

EXAMINING PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN CHILDREN'S PRIMARY EDUCATION IN RURAL MALAWI: THROUGH ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS THEORY

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Abstract

The importance of quality education is encapsulated in SDG # 4 – *Quality education for all* which includes lifelong learning in inclusive settings and is considered to be one of the key factors to escape poverty. In Sub-Saharan Africa low educational attainment has continually hampered the fight against poverty, nonetheless education is recognised there as a means for expanding human capabilities and choices. One of several factors which has been universally recognised as positively affecting educational achievement is parental involvement. The purpose of studying parental involvement in rural Malawi will give us an important insight into the extent of it and will explicate to all concerned the importance of parental involvement when it comes to educational attainment in the strive for poverty reduction.

This study analyses parental involvement in their children's primary education in four rural primary schools in Malawi, focusing on the home and the school settings. Through focus group discussion and semi-structured interviews information was obtained from 19 parents, 24 teachers, along with four headteacher. We applied the micro- and mesosystem elements from Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory to make sense of data. The home and school settings represent the autonomous microsystem whereas parental involvement is part of the mesosystem. Findings indicate that the microsystem appears to be active however the mesosystemic interaction is limited and misinterpreted. Parents do participate in their children's education and assert for instance that they do come to school somewhat regularly to follow up on their child's progress and behaviour. However that contradicts the teachers' view on how involved parents are which claim that they hardly ever meet parents at school. Both parents and teachers are aware of the importance of parental involvement nonetheless they need to build and strengthen their mutual relationship and interactions to better support learners. The school also needs to communicate positive aspects of children's learning to parents. Opening up positive reinforcement could enhance parental involvement.

Keywords: *Ecological systems theory, home-school settings, rural primary schools, Malawi, parental involvement.*
