

Psychosocial support issues; New parenting demands during the COVID – 19 era

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Abstract: COVID -19 closure of schools in Eswatini have dismantled or rippled the seven dimensions of quality education that are enshrined in Inqaba Initiative thus, affecting parents and children greatly. Through, UNICEF, Eswatini, Inqaba Initiative promotes, lobby for and mobilise schools' provision of care, support and protection of children from diverse backgrounds and situations. The paper outlines how COVID-19 at-home learning has turned the home into the centre of care, support and protection for the Liswati child thus, overburdening parents or guardians. It is a desk review of the new parenting style demanded by the COVID -19 at - home learning. It builds up on conclusions from literature reviewed or meta-analyses data on COVID-19. The review adopted Bronfenbrenner (1970) Ecological Systems Theory and Model as lenses through which ideas discussed in this study were formed. The paper suggests that to help Emaswati children survive or cope with COVID-19 at-home learning, parents should adopt transitional parenting styles; train children self-management skills, improvisation techniques and digital group growth. It suggests to parents and guardians, ways of giving support to learners during the Covid-19 teaching and learning era, thus, adds new knowledge to education practice.

Keywords: Holistic needs, Inqaba Initiative, psychosocial support.

Introduction

Inqaba Initiative is an integrated and comprehensive school – based model that ensures delivery of quality, child – centred teaching and learning as well as physical education activities to all children regardless of their different socio – economic backgrounds (UNICEF, 2017). Originally, Inqaba Initiative was designed by World Health Organisation (WHO) in 1995 to ensure fulfilment of the right to health for all nations, communities, families and children through schools or provision of education (WHO, 2021). It is built on seven dimensions that form its pillars of quality education; protection and safety, psychosocial –support, food security, health, water sanitation and hygiene as well as life skills education (UNICEF, 2017). Eswatini is an affiliate of Inqaba Initiative therefore, committed to offering holistic needs to Emaswati children.

Besides Inqaba Initiative, the demand for provision of children's rights have made Eswatini schools to be the best home for children as schools are made to offer holistic support and care to the Liswati child. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Eswatini schools were an equaliser exposing learners to the same situations and equal opportunities for all. Eswatini Global Evaluation Report emphasise on the school being a child-friendly organisation (UNICEF, 2017). Five basic needs of the Liswati child are provided by schools in the Kingdom of Eswatini; physical, emotional, cultural, social, spiritual and mental needs. Provision of all these needs for survival and development of the Liswati child have been stopped unceremoniously by the sudden unanticipated closure of schools. Not only education is affected and reshaped by the COVID- 19 crisis but life as a whole.

Despite, the fact that teachers in the Kingdom of Eswatini are currently running teaching online the absence of school is causing psychological and physical challenges to educators, parents and children in the Kingdom of Eswatini as they are affected emotionally, spiritually, culturally, morally, physically and otherwise. The study is a desk review of psychosocial support issues; the new parenting role to be assumed by parents and guardians in response to COVID – 19 as they ensure provisional of basic rights of health and education. The study build – up on research by Colao, Piscitelli, Pulimeno, Colazzo, Miani and Giannini (2020) who cited major inequalities with childrens' access to digital learning resources; Cacciamani, Cesareni, Perrucci, Balboni and Khanlari (2018) who suggested the use of a social tutor to promote online learning and increase students' participation. It also, develops from Basilaia and Kavadze (2020) who concluded that the experiences and studies done during the quick transition

to online learning can be useful for other countries that have not found ways of transition yet. Based on the above secondary data source, the major purpose of this paper is to equip parents or guardians with the new parenting demands during the COVID – 19 era. This study view parents or guardians as the solution to the major inequalities brought by at-home learning, they are to transform their parenting styles into ones that embrace the transition by assuming the role of a social tutor.

In the past child upbringing in the Emaswati society was a collaborative or joint responsibility of the home, school and society. However, during the end of the past decade; the 20th century, the Emaswati society experienced a number of calamities such as the hit by HIV and AIDS that claimed so many lives thus, giving birth to disorganised family structures. Besides being an adversity on its own, HIV and AIDS gave birth to other adversities such as displacement, abuse, sickness, prostitution etc. all contributing to poverty being a vicious cycle in Kingdom of Eswatini, one adversity lead to another. The impact has been great such that today the school environment is crowded by diverse learners with different pathetic situations; orphaned and vulnerable children (OVC), children from single, divorced, unmarried and same -sex parenting, abused and grand-parented, street kids or those without homes as well as children who are heading families by themselves. Thus, provision of holistic needs necessary for total growth of the Liswati child remain the core duty of the school and the teacher with most learners. Consequently, the above adversaries gave birth to the name “guardian” to refer to the volunteer parent. Thus, the use of the name “parent” in this study refers to the guardian, a family relative or foster parent, a step and adopted parent; any one entrusted with the responsibility of raising a child especially during the COVID -19 era where all children’s human needs are to be meet at home.

Abraham Maslow categorise these human needs necessary for child development into; physiological (air, water, food, shelter, clothing and reproduction); safety needs (personal security, employment, resources, health, and property); love and belonging needs (friendship, intimacy, family and a sense of connection); esteem needs (respect, self –esteem, status, recognition, strength and freedom) and self- actualisation needs as the desire to be become the most that one can be (Hopper, 2017). The greater demand for provision of these needs to children in the Kingdom of Eswatini is enforced in Eswatini Inqaba Initiative.

Breaking the cycle of poverty and social exclusion in Eswatini

As ways of ensuring responsibility of schools towards provision of the above needs to children, Eswatini government have got laid down policies and procedures to which aspects of the Inqaba are enshrined. To carry out the mandate by Inqaba the Kingdom of Eswatini schools through government aiding and funding provide children with educational facilities, food provision, guidance and counselling, teaching and learning material, physical education necessary for their health, bursaries to fund their education so forth and so on. The Eswatini Free and Compulsory Primary Education (FPE), Orphaned and Vulnerable Children (OVC) grants and the free supply of food for all schools are evidence of compliance. Though, not meaning to say that the other levels of schooling are neglected the primary level of schooling in the Kingdom of Eswatini is the major benefactor for the Inqaba Initiative Project.

COVID – 19 attack

In response to the COVID -19 crisis the global society; World Health Organisation (WHO) in a statement on the second meeting of the International Health Regulations (2005) Emergency Committee held on the 31st of December 2019 has declared the outbreak of novel corona virus (2019-nCoV) a public health emergency of International Concern (WHO, 2020). On the same note the United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development (UN IANYD) considered health and education as fundamental rights for children’s’ survival during the COVID-19 era, therefore, recommended use of various technologies and communication tools as means to develop local solutions. The Kingdom of Eswatini did the same through a statement from the Ministry of Education and Training. The three terms “mobile learning”, “e-learning” , and “ at -home learning” are used interchangeably to refer to the process of teaching and learning that happens online. Online learning in the Kingdom of Eswatini began with learners of external classes; Grade 7, Forms 3 and 5 and tertiary institutions and later narrowed down to other classes.

Problem statement

Online learning has automatically ripped the school its powers as an organisation that operates at the outer circle of child support. In the process, the home has since become the new school environment. Therefore, children found themselves vulnerable as they are now left with the innermost circle; the home where the key players are parents or guardians. The authors view this as creating conflict of interest with the learners given home and school responsibilities. Thus, the study suggests the new role to be assumed by the parent or guardian as the only circle available for child development.

Theoretical framework

The study is framed within the Ecological Systems Theory and model both by Bronfenbrenner (1970). The two argue that the development of a child is surrounded by complex and highly influential layers which cannot be separated from each other; micro system, the meso system, the exo system and the macro system. These systems are also referred to as development relationships within communities and the wider society in that they work together cooperatively to nurture the holistic development of the child. The theory is framed in the shape of an onion with the child at the centre or core of the onion rings surrounding the child. The onion shape demonstrates how the layers impact each other. The systems are tied together and each is highly influential towards the development of the child though with varying roles. Changes or conflict in any or one layer ripple throughout to other layers as well thus, greatly affecting the child whom the theory puts at the centre of attention.

Psychosocial support simplifies the systems into the child’s immediate family (home), community (society), environment (country), and the societal landscape (global society). Significantly, the global society is responsible for passing policies, laws, declarations, treaties and conventions to be adhered to whilst, the other layers are responsible for the practical implementation. COVID -19 social distancing rules has temporarily removed the school as an organisation that operates at the societal level of Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory thus, making children solely dependent on the home. Figure 1 and 2 are Bronfenbrenner’s model and theory of development relationships within communities, the theory have been formed from the model.

Figure 1 Bio-ecological model by Bronfenbrenner (Bronfenbrenner, 1970).

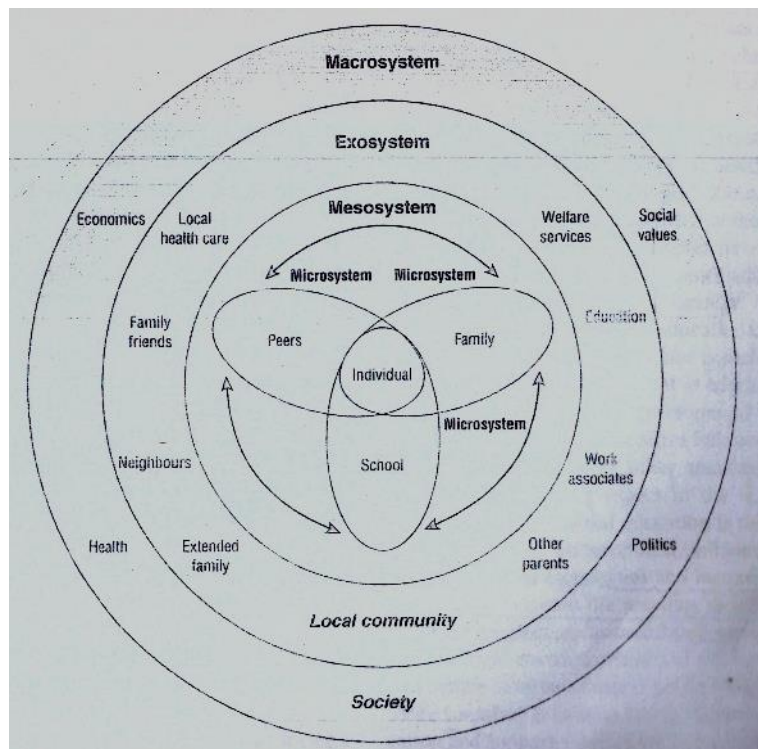
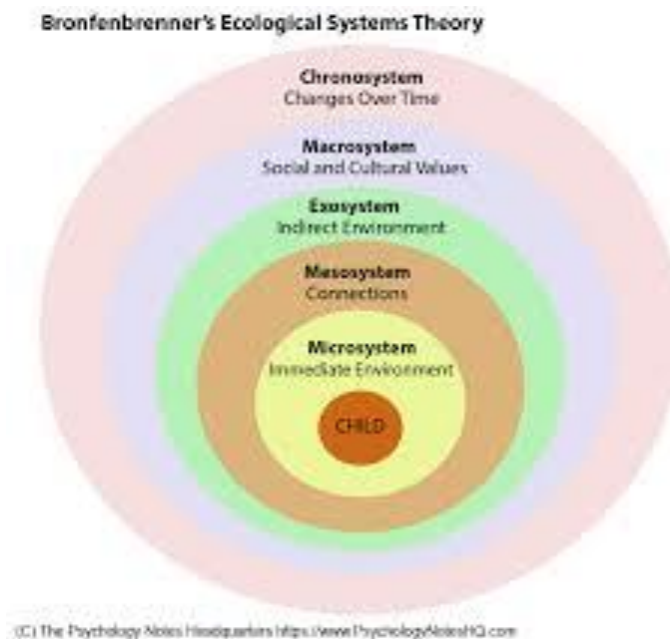


Figure 2 Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory formed from the model above



Bronfenbrenner (1970)

The above theory and model articulate the importance of the child who is supposed to be always put at the centre of everything. In this paper the researcher argue that though we are living in the Covid-19 era, still the child’ needs come first and the first provider should be the immediate family, thus the need to draw attention to parents and or guardians on their new role proposed in this paper.

Literature review

Rovai & Whighting (as cited in Cacciamani et al., 2018, p. 2) complained that though online courses and classes are flexible in terms of time and accessibility within their locations students’ lack of face-to-face meetings with teachers and their peers can cause feelings of isolation, reduce their participation and diminish the quality of learning. In trying to bring a solution Cacciamani et al. (2018) investigated the effects of a social tutor on participation, sense of community and learning in online university courses in Britain. The results indicated that the use of a social tutor in online learning greatly improve students’ participation. This study views the parent or guardian as the readily available social tutor who can stand in the gap.

Colao et al. (2020) view the COVID – 19 crises as an opportunity to re –assess the type of school we want for the future. The researcher in this study views the COVID-19 crisis as an opportunity to re-assess the type/parenting approach we use. According to Calao et al. (2020) after the COVID- 19 beyond offering academic content, the school through teachers should foster personal hygiene, physical activities, a balanced diet and raise awareness on the consequences of risky behaviours. This study views the parent or guardian as someone who can stand in while schooling is temporary closed.

Basilaia and Kvavadze (2020) studied countries and their populations’ capacities to continue education online. Significantly, Basilaia and Kvavadze (2020) drew the major distinction between traditional, modern and online education classrooms. Whilst, the traditional classroom uses books and blackboards, the modern uses whiteboards, projectors (audio –visual display equipment) and digital boards. Contrary, the online uses the internet and video/audio and text communication as well as software as information communication technologies to offer teaching and learning to learners in diverse geographical locations. Basilaia and Kvavadze (2020) view online learning as a transition. Transition in the kind of classroom is a transition in the philosophy as well, from at school-philosophy to at –home- philosophy. When philosophy re-defines the role of the teacher and school, it does the same with the role of the parent or guardian and the society as well. The researcher in this review believe that transition in the kind of classroom also, call for transition in the parenting approach.

Whilst, UNICEF (2017) put emphasis on schools being child-friendly, the researcher views the home as one to be child-friendly during the COVID 19 – era. This paper views the transition on the angle of the parent or guardian who is at home with the child –learner. The COVID – 19 era call for parents or guardians to be change agents. Change agents are classified by Rogers (1976) into different categories based on their levels of adopting the change; innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority and laggards. However, the study does not apply pressure to parents or guardians but raises awareness on their new role.

To sum up, Colao et al. (2020) studied the role of the school after COVID -19, Cacciamani et al. (2018) reviewed the role of a social tutor on participation, sense of community and learning in online university courses. On the other hand, Basilaia and Kvavadze (2020) studied the transition to online education in schools during a SARS-CoV-2 Coronavirus (COVID -19) Pandemic in Georgia. This study is a desk review of psychosocial –support issues; the new parenting role to be assumed by parents and guardians in response to COVID – 19 crises.

Methodology

The research is a desk review of psychosocial support issues during the COVID -19 era. Whilst, other systematic reviews bring together, synthesise and critique (Siddaway, Wood & Hedges, 2019, p.1) this study synthesise and build upon available literature on COVID – 19 issues and children. Inclusion and exclusion criteria is crucial when conducting a desk review as not everything is useful (Baumeister ,2013); to broaden understanding of psychosocial-support issues during the COVID – 19 era the researcher have used her own knowledge of psychosocial-support and extended on the three studies recently published on the COVID – 19 pandemic. These studies have been used as secondary data sources.

Impact of COVID – 19 on parenting styles

The researcher in this study views the country’s attack on COVID – 19 as a “Back to the Crisis” for children having dependent on the school for almost everything. The COVID-19 crisis and the so-called social distancing is temporarily replacing school and teacher support with parent or guardian support. Colao et al. (2020) assert that temporal closure or shut down of schools have devastating effects to most vulnerable children who rely on school for provision of their educational, nutritional and health needs. Thus, schooling was an equaliser to the child who is now quarantined at home. Meaning that, it is now the home that is a centre of care and support for the Liswati child.

While the popular slogan is “it takes a village to raise a child” (Power, 2013, p. 90), COVID -19 is monopolising child upbringing back to the parent or guardian only thus, the slogan has shifted to “it takes a parent or guardian to raise a child”. Though, Eswatini learners’ different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds cannot be argued and is a situation beyond control, the reality is that all children are looking up to their parents or guardians for their survival during the COVID – 19 era. Thus, parents or guardians are obliged to shift from the old parenting models of the 20th century and adopt innovative and creative parenting models of the 21st century. Therefore, the paper seeks to bring insight into the new parenting role to be assumed by parents or guardians in the absence of school environment from the child.

While, we have authoritative, authoritarian, permissive and uninvolved parenting as commonly used approaches to child upbringing, the COVID – 19 demand for postmodernism parenting. The authoritarian and authoritative are traditional parenting styles used by parents or guardians known to value provision of basic needs that is accompanied with too controlling, too demanding and too pushy child upbringing mentalities. Authoritative parents give children room to express their feelings thus, inspiring them to be involved in decisions that affect their lives. It is the open and transparent line of communication that makes children from such parenting become autonomous and independent. Rego (2015) recommend authoritative parenting for its ability to produce children with good intra and intrapersonal relations. Moreover, they become proficient, cheerful and successful (Rego, 2015, p.1). Consequently, Rego (2015) opined that such children have mastery goals, inclined behaviours and the intrinsic motivation to enjoy school and are blessed with innovative abilities. Thus, the researchers in this study view authoritative parenting as one that embrace children’s rights. Children’s right to express themselves in decisions that affect them is one of the pillars of child development cited in Eswatini Child Protection and Welfare Act 2012 (Ministry of Justice & Constitutional Affairs, 2012).

On the other hand, permissive and uninvolved parents or guardians are low controlling and less demanding parenting styles used by parents who believe in responding to their children's needs or desires aligned with provision of basic needs; food, shelter and clothing and nothing else beyond that. Whilst, the authoritative parents or guardians set up clear consistent rules and boundaries, permissive and uninvolved parents do not set limits or boundaries for their children. The American Psychological Association (2017) define such parents as though warm but lax and the products of their parenting approach as aimless, rebellious, over - dependant, aggressive and lacking the will and inspiration for achievement. The researchers view COVID -19 era as requiring a postmodernism parenting approach that train and initiate children to life outside the home through exposing them to technology devices that will connect them with the outside world. According to the researcher three crucial roles of the parent or guardian are demanded by the COVID -19 era; training children self-management skills, improvisation techniques and digital group growth.

Self-management skills

COVID – 19 crises have introduced 24 hour seven parenting methods enforcing parents to train children self-management, time -management and personal -management skills as three key attributes of “Crisis management”. At home learning calls for children to manage their time very well and effectively, spread it across their daily and timed routines. Self-management skills help children not to or reduce missing out timelines for teachings currently running on television, radio and print-media forums. Also, the use of ICT devices for learning has high chances of exposing irresponsible children to educationally irrelevant and socially undesirable sites (Madzima, Dube & Mashwama, 2016). Therefore, children are more likely to divert from the objective concept of learning to a social objective packed with fun.

Training personal responsibility is crucial for the so -called at-home learning for children as parents or guardians cannot be there at all times to remind them of their daily routines. Also, supervision of the children's use of internet and technological devices is hectic. Parents or guardians are to act as scaffolds during the COVID -19; provide their children lifelong support that is accompanied with personal responsibility. As much as the children need support and help, the two; support and help should be provided when necessary and be removed when unnecessary. The notion behind removal of the scaffold is that the child should be able to survive even if the parent is not there. The COVID – 19 era is posing difficult situations for children in that it requires use of their own strengths, knowledge and abilities to rescue themselves out of difficult situations they face. In a way the COVID – 19 at - home learning has taken the role of being a scaffold from the teacher to the parent or guardian thus, overloading them. Therefore, to avoid burnout parents are to adopt parenting styles that instil not only resilience and sustenance but personal management.

Improvisation techniques

Whilst, anecdotal evidence on the use of ICT in the Kingdom of Eswatini reveals the persistent struggle for needs, resources and proficiency (Mthethwa -Kunene & Maphosa ,2020;Madzima et al., 2016; Bhebhe & Maphosa, 2016), at home learning require use of ICT facilities. Improvisation entails that “what I have is what I use”. The COVID - 19 crisis is also, a threat considering the different parents' or guardian's financial affordability. At - home/mobile learning demand use of ICT gadgets which is automatically a break down in the parents' or guardians' economy. The researcher view this anew need as a “back to the roots” strategy. In the past Emaswati will improvise and make sense of available tools and information for the holistic development of the Liswati child. The use of ICT facilities for teaching and learning during COVID – 19 may sound “New” but it is not totally “New”. It is an innovation that was introduced by Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) way back, that view development as not wholesome but gradual and to be adopted according to each country's needs and resources more especially the implementation of SDG 4.7 as a Global Citizenship Education (GCED). SDG 4.7 postulates that “by 2030 education should be transformative by building knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that learners need to be able to contribute to a more inclusive, just and peaceful world” (UNESCO, 2018, p.3).Therefore, ESD emphasise on the use of technology alongside flexibility; that is the ICT facilities are to be adapted and contextualised to each country's socio – economic background and status (McNutty, 2018; Joynes, Rossignoli & Amonoo-Kuofi, 2019). This implies that the parents or guardians should do the same, improvise ICT facilities to enable at-home learning for all their children.

Whilst, we have the radio, cell phone, television, print media (The Times of Eswatini and the Eswatini Observer), Google classrooms, flipped classrooms to mention but a few of the ICT facilities easily accessible to most parents and children, they should be accessed and used according to affordability. Li and Lalani (2020) regard COVID-19 as a catalyst in offering new methods of delivery for teachers, the researcher views COVID -19 as a catalyst that is channelling new parenting techniques for parents and guardians. While, Li & Lalani (2020) view at- home learning as a digital divide the researcher in this paper view it as an improvisation divide.

Digital Group Growth

Technological devices have got apps that allow people to meet each other and share ideas online or electronically; what's up, Google classrooms, wiki page, Facebook etc. Group growth entails that children should use these platforms to share their thoughts and feelings without any physical contacts. According to National Education Association (NEA) (2010) to enhance critical thinking, creativity and problem-solving children should be allowed to interact with evolving technological devices and people from diverse backgrounds. Though, most of the time groups are known to be jolly COVID – 19 era group activity should be meant to mature the child; enhance growth versus group joy. Cacciamani et al. (2018) refer to them as virtual communities where people talk or communicate similar interests. Professor Carol Seefeldt (as cited in NEA, 2010, p.14) cites that communication and development of social skills go hand in hand.

In the group children learn to articulate their thoughts and ideas effectively through writing, reading, speaking and listening to people from diverse linguistic backgrounds. Amongst, the skills learnt through group growth are; giving each other turns, solving verbal conflicts, hooking up with others, maintaining friendships, tolerance, compromise, assuming shared responsibilities so forth and so on. The conclusion is that there is so much wisdom learnt from the crowd. "Under the right circumstances, groups are remarkably intelligent and are often smarter than the smartest people in them" opined Surowieck (as cited in NEA, 2010, p. 19). Additionally, group work or team-based learning is one of the teaching activities recommended for the 21st century for its ability to equip the learner with the 4Cs; communication, collaboration, critical thinking and creativity as skills for personal development. It is no doubt therefore, that through group work children can continue developing their intellects whilst still at home. The implication to the parent or guardian is that they should motivate online group interaction for its ability to develop good intra and interpersonal relationship skills, problem solving and collaborative responsibilities which finally, enhance teamwork, cooperation and creative innovative abilities.

Conclusion

Online learning is here to stay, Cv-19 or not. Teaching and learning has transided greatly to either blended or online learning mostly happening at-home. Therefore, this paper brings light to the need for parents to adopt Cv-19 parenting demands and schools to revive and strengthen teacher-parent relationships, all for the betterment of the Liswati child.

Brief notes on the author

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