



RESEARCH ARTICLE

PARENTAL ROLES IN EFL LEARNING: A CASE STUDY OF FORM 1 STUDENTS IN PARAKOU, BENIN

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Abstract

This study investigates the level of parental involvement in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning for first-year students (Form 1) at Titirou Secondary School, Parakou, Benin. Using a mixed-methods research design, the study consisted of 10 teachers, 25 parents, and 60 students who were randomly selected and were also part of purposive sampling. Data collection involved questionnaires, interviews, and classroom observations. Quantitative data underwent analysis by SPSS version 22, while qualitative data were subject to thematic content analysis. It can be seen from the results that 60% of teachers feel they share engagement with students, whereas an opposite view is held by 40% of the teachers, stating that they do provide EFL activities to their students. In addition, 60% of teachers indicate that they never or rarely have an interaction with parents, which is certainly a barrier to collaboration. The implications of the findings suggest that ineffective interaction with parents could deter a student's learning experiences in EFL. The implications of this study have presented possible practices to enhance the parent-teacher relationship to support students' learning of EFL. The findings and discussion from this study provide additional insight about parental engagement and its association with academic achievement in the research context of secondary education in Benin.

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Introduction:-

This research examines the effects parental involvement might have on the academic achievement of students in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) at Titirou Secondary School in Parakou, Benin. While parental involvement has been considered highly influential in students' academic performance, motivation, and self-esteem (Gumapac et al., 2021), multiple researchers have concluded that increased parental involvement in education leads to improved student educational outcomes and more positive attitudes toward school (Barger et al., 2019). Since these students are facing difficulties in acquiring a new language in an EFL context, the assistance of parents is necessary to enhance language skills, abilities, and interest in the subject (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997).

Although parental involvement in education has been recognized as crucial, it remains comparatively low in EFL education in Benin. Many parents expect their role to be limited to basic school needs, such as school fees and

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stationery, not realizing the importance of actively engaging in their child's learning process, particularly in language learning. This limited involvement can hinder student progress and success in EFL lessons. Many parents do not realise the extent to which even limited involvement, such as helping with homework or encouraging language practice, can positively influence their children's engagement. This study aims to examine and explore the role of parents in supporting EFL learning at Titirou Secondary School and to assess the factors that prevent them from becoming involved. More specifically, it examines the degree of parental involvement, its effectiveness in enabling students to improve, and the limitations of increasing parental involvement.

This mixed-methods research examined parents' attitudes, knowledge and participation in children's English learning, including qualitative interviews that gathered information on parental motivation, parental styles and the types of support parents can provide to English learners. Quantitative data collection gathered information regarding the degree of parental participation with school activities and the association with pupils' achievement in English lessons. Collectively, these methods provided a complex and advanced understanding of parent involvement and its potential influences on second and foreign language learning.

To direct this research, the following research questions have been raised:

- **Main Research Question:**

In what ways does parental involvement influence the academic achievement and language ability of Form 1 EFL students at Titirou Secondary School, Parakou?

- **Specific Research Questions:**

1. How do parents perceive their role and involvement in their children's learning of English as a foreign language, particularly in terms of performance and language skills?
2. What are EFL teachers' views on parental support in improving pupils' participation and performance in English lessons?
3. How does parental involvement affect pupils' achievement and behaviour in EFL classes?

Literature Review:-

Parental involvement in children's learning is globally recognized as one of the key predictors of their academic growth and achievement. It assumes a specific role in the acquisition of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), where parental involvement plays an essential role in language learning. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1978) and Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory (1979) hypothesize specific channels with a focus on the active participation of parents in children's learning lives, particularly in language learning. Based on the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) model, parents' involvement is triggered by parents' perceptions, sense of self-efficacy, and school invitations that condition them to participate in education.

In the Benin context, where English is not the first language and is often considered a "least preferred" subject compared to Mathematics and Science, it is such variables that explain variations in the degree of parental involvement in EFL learning. English is also perceived by some parents as a valuable universal skill and therefore encourage their children to study it, while others ignore the subject entirely. Studies, such as that of Barger et al. (2019), have established a connection between parent involvement in homework and students' academic achievement, language proficiency, and motivation.

Nevertheless, in Benin, parental contribution to EFL education is generally curtailed by several factors. Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994) indicated that parents who involve their children in discussions about language and assignments are typically more supportive. While some parents recognize the value of being supportive, the combination of a dominant local language and rural indifference means that many parents, again mainly in rural areas, did not feel they even had a way to help with their children's EFL homework. Even parents who recognize the importance of English learning often feel entirely incompetent to contribute, either due to barriers associated with language or the belief that learning English will have no impact on their children's academic success (Walker, 2005; Hayek et al., 2022).

Socioeconomic factors inhibit parental involvement. In Benin, most families, especially those with low incomes, cannot afford education-related costs and, therefore, cannot provide necessary assessments or attend school events (Sui-Chu & Willms, 1996). In rural areas, where EFL learning often requires regular practice, parents may not always have the financial means to support these activities. Cultural factors are also relevant, and Coleman (1966) has reported that, in many, if not all, African cultures—including those of Benin—parents perceive their primary

role as ensuring their children receive the necessities of survival and have expectations that the educational system fulfills its role in educational provision. This perception of educational responsibilities leads to a disconnect between one's home and educational experience, as parents routinely have limited interactions with their children's academic lives.

Moreover, at times, the Beninese schools do not offer the requisite materials and opportunities for an effective parental role to take place, which will then discourage engagement. Epstein (2001) suggested that schools should foster parents' involvement by providing opportunities for them to participate in events and activities through various communication methods. However, in some impoverished areas, such opportunities are lacking, posing an additional challenge for some students. Hussain et al. (2019) reported on schools with no parental engagement and concluded that achievement and behavioral problems were typical of those students when these schools ceased to engage with parents. In this way, a lack of parental engagement leads to a lack of motivation and poor performance in students, particularly among EFL learners (Opata, 2022).

Several solutions to the problems identified have been proposed. Epstein (2001) suggested that schools regularly involve parents in communication and certain educational activities. Mohammed Noor et al (2022) noted that parents try to support EFL learning, even when they do not speak the language, by supervising homework and using English-language media to expose their children to the language (Walker et al., 2011; Wang, Hill, & Hofkens, 2014). Finally, Azoua, Lanmatchion, and Akognon (2020) suggested that Beninese schools should create awareness and emphasize the importance of EFL in a global context, utilizing seminars and teacher-parent sessions to promote improved parental engagement in EFL education.

In sum, although parental involvement is crucial for academic achievement, particularly in EFL learning, it is often hindered by linguistic, socioeconomic, and cultural constraints in Benin. Therefore, to enhance the performance of students with EFL, educational institutions must employ inclusive strategies to promote, encourage, and facilitate parental involvement.

Methodology:-

This study was carried out at Titirou Secondary School, Parakou, in northern Benin, with the purpose of investigating the contribution of parents towards English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning for Form 1 students. The respondents were parents, students, and EFL teachers with purposive and systematic sampling to cover every category.

The sample consisted of 60 Form 1 students with different English proficiency levels, chosen because they needed a lot of parental support. Twenty-five parents with basic English proficiency were selected because they would more likely support their children in learning. Ten EFL educators were selected through systematic sampling to ensure variety in level of teaching experience and teaching qualifications, specifically Bachelor's and Master's degrees (or equivalents) and some BAPES professional teacher diplomas. The sample size was rather small; however, it will allow for a qualitative, in-depth study and will allow larger, more varied samples in future research for more generalizability.

Three questionnaires, a teacher questionnaire, a student questionnaire, and a parent questionnaire were created. The teacher questionnaire included seven questions on parent-teacher communication issues and parental involvement issues. The student questionnaire had seven questions on how parents help students with homework and students' attitudes toward learning EFL. The parent questionnaire included six questions about parent-teacher interaction and parental involvement. A pilot study was carried out to provide clarity, especially with the student questionnaire.

Data were gathered using semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. Semi-structured interviews with all 10 teachers were held to solicit their opinions regarding parents' involvement. Three volunteer teachers permitted classroom observations to identify any changes in students' participation with and without parental support. All participants were made aware of the aims of the study, as well as informed consent, in consideration of ethics.

Data were processed and arranged in Microsoft Excel prior to analysis with SPSS version 22. Descriptive statistics (mean, percentages, and frequencies) were used to summarize parental engagement, and cross-tabulation tables were used to examine the association between parental support and learner performance. Interview qualitative data were analysed using content analysis to identify patterns and themes of parental engagement and how this impacted EFL learning.

Findings and Discussion:-

The present study sought to investigate the influence of parental involvement on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning at Titirou Secondary School in Parakou, Benin. The research study assessed the role of parental involvement in students' performance and motivation, and analysed the nature of the parent-teacher communication process. The findings of the data, derived through quantitative and qualitative analyses, have provided insights that, in some aspects, support existing theoretical reports on parental involvement in education, while also refuting others.

Data Related to EFL Teachers

The analysis of the 10 EFL teachers interviewed has brought to light some interesting insights regarding their educational backgrounds and their views on learner skills and parental involvement.

Teachers' Educational Qualifications:

The breakdown of teachers' educational qualifications, as indicated in Table 1, reveals that 40 percent (%) of the teaching staff hold a Master's degree, and 40 percent (%) hold a BAPES (Bachelor of Education) certificate. These figures indicate a relatively high quality of professional and academic competency of teachers. Together, their credential record suggests that the teaching staff is academically qualified to deliver high-quality EFL instruction.

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)

Despite this, professional preparation per se is not necessarily associated with ideal student outcomes in EFL. As indicated by *Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994)*, even adequately trained teachers cannot compensate for the absence of home support. Therefore, the qualifications of the teachers might enable them to deliver quality instruction; however, this study asserts that the involvement of parents in the learning process is equally vital in enhancing the learning process that takes place in the classroom. The interplay between teacher qualifications and parental involvement, therefore, becomes a determinant of a more comprehensive and stronger system of learning among students.

Teachers' Perceptions of Learners' Preferred Skills:

Table 2 indicates that teachers perceive that students show greater preference for receptive competencies, with reading (50%) and listening (30%) identified as the most favoured skills. Speaking and writing did not rank number one for most of the respondents (10 %).

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)

This pattern of preference corroborates *Al-Seghayer (2017)*, who reports that EFL learners often demonstrate greater comfort with passive language skills. The simplicity of these activities can be explained by the fact that the activities do not compel the learners to produce a language output. However, speaking and writing are unavoidable productive language skills in order to achieve comprehensive language development. *Richards (2006)* argues that a balanced pedagogical framework, integrating both receptive and productive dimensions, is crucial for developing robust communicative competence. This is why teachers should avoid a narrow focus on passive skills only and plan their instruction, paying more attention to speaking and writing, so that the process of language learning would be more interactive and motivating.

Teachers' Views on Parental Involvement:

Table 3 indicates that the majority of teachers (80%) regard parental involvement as essential to student success, while 20% deem it necessary but optional.

Table 3: Teachers' Perception of Parental Involvement.

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

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

Although the majority of teachers recognize the importance of parental involvement, the low frequency of communication with families, as shown in Table 4, can be viewed as a current obstacle to the successful home-school collaboration process. To be more precise, 60 percent of the teachers indicated they had limited or no contact with parents, even as many of them indicated they felt engaging parents was important.

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)

Weak communication channels between home and school entities thwart the establishment of effective partnerships, which are crucial for students' academic advancement. *Epstein (2001)* contends that maintaining consistent dialogue between parents and teachers is essential to secure beneficial student results. The present findings demonstrate the essential need to develop teacher-parent communication channels to boost parental engagement and advance student education.

Data Related to EFL Learners

The survey of 60 learners provides information regarding their attitudes towards learning English, the skills they prefer, and the amount of parental support.

Learner Attitudes Toward Learning English:

Table 5 shows the distribution of student attitudes towards English; 80 percent of the student body believes that English is interesting, and this is likely to indicate a high level of intrinsic motivation to study the language. On the other hand, 20 percent say the subject is either boring or useless.

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)

The elevated proportion of students reporting intrinsic interest aligns with the findings of *Buendía & Ortega-Martín (2018)*, who argue that learners driven by intrinsic motivation attain superior learning outcomes. The 20 per cent indicating that English was either irrelevant or boring also shows that there is something deficient in two ways: content or instructional implementation. In response, practitioners could try to adopt a more interactive and contextualized form of activity, or genuine activities that are logical in nature and likely to keep learners motivated. This is an approach *Richards (2006)* promotes.

Learner Preferences for Language Skills:

From Table 6, it is evident that students prefer aspects of receptive skills, such as listening (40%) and speaking (32%), as opposed to writing (0%), which they do not prefer at all. The preferences of these students agree with prior conclusions on student preference for more passive skills, while being less demanding of language production.

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)

This finding also supports *Al-Seghayer (2017)*, who proposed that EFL learners seem to prefer receptive skills, mainly listening, since it seems less demanding to actively produce the language. However, for students to completely function in the target language, they must develop all areas of competency in the target language; receptive skills include listening and reading, while productive skills involve speaking and writing. *Richards (2006)* contended that both receptive and productive skills must be developed together to develop fluency in the language. This implies that teachers need to provide students with more opportunities to practice speaking and writing so that students can develop as well-rounded users of the language.

Parental Support for English Homework:

As indicated in Table 7, 60% of students receive regular parental assistance with English homework. 40% report that their parents cannot assist them because they lack English skills.

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)

The lack of assistance for 40% of students indicates that parents' own education and language capacity serve as constraints on their ability to assist their children with English assignments. This is supported by *Sui Chu and Willms (1996)*, who noted that students from lower-income or less-educated households often faced a disadvantage because they were not supported at home. Schools should start to address this in some capacity by providing workshops or resources in the local language to assist parents in supporting their children's learning.

Parental Help with Homework

Table 8 highlights the gap in parental involvement in English homework: while 60% of the 25 parents surveyed regularly assist their child, 40% are unable to offer such assistance due to language barriers.

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)

This distribution illustrates how language barriers can significantly limit parental involvement in EFL learning and highlights the importance of providing French-language support materials and workshops to enable all parents to participate actively in their children's English-language learning.

Data from Classroom Observations

As observed in the classroom, there was a high correlation between parental involvement and the involvement of the EFL learner. Students with highly engaged parents in education exhibited better classroom behavior, a stronger

demeanor, and improved academic performance. They displayed better behaviors, willingly joined in class discussions, and were doing assignments successfully. By contrast, the children who had poorer parental support exhibited disengaged modes of behavior, lower motivation, and lower academic achievements. These findings go with the research of Buendía and Ortega-Martín (2018), who maintain that motivation and active participation are required for language learning.

Compared to students with less parental support, those with parental support consistently did better in terms of classroom behavioral and higher completion rate of assigned tasks. These results support Epstein's (2001) assertion that effective home-school collaboration is essential for positive student outcomes. Therefore, parental involvement results as an important predictor of success in learning EFL along with such other important aspects as teacher qualifications and intrinsic motivation of the students.

To sum up, research results show that communication channels between parents and educators should be made more efficient with special support provided to families with low English proficiency levels. Schools are thus recommended to embrace parent workshops and resource programs that train the parents to invest more in the education of their children in EFL. Moreover, incorporating higher levels of productive language skills into the curriculum is likely to support the learning outcomes, especially when combined with strong home-school relationships.

Discussion:-

These findings hark to the importance of parental involvement in student achievement in EFL, an opinion also shared by Driessen et al. (2005). The study examined three core questions: the ability of parental engagement to affect language acquisition, the obstacles toward effective parental engagement, and the preferences of teachers in coping with different learners.

Firstly, parental involvement has a significant impact on language acquisition. Eighty percent of teachers recognize its significance, yet surprisingly, 60% report never having met a parent (Table 4). This breakdown illustrates an important gap in parent-teacher communication hindering students' progress in language acquisition and motivation (Hussain et al., 2019); for example, students with involved parents tend to be much more excited about learning and engaging in language-rich activities at home, which enhances their language skills and confidence.

Secondly, there are many obstacles that hinder effective parental involvement as revealed in the study. Poor communication between teachers and parents and a lack of resources do not allow parents to be active in their children's education. Most parents, especially low-income parents, face barriers like language and lack of familiarity with educational systems (Sui-Chu & Willms, 1996). Barriers can lead to alienation and frustration, moving them away from school-related activities or interactions with teachers. These areas must be dealt with; schools need to provide resources, such as French workshops for non-native speaking parents, and take advantage of regular meetings, which provide open discussion on student status and support techniques.

Lastly, the inclination towards the receptive skills (listening and reading) over the productive skills (writing and speaking) indicates right away that there is a compelling necessity for instructors to adjust their teaching practices for effective engagement of students in all the language skills. The pedagogy of today usually inclines towards receptive skills, which can cause a lack of balance in developing the language of students (Table 6). To balance this situation, the incorporation of communicative language teaching (CLT) and task-based learning (TBL) approaches can ensure a comprehensive approach towards language learning (Richards, 2006). CLT and TBL approaches promote active participation and collaboration, which are inherently real-life language uses, allowing for a more even playing field for students with varying abilities

In sum, while teachers recognize and students would agree that parental involvement is essential to the student/successful parent model, there are challenges to parental participation. Increased parental-teacher communication, both with direct resources and at more levels of inclusive pedagogy, will help overcome these challenges, raise EFL learning achievement for students, and in turn increase successful parental involvement. Together, these nuggets can create a rich learning context that endorses parent engagement and maximizes student success.

Conclusion:-

This study has assessed the influence of parental contribution towards EFL study among Form 1 students at Titirou Secondary School in Parakou, Benin. It investigated parental duties, consciousness, and the effect of their contribution on the performance of children. Data collection involved questionnaires, 10 teacher interviews, 25 parent interviews, 60 student interviews, and classroom observations, as appropriate. Quantitative data resulted from using SPSS V22 for descriptive statistics, and qualitative data were analyzed through content analysis.

Parental involvement gaps were found to be very large. Although 60% of parents understood the importance of their involvement in children's learning, 40% only expressed positive opinions of the EFL activity. Furthermore, most parents preferred subjects like mathematics instead of English; thus, minimal support was displayed towards EFL learning. Teachers maintained regular communication with parents by only 40% of them, limiting the effectiveness of parent involvement. These results suggest the need for more proactive school action in establishing communication with families.

One of the constraints of the present research is the limited sample size, which can affect the external validity and reliability. The study was conducted at a single school, and thus the results are not transferable to Benin's education system. Future research requires larger and more varied samples from different institutions to better understand parental engagement in EFL.

To boost parental involvement, schools could hold seminars to provide more guidance on how parents can contribute to the language learning process. Normally, the routine of parent-teacher meetings can lead to communication between families through online pathways. Parental involvement is a key variable in determining students' performance in EFL. If the interventions to address the challenges outlined in this study lead to a better context for student performance, perhaps future research will also focus on the use of interventions designed to enhance parental involvement within different learning contexts, to ultimately identify best practices related to parent-school partnerships.

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