



Primary school teachers' experiences of parental involvement for learners' literacy skills development

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Abstract

The aim of the study was to explore teachers' views on parental involvement for learners' literacy skills development in primary schools. The study was located within the interpretivist paradigm, guided by a qualitative research approach and a phenomenological design. Data were gathered through semi-structured WhatsApp interviews from six teachers from an urban township school in Kwa-Nobuhle, Nelson Mandela Metropole. The interviews were transcribed, and the data were analysed and categorized into themes. The three broad areas that guided the findings of this study focused on the significance of parental involvement and the barriers and strategies related to parental involvement for learners' literacy development. The findings that emerged from this study indicated that teachers deemed parental involvement in learners' literacy skills development imperative, as it fosters and encourages positive literacy attitudes and successful schooling. Moreover, teachers regarded home-based literacy skills, the promotion of reading and writing at home and homework monitoring at home as indicative of active parental involvement.

Key words: Parental involvement, literacy skills development, language teachers, intermediate phase, emergent literacy.

Introduction

A benchmark for studying the literacy levels in South Africa is the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study, known as PIRLS Report (Howie et al., 2017) which assessed reading comprehension in over 60 countries. The reading comprehension test within the South African context assessed learners' reading comprehension in all 11 official South African languages. One of the key findings emerging from this report was that South Africa was the lowest performing country in terms of learners reading for meaning, achieving a mean score of 320 out of the 60 countries. Furthermore, the study revealed that South African grade 4 learners do not have basic reading skills and could not read for meaning by the end of the grade 4 academic school year (Howie et al., 2017, p.48). The study on literacy skills mentioned above, suggests that these skills are a challenge in the country, where results for South Africa were extremely low. This is also noticeable in class where learners struggle to read, understand, and interpret texts.

With reference to writing, Condy and Blease (2014) contend that writing remains an area of weakness in a national schooling system in South Africa. Moreover, this is still an issue today where

learners struggle with writing skills, leading them to experiencing challenges in expressing themselves through writing. Due to the low literacy levels in South Africa the Department of Basic Education (2016), in an attempt to motivate and encourage parents to be more involved in their children's schooling, introduced practical guidelines on how parents could contribute meaningfully to the success of their children academically. According to the DBE (Department of Basic Education, 2016) there is a positive correlation between effective parental involvement in a child's education and children's academic success. In addition, parental involvement may support learners to develop any of the literacy skills acquired or taught at school, since they will have ample opportunities to experience and practice the skill at home. It is with this background in mind that this study aimed to examine primary school teachers' views on parental involvement in their children's literacy skills development within the context of a previously disadvantaged school in KwaNobuhle situated in the Nelson Mandela Metropole. KwaNobuhle is a large township on the outskirts of Uitenhage (Kariega) in the Eastern Cape Province, which is part of the western region of the Metropole. The primary school identified for the purposes of this study is an urban township public school located in KwaNobuhle, which serves diverse learners from different parts of the area. The school falls under the jurisdiction of the Department of Basic Education (DBE), Uitenhage District (Kariega).

The success of a learner's academic performance is dependent on the collaboration of parents, teachers, and the community. It is with this in mind that the Department of Basic Education (2016) contends that there is a need for parental involvement, because parents do not only support the teachers and their children to succeed academically, but they can also contribute significantly to their literacy skills through real life-literacy practices from an early age at home (Cozett & Condy, 2016). However, when examining parental involvement in the development of a child's literacy, the reality is that when it comes to the academic development of their children, parents tend to leave all academic responsibility to the teachers. This may be due to a variety of factors and challenges that parents may have to contend with. One of these factors may be due to parental beliefs and how they feel they could bring change in their children's schooling which may affect their involvement (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Stutzel, 2019). For example, in Kwa-Nobuhle in Uitenhage (Kariega), since there are absent parents, most of the learners are raised by their grandparents, who indicated that they do not have sufficient academic knowledge to assist their grandchildren. This may be due to their disadvantaged backgrounds and the results of illiteracy where the grandparents themselves cannot read or write (Someketa et al., 2017; Kigobe, 2019).

When parents are not involved in their children's literacy development, a noticeable number of learners are unable to read or write. As a result, this causes learners to perform poorly in assessments, because they cannot read texts or respond to questions in writing which results in learners not having confidence in themselves, thereby becoming frustrated when faced with having to use these skills. The reality is that learners are taught to read and write at school, and these are skills. A skill needs to be practiced, not only at school, but also at home. The fact that learners struggle to read or write, leads us to contemplate on the parents' role in developing their reading and writing skills. The question arises as to what parents are doing to enhance their children's literacy skills and how this contributes to the literacy development of their children. With this in mind this study aimed to ascertain from teachers how they experience parental involvement in terms of the promotion of their children's literacy development skills and the support that schools provide to parents to empower them with skills for their children's literacy development at home.

Research Objectives

The study was guided by the following research objectives:

1. To establish how primary school teachers view parental involvement for learners' literacy development based on their experiences
2. To examine teachers' views on the barriers to meaningful parental involvement for learners' literacy development

3. To identify strategies proposed by teachers for enhanced parental involvement for learners' literacy development

Theoretical framework

This study was guided by Epstein's framework that identifies and defines six types of parental involvement. Epstein (1996) contended that children learn and grow through three interrelating spheres of influence namely the family, school, and community. These three spheres must form partnerships to best meet the needs of the child. She described six types of involvement based on the relationships between the family, school, and community: parenting (skills), communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community (Epstein, 1996). According to Epstein all six types of involvement need to be included for the creation of successful partnerships. This study was mainly based on the fourth type of involvement which emphasises that most parental participation and skills development in children occur at home.

Another theory that forms the basis of this study is Marie Clay's (1993) theoretical perspective on emergent literacy theory that affirms that there are characteristics of literacy behaviour, skills, ideas, knowledge, and attitudes which children acquire informally at home before they formally enter the classroom which facilitates the acquisition of conventional reading and writing skills. Doyle (2013) further opines that children bring their unique stories of literacy knowledge, which they experience at home, with them to school.

Epstein's theoretical model of overlapping spheres of influence indicates how the family, the school and the community interact mutually to promote learning and development. According to Epstein (2001) learners are best supported when their families and the school, work collaboratively to achieve common goals. The school is placed in the centre and is seen as a mediator to facilitate, initiate and maintain parent-school relationships (Barbour et al., 2007). This model recognises three major contexts in which children develop which are: the family, the school, and the community. By working collectively, communication and collaboration increases as the three major contexts intersect. Therefore, this suggests that if the school, families, and communities do not work collaboratively, these spheres are pulled apart (Epstein & Dauber, 1991). Epstein and Dauber (1991) posit that as learners progress from elementary to middle school and as they get older, the spheres of influence are more likely to be pulled apart if the parents feel they are unable to support their children. Rafiq, et al., (2013) indicate that interactions and social ties developed among parents and the school will generate social capital that may influence learners' academic success. The mutual effort of parents and teachers draw the spheres of family and school influence closer and the increased communication between parents and schools result in families that value school practices as well as schools that value family's roles (Griffin & Steen, 2010).

Hence, it is imperative for teachers to welcome parents and the community and treat each learner as an individual where communities are also responsible for creating settings so that families can support their children (Barbour et al., 2007). On the other hand, in families that support and promote school values it is the role of the parents to guide their children to fulfil their roles and responsibilities as learners (Epstein, 2001). The parent's role is to stress the significance of school, homework completion and the activities that lead to academic success (Rafiq et al., 2013). It is evident that the intersection between home, school and communities can be encouraged by parent-teacher communication, parent and school cooperation, policies and the creation of programmes that promote parental involvement (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Stutzel, 2019).

Literature Review

Parental Involvement for Children's Literacy Development

Parental involvement in children's school achievement is largely associated with academic success because it promotes positive school attitudes, higher aspirations and other positive behaviours (Georgiou & Tourva, 2007). Singh et al. (2004) posit that black parents have crucial roles to play in the enhancement of learner success as parents who play little or no role in their children's homework and study programmes contributed to the poor performance of their children in the classroom.

Hence, Rooi's (2013) study yielded recommendations on how parents could support their children's literacy development. The study recommended that parents seek guidance and suggestions for literacy activities from their children's teachers. It is recommended that parents create routines with their children to ensure the completion of homework by using of crossword puzzles, brain teasers and word searches to develop their children's literacy skills at home. Moreover, Rooi (2013) encouraged parents to review their children's schoolwork and to meet teachers regularly to discuss how they could support their children academically and to acquaint themselves with the work covered. In a study conducted by Rapp and Duncan (2012), which focused on the role of the principal in developing a multi-dimensional parental involvement model, the parents were perceived as significant role players in the process. Thus, they also encouraged parents to be aware of their child's progress and promoted parent-teacher communication where parents could volunteer in school programmes and participate in decision making at school when it concerned their children's educational and skills development (Rapp and Duncan, 2012).

Milly's (2010) study identified ways that parents could become involved in their children's literacy development which could be adapted by any parent irrespective of their socio-economic class through home literacy practices. According to Milly (2010), when parents provide their children with real life literacy experiences consistently such as; writing grocery lists and other authentic practical writing, spending time reading to and with their children and involving them in outside activities such as visiting the library and museums, their children tend to acquire more enhanced literacy skills than those who are not exposed to real life literacy experiences. Milly (2010) made this finding in a study aimed at determining the relationship between children's literacy success and parental involvement and support they receive in their primary conversation. The study, which was conducted at a literacy centre in New York with three 5th grade learners and their parents, involved the use of observation, questionnaires, and homework logs.

Saracho (2017) posits that parents can engage their children in joint book sharing where they read appropriate texts to children in a home environment, which will lead to the development of language growth, emergent literacy and reading achievement. From these studies on parental involvement in literacy development it emerges that home literacy practices are imperative and that parents, who participated in these studies, seemed to enjoy reading with their children.

Emergent Literacy Development

According to Mason and Allen (1986) and Kigobe (2019), social contexts for literacy acquisition show that, parent-child interactions, and parent-child literacy activities are critical support mechanisms for the acquisition of reading and writing concepts. Clay (1966) invented the phrase 'emergent literacy' which signifies the process of becoming where literacy is regarded as writing and reading in young children's development. She suggested that literacy development occurs during the first years of a child's life. Thus, parental attitudes towards education and their influence as models for reading and writing at home play a significant role in the child's literacy development (Mason & Allen, 1986; Stutzel, 2019). Clay's (1966) emergent theory relates to the child's first experiences with print at home where she stated that there are parts of literacy behaviour, skills, ideas, knowledge, and attitudes which children acquire informally before they enter the formal classroom space. These informal skills acquired at home support the development of conventional reading and writing skills. Both Kigoba (2019) and Stutzel (2019) point out that a literacy rich home environment that promotes literacy among children include; having print materials and books available in the home with parents' reading, allowing children to scribble by providing platforms which will enable them to demonstrate literacy related skills, knowledge, and attitudes which act as a foundation for conventional reading and writing skills. Doyle (2013) posits that this theory considers that children's listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills, which are experienced at home, are all interconnected and are strengthened by literacy rich home environments where children, who are not exposed to literacy at home, have low-literacy performance at school (they struggle to read text and write). This view is also supported by Vasylenko (2017) who contends that parents can make a significant contribution to promoting basic literacy skills development among their children, because if they assist their children during the formative years of their schooling, reading difficulties that learners could experience later could be minimised.

Teachers' Perceptions of Parental Involvement

According to Makgopa and Mokhele (2013) teachers have their own perceptions on how parental involvement should be conducted. Some teachers acknowledge that parents can indeed be of great help, because it is the parents who can influence certain aspects of the learners' lives, aspects to which teachers simply do not have access to. However, teachers' sometimes may have certain expectations which parents cannot perform, resulting in communication breakdown (Makgopa & Mokhele, 2013).

Thus, a qualitative study by Christianakis (2011), which aimed to encourage teacher and parent relationships, especially in under resourced inner-city schools, examined how inner-city teachers view parents and parental involvement at Jefferson Elementary School in Northern California. Fifteen diverse teachers were interviewed over a period of six months through semi-structured and structured interviews guided by three questions. One of the key findings of this study was that teachers view parents as support agents to cover curriculum expectations in that parents should always be available and must contribute towards stationery, cleaning materials, explanation of homework and completion of tasks (Christianakis, 2011). A key feature of this study is that teachers tend to use parents to execute tasks that teachers and the school are responsible for such as curriculum coverage and the development of a learner. It is important for teachers to understand that parents are not there to help them cover the curriculum, but they must realise that the most important role that a parent can play in their child's schooling is by assisting the child to develop his/her acquired skills at school and at home. However, Makgopa and Mokhele (2013) state that when parents do not perform tasks required by teachers, parents and teachers tend to blame each other, especially if the learners do not perform well at the end of a year. Hence this study views parents as facilitators of literacy development to support their children so that they can succeed academically at school.

Moreover, Someketa et al. (2017) explored the perceptions of eight parents and four teachers on parental involvement in literacy development in the early childhood using semi-structured interviews whilst utilising voice recorders, document analysis and observations. Teachers complained about the lack of parents' availability to discuss their children's progress and the lack of participation in school meetings (Someketa et al., 2017). However, in reflecting on the findings one must consider factors that could inhibit parental involvement as well (Hill, 2019). In this regard Kigobe (2019) in his study on parental involvement in literacy development of primary school learners in Tanzanian schools, found that parents' level of education had an influence on their children's literacy development. The study found that children with educated parents made more rapid progress in their literacy development than those whose parents were less educated (Kigobe, 2019). This was supported by Stutzel's (2019) research in which she found that the education level of parents, their perceptions of their ability to assist their children, limited resources at home and different times that lower income parents work had an impact on their ability to assist their children in their literacy skills development. However, as Stutzel (2019) points out although parents may believe they do not have the knowledge to work with their students on literacy, they have a wealth of knowledge from their cultures, languages and backgrounds that could be beneficial to their children's literacy skills development. Lower income families may also not have as many resources to help their child, such as books at home or educational games and resources (Stutzel, 2019). Research has shown that children show greater progress when parents learn specific methods for literacy improvement (Hill, 2019).

Teachers also need to examine their relationships with parents and how they communicate with each other so that parental involvement can be maintained where working parents can be accommodated so that they can participate in such meetings. Hence, it is imperative to explore different ways of increasing parental involvement to ensure that all parents are accommodated when activities or meetings are held.

Research Methodology

Research Design

A qualitative approach was used for the purposes of this study. According to Leedy & Ormrod (2001) a qualitative study aims to address questions of a complex social phenomenon with the aim of describing the phenomenon from the participants' viewpoints. The adoption of a qualitative approach enabled us to explore teachers' views on parental involvement in facilitating learners' literacy development, which served

to enhance our understanding of the area of research. Since the study was interpretive in nature, an appropriate research design was selected for gathering data to respond to the research question which was guided by the principles of phenomenology. Phenomenology is an approach to qualitative research that focuses on the commonality of lived experiences within a particular group. The fundamental goal of the approach is to arrive at a description of the nature of the particular phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). This process enables the researcher to collect information and knowledge about a phenomenon from a group of individuals, who have first-hand knowledge of an event, situation, or experience. For the purposes of this study a phenomenological design was implemented through the use of interviews conducted via WhatsApp, which enabled teachers at a primary school in Kwa-Nobuhle to share their views and beliefs on how they perceived parental involvement for learners' literacy development based on their knowledge and experiences.

Population and Sample

The population for this study comprised grade 4-7 teachers who are involved in teaching languages at schools in Kwa-Nobuhle (a previously African township) situated in the town of Uitenhage (Kariega) in the Nelson Mandela Metropole. This population was identified as the teachers teaching languages in the Intermediate Phase (grades 4-7), since they were best able to describe their perceptions on parental involvement for learners' literacy development in Kwa-Nobuhle based on their experiences and contexts. The participant selection strategy that was used for this study was purposive sampling. According to Creswell (2013) purposive sampling is sampling where participants are selected because of their knowledge on the subject, availability, and proximity to the researcher. The participants for this study consisted of professional teachers in the Intermediate Phase (grades 4-7) who teach IsiXhosa Home language and English as an additional language, in a primary school located in Kwa-Nobuhle. From the population of the study 6 teachers teaching languages in the Intermediate Phase (grades 4-7) represented the sample for this study. These teachers were selected because of their vast knowledge in learners' literacy development as they could best describe the impact of parental involvement in their children's schooling. Moreover, they are exposed to how parental involvement can develop learners' reading and writing skills because language teaching focuses predominantly on the development of these fundamental skills. We used purposive sampling because the teachers, who were the participants for the study, had the relevant knowledge and we could easily access them. The participants were recruited for their knowledge in language teaching as they could best share their opinions and perceptions on parental involvement in the learners' literacy development. Through communicating with grade 4 to 7 teachers at briefings on the study's purposes, which were held on Tuesdays and Thursdays for recruitment purposes, teachers, who were willing to participate signed a consent form and represented the sample of the study. Thereafter the times and dates for interviews were decided on in consultation with the participants.

Data Collection Strategy

The primary data collection tool for the purpose of this study was individual semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews were selected as they allowed for the use of a series of open-ended questions which enabled us to probe the participants for more in-depth information. We administered one-on-one semi-structured interviews with six language teachers from the Intermediate Phase (grade 4 to 7), who teach in a public school in Kwa-Nobuhle in the Nelson Mandela metropole. The one-on-one interviews were conducted via WhatsApp voice notes due to the corona virus outbreak, during the lockdown period. During this time precautionary safety measures had to be implemented to ensure that there was no contact between the participant and the researcher, hence there were no face-to-face interviews and WhatsApp voice notes were utilized. The use of in-depth semi-structured interviews contributed to our understanding of the phenomenon, whilst the use of probing questions provided insights into the views of teachers' which served to address the study's main question. According to George (2022) this data collection method which focuses on posing open-ended questions according to a predetermined framework, is a flexible approach to data collection, since it contributes to the identification of patterns, while still enabling the researcher to examine

the comparisons in participants' viewpoints. Within the context of this study the semi-structured interview was well suited for the exploration of participants' values and beliefs, as it allowed for new ideas to be brought up during the interview process (Barriball & While, 1994; George, 2022). Additionally, it afforded the researcher an opportunity to observe non-verbal indicators when participants responded to questions (George, 2022). The semi-structured interviews were beneficial for the purposes of this study in that the researcher asked probing questions that the participants would not have felt comfortable responding to in the presence of peers, which led to more in depth interrogation of the issues discussed (Wholey et al., 2015).

Data Analysis

For the purposes of this study interpretative phenomenological techniques for data analysis, which aim to describe personal experiences through analysing statements from interviews and converting them into themes for data interpretation, were adopted (Bhar, 2019). The thematic analysis process, which is an inductive approach to analysis, assisted in drawing conclusions relating to participants' views, knowledge, and experiences, through a process of coding, organizing codes into themes and identifying the patterns arising from the themes (George, 2022).

Ethical Measures

Ethical measures adopted for the purposes of this study involved the use of pseudonyms for each of the participants interviewed and applying for ethical clearance for the study from the Nelson Mandela University's Ethics Committee.

Findings

The findings of the study indicate that teachers are of the view that parents have a significant role to play in their children's literacy development at home. The themes emerging from the study are discussed in terms of the significance of parental involvement in children's literacy development, strategies that parents could use to enhance literacy development and the barriers that hinder parental involvement within the context of the study.

Significance of parental involvement for children's literacy development

The participants interviewed all shared the same view that parents can play a significant role in motivating their children to learn. The views are discussed based on the findings emerging from the interview transcripts.

Autumn (Translated from isiXhosa) expressed her view as follows:

'When a child sees someone holding a book they first see them at home and they also mimic whatever is said around them. That is when a child notices activities occurring around them, so when they see their parent reading a book they will do the same thing.'

It was interesting to note that Autumn felt that when parents perform reading activities, they motivate their children to read.

Blossom shared a similar view to that of Autumn as she contended that when parents practice literacy home-based activities, they develop a culture of reading among their children and a value for education. Blossom (Translated from isiXhosa) states that:

'The role of a parent is important to develop their children's literacy skills because a child has to first get motivation to learn from home, and if there's no motivation at home then that child will not see the value of education.'

It was noteworthy to record that Blossom mentions that when parents are not involved in their children's literacy development, the children are not motivated to develop their literacy skills, because they are not stimulated and supported.

Iris also expressed the view that when parents assist their children in developing literacy skills, they increase their chances of successful learning and academic success. Iris (Translated) states that:

'You would find that some parents assist their children to do their homework which causes the child to become active in class because back home education is valued. At the same time in order for a child to be motivated to learn they need encouragement and assistance from home so that they can be determined to learn and be successful in their learning.'

Hazel indicated that parental involvement and assistance also enables a child to be confident in the development of his/her reading and writing skills. Hazel (Translated) states that:

'If a child notices that a parent involves him or her in mastering spelling the child can do more. This will build the child's confidence so that when he goes to school, he will have that confidence because he knows that he can read and write.'

It was also interesting to note that Genesis felt that parents play a significant role in solidifying information learnt at school. Genesis (Translated) said:

'If parents were to help their children at home with their homework so that whatever they have learnt at school, they can be able to develop it and nurture it.'

Some teachers such as Coral and Autumn shared the view that parents could build a foundation in developing their children's reading and language skills from a young age. They expressed these views as follows:

Coral (Translated) contended that:

'Parents are people who develop the love of reading at a very young age.'

Autumn (Translated) stated that:

'A parent can teach a child to pronounce words and if the child does not pronounce the word correctly, the parent corrects the child. That is when the child develops language and how to speak properly.'

Most participants expressed the view that parents could contribute to their children's literacy development by motivating them to build their confidence towards literacy practices for successful academic achievement. Some indicated that without parental involvement learners do not develop the love for reading and writing which may affect their academic performance at school. Thus, teachers expressed the view that parents need to motivate, build confidence, create a solid literacy foundation, and aim to enhance their children's reading and writing development by supporting and assisting them.

Barriers to parental involvement in learners' literacy development

The barriers that teachers identified to parental involvement in learners' literacy development included parents' educational background and attitudes, the role of grandparents, working hours of parents and poverty and unemployment.

Parents' educational background and attitudes

Most teachers expressed the view that parents' educational backgrounds impact their involvement because some of them were not exposed to the value of education or dropped out of school, resulting in some young parents focusing more on fun than on the development of their children's literacy skills.

Coral felt that the parent's educational background has an impact on learners' value for education. Coral expressed that (Translated):

'The background of Kwa-Nobuhle involves parents who are young, uneducated and undriven. This has an effect on learners' because they do not witness the value of education at home. So, some parents do not realise the value of education and the need to motivate their children.'

Her sentiments were further expatiated on by Autumn as follows who also stated that (Translated):

'Some parents dropped out of school and became parents at a young age. Along the way it happened that parents lost interest in schooling, because they do not have educational backgrounds. We find that we teach learners' who are not interested in learning and who don't understand the value of education.'

Iris echoed the same sentiments which she voiced as follows (Translated):

'Most of our learners' parents are so young and that impacts the way learners' learn their literacy skills and literacy development because you would find that even though their parents are young, they do not have time to assist their children with homework. In most cases even though you have given a learner homework, you would find that it has been written for them, to show that there was no engagement between the child and the parent to promote learning.'

Genesis stated that (Translated from isiXhosa):

'Mostly parents are young, they roughly range from the ages of 20-25; this means that some of them still have parents they live their children with. Some parents here sometimes do not care for their children, they value fun and alcohol.'

It was interesting to note that Genesis felt that the young parents' admiration of fun causes them to lose interest in their children's schooling.

Her opinion was mirrored by Autumn's as she said (Translated):

'Looking at this township there are so many shebeens (taverns) more than schools which means we have some parents who drink that become disinterested in their children's schooling.'

Genesis also stated that (Translated):

'This environment has too many taverns and learners see people drinking daily and they witness bad behaviours. Some of their parents also drink, which means at home there might be no opportunity to develop literacy skills'.

It was intriguing to note Hazel's viewpoint that parents' attitudes towards schooling may impact their involvement in their children's academic development. She said (Translated):

'Some parents often think that it is only the teachers' responsibility to teach and develop their children and forget that it is also their duty to support their children's learning.'

Almost all the teachers indicated that the parents' educational backgrounds and attitudes have an impact on parental participation in their children's schooling and literacy development. They mentioned that due to parents' educational backgrounds and attitudes, parents devalue education which in turn affects the learners' attitudes towards education. The participants revealed that parents often do not see their role as

important due to the challenges they face, hence they leave their children's academic support to the teachers as mentioned by Hazel.

The role of grandparents

All the teachers were of the view that learners in Kwa-Nobuhle grow up with their grandparents, and most of their grandparents are illiterate making them unable to assist in the learners' literacy development.

Coral stated that (Translated):

'Our learners' end up being raised by their grandmothers because their parents drink alcohol, the same grandparents who are illiterate who have never gone to school due to poverty'

Genesis also said (Translated):

'Some of their grandmothers have never experienced reading a book because they have never been to school.'

Hazel expressed her view as follows (Translated):

'In some cases learners' are left with their grandmothers, this could be because the parent works out of town. The grandmother might not have the strength to look after this child, or they might be illiterate. She cannot even check at the child's books.'

Her sentiments were echoed by Iris as she stated that (Translated):

'Most of the learners live with their grandmothers, which means most of these grandmothers are uneducated; the apartheid era inequalities, causing them to struggle to assist their grandchildren with homework.'

Blossom also said (Translated):

'In this community the situation is bad because some of the parents are unprivileged and you would see that they still live with their children's grandparents who are uneducated. They did not get the opportunity to study and some of them cannot read and write, resulting in the child having lack of support for literacy.'

Autumn as well expressed that (Translated):

'These grandparents are old, sometimes some of them cannot even see because they are old and have never been to school. Some of them are illiterate.'

All the participants shared the view that most learners are raised by their grandparents, who, due to the inequalities of the past and poverty did not attend school or were not exposed to reading and writing at an early age. Thus, due to their educational backgrounds these grandparents are not able to assist their grandchildren in their literacy skills development.

Parents' working hours

Some teachers were of the view that parents' working hours may impact their involvement in developing their children's literacy skills.

Hazel expressed her view as follows (Translated):

'Most parents leave their children at home and go to work, when they are back they come back tired and they don't have a chance to check if their children have homework.'

Sometimes learners' lie to their parents and do not inform them about homework because they want to go outside and play'.

Her opinion was echoed by Iris as she said:

'Some parents work but their working hours are so awkward in such a way that learners' will go home from school and arrive before their parents or the parent would be tired from work to assist the child'.

These teachers felt that due to the parents' working hours, parents are unable to assist their children as they come home from work exhausted and hence do not have the energy or time to assist their children with their homework or to support their literacy skills development.

Unemployment and poverty

Most of the teachers were of the view that unemployment and poverty have an impact on parental involvement in terms of their children's literacy development.

Autumn said (Translated):

'The high rate of unemployed rate here at Kwa-Nobuhle is really high, even parents cannot afford their children's schooling needs, so they do not have money to buy educational resources for their children. With little they have they buy food and enjoyment.'

Blossom also expressed that

'At Kwa-Nobuhle there are only two libraries and they are far away from each other. So, sometimes parents cannot afford transport money for their children to go visit libraries'.

These teachers revealed that some parents in Kwa-Nobuhle are unable to support their children's literacy development as they are faced with poverty. They furthermore mentioned that due to parents' financial constraints they are unable to purchase educational material for their children that could assist them in developing their literacy skills.

Strategies for Parental Involvement in Children's Literacy Development

All the participants interviewed shared the same view that parents can become actively involved in their children's literacy development by practicing home-based literacy activities.

In this regard Autumn contended that (Translated):

'Parents can allow their children to read subtitles from cartoons to develop their vocabulary, also children can read the short passages in magazines. There they will see pictures to comprehend the meaning of the passage.'

It was important to note that Autumn mentioned how reading at home could contribute to the development of learners' vocabulary and comprehension skills.

Blossom shared similar sentiments to that of Autumn, which she expressed as follows (Translated):

'There are also reading programmes like Nali'bali that assists parents in helping their children read to make reading fun, to develop their vocabulary and interest in reading.'

Blossom suggested further that reading assists in developing learners' writing skills. Hazel expressed the view that in order to develop reading at home workbooks from school can be utilised. Hazel revealed that (Translated):

'Workbooks have stories. Children can be asked to read at least one story a day, by doing that the child will be able to pronounce words and also to write those words in a correct manner.'

Iris said (Translated from isiXhosa):

'Children should read at home and parents can try to have library book at home so they can get used to home reading. Also, they should help with homework and make sure that their children do it by checking their books.'

Iris's focus on parents checking their children's homework and the development of a book collection at home is imperative for children's literacy skills acquisition

The above viewpoint was shared by Coral who stated that (Translated):

'At home, it was where parents can read with their children and constantly check on their schoolwork, because there are parents who do not care to check their children's books.'

Some participants interviewed shared the same view that parents can become actively involved in their children's literacy development by communicating with the school and teachers.

Coral said (Translated):

'There must be communication between the parent and the teacher, so that the parent can know when they can be of assistance to their child.'

Blossom mirrored Coral's sentiments as she said:

'A parent must communicate with the teacher and make sure they have the teacher's contact details to ask about homework and the child's academic progress, and the child's behaviour.'

Autumn said (Translated from isiXhosa):

'A parent has to know their child's ability and level and if they do not know it, they should go to the child's school and ask. So, it was important for them to ask about their child's progress.'

It was interesting to note that Iris felt that parents can be actively involved by attending literacy development events organised by the school. Iris stated (Translated):

'If at school there will be spelling bees and writing competitions, the child should be able to talk to the parents about such events freely. Parents as well must attend these events to show their support and they should also effectively communicate with the school.'

Some teachers were of the view that parents should visit the library with their children to develop their reading skills.

Blossom, for example said:

'Parents should also encourage their children to visit libraries often because I grew up visiting the library and that helped me a lot.'

Autumn also expressed that:

'If the parent cannot assist their child, they can go to the nearest library to find reading resources, and since the school does not have enough books to lend to learners it is important for learners to be registered in the library.'

A very interesting theme emerging from the interviews relating to parental involvement in learners' literacy development was teachers' viewpoints on the pivotal role that technology could play in the development of children's literacy skills at home.

Autumn mentions (Translated) that:

'Education has been made easier because parents can buy their children kiddies laptops that teach Maths and other language activities. Turning their love for technology into a fun activity for learning. There are also educational games played on smartphones which can help children with their learning.'

Blossom expressed that:

'They should also play educational games at home, read newspapers and do maths challenges to develop grammar.'

The interviews indicated that all the participants shared the same sentiments that parents play a pivotal role in their children's literacy development. They mentioned the use of home-based activities as being among the best practices that parents could embrace to develop their children's vocabulary, comprehension, language, and literacy skills. They further revealed that parents could also communicate with the school to assist their children in developing skills they might be struggling with at school. Moreover, it was noteworthy that the teachers regarded the checking of homework, home-based literacy activities, attending literacy events, library use and the use of technology as active parental activities that could stimulate the development of learners' literacy skills.

Discussion

Teachers deemed parental support for their children's literacy development at home as pivotal, since home-based learning opportunities created by parents have the potential to contribute to the enhancement of learners' literacy skills. This is supported by Milly's (2010), Kigoba's (2019) and Stutzel's (2019) research into the significant role that parents could play in developing their children's literacy skills at home.

Most teachers expressed the view that parent-teacher interactions will enable parents to focus on strengthening literacy skills that their children might be struggling with at school. They also mentioned that parents should encourage their children to visit the library. According to Milly (2010) outside learning activities such as visiting the library, word puzzles and other shared activities are imperative for learners since, when these activities are promoted in the school, parents' dedication and commitment to the child and their educational needs are enhanced.

Although teachers felt that active parental involvement was important for successful literacy development among learners, they acknowledged that the social context of Kwa-Nobuhle, the township in which the school was situated, could impact parental involvement in their children's literacy development. They felt that since this community comprised predominantly young adult parents who do not have strong educational backgrounds; this could contribute to these parents' disinterest in their children's literacy development. The teachers also expressed the view that young parents' interest in fun and enjoying their lives, with limited involvement in their children's schooling, may be the reason for their lack of literacy skills development at home, since they indicated that Kwa-Nobuhle had 'more taverns than schools'. All the teachers indicated that most of the learners are raised by their grandmothers, most of whom had not received adequate schooling due to the impact of apartheid on their education, resulting in them being either illiterate or semi-literate. Consequently, this has an impact on their ability to promote learners' literacy skills development at home. According to Someketa et al. (2017) the level of education and literacy of

parents are significant since parents may not have the requisite skills and knowledge to respond to the school's demands, and the expectations of teachers for their children's literacy development. Milly (2010), however, points out that although parents may not be able to contribute to the development of their children's reading and writing skills, they could still contribute to literacy development in other ways. This could occur through play at home, story-telling, the use of photographs, drawings and writing of captions as well as playing house (Mielonen & Paterson, 2009; Stutzel, 2019).

Teachers in the study also indicated that there were high unemployment and poverty rates among parents from the community which impacted parental involvement, since parents did not have the time or the means to afford additional educational resources to promote their children's literacy development at home (Somketa et al., 2017). To overcome this challenge schools should make concerted attempts to network with parents so that they acquire a better understanding of the challenges experienced by them and how they could support them to overcome these challenges for enhanced participation in the school's programmes and projects (Bush et al, 2010). Schools could also contribute to parents' own literacy skills development by implementing workshops and programmes that will enhance their literacy skills. They could furthermore also establish parent forums and committees tasked with addressing cultural differences and language barriers (LaRocque et al., 2011; Hill, 2019).

Teachers also felt strongly that parent-teacher interactions must be promoted by the school so that parents could work collaboratively with the school to enhance their children's literacy development. In the research conducted by Hornby & Lafaelen (2011) it was revealed that if teachers are welcoming and open to parents, they will be more motivated to participate in the school's activities and to support their children academically. Furthermore, as pointed out by Sapungan & Sapungan (2014) in their research into parental involvement, a collaborative partnership between the school, parents, teachers, and learners is imperative for the enhancement of learners' literacy development. Research has shown that children perform better academically when parents learn specific methods for literacy improvement (Hill, 2019). According to the National Institute for Literacy (2019), parent and child interactions is the heart of a child's literacy development. Bringing children and parents together to work, play, read, and learn can lead to positive outcomes in language, literacy, emotional growth, and cognitive development (Jacobs et al., 2019).

Conclusion

This study was conducted to explore teachers' views on parental involvement in learners' literacy skills development in Kwa-Nobuhle, Nelson Mandela Metropole. The empirical evidence emerging from this study indicated that teachers considered parental involvement pivotal to learners' literacy skills development. Furthermore, this study also revealed that there are numerous ways that parents could become actively involved in fostering their children's literacy skills acquisition. However, the study also found that teachers felt that parents are faced with a variety of challenges that could negatively influence parental involvement. In attempting to enhance parental involvement this study found that the development of collaborative school-home partnerships could contribute to learners' literacy skills development.

Implications of the study

The implications of this study are that schools need to play a more pivotal role in involving parents interactively in promoting literacy development at home. The achievement of this ideal is dependent on the political will of schools to engage parents more meaningfully in the schools' activities and programmes, and recognising that parents can contribute to learners' literacy skills development through the knowledge that they bring to the process. This also entails that schools need to reflect more comprehensively on the strategies that they could implement to ensure that parents are involved in the literacy development of their children. Schools also need to realise that parents have linguistic, cultural and community knowledge which they could harness for the purposes of enhancing literacy skills development among their learners. These are the funds of knowledge which will contribute significantly to the overall literacy development of learners.

Recommendations

If there is a lack of parental involvement in schools, it is incumbent on the schools to establish reasons for the lack of involvement and to devise strategies that they could implement to involve parents optimally (Tarasawa & Waggoner, 2015). In this regard Epstein's (1996) focus on the role of the parents to promote literacy development at home and the role of the school to develop school-community partnerships are crucial for children's literacy development. The school thus has a significant role to play in conscientizing parents on how they could develop learners' literacy skills at home and creating a partnership between the home and the school for the enhancement of learners' literacy skills development.

Policy makers, teachers and schools should make concerted attempts to create an inclusive environment in schools that aim to facilitate active engagement of all parents in their children's reading development regardless of their socio-economic status (Kigoba, 2019). According to Hill (2019), strategies that schools should consider implementing to enhance parents' skills in literacy development should include, among others, parent teacher conferences, literacy nights for parents, workshops on You Tube on how parents could develop their children's literacy at home, and utilising social media to engage parents more interactively. Involving parents in their children's literacy skills development at home will enable them to view themselves as partners with teachers for their children's academic success (Hill, 2019). The creation of a partnership between the home and the school will also motivate parents to be more actively involved in the development of their children's literacy at home.

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