



Parenting and Learner Support in Rural South African Schools: Home Involvement as a Conduit for Strengthening Home-School Partnership

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ABSTRACT

For the delivery of effective and quality education, active parent participation regarding learning support both in schools and at home is crucial. The study, hinged on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model sought to analyse School Management Teams (SMTs) and parents' views on and interpretations of parental school involvement. Interviews were used to collect data from fifteen (15) purposively selected participants from three Junior Secondary Schools in the OR Tambo Coastal District in the Eastern Cape Province. The data was analysed using Atlas. ti and presented thematically and through network diagrams. The findings revealed that while parents were valued stakeholders in schools, there was a lack of viable partnerships between parents and schools. It emerged that effective home-school partnership was hindered by communication challenges as most parents were illiterate, hence children received minimal learning support from home. The low socio-economic status of the parents drove them towards tilling their land to provide food rather than actively participating in school activities. It was concluded that while parents had a clear and consistent understanding of parental involvement in school activities, the high poverty diminished their motivation for school involvement. Recommendations include the need for the Department of Education to foresee that school governing bodies ensure collaboration between homes and schools. Also, there should be intervention programs to enhance active parental participation in schools. This study adds to the existing literature on inclusive education in South African schools.

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INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the imperative aspects that not only inculcates the essential skills, abilities, and knowledge among individuals but also leads to overall growth and progress of the individuals, community and nation as a whole.¹ An educated person is not only able to accomplish his desired goals and objectives but is also able to render an efficient contribution towards the well-being of the community. Parental involvement in education is widely considered a significant factor in children's academic achievement and success in school.² It can be argued that active parental participation in some South African schools is very minimal if at all in existence. The Minister of Basic Education, Matise Angelina Motshekga has acknowledged that parental involvement is

¹ Radhika Kapur, "Factors Influencing the Students' Academic Performance in Secondary Schools in India" (University Of Delhi , 2018).

² Karen L. Mapp and Paul, J. Kuttner, "Partners in Education: A Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships," *Sedl* , 2013.

one aspect that needs intervention in South African schools.³ The parent-teacher partnership makes a tremendous impact on children's education.

According to Llamas and Tuazon, parents become uncomfortable when the education system requires their involvement in school activities.⁴ Some researchers argue that the South African education system is in crisis. They cite violence and burning of schools as having a direct negative impact on the delivery of quality education for all.⁵ Currently, South African schools and universities have been characterised by disruption and shutting down. In some instances, it is noted that the burning of schools is characterised by dissatisfaction amongst communities.⁶ For example, in Limpopo Province, especially in the Vuwani area, some residents protested the Board's decision of demarcation which would incorporate their area into a new municipality. Although this was caused by ethnicity and political issues, violence escalated to schools and left over 30 schools burnt into ashes. The scourge moved to the Eastern Cape Province where a few schools were also set alight. For example, four schools in one education district were burned down in one month. The learners contended that they wanted back five teachers who had been allegedly dismissed by the School Governing Body (SGB) and the local traditional authority.⁷ In another instance, nine teachers left their school citing a lot of work and intimidation by the SGB as their reason to leave the classroom.

Research has shown that school violence is escalating despite the measures put in place to address the problem by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and the schools themselves.⁸ Under these circumstances, one can argue that quality education for all or effective teaching and learning cannot be realised unless there are intervention programmes that promote active parental participation in schools. Equally important is the view of Makgopa and Mokhele who, in their study, state that teachers and parents need to work together to ensure that the child develops to the best of his or her ability.⁹ The Department of Education (DoE) has invested a lot in schools through the South African Schools Act 84 (SASA) of 1996 which empowers parents to be actively involved in the governance of schools.¹⁰ It goes without saying that community leaders and parents can and should play a significant role in assisting schools to be effective in their goals for quality education. Active parental involvement can strengthen learner performance and educational outcomes determined by the school values and culture. The involvement of parents in their children's education has long been considered by researchers as a significant factor in positively impacting children's school success.¹¹ According to Garcia and Thornton, research shows that the involvement of family in learning helps to improve learner performance, reduce absenteeism and restore parents' confidence in their children's education.¹² There are various ways that community leaders and parents can assist schools. Buka and Molepo have also stated that, with the rise in school violence, HIV/AIDS, drug abuse, teenage pregnancy, and teacher burn-out in schools, there is an accommodation for community members and community-based organisations to contribute towards combating these challenges both in schools and in the community.¹³ The Ministry of Education recognises the reality, responsibility, and influence of the education system within the community at large.

It seems that the important role the school community must play in the education system is inevitable and imperative. Despite the presence of various reforms (South African Schools Act 84 (SASA), 1996), the primary tasks of schools are to act as institutions of learning and teaching, and therefore, must take into consideration and manage those elements that negatively affect their primary tasks. Literature maintains that

³ Angie Motshekga, "Statement during the Announcement of the 2012 National Senior Certificate Grade 12 Examination Results by Mrs Angie Motshekga, Minister of Basic Education, SABC Auditorium," 2013.

⁴ Alicia V Llamas and Ariel P Tuazon, "School Practices in Parental Involvement, Its Expected Results and Barriers in Public Secondary Schools," *International Journal of Educational Science and Research* 6, no. 1 (2016): 69–78.

⁵ Andrea Mqondiso Buka and Jacob Maisha Molepo, "Principals' Perspectives on Socio-Psychological Support to Learners in Primary Schools: Caring for Those in Need," *Journal of Social Sciences* 42, no. 1–2 (January 11, 2015): 45–50, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09718923.2015.11893392>.

⁶ Bernard N Rasila and Mavhungu E Musitha, "Assessing Challenges to Ineffective Communication in Government Institutions: A Case Study of Vuwani Area, Limpopo, South Africa," *Africa's Public Service Delivery and Performance Review* 5, no. 1(2017): 1–10.

⁷ Brian Levy and Lawule Shumane, "School Governance in a Fragmented Political and Bureaucratic Environment: Case Studies from South Africa's Eastern Cape Province," *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2956313>.

⁸ Department of Basic Education, 2015.

⁹ Masiye Makgopa and Matseliso Mokhele, "Teachers' Perceptions on Parental Involvement: A Case Study of Two South African Schools," *Journal of Educational and Social Research*, September 1, 2013, <https://doi.org/10.5901/jesr.2013.v3n3p219>.

¹⁰ South Africa. Department of Education, *Education White Paper 6: Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System* (Department of Education Pretoria, 2001).

¹¹ Anita Parhar, "Broadening Our Conceptualization of Parental Involvement: Ethnic Minority Parental Participation as Democratic, Educational Practice," *University of British Columbia. (A Paper Presentation)*, 2006.

¹² Lily Eskelsen Garcia and Otha Thornton, "The Enduring Importance of Parental Involvement," *NEA Today*, 2014.

¹³ Andrea Mqondiso Buka and Jacob Maisha Molepo, "A Psycho-Pedagogic Approach for Inclusive Classes in Disadvantaged Rural Primary Schools in South Africa: Advancing Teaching Practices," *International Journal of Educational Sciences* 12, no.1(2016):38–44.

learner success is a product of the correlation between homes and schools. The more parents get involved in school activities and at home, there is the likelihood that learners will succeed in school. However, the common trend is that most relationships between homes and schools, especially in rural areas are weak, and this results in compromised learner achievements. The study which is hinged on Bronfenbrenner's ecological model and using a qualitative mode of inquiry with a case study as a research design, seeks to establish SMT's and parents' views on and interpretations of parental school involvement from three Junior Secondary Schools in the OR Tambo Coastal District in the Eastern Cape Province. The result of the study are presented in the subsequent sections. This is preceded by a literature review on the subject under consideration.

LITERATURE REVIEW

One of the factors which influence the success of a school system is the involvement of its stakeholders (SASA, 1996). Active parent participation in learner support is becoming more crucial than ever to sustain quality education and intensify effective learning both at school and at home. The strong collaboration of parents with school authorities can lead to increased improvement in both the physical and academic performance of the school. Hence, school administrators have to encourage parents to get involved and make contributions towards helping the school achieve its mission and goals.¹⁴ Such involvement is a combination of commitment and active participation on the part of the parent to the school and the learner. While there might be many challenges concerning involvement and commitment such as parents feeling unwelcomed at school or lack of knowledge and education, active parental involvement, in almost any form, produces measurable gains in learners' achievement.¹⁵ Most parents in the rural Eastern Cape were found illiterate or unable to speak English. This by itself poses communication problems even if they were willing to offer greater participation.

Learning Support

South African education system is characterised by many challenges. However, many factors are responsible for these challenges including those associated with learners, schools, and families.¹⁶ Parents are the first educators and teachers of their children. In schools, whatever problems that children go through regarding academics and other areas, they normally communicate them to their parents. Parents are sources of security, and encouragement and help their children by providing solutions to their problems. They play a primary role in their children's family education. Kraft and Dougherty identified three primary mechanisms that most likely affect the engagement: stronger teacher-learner relationships; expanded parental involvement; and increased learner motivation.¹⁷ Getting parents involved in their children's learning is just as important as teachers teaching learners. Seeing parents involved in the education of their children is a good thing because it improves academic performance. Learners become more focused on their schoolwork.¹⁸ This motivates learners not to give up easily when they do not understand a particular topic and will not skip classes because they know that their parents are always monitoring their school attendance.¹⁹ Houtenville and Conway view parental participation and learner support as important factors in learner achievement.²⁰ For example, if a parent sets apart a time to help a child with homework, that child will most likely develop an interest in schoolwork and will apply himself/herself to schoolwork more diligently. Homework supervision includes ensuring that children are completing homework on time, parental control of television viewing time, and establishing a learning environment.²¹

¹⁴ Gina Madrigal Sapungan and Ronel Mondragon Sapungan, "Parental Involvement in Child's Education: Importance, Barriers and Benefits," *Asian Journal of Management Sciences & Education* 3, no. 2 (2014): 42–48.

¹⁵ Joyce L. Epstein, "Attainable Goals? The Spirit and Letter of the No Child Left Behind Act on Parental Involvement," *Sociology of Education* 78, no. 2 (April 24, 2005): 179–82, <https://doi.org/10.1177/003804070507800207>.

¹⁶ David Ngidi and Jetro Qwabe, "The Partnership of Parents, Educators and Principles in Creating a Culture of Teaching and Learning in Schools," *South African Journal of Education* 26, no. 4 (2006): 529–39.

¹⁷ Matthew A. Kraft and Shaun M. Dougherty, "The Effect of Teacher–Family Communication on Student Engagement: Evidence From a Randomized Field Experiment," *Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness* 6, no. 3 (July 2013): 199–222, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19345747.2012.743636>.

¹⁸ Siphokazi Kwatubana and Thabo Makhalemele, "Parental Involvement in the Process of Implementation of the National School Nutrition Programme in Public Schools," *International Journal of Educational Sciences* 9, no. 3 (June 25, 2015): 315–23, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09751122.2015.11890321>.

¹⁹ Eleanor Lemmer and Noleen van Wyk, "Schools Reaching out: Comprehensive Parent Involvement in South African Primary Schools," *Africa Education Review* 1, no. 2 (January 2004): 259–78, <https://doi.org/10.1080/18146620408566284>.

²⁰ Andrew J. Houtenville and Karen Smith Conway, "Parental Effort, School Resources, and Student Achievement," *Journal of Human Resources* 43, no. 2 (2008): 437–53, <https://doi.org/10.3368/jhr.43.2.437>.

²¹ Toni Mora and Josep-Oriol Escardíbul, "Home Environment and Parental Involvement in Homework During Adolescence in Catalonia (Spain)," *Youth & Society* 50, no. 2 (March 1, 2018): 183–203, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0044118X15626050>.

Li, Yang, Wang and Jia proposed a framework for parental involvement in home-based education comprising home supervision, home communication, home-school communication, participation in school activities, educational beliefs, and educational expectations.²² To ensure learner success, parental involvement in schools must be strengthened and placed at the centre of teaching-learning relations as a key strategy for addressing challenges to teaching.²³ Parent, family, and community involvement in education has a bearing on higher academic performance and school improvement. When schools, parents, families, and communities work together to support learning, learners tend to earn higher grades, attend school more regularly, stay in school longer, and enrol in higher-level programs. The results of Jeynes' study also consistently confirm that parental involvement is related to higher pupil achievement outcomes whether the outcome measures were grades, standardised test scores, or a variety of other measures, including teacher ratings.²⁴

Active Parent Participation in Schools

Quality education can be defined as the acquisition of the knowledge, skills and values that society deems valuable, as articulated in the curriculum. Thus, one of the factors which influences the success of a school system is the involvement of its stakeholders.²⁵ Home is referred to as the place from where the foundation of learning and education takes place. To produce good academic outcomes, the parents, children and other family members need to encourage a learning atmosphere within homes. For instance, when students experience problems in certain subjects, parents are responsible for providing help. This help may be in the form of private tuition or they may teach their children themselves. They make provision of technology and other learning materials at home to enhance the performance of their children. Parents play an important role in leading to operative growth and development of their children. In schools, whatever problems that children go through regarding education and other areas, they normally communicate with their parents. Parents are sources of security, and encouragement and help their children in providing solutions to their problems. Studies show that the more the parents are involved in their children's education, the higher their children's success rate will be at school. Parental involvement is highly important in pushing the public school systems to higher standards.²⁶ However, parents usually do not actively involve themselves in their children's schooling due to their busy schedules.²⁷

There is substantial evidence to suggest that active parental participation in the education of children can make a significant difference in the educational attainment of those children.²⁸ Moreover, parents perceive active parental participation as a combination of supporting learners' academic achievement and participating in school-initiated functions. Mncube notes that the concept entails awareness of, and achievement in, schoolwork, an understanding of the interaction between parenting skills and learner success in schooling, and a commitment to consistent communication with educators about learner progress. However, Spens indicates no existence of shared responsibility between parents and schools in Kenyan rural primary schools and that schools were solely responsible for learners' education.²⁹ Echaune is of the view that primary schools in Teso North Sub County have continuously posted poor results in the national examinations amid claims that parents are not supportive.³⁰ The Basic Education Act of Kenya was enacted requiring the school Boards of Management to assess school needs with full participation of parents.³¹ Belfield and Levin argue that parent-family-community involvement is key to addressing the school dropout crisis and note that strong school-family-community partnerships foster higher educational aspirations and more motivated learners.³²

²² Li, Xuefeng, Han Yang, Hui Wang, and Jin Jia. "Family socioeconomic status and home-based parental involvement: A mediation analysis of parental attitudes and expectations." *Children and Youth Services Review* 116 (2020): 105111.

²³ Department of Education, 2001.

²⁴ William H Jeynes, "The Effects of Parental Involvement on the Academic Achievement of African American Youth," *The Journal of Negro Education*, 2005, 260-74.

²⁵ Republic of South Africa (RSA), *South African School Act, Act No 84 of 1996*, 1996.

²⁶ Narvaez, Maria G. "Latinx Parent and Family Engagement within the Bilingual Community: Inviting la Loca to Inform the Ignorant Systems." (2023).

²⁷ Kraft, Matthew A., and Shaun M. Dougherty. "The effect of teacher-family communication on student engagement: Evidence from a randomized field experiment." *Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness* 6, no. 3 (2013): 199-222.

²⁸ Vusi Mncube, "Parental Involvement in School Activities in South Africa to the Mutual Benefit of the School and the Community," *Education as Change* 14, no. 2 (December 2010): 233-46, <https://doi.org/10.1080/16823206.2010.522061>.

²⁹ Kari Spens, "'I Buy Paraffin So He Can Read in the Evening'--A Study from Kenya about Parental Involvement in School.," *International Journal About Parents in Education* 5, no. 1 (2011).

³⁰ M. Echaune, "Parental Involvement in Education and Primary School Academic Performance in Kenya" (MasindeMuliro University of Science and Technology, 2014).

³¹ Republic of Kenya. "Kenya Education Sector Support Programme 2005-2010." (2005).

³² Clive R. Belfield and Henry M. Levin, *The Price We Pay: Economic and Social Consequences of Inadequate Education* (Brookings Institution Press, 2007).

One of the most important things that parents can do is to support the goals and the process of education in that school. Becoming involved at school has important effects not just for students but for all members of the family. Parents develop more positive attitudes toward the school, become more active in community affairs, develop increased self-confidence, and enroll in other educational programs.³³ In Namibia, Trewby in Siririka found that parents with limited or no education may have the will to help their children but are constrained because they are convinced that they are incapacitated by their limited school education to help their children with their learning.³⁴

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model is of relevance to the study, in particular its interpretation of the critical and continuous role that families play. It lays the foundation for understanding and promoting cooperation and collaboration between the most important systems in children's lives. The ecological systems theory represents the family as a system, nested in several other societal systems and helps to explain the effect the school-family relationship can have on children's learning and development. This model helps to understand the complexity of the family as a system and how the individual child functions within both that family and wider society.

With reference to the microsystem, families should be included in all aspects of their children's schooling, including decision-making, governance and advocacy. In turn, schools should work with families to establish school-level policies that promote parental participation. The macrosystem encompasses the attitudes, beliefs, values and ideologies inherent in the systems of a particular society and culture which may have an impact or be influenced by any of the above systems.³⁵ Examples of values and beliefs could include democracy, social justice and *ubuntu*, and it is within this sphere that family collaboration becomes a matter of multi-cultural engagement. "Decisions by a SGB might directly affect the school curriculum, or contradict family values and beliefs, resulting in withdrawal of any support a family might have considered giving to the school."³⁶ If teachers and families are to work together, there is a need for a holistic approach, that is one that sees all stakeholders assisting in the creation of an environment that is conducive to learning and teaching, and geared to improving the quality of education.³⁷

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative mode of inquiry with a case study as a research design was adopted. One advantage of qualitative studies is that they offer opportunities for the exploration of and deeper understanding of the phenomenon and views or beliefs of participants.³⁸ A purposeful sampling technique was employed. The data was analysed according to themes which were generated from the findings. Research sites for data collection were three Junior Secondary Schools in the OR Tambo Coastal District in the Eastern Cape Province. From each school, one Principal, one Head of Department (HoD) and three parents were individually interviewed. A total of nine parents and six SMT members were interviewed which culminated in a total of 15 participants.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

It emerged that there was a large gender disparity among participants. Of the fifteen (15) participants, only two (2) were males while the rest were females. This section commences by presenting SMTs' justification of parental involvement in schools followed by ways through which the SMT could promote parental involvement in school activities. For anonymity, PrSA refers to the principal of school A, HoDSB refers to the Head of Department of school B while P3SC refers to the third parent interviewed at school C. Three themes were generated, namely: views on parental involvement, interpretations of parental involvement and demotivators of parental involvement.

³³ Sarah Schlegel, "Mind in the Making: The Seven Essential Life Skills Every Child Needs," *Journal of Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics* 32, no. 5 (June 2011): 401, <https://doi.org/10.1097/DBP.0b013e31821f8d89>.

³⁴ Gisela Siririka, "An Investigation of Parental Involvement in the Development of Their Children's Literacy in a Rural Namibian School" (Rhodes University Grahamstown, 2007).

³⁵ Urie Bronfenbrenner and Pamela Morris, "The Ecology of Development Process," in *Handbook of Child Psychology*, ed. R.M. Lerner, vol. 1 (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 2006).

³⁶ Rollande Deslandes, "Designing and Implementing School, Family, and Community Collaboration Programs in Quebec, Canada.," *School Community Journal* 16, no. 1 (2006): 81-106.

³⁷ Maria Mavis Raborife, *School-Family Collaboration: A Case Study in an Informal Settlement in Rustenburg* (University of Johannesburg, South Africa, 2011).

³⁸ Kobus Maree, *First Steps in Research* (Van Schaik Publishers, 2007).

Views on Parental Involvement

This theme had two sub-themes.

Justification for Parental Involvement in Schools

Participants presented various responses to justify why parents were to work with schools. Such responses included that *“Parents are the owners of the school”* (PrSB); *“Parents can help a lot in driving children to school”* (HoDSC). PrSA also said, *“It helps everybody to know that it is important to contribute to the school”*, whereas HoDSB indicated, *“They bring their opinions, views and ideas from various backgrounds.”* Another SMT acknowledged the necessity of parental involvement in school by saying, *“...they assist teachers in disciplining their children”* (HoDSA), while PrSC uttered, *“Parents are responsible for paying the school fees and buying uniforms.”* Overall, participants’ responses showed the same feeling that working collaboratively with parents was necessary for realistic school and learner development.

SMTs’ Roles in Promoting Parental Involvement in Schools

In relation to the obligations of management in promoting parental involvement in school activities, SMTs were consistent about their responsibilities, as in Fig. 4.1. PrSA said, *“As management, we need to explain to them the importance of their involvement in school.”* Similarly, PrSB indicated, *“Management has to preach to parents the importance of involving themselves in electing, supporting and strengthening SGBs.”* The HoDSA concurred saying, *“Management has a duty to involve parents from the start during planning, during school activities and also at the end when we look at problems and successes.”* The same sentiments were raised by HoDSC as indicated, *“As management, we have to welcome parents’ contributions and involve them even in curriculum matters.”*

Interpretation and Conceptions of Parental Involvement in Schools

Participants had different conceptions regarding parental involvement in schools, as shown in Fig. 4.2.

Family Involvement and Involvement Time

Involvement time emerged as central to enhancing the role of the SMTs in promoting parental involvement. The parents indicated that family involvement was beneficial to help monitor the children’s homework or ensure they study for tests before they sleep. SMTs said parents also provided school uniforms for their children. *“Every time I see a need to be involved in my child’s education. I’m responsible for collecting progress reports for my child”* (P2SA). P1SC agreed by saying, *“I must be involved every time because I’m responsible for my child’s needs.”* P3SC further cemented the need for involvement when said, *“When there is need for school uniform, even progress report, I take responsibility.”* P3SB was of the strong view that *“SGB and teachers must invite parents to meetings to decide on many things.”* One SMT also agreed that parents should be involved *“In any activities happening in the school such as [checking] learner progress”* (PrSB).

Parental Motivation in Working with Schools

Participants were of the general view that parents were not interested in their children’s education. PrSB said, *“Parents are not interested in involving themselves in their children’s education”*. PrSA also agreed saying, *“In my observation, parents are not interested in supporting the schools because they did not attend parents’ meetings.”* In another school, PrSC pointed out that, *“Parents come to school only when they seek help from the school for example, filling of birth certificates forms and Identity Documents letters and also when they seek admissions for their children.”* HoDSB indicated that, *“Parents don’t value education for their children, they believe in ploughing their mealie fields for a living.”*

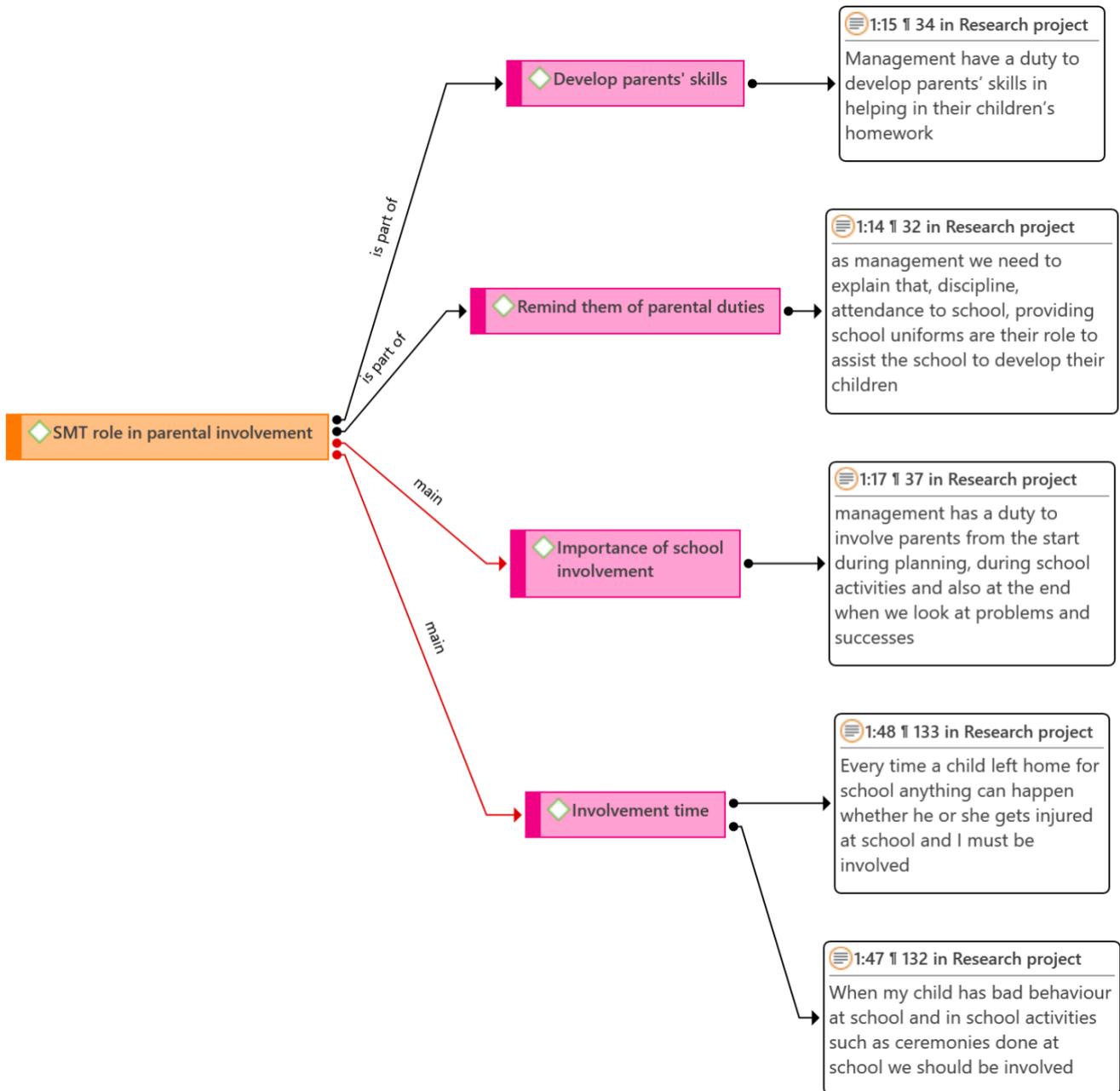


Fig 4.1: SMTs' role in promoting parental involvement in schools

Parents also justified the need for their school involvement as P1SA responded by saying, "...because I sent my child to school, teachers didn't take our children from home". P2SA indicated that "It is said that school is based in three components, that is, teacher parents and learners." P1SB pointed out that "Family involvement is beneficial to the teacher because they help monitor their children's homework. They also provide school uniforms for their children." In another site, participants had mixed feelings as P1SC responded by saying, "I regularly attend parents' meetings organised by schools", while P2SC said, "I don't take any part because I know nothing about education". Lastly, P3SC resonated, "[I participate] because I want my child to be educated because I'm illiterate."

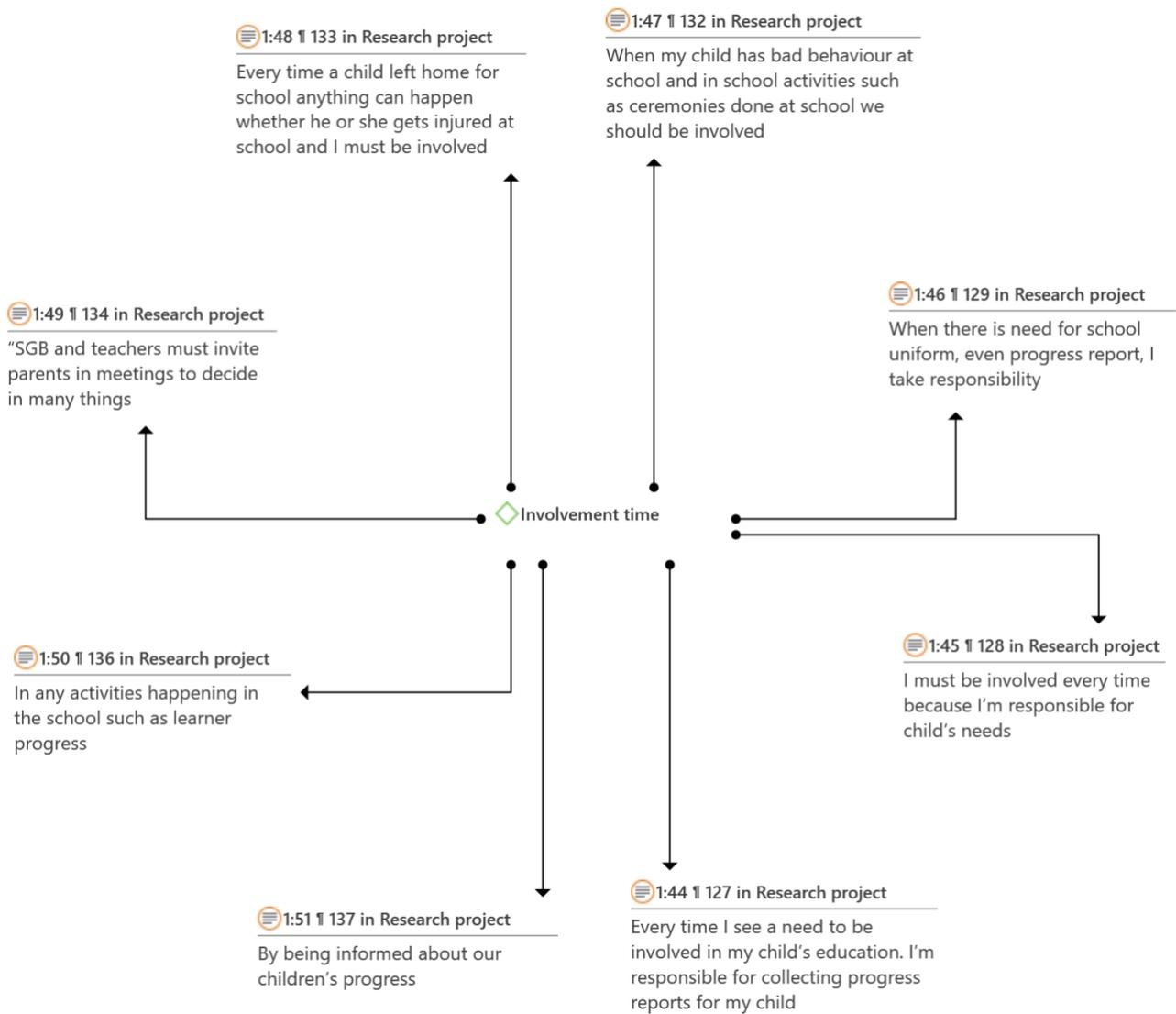


Fig 4.2: Parents' interpretation of school involvement for meaningful partnership

Demotivators of Parental Involvement

It also emerged that participants raised concerns about factors that negatively affected active parental participation in schools.

Influence of Parental Literacy on School Involvement

SMTs and parents' responses were nearly consistent, one being that "When parents are illiterate, it is difficult for them to assist their children in their homework" (PrSC). HoDSA reiterated, "Mostly, parents don't understand English in order to help their children with school homework". Similarly, one parent said, "No, I do not participate in their homework due to the fact that I'm illiterate" (P3SB). In school A all participants indicated that the literacy level of parents affected their involvement in their children's education because they could not afford to assist their children in their schoolwork, resulting in children going back to school without any assistance from parents. P2SA said, "Literacy level affects education because I can't afford to assist my child in their schoolwork." On another site, P3SB said, "It is difficult for me to assist my child with his schoolwork. I send him to my neighbours". P1SC agreed by saying "...because I am unable to assist my child, I left everything to his/her teacher". On the same issue, PrSA said, "It is difficult for them to work in areas like finance and books of the school". Sharing the same sentiments, HoDSB responded by saying, "If parents are illiterate, keeping books of the school and recording especially big monies of the financial side becomes difficult." Likewise, HoDSC said, "When parents are illiterate, they can be easily cheated by their children".

PrSB expressed the view that “It is difficult to understand policies of the Department of Education in English, they depend on the mercy of teachers to explain or interpret them”.

Socioeconomic Factors Hindering Parental Involvement

Parents were questioned on factors that discouraged their active participation in their children’s school life. Regarding such concerns, a parent at school A said, “I live far away from my child due to unemployment, so they have to go and stay with another person because I have no money to raise them” (P1SA). Another parent said, “The English language is not easy” (P2SA). At the same school, another parent pointed out that, “Due to the work I did at home in order for them to eat after school” (P3SA). In school B participants agreed saying that the high rate of unemployment, language difficulties, and some of the subjects that were introduced in schools were new to them and they had no time to go to school when they were needed. In school C they said they had no time because they were busy at home ploughing for a living because they were unemployed.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

It emerged from the interviews with SMT members that, the literacy level of level parents was low. All participants indicated the same idea that if parents are illiterate, it becomes difficult for them to understand the policies of the department. Instead, they depend on the mercy of teachers to explain or interpret them and in dealing with their children’s work. Nicholas-Omoregbe is of the view that the educational level of parents is a powerful factor that influences children’s academic performance.³⁹ Literacy levels of parents may be a problem, but even if they cannot read or write, parents can still assist their children. Their interest and motivation can have a positive effect on the standard of their children's work.

Parents do not have to understand English to assist children in their schoolwork. The Education White Paper 6 (EWP6) legislation suggests that the non-involvement and non-recognition of parents is a barrier to learning and quality of education.⁴⁰ For instance, Smith found communication and language to be among the barriers to parental involvement.⁴¹ Parents’ educational level is significantly associated with learners’ academic achievement because parents with higher educational levels can contribute to children’s education by being more involved in their schoolwork at home.⁴² SMT members play a big role in involving parents in their children’s education. They must develop parents’ skills and explain to them that discipline, regular attendance to school and providing for school uniforms are their roles to assist the school in developing their children. For instance, school A participants stated that parents were interested in involving themselves in their children’s education such as involving themselves in SGBs, buying school uniforms and assisting in the physical development of the buildings.

Involving parents in their children’s education not only increases the child’s achievement but also helps parents to understand their children and teachers better.⁴³ The following are the benefits of parental involvement. Some researchers have posited that parental involvement in young children’s education can promote infants’ social-emotional development;⁴⁴ improve learner performance achievement;⁴⁵ promote better grades, test

³⁹ Olanike S Nicholas-Omoregbe, “The Effect of Parental Education Attainment on School Outcomes,” *IFE Psychologia: An International Journal* 18, no. 1 (2010): 176–82.

⁴⁰ Department of Basic Education, 2001.

⁴¹ Julia Smith, “Teachers’ Perspectives on Communication and Parent Engagement in Early Childhood Education Programs for Migrant Farmworker Children,” *Journal of Early Childhood Research* 18, no. 2 (June 30, 2020): 115–29, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1476718X19898712>.

⁴² Yingqi Wang, “A Trend Study of the Influences of Parental Expectation, Parental Involvement, and Self-Efficacy on the English Academic Achievement of Chinese Eighth Graders,” *International Education* 44, no. 2 (2015): 45.

⁴³ Elyna Nevski and Andra Siibak, “The Role of Parents and Parental Mediation on 0–3-Year Olds’ Digital Play with Smart Devices: Estonian Parents’ Attitudes and Practices,” *Early Years* 36, no. 3 (July 2, 2016): 227–41, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09575146.2016.1161601>; Roberta Pineda et al., “Parent Participation in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit: Predictors and Relationships to Neurobehavior and Developmental Outcomes,” *Early Human Development* 117 (February 2018): 32–38, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.earlhumdev.2017.12.008>.

⁴⁴ Monica Hedenbro and Per-Anders Rydellius, “Children’s Abilities to Communicate with Both Parents in Infancy Were Related to Their Social Competence at the Age of 15,” *Acta Paediatrica* 108, no. 1 (January 29, 2019): 118–23, <https://doi.org/10.1111/apa.14430>.

⁴⁵ Epstein, “Attainable Goals? The Spirit and Letter of the No Child Left Behind Act on Parental Involvement”; Midori Otani, “Relationships between Parental Involvement and Adolescents’ Academic Achievement and Aspiration,” *International Journal of Educational Research* 94 (2019): 168–82, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2019.01.005>; Jaime Puccioni, “Parental Beliefs About School Readiness, Home and School-Based Involvement, and Children’s Academic Achievement,” *Journal of Research in Childhood Education* 32, no. 4 (October 2, 2018): 435–54, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02568543.2018.1494065>.

scores, and school attendance,⁴⁶ help learners have better performance and motivate them;⁴⁷ offer opportunities for parents and teachers to create mutual respect and understanding (e.g., attending school meetings, supporting school events, talking to teachers or volunteering at the school);⁴⁸ help parents and teachers build a good relationship so that parents can have a better understanding of the teacher's job and school curriculum;⁴⁹ and help teachers acquire a better understanding of families' cultures and diversity, and form deeper respect for parents' abilities and time.

All participants stated that parental interest affects their involvement in their children's education. Schools have to communicate with parents, but more often parents are not available. Some schools indicated a lack of parental interest. Parents do not value education for their children, they believe in ploughing their mealie fields for a living. It was discovered from the interviews that parents should be encouraged from all backgrounds to contribute to the life of a community by offering their time for school involvement. The community environment affects parental involvement because these schools are located in rural areas and most participants are illiterate. It emerged from the findings that the parents are involved in the governance, teaching and learning in schools but both schools and parents are not clear on how and where to involve parents so both of them need to be workshopped about parental involvement. The SASA mandates the establishment of school governing bodies in all schools in the country in order to ensure that parents, teachers, non-teaching staff and community members will actively participate in the governance and management of their schools with their view to provide better teaching and learning.⁵⁰

Parents indicated that family involvement is beneficial to the educators because they help monitor their children's homework although in school B one participant said she did not participate in her child's education because she is illiterate. Some of the participants believed that family involvement is beneficial to educators because children came from homes. Some of the participants indicated that they are involved in their children's education by helping them with schoolwork although they experienced some difficulties. Some parents posed some difficulties which they faced in taking part in their children's school activities saying that their homework was too difficult for them and they were illiterate. Parent-teacher meetings are useful tools for teachers and parents to communicate with each other. In such meetings, both teachers and parents can share their ideas and concerns about the children while setting goals for their children's development. Based on the information from such meetings, parents can gain a better image of the schoolwork, and teachers can have a better understanding of learners' complex cultural backgrounds, needs, and interests.⁵¹

Some parents posed limited understanding of their roles and preferred to leave everything to educators. Such parents find themselves not knowing what to do or what should be their contribution. All participants indicated that the literacy level of parents affects education because they cannot manage to assist their children in their schoolwork, and they would go back to school without any assistance from their parents. Some parents said they did not want to interfere in the education system; they were illiterate and thus left everything to the teachers. Spens also indicated no shared responsibility between parents and schools in Kenyan rural primary schools and that schools were solely responsible for learners' education and there was hardly any relationship between parental involvement and learners' academic performance.⁵² Parents were living far away from their children due to unemployment, so children had to go and live with a relative or family member. Time and finance are also factors that hinder their involvement. Language issues, where the medium of instruction at the school is different from the home language also can be a barrier.⁵³ The participants need to be offered relevant orientation and training related to their children's education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that the literacy levels of parents or guardians should not be used as a predictor for parental involvement. Instead, parents should be involved and motivated to participate in their children's

⁴⁶ Epstein, "Attainable Goals? The Spirit and Letter of the No Child Left Behind Act on Parental Involvement."

⁴⁷ Gintautas Silinskas and Eve Kikas, "Parental Involvement in Math Homework: Links to Children's Performance and Motivation," *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research* 63, no. 1 (January 2, 2019): 17-37, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00313831.2017.1324901>.

⁴⁸ Lourdes Mata, Isaura Pedro, and Francisco J Peixotoa, "Parental Support, Student Motivational Orientation and Achievement: The Impact of Emotions," 2018.

⁴⁹ Epstein, "Attainable Goals? The Spirit and Letter of the No Child Left Behind Act on Parental Involvement"; Amelia N Owen, "Forming Collaborative Parent-Teacher Relationships to Increase Parental Involvement," 2016.

⁵⁰ Republic of South Africa (RSA), *South African School Act, Act No 84 of 1996*.

⁵¹ Xuefeng Li et al., "Family Socioeconomic Status and Home-Based Parental Involvement: A Mediation Analysis of Parental Attitudes and Expectations," *Children and Youth Services Review* 116 (September 2020): 105111, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chilyouth.2020.105111>.

⁵² Spens, "I Buy Paraffin So He Can Read in the Evening"--A Study from Kenya about Parental Involvement in School."

⁵³ Lemmer and van Wyk, "Schools Reaching out: Comprehensive Parent Involvement in South African Primary Schools."

education for effective learning and success. Also, schools should be motivated to develop parent's skills in curriculum matters. It is the Principal's role to create a school climate conducive for parental involvement. SMT members should be knowledgeable about SGB functions so that they can work in collaboration to uplift learners and schools. The South African government must take major action to prepare people for change if they want this to happen. Therefore, both parents and schools should embrace change and be ready to understand where and how the involvement is supposed to take place. When the climate is conducive, the direct result is an interaction and willingness to participate. This transformation requires stakeholder alliance. Change is an inevitable, continuous part of life. Thus, parents should be kept motivated by the schools and be made aware that it is their responsibility to work with teachers and inform each other of the learners' progress. The schools should involve parents in governance, teaching and learning. There should be training of SGB members so that they are informed of their duties and responsibilities. Parents must be valued at school and must assist in the supervision of necessary individualised work programmes developed by schools, as well as with the general management of school resources. Lastly, it is important to develop partnerships between schools and homes, and they should be active partners in fashioning the education system. Parents should be informed about their children's performance while school governors need to be familiar with legislation mandating their obligations. As such, stakeholders should jointly work and take decisive action toward promoting school, learner and home partnerships.

CONCLUSION

This study sought to analyse SMTs and parents' views on and interpretations of parental school involvement. The study revealed that most parents understood that children needed to attend school. However, they did not know what involvement was and what activities took place in schools. The study also revealed that parental involvement is a complex phenomenon. There was no or limited partnership between schools and parents as very few parents were involved in school activities. Also, most parents were illiterate. This reality demotivated them from participating in school activities. SMTs were left alone to deal with learners, which placed additional strain on teachers and school management. The lack of parental involvement in their children's education contributed to learners' poor performance as there was no strong bond and support between homes and schools. Rather, the two seemed to be isolated, independent entities. This confronts efforts to promote joint educational management between home environments and school settings. There is a need for stakeholders to create intervention programs to enhance active parental participation in schools so ensure the holistic development of learners which will lead to societal growth and development.

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