Fostering Learning at Home: Examining Parental Involvement in Education Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to assess parental involvement in educating their children during Covid-19 pandemic at Nakambala Private School and Mukuyu Primary School in Mazabuka District, Zambia. A descriptive survey research design was adopted for this study. Data were collected through a questionnaire and interviews from parents and learners. The sample size of the study was one hundred (100) parents and ten (10) learners from selected basic schools in Mazabuka district giving a total of 110 participants. The sampling technique used was purposive sampling with the sample criteria being parents who have children at Nakambala Private School and Mukuyu Primary School. Random sampling was also used to select parents and students to be interviewed for the study. The findings of the study were that a good number of parents with children from Nakambala Private School situated in Mazabuka Urban and Mukuyu Primary situated in Mazabuka rural of Mazabuka district were involved in ensuring that their children receive education during Covid-19 pandemic by helping their children with school work at home and providing facilities in the form of mobile phones and Internet service coverage during online learning. The results also showed that parents interacted with their children by spending quality time teaching their children and helping in doing school work. Parents faced challenges in ensuring that their children continue receiving quality education during Covid-19 pandemic. These were: lack or limited access to internet and the poor internet connection in the area, inadequate time to be with the children because of busy schedule, balancing responsibilities, lack of smart phones, and challenges in sourcing for data bundles. It is recommended that parents get prepared in advance by acquiring smart phones and balancing responsibilities in case the pandemic resurface in future. The study also recommend that network providers to improve in the provision of internet in rural areas so that people in rural areas have quality access to internet, and also teachers to develop their own hybrid model of teaching and learning suited to specific educational needs in times of Covid-19 pandemic.

Background

Education is critical in developing students’ quality and ability to adapt to rapid changes in a global society. The Ministry of Education has responded to this need by implementing the 21st-century education system through the 2013 Curriculum, emphasizing a student-centered approach that integrates creativity, cooperation, critical thinking, and ethical and moral engagement. The COVID-19 pandemic has prompted governments, including Zambia, to implement emergency strategies such as the closure of educational institutions, malls, parks, and other public spaces to curb the transmission of the virus. These measures, aimed at social distancing, have resulted in disruptions to normal life, affecting students academically and mentally. In response to these disruptions, various academic measures, including online learning and educational resources, have been employed to ensure the continuity of teaching and learning. However, the abrupt transition to online learning has posed challenges for educators, families, and students, impacting work, health, social standards, and public education globally.
The role of parents has become increasingly crucial in the education of their children during the pandemic. With schools closed, parents have taken on the responsibility of homeschooling, facing additional stress due to challenges like work-from-home, unemployment, and domestic duties. This has exposed existing social inequalities, particularly in students' home environments, influencing their ability to access quality education.

In Zambia, where digital resources are not universally accessible, the shift to online learning has posed significant challenges. The pandemic has highlighted the disparities in resources and socioeconomic factors, exacerbating the impact on students from low-income families.

This research aims to address these gaps in social inequalities and explore the impact of the home environment on students' education during the pandemic. While prior research has extensively examined the role of parents in conventional on-premises education, limited research has focused on how the role of parents has evolved due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The study presented here aims to assess parental involvement in educating their children during the pandemic at Nakambala Private School and Mukuyu Primary School in Mazabuka District, Zambia. By understanding the challenges and dynamics of online education, this research seeks to contribute valuable insights into the changing role of parents in the education of their children in the current global context.

Materials and Methods

Research Design

A mixed methods research strategy was employed in this study, adopting a converging parallel study design to integrate the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative methods. Despite separate examination of quantitative and qualitative findings for the study's sub-problems, a single conclusion and syntheses were generated. The descriptive survey research design was chosen for its suitability in obtaining in-depth data from respondents to describe the existing state of affairs.

Study Site

The study was conducted at Nakambala Private School in Mazabuka Urban and Mukuyu Primary in Mazabuka Rural. The selected schools represented diverse settings, with Nakambala Private School established in 1990 and Mukuyu Primary School in 1969.

Sample Size

The target population comprised parents with children in grade nine, grade nine students, and teachers from Nakambala Private and Mukuyu Primary School. One hundred parents (45 male, 55 female) and six students (3 male, 3 female) were purposively sampled. Stratified random sampling ensured a representative selection of participants, maintaining equal and independent chances.
Data Collection Instruments: The study utilized a mixed-method approach, employing triangulation of tools for both qualitative and quantitative data collection. The instruments included:

A researcher-developed Parents’ Questionnaire administered to all 100 parents.

Semi-structured interviews using researcher-developed guides for 10 parents and 6 students, exploring their experiences during the pandemic.

A 10-item Likert-type instrument to assess parental involvement, with responses ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

**Data Analysis**

Quantitative data from the questionnaire were coded and analyzed using SPSS version 25, employing descriptive statistical techniques such as frequencies. Qualitative data from interviews underwent seven key steps of analysis: familiarization, compilation, condensation, preliminary comparison, naming of categories, constructive comparison, and theme development.

Semi-structured interviews with senior teachers and Head teachers were recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed similarly. The transcribed data were assigned identities based on the type of participant (P for parent, ST for student) and a corresponding serial number. Themes emerging from each category were noted, and verbatim quotes were selectively used to enrich the analysis. Data collection spanned one month.

**Results**

**Demographic information**

Data revealed that 45 of the parents from Nakambala PVT and Mukuyu Primary Schools who took part in the research were male and 55 were females. Eight (8) of the participants were aged between 21–30 years, while 24 and 32 were aged between 31–40 years and 41–50, respectively, and thirty six were aged 51 years and above. Thirty four parents had a certificate in terms of academic credentials, fifty four had diploma, twelve had bachelor’s degree and none had a master’s degree. The majority (88%) of parents fifty eighty reside in urban area of Mazabuka, while forty two reside in rural of Mazabuka district. Table 4.1 show the demographic characteristics of parents that participated in this study.
Table 4.1
Demographic characteristics of parents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>55</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age (years)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21–30</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31–40</td>
<td>24</td>
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<tr>
<td>41–50</td>
<td>32</td>
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<tr>
<td>51 and above</td>
<td>36</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Highest level of Qualification</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Certificate</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor Degree</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master's Degree</td>
<td>00</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Residential</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>42</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship</th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guardian</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2 presents a comprehensive overview of parents' responses regarding their involvement in their children's education during the lockdown, with a sample size (N) of 100 participants. A substantial 56.0% of parents affirmed that they took the time to teach their child every day during the lockdown, indicating a proactive engagement in their children's academic progress. Around 44.0% of parents actively assisted their children with school assignments, reflecting a collaborative effort in facilitating their children's learning at home. Approximately 30.0% of parents reported providing facilities like mobile phones and
internet service coverage for online learning, showcasing a notable but not universal commitment to supporting their children's virtual education. Parents displayed varied involvement in their children's use of online learning tools. While 28.0% reported their children having online lessons using tools such as TV, YouTube, Radio, or mobile phones, 28.0% also expressed uncertainty or challenges. A significant 34.0% of parents actively monitored their children's online learning activities regularly, demonstrating a keen interest in their academic endeavors. Half of the respondents (50.0%) acknowledged spending quality time helping their child with schoolwork, emphasizing a substantial parental commitment to their children's academic success. An impressive 60.0% of parents reported that class teachers actively assisted in marking their children's work, showcasing a collaborative approach between parents and teachers in the assessment process. While 52.0% of parents faced difficulties in sourcing internet bundles for their children's online learning, a notable 28.0% did not encounter such challenges. A considerable 40.0% of parents found it easy to obtain educational materials for their children from the school, indicating a reasonable level of accessibility. Teaching proved to be challenging and stressful for 32.0% of parents, while an additional 28.0% reported a similar sentiment to a higher degree, underscoring the complexities faced by parents in assuming an instructional role. The results highlight varying degrees of parental involvement in supporting their children's education during the lockdown, with notable strengths in teaching, assignment assistance, and collaboration with teachers, but also challenges in aspects such as sourcing internet bundles and facing the stress of assuming an instructional role.

Table 4.2: Parents Responses (N=100)
### 4.3: Parents’ views and opinions regarding their involvement in educating their children and challenges faced

In addition to the parents’ questionnaire which was used to assess parental involvement in educating their children during Covid-19 pandemic and the challenges they faced, an interview guide was conducted with ten (10) parents (five from each selected school) and six (6) students (three from each selected school). The interviews helped the researcher to gain a deeper understanding on parental involvement in educating their children during Covid-19 pandemic, challenges they face in helping their children learn during the pandemic.

#### 4.3.1: How parents were involved in educating their children during the Covid-19 pandemic

The task of educating is still the obligation of parents, from the lowest level of education to higher education. Especially in a global pandemic like today. Parents are obliged to meet all the needs of their children. According to Ceka dan Murati: "...the family has a huge and very tough responsibility; as it has
to take proper care on their health, their physical development, their overall education, the development of their intellectual affinities, as well as creation for better moral values and convictions and attitudes, habits to a firm and well-behaved cultural relation in the family itself as well as in the society where the child lives”.

According to the interviews, parents were generally involved in educating their children during Covid-19 pandemic. Participants (parents and learners) revealed that they encouraged their children to read books, monitored the participation of their children in online classes, discuss lessons or assignments with their children, provide facilities for learning to my children such as mobile phone and Internet service and supervising the their children to do tasks sent by their teachers. Some excerpts of interviews suffice to illustrate:

“I encouraged my children to read books and participate in online classes, I also monitored my children participation in online classes, read with them, encourage them to listen to virtual learning plant forms such as educational broadcast on tv and radio. (Parent 10)

I provide facilities such as mobile phones and Internet service coverage to my children to use during online learning. (Parent 8)

I provide support and motivation and provide facilities for learning to my children such as mobile phone and Internet service. (Parent 2)

Several parents disclosed their roles in educating their children during Covid-19 pandemic as maintain communication with the teachers who were teaching their children, assisting their children in assignments, providing help on areas the children needed assistance on and also actively teach the child. This was echoed by some senior teachers interviewed:

As a parent I should develop a habit of keeping constant and continuous communication with the teachers to my children who engage with my children. I spare some time to schedule a virtual meeting with the teacher to catch up with my children’s progress. (Parent 3)

Now that my children are learning from home, I have so much visibility into the lessons that happen in class. I do spare some time and discuss lessons or assignments with my children that are given to them by their teachers. I also come in to provide help on areas they need assistance on. (Parent 7)

I helped my child by getting myself in the groups which the school created, huh the same groups where teachers were teaching from”. And then I also got involved because I provided the phone to my child to use every time it is time for learning. (Parent 6)

I made sure there were data bundles in my phone so that she can be able use to learn. (Parent 9)

I help my children with their homework and I also actively teach them. When I collect work from my child’s school I would sit with him to ensure that he does the work. (Parent 4)

The other participants gave the following suggestions when they were interviewed:
A proper timetable is set where I wakes up at 8:00 am as I have Zoom classes. Till 2:00 pm I have to complete my given task of each subject, during that my father and I sit together to complete the school task. (Learner 4)

I spend about 2–3 hours on a daily basis working with my father on my school work because of the transition to online education during the Covid-19 pandemic. (Learner 1)

My parents supervise me during study time and provide learning facilities. (Learner 3)

The majority of findings of the study show that the role of parents is directly involved in monitoring, providing ongoing encouragement and assisting in student learning activities at home through various applications or digital platforms such as Whatsapp, Google Classroom, Zoom, Webex and Youtube.

Interaction of learning between parents and children in delivering learning by parents

I interacted with my child especially when doing are lessons because were times she could face difficulties in the work given, but I would be there to make her understand what the teacher expected from her. I would also become another teacher at home by explaining the concepts. (Parent 10)

Every day I would be there and even in studying I would wake him up at 04:00 hrs so that he goes to study and every morning I was doing that. (Parent 6)

On a daily basis when I knock off from work, I take time to go through with my children the work he learned with his teachers during the day and assist him were possible. (Parent 7)

After the child finishes online lessons, I sit down with her for about two hours and assist her in carrying out assignments. (Parent 5)

I encourage my child to read books, at times I sit with my child and read with him. I also encourage him to participate in online classes. I monitor him to participate in online classes. (Parent 1)

I regularly monitored my child when learning online. (Parent 3)

I spend three hours quality time helping my child to do school work. (Parent 4)

I spend about 2–3 hours on a daily basis working with my child on his school work because of the transition to online education during the Covid-19 pandemic. (Parent 9)

I supervise my child study time and provide learning facilities. (Parent 2)
Methods of teaching used to teach learners during the Covid-19 pandemic

Learning is defined as assistance provided by educators so that the process of acquiring knowledge and knowledge, mastery, proficiency, and character can occur, as well as messages of attitudes and beliefs in students and helping students to learn better.

The principles of learning, teachers must also pay attention to the material, methods, and media used. The use of various methods in learning must also be provided by the specified learning objectives. Some methods of teaching used to teach learners during the Covid-19 pandemic were explained by both parents and learners who participated in the study. It was noticed that learners used to learn through whatsapp, email platforms, zoom platform and hard copies prepared by teachers. In that sense, the participants had to say:

Mostly the teachers would send soft copy notes and voice notes to the Whatapp group and pupils would respond to. Sometimes teachers would just interact with the learners, the teacher will pose a question then the learners would respond to the question by sending voice notes. (Parent 10)

Whatsapp was used to send and receive homework and other assigned tasks. Some teachers used Whatsapp for conducting classes. (Parent 1)

The teacher could sent work on my Whatsapp and then I would give the work to my child to do. At times the teachers will send video or audio recordings which I used to deliver to my child to attend to. (Parent 6)

I used to physically go to my child’s school to collect work for my child from his teachers since I don’t have a smart phone. (Parent 4)

I teach my child using the content sent by his teachers through Zoom platform. (Parent 3)

Teachers used to send the work using the Zoom platform and alternatively email platform. (Parent 7)

Challenges parents experienced during Covid-19 pandemic

The respondents were all very appreciative of the efforts of the Ministry of Education to continue the learning of their children despite the pandemic by implementing online learning. However, there were some challenges they encountered in this approach of learning.

The study revealed that the main challenges encountered by the parents were lack or limited access to internet and the poor internet connection in the area.

Getting data bundles for my child to use for online learning was so a very big challenge for me as money for data was difficult to get. (Parent 1)
Helping my child with online classes and school work has been a challenge to me. I found it difficult to keep my child on track and help her with assignments because of my busy schedule. (Parent 5)

I found it difficult to ensure that my child attend the online classes as per time table, complete his homework and send it to the teachers and prepare for the next day’s class due to balancing responsibilities. (Parent 7)

In my education I only ended in grade five so I don’t understand the content my child is learning so for it is difficult to explain the lessons to her. (Parent 9)

My parents don’t have a smart phone so I rely on my friends to access the work sent to us by our teachers. (Learner 3)

Sourcing for data bundles for my child to use during online learning is one of the challenges I had. (Parent 6)

Getting education materials for my child from the school was a challenge for me because I had to travel all the way to my child’s school to get the materials from her teachers on a daily basis which was stressful. (Parent 4)

Teaching my son was stressful and challenging because of time. I have a lot of things to do so diving time and attention was a challenge to me. (Parent 8)

Challenges were there and those I experienced included: limited or poor network being in rural area of the country side, we use solar so sometimes the phone is not charged because there is no solar so the child would not be able to attend the learners and sometimes if you don’t have money to by internet data bundles for the child so these where some of the challenges. (Parent 10)

Discussion

The present study aimed to assess parental involvement in educating their children during the Covid-19 pandemic at Nakambala Private School and Mukuyu Primary School in Mazabuka District, Zambia. Employing a descriptive survey research design, data were collected through questionnaires and interviews from 100 parents and 10 learners, all having children in grade nine at the two selected schools. The study explored various aspects of parental involvement, challenges faced, and methods employed during the pandemic.

The findings revealed a commendable level of parental involvement in ensuring their children received education during the pandemic. A significant number of parents actively helped their children with schoolwork, provided facilities like mobile phones and internet coverage for online learning, and spent quality time teaching their children. However, challenges emerged, including limited access to the internet, poor internet connectivity, time constraints due to busy schedules, and difficulties in sourcing funds for data bundles.
The study aligns with previous research indicating that parents played a pivotal role in supporting their children's learning during remote education. Parents engaged in various activities such as encouraging reading, monitoring online classes, and facilitating discussions with teachers. Despite challenges, over 70% of parents reported assisting their children in completing school assignments, emphasizing the shared responsibility in the education process.

The methods of teaching during the Covid-19 pandemic were diverse, with schools initiating online classes through platforms like WhatsApp, Zoom, and Google Classroom. Children actively participated in these classes, maintaining a semblance of a regular learning schedule. Parents supplemented these efforts by physically collecting work from schools, teaching their children using materials sent via WhatsApp, and interacting through various digital platforms.

Parental interaction was evident through the time spent helping children with schoolwork, regular monitoring of online learning, and discussions about lessons and assignments. The study concurs with Hasan (2020), highlighting that parents were actively involved in educating their children, thus contributing to a conducive learning environment.

Despite their involvement, parents encountered challenges, such as difficulties in sourcing funds for internet data bundles, limited access to the internet, and poor connectivity. The study corroborates with other studies, who identified stress and worry among parents, especially those from vulnerable groups, during the early stages of home schooling.

The findings emphasize the need for comprehensive support systems to address challenges faced by parents, ensuring equitable access to educational resources and promoting a positive learning environment during crises.

**Conclusion**

The study provides insights into parental involvement in educating children during the Covid-19 pandemic, revealing a commendable effort by parents despite challenges. The results underscore the importance of acknowledging and addressing the multifaceted challenges faced by parents to ensure an inclusive and effective educational experience for all children, regardless of the circumstances. Future interventions should consider the diverse needs of parents, fostering collaboration between schools, parents, and policymakers to create resilient and adaptable educational systems.

**Declarations**

Ethics was obtained from Human and Social Sciences ethics Board, Ref HSS201901 apart from the permission from the School Education Board.

**References**