

EXPLORING DEPARTMENTAL HEADS' EXPERIENCES OF MANAGING LEARNER DISCIPLINE THROUGH PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA

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Abstract: This qualitative research explores the experiences of departmental heads in managing learner discipline through the facilitation of parental involvement. Recognizing the critical role of parental engagement in shaping learner behavior, this study aims to uncover the challenges hindering departmental heads from involving parents in learner discipline and strategies that can be adopted to effectively enhance parental involvement in learner discipline. This study adopts a qualitative research approach through the lens of a constructivist research paradigm. 15 participants, comprising ten departmental heads and five principals, were selected for the study. Data were collected using one-on-one, semi-structured interviews and analyzed using qualitative content analysis. Data indicates that the challenges hindering departmental heads from involving parents in learner discipline are communication barriers, inadequate collaboration, inadequate educational leadership training, inadequate parent commitment, as well as social and contextual factors of the parents. Amidst these challenges, the study advanced strategies that departmental heads can implement to enhance parental involvement in learner discipline, which include training and professional development, improved parent-school partnerships, orientation programs, and collaboration with parents. Keywords: departmental head, learner discipline, parent involvement, parent-school partnership, leadership training, professional development, orientation programs, collaboration

Introduction

Learner discipline is essential for creating a safe, inclusive, and conducive learning environment that supports the academic, social, and emotional development of all learners. Learner discipline is a critical factor in the effectiveness of the school environment. It is a dynamic and ongoing process that requires collaboration, communication, and a commitment to promoting positive behavior and learner success. Examples of learner indiscipline can vary widely depending on the context, age group, and cultural factors. Issues of learner indiscipline manifest in various forms, including disruptive behavior in the classroom, defiance of authority, bullying or harassment, academic dishonesty, vandalism or destruction of school property, truancy or absenteeism, substance abuse, disregard for safety regulations, disrespectful behavior towards peers, and cyberbullying or online misconduct (Ngwokabuenui, 2015; Obadire & Sinthumale, 2021). Learner indiscipline can stem from various factors, both internal and external, that influence students' behavior and attitudes towards school and authority. Some common causes of

learner indiscipline include lack of clear expectations, poor classroom management, peer influence, personal factors, family environment, socioeconomic factors, academic challenges, cultural factors, school environment, and lack of positive reinforcement (Masingi, 2017; Ngwokabuenui, 2015; Thelma et al., 2023). The effects of learner indiscipline can vary widely depending on the severity and frequency of the misconduct, as well as the context in which it occurs. Some common effects include disruption of learning, decreased academic performance, negative impact on school climate, increased teacher stress and burnout, compromised school safety, escalation of conflict, negative social and emotional development, and damage to school reputation (Dearing, 2020; Jinot, 2018; Wang, 2022).

Educational leaders play an essential role in managing learner discipline and creating a safe and conducive learning environment (Netshitangani, 2018). Effective management of learner discipline is a key responsibility of educational leaders (Narain, 2015). They are responsible for establishing discipline policies, maintaining discipline standards, and implementing effective strategies to address learner discipline problems in schools (Lumadi, 2020). It is paramount to creating and leading a secure and productive environment, which is essential for the success of educational institutions. Among school leaders, departmental heads play a significant role. School departmental heads are educational administrators responsible for overseeing specific academic departments within a school and typically hold leadership roles, managing and coordinating the activities, curriculum, and faculty within their respective departments (Tapala et al., 2022). Departmental heads collaborate with other school stakeholders, including parents, to ensure alignment with educational objectives, standards, and policies (Kalane & Rambuda, 2022). Their responsibilities often include curriculum development, teacher evaluations, student progress monitoring, budget management, and fostering a positive learning environment within their departments (Mthiyane et al., 2019). Department heads are essential in determining a school's academic course, fostering collaboration with parents, encouraging excellence, and fostering the professional development of faculty members. Among school stakeholders, departmental heads play a pivotal role in maintaining order and fostering a conducive learning environment. Narain (2015) asserts that making sure the school maintains learner discipline is one of the departmental heads' duties. Educational leaders, especially the departmental heads, are responsible for creating synergy and inclusivity in managing learner discipline through fostering positive parent involvement. They can leverage the support, knowledge, and influence of parents in promoting constructive discipline practices and developing a culture of respect, responsibility, and accountability, ultimately benefiting all school stakeholders.

Managing learner discipline cannot be accomplished in isolation and requires positive parent involvement (Lumadi, 2019). In recent years, there has been a growing emphasis on the importance of parental engagement in education, particularly in matters related to student behavior and discipline. Parents are viewed not only as partners in their children's educational journey but also as essential contributors to the maintenance of discipline and conducive learning environments. Consequently, exploring the experiences, perceptions, and strategies of departmental heads in managing learner discipline through parental involvement is a pertinent area of research. A crucial aspect of educational leadership is the ability to foster the positive involvement of parents in the management of learner discipline. For educational leaders, recognizing the significance of positive parent

involvement is a key element in fostering a safe and secure environment conducive to learning and promoting positive learner outcomes. The importance of parent involvement in shaping and reinforcing learner discipline cannot be overemphasized. The involvement of parents in learner discipline has been widely recognized as an essential element of successful educational systems worldwide (Lumadi, 2019). Collaboration between parents and educational leaders has demonstrated positive outcomes, including improved learner discipline, better academic performance, stronger school-community relationships, and the overall success of schools (Munje & Mncube, 2018; Sibanda, 2021).

There is an alarming increase in learner indiscipline issues. Incidents of fighting, bullying, neglecting to complete homework and assessment tasks, and general contravention of the schools' discipline policy and learner code of conduct have become an urgent cause for concern. Management techniques such as the merit and demerit system, detention, and referral to social workers have proved fruitless due to inconsistency and a lack of reinforcement of appropriate discipline and behavioral expectations between school and home. Several studies have indicated that learner indiscipline is a common concern for educators and administrators. Addressing this issue requires a multifaceted approach that involves proactive measures to promote positive behavior, effective discipline management strategies, and collaboration among educators, students, parents, and community stakeholders. Effective management of learner discipline within educational institutions is a multifaceted challenge that demands collaboration among various stakeholders, including teachers, school leadership, students, and parents. This study therefore sets out to explore the lived experiences of departmental heads in managing learner discipline through parent involvement in learner involvement.

Main Question: What are the departmental heads experiences of managing learner discipline through parental involvement?

Sub-Questions:

1. What challenges do departmental heads encounter in involving parents in learner discipline?
2. What strategies can departmental heads implement to enhance parental involvement in learner discipline?

Concept of learner discipline

Learner discipline refers to the methods, systems, and strategies employed by educators and administrators to maintain order, manage behavior, and promote a conducive learning environment among students within educational institutions (Obadire & Sinthumule, 2021; Padayachee & Gcelu, 2022). It encompasses a range of approaches aimed at guiding students towards responsible and respectful conduct, fostering positive social interactions, and preventing disruptive or inappropriate behavior that may hinder the learning process (Ndlovu et al., 2023). Discipline in this context involves not only addressing instances of misconduct or rule violations but also instilling values, promoting self-regulation, and nurturing a sense of accountability among learners. It encompasses both proactive measures, such as setting clear expectations and establishing routines, and reactive responses, such as implementing consequences for misbehavior or providing support for students experiencing difficulties. Effective learner discipline involves a balance between firmness and fairness, emphasizing the importance of consistency, transparency, and respect for the dignity of each student (Khanyile & Mpuangnan, 2023). It is often guided

by a school's code of conduct or disciplinary policies, which outline expectations for behavior, procedures for addressing infractions, and the roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders, including teachers, administrators, students, and parents.

Factors Influencing Parental Involvement in Learner Discipline at School

Parental involvement in disciplinary matters is influenced by a myriad of factors, including social, cultural, economic, and institutional contexts.

1. **Socioeconomic Status and Demographic Factors:** Socioeconomic status plays a significant role in shaping parental involvement in learner discipline. Studies have shown that parents from higher socioeconomic status backgrounds tend to be more actively engaged in school-related activities, including disciplinary matters, compared to those from lower socioeconomic status backgrounds (Naite, 2021; Şengönül, 2022; Vadivel et al., 2023). Factors such as parental education, income level, and occupation can influence parents' ability and willingness to participate in school-based activities, attend meetings, and communicate with school staff regarding disciplinary issues (Ndwandwe, 2023). Additionally, demographic factors such as race, ethnicity, and language proficiency can impact parental involvement, with minority and non-English-speaking parents facing additional barriers to engagement due to cultural and linguistic differences (Baker et al., 2016).

2. **Communication and Relationship Building:** Effective communication and relationship building between parents and school staff are essential for promoting parental involvement in learner discipline. Research suggests that open, transparent, and culturally responsive communication channels are critical for engaging parents in disciplinary matters (Baker et al., 2016; Leo et al., 2019; Manamela, 2015). Schools that prioritize regular communication, provide clear information about disciplinary policies and procedures, and establish trusting relationships with parents are more likely to facilitate meaningful parent-school partnerships. Furthermore, efforts to involve parents in decision-making processes related to discipline can enhance their sense of ownership and investment in school discipline practices (Kelty & Wakabayashi, 2020).

3. **School Climate and Culture:** The school's climate and culture significantly impact parental involvement in learner discipline. A positive school climate characterized by safety, respect, and inclusivity fosters parents' confidence in the school's ability to address disciplinary issues effectively (Mousena & Raptis, 2020). Conversely, a negative or hostile school climate can deter parents from engaging with school authorities regarding disciplinary matters (Pourrajab et al., 2018). Schools that actively promote parental involvement, create welcoming environments for families, and provide opportunities for parent input in shaping disciplinary policies are more likely to encourage parent participation in disciplinary initiatives (Naite, 2021).

4. **Parental Beliefs and Attitudes:** Parental beliefs and attitudes towards discipline influence their level of involvement in school-based disciplinary practices. Gomba (2015) and Lim et al. (2022) indicate that parents' perceptions of their role in disciplining their children, their attitudes towards authority, and their cultural beliefs about discipline shape their willingness to collaborate with schools on disciplinary matters. For example, parents who view discipline as solely the responsibility of educators may be less inclined to engage with school authorities regarding disciplinary issues. On the contrary, parents who value partnership and shared responsibility in discipline are more likely to actively participate in school-based disciplinary initiatives (Lumadi, 2019).

5. Parental Empowerment and Inclusion: Empowering parents and promoting their inclusion in decision-making processes regarding learner discipline can enhance their involvement in school-based disciplinary practices. According to Bunijevac (2017) and de Wet et al. (2019), involving parents in the development, implementation, and evaluation of disciplinary policies increases their sense of agency and ownership in school discipline practices. Additionally, efforts to provide parents with training, resources, and support to effectively advocate for their children's disciplinary needs can further promote their engagement in school-based disciplinary initiatives (Lumadi, 2019).

6. Institutional Policies and Practices: Institutional policies and practices significantly influence parental involvement in learner discipline. Schools that have clear, consistent, and transparent disciplinary policies are more likely to foster parent-school partnerships in addressing disciplinary issues (Padayachee & Gcelu, 2022). Contrariwise, schools with ambiguous or punitive disciplinary practices may deter parents from engaging with school authorities regarding disciplinary matters (Duarte et al., 2023). Moreover, efforts to promote parental involvement in learner discipline must be supported by school leadership, staff training, and resources to ensure effective implementation and sustainability of parent-school partnerships (Miller, 2021). Understanding these factors is essential for designing effective strategies to promote parental involvement in school-based disciplinary practices and create supportive and inclusive learning environments for all learners.

Methodology

The study fits under the constructivist paradigm, which attempts to comprehend department heads' experiences of managing learner discipline through parental involvement (Mertens, 2005). A qualitative research approach was chosen for this study, as it offers interpretive approaches geared towards examining phenomena within their natural contexts (Creswell, 2012). The research design employed was a generic qualitative approach focused on uncovering and comprehending phenomena, processes, or the perspectives of participants involved in the study. Utilizing purposeful sampling, participants were deliberately selected to best address the research objectives (Klenke, 2016). 15 participants, comprising two departmental heads and their school principal, who could attest to their experiences, were selected from five schools, making a total of ten departmental heads and five principals. The participants selected have been in their respective positions for a minimum of five years and have been involving parents in managing learner discipline. Data were collected through one-on-one, semi-structured interviews and analyzed using qualitative content analysis.

Findings and Discussion

Challenges departmental heads encounter in involving parents in learner discipline

1. Communication Barriers

Data revealed that communication barriers are a major hindrance that departmental heads encounter when involving parents in learner discipline. The excerpts below show how communication barriers served as a challenge, hindering departmental heads from involving parents in learner discipline. My school serves a predominantly ethnic group that speaks a variety of local languages. As a departmental head, my communication with parents, sharing of information, and collaborating on disciplinary issues have often proved to be ineffective due to my poor proficiency in local languages and the parents' limited

proficiency in English. At my school, all official communication, including our discipline policy, learner code of conduct, newsletters, and my interpersonal communication with parents, is in English. This limited my ability to communicate with parents regarding their understanding and my expectations of them in the application of the discipline policy and learner code of conduct. In my school, we serve diverse population groups with parents whose proficiency in English is limited. Communication, impeded by my poor proficiency in local languages, made it difficult to establish rapport, build trust, and effectively communicate and address disciplinary concerns with parents. I have found that parents and grandparents, particularly those of the older generations, have been hesitant to communicate with me due to a language barrier. Reflecting on language barriers, I realised that, as departmental head, I have neglected to communicate with parents on their understanding and application of the discipline policy and the code of conduct, which have been written in English. The principals also attest that the communication barrier is a change for departmental heads to manage learner discipline through parental involvement. I also realise and agree that communication regarding parent involvement in learner discipline is lacking because of language barriers. Many of our learners live with grandparents or parents who are uneducated. They are unable to understand exactly what is required of them by reading the Code of Conduct and the Discipline Policy because we publish them in English. Translating our expectations and speaking to parents in their home language is an advantage because it makes them more receptive to what is being communicated.

Mwase et al. (2020) and Ozmen et al. (2016) confirm that cultural differences in language are a significant barrier hampering parental involvement. Narain (2015) also found that for parents from disadvantaged communities, especially, English, the medium of instruction, hindered effective communication, thus contributing to inadequate parent involvement in learner discipline. Communication barriers encountered by educational leaders make it difficult to establish mutual understanding and to align expectations of the disciplinary processes of the Discipline Policy and the Learner Code of Conduct with parents (Mwase et al., 2020; Triegaardt & Diermen, 2021).

2. Inadequate Collaboration

Data also revealed that inadequate collaboration between departmental heads and parents serves as hindrance in foster parental involvement in the learner discipline. Inadequate collaboration has influenced my ability as departmental head to foster better parental involvement in learner discipline. Regular collaboration regarding shared expectations between parents and me has been lacking when discipline issues have arisen. Shared expectations on the application of the Discipline Policy and Learner Code of Conduct, sharing of ideas, and collaborative problem-solving regarding parental involvement in learner discipline have been inconsistent. ... Time constraints pose a major problem in collaboration with parents regarding their involvement in discipline issues. We have many responsibilities. There just isn't enough time to get everything done. Another departmental head provided reason for the inadequate collaboration: "My heavy workload and conflicting work responsibilities have impacted my ability to sufficiently collaborate with parents in order to cultivate and sustain their involvement in learner discipline and to prompt identification and action in addressing the challenges hindering parent involvement in learner discipline." One of the principals affirmed that "I can confirm that we, as SMT, have heavy workloads. The workload of departmental heads and conflicting work priorities

is an obstacle to enhancing parental involvement in learner discipline.” Munje and Mncube (2018) found that parents feel alienated and disconnected from the schooling system as a consequence of inadequate collaboration, further hindering involvement in learner discipline. Ozmen et al. (2016) also indicate that time constraints owing to departmental heads workload affect their collaborative efficiency with parents. According to Lumadi (2019), when discipline issues do arise, consistency, shared expectations, and collaborative problem-solving between parents and teachers ensure that each feels supported, in addition to learners feeling motivated and supported to improve their behaviour.

3. Inadequate educational leadership training

Data indicated that inadequate educational leadership training for the departmental heads constitutes another major constraint in involving parents in learner discipline. For example, one of the departmental heads remarked that: “Since my appointment as departmental head, I have not received the appropriate and relevant training from the Department of Education or my school on how to work with parents. My formal education at the tertiary level has also not given me the tools and skills to approach and respond to parents whose involvement in learner discipline matters is inadequate. The principals agreed that the departmental heads barely receive sufficient training on best practices necessary for them to involve parents in learner discipline. “Unfortunately, the Department of Education does not provide orientation and awareness training to fully equip departmental head appointees in the leadership position in all ramifications of their responsibilities.” Another principal reinforced: From my own research and studies in leadership and management, I agree that our education and training at university do not equip us to address the challenges we face in encouraging parental involvement in learner discipline. Neither are we offered in-service training nor additional courses by our employer, where we are given research-based strategies on how to deal with socio-economic factors affecting parental involvement through in-service training. According to Munje and Mncube (2018), parent non-involvement is exacerbated by the inadequate knowledge and training of educational leaders on how to foster positive relations with parents. This was further echoed in studies by Oranga et al. (2022), which report a lack of training by school leaders on parent involvement at various levels. According to Oranga et al. (2022), a lack of pre-service training at the tertiary level and a lack of in-service training and continuous professional development of school leaders on effective engagement with parents at the school level are additional barriers encountered by educational leaders in fostering positive parent involvement in learner discipline. School leaders who are ill-equipped to apply parenting models that encourage partnerships between parents, schools, and local societies are more likely to project unfavourable views of parental involvement. Netshitangani (2018) declared that educational leaders are responsible for creating a safe and conducive environment for all stakeholders, making it essential for them to undergo continuous training.

4. Inadequate Parent Commitment

The participants unanimously remarked that inadequate parental commitment is another factor hindering departmental heads from ensuring better parental involvement in learner discipline. One of the departmental heads shared their experience: “Parents not showing up to meetings, resisting attempts to engage with them, and not putting in the effort to align their ideas of discipline with those stipulated in the Learner Code of Conduct have been extremely challenging for me as a departmental head. My efforts to involve parents in

learner discipline are not reciprocated by the parents. Some parents have been unresponsive. Another departmental head remarked: “In my experience as departmental head, inadequate parent commitment has been a significant hindrance in my attempts to involve them in learner discipline. I have found that parents often do not attend individual and collective meetings; they do not answer or return calls.” The principals emphatically agreed that inadequate parental commitment does affect the ability of the departmental heads to involve them in learner discipline. Some of the principals indicate: “I am aware of parents not taking your calls and not coming to meetings.” “I have seen that some parents do not respond to messages, and I can attest to the fact that many do not come to scheduled meetings.” In accordance with this data, research has shown that inadequate parent commitment poses a significant challenge to educational leaders in positively involving parents in learner discipline. Ozmen et al. (2016) reported communication, cultural, and parents own negative experiences at school as reasons for inadequate parent commitment to learner discipline. According to Mbalo (2022), factors contributing to inadequate parent commitment include parents’ lack of awareness and limited understanding of their role in learner discipline. Parents have limited knowledge of relevant policies and their significance as stakeholders in contributing towards and implementing the discipline policy and learner code of conduct, especially in the case of parents with low levels of literacy and low standards of education (Mbalo, 2022).

5. Social and contextual factors of parents

Another factor hindering parental involvement in the discipline of learners, as indicated in the data, is the social and contextual factors of the parent. A departmental head remarked that: “Reflecting on my interaction with parents, I have found that my lack of awareness of certain social factors affecting parents, such as poor standards of education, demanding work schedules, and a lack of family support, created a barrier preventing effective parental involvement in learner discipline.” Another departmental head also shares their experience: As an educational leader, I have observed some social and contextual factors such as poverty, unemployment, and lack of access to resources, low levels of parental education and literacy, parental work obligations, cultural differences in attitudes towards authority and discipline, and parent-school relationships capable of impeding parental involvement regarding learner discipline. These factors have posed further challenges for me as a departmental head in positively involving parents in learner discipline. Principals agree that the lack of adequate awareness regarding social factors affecting parents has contributed to the inability of the departmental heads to manage learner discipline through parental involvement.

Lack of awareness of social factors affecting parents is a major factor influencing parental involvement in learning discipline. Parents lack confidence in their abilities due to social factors and home circumstances; hence, they shy away from involving themselves in discipline and school matters. I remember during departmental head meetings with parents, they were less receptive and responsive because the departmental heads did not understand their circumstances.

Ozmen et al. (2016) identified physical distance, financial status, and time constraints as compelling factors impairing collaboration between parents and schools, thus hindering educational leaders from fostering positive parent involvement in learner discipline. Additionally, Mwase et al. (2020) reported unemployment, a poor standard of education, demanding work schedules, and dysfunctional family dynamics as significant barriers

preventing the effective involvement of parents in learner discipline. According to Mwase et al. (2020), parents feel threatened and avoid significant involvement and meaningful interaction with schools due to their own negative experiences, low self-esteem, lack of knowledge, and lack of confidence triggered by their own poor performance and lack of success at school. Mbalo (2022) also identified parents' levels of income, socio-economic and employment status, time constraints, family dynamics, competing responsibilities, and limited resources as factors hampering parent commitment, which in turn affects educational leaders' attempts to positively involve parents in learner discipline. Ndlovu (2013) also identified poverty, unemployment, single-parent homes, lack of education, lack of family structure and support, chronic health issues such as HIV and AIDS, job dynamics, and demanding work schedules as socially significant factors influencing communication and hindering parent participation and involvement in learner discipline.

Strategies departmental heads can implement to enhance parental involvement in learner discipline

1. Training and professional development for departmental heads

Participants posit training and professional development as efficient strategies to enhance parental involvement in learner discipline. One of the departmental heads indicates that: Further training and development focused on improving my communication skills and my knowledge of best practices and legal and ethical considerations are essential for me as a departmental head. Training and development are also necessary for me on how to respond appropriately to the norms and values of parents and with cultural awareness and sensitivity to social factors preventing me, as the departmental head, from engaging parents in learner development. A principal also validates that: "Organising training and professional development for departmental heads will be a good strategy for them to enhance their ability to effectively communicate and involve parents in learner discipline." Mbalo (2022) and Munje and Mncube (2018) assert that training and professional development programs can potentially equip educational leaders with practical skills and attitudes to effectively increase engagement with parents. Key areas of development include communication skills with a focus on effective communication strategies such as active listening, empathy, conflict resolution, communication across racial and cultural groups, and communication in indigenous languages. In addition, Triegaardt and Diermen (2021) recommend training and professional development, such as in-service training, as avenues for learning and empowerment in understanding the vast societal and contextual factors that could affect parents in the context of the school. There is also a need for school leaders to be trained on effective communication and diplomatic skills while remaining attentive and cognisant of contextual factors in order to establish and sustain positive partnerships with parents (Mbalo, 2022; Triegaardt & Diermen, 2021).

2. Improved Parent-School Partnerships

Data show that fostering effective parent-school partnerships is an effective strategy for departmental heads to improve parent involvement in learner discipline. One of the departmental heads suggest: If we encourage parents to participate in formulating the Code of Conduct at school, it will help them to add their voice and be able to monitor learners towards adhering to the rules of the school. It is good to encourage them to be part of the disciplinary programs that maintain order at school. I suggested parents' meetings where they were required to sign a contract committing their participation and engagement in school activities. We need to work closely with the parents and carry them along in

everything we do regarding learner discipline. Without this, our effort will not be supported by the parents. In agreement to this view, a principal emphasized that: “Teamwork is vitally important to the success of an organization. Particularly where children are involved. Follow-up meetings with all stakeholders are necessary for consistency in sharing information regarding learner discipline at home and at school”. Another principal also indicated that: “Including parents in our decision-making processes at school, each sharing their ideas on learner discipline and other factors that enhance parental involvement, allows parents to feel like significant stakeholders, thereby motivating them to be more involved in the discipline of the learners.” Parent-school partnerships remain one of the main strategies emphasized by Lumadi (2019) and Sibanda (2021) as being an essential component in enhancing parent involvement in learner discipline. Parent commitment plays an essential role in educational leaders being able to positively involve them in the management of learner discipline. Kaluma (2021) found a positive correlation between parent commitment and the management of learner discipline. A personable, welcoming, and inclusive school climate allows for better parental involvement in school activities, decision-making, the development of policies, and the evaluation of procedures using effective communication strategies and training programs for enhanced parent partnerships, thus increasing their sense of ownership and engagement in the school community (Lumadi, 2019; Sibanda, 2021). Collaboration with parents is crucial in fostering their involvement in learner discipline. Regular collaboration with parents, shared expectations on the application of the discipline policy and learner code of conduct, sharing of ideas, and collaboration in solving discipline problems are significant factors in fostering positive involvement in learner discipline. Lumadi (2019) reports that when discipline issues do arise, consistency, shared expectations, and collaborative problem-solving between parents and school leaders ensure that each feels supported, in addition to learners feeling motivated and supported to improve their behaviour.

3. Orientation

According to the data, another significant strategy that departmental heads could adopt to enhance parental involvement in learner discipline is orientation. One of the departmental heads remarked that: It is good to encourage parents to attend termly parent orientation programs to familiarise themselves and reinforce the application of the discipline policy and the learner code of conduct of the school. The orientation will create a medium for awareness and sensitisation of what learners need to know and do regarding learner discipline. This strengthened the relationship between parents and the SMT. It will help the parents understand their roles and responsibilities regarding learner discipline and empower them to effectively participate in the school's disciplinary committee. During orientation with parents, they will be able to ask questions on issues that are not clear.

The principals also agree that the parents should be orientated: It is true that parents need to be informed about what is expected of them regarding their children's discipline. I believe some of them are ignorant about the roles and duties. ... not that they are not willing to take up their responsibilities, but it seems that they are not aware of it. The orientation should be carried out for all parents, especially the new ones who are not familiar with our discipline policy and the learner code of conduct.

Orientation helps establish clear expectations and communication channels between the school and parents. Gonzalez and Ramirez (2019) state that orientation programs for involving parents in learner discipline are essential for establishing clear expectations,

fostering effective communication, and promoting meaningful parent-school partnerships. Orientation provides parents with information about school policies, procedures, and expectations regarding discipline, equipping them with the knowledge and resources needed to actively engage in disciplinary matters and the role parents are expected to play in supporting learner discipline (Smith, 2020). By clearly communicating school rules, procedures, and expectations to parents, orientation programs minimize misunderstandings and discrepancies between home and school environments, thereby promoting consistency and coherence in disciplinary approaches (Gonzalez & Ramirez, 2019).

Orientation programs serve as a mechanism for building parental efficacy by providing parents with the information and skills needed to navigate disciplinary processes effectively. A study by Watkins and Obiakor (2022) argue that parents who understand school expectations are more likely to be actively engaged in school-related activities, including disciplinary matters. Furthermore, orientation programs play a crucial role in promoting communication and relationship building between parents and school staff by providing opportunities for parents to interact with school personnel, ask questions, and voice concerns about disciplinary practices, thereby fostering positive relationships and promoting mutual understanding between parents and school staff (Lee & Kim, 2021). This open dialogue can help build trust and a sense of partnership between the school and parents, which is essential for successful parent involvement in learner discipline. This alignment is crucial for ensuring that parents feel informed, supported, and empowered to collaborate with schools in addressing disciplinary issues effectively. Alignment between school and home practices can enhance the consistency and effectiveness of learner discipline.

Conceptual Learning

The study revealed that communication barriers are a primary hindrance for departmental heads in involving parents in learner discipline. The lack of departmental heads' proficiency in communicating in the major indigenous languages spoken by parents hampers them from communicating clear expectations regarding learner discipline processes and the significance of their involvement. Communication with parents whose first language is not English, regarding their understanding and application of the discipline policy and learner code of conduct, was therefore identified as a challenge in having a positive engagement with parents. Mwase et al. (2020) emphasize differences in language as a major impediment to parent involvement. The study also showed that social and contextual factors among parents could hinder departmental heads from facilitating parental involvement in learner discipline. Ozmen et al. (2016) posit that parents economic and employment status, physical distance, time constraints and demanding work schedules, poor standard of education, dysfunctional family dynamics, and poor self-esteem are crucial social and contextual factors preventing effective parental involvement in learner discipline. The study further revealed that inadequate leadership training of departmental heads could hinder them from fostering positive parental involvement in learner discipline. The lack of adequate leadership training on how to relate with parents could result in a lack of parental commitment to learner discipline. Inadequate collaboration between parents and departmental heads regarding expectations of the application of the discipline policy and code of conduct is a challenge that must be overcome in order to foster positive parental

involvement in learner discipline. Munje and Mncube (2018) found that inadequate collaboration with parents results in them disconnecting from the schooling system. The strategies departmental heads could adopt to enhance parental involvement in learner discipline include educational leadership training and professional development. The training and professional development should include strategies to enhance parent involvement in learner discipline, effective communication strategies with an emphasis on active listening, empathy, conflict resolution, communication across racial and cultural groups, and communication in indigenous languages. This could equip departmental heads with the tools to refine their skills in successfully involving parents in learner discipline. Encouraging parent partnerships and orientation programs can strengthen my relations with parents. To enhance parental involvement in learner discipline, departmental heads can organize orientation programs for parents where the school discipline policy, learner code of conduct, and other relevant information will be clarified and discussed with the parents. The orientation can create an avenue for parents to ask questions regarding learner discipline issues, leading to an inclusive environment and encouraging parents to participate in decision-making, formulation, and implementation of the discipline policy and learner code of conduct, thus enhancing departmental heads skills and practice in managing learner discipline through parent involvement.

Conclusion

The findings of this study highlight several key challenges faced by departmental heads in involving parents in learner discipline. These challenges include communication barriers, inadequate collaboration, inadequate educational leadership training, inadequate parent commitment, and social and contextual factors affecting parents. These barriers significantly hinder departmental heads' efforts to engage parents in disciplinary matters. However, amidst these challenges, there are also strategies that departmental heads can implement to enhance parental involvement in learner discipline, which include training and professional development, improved parent-school partnerships, orientation programs, and collaboration with parents.

Recommendations: Based on the findings and conceptual learning of this study, the following recommendations are made:

Training and Professional Development: Departmental heads should opt for training and professional development opportunities focused on improving communication skills, cultural awareness, and strategies for effectively engaging parents in learner discipline. These programs should equip departmental heads with the practical skills and attitudes necessary for building positive relationships with parents and addressing communication barriers effectively.

Improved Parent-School Partnerships: Departmental heads should actively foster partnerships with parents by involving them in decision-making processes, sharing expectations regarding discipline, and creating opportunities for collaboration and shared responsibility. By establishing open lines of communication and mutual trust, departmental heads can enhance parent involvement in learner discipline and create a supportive school environment.

Orientation Programs: Departmental heads should organize orientation programs for parents to familiarize them with school policies, procedures, and expectations regarding learner discipline. These programs should provide parents with the information and

resources needed to actively engage in disciplinary matters and empower them to play a proactive role in supporting their children's behavior.

Collaboration with Parents: Departmental heads should prioritize collaboration with parents by creating opportunities for regular communication, sharing of ideas, and problem-solving regarding learner discipline. By involving parents in the decision-making process and addressing their concerns and suggestions, departmental heads can build trust and mutual understanding, fostering positive parent-school partnerships.

In conclusion, addressing the challenges encountered by departmental heads in involving parents in learner discipline requires a multifaceted approach that prioritizes communication, collaboration, and partnership between schools and families. By implementing the recommendations outlined above, departmental heads can overcome barriers to parental involvement and create a supportive and inclusive school environment that promotes positive learner behavior.

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