

PERSPECTIVES OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS REGARDING PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN MOBILE EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION ACTIVITIES

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Abstract

There are early childhood development centres that have been designated as mobile centres in the South African environment. These facilities have been running for a while with the goal of providing early learning to a throng of South African children. The Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) program aims to provide children from birth to age 9 with a strong foundation for their education. The goal of this program is to ensure that kids transition successfully from early childhood education or pre-primary level to primary level of education. Early life experiences are thought to be of utmost importance to a child's overall wellbeing and capacity for lifetime learning. In South Africa, the issue of parental engagement/ involvement in the early education of their children in conventional ECCE centres has been a topic of debate among early childhood educators. However, no empirical research has been conducted to establish the level of involvement of parents in mobile ECCE activities in South Africa. Thus, this research explored early childhood educators' perspectives regarding parental involvement in mobile ECCE activities. To implement this research, the researchers used an explanatory sequential mixed methods research approach. In this study, a sample of 10 early childhood educators from one organization in the Free State Province that offers mobile ECCE was used. With the aid of a structured questionnaire and a semi-structured interview guide, the necessary data for this study were gathered. The psychometric properties of the quantitative instrument and the trustworthiness of the qualitative instrument were sufficiently guaranteed. While ATLAS.ti software was used to analyze the qualitative data, relevant descriptive statistics such as bar charts, and percentage were used to analyse the quantitative data. It was found that a lot of parents are very concerned about their children's early learning. Most of the participants reported that some parents normally help in cleaning and washing the carpets and mats when they become dirty. Moreover, parents are involved because sometimes when there is an introduction of new themes, the parents take over the teaching of the themes to the children, especially the days when the educators are not there. This finding has practical implication in the sense that the more the parents are involved in the early education of their children, the more opportunity the children have in their early cognitive development. Thus, such involvement helps the early childhood educators in the mobile centres to cover the required themes for the contact. Therefore, the policy implication of this finding is that an adequate policy framework that will cover the active involvement of parents in the activities of mobile ECCE needs to be made and properly implemented.

Keywords: Early childhood educators, Mobile early childhood care and education centre, Parental involvement.

1 INTRODUCTION

International research demonstrates the significant advantages that parental involvement has for families, schools, and both rich and developing nations' economies over the long run [1]. Early childhood education has come to be seen as being critically dependent on parental participation [2]. One of the most important factors to improve high early childhood achievement, especially in underprivileged settings, is active parental participation [3]. Thus, it is crucial to have two-way communication between the home and the school to establish good parental engagement. Citing the work of Bower and Griffin, [4] reported that studies on the connection between parental participation and children's academic achievement have shown that parental involvement can take many different forms and is considered to be an effective method to increase student success. It has been established that parental participation is a crucial factor that can either have a favorable or negative impact on a child's academic performance though lack of involvement or excessive involvement may negatively affect students' behavior inside and outside of the classroom, which ultimately has an impact on their success and educational growth [5]. However, schools all across the world prefer to emphasize contact between the home and the school, giving parents less opportunity to express their opinions about the caliber of education [1]. Recent research from New Zealand first indicates that parent involvement in ECCE settings is necessary

for parent-teacher partnerships and that the existing form and scope of this partnership's implementation are problematic [6]. For ECCE teachers, knowledge of kids' learning experiences at home is important information. Citing the works of Hedges and Cooper, [6] reported that children experience a continuity of understandings and expectations between home and educational settings when teachers deepen their knowledge of children's participation in their families' and communities' activities and then engender links to these experiences within the educational program. This continuity can then foster children's enthusiasm for learning. Teachers made it very obvious that parents may be very helpful because they have access to areas of their children's lives that they are unable to affect themselves [7]. In order to create early childhood programs that are accessible to families with young children and are sustainable, successful, and high-quality, educators, administrators, and researchers are working very hard [8]. Supporting family participation in program activities and family members' attempts to continue children's learning at home are essential elements of high-quality early education [8].

Numerous initiatives worldwide, including those in the United Kingdom, Australia, and the United States as well as in international organizations like the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and United States Agency for International Development, reflect the importance of family engagement in early childhood education [8] Although studies on the relationship between parental involvement and children's academic performance across subjects (such as literacy and numeracy) have been conducted recently, there is much less information available on whether parental involvement affects children's academic performance differently across subjects with a longitudinal design when parents are present and supervising their children much more than before [9]. Pupils from houses with more controlling parenting styles typically performed worse than those from more distal or indirect profiles of family engagement. Even after taking into consideration the impact of context or background variables, parental participation styles have an impact on academic attainment at the individual and school levels [10]. Citing the work of Gadsden and others, [2] stated that studies on parental involvement showed not only that it had a positive impact on children's development but also that there were clear associations between the structure of the involvement and the academic and social-emotional outcomes of the children.

Research repeatedly demonstrates that parental involvement improves academic performance throughout childhood [11]. That notwithstanding, it was shown that although parents have the propensity to attend parent-teacher conferences, their degree of interest in their children's academic progress was only modest, and they showed little enthusiasm for or involvement in their kids' classroom activities [2]. The results a similar study showed some specific drawbacks of school-centered approaches and hinted that they can actually limit parents' comprehension of how to promote mathematics learning at home. However, the discovery deepens our comprehension of the possibilities offered by a parent-centered strategy for parental involvement in mathematics learning [12]. Parents are the main focus of the ongoing discussion about parental involvement (PI) but teachers' perspectives on PI have received very little investigation [3].

Based on the foregoing, it is very clear that despite the importance of parental involvement in the early education of children, literature is scarce on the perspectives of practitioners on parental involvement in mobile ECCE activities. Thus, this research sought to find out the perspective of practitioners regarding parental involvement in mobile ECCE activities.

2 METHODOLOGY

To conduct the research, the researchers used an explanatory sequential mixed techniques strategy. Researchers can gather quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously using an exploratory sequential mixed methods design with the goal of using the results of the qualitative data analysis to explain the results of the quantitative data analysis. In this study, a sample of 10 practitioners from one organization in the Free State Province that offers mobile ECCE took part. To meet the study's goals, a purposeful sample of these subjects was chosen. With the aid of a systematic questionnaire and a semi-structured interview guide, the necessary data for this study were gathered. Twenty questions on the survey were organized into four categories: very high level (VHL), high level (HL), low level (LL), and very low level (VLL). The quantitative tool's psychometric properties were appropriately protected. In other words, the questionnaire underwent proper face validation by professionals in early childhood education and test creation. The experts were asked to validate the questionnaire's items in terms of their phrasing, appropriateness, and applicability to the goal of the research.

The researchers were able to create the instrument's final version thanks to the experts' comments. After that, 20 practitioners who weren't involved in the study were given copies of the questionnaire.

This was done in order to determine the internal consistency and reliability of the questionnaire's items. The questionnaire's reliability coefficient, calculated using the Cronbach alpha method, was 0.89, indicating that the instrument was trustworthy. The reliability of the interview guide for the qualitative instrument was verified by having it thoroughly read by a variety of experts in the qualitative research approach. An ethical permission certificate was obtained prior to the administration of the instruments by the University of the Free State's Faculty of Education committee on research ethics. Additionally, the mobile centers used for the research provided gatekeeper letters. Following that, the practitioners were given the instruments in their various mobile centers, and the interview sessions were also done as necessary. While ATLAS.ti software was used to analyze the qualitative data, relevant descriptive statistics for the study of the quantitative data are bar charts and percentage.

3 RESULTS

The results were presented based on the quantitative and qualitative data analysis results.

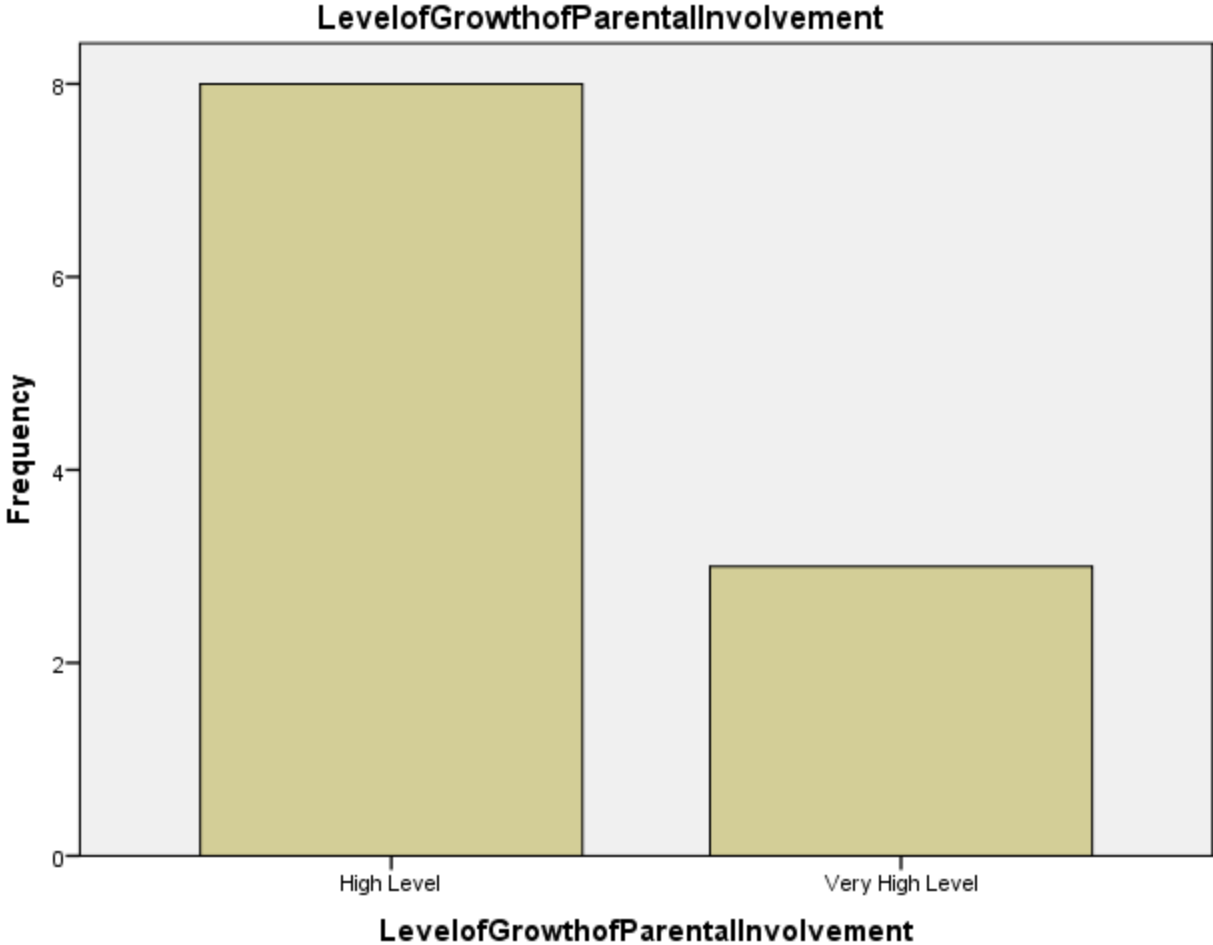


Figure 1: Bar chart representation of the level of growth of parental involvement

Figure 1 indicates that 72.7% of the practitioners responded that there is a high level of growth of parental involvement in the Lesedi Educare ECD centre in the Free State Province while only 27.3% responded that there is a very high level of such. This by implication means that there is a high level of growth of parental involvement in the Lesedi Educare ECD centre in the Free State Province.

In support of the above finding, the qualitative finding showed that a lot of parents are very concerned about their children's early learning. Practitioners normally receive support from our coordinator, mobile teams, as well as parents. Parents give us support because when we ask them to help the children with something the children struggle. Furthermore, the practitioners reported that the parents become involved especially when new themes are introduced to the children. In such a situation, the practitioners will introduce the themes to their parents so that on the days when the practitioners are not there, the parents should take over with the theme.

Below are the extracts from the participants' responses

3.1 Theme 1: A lot of parents are very concerned about their children's early learning

Participant 1 responded thus "I received the support from our coordinator, mobile teams. Also, the parents, they give us the support because when I ask the parents to help the children with something that the children struggle, with the parents support me".

Participant 2 responded thus "*Like for some parents they normally help, like if ever we need some help, normally the carpets get dirty because we have to put them on the floor. They will be helping us with cleaning the carpets on Thursday. We take the mats to the parents so they can wash them*".

Participant 4 responded thus "*The parents become involved because sometimes when we introduce a new theme to the children, we start to the parents and we introduce the theme to their parents so that as you can realize Prof, we are working two and half hour with children of which is not enough. So, it's better for us to introduce the theme to the parents so that the days when we are not there, the parents should take over with the theme that is how their parents become so much involved*".

Participant 5 responded thus "*Because you'll find that the child has sang a song to the parents and their parents, when they don't know it, they will just come to us and ask the exact words so that they can go and help children to know it better. Even the rhymes, if they don't know about any rhyme that we've done at the playgroup, the following day they will come and ask for exact words, if they have our WhatsApp, they will WhatsApp and say what is the exact words of those rhymes and song?*"

Participant 7 responded thus "*Yes, those parents are very serious with the futures of their children. They will come and ask: ok, the children came telling me that today we did this and that, so she was singing this rhyme or recitation, can you please write it for me or can you please sing for me so that I can be able to sing with the child at home*".

3.2 Theme 2: Getting clean drinking water for the children seems challenging and the practitioners have to purchase it

Participant 5 responded thus "*We buy purified water for them to drink and use tap water to wash hands, so if the child is thirsty, we'll give them the purified water. The municipality will be struggling to provide them (parents) with water and crops don't come out nicely*".

Participant 6 responded thus "*It is clean because the water that our children drink is the water that we buy from the stores. So, we are given the money so that we can buy and not give children water from the taps*".

Participant 10 responded thus "*What we do is our water is taken to the site every day and it is bought water or it is borehole water that we supply*".

4 DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

This research was necessitated due to the paucity of literature on early childhood educators' perspectives regarding parental involvement in mobile ECCE activities in South Africa. The results of the research have empirically shown that the early education of their children is a major concern for parents. Typically, our coordinator, mobile teams, and parents offer support to practitioners. Parents support us because we ask them to assist the kids with something and the kids struggle. In addition, practitioners indicated that parents get involved, particularly when kids are introduced to new subjects. In this case, the practitioners will explain the themes to their parents so that they can take over the theme on days when the practitioners are not there.

Buttressing these findings, Hedges and Cooper as cited in [6] reported that children experience a continuity of understandings and expectations between home and educational settings when teachers deepen their knowledge of children's participation in their families' and communities' activities and then engender links to these experiences within the educational program. This continuity can then foster children's enthusiasm for learning. Teachers made it very obvious that parents may be very helpful because they have access to areas of their children's lives that they are unable to affect themselves [7]. In order to create early childhood programs that are accessible to families with young children and are sustainable, successful, and high-quality, educators, administrators, and researchers are working very hard [8]. Supporting family participation in program activities and family members' attempts to continue

children's learning at home are essential elements of high-quality early education [8]. Numerous initiatives worldwide, including those in the United Kingdom, Australia, and the United States as well as in international organizations like the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and United States Agency for International Development, reflect the importance of family engagement in early childhood education [8].

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5 CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of this research the researchers concluded that parental involvement is very germane to mobile ECCE activities. In other words, the involvement of parents in the activities of mobile ECCE center brings effective management of such center. Thus, the researchers recommend that the active involvement or participation of the parents in the mobile ECCE centers should be sustained.

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