

An Investigation of the Impact of Parental Involvement on Primary School Students Achievement at Grade 7 Certificate Level in Monze District, Zambia

Dorababu Tadepalli

Address: Assistant Professor Group of Adult Education School of Social Sciences
Jawaharlal Nehru University New Delhi – 67, India

Abstract

Zambia National Survey reports show low academic achievement at Grade Seven level in the country. The challenge the researcher had was to determine the cause of low academic achievement as to be associated with parental involvement or other factors. This study focused on an investigation into the impact of parental involvement on pupil academic achievement of Grade seven pupils in community and public primary schools in Monze District, Zambia. Studies of parental involvement in pupil's academic achievement in the country have shown substantial factors causing the decline in academic performance at Grade 7 certificate level. This problem was what provoked the researcher to investigate into the impact of parental involvement on pupil achievement at Grade 7 certificate level in five community primary school and five public primary schools in Monze District. Presently, at provincial level, Grade 7 results for Southern Province showed a decline by more than 48%. According to 2012 Grade 7 academic results analyzed by the Examination Council of Zambia; the 11 districts of Southern Province student achievement had improved in community schools of Livingstone district, yet in Monze results remained at position 7 like 2011 Grade 7 certificate results. The researcher attempted and investigated the impact of parental involvement by administering a questionnaire to five out of thirty eight community primary schools and five out of seventy seven public primary schools in Monze District to find out whether improved and programmed parental involvement would improve student's academic achievement at Grade 7 certificate level in Monze District.

KEYWORDS: investigation, primary school, students, achievements, Monze district, Zambia

This research proceeded in parallel with a significant number of educational strategies that the country introduced in 2007 to achieve Educational For All or (EFA) goals which necessitated and brought on board the reform of sound school organization, administration, management and the curriculum that is implemented, because of the low examination results for the country and for southern province in particular as overwhelmingly nose diving at Grade 7 and Grade 9. The research found out what factors impact parents involved and what activities activate parents influence on pupil achievement both at home and at school as well as how they can be programmed in school activities so that students increase their levels of attainment in terms of acquisition of skills, attitudes, concepts, values and bodies of curriculum conducive to self-fulfillment of good citizenship. Although there are concerns raised by researchers on the impact of parental involvement on community school and public school student results at

Grade 7 certificate level, the challenge remains for Zambian parents whose students are expected to perform well. The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of parental involvement in five community primary school students and five public primary school students at Grade 7 certificate level to determine whether parental involvement in student achievement would improve academic achievement in Monze Districts. This research however was conducted in Zambia in Southern Province in Monze District. The researcher investigated the relationship between the impact of parental involvement and student academic achievement. Monazza and Wenglinsky's questionnaire of the Likert – Instrument type was combined and was used to investigate and to collect data from five community primary schools and five public primary schools one private primary school in Monze District. Demographic data plus reading of 2003, 2006 and 2008 Grade five assessment reports, review of government documents and observation of teachers and discussions with parents were used to collect data from the purposive sample of 150 students randomly sampled and 150 parents of the student sample. The target population comprised of 150 students and 150 parents from the 10 schools. The findings revealed that educated parents in community primary schools where parents were generally involved with some form of class work and home work, students become interested in schooling. Following their academic performance from 2012 to 2013 we discovered that some of those community primary schools where NGO interventions like Time to Learn insist on parents' involvement in students academically achievement results improve. In the private primary school in Monze data findings revealed that parents were involved in many areas of the students' academic performance to an extent that parents chose what their students should learn and what they should not because of what professional pathways they wanted their children to concentrate in and so parents were fully involved in students academics and they assisted students in achieving excellent academic levels. For public primary schools in Monze, the research findings revealed that those students whose parents had a good education and they were female parents or guardians, were involved in their children's academic activities by providing guidance and communicating with children's teachers, helping children with home work, supervising children home works and assignments, attacking difficult assignments as well as helping complete home work and other difficult questions in order to improve performance at Grade 7 certificate level. However, if the parent of the student had minimum education or had gone to school up to Middle Basic school level, their influence in students academic work was very minimal and sometimes no involvement was seen according to the data findings, this is the reason the majority of respondents showed lower achievers in academic performance and non involvement of parents. Significant relationships were established between involved parents and students academic achievement at grade 7 certificate level. Findings revealed that educated parents were more involved in students' academic performances than those parents who were not educated. The conclusions justified that parental involvement policies if introduced and practiced in all schools and strengthened in primary schools at an early stage of Grade 2 or 3, academic achievements at Grade 7 certificate level would substantially improve in primary schools to levels of pride in the province. Conclusions further justified that if students engaged in solving home work problems, getting help from teachers and parents, in developing skills knowledge and values that improve academic performance, tackling harder assignments and increased efforts to work hard and understand the new basic school curriculum

school vision, as well as asking their parents to discuss academic performance at Grade 7 certificate level results would improve in Monze District, Zambia.

Parental effort is consistently associated with higher levels of achievement, and the magnitude of the effect of parental effort is substantial. Desforges (2007) stated that, it was widely recognized that if pupils maximized their potential from schooling they would need the full support of their parents. To shed more light Desforges (2007), attempts to enhance parental involvement in education occupied governments, administrators, educators and parents' organizations across North America, Australasia, continental Europe, Scandinavia and the UK. He adds that it was anticipated that parents played a role not only in the promotion of their own children's achievements but more broadly in school improvement and the democratization of school governance. He provides an example of The European Commission, which holds that the degree of parental participation is a significant indicator of the quality of schooling. He further illuminates that in England, the Government's strategy for securing parental involvement was first set out in the 1997 White Paper, with the title '*Excellence in Schools*'. Where the strategy described three major elements namely; providing parents with information, giving parents a voice and encouraging parental partnerships with schools. This strategy has played through a wide range of activities including the enhancement of parent governor roles of involvement in inspection processes provision of annual reports and prospectuses, the requirement for home-school agreements, the provision of increasing amounts of information about the curriculum and school performance, regardless of government policies. Some parents have been actively involved in enhancing their children's development and educational progress even spontaneously participated in activities taken by a number of forms including activities such as good parenting in the home, instilling skills, and good attitudes of self concept. Parents visits to schools helped to gather relevant information and to establish good relationships with other parents and students by holding discussions with teachers in order to keep abreast with the child's progress as well as discussing emergent problems and assisting more broadly in the practical activities and governance of the school.

Another study on community school effect on student academic performance in comparison with public student academic performance by (Colemann, Hoffer & Kilgore 1982) revealed that taking into account key background characteristics of parent involvement in students socio-economic status and other factors, was discovered that students attending community primary schools out performed students attending public primary schools in academic achievement in America. Additionally, the researchers reanalyzed that the national data from the 1982 study responded to several criticisms of the research and replicated their findings and successfully concluded that the key issues of the results still indicated that whether students were attending school in community primary schools or public primary schools, students who were performing higher remained performing higher because of parental involvement. Gonzalez (2010) discussed academic performance and conquered with Terry Heick that the influence of parents on student academic achievement was more likely to be above 52% than those attending school without parental involvement. He added that such students were more likely to enjoy schooling and to get straight A's than those whose parents were not involved in their academics.

Topor (2011) and Gonzalez (2008) and other researchers hold that parents of high qualifications develop high achieving students by setting higher standards for their children's educational activities than parents of low achieving students. In earlier research it was revealed that if parents were involved in their children's education at home they performed better in school than those students whose parents were not involved. Lightfoot (2004), states that many articles discussed parental involvement to target low-income families and urban parents as key targets in the educational system (p. 91). In his research he discovered that the school staff, focused on various deterrents, such as education, unemployment, substance and spousal abuse, parenting skills, health issues, incarceration, and homelessness. He consistently said these factors were considered as deterrents, to prevent parents' involvement in students' achievement. Additionally he said that there existed a deterrent such as substance abuse that prevented parents from fulfilling their parental role of helping their students succeed academically. Consequently, he confirms that reports of children from families with substance abuse were more likely to have problems with delinquency, poor school performance, and emotional difficulties than their peers from homes without substance abuse.

According to Gaustad (1993), he as well added that substance abuse affects American students of all economic backgrounds in every geographic area. However, Gaustad's research was linked to drug use and the decline in student's academic performance resulting in truancy and dropping out, and crime and misconduct. The idea that parental involvement shares a relationship to student achievement is not new because research indicated that this idea contributed to the organization of one major advocate for parental involvement in education, namely the National Parent Teacher Association (PTA, 2006) in USA. Gaustad (1993) confirms that parental involvement very commonly affected student's academic achievement.

Parental involvement on student achievement has a strong positive effect on the grade point average of the 9th graders in USA says Keith, T.Z., Keith, Quirk, Sperduto, Santillo, & Killings, 1998. Balen and Moles (1994) and Hurst (2002) suggested that when parents have a positive attitude regarding education and demonstrate trust that their children can do well, children performed better in school. However, parental involvement tends to decrease as students become older (p. 3). This collaborative effort begins with assistance from the school administration and Parent Teacher Association who work in collaboration and strategize student activities in improving students' achievements. Gaustad (2006) concurs with other researchers who hold that the primary function of the PTA is to recruit parents and schedule regular parent meetings, which provide opportunities for parents to meet and converse regarding issues they find pertinent to student performance as well as come up with topics of discussion including parenting needs, infrastructure, staff, and funding, as well as other school business to inject value to student improvement in academic achievement. The researcher's findings proved that a key individual in this initiative was a Parent Liaison. We find this according to S. Ingram's *personal communication*, (June 15, 2007), Parent Liaison for Malcolm X Shabazz

Other researchers ranging from parents, educators, political leaders and community stakeholders maintain the ideology that the lack of parental involvement has a direct correlation to student achievement. Examples from earlier research findings have shown that schools as well as students continue their efforts to encourage and increase parental involvement as a means of improving student achievement however it depends on individual parents to take up the challenge to avoid deterrents believed to prevent parents from participating in the educational process of their child. The researcher agrees that such research collected data using questionnaire surveys unearthed overwhelming findings of relevant data in Monze District. To prove further earlier researchers made use of the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation statistical instrument which allowed the analysis of quantitative data to answer research questions posed. The research used the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation design as a research tool that is believed to be commonly used in the research measurement of two variables Gaustad (2006) says and this is the instrument this research will use.

Concurrently the foundation for this research is derived from finding from earlier research of parental involvement in Community Primary schools and students' academic achievement and parental involvement in Public Primary schools and students' academic achievement. Thorkildsen and Stein (2003) suggest that parenting programs should have a significant impact on parents becoming involved in the education of their child, and as measured by the questionnaire survey, they confirm that parenting programs are needed to assist parents in becoming more involved in the education of their child. Not only does this earlier research show the need for parental involvement in student achievement, but one other research by Shumow's (2001) whose study serves as a major contributor on the topic of parental involvement and student achievement also confirms the idea that if parents are involved in students activities, greater achievement will be seen.

Additionally, parent involvement in a child's early education is consistently found to be positively associated with a child's academic performance (Hara & Burke, 1998; Hill & Craft, 2003; Marcon 1999; Stevenson & Baker, 1987) says. Concurrently, these researchers are in agreement and state that when specifically, children whose parents are more involved in their education tend to have higher levels of academic performance than children whose parents were involved to a lesser degree. They illuminate further that the influence of parent involvement on academic success has not only been noted among researchers, but also among policy makers who have integrated efforts aimed at increasing parent involvement into broader educational policy initiatives. Coupled with these findings of the importance of early academic success, Entwisle & Hayduk 1988; Pedersen, Faucher, & Eaton, 1978 concluded that a child's academic success has been found to be relatively stable after early elementary school, meaning, it is important to examine factors that contribute to early academic success that are amenable to change.

Since early researchers Christian, Morrison, 1977; Bryant, 1998; Committee on Early Childhood Pedagogy, 2000 reported that parent-child interactions, specifically stimulating and responsive parenting practices, are important influences on a child's academic development because it calls for examining specific parenting practices that are amenable to change, such as parent involvement, and the mechanisms by which these practices influence academic performance, programs in order to develop and increase a

child's academic performance. Research concludes that while parent involvement was found to be related to increased academic performance, the specific mechanisms through which parent involvement exerts its influence on a child's academic performance are not yet fully understood Hill & Craft, (2003). This is why understanding these mechanisms would improve further research and policy initiatives and may lead to the development of more effective intervention programs designed to increase children's academic performance.

The Zambia Journal of Teachers Professional Growth highlights that the development of reading and writing skills in learners is influenced by biological and environmental factors whose answers are found within the community and the school environment. The findings showed that the influence in the home, who are the students parents is of central importance and if left unnoticed, resulting in learning difficulties which affect students achievement and increase drop -out rates in the country (p.35). Parental involvement is defined and measured in multiple ways that include activities of parents engaged at home and at school as well as development of positive attitudes towards their child's education, school, and teacher (Eptein, 1996, Grolnick&Slowiaczek, 1994: Khol, Lengua, & McMahan, 2000). This distinction of activities in parents' involvement and the attitudes parents develop towards education was highlighted by several recent studies. Several studies found that increased frequency of parent activities was associated with higher levels of student's positive behavior in the classroom (Izzo, Weissberg, Kasprov, &Fendrich, 1999). Additionally, positive attitudes towards education and school were associated with the student's increased academic performance and parental involvement (Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta, Cox & Bradley (2003). Specifically, Izzo et al. (1999) reported that increased parent's school activities, such as increased number of parent-teacher contacts, was associated with improved academicachievement. The significance of parent attitudes toward education and school was less understood, although attitudes were believed to comprise key dimension of the relationship between parents and students academic achievement (Eccles & Harold, 1996). Parents convey attitudes about education to their children during out-of-school hours and these attitudes are reflected in the child's classroom behavior and in the teacher's relationship with the child and the parents (Kellaghan, Sloane, Alvarez, & Bloom, 1993).

Findings of this study revealed that educated parents in community primary schools where parents are generally involved with some form of class work and home work, students become interested in schooling. Following their academic performance from 2012 to 2013 we discovered that some of those community primary schools where NGO interventions like Time to Learn insist on parents' involvement students academically improve. In the private primary school Petersen in Monze findings revealed that parents are involved in many areas of the students' academic performance to a level that they even choose what to learn and which areas they want their children to concentrate in and so they were involved because they assisted students in achieving academic levels that were good. For public primary schools of Monze, the research findings revealed that those students whose parents had a good education and they were female parents or guardians, they were involved in their children's academic achievement by providing guidance to communicating with children's teachers, helping children with home work , supervising children home works and assignments, attacking difficult assignments as well as helping complete home work and other difficult questions in order

to improve performance at Grade 7 certificate level. However, if the parent of the student had minimum education or had gone to school up to Middle Basic school level, their influence in students academic achievement was very minimal and sometimes not involved seen in the data findings of the research were the majority of respondents showed lower achievers in academic performance.

Conclusions

It should be noted that the data obtained for this study is sufficient for the researcher to make absolute judgment, however it provides additional sources of information on which decisions for this study have been based. In this regard therefore, the researcher is led to the following conclusions; Understanding how any one part of a complex interacting system impacts on the desired outcomes is clearly very challenging. The ideal scientific approach to such questions would be to conduct a programme of carefully designed experiments in which all factors except the variable in question are controlled in order to observe the impact on the system. In complex human systems this is impossible, and indeed, may be unethical. The modern alternative to the experiment is to use statistical techniques on large data sets which allow the researcher to exercise a degree of statistical control over many variables in order to test theories about how the system works. The scientifically most sound studies of parental involvement adopt just such an approach. Recent studies in this vein have provided a consistent picture of how parental involvement influences pupil achievement and adjustment and the degree to which this influence operates.

Results indicated a statistically significant association between parent involvement and a child's academic performance, over and above the impact of the child's intelligence. A multiple mediation model indicated that the child's perception of cognitive competence fully mediated the relation between parent involvement and the child's performance on a standardized achievement.

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