

Parental Involvement in Assessment for Learning at Elementary Schools

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Abstract

Parental involvement has become a key factor in Assessment for Learning (AfL), as parents use assessment information and feedback to support their children's learning. This study aimed to examine the nature of parental engagement in AfL at elementary schools by describing the types of parental involvement, the use of assessment information and feedback, parents' views of their role in supporting children's learning and the issues parents face concerning effective parental engagement in AfL. Qualitative descriptive research was used to gather data via semi-structured interviews from 25 parents of elementary school children at government elementary schools in Odisha that had been purposively selected. The data was analyzed with Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis approach. Four critical themes were identified from the data: (a) forms of parental engagement in AfL; (b) use of assessment information and feedback; (c) parental perception of their role as supporters of their children's learning; and (d) barriers to effective engagement in the AfL process. The interviews indicate that parents are actively involved in monitoring academic achievement, communicating with teachers and providing support for their child's learning at home. Both assessment information and feedback provide parents with information that assists them in understanding their child's learning needs and helping them plan and implement learning activities for their child. Participants also indicated that they viewed themselves as necessary partners in their child's learning and believed that there should be a shared responsibility for learning between parents and schools. Limited assessment knowledge/education, restraints on time, barriers in communication, and the socio-economic hardships of families all were detrimental to the effective participation of parents in their child's education. It is apparent from the literature that building stronger partnerships between schools and parents and improving the assessment knowledge/education of parents is an important part of providing successful assessment for learning. Findings of this study will have relevance to educators, educational leaders and policymakers who wish to build more effective partnerships between parents and schools as well as improve parent engagement in learning to enhance student achievement in elementary schooling.

Keywords: Parental Involvement, Assessment for Learning, Elementary Education, Home-School Partnership, Assessment Feedback

1. Introduction

Assessment for Learning (AfL) has become one of the most prominent approaches to education today. AfL utilizes assessment evidence to develop teaching and learning instead of only measuring academic achievement (Black & Wiliam, 2009; Heritage & Wylie, 2018). Through continuous feedback and track-

ing progression, AfL identifies what students need to learn and enables them to reach their learning goals. Various stakeholders, including parents, must be actively involved in ensuring the successful implementation of AfL. There is considerable evidence that parental involvement is one of the most significant factors influencing a child's academic success. According to the research, children whose parents are involved in their education achieve higher levels of academic success and exhibit higher levels of motivation and engagement in their schools (Epstein et al., 2018; Gonzalez-DeHass et al., 2005; Tan et al., 2020). In relation to the assessment of their child's progress, parents assist in the educational process by discussing their child's assessment results, communicating with the school's teachers, monitoring their child's progress, and responding to evaluation feedback (Cheng et al., 2010; Zhang, 2021). Such involvement strengthens home and school partnerships and enhances students's learning experiences.

Recent research suggests that the involvement of parents with their children's assessment do not simply involve accessing the assessment results, but involve actively helping their child learn, through their child's assessment results (Sarsale et al., 2024). However, despite global interest in the area of parental involvement in assessment for learning, there is limited research in the area of parental involvement in assessment for learning within India, especially in the context of Odisha. With the introduction of National Educational Policy (NEP) 2020 and the National Initiative for Proficiency in Reading with Understanding and Numeracy (NIPUN) Bharat initiative, which emphasizes competency-based education, ongoing assessment and stronger partnerships between home and school, parental involvement is becoming increasingly more important in elementary education. In order to successfully implement the new educational policies, it is critically important to understand how parents in Odisha are involved in their child's education through the assessments received on their child. Therefore, the purpose of this project is to explore the ways that parents in Odisha are involved in their child's education through assessment for learning in elementary schools in the region. This will include a detailed analysis of the different types of parental involvement, the manner in which assessment is used, parental perceptions of their role in assessment and the challenges faced by parents when supporting their child's learning based on assessment results

1.1 Assessment for Learning

AfL is a form of assessment that involves collecting and using evidence of students' learning to inform instructional practice and improve overall student achievement. Unlike traditional assessment practices that predominantly focus on measuring achievement, AfL focuses on identifying learning needs, providing feedback to students, and guiding learning (Black & Wiliam, 2009). AfL utilizes a variety of formative assessment strategies, including feedback, questioning, and monitoring student progress, to help teachers adjust instruction and allow for increased student responsibility for learning (Heritage & Wylie, 2018). Effective implementation of AfL depends on the involvement of all the relevant stakeholders. While teachers play an important role in providing and interpreting assessment results, parents also have a role by understanding how to interpret assessment feedback and how to help support their children's learning at home (Martínez et al., 2004). Thus, AfL occurs in a broader context than simply within the classroom; it fosters collaboration among educators, learners, and their families. Reforms in Indian education, such as the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and the National Initiative for Proficiency in Reading with Understanding and Numeracy (NIPUN Bharat), have reinforced the need for competency-based, ongoing assessment. These initiatives reinforce the importance of using assessment data as evidence to support students' longitudinal learning and promote parental involvement in the Assessment for Learning process.

1.2 Parental Engagement in Assessment for Learning

Parental engagement in Assessment for Learning (AfL) is about how parents are involved in all aspects of assessment related to their child's learning. Parents are increasingly seen as active collaborators, interpreting assessment data, responding to comments from teachers about their child's performance and supporting the child in achieving their learning goals (Sarsale et al., 2024). Examples of this type of engagement include parents discussing results with their child and/or teacher, communicating with the teacher about the assessment process, attending parent-teacher conferences, providing homework help for their child, and encouraging their child to do better academically (Martínez et al., 2004; Holyk, 2011). Evidence indicates that when parents have information about how well their child is doing with assessments, they are able to use this information to help with learning at home and track the child's development (Zhang, 2021). The success of parental involvement with assessments depends on parents being able to understand what is being measured and how schools communicate information to families about assessment practices (Cheng et al., 2010). There are four barriers to effective parental engagement in assessment; a lack of knowledge about assessment, little time to spend assisting their child, an inability to communicate with the school and a lack of confidence as to whether they were providing appropriate support (Sarsale et al., 2024).

2. Research Questions

- A. How are parents involved in assessment practices that support their children's learning at the elementary school level?
- B. How do parents use assessment information and feedback provided by schools to support their children's learning?
- C. What challenges do parents face in engaging with assessment-related activities and processes?
- D. How do parents perceive their role in supporting Assessment for Learning?

3. Methodology

The goal of this study was to determine how parents involve, perceive, and practice Assessment for Learning (AfL) using qualitative research methodology. Qualitative research allows for an in-depth understanding of participant perspective and experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study took place in three government elementary schools located in the Mayurbhanj district of Odisha. The selected sites provided a range of rural to semi-urban contexts and a variety of parental perspectives on the engagement of parents with regard to Assessment for Learning.

3.1 Participants and Sampling

The participants of this study were the parents of children enrolled in Grades I–VIII in elementary schools. Purposive sampling was used to select information-rich participants (Patton, 2015) and to ensure diversity amongst the selected participants in terms of gender, educational level, occupation, and socio-economic status. A total of 25 parents were selected across the three elementary schools.

3.2 Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected via semi-structured interviews with each participant. In line with ethics approval, all participants were informed about the study and gave their consent to participate in the study. The interviews were conducted in Odia, lasted approximately 20–30 minutes, and were recorded with the participant's consent. Data analysis followed the six-step process of thematic analysis outlined in Braun and

Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis continued until the themes were saturated and no new themes were identified.

4. Results

The thematic analysis of interviews with parents revealed in four major themes: 1. Use of Assessment Information and Feedback, 2. Forms of Parental Engagement in Assessment for Learning, 3. Challenges to Parental Engagement, and 4. Parents' Perceptions of Their Role in Assessment for Learning. These themes capture parents' experiences and perspectives regarding their involvement in supporting children's learning through assessment.

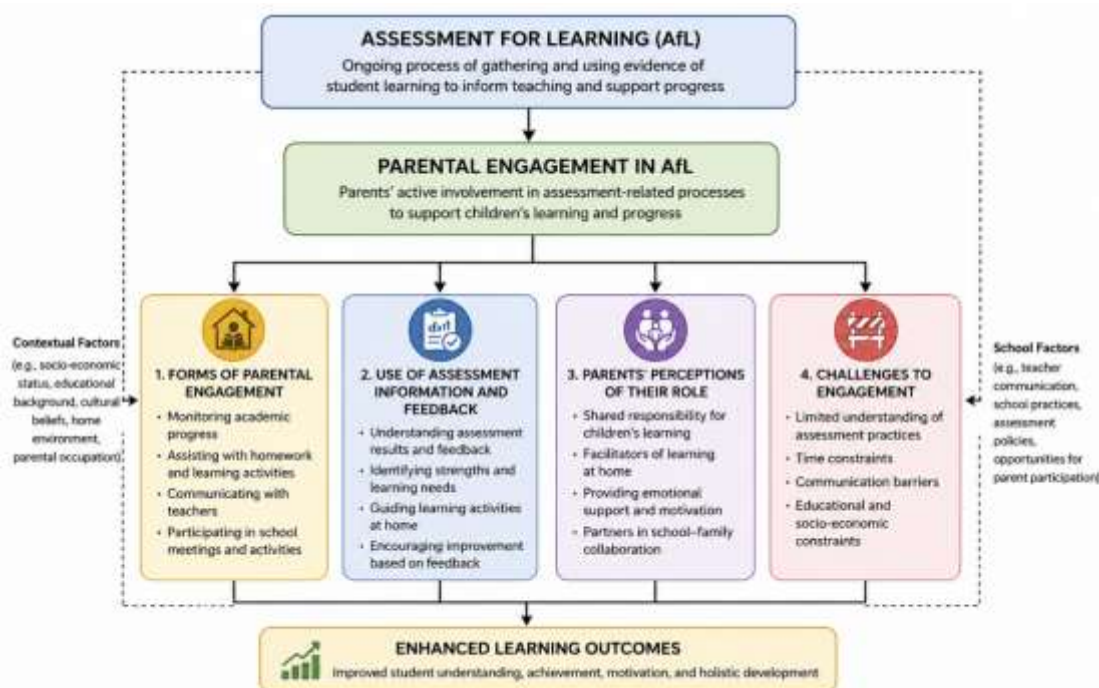


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Parental Engagement in Assessment for Learning in Elementary Schools.

4.1 Theme 1: Forms of Parental Engagement in Assessment for Learning

The ways that parents engaged in their child's assessment and learning experiences were really varied. There were three main areas of activity described by parents.

4.1.1 Monitoring Children's Academic Progress

Most of the parents regularly checked the homework, classwork and examination performance of their kids. Parents described that they check their child's notebook and also talk to them about school each evening or at least on a regular basis, and watch their child's academic performance through report cards and teacher comments. Some of the parents comments are:

"...I check my kid's notebook every evening and ask what he got taught while he was at school. It helps me learn if he is learning correctly..."

"...Whenever my kid gets a report card I sit down with her and go over her marks to personally identify areas she needs to work on..."

4.1.2 Communication with Teachers

Parents said they thought it was important to talk to the teacher, both during parent-teacher conferences and when visiting the school. By talking to the teacher, parents were able to learn more about their child's capabilities, things they struggle with and how they learn. Some of the parents responses are:

“...I try to attend parent-teacher conferences as often as possible, because teachers help me learn how well my son is doing, and how I can assist him with things at home...”

“...If my child struggles in a certain subject, I will call the teacher and ask how I can assist my child in improving in that subject...”

4.1.3 Providing Learning Support at Home

According to majority of parents, they help their children with homework and encourage the creation and use of study materials as well as motivate their children to do well academically. Some of the parents responses are:

“...I am with my daughter when she studies and encourage her to finish her assignments and practice reading...”

“...Although I do not have much formal education, I try to help my child grow academically by preparing a good place for studying at home and encouraging them to learn...”

4.2 Theme 2: Use of Assessment Information and Feedback

Parents expressed that the assessments provide essential insight into their child's learning progress.

4.2.1 Understanding Children's Strengths and Weaknesses

Through assessments, parents can determine areas their child is capable and areas that require additional support. Some of the parents responses are:

“...The results of the assessments will help me determine what my child does well at, and what they need to improve on...”

“...When my child receives a lower score in mathematics, I know they need to do more practice in that area to improve...”

4.2.2 Guiding Learning Activities at Home

Parents indicated using teachers' comments, report cards, and assessment information to organize study schedules and target assistance for their children. Some of the parents responses are:

“...The teachers' comments I get help me determine the areas to concentrate on that will help my child learn while at home...”

“...Based on the feedback received from the teacher, I support my son by encouraging him to focus on the subjects that are challenging for him...”

4.2.3 Encouraging Improvement through Feedback

Parents reported using feedback as one means of motivating children to achieve improved learning outcomes. Some of the parents responses are:

“...I tell my daughter that feedback is not criticism; it is a method of assisting you to improve your learning...”

“...When the teacher points out where mistakes have been made, we talk about those mistakes at home to prevent repeating them...”

4.3 Theme 3: Parents' Perceptions of Their Role in Assessment for Learning

Overall, parents view themselves as being partners with their child in the journey of learning.

4.3.1 Shared Responsibility for Learning

Parents view that both schools and parents share responsibility for learning outcomes for children.

“...Education should not rest with just the teacher; there must be an equal partnership between parents and schools to support children's learning...”

“...Children achieve much greater success when schools and parents work as partners...”

4.3.2 Facilitators of Learning

Many participant responses highlighted the role of creating supportive home environments, encouraging effort and reiterating the guidance given by the teachers of their children.

"...I support my child, encourage them to create regular study habits, and ensure they do their home-work..."

"... I may not teach all the lessons, but I can provide guidance, motivation, and encouragement to learn for my child..."

4.3.3 Emotional Support and Motivation

The importance of providing emotional support was also highlighted by parents, particularly when their children are experiencing difficulties academically.

"...When my child is disappointed after an assessment, I encourage them to continue trying (not lose confidence)..."

"... Children require reinforcement. I praise my daughter for all her accomplishments..."

4.4 Theme 4: Challenges to Parental Engagement in Assessment for Learning

Even though parents recognized that it is important to be involved in the learning assessment process for their children, they reported a number of challenges.

4.4.1 Limited Understanding of Assessment Practices

Some parents reported having difficulty interpreting the assessment criteria, the grading and feedback provided by their child's school.

"...Sometimes I do not understand how the grading system works or what the teacher's comments mean..."

"...I want to help my child more but I never know when or how to interpret the assessment results..."

4.4.2 Time Constraints

Parents of children working on low-wage labor jobs, farming or any other professions had a difficult time finding enough time to be able to monitor their children's learning activities.

"...Working all day I sometimes do not have enough time to monitor my children's studies..."

"...After coming home from work it becomes difficult to find enough time to discuss with them on a regular basis about their school..."

4.4.3 Communication Barriers

Many participants reported only limited communication with the teachers of their children, while opportunities for discussing assessment issues with teachers were extremely limited.

"...I do not get enough information about my child's progress since we only meet for parent/teacher meetings every now and then..."

"...I would really like to see more regular communication from teachers regarding assessment and learning skill issues..."

4.4.4 Educational and Socio-economic Constraints

Parents who did not complete a higher education were found to lack confidence in helping their children with academic work or effectively reading and interpreting results related to their children's assessments.

"...I only completed primary school. Therefore, I sometimes have difficulty assisting my child with their schoolwork..."

“...There are not enough resources in the home to allow me to provide any additional supports for learning...”

These findings suggest that parents are actively participating in Assessment for Learning by supportive involvement in their children's learning and monitoring their progress, communicating with their teachers, and providing support for their learning at home. Without Assessment information and feedback, parents would not be able to support their children's learning or help identify areas needing improvement.

5. Discussion

The research demonstrates that parents are actively involved in helping their children learn outside of the classroom by participating in Assessment for Learning by checking their child's homework, analyzing their child's grades, attending parent-teacher meetings and communicating with teachers. This supports previous research that has shown that parental involvement is made up of both home and school activities (Epstein et al. , 2018; Sarsale et al ., 2024) and shows how parents in Odisha are investing in their child's education by supporting their learning beyond the classroom. In addition, parents use assessment information collected from sources such as report cards and comments from teachers to help them identify their child's learning needs at home. This finding aligns with Cheng et al. (2010) and Zhang et al. (2021) who report that using assessment data allows parents to monitor their child's progress and give them guidance on how to support their child's learning. Lastly, the parents in this study view themselves as an integral partner in the education of their child and believe that supporting their child's learning is a mutual responsibility between families and schools (Goodall, 2018; Epstein et al. , 2018). Parents also place great importance on providing emotional support, encouragement and motivation to their children, and that these supports are critical in supporting students' learning and achieving success in school (Gonzalez-DeHass et al ., 2005). Though parents have made valuable contributions to supporting their children's education through assessment, they also encountered many obstacles including limited knowledge of how assessments are conducted, lack of time and difficulties communicating with schools. Researchers have previously identified similar barriers to parental engagement (Hornby & Blackwell (2018); Sarsale et al. 2024). Parents of rural and low socio-economic status also strongly demonstrated these barriers. The researchers indicate that parental involvement is an excellent way to enhance Assessment for Learning in Odisha's primary schools. Parents must also be given adequate support to improve their understanding of assessment processes and how they can effectively participate in their children's education through positive interactions with their children's schools. This research adds to the very limited body of knowledge regarding parents' involvement with Assessment for Learning by providing insights from the perspective of parents in Odisha, and affirms that parents must work closely in partnership with their children's schools to ensure their children's success at school.

6. Conclusion

Parental involvement in Assessment for Learning (AfL) within elementary schools in Odisha was the subject of this research. The findings indicated that parents play an essential role in their children's education, both through support of their child's learning and participating in their child's learning by tracking academic achievement; communicating with teachers; and using assessment data and feedback to support their child's learning activities at home. Parents believed they were an integral part of their child's education and recognized their shared responsibility for their child's education. A number of fac-

tors impeded parental engagement, including limited access to understanding of assessment practice, lack of time, limitations on communication, and socio-economic issues. Therefore, this study suggests improving parents' understanding of assessment practice and enhancing the communication between parents and schools can increase the success of Assessment for Learning. These results support a more collaborative relationship between home and school in supporting the competency-based assessment reforms and reaching the targets set out in the National Education Policy 2020.

7. Implications

The implications of this research extend beyond the individual and provide both significant and far-reaching implications for educational practice, policy and future research.

7.1 Implications for Teacher

Teachers should communicate assessment information and feedback clearly and simply, using language that is accessible to parents. Parents can better support their children at home if they have regular interactions with their children's teachers so that they have a better understanding of their children's learning needs. Teachers should also organize parent orientation sessions so that parents can learn about assessment and feedback practices.

7.2 Implications for School

Schools need to provide more structured opportunities for parent engagement in Assessment for Learning. Collaborative practices between schools and families can be strengthened when schools create and maintain mechanisms for parents to participate in parent-teacher meetings, attend workshops and share progress regularly with parents. Schools should also adopt effective communication strategies that include parents with diverse educational and socioeconomic backgrounds.

7.3 Implications for Policy makers

The findings of this study highlight the importance of parental participation in their children's learning as articulated in the National Education Policy (NEP), 2020, and support the Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) mission. Policymakers should consider the development of parent-centred assessment literacy programmes to promote appropriate understanding of assessment and the effective use of assessment information by families. Further, the development of a school-family partnership could assist the effective implementation of competency-based assessment reforms in elementary education.

8. Limitations

There are several limitations within the research despite the research having made noteworthy contributions to the field. First, the research was restricted in its generalizability due to the study being conducted in a small number of elementary schools within Odisha; therefore, the research findings may not be generalizable to all educational contexts within this geographical area. Second, the research relied solely on the parent's perspective; including perspectives from other stakeholders, such as teachers, students and school administrators, would lead to a more comprehensive perspective on parental engagement in Assessment for Learning. Third, as the study was qualitative in its nature and had a relatively small number of participants, the research focused on depth of understanding and exploration rather than on statistical generalization; thus, limiting the extent to which the results can be extrapolated to a larger population. Finally, the results of this study were based upon self-reported participant experiences; therefore, these results are subject to being influenced by the perspective of each participant's personal experience and/or memory related to Assessment for Learning. Future research would benefit from using

a mixed-method and/or longitudinal research design to further explore how parental engagement in Assessment for Learning changes over time and how changes in parental engagement in Assessment for Learning may influence students' educational outcomes.

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