

CHAPTER 4

EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The preceding chapters form an important background to the investigation contained in this research. Chapter two provides a theoretical background to the nature of parent involvement in education. It is clearly illustrated that lack of parent involvement in the education of their children should be investigated by the researcher. Chapter 3 provides the theoretical background of parent involvement in education in South Africa.

The substantive literature study, as well as the preliminary research, served to identify some of the crucial issues pertaining to the topic, as well as to indicate gaps in the existing knowledge on parent involvement

In this research it has been proved by a literature study that parent involvement plays a significant role in the education of the child (Fuller & Olsen, 1998:30).

In this chapter the empirical research will be discussed. Attention will be focused on the research design, construction of the questionnaire as a measuring instrument through which the presentation and analysis of the responses to the questionnaires will be explained, the pilot study, target population, sampling method and data analysis. The reason for the choice and types of questionnaires will be advanced.

The aim of the empirical research is to test the validity of the discoveries from the literature study and to determine the degree of parent involvement and the reasons of non-involvement of parents in the education of their children in the Potchefstroom district of the North West Province.

4.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design is a blueprint for the conduct of a study that maximises control over factors that could interfere with the study's desired outcome (Burns & Grove, 1997:50).

4.2.1 The quantitative survey

Quantitative research is a major focus in this study, and involves the generation of numerical data to address the research objectives or questions and to generalise the outcomes.

An exploratory, descriptive, quantitative survey will be used in this study in an attempt to explore and describe the phenomena in real life, and to identify possible reasons of non-parent involvement in the education of their children.

Quantitative research refers to the use of numbers in collecting or working with research data. Quantitative method has advantages and disadvantages. According to Louw and Edwards (1997:36) the following advantages and disadvantages are identified.

4.2.2 Advantages of the quantitative survey

- Provides a basis of comparing one result with another.
- Numbers can be subjected to mathematical procedures and worked with on a computer, so quantitative method provides ways to deal with large bodies of data.
- Statistical techniques permit hypotheses to be rigorously tested.

4.2.3 Disadvantages of the quantitative survey

- Data converted to numbers are removed from the actual behaviour and experience of the participant and the results then often fail to show the true nature of data that have been quantified.
- Many complex psychological phenomena are difficult to quantify and emphasising quantitative research may keep the researcher's attention on simple and superficial aspects of human nature.

4.3 THE QUESTIONNAIRE

4.3.1 Introduction

Data for this study will be collected through the use of the structured questionnaire survey technique, which will be developed in the light of the literature study. A questionnaire is a printed self-report form designed to elicit information that can be obtained through written responses of the subjects (Burns & Grove, 1997:311).

Babbie (1989:39) defines a questionnaire as a set of questions on a form, which is completed by the respondent in respect of a research project.

For the purpose of this research, the structured questionnaire containing mostly closed ended questions but also a number of open-ended questions will be used, because it is the only way that parents and educators of the selected schools will be reached who live in the Potchefstroom district of the North West Province. Structured questionnaires will be used because the quantification and analysis of the results may be carried out more efficiently (Burns & Grove, 1997:358).

Questionnaires can be designed to determine facts about subjects or facts about events or situations known by subjects, or beliefs, attitudes, opinions, levels of knowledge, or intentions of the subjects (Burns & Grove, 1997:311).

The aim of the questionnaires is to determine whether the responses of the target group will be in agreement, or refute the discoveries of literature study.

4.3.2 Types of questionnaire

4.3.2.1 Mailed questionnaire

According to Grinnell (1993:216-217), a mailed questionnaire is a questionnaire which is sent off by mail in the hope that the respondent will complete and return it.

The researcher compiles the questionnaire and it is accompanied by clear, carefully worded prescriptions at the level of understanding of the target population to be reached. The first section of a mailed questionnaire must be designed in such a way that it is not threatening and creates an interesting impression. What is important here is that the respondent and the researcher are physically removed from one another. The questionnaire is the only communication channel between the compiler of the questionnaire and the respondent.

The appearance of the mailed questionnaire must encourage the respondent to complete it. The investigator must do everything in his power to raise the respondent rate, for instance to prepare the respondents for the study by means of a newsletter. Sending reminders and including franked envelopes are also conducive to a higher response rate

4.3.2.2 Telephonic questionnaire

As in the case of the mailed questionnaire, the researcher and respondent are physically removed from each other, but able to communicate with each other about the contents of the questionnaire.

The questionnaire completed telephonically must contain comprehensive instructions because the field worker does not have the opportunity to consult separate manuals while he is busy asking the questions (De Vos, 2000:54).

4.3.2.3 Personal questionnaire

In this case the questionnaire is handed to the respondent who completes it on his own, but the researcher is available in case problems are experienced. The researcher limits his own contribution to the completion of the questionnaire to the absolute minimum. The researcher thus largely remains in the background and can at most encourage the respondent with a few words to continue with his contribution or lead him back to the subject.

4.3.2.4 Questionnaire delivered by hand

The researcher or the field worker delivers questionnaires by hand, so that the respondents can complete them in their own time, and then collects them again later. It is important that an appointment be made for collecting the questionnaires again and this should preferably not be more than 48 hours after delivery.

4.3.2.5 Group administered questionnaires

In this case respondents who are present in a group complete a questionnaire or questionnaires on their own. Preferably each respondent should receive the same

stimulus and complete his own questionnaire without discussion with the other members of the group (De Vos, 2000:52-156).

4.3.3 Principles of questionnaire construction

According to De Vos (2000:56-186) a number of basic principles must be taken into consideration when a questionnaire is developed. Some of these are discussed below.

4.3.3.1 Information needed

Before the researcher can decide on the nature of the questionnaire, there must be clarity on precisely what information is to be obtained. The questionnaire must be brief, including only those questions which are absolutely necessary to collect all the relevant information. On the other hand it must be long enough to incorporate all the questions, so that a situation does not arise later where information is missing.

4.3.3.2 The format of the questionnaire

The format of the questionnaire will be influenced by whether it will be a mailed, telephonic, group-administered or other type of questionnaire, as well as where, under what circumstances and by whom it will be completed. All questionnaires should, however, be accompanied by a covering letter. In the covering letter the person or organisation undertaking the research must be identified. A brief description of the purpose of the study, must also be given in order to motivate respondents to give their co-operation for the investigation. The covering letter must also give an indication of the importance of the study, as well as for whom it is of special importance. The covering letter should also give an indication of how the respondent came to be involved in the investigation.

4.3.3.3 Formulating the questions

Certain basic principles can be stated for the formulation of questions of a questionnaire:

- Sentences must be brief and clear, and the vocabulary and style of the questions must be understandable to the respondents.
- Questions and response alternatives must be clear and not reflect the bias of the researcher.
- Every question must contain only one thought.
- Every question must be relevant to the purpose of the questionnaire.
- Abstract questions not applicable to the milieu of the respondents must rather be avoided. Researchers must also not take it for granted that respondents will have knowledge about a subject.
- The sequence in which the questions are presented must be aimed at general, non-threatening questions first and more sensitive, personal questions later.

4.3.3.4 Pilot testing the questionnaire

In all cases it is essential that newly-constructed questionnaires be thoroughly pilot-tested before being utilised in the main investigation. This ensures that errors of whatever nature can be rectified immediately at little cost. Space should also be left on the questionnaire for comment or evaluation of the questionnaire by the field worker and/or the respondent. In this manner the researcher obtains a general impression of the feasibility of his questionnaire and the data which he/she obtained.

4.3.4 Steps taken to ensure completion of the questionnaire

For mailed questionnaires an addressed, franked envelope must be enclosed. Follow-up letters or postcards can be mailed to those who have not reacted about two or three weeks after the original has been mailed off. A second follow-up request and even telephonic requests can be considered.

In conclusion, the questionnaires will be designed to be clear, unambiguous and uniformly workable. The design of the questionnaires is intended to minimise potential errors from respondents and coders. Since the participation of the respondents in this survey will be voluntary, questionnaires will be designed so as to engage their interest and encourage their co-operation.

For the purpose of this research and after taking into consideration the advantages and disadvantages of a questionnaire as a measuring instrument, it has been decided to deliver the questionnaires to the principals of the eight schools which will participate in this research. The principals will distribute the questionnaires to the educators and learners to give to their parents.

The completed questionnaires will be placed into a specific container designed by the researcher in each school, and be collected by the researcher on specific predetermined date.

According to Burns and Grove (1997:358-359) the questionnaire has the following advantages and disadvantages:

4.3.5 Advantages of selecting the questionnaire

- A questionnaire as a measuring instrument is more effective than an interview.

- Because the respondents remain anonymous and personal contact is minimised, greater objectivity can be attained.
- Many people can be easily contacted in this fashion.
- It is more economical than an interview.
- The standardised instructions allow the respondents to answer what is expected from them.
- Responses can be easily analysed.
- It is very useful for gathering large amounts of data.

4.3.6 Disadvantages of the questionnaire

- It is difficult to determine the reliability of a postal questionnaire.
- The correctness of the answers is difficult to determine.
- No provision is made for the independent opinion of the respondents.
- The questionnaire can be completed by someone other than the respondent.
- The respondent can interpret the questions wrongly.
- Because the anonymity of the respondent is protected, the non-responding individuals can't be traced and as such, this can lead to poor feedback from the respondents.

The questionnaire is deemed suitable for this specific survey because all the parents could read and write and could be reached easily. The respondents could complete the questionnaires in their own time, and responses can be easily analysed.

4.4 PILOT STUDY

A pilot study is frequently defined as a smaller version of a proposed study conducted to refine the methodology. It is developed similarly to the proposed study, using similar

subjects, the same setting, same treatment and the same data collection and analysis techniques (Burns & Grove, 1997:52).

The questionnaire has been pre-tested with five selected number of respondents with regard to its quality of measurements and appropriateness, and to review it for clarity.

The questionnaire was found to be appropriate to the study, clear and with high quality of measurement.

4.5 SELECTION OF STUDY POPULATION

This research handles theories, problems, advantages, and solutions towards parent involvement in the education of the child. The education of the child implies the involvement of parents as primary educators, and school educators as secondary educators of the child. Therefore, the questionnaires used in this research are aimed at gathering information from both parents and educators. This research project is focused on the degree of involvement of parents in the education of their children with special reference to the Potchefstroom district of the North West Province.

The study population for this survey comprised of parents and educators from eight secondary schools (n=8) in the Potchefstroom district of North West Province.

4.6 SAMPLE

A random sample of four (4) schools that had a pass rate of below forty percent (40%) in the 2000 Grade 12 examination and four (4) schools that had a pass rate of above seventy percent (70%) has been selected to participate in the research.

In each of these eight (8) schools, the principal has been approached to assist the researcher in distributing questionnaires to 10 of the educators in these schools and to at least 40 parents in each of these schools.

4.7 PERMISSION

Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the Department of Education of the North West Province in the Potchefstroom district, and from the principals of the schools selected.

4.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

The questionnaires were completed anonymously and no respondents were traced, as the questionnaires were not numbered beforehand. As the questionnaires were completed anonymously, the respondents were assured of the confidentiality of their individual responses. The respondents returned completed questionnaires in sealed envelopes to the principal, without coercion and without remuneration.

No codes were used on the questionnaires, in an effort to ensure absolute anonymity in order to obtain truthful answers, thus the non-respondents could not be identified.

4.9 DATA ANALYSIS

As this research was conducted as an exploratory, descriptive, quantitative survey and no hypotheses were formulated, the responses from the usable questionnaires were tallied, percentages calculated and frequency displayed in tables as necessary.

Data were processed and analysed by means of statistical programmes selected in consultation with the Statistical Consultation Service of the Vaal Triangle Faculty of the Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education, so that statistical comparisons

could be made between poor and well-performing schools, using techniques that have been chosen.

In this way the raw data from the questionnaires were summarised and communicated to the readers of the report (Polit & Hungler, 1997:260).

These statistical measures were used to obtain an idea about the nature, reasons of non-involvement of parents in the education of their children in Potchefstroom district of the North West Province.

4.10 RESEARCH RESULTS

The research results, obtained from parents and educators living in the district of Potchefstroom of the North West Province were presented together with brief interpretations and discussions from both groups of respondents whenever possible, in an effort to enhance the meaningfulness of the research results. Furthermore references to similar or dissimilar results reported by others in the literature reviewed were provided in an attempt to link this project's results to those of previously reported research projects addressing the same issues.

4.11 SUMMARY

This chapter briefly outlined the aims of empirical research, research design, selection of target population and the principles of questionnaire construction.

The next chapter will focus on the analysis and interpretation of the data collected.