welcome to visit the school at any time. Parents' involvement should also be planned in such a way

that all parents are involved – no matter their level of education.

Authors' Contributions

Both authors contributed to the conception and design of the study. AOJ conducted the interviews and wrote the first draft of the manuscript. Both authors reviewed and approved the final manuscripts.

Notes

- i. This article is based on the master's dissertation of Adelabu Oluwatoyin Jumoke.
- ii. Published under a Creative Commons Attribution Licence.
- iii. DATES: Received: 9 April 2022; Accepted: 10 October 2023; Published: 31 December 2023.

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