

PARENTAL LEVEL OF EDUCATION AND ITS EFFECTS ON THE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF ADOLESCENTS IN MASVINGO, ZIMBABWE

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the influence of parental level of education on the academic performance of adolescents in Masvingo, Zimbabwe. The study is informed by Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory. A qualitative phenomenological design was used with interviews as data-collection instruments to eight (8) form 2 learners and four (4) parents who were purposively sampled at a secondary school in Masvingo province. The Tesch's open coding method of data analysis was used to identify themes and categories. Findings from this study revealed that some form two learners encountered financial stress and drop out from school due to lack of support from their uneducated parents thus adversely affecting children's health, and academic achievements. This study also established that the academic performance of adolescence is affected by parents' level of education, lack of scaffolding and support from parents, poor interaction between the parents and parents, parental monitoring and parental value of education. This study recommends adult education programmes to ensure that parents who fail to go to school in the past are given the opportunity to read and write and at the same time mobilise their children to like school.

Keywords: adolescence, academic performance, level of education, ecological system, phenomenological.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Research suggests that the problem of low academic performance starts with the parents and their lack of education and understanding of the needs of the children (Li-Grinning, 2007). Feldman and Feldman (2009) concur with this view when they argue that in many poor households, parental education is substandard, time is short and warm emotions are at a premium—all factors that put attainment process at risk. Davis-kean (2002) supports this notion when he argues that parental education level is an important predictor of children's educational and behavioural outcomes. Levin (2001) also argues that parents are probably the actors with the clearest undimensional interest in a high level of their children's academic performance. From a study carried out by Dearins, McCorney and Taylor (2002) on the impact of parental involvement, it was discovered that parental involvement may vary by parental education. They discovered that involvement from more educated parents was associated with high academic performance.

Feldman (2010) points out that in many poor households, parental education is substandard and this put the attainment process at risk. McLoyd (2002) argues that the level of education influences parents' knowledge, beliefs, values and goals about child rearing so that a variety of parental behaviour are indirectly related to the adolescents' school performance, for

example, high levels of education may enhance parents' facility at becoming involved in their children's education and also enable parents to acquire and model social skills and problem solving strategies conducive to children's school success. Bream and Buchanan(2003) concurs with the above notion when they argue that the level of education influences the parents' knowledge, beliefs, values and goals about child rearing so that a variety of parental behaviour are indirectly related to children's school performance, for example, higher levels of education may enhance parents' facility at becoming involved in their children's education and also enable parents to acquire and model social skills and problem solving strategies conducive to children's, success, thus, children whose parents have higher levels of education may have an enhanced regard for learning, more positive ability beliefs, a strong work orientation and they may use more effective learning strategies than children of parents with lower levels of education. The same sentiments are shared by Perlman (2000:87) who posited that children who lack loving care from parents are likely to underachieve at school. Zindi (1997) argues that these adolescents tend to have high rates of delinquency and lower educational performance. Same sentiments are echoed by Lockwood and Kanda (2002) who classify role models into two, namely positive role models and negative role models. Positive role models, they argue, refers to individuals who have achieved outstanding success and are widely expected to improve and to pursue similar excellence while a negative role model refers to the individuals who have not achieved outstanding success and are expected to motivate people to take two steps necessary to avoid similar mistakes, thus ,if parents are not educated enough, they do not provide a good model to the pupils, as a result, there would imitate the behaviour of such parents

According to Davis-Kean (2005) during adolescents, parental monitoring to the extent to which parents know their children's activities outside home and school plays a crucial role in adolescent outcomes, particularly when children and adolescents perceive genuine care from their parents as was propounded by Rogers that parents needs to be genuine in their dealings with adolescents. In support of this view, Rosenzweig (2011) emphasised that parent monitoring is associated with fewer school problems, less substance abuse and reduced delinquency. Moreover, parental monitoring is positively linked to social development, school grades and school engagement such as paying attention in class and being motivated to do well in school. Driscoll and Nigel (2010) supports the above notion when they argue that adolescents from poor families who are not constantly monitored are more likely to stop thinking that they will get good marks, more likely to stop liking school and more likely to stop thinking that they will proceed with education up to university level than young people from richer families. These researchers sought to find out if a correlation exists between parents' level of education and the adolescent's academic performance in Masvingo district.

Studies which examined African American parents recorded that parents who maintained positive views about the value of education and who hold high academic expectations have children who often experience higher levels of academic achievement (Torre & Carpio, 2015). Same views are expressed by Unger (2010) when he argues that when parents set high standards, children work harder and their school achievement is higher. He goes on to argue that high school drop outs report their mothers have lower expectations for them and high school drop outs are likely to have a family history of dropping out suggesting again the influence of family norms or expectations, that is when parents express high expectations about academic excellence, children are more likely to perform well in their studies. Driscoll and Nigel (2010) concur with this view when they argue that richer parents tend to set higher expectations for their children's education than poorer parents, as a result, adolescents from richer families tend to have higher educational aspirations and expectations than young people from poor families. In support of this idea, Dantesy (2004) asserts that high

aspirations maybe especially important for adolescents from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Parents who have high aspirations may provide a strong influence that enables children to overcome other disadvantages. Booth and Amato (2011) argues that children whose parents have higher levels of education may have enhanced regard for learning more positive ability beliefs, a stronger work orientation and they may use more effective learning strategies than children of parents with lower levels of education. They emphasised that when parents attend consultation days at school, help adolescents with their homework at home and watch their children in sports or other activities, their children do better in school and if parents are not involved, their children receive lower grades and are more likely to drop out and perform poorly in their home works. Driscoll and Nigel (2010) agree unanimously with this view when they argue that rich and educated parents are more likely to help their children with homework, more likely to get involved in school activities and more likely to share family views with their children than uneducated parents.

Therefore, parental involvement and level of education are a potent predictor of school success regardless of ethnicity, family structure or gender. Bream and Buchanan (2003) argue that parents with higher levels of education are also more likely to believe strongly on their abilities to help their children learn. Cohen, Doye, Turner, Alper and Skoner (2003) assert that children's reading and arithmetic attainment and social adjustment in schools are positively co-related to parental level of education. They go on to argue that this is due to the fact that children spend more time at home than in schools, and the parents have the opportunity for a number of interactions with their children in one-on-one situations. Baldwan and Hoffman (2002) concurs with this view when they argue that the level of education of parents can help the children develop proper personality characteristics and equip them better to adjust socially and academically. Same sentiments were echoed by Driscoll and Nigel (2010) when they argue that if both parents and one of the parents holds a university degree himself or herself, he/she is more likely to expect her child to go to university than if he/she does not. They made a conclusion that was based on behaviour pattern of educated and uneducated parents. They concluded that a high degree of literacy leads to more positive and healthy pattern of behaviour. This view contradicts the notion forwarded by Evans, Jonathan, Richard and Wanner (2011) that examinations across varied culturally groups within the United States suggested level of education does not appear to determine the value parents place on education, their interest in their children's schooling or their aspirations for their children's academic success. They argue that teacher communication to parents predicted parental involvement suggesting that regardless of educational level, parents need encouragement from educators to become involved in their children's academic abilities.

Beauvais and Jensen (2003) point out that parent participation in the school ranging from classroom visits to tutoring, text book evaluations and staff evaluations result in better school-family relations. Improved communication between the school and the family keeps parents informed and provides information on how to help their children succeed. The result would be improved student achievement and attitudes towards school. One study of high achievement at Latino College, students found that their parents imparted strong encouragement and values that emphasised education as a means to escape poverty.

As a result of economic instability, the parents do not have time to sit down and talk with the adolescents and also monitor closely the adolescents' school work, for instance, homework assignments. Instead parents spend the day buying and selling so that they can afford a decent meal for the family. Without close monitoring both at school and at home, some adolescents' performance may decrease drastically. Aremu (2000) asserts that parental involvement emerges as another robust influence on educational outcome. Examples include monitoring

children's activities outside home and school, setting rules, having conversations about and helping children with school work and school related issues, holding high educational expectations, discussing future planning with children and helping them with important decision making, participating in school related activities such as meeting with parents and volunteering in the classroom and reading to children or engaging in other enrichment or leisure activities. The same views are echoed by Duru, Gandari and Mafunga (2017) who posit that another aspect of family that is critical to the youth is parental involvement in school which can range from monitoring homework at home to participating in school governance is found to relate to school achievement. Same sentiments are echoed by Mwamwenda (2010) who argues that monitoring of an adolescent's school work both at home and at school may be regarded as one of the important factors in the creation of a favourable environment for effective learning. The present study sought to establish whether indeed the level of parental education and lack of close monitoring of an adolescent's school work at home may result in the decrease of an adolescent's academic performance.

Chinyoka and Naidu (2013) argue that despite coming from poor backgrounds, some students managed to defy the odds and excelled academically. Frazer (2001) argues that some children irrespective of home background or structure may work harder and become successful in life. Therefore, besides low socio-economic background and academic levels of parents, some factors come into play such as resilience, inborn factors and motivation. Rutter's Pathway model (2008) explains that children born in poverty can have self-righting tendencies, making them much more resilient to pressures of poverty. Grinnell and Unrau (2008) emphasised that boys and girls from deprived homes may attain greater satisfaction in life both by their own and by societal demands. They go on to argue that though more pronounced for adolescents from middle class backgrounds, these favourable outcomes were also evident among their lower class counterparts as well. The loss of economic security forced the family to mobilise its own human resources including its own teenagers who had to take on new roles and responsibilities both within and outside the home and to work together towards the common goal of getting and keeping the family on its feet. They argue that this experience is essential for it provides effective training in initiative, responsibility and cooperation which is crucial for any academic success. Consequently, resilience may to a greater extent, drive students from poor socio-economic status to perform better or to perform extremely well, despite their harsh economic backgrounds.

Ecological Model (Urie Bronfenbrenner)

The major informant of this study is Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. The emphasis on Urie Bronfenbrenner ecological theory is on the child's surroundings, for example, their home, church, schoolwork, neighbourhood, culture and government having an influence on the way the child develops (Donald 2010; Berk 2007). Bronfenbrenner (2008) emphasised that individual development is a culmination of many direct and indirect influences which either facilitate or impede individual potential. The influences consist of five nested structures: micro-systems, meso-system, exo-system, macro-system and chrono-system. The micro-system refers to any immediate organizations or relationships the children interact with, for instance, the immediate family, school, peers, neighbours and caregivers. According to, Cole et al (2009) the meso-system describes how the various aspects of the micro system work together. The exo-system deals with aspects that indirectly affect the child which have a great impact on the academic performance of adolescents, for example, the neighbourhood, the parents' work place and the extended family members whose lifestyle indirectly affects the child which in turn affects the academic performance of adolescents.

According to Bronfenbrenner (2008) the macro-system involves the cultural aspect of the human component which involves dominant socio-economic structures. The culture includes the norms, values, beliefs and practices that influence all other social systems. Therefore, the individual's performance is greatly affected by the cultural beliefs of the society in which the child lives, thus, the individual is not independent of his/her own culture.

The chrono-system takes into account the aspect of time. According to Chinyoka and Naidu (2013) the chrono-system involves development overtime that affects the interactions between those systems. Understanding the interactions of these systems is essential in order to understand how a child develops and factors which led to the child's failure.

According to Chinyoka (2013) understanding the interaction of these systems is essential in order to understand how a child develops, in particular, an adolescent and what factors lead to their academic failure. According to Mugweni (2012) developmental time affects the interaction between ecological systems and may influence an individual's development. Therefore, if an adolescent's immediate family, extended families and all other systems in which an adolescent is developing are involved, they continually change and develop themselves. These changes interact with an adolescent's progressive stages of development in a way which affects his/her performance. According to Donald et al (2010) the ecosystem helps to see how things might change, develop and can be healed.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study adopted a phenomenological design in order to explore and present the influence of parental level of education on the academic performance of adolescents in Masvingo, Zimbabwe. Qualitative phenomenological approach is used to highlight the specifics and to identify phenomena through how they are perceived by form two learners and parents. One of the advantages of this approach is that it allows the researchers to gain an understanding of social phenomena from participants' perspectives in their natural settings (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

Sample and Sampling

The sample comprised of eight form two learners and four parents. In this study, purposive sampling was found to be more realistic than other sampling methods in terms of time, effort and cost needed in finding informants (Bernard, 2012). The secondary school was chosen because of its proximity to the researchers.

Instrumentation

Data were collected through interviews. Creswell (2013) argues that, capturing what people say in their own words is the most important contribution of qualitative research to understanding human behaviour and perception. The advantages of using interviews in this study was to allow the researchers to adapt the questions as necessary, clarifying doubt and ensure that the responses were properly understood by repeating or rephrasing the questions (Patton, 2012). Another advantage of using face-to-face interviews in this study lies in the quality of the data obtained. This implies that the participants were in a position to seek further clarification on some of the responses through probing. Each interviewee's tone, voice and facial expression was captured by the researchers.

Data Collection Procedures

To allow for the collection of as much relevant information as possible, the interviews to eight selected form twos and four parents were not tightly structured. Therefore, relevant

issues which were not included in the interview guide but arose during the process of conducting the interviews were explored and noted in impromptu supplementary questions. This was in line with the flexible nature of qualitative research (Yin, 2012). Follow-ups and probing questions were also asked for elaboration or in order to seek clarification during interviews. The research instruments were validated by research experts and a pilot study was conducted hence trustworthiness of data was ascertained.

Data Analysis

In order to identify themes and categories, the researchers applied the Tesch's (2006) open coding method of data analysis. This Tesch's method is a systemic process of examining, selecting, categorising, comparing, synthesising and interpreting data to unpack the major research question of the study (Yin, 2012).

Ethical Considerations

Permission to conduct the study was secured from the Ministry of Primary and Secondary schools in Zimbabwe, eight parents/guardians of the students and four parents. Form twos who participated in interviews completed assent forms to show their willingness to participate in the research while parents filled in consent forms. The participants were informed that their involvement in the study was voluntary and that they were free to withdraw at any stage of the interviews and focus group discussions if they were not comfortable. Participants were assured of anonymity in participating in the study. Confidentiality and privacy were upheld.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

From the interview administered by the researcher to the parents and the adolescents', the researchers found out that the parent's level of education has a significant role to play in the academic performance of form two learners. From the findings, three of the eight parents were illiterate which meant that they could neither read nor write. As a result, they could not assist their children at home when working on the home work given by the teacher. Two of the parents were educated up to primary level, therefore, they could not adequately assist their children at secondary level and this had a negative impact on the academic performance of adolescents. About three out of eight of the parents were educated up to diploma and degree level, therefore, they were able to assist their children; however it was noted that they were too busy to sit down and assist the adolescents with their work. The study yielded the following themes:

Themes Derived from the Findings

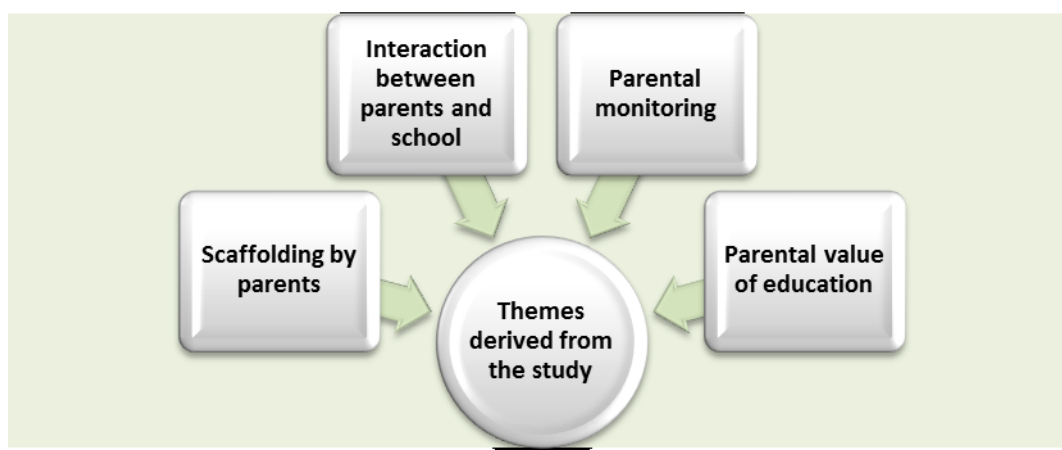


Fig. 1: Summarising major themes from the findings

From fig 1, the following themes were derived from the findings, assisting adolescents to do their homework or scaffolding, interaction between parents and the school, parental value of education and parental monitoring.

Theme 1: Scaffolding/Parental assistance on school work at home

During interviews, most of the form twos indicated that they did not get adequate help at home as their counterparts from affluent families. As a result of illiteracy, the parents could not assist their children. The findings from the interview with parents are in line with these findings. One parent bemoaned illiteracy as a stumbling block, she said that long ago, only boys were given the opportunity to go to school, educating a girl child was regarded as wasting money, therefore, the mother lamented that as much as she would like to assist her child working on the home work, she could not because she was uneducated. As a result, the child always performed badly in her academic work and the child would eventually accept that he/she is incapable, as a result. She goes on to say that the her child would start to lose interest in school and would finally drop out of school as a result. One form 2 learner G1, lamented that:

... there would be no one at home to assist him /her when working on the home work because the mother and father are always on short business trips to neighbouring countries such as South Africa, Botswana and Tanzania. Mostly, they would be staying with their grandparents who could neither read nor write.

The same sentiments were echoed by Data (2010) who argued that if parents migrate to neighbouring countries, children are deprived of the family support system they used to lean on, therefore, they would not have anyone to supervise their homework and help them whenever it was necessary. Li-Grinning (2007) seems to agree with this idea when he suggests that the problem of low academic performance starts with the parents and their lack of education and understanding of the needs of the children. Eneji, Ubo –Bassey, Eneji, Obogo and Dunnamah (2013) concurs with this view when they note that many parents have never attended school and they cannot read, write or count properly. It should also be noted that educated parents are not always available to assist their children with their school work.

Theme 2: interaction between parents and school

From the interview which was administered to parents, an overwhelming majority indicated that an interaction between parents and the school plays a major role in the academic performance of adolescents. The majority of parents indicated that they had tight schedules at home which do not give them time to visit the school and even on consultation days. One of the parents pointed out that he never met anyone form two teacher for his daughter and most of the parents confessed that interaction between home and the school influences the academic performance of adolescents. From the interviews, the adolescents indicated that the parents were always busy to such an extent that they could not spare time even on consultation days to visit the school. Some of the adolescents indicated that they stayed with grandparents who could not travel and if they could, they could not understand the language of the teacher since they were illiterate. As a result, the researchers discovered that the performance of the adolescents would be seriously tempered with that way.

The above findings seem to concur with Deanns et al (2002) who discovered in their research that parental involvement is crucial for the academic achievement of an adolescent. They assert that children of highly involved parents performed well in their academic work. Davies-Kean(2005) expresses the same sentiments when he emphasized that children whose parents perceived more parental involvement tended to exhibit fewer problems and higher language and Maths competencies compared to children whose parents perceived less

parental involvement. Parveen, Noor-UL-Amin and Nazir (2013) strongly emphasized the importance of strong family school-relations. The findings of the current research revealed that parental involvement is associated with various measures of student achievement for all students including who come from low socio economic background.

Theme 3: Parental value of education

From the interviews held, there were mixed feelings on parental value for education. The study established that parents who maintained positive views about the value of education and who hold high academic expectations, educated or not educated usually have children who experience higher levels of academic achievement. In line with the findings, Unger (2010) posits that when parents set high standards, children work harder and their school achievement becomes higher. He went on to argue that high school drop outs are likely to have a family history of dropping out suggesting the influence of family norms or expectations, that is, when parents express high expectations about academic excellence, children are more likely to perform well in studies. Dantesy (2004) agrees with the above views when he asserts that high aspirations may be especially important for adolescents from low socio economic backgrounds. He went on to argue that parents who have high aspirations may provide a strong influence that enables children to overcome other disadvantages.

Theme 4: Parental Monitoring

Majority of form two participants bemoaned lack of monitoring from their parents .They pointed out that when they reached home, they would find household chores awaiting them and even if they told their parents of the homework they were given by the parents, parents seemed to give a deaf ear to their plea. They would emphasize the fact that children had to be trained to be responsible mothers and fathers of tomorrow. After doing household chores, they would be tired that they would go straight to bed. They lamented that their parents never encourage them to work on their school work or to check if they had done their home work. Parents interviewed showed that adequate monitoring is crucial, however, some of the parents elaborated that because of economic hardships the parents are facing, they do not have time to sit down and discuss with their children educational matters. Some of the parents pointed out that they spent most of the time toiling and hustling to fend for the family; therefore, monitoring of adolescents was regarded by them as an insignificant factor to be considered compared to other pressing issues.

The above findings concurs with the views from Davis-Kean (2005) who asserts that during adolescence, parental monitoring to the extent to which parents know their children's activities outside home and school had a great role to play in their academic outcomes. Carl Rosenzweig (2001) emphasized that parental monitoring is associated with fewer school problems, less substance abuse and reduced delinquency. He went on to emphasize that parental monitoring is positively linked to social development, school grades and school engagements such as paying attention in class and being motivated to do well in school. Same sentiments are echoed by Threifall, Seay and Kohl (2013); Hafiz, Tehsin, Malik, Muhammad and Muhammad (2013) when they argue that parents have a fundamental responsibility to ensure that their children are at school and their school work is done. Consequently, the researcher concluded that parental involvement, according to this study plays a crucial role in the academic performance of an adolescent.

From the interviews, the results have shown that children with parents whom are learned have set for themselves high standards issues to be achieved by them unlike those from low socio economic backgrounds where parents are illiterate and do not hold any value on education, thus, the adolescent would lack a role model at home to imitate. The participants

also agree on the fact that educated parents tend to monitor their children to find out if they have done the home work or not and this goes a long way in augmenting the academic performance of adolescents.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The research findings reveal that educated parents usually set goals to be achieved by their children and the children would strive to achieve the set goals. Consequently, the adolescents would be motivated and they develop self-efficacy. To them, the sky would be the limit, thus, the adolescents would develop high aspirations in life. Contrary to that, adolescents who come from poor socioeconomic background would lack supervision which is adequate at home when doing home works, as a result, they perform below standard in class.

The government is encouraged to continue with the programme of adult education to ensure that parents who fail to go to school in the past are given the opportunity to read and write. Through this effort, the parents would test the sweetness of education and would eventually support and mobilise their children to like school.

The schools are encouraged to host events which enable parents to interact with the school on monthly basis such as consultation days, visiting days and sports day whereby parents are invited to cement the relationship between the school and the parents for the benefit of the child academically.

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