

Parental Roles in EFL Learning: A Case Study of Form 1 Students in Parakou, Benin

Abstract

This study examines the level of parental involvement in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning among Form 1 students at Titirou Secondary School in Parakou, Benin, with a focus on parental responsibility and its potential impact on student performance. A total of 10 teachers, 25 parents, and 60 students were selected through purposive and random sampling methods. Data were collected using a combination of questionnaires, interviews, and classroom observations, with both quantitative and qualitative analysis methods. The quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS 22, while the qualitative data were analyzed through content analysis. The findings indicate that while 60% of parents acknowledge the importance of their involvement in EFL learning, only 60% actively participate in EFL-related activities. Additionally, 60% of teachers reported limited parental contact, hindering effective collaboration. The study concludes with recommendations for enhanced cooperation between parents, teachers, and students to improve EFL learning outcomes.

Keywords: EFL learning, parents' involvement, students, school performance

1. Introduction

This study explores the impact of parental involvement on students' academic success, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, at Titirou Secondary School in Parakou, Benin. Parental involvement has been shown to significantly influence students' academic performance, motivation, and self-esteem (Gumapac et al., 2021). Numerous studies have highlighted the positive correlation between parental engagement in education and improvements in students' academic outcomes and attitudes towards school (Barger et al., 2019). In the context of EFL learning, where students face challenges in acquiring a new language, parental support is essential to boost language skills, abilities, and interest in the subject (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997).

Despite the recognized importance of parental involvement, the level of engagement in EFL education in Benin remains relatively low. Many parents view their role as limited to providing basic school necessities, such as school fees and stationery, without understanding the critical need for active participation in their children's learning process, especially in language learning. This limited involvement can impede students' academic progress and hinder their ability to succeed in EFL classes. Many parents are unaware of how their involvement—such as assisting with homework or encouraging language practice—can significantly impact their children's performance. This study aims to investigate the roles parents play in supporting EFL learning at Titirou Secondary School and assess the barriers preventing more active engagement. Specifically, it will examine the level of parental involvement, the effectiveness of this support in improving student performance, and the factors limiting increased participation.

The objectives of this study are to assess parents' awareness of the importance of their involvement in their children's schooling using qualitative interviews; to examine the role of

parents in supporting their children's EFL learning, particularly in terms of motivation and providing learning resources; and to evaluate the extent of parental involvement in school activities and its impact on students' academic performance in EFL classes.

To guide this study, the following research questions have been formulated:

- **Main Research Question:**

How does parental involvement impact the academic performance and language proficiency of EFL learners in Form 1 at Titirou Secondary School, Parakou?

- **Specific Research Questions:**

1. How do parents perceive their roles and participation in their children's EFL learning, particularly in relation to performance and language abilities?
2. What are EFL teachers' perspectives on parental support in improving students' participation and performance in English language classes?
3. How does parental involvement affect students' achievement and behaviour in EFL classrooms?

2. Literature Review

Parental involvement in children's education is widely recognized as a critical factor in their academic development and learning outcomes. This is particularly important in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), where parental support can significantly influence language acquisition. Theories such as Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory and Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological system theory emphasize that parents play a crucial role in children's academic careers, especially in language development. According to Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1997) model, parental involvement is driven by factors such as parents' perceptions, sense of self-efficacy, and invitations from the school, all of which impact their engagement in education.

In the Benin context, where English is not the primary language and is often considered a "least preferred" subject compared to Mathematics and Science, these factors help explain the varied levels of parental involvement in EFL learning. Some parents view English as a valuable global skill and thus support their children's learning, while others neglect the subject entirely. Studies, such as those by Barger et al. (2019), have shown a positive correlation between parents' involvement in homework and their children's learning outcomes, including language development and motivation.

However, parental involvement in EFL education in Benin is often limited by several factors. Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994) highlighted that parents who engage in discussions about language learning and assignments are the most supportive. Despite understanding the importance of their involvement, many parents, particularly those in rural areas, feel ill-equipped to assist with EFL homework due to language barriers. In Benin, where the official language is French, many parents do not feel confident in supporting English language learning, which is often viewed as unnecessary for academic success (Walker, 2005; Hayek et al., 2022).

Socioeconomic factors also restrict parental engagement. Many families in Benin, especially low-income households, struggle to afford education-related expenses, limiting their ability to provide necessary resources or attend school events (Sui-Chu & Willms, 1996). In rural areas, where frequent practice is essential for EFL learning, parents often lack the financial means to support such activities. Cultural factors also play a role; as noted by Coleman (1966), in many African cultures, including Benin, parents' primary responsibility is to ensure their children's basic needs are met, leaving educational responsibilities to the school. This often leads to a disconnect between home and school, with many parents distanced from their children's academic lives.

Furthermore, schools in Benin sometimes fail to provide the materials or opportunities necessary for effective parental involvement, which further hinders engagement. Epstein (2001) emphasized that schools should actively facilitate parental participation through regular communication and activities. However, in many impoverished contexts, such opportunities are limited, exacerbating the challenges students face. Hussain et al. (2019) found that when schools fail to engage parents, students perform poorly and exhibit behavioral issues. Low parental involvement leads to a lack of motivation and poor performance, especially in EFL (Opata, 2022).

To address these challenges, several strategies have been proposed. Epstein (2001) suggested that schools should routinely communicate with parents and involve them in various educational activities. Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) argued that parents can still support EFL learning by monitoring school assignments and exposing their children to English-language media, even if they cannot speak the language themselves (Walker et al., 2011; Wang, Hill, & Hofkens, 2014). Azoua, Lanmatchion, and Akognon (2020) further suggested that schools in Benin need to raise awareness about the global importance of English, using seminars and teacher-parent interactions to increase parental involvement in EFL education.

In conclusion, while parental involvement is crucial for academic success, particularly in EFL learning, it is often constrained by linguistic, socioeconomic, and cultural barriers in Benin. To improve student performance in EFL, schools must adopt inclusive strategies that actively encourage and facilitate parental engagement.

3. Methodology

This research was conducted at Titirou Secondary School in Parakou, northern Benin, to examine parental involvement in supporting English as a Foreign Language (EFL) acquisition among Form 1 students. The study focused on the roles of parents, students, and EFL teachers, employing purposive and systematic sampling to ensure each group was appropriately represented.

The sample included 60 Form 1 students, selected based on their varying levels of English proficiency, who required significant parental support. Twenty-five parents with basic English proficiency were chosen, as they were more likely to assist with their children's learning. Ten EFL teachers were selected using systematic sampling, ensuring a mix of experience and qualifications, such as Bachelor's and Master's degrees, and professional teaching certificates (BAPES). The sample size, while small, facilitated focused qualitative analysis, and future research could expand with larger, more diverse samples for broader generalization.

Three customized questionnaires were developed for teachers, students, and parents. The teacher questionnaire consisted of seven questions about parental engagement and challenges in communication. The student questionnaire included seven questions assessing parental assistance with homework and students' perceptions of EFL learning. The parent survey contained six questions on parental involvement and interactions with teachers. A pilot test was conducted to ensure clarity, particularly with the student questionnaire.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. Interviews were conducted with all 10 teachers to gain insights into their views on parental involvement. Three volunteer teachers allowed classroom observations to compare the engagement of students with and without parental support. All participants were informed of the study's goals, and consent was obtained, ensuring ethical compliance.

Data were processed in Microsoft Excel for organization and cleaning, followed by analysis in SPSS version 22. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, and means) were used to summarize parental involvement, while cross-tabulation tables examined relationships

between parental support and student outcomes. Qualitative data from interviews were analyzed using content analysis to identify patterns and themes regarding parental involvement and its impact on EFL learning.

4. Findings and Discussion

The study aimed to explore the role of parental involvement in EFL learning at Titirou Secondary School in Parakou, Benin. Data were gathered through surveys, classroom observations, and semi-structured interviews with EFL teachers, students, and parents. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS 22 for descriptive statistics, and qualitative data were analyzed through content analysis.

4.1. Data Related to EFL Teachers

The analysis of the 10 EFL teachers surveyed revealed important insights regarding their educational backgrounds and their views on learner skills and parental involvement.

Table 1: Teachers' Educational Qualifications

Teacher Qualification	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Bachelor's Degree	2	20%
Maîtrise/Master's Degree	4	40%
BAPES (Teacher Certification)	4	40%
Total	10	100%

Source: Field Data Processed (SPSS 22) in 2024 (Unpublished)

Table 1 indicates that 40% of teachers have a Maîtrise/Master's degree, while another 40% hold BAPES certification. This suggests that the teaching staff is well-qualified, which could positively influence the quality of instruction and student outcomes.

Regarding learner preferences, 50% of students preferred reading, while 30% favoured listening, and only 10% selected speaking and writing. This preference for receptive skills may suggest that students feel more comfortable with activities that require less active language production (Al-Seghayer, 2017).

Table 2: Teachers' Perception of Learners' Preferred Skills

Preferred Skill	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Reading	5	50%
Listening	3	30%
Speaking	1	10%
Writing	1	10%
Total	10	100%

Source: Field Data Processed (SPSS 22) in 2024 (Unpublished)

The data in Table 2 reflects that learners may favour passive skills like reading and listening, possibly due to their perceived lower difficulty compared to active skills such as speaking and writing.

When asked about parental involvement, 80% of teachers considered it indispensable for student success, and 20% viewed it as important but optional (Table 3). These results align with existing literature, which suggests that parental engagement enhances students' motivation and academic performance (Driessen et al., 2005). However, despite this recognition, 60% of teachers reported never meeting with parents, indicating a gap in parent-teacher communication.

Table 3: Teachers' Perception of Parental Involvement

Perception of Parental Involvement	Frequency	Percentage (%)
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Unavoidable	8	80%
Optional	2	20%
Useless	0	0%
Total	10	100%

Source: Field Data Processed (SPSS 22) in 2024 (Unpublished)

Table 4: Frequency of Parent-Teacher Communication

Frequency of Parent-Teacher Meetings	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Never	6	60%
Regularly	2	20%
Occasionally	2	20%
Total	10	100%

Source: Field Data Processed (SPSS 22) in 2024 (Unpublished)

Table 4 highlights the limited communication between parents and teachers, which may hinder effective collaboration and parental support for students' EFL learning.

4.2. Data Related to EFL Learners

The survey of 60 students revealed their attitudes toward English learning, their preferred skills, and the degree of parental support they received.

Table 5: Learner Attitudes Toward Learning English

Learner Attitude	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Interesting	48	80%
Boring	7	12%
Useless	5	8%
Total	60	100%

Source: Field Data Processed (SPSS 22) in 2024 (Unpublished)

As shown in Table 5, 80% of learners find English interesting, which suggests intrinsic motivation for learning the language. However, 20% of students expressed negative attitudes, with some finding English boring or useless, which suggests that without engaging materials or clear relevance, students may become demotivated (Buendía & Ortega-Martín, 2018).

Table 6: Learner Preferences for Language Skills

Preferred Skill	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Listening	24	40%
Speaking	19	32%
Reading	17	28%
Writing	0	0%
Total	60	100%

Source: Field Data Processed (SPSS 22) in 2024 (Unpublished)

Table 6 illustrates that students prefer listening and speaking over reading and writing. This suggests a need for more engaging writing activities that focus on creativity and communication (Richards, 2006).

Table 7: Parental Support for English Homework

Parental Support	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Regular Help	36	60%
No Help	24	40%
Total	60	100%

Source: Field Data Processed (SPSS 22) in 2024 (Unpublished)

As seen in Table 7, 60% of learners receive regular help with English homework, while 40% do not, mainly due to parents' low English proficiency. This finding corroborates Sui-Chu & Willms (1996), who noted that low-income parents often lack the resources to support their children's education.

4.3. Data Related to Parents

The data from 25 parents revealed mixed levels of engagement. While 60% of parents reported helping their children with homework, 40% could not due to language barriers (Table 8). This highlights the importance of providing support resources, such as workshops in French, to help parents engage more effectively in their children's EFL education.

Table 8: Parental Help with Homework

Parental Help	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Regular Help	15	60%
No Help	10	40%
Total	25	100%

Source: Field Data Processed (SPSS 22) in 2024 (Unpublished)

4.4. Data from Classroom Observations

Classroom observations provided valuable insights into the impact of parental involvement on student engagement. Observations showed that students whose parents actively supported their EFL learning were more engaged, participated in discussions, and performed better in class. In contrast, students without parental involvement were less motivated, often struggled with tasks, and displayed disengaged behaviour. These observations align with Buendía and Ortega-Martín (2018), who emphasize that motivation and active participation are key to successful language learning.

Teachers also noted that students receiving parental support tended to demonstrate better classroom behaviour and were more likely to complete assignments. This supports the findings of Epstein (2001), who argues that strong home-school collaboration is critical to student success.

4.5 Discussion

The findings confirm that parental involvement is crucial for student success in EFL education, supporting the views of Driessen et al. (2005). However, barriers such as limited communication between parents and teachers and a lack of resources prevent effective parental engagement. Although 80% of teachers recognize the importance of parental involvement, 60% reported never meeting with parents (Table 4), indicating a gap in parent-teacher communication. This gap negatively affects students' progress, particularly in terms of language acquisition and motivation (Hussain et al., 2019).

The preference for receptive skills (listening and reading) and the lack of interest in writing (Table 6) suggest that teachers need to adapt their methods to engage students in all language skills. Incorporating communicative language teaching (CLT) and task-based learning (TBL) strategies can help address these gaps (Richards, 2006). Additionally, the study reveals that many parents, especially from lower-income backgrounds, struggle to support their children due to language barriers and lack of resources (Sui-Chu & Willms, 1996). Schools should address these issues by offering resources, such as workshops in French, and by creating supportive learning environments for both students and parents.

In conclusion, while most teachers and students recognize the importance of parental involvement, significant barriers to engagement remain. Improving communication between

parents and teachers, providing resources for parents, and adopting more inclusive teaching strategies will help bridge these gaps and improve student outcomes in EFL education.

Conclusion

This study assessed the effect of parental involvement in EFL learning among Form 1 students at Titirou Secondary School in Parakou, Benin. It explored parental responsibilities, awareness, and the impact of their involvement on children's academic performance. Data were collected through questionnaires, interviews with 10 teachers, 25 parents, and 60 students, and classroom observations. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS 22 for descriptive statistics, while qualitative data were analyzed through content analysis.

The findings revealed significant gaps in parental involvement. While 60% of parents recognized the importance of their contribution to their children's education, only 60% provided support for EFL activities. Furthermore, many parents prioritized subjects like mathematics over English, leading to insufficient support for EFL learning. Only 20% of teachers maintained regular communication with parents, limiting the effectiveness of parent involvement. These results suggest the need for schools to take a more active role in fostering communication with families.

One limitation of this study is the small sample size, which may affect the external validity of the findings. Additionally, the study was conducted at a single school, meaning the results cannot be generalized across Benin's educational system. Future research should include larger, more diverse samples from different institutions to provide a broader perspective on parental involvement in EFL.

To increase parental engagement, schools should organize seminars to raise awareness of parents' roles in language development. Regular parent-teacher meetings and the use of digital communication platforms can foster continuous cooperation between schools and families. Ultimately, the level of parental involvement plays a critical role in students' success in EFL learning. Addressing the challenges identified in this study could help create a more supportive environment that enhances students' performance. Future research could focus on interventions to increase parental involvement in different educational contexts to identify effective strategies for promoting parent-school collaboration.

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