

Stakeholders' Views on Engaging Fathers in Early Childhood Care and Education

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ABSTRACT This study explored stakeholder views on the engagement of fathers in early childhood care and education (ECCE) provisioning in one educational district in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa. A descriptive-survey research design was adopted for the study, with a sample of 309 respondents. The Principals and Teachers' Views Questionnaire and the Fathers and Mothers' Views Questionnaire (PTVQ and FMVQ, respectively) were used for data collection. The internal consistency reliability indices of the items of the instruments were 0.94 and 0.96 for the PTVQ and FMVQ, respectively, using Cronbach's alpha. The mean and the t-test were used to analyse the data. The findings revealed that stakeholders have positive views on the engagement of fathers in ECCE. Conclusively, fathers' engagement in ECCE is paramount in ECCE. It is recommended that fathers should be engaged to shoulder their responsibilities by discussing the importance of good education with their children.

INTRODUCTION

Literature has it that fathers play important and loving roles in the lives of their children (Law 2019). Ruíz et al. (2019) found that father involvement contributes significantly to children's psychological adjustment. Fathers play significant roles in the social, emotional, and behavioural development of their children (Morgan et al. 2019). Men who participate in the early years of their children's lives are often transformed by their experiences, with lasting emotional attachment to their children (Makusha et al. 2018). In line with the above, Rominov et al. (2017) found that active engagement of fathers in maternal care is associated with long-term benefits for the father, partner, and child.

Although fathers' involvement does have a significant impact on the education of their children, literature shows that, in South Africa, fathers are not properly engaged in the ECCE of their children. According to Koketso et al. (2019),

the absence of fathers in their children's lives is a major challenge in South Africa. Botha and Meyer (2019) found that a father's absence has an effect on the emotional, social, moral, spiritual, cognitive, and physical development of a child.

According to Clyde (2016), fatherhood roles are not fully practised in South Africa. This is especially true for those young fathers who become parents while still at school due to pre marital or unprotected sex, and therefore cannot be involved in the lives of their children. But-tressing the above claim, Adams (2016) and Mncanca et al. (2016) opined that lack of father involvement may be because the fathers themselves had never experienced life with a father figure. In addition, Okeke (2018) found that fathers often find themselves not knowing how to be the father they want to be and thus lacking in their responsibilities as fathers. This kind of situation, in which most fathers in South Africa find themselves, negates the ecological systems theory propounded by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979).

Theoretical Background of the Study

This study was anchored on Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory. Bronfenbrenner (1979) believed that one must

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consider the entire ecological system in which growth occurs to understand human development. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory looks at a child's development within the context of the system of relationships that forms the child's environment. Bronfenbrenner's theory defines complex 'layers' of the environment, each affecting the child's development. The 'bioecological systems theory', as it is called, calls attention to the fact that a child's biological environment is a primary environment stimulating his or her development. To study a child's development, then, one must look not only at the child and his/her immediate environment but also at the relations within the larger environment (Bronfenbrenner 1979). Children need a cordial relationship that should be present either in the child-parent relationship or in that of the child to another significant adult. Thus, the researchers of this study used the tenets of Bronfenbrenner's theory to explore stakeholders' views on the engagement of fathers in ECCE. This theory has also been successfully used by Mathwasa and Okeke (2016) and Mncanca et al. (2016). Mathwasa and Okeke (2016) recommended that schools and teachers should work together to support the major relationships influencing a child and create an environment that welcomes and promotes families.

Empirical Reviews on the Perceptions of Fathers' Involvement in Children's Education

Studies have revealed the educational implications of fathers' engagement in ECCE. In a study, Foster et al. (2016) found that children's early, home-learning environment is highly predictive of their later academic competencies. However, the bulk of this learning environment experienced by these children were from their mothers' involvement (Foster et al. 2016). Mathwasa and Okeke (2016) found that participation of mothers in early childhood development (ECD) provisioning has been widely reported in literature, with fathers' engagement in most ECD-related activities lacking. Morgan and Young (2017) indicated that fathers' parenting practices likely play an important role in promoting healthy behaviours in children, although with an inadequate evidence base. In a study, improvement in some fathers' behaviour appeared

to contribute to increased feelings of safety and wellbeing within some families (McConnell et al. 2017).

Furthermore, Kadar-Satat et al. (2017) found that active participation of fathers in school activities of their children is paramount in achieving the best educational outcomes for children. Young children's learning and development are dependent on active family involvement in early childhood special education (ECSE), as postulated by Ancell et al. (2018). Ancell et al. (2018) further found that fathers lack the responsibility of being actively involved in the early education of their children. Children perform better in school when fathers are actively involved, though sadly, the reverse becomes the norm (Noggle 2019). Morgan et al. (2019) found that meaningful engagement of fathers increases physical activity behaviour in preadolescent girls. Despite the American Academy of Paediatrics' recommendations that paediatric primary care providers should routinely engage fathers in care, the contrary is often true (Allport et al. 2019). Rahmah (2019) found that, in Indonesia, fathers with young children have positive attitudes towards their children's education. Nonetheless, the dominating female presence in the childhood educational setting limits the fathers from participating in childhood education. Ancell et al. (2018) noted that most ECCE programmes do not actively engage fathers. This is so even with the use of the family-centred approach used in early intervention, despite the role such engagement plays.

The foregoing has shown the educational implications of fathers' engagement in ECCE. There is a paucity of empirical evidence on the perceptions of principals and teachers on the engagement of fathers in the education of their children. Thus, the researchers sought to explore various stakeholders' views on engaging fathers in ECCE in one education district in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa.

Objectives of the Study

The following were the objectives of the study:

1. Identifying principals and teachers' views on the engagement of fathers in ECCE provisioning.

2. Identifying mothers and fathers' views on the engagement of fathers in ECCE provisioning.

Research Questions

The following research questions were posed for the study:

1. What are principals and teachers' views on the engagement of fathers in ECCE provisioning?
2. What are mothers and fathers' views on the engagement of fathers in ECCE provisioning?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

- H₀₁*: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of principals and teachers on their views on the engagement of fathers in ECCE provisioning.
- H₀₂*: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of mothers and fathers on their views on the engagement of fathers in ECCE provisioning.

METHODOLOGY

Research Paradigm and Approach

The study adopted the post-positivist paradigm, which mostly involves a quantitative research approach. The post-positivist paradigm is referred to as one that is based on testing a theory that relates to variables and analysing data with statistical procedures (Bakkabulindi 2015: 22). This study utilised the quantitative research approach to obtain primary data in line with the post-positivist paradigm. According to Flick (2015: 270), "a quantitative research method aims at covering the phenomena under study in their frequencies and distribution through the involvement of large numbers in the data collection." It is in line with this argument that this paradigm was found relevant by the researchers for adoption in determining the relevant stakeholders' views on the engagement of fathers in ECCE provisioning.

Research Design

The design of the study was descriptive-survey research. A survey research design provides a quantitative description of the opinions of a population by studying a sample of that population (Creswell 2014). This research adopted a pure quantitative research methodology. According to Creswell (2014), quantitative methods emphasise objective measurements, and the statistical analysis of data collected through surveys.

Population, Sample Size and Sampling

The population of this study comprised of all principals and teachers, and fathers and mothers of pupils in preschools (0-4 years) and Grade R aspects of the foundation phase in the educational district of King William's Town in the Eastern Cape province. Principals and teachers were chosen because they work in the educational setting where children are meant to be educated. Fathers and mothers are the parents of the children and are supposed to ensure engagement of fathers in the development of their children.

A sample of 309 respondents, comprising 16 principals, 78 teachers, 94 mothers, and 121 fathers, participated in the study. Sampling was done through use of a multi-stage sampling procedure. The first stage was the selection of schools to be involved in the study using a stratified random sampling technique. Through this technique, two schools each were randomly sampled from each of the four satellite jurisdictions in the whole district, resulting in eight schools sampled.

The second stage of the sampling process was the selection of the principals, teachers and parents to be involved in the study. For the principals and teachers, the *total enumeration* technique was used. For each of the eight schools, both the principal and the deputy principal were selected, resulting in 16 principals in all being involved in the study. The random sampling technique was used to select 78 teachers from the selected schools based on the population of the teachers at the selected schools.

Regarding the selection of parents, a purposive sampling technique was used to select 94 mothers and 121 fathers of children in the se-

lected schools. Several criteria for inclusion had to be adhered to. These included that the parents had to be willing to be involved in the study, had to be able to read and respond to questions without any second-hand information from another person, and had to have at least a child in preschool or Grade R in one of the selected schools. Therefore, the sample of this study comprised of 16 principals, 78 preschool teachers, and 215 parents of children in preschool and Grade R, making a total of 309 respondents. The demographic characteristics of the principal and teacher respondents are summarised in Table 1, with that of the parent respondents summarised in Table 2.

As seen in Table 1, the principals represented seventeen percent and the teachers eighty-three percent of the principal and teacher respondent population. In terms of age, the majority of these respondents (87%) were above 30 years of age, while only thirteen percent were 30 years old or below. In case of marital status, the majority were married (65%), while thirty-five percent were not married. Regarding racial category, the largest proportion of these respondents were Black (70%), with twenty-two percent Coloured, four percent Indian and three percent White.

Table 1: Age, marital status and race of the principals and teachers

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Freq.</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Age</i>		
≤30	12	12.8
30yrs +	82	87.2
Total	94	100
<i>Status</i>		
Principals	16	17
Teachers	78	83
<i>Marital Status</i>		
Married	61	64.9
Not Married	33	35.1
<i>Race</i>		
Black	66	70.2
White	3	3.2
Indian	4	4.3
Coloured	21	22.3
Total	94	100

For the demographic data of the parent respondents, Table 2 shows that twenty-six percent of the respondents had obtained a diploma certificate, whereas twenty-three percent had

Table 2: Level of education, occupation and position of the fathers and mothers

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Freq.</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Level of Education</i>		
1 st Degree +	49	22.8
Diploma	55	25.6
Technikon	22	10.2
Certificate	45	20.9
Matric	44	20.9
<i>Occupation</i>		
Public workers	132	61.4
Self-employed	47	21.9
Artisan	11	5.1
Unemployed	24	11.2
<i>Position</i>		
Father	121	56.3
Mother	94	43.7
Total	215	100

obtained first degrees. Those who had obtained certificate qualifications and matric were twenty-one percent each, with ten percent having obtained technical certificates.

Instrumentation and Procedure

Two survey instruments were used to collect data, that is, the PTVQ and the FMVQ. The first part of each instrument sought demographic information from the respondents and the second part was based on a rating scale that allowed respondents to indicate a level of opinion on the items. The PTVQ was a 20-item instrument structured on a modified 4-point Likert rating scale of 'Strongly Agreed' (SA), 'Agreed' (A), 'Disagreed' (D), and 'Strongly Disagreed' (SD). Likewise, the FMVQ was a 23 item instrument structured on a modified 4-point Likert rating scale with the same four measures as the PTVQ. The 4-point Likert rating scales were coded SA=1, A=2, D=3 and SD=4 for negative items and the reverse, that is, SA=4, A=3, D=2 and SD=1 for positive items. The questionnaires were administered to teachers and parents accordingly.

Instrument Validation

To ensure the face validity of the instruments, copies of the instruments were given to experts for their constructive criticisms. The instruments were also pre-tested in a field study. The field test of the instruments ensured the reliability of

the instruments. The internal consistency reliability indices of the items of the instruments were obtained to be 0.94 and 0.96 for the PTVQ and FMVQ questionnaires, respectively, using Cronbach's alpha coefficient.

Ethical Measures

Educational research focuses mainly on human beings. Consequently, researchers are ethically responsible for protecting the rights and welfare of the participants, which involves issues such as physical and mental discomfort as well as harm and danger. As Oliver and Eales (2008) pointed out in their overview of ethics in research, ethical issues arise before, during, and after the actual research activity within a project. Ethical clearance was obtained through the Faculty Research Ethics Committee (FREC) and University Research Ethic Committee (UREC) of one Eastern Cape-based university. In addition, a letter of permission was obtained from the Eastern Cape Department of Basic Education, Bisho, Zwelitsha to conduct the study in the schools.

Data Analysis

Data were analysed using the mean and independent samples t-test. The mean was used to answer the research questions, whereas the independent samples t-test was used to test the null hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS

Each of the research questions and their relevant hypothesis were discussed in this section.

Research Question 1: What are principals and teachers' views on the engagement of fathers in ECCE provisioning?

Table 3 reveals that the principal and teacher respondents strongly agreed with many of the items on the questionnaire. Firstly, respondents agreed that fathers should visit the school to check their children's progress (item 1; mean = 3.75). This item was highly scored and is thus very positive. Secondly, respondents agreed that fathers should feel free to seek for assistance from the school for their child's education (item 4; mean = 3.47). Respondents also felt that fathers are expected to have aspirations for their

Table 3: Principals and teachers' views on the engagement of fathers in ECCE provisioning (n = 94)

S. No.	Item statement	Mean	SD
1	Fathers should visit school to check their children's progress.	3.75	.43
2	Fathers should be interested to be a resource person in the classroom as story reader.	2.93	.82
3	Fathers should be encouraged to share knowledge and skills with school's staff and children.	3.14	.71
4	Fathers should feel free to seek for assistance from the school for the child's education.	3.47	.74
5	Fathers are expected to have aspirations for their children's educational improvement.	3.45	.74
6	Fathers should have greater awareness of children educational progress.	3.59	.49
7	Fathers are expected to know about what the school is teaching the child.	3.42	.55
8	Fathers should perceive themselves as educators at home in their children's live.	3.53	.69
9	Fathers should establish and maintain on-going and productive communication with school.	3.52	.56
10	Fathers should contribute to school aims/policies/procedures.	3.13	.93
11	Fathers should contribute to the progress of their children school.	3.40	.61
12	Fathers should use the opportunities during "drop off" and "pick up" time to know their child's teacher.	3.11	.80
13	Fathers should encourage school visitation to the home.	2.74	1.00
14	Fathers should actively engage in school matters.	3.29	.76
15	Fathers in the school community are aware of their importance to be engaged in their children education.	3.14	.70

children's educational improvement (item 5; mean = 3.45) and that fathers should have a greater awareness of their children's educational progress (item 6; mean = 3.59). In addition, respondents strongly agreed with the statements that fathers should perceive themselves as edu-

cators at home in their children’s lives (item 8; mean = 3.53) and that fathers should establish and maintain ongoing and productive communication with the school (item 9; mean = 3.52).

Although the above mean scores were some of the highest for the principal and teacher respondents, many of the other items on the PTVQ also received high ratings. For instance, respondents agreed that a father should be interested in being a resourceful person in the classroom as a story reader (item 2; mean = 2.93), and that fathers should also be encouraged to share knowledge and skills with school staff and children (item 3; mean = 3.14). In addition, respondents believed that fathers are expected to know about what the school is teaching their child (item 7; mean = 3.42). Unfortunately, space does not allow discussing each item’s mean score individually. The overall mean of 63.40 and standard deviation of 13.96 for the PTVQ imply that the principal and teacher respondents had positive views concerning fathers’ engagement in ECCE provisioning.

Ho₁: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of principals and teachers on their views on the engagement of fathers in ECCE provisioning.

Table 4 shows that there was no significant difference in the mean ratings of principal respondents and those of the teacher respondents on their views on the engagement of fathers in ECCE early childhood education provisioning, $t(92) = 0.956, p > 0.05$. Therefore, both principal and teacher respondents had positive views on the engagement of fathers in ECCE provisioning.

Table 4: t-test analysis of the difference in the mean ratings principals and teachers on their views on the engagement of fathers in the early childhood education provisioning

Respondent	n	Mean	SD	df	t	Sig
Principals	16	64.65	12.54	92	.956	.087
Teachers	78	63.53	13.08			

Research Question 2: What are mothers and fathers’ views on the engagement of fathers in ECCE provisioning?

Table 5 reveals that the father and mother respondents strongly agreed with various of the

Table 5: Fathers’ and mothers’ views on the engagement of fathers in ECCE provisioning (n = 215)

S. No.	Item statement	Mean	SD
1	One of a fathers’ responsibilities is to monitor his child home works	3.42	.78
2	It is important for a father to ensure that his child attends school regularly and on time.	3.61	.62
3	Father took it as a must to assist his child in attempting the home works.	3.15	.92
4	Fathers should always be ready to provide assistance for the child’s home work.	3.14	.90
5	Reading to the children must form part of fathers’ hobbies.	3.20	.71
6	Reading to the child by father is not a waste of time.	3.38	.75
7	Father’s responsibility is to keep an eye on his child’s progress.	3.45	.85
8	Fathers have responsibilities of discussing the importance of good education with their children all the time.	3.60	.59
9	Fathers should encourage the children to obey school policies and good behaviour.	3.57	.51
10	Fathers should be happy to take children out for recreation activities during out-of-school period.	3.36	.55
11	Fathers should be aware that it is extremely important to attend parent’s meeting at school.	3.47	.59
12	Fathers must ensure that their children have excellent attendance at schools.	3.45	.62
13	Fathers’ responsibility is to provide/maintain clear rules at home for the children to obey.	3.48	.59
14	Fathers’ responsibility is to spend more time caring for the children’s physical and personal hygiene.	3.14	.84
15	It is boring for father to be playing with the children at home.	1.87	.97

items on the FMVQ, the highest scores being discussed in this paragraph. Firstly, respondents believed that it is important for a father to ensure that his child attends school regularly and on time (item 2; mean = 3.61), and that fathers have responsibilities of discussing the importance of good education with their children all

the time (item 8; mean = 3.60). In addition, respondents agreed that fathers should encourage their children to obey school policies and good behaviour (item 9; mean = 3.57), and that a father’s responsibility is to provide and maintain clear rules at home for their children to obey (item 13; mean = 3.48). Respondents also agreed that fathers should be aware that it is extremely important to attend parent meetings at school (item 11; mean = 3.47), and that a father’s responsibility is to keep an eye on his child’s progress (item 7; mean = 3.45).

In addition to these higher scores, parent respondents also agreed with other items. For instance, they agreed that one responsibility of a father is to monitor his child’s homework (item 1; mean = 3.42), and that reading to the child by a father is not a waste of time (item 6; mean = 3.38). Furthermore, parent respondents agreed that fathers should be happy to take children out for recreational activities during out-of-school periods (item 10; mean = 3.36), and that a father’s responsibility is to provide learning resources at home for their children (item 21; mean = 3.34). The overall mean of 71.67 and standard deviation of 15.25 for the FMVQ imply that fathers and mothers have positive views about fathers’ engagement in ECCE provisioning.

Ho₂: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of mothers and fathers on their views on the engagement of fathers in ECCE provisioning.

Table 6 shows that there was no significant difference in the mean ratings of the mother respondents and those of the father respondents on their views on the engagement of fathers in ECCE provisioning, $t(213) = -1.541, p > 0.05$. Therefore, both mother and father respondents had positive views on the engagement of fathers in ECCE provisioning.

Table 6: t-test analysis of the difference in the mean ratings mothers and fathers on their views on the engagement of fathers in the early childhood education provisioning

Respondent	n	Mean	SD	df	t	Sig
Mothers	94	69.16	12.45	213	-1.541	.076
Fathers	121	71.76	9.68			

DISCUSSION

The study sought the views of stakeholders (principals, teachers, mothers and fathers) on the engagement of fathers in ECCE provisioning. The results revealed that the stakeholders have positive views on fathers’ engagement in ECCE provisioning. For instance, respondents agreed that fathers should visit the school to check their children’s progress and that they should feel free to seek for assistance from the school for the child’s education. Furthermore, respondents agreed that fathers are expected to have aspirations for their children’s educational improvement and that they should have a greater awareness of children’s educational progress. Among other factors agreed on by respondents are that fathers should perceive themselves as educators at home in their children’s lives and that fathers should establish and maintain ongoing and productive communication with schools.

These findings might be as a result of the fact that these stakeholders are parents that value education and can give whatever it takes to educate their children right from an early stage. In line with that, Burton and Osborne (2014) observed that African principals and teachers are knowledgeable about the fact that African fathers cherish their children and like to educate them because children in Africa are seen as the future of the family. These findings are in line with the findings of previous empirical studies (Mathwasa and Okeke 2016; Foster et al. 2016; Morgan and Young 2017).

Mathwasa and Okeke (2016) found that fathers’ participation in their children’s education is germane to effective ECCE in schools. Foster et al. (2016) found, however, that the bulk of the experiences in these learning environments were from the mothers’ involvement in their children’s education, and not from the fathers’. Morgan and Young (2017) found that to promote healthy behaviours in children, fathers’ parenting practices have an important role to play. According to Kadar-Satat et al. (2017), the importance of the involvement of fathers in the education of their children is acknowledged by fathers, school staff, and children. Furthermore, Kadar-Satat et al. (2017) found that achieving the best education outcomes for children is dependent on the active involvement of fathers in school.

Young children's learning and development are dependent on active family involvement in early childhood special education (Ansell et al. 2018). According to Noggle (2019), children perform better in school when fathers are actively involved in their children's education. Law (2019) found that fathers play important and loving roles in the lives of their children. According to Ruíz et al. (2019), father involvement contributes significantly to children's psychological adjustment. Morgan et al. (2019) emphasised that fathers play significant roles in the social, emotional, and behavioural development of their children. Men who participate in the early years of their children's lives often build lasting emotional attachments with their children as these experiences transform their lives (Makusha et al. 2018). In line with the above, Rominov et al. (2017) found that fathers who actively participate in maternal care benefit in the long term not only for themselves, but also for their partners and children. Allport et al. (2019) found that despite the American Academy of Paediatrics' recommendations, paediatric primary care providers do not routinely engage fathers in caring for their children's education. In an Indonesian study, Rahmah (2019) found that fathers with young children have positive attitudes towards their children's education, albeit the prevailing female presence in the childhood education settings limits the participation of fathers in child education. The findings of this present study have educational implications. The findings of this study might equip fathers with the necessary information needed for them to take on active roles in the education of their children and to provide the necessary support for their children's optimal and holistic development. National and provincial governments as well as non governmental organisations (NGOs) may use the results of the study in future plans regarding educational programmes for fathers.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The empirical outcomes of this study may be used as a basis of information for teachers and parents that would assist fathers with positive engagement in the ECCE of their children. Also, policymakers, local educational districts,

provincial governments, national government, and NGOs may use the results of this study in the drafting of future educational programmes for fathers. It is hoped that the study might generate new knowledge on fathers' engagement in the lives of children in the early years of education, adding to the existing body of knowledge. Through this study, the Eastern Cape Provincial Department of Education and the National Department of Education will appreciate the necessity to design and implement a good programme that will promote the effective engagement of fathers in the ECCE of their children. Schools and teachers are likely to profit from the results of the study if fathers are engaged in the lives of their children. Lastly, children may benefit greatly where there is cooperation between schools and fathers, as this will have a positive impact on learners' learning processes.

The study demonstrated the relationships that comprise a child's environment and affect their development, thereby strengthening the bioecological systems theory. Hereby, schools and teachers can be enabled to fortify the major relationship between a child's environment and development and can create a school environment that welcomes and promotes families.

LIMITATIONS

The sample size of this study may limit the generalisability of the findings. The fact that only eight schools and only learners from the foundation phase classes were involved is a limitation. Thus, future researchers can replicate the study by increasing the number of schools as well as respondents. In addition, some respondents were reluctant to fill in the questionnaire, claiming they were too busy. Therefore, some of the questionnaires were not returned. Among those returned, some were not properly filled in, thus resulting in missing information.

CONCLUSION

This study revealed that stakeholders have positive views on the engagement of fathers in ECCE. Conclusively, fathers' engagement in ECCE is paramount for the early education of children. Stakeholders are of the view that fa-

thers should shoulder their responsibilities by discussing the importance of good education with their children. In addition, fathers are expected to foster aspirations for their children's educational improvement, and to establish and maintain ongoing and productive communication with schools to improve the early education of their children.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made. The South African Government should as a matter of urgency advocate for ECCE policies that lay out concrete commitments and guidelines for fathers' engagement in their children's educational performance. In addition, policy may advocate for a special events day to be organised where fathers are motivated in becoming actively engaged in the education of their children. Furthermore, fathers should be informed of the need to read with their children at home.

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