

Exploring the effects of the home environment on learner behaviour in school

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Abstract: *Since Namibia's independence in 1990, learner behaviour has been perceived as a challenge. At some schools learners display violent behaviour, as is the case of one of the schools that took part in this research. Despite the efforts of the Ministry of Education Arts and Culture in Namibia to create guidelines to guide the behaviour of learners in schools, learner behaviour remains a concern in some schools. This research explored teachers', principals' and parents' views of the effects of the home environment on learner behaviour in school through individual interviews with the school principals, homogeneous focus group interviews with the teachers and parents and observation. Various categories under which the data were organised emerged from the interviews. The findings indicate that learner behaviour in school is embedded in the home background the child comes from. Various socialization aspects of the home environment, i.e., the child's experiences at home, are what the child will take to school. The child imitates and absorbs what he or she sees and hears at home and owns it as part of his or her behaviour. Therefore, parents at home have a role to play in facilitating and reinforcing values that promote positive behavior in their children if positive behaviour is to be realised in school. The home is the first school that learners attend and, if the home was not a good first school for them, such children can have behavioural problems in school.*

Keywords: *home, environment, school, behaviour, learners*

INTRODUCTION

The behaviour of learners in Namibian schools is guided, among others, by the following rules stipulated in the Education Act No. 16 of 2001. The rules state that learners:

- are expected to respect the dignity of other people,
- must not behave themselves in a disgraceful, improper or indecent manner,
- must not bring firearms into the school,
- must not use drugs or sell them on school premises,
- must not vandalise school and government properties, and
- must not influence others to disobey rules (Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, Namibia, pp. 51-52).

However, with all the above rules in place, learner behavior is a concern in some Namibian schools. This concern is not only a Namibian concern. Bechuke and Debeila (2012) in their research about some South African schools argue that little has been said about what caused inappropriate behaviours of learners in schools. Bechuke and Debeila's argument that there is a need to understand the behaviour of learners and why

they behave the way they do led this researcher to explore the effects of the home environment on learner behaviour in schools from a Namibian perspective.

Literature review

Literature on home environment and its effects on learner behaviour at school is reviewed below.

There is a great deal of literature that provides substantial evidence that the home environment has effects on learner behaviour in school. For example, Tifft, Sullivan and Sullivan (2008, p. 367) explained that it is important to consider the conditions where children grow up and are taught. It is believed that learners may come from social systems where they did not experience the value of being together. The social systems such as the home, where children come from may also not have inculcated values in them, to prepare them to become moral citizens and this may have an impact on their behaviour in school. Parents are the role models of their children, therefore, children emulate the behaviour of their parents. Thus, Winstok and Perkis (2008) posit that children's behaviour is not far from that of their parents. In accordance with Winstok and Perkis, De Klerk and Rens (2003) also pointed out that the sources for children values are parents. They further explained that parents need to provide guidance and positive models to their children when it comes to their own behaviour. The researcher too believes that the quality of learner behaviour in both the school and the society is based on attitudes and values children learn at home. Therefore, the home environment plays an important role regarding learner behaviour in school. Wolhuter and Steyn (2003) assert that parents have a responsibility to develop attitudes and values in their children. However, De Klerk and Rens (2003) argued that it is unfortunate, that parents often fail to do so, which has a negative impact on the school culture where their children may find themselves

Credible evidence by Woolley and Kaylor (2006) show that supportive parenting may be an appropriate predictor for school behaviour while poor family and parenting relations are in many cases associated with delinquent behaviours. Elias and Noordin (2011) also debate that parents in poor families are believed to provide poor role models as well as being ineffective in disciplining their children. In addition Jones (1998) believed that when children are exposed to severe violence in families, issues of psychological and emotional disturbances this results in violent behaviour among learners in school. An observation made by Durmuscelebi (2010) is that there are many children in school who come from home environment where they do not receive proper support and guidance which develop their social skills to interact appropriately with others in school. Such children are believed to bring complicated behavioural issues to school. As such, they do not know how to behave appropriately. Visser (2000) explained further that learners enter the school from different backgrounds, contexts and systems. He said that in some of these backgrounds children feel secured, loved and live in harmony with each other in the family. Contrary, others live in fear and experience an unpleasant home environment where arguments, fights, insults and all other emotional issues are the order of the day in their homes. Such contexts have an influence on learner behaviour in school. For example, Kerr and Nelson (1998) point out that some parents fight and curse their children and neighbours. As such, these children may think that this is an acceptable way of living and behaving. They may think their behaviour is

acceptable because it is practiced at home and in their neighbourhood. Therefore, they replicate it at school (Kerr & Nelson, 1998, p. 2).

Parents further influence learner behaviour in school in the sense that some learners come from homes where teachers do not receive respect from parents, which is a challenge and frustration to the teachers. Estevev, Jimenez and Musitu (2008) argued that family systems to a certain extent develop behavioural problems in children. It is further argued that the probability of the learner showing antisocial behaviours increases when socialization in the family is fuelled with irregular discipline, day to day conflicts and parents who do not support their children. This kind of situation can lead the learner to become violent and develop antisocial behaviour (Estevev et al., 2008). The experience by the child in the situation or environment he or she finds himself is what this child takes with him or her to school. Therefore, the child's experiences with family, such as television violence, dysfunctional families, grinding poverty, child abuse, domestic violence, poor emotional and cognitive development, drugs and gangs, may impact his or her behaviour (Edwards, 2001, p. 249) in school. There is significant evidence from the literature that the child who held a sense of positive and or bad behavioral experience at home might reflect such behaviour at school.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In Namibia, learner behavior in schools has been perceived as a challenge. Lee (2011, p. 1669) points out that the relations and human behaviour experienced by the learner in different settings is what the learner takes with him or her to school. Some research works have revealed that the behaviour of learners in school is a result of a variety of aspects surrounding him or her and which have an influence on the learner and make him or her become who he or she is in terms of identity and behaviour. Because of this, the researcher found it necessary to explore the effects of the home environment on learner behaviour in two selected primary schools in Namibia.

In view of the latter, this research study explored classroom teachers', principals' and parents' views of the effects of the home environment on learner behaviour in school setting.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Approach and Design

This study used a qualitative research approach and a case study design. The researcher based the selection of using a qualitative approach on Silverman (2001) that qualitative researchers analyse things as they exist in natural settings. The selection of to use a qualitative approach was further based on Henning (2004) who states that participants can talk about their experiences more efficiently when asked to do so (pp. 37-41) in qualitative research. In this case, the phenomenon explored was the effects of the home environment on learner behaviour in the school settings of this research. The qualitative approach prevented the researcher from entering the field with predetermined categories of the participants'

views on the effects of the home environment on learner behaviour in school. The researcher also understands that in qualitative research data sources are highly complementary to each other as there is no one single best way to collect data in qualitative research (Hahn, 2008, p. 70). Therefore, individual interviews with the principals, homogeneous focus group interviews with the teachers and parents and observation was conducted and analysed. These qualitative research methods were then used to triangulate the data.

In this research, full cognizance of the criticism and complaints about qualitative research that quality is compromised in qualitative research as there is no criteria to judge it, and that quality in qualitative research is uncertain (Hammersley, 2007, p. 287) doubted was observed. However, as Wolcott (1990) argues, the important thing in this research was for researchers to understand the phenomenon and how the participants make meaning of and interpret their situations (p. 146). Therefore, setting quality criteria would not be compatible with this research as the purpose of the research was to gain in-depth understanding of the views of the participants about the effects of the home environment on learner behaviour in school.

Moreover, multiple data sources were used to ensure that data was generated from different perspectives. The interpretive case study method was employed to gain in-depth understanding and interpretations from the participants' views of the effects of the home environment on learner behaviour in school. The interpretive case study method allowed the researcher to generate

extensive data and give detailed descriptions of participants' views on the effects of the home environment on learner behaviour in school. The case study selection was made up of the two schools selected for this research. These were the schools known as bad schools in terms of their learner behaviour. The sample consisted of 26 participants, that is, 13 participants at each school were selected. Participants were purposefully sampled. The idea was to purposefully select informants, who would give rich information about the effects of the home environment on learner behaviour in school. The sample included the principal, six teachers who were randomly selected in consultation with the school principal and six parents who were members of the school board members from each selected school who were also identified in consultation with each school's principal. Although purposive sampling was used, participation in this research was voluntary for all participants.

Data analysis

In the data analysis process, Taylor and Bogdan's (1998, p. 135) point is considered that any good qualitative research provides rich descriptive data. Data was displayed in an attempt to give readers a feeling of seeing things from the participants' point of view. Therefore, detailed narratives of the participants' own words were provided and analysed. This was done to give insight, meaning and understanding into the perceived connection between the home environment and the behaviour of learners in school. In the data presentation the data from the interviews were combined with the information from the observation. Data analysis was further based Taylor-Powell and Renner (2003) whereby the researcher read and re-read through the data in order to identify categories (p. 2). With this orientation a narrative analysis method was employed to analyse data in this research. The data analysis process involved transcribing the interviews and reading through the

transcripts and observation notes which helped to develop the categories under which the data were organised.

Ethical considerations

Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to interviews. Participants were also informed that their participation in this research was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time without any consequences. Participants were assured of their confidentiality and were informed that pseudonyms would be used to ensure their anonymity. To avoid plagiarism, sources used in this research are acknowledged.

RESULTS

Parents do not have time with their children at home

It was observed that some learners at the two selected schools for this research show disrespectful behaviour towards fellow learners and to their teachers. Participants believed that discipline and/or ill-discipline of learners in school might be caused by parents who are not guiding the behaviour of their children at home. Some teachers viewed different home backgrounds were learners come from as affecting the way learners behave at school. Teachers further believed that children bring the behavior of home (positive or negative) to school. These teachers further argued that the problem they faced in schools of learners misbehaving was due to parents who do not care and reinforce appropriate values at home. Thus, according to the participating teachers in this study there is a need for parents to educate their children and engage them about values they want them to emulate in school and in the society at large. On this point Mr Larry remarked:

For us to have good behaviour at school, parents at home are responsible for their children's behaviour. Learners cannot behave as expected by the school if parents have not done their homework well.

Ms Eddy also noted that:

In our houses, if parents do not care and reinforce appropriate values, children will not behave according to those values. A simple example: if you do not mind to teach them to clean their rooms, they will develop that habit of not cleaning their rooms. Rooms are not cleaned, that is what they know. They will take this understanding to school.

During the interview some participating parents acknowledged that they failed in their duties to teach their children good behaviour due to the fact that nowadays parents do not have time with their children. They reported that some parents spend much of their time at shebeens. Mr Luteni clearly acknowledged this in this statement, '*We parents at home sometimes fail in our duties to teach our children good behaviour. Today's parents do not have time with their children as it was in the past*'. Ms Nande seemed to agree with Mr Luteni. She clearly acknowledged that nowadays parents let their children to do whatever they want to do. She believed that children will take the same

kind of attitude to school. The participant explained that children are left on their own without any guidance from parents, while parents socialise themselves the whole day at shebeens. This has a negative effect on the behavior of the child at school. This participating parent illustrated this point by saying:

Some parents are sitting the whole day at shebeens and drinking outlets. When he or she comes home, it is late in the evening. Who do you think is at home guiding these children? Such children are on their own without a parent figure among them to guide their behavior. When they come to school, a teacher is not a parent to them. We should revert back to our responsibilities as parents.

Gender bias

Gender bias was further identified as having impact on learner behaviour. Participants believed that the way children are brought up at home has an effect on their behaviour at school. Participants observed that the cultural way of bringing up children especially in their context is gender bias. That is, the way parents treat their boy and girl children at home is not equal. These sentiments were expressed by Ms Fares that

The cultural way in of bringing up children in our context at home is usually gender biased. Parents mostly pay attention to girl children to stay at home and do the household chores. Parents normally do not care too much when a boy child is not at home, but with girls, they have to ask many questions if the girls are not at home. Boys are walking around in the streets. That mentality is the one that leads to inappropriate behaviour among boys at school because most of the times they are left on their own at home. And they feel the same at school.

The observation made was that boys were the most misbehaving children at both schools. This observation was explained by participants that parents tolerate bad behaviours of their boy children at home than with girls. Mr Sem clearly explained that:

Gender bias is a problem that has an effect on the learners' behaviour. You find at home that some parents do not care about what their boy children are doing at home. They look at them doing wrong things and they do not correct them. They tolerate these behaviours without acting. Parents should develop and reinforce appropriate moral values in their children regardless of their gender.

The behaviour of learners in school is believed to be weakened by parents who do not enhance positive behaviour in children and who do not treat them equally at home. It appeared that some parents tolerate bad behavior at home especially with their boy children. The sentiments expressed by participating teachers are that parents should develop and reinforce appropriate moral values in their children regardless of their gender. It is believed that by so doing appropriate behaviour of learners in school may be realised.

“Learners imitate and assimilate”

One of the aspects participants identified which impact on learner behaviour in school was lack of moral values. Participants observed that there is a lack of moral values such as respect in some families. Participants claimed that in some parents go to an extent whereby they fight and insult each other in front of their children. Other issues which affect learner behavior in school identified were drunkenness, killings and parents showing disrespect to each other. Some graffiti on the walls of the participating school expressed bad and vulgar language used by learners. Moreover, it showed disrespectful behaviour towards others, including teachers in school. Children learn from what they see around them and they take those violent behaviours to school. One participant emphasised this by saying, *‘Moral values are lacking in our homes. Therefore, when children come to school they imitate what their parents are doing at home’* To some children, the home is not a happy and harmonious environment for them. They never experience peace and joy at home. It should be noted that the home is the first school children attend and if it was not a good school for them, it can cause life problems for such children.

Through observation there is a need for parents and the school to work together as parents and empower each other to guide learner behaviour positively. This was expressed by one participant that:

One could say parents sometimes do a kind of sabotage to the efforts of teachers at school. Some parents make it difficult for us here at school when it comes to reinforcement of moral values at home. They do not inculcate moral values in their children at home. Values such as respect are lacking in some homes. Children grow up as disrespectful people at home, and that is what they bring to school.

Participants also noted that back biting and saying bad words against teachers are forms of values which do not reflect good moral values and have effects on the behaviour of learners at school. It is believed that learners are not mature yet and they assimilate what they hear and see. Mr Nguno noted how such home influences affect learner behaviour at school and cautioned:

Parents should be considerate about what they are saying in the presence of their children. What parents sometimes say at home in the presence of children put us in trouble in schools. As a parent, you cannot say bad words against the teacher, somebody who is teaching your child and helping you nurture your child to become somebody in future. This child will take what he or she heard from you to school, and will say the same to the teacher. Kids are just kids and they copy everything they see.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Marais and Meier (2010) argue that it is the primary function of parents at home to teach children to act morally (p. 47) where ever they find themselves. Homes set a tone and provide an environment that shapes learner behaviour in one way or another

(Poipoi, Agak & Kabuka, 2011, p. 30). The next section discusses the findings of this research.

Values: It is believed that the home as a social environment has an effect on the learner's behaviour in school. This is consistent with Kamuti (2015, p. 19) study which maintains that a parent's decision either to be committed and try hard to guide his or her children and take care of them regardless of the exciting worlds such children live in or to leave them on their own and unsupervised will make tremendous impact on the life of their children. That is, values and practices at home shape the behaviour of the child in school, subconsciously. Values such as respect of another person's dignity and positive relations at home among family members influence children's behaviour at home and consequently become their standards of behaviour at school. As Mukuka (2013) explains, practices at home are indicators of the learner's morality (p. 145) at school and community at large. Standard behaviour does not just happen, it is realised through reinforcement and socialization of children in the values at home where children absorb and own those values as standards of behaviour. By so doing, parents at home support the school in reinforcing values that shape the behaviour of learners positively later in school. This is again consistent with the study done by Oselumese, Omoike and Andrew (2016) where they argue that the first educational experiences start home. The home is the first classroom where the child learns ideas, and general pattern of behaviour (p. 12). In line with Oselumese, Omoike and Andrew, Young, Caldarella, Richardson and Young (2012) explain that what the child learns home and reinforced at school helps that child to make a meaningful connection of what behaviour is expected from him or her at school, home, the community (p. 26) and in the society at large. Thus, the behaviour of learners in school is a social aspect that is handled collectively from home to the school. That is, learner behaviour in school is not isolated from what is happening at home.

Parenting relations: It is further believed that the quality of human relationships at home is crucial and has effect on learner behaviour in school. The positive or negative social relationships children experience at home are what learners will take to school. If, for example, children do not experience close relationships and warm friendships at home, they will not develop a sense of relatedness and a feeling of connectedness (Vallerand, 1997, p. 300) at school. Children observe and imitate the kind of relationships they are socialized with at home. Parents have an influential role to play in the behaviour of their children with regard to the kind of relationships they portrayed to their children as children emulate them. This is again aligned with the study done by Oselumese, Omoike and Andrew (2016) that the variation in learner behaviour at school is a result of differences and variations in the home (p. 13) backgrounds.

Non-conductive home environments: Some homes are believed to be not happy and harmonious environments for everyone to live. They are places for quarrelling and fighting. They are places for insulting each other and disturbances. They are bad socialization environments with unhealthy interactions that have a negative effect on learner behaviour in school. This is in accordance with Schein's (2010) belief that individuals' personalities and characters reflect the groups that socialized them and that they belong to (p. 9) and the home is such an environment where a group of people are socialised and their personalities and characters are nurtured. This can also further

be explained according to Osterman (2000) who explains that when children have positive experiences with others, they develop a sense of responsibility of their own behaviour and always strive to conform to the standard social norms and values (p. 331) of the social entity, for example the school.

Non-caring home environment: Non-caring home environments have been identified as having negative effects on learners' behaviour in school. Some parents are seen as not instilling moral behaviour in their children and this has negative effects on the behaviour of learners in school. In accordance with Durmuscelebi (2010), learners bring many complicated issues to schools which are related to their home environments where they are not receiving adequate support to develop their social skills necessary to interact and behave in school (pp. 377-378) and in the community at large. It is believed that children are left alone at home without the parent figure to guide them and take care of their behaviour. It is believed that boy children, especially, are usually not taken care of as they are left on their own. Saphier and King (1985, p. 67) maintain that good behaviour will not develop in children when the environment or the culture at home is not conducive and appropriate for children to learn appropriate behaviour. That is, there is a need for parents at home to cultivate habits of self-control guided by moral social principles (Mugabe & Maposa, 2013, p. 112) among their children, so that children can grow up as moral people, which consequently can enhance positive behaviour of learners in school and in society in general. In the same vein, Kraft and Dougherty (2013, p. 6) allude that the key role players and focal persons to shape children's behaviour in school are the parents. Without the helping hand from the parents, the school will not succeed in their efforts to develop appropriate behaviours in learners.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this research was to explore the effects of the home environment on the behaviour of learners in school. The findings of this research strongly show that there is a great correlation on the influence of home environment and learner behaviour at school. The research found that parents have a role to play in facilitating positive behaviour in their children if positive behaviour is to be realised in schools. Children observe and imitate what they see and hear at home and they take it to school. Gender bias in the upbringing of children, and family instability where unhealthy relationships, fighting, disrespect of each other and insults exert serious effects on the child's behaviour at school. This research contributes to this line of research because it produced similar findings that lack of moral values, parenting relations; non-conducive home environments and non-caring home environment are some aspects which influence learner behaviour in school. The findings revealed that parents who do not foster moral values in their children are easily identified through their children's behavior at school while a home environment that reinforces and socializes children in positive values attracts positive learner behaviour in school. It provides insights for bridging the gap between home environment and learner behaviour in school. The findings of this research have implications on ways to improve learner behaviour at home and consequently in school.

The following recommendations were formulated. Schools selected for this research were purposefully selected as typical case schools. Readers are likely to find that these accounts resonate either positively or negatively with their experiences. Though no generalisations can be made from this research due to the size and nature of the research, some lessons can be learned and shared. Thus, the current research recommends regular meetings where parents are informed and sensitized about the important role they play in nurturing the behaviour of children both at home and in school. Schools should also strengthen their relationships and establish good communication with parents to work as a team in developing appropriate learner behaviour. This could be done through parents meetings

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