PERCEIVED RELUCTANCE OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT- A PERSPECTIVE OF BLACK LEARNERS ATTENDING SOUTH AFRICAN HISTORICALLY WHITE MULTICULTURAL SCHOOLS

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Abstract- Society has evolved enormously over the past few decades because of colonisation, slave trade migration, immigration and recently, the colossal advancement in modern technology. The latter has resulted in an increased diversity in societies and inevitably in school classrooms. South Africa, and more especially post-apartheid South Africa, is no exception. The study analyses the perceived reluctance of parents' of black learners attending historically white multicultural schools in South Africa. It commences by exploring the South African schooling system immediately after the demise of *apartheid* and examines the role of parents' in relation to the schooling of their children. The study finally attempts to determine the possible reasons for the perceived reluctant involvement of these parents, from the perspective of their children. The quantitative research method was employed to collect the required information. The key findings revealed that black parents are indeed less involved as compared to their white counterparts and the reasons for this were, that schools usually communicated in a language not fully understood by black parents; they were made to feel unwelcome at these schools and that the ethos and culture of these schools was foreign and often non-embracing.

Key words- Parental involvement, Back learners, Historically white schools

I. INTRODUCTION

Most children are born into a home with a family and this is the space where children receive their first education, with the parents as the primary educators. School education, according to Quan-Baffour (2006:3) is supposed to build on the foundation laid by the home through partnership with parents. Building on the foundation of home education has, however become rather challenging, since a monocultural learner population no longer constitutes schools. The complexities of a multicultural modern society compel parents to join forces with the school to offer the child a suitable education that will benefit all, namely, the child, parents and society. The school may therefore not act in isolation, in trying to overcome obstacles posed by the multicultural character of the school. Decker, Gregg and Decker (1994:18)endorses this and explain that the school, the parent and the community all share responsibility for the development of the child.
Squelch (1991:153), Khosa (2001:8), Dockett and Perry (2005:272), along with Panayiotopoulos and Nicolaidou (2007:6) also regard parental involvement as decisive in the reinforcement of multicultural education in multicultural schools. The authors have further established that there is a positive correlation between parental involvement and learner achievement.

Since multicultural schools reflect a heterogeneous learner population, parental involvement in the education of their children in a multicultural setting would thus make sound educational sense. This implies that schools should create structures and opportunities for parents from various cultural backgrounds to become involved in the school. Brandt (1990:86), Pumfrey and Verma (1990:72 -74), van Schalkwyk (1990:26), and Atkinson and Juntunen (1994:108) echo these sentiments and advise that effective communication channels should be established, so that information relating to the quality of education, the curriculum, and learner progression, be transmitted to the parents on a regular basis. In this manner, parents could be empowered and could make valuable inputs towards the education of their children and the work of the educator.

While the provision of structures and opportunities for parental involvement at these schools is essential, the capacity of the parent to connect with the school seems to be an aspect that needs careful consideration, as well. However, Dockett and Perry (2005:273) warns that the forging of these connections may be difficult if parents have no real understanding of the character, ethos and function of the school. The situation may be further complicated in instances where the parents' understanding of the school is based on their own experience. This may particularly be the case if the parents' own education occurred in a different cultural context. Tensions between the school and the parents may result if the expectations of the school differ markedly from those of the parents. The issue of language could be another factor that may cause tension between the school and the parents. Tensions may also arise when parents who are not conversant in English, cannot access information about the school, or fully grasp school expectations in their home language. This may result in parental frustration, as they may believe that they are unable to assist their children in preparing for and

participating in the school experience.

The above-mentioned tensions and frustrations seem be particularly relevant to the South African school situation in general, and therefore the Northern Cape multicultural school situation in particular. This may very well be the case with large numbers of black parents, who opted to enrol their children at multicultural schools after the demise of apartheid. Many of these parents, who were schooled in a divided, inferior apartheid educational context, may find difficulty in understanding and connecting with multicultural schools, given their own schooling background.

1.1 Factors influencing parent-school relations

Dockett and Perry (2005:273) are convinced that parental involvement in schools is a critical factor in promoting the learner's success at school. While Sabry and Bruna (2007:46 – 47) tend to agree, they however warn that there are indeed factors that might have an influence on parent-school relations. In this regard, the authors identified the following three factors, namely:

An inaccurate and biased curriculum

A major factor relating to curriculum and the schooling of black learners is *inaccuracy and bias*. Many black parents are subjected to stories told to them by their children about the misinformation transmitted about afro-centrism to learners through the curriculum. An example of this is where credit is given to Europeans for introducing blacks to religion and Western civilisation.

Insensitive and unaware instruction

This factor relates to the discontent experienced by parents towards teachers who find it difficult to conceal their biases about different issues. It may often be the case that the teachers' own opinions in many instances affect the manner in which they unfold the subject content to their learners. A case in point could be where teachers, while dealing with issues in the Middle East in Social Studies, refers to this region as "the region of peace haters." This could greatly embarrass the Muslim learners and may cause such learners to begin fearing that their non-Muslim peers would have the same "peace-hating" impression of them. This may even further strain relations between parents and the school.

Uncooperative, passive home-school relations

Another major element related to home-school relations and the schooling of black learners is uncooperative,passive relationships between parents and schools. Both the black parents, as well as white teachers seem to be not entirely satisfied with the present state of relations between the two parties. It might be that many black parents themselves do not fully understand the ethos and culture of historically white multicultural schools. Many of these parents may not be fully conversant in English and may even lack a satisfactory education. The latter may result in these parents feeling inadequate, resulting in a general reluctance to become involved with school affairs, and preferring to play a passive role in school affairs.

From the above discussion, it could be concluded that an effective and functional parent-school relationship is vital in a multicultural school setup. Morefield (1996:37) encapsulates the importance of parental involvement as follows: "Parental involvement in a child's education is not a luxury, not just a nice idea. It is not a frill or set of activities engaged in only when time allows. Parental involvement is essential to ensuring all children's success".

What also seems to be clear is the importance for multicultural schools to re-assess the manner in which information about the school is rendered available and communicated to parents from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Also emanating from this discussion are the black parents' perceptions of themselves and their ability to assist their children and how this may affect the manner in which they connect with multicultural schools. It further becomes clear that poor or strained parent-school relations may, as a result also influence the children's perceptions of the school, in a way that does not foster an amicable scholastic experience. The possibility does exist that this phenomenon may also be prevalent in historically white multicultural schools in the Northern Cape. It may therefore be incumbent upon school governing bodies and school management teams at multicultural schools in the Northern Cape, to take note of these factors when dealing with issues of diversity and the establishment of harmonious relations for all learners.

II. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Quantitative Research

An empirical investigation, by way of the quantitative research method was conducted. A quantitative approach involves the … "processes of collecting, analysing, interpreting, and writing the results of a study" (Creswell, 2013: v). As the researchers sought to collect data from a large population and analyse and interpret how, black learners attending South African historically white multicultural schools,perceive their parents' reluctance to be involved in their schooling. In order to do the latter, a quantitative approach was appropriate. Specifically, the study followed a quantitative survey design. According to Creswell (2013), a survey design is used when one gathers facts about a society or its part about the quality of interaction among its people or institutions (Rossi, Wright & Anderson, 2013). Since the study attempts to ascertainthe perceived reluctance of black parents whose children are

attendinghistorically white multicultural schools, the survey design was apt in providing the methodological direction.

2.2 Questionnaire

Following the quantitative approach as the methodological paradigm, a self- designed 4- point Likert scale questionnaires was used to determine the perceived reluctance of black parents whose children attended South African historically white multicultural schools.

2.3 Purposive sampling

The research site of this study was limited to twenty-seven (27) historically white multicultural high schools in the five education districts of the Northern Cape province, namely, Frances Baard (10 schools), ZF Mgcawu (6 schools), Pixley Ka Seme (4 schools), Namaqua (5 schools) and JT Gaetsewe education district (2 schools). The respondents were selected using a purposive sampling. The criteria for inclusion in the study was Further Education and Training (FET) learners in the selected research sites; black learners in historically white schools. Using the criteria, a sample population of 1037 black learners was identified as the respondents. A total of 832 questionnaires were completed by learners.

2.4 Data analysis

Data were analysed using Factor Analysis. In order to assess the factorability of the data, the researcher used the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's test of sphericity, that states that for the difference to be statistically significant, the P-value must be < than 0.05. This means that there is a 95% chance that the results are due to influence of an independent variable, or a combination of independent variables and not to chance (De Vos, Strydom, Fouché, Delport, 2005:245). The data acquired from the questionnaires was integrated with the data acquired from the literature study, in order for the researchers to make summaries, draw conclusions and offer recommendations.

2.5 Ethical considerations

Permission to conduct the empirical study was sought from the Northern Cape Education Department, school principals and learners of these specific schools.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The questionnaire posed questions 1 to 5 to gather information regarding parental involvement at these schools.

Tables 1 to 5 tabulate the responses of learners in relation to parental involvement.

Table 1: Learners' responsesto the question, *"My school sometimes arranges for an interpreter for parents who do not understandeitherEnglish or Afrikaans"*

Item	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	81	9.7	10	10
Agree	138	16.6	17	27
Disagree	254	30.5	31.3	58.3
Strongly Disagree	339	40.8	41.7	100
Missing system	20	2.4	0	
Total	832	100	100	100

An overwhelming majority (71.3%) of respondents stated that their school did not arrange for an interpreter for parents who understood neither English nor Afrikaans. Improved communication between the school and those parents who are not fully accustomed to the dominant languages of these schools may assist in bridging the divide between the school and black parents.

Table 2: Learners' responsesto the question, *"My parents are less involved in the activities of the school than white parents"*

Item	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	191	23	23.6	23.6
Agree	300	36.1	37.2	60.8
Disagree	185	22.1	22.9	83.7
Strongly Disagree	132	15.9	16.3	100
Missing system	24	2.9		
Total	832	100	100	100

Most learners (59.1%) admitted that their parents were less involved in the activities of the school than their white counterparts were. This tendency calls for urgent intervention, because the intimate involvement of parents and educators with children provides natural opportunities for modelling, guiding and nurturing positive racial, ethnic, and cultural attitudes and perspectives.

Table 3: Learners' responsesto the question, *"The reason why my parents are less involved in my schools is because they are less interested in my academic progress"*

Item	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	52	6.2	6.4	6.4
Agree	62	7.5	7.6	14
Disagree	235	28.2	28.9	42.9
Strongly Disagree	465	55.9	57.1	100
Missing system	18	2.2	0	
Total	832	100	100	100

Table 3 displays that a preponderance of learners (55.9%) strongly disagreed, with another 28.2% disagreeing with the perception that the reason why

their parents were less involved in their schools, was because they were lessinterested in their academic progress. Merely 7.5% and 6.2% were in agreement and strong agreement with this perception.

TABLE 4: Learners' responsesto the question *"The reason for the limited involvement of my parents is because they feel unwelcome or inadequate"*

Item	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	105	12.6	12.9	12.9
Agree	148	17.8	18.2	31.1
Disagree	283	34	34.8	65.9
Strongly Disagree	277	33.3	34.1	100
Missing system	19	2.3	0	
Total	832	100	100	100

In relation to the limited involvement of non-white parents in the activities of the school, the bulk of the respondents (67.3%) were convinced that the reason for the latter was not that they felt unwelcome or inadequate. It was abundantly clear that black parents were not as involved in the schools activities as their white counterparts were. A possible reason for this state of affairs might be that many black parents themselves did not fully understand the ethos and culture of historically white schools. Additionally, many of these parents might not be fully conversant in English or Afrikaans and may even lack a satisfactory education.

TABLE 7.19: Learners' responsesto the question, *"black parents also serve on our school governing body"*

Item	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	292	35.1	36	36
Agree	252	30.3	31.1	67.1
Disagree	108	13	13.3	80.4
Strongly Disagree	159	19.1	19.6	100
Missing system	21	2.5		
Total	832	100	100	100

It is encouraging that the respondents who held the opinion that black parent were also represented on the school governing body were in the majority (65.4%). One of the most effective ways to ensure school improvement is to offer those who are closest to the learners, namely the parents, the authority to make decisions. In this way, black parents can assist multicultural schools in enhancing the scholastic experience of black learners.

CONCLUSION

The aim of the study was to analyse the perceived reluctance of parents' of black learners attending historically white multicultural schools in South Africa. It could therefore be concluded that, although black parents were less involved in the schooling of their children, it was not because they were less interested in the academic progress of their children. The reasons for their perceived reluctant involvement was primarily that they felt unwelcome at these schools or that they did not fully understand the ethos and culture of these schools. Parents' inability to comprehend the dominant languages, such as Afrikaans and English proved to be a further hindrance to black parents.

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