



Educators' perspective on parental involvement in homework at a rural primary school in Palala



Authors:

Hlongolane A. Seleka¹ 
Charles S. Masoabi² 

Affiliations:

¹Department of Postgraduate Studies, Faculty of Humanities, Central University of Technology, Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa

²Department of Mathematics, Science and Technology Education, Faculty of Humanities, Central University of Technology, Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa

Corresponding author:

Charles Masoabi,
cmasoabi@cut.ac.za

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Background: Educators have a very important job of moulding learners' lives. However, they cannot do it alone, they need assistance from parents. Every child is different and learns differently and most of the information a child receives comes from their parents.

Aim: The article seeks to find ways to help educators to work closely with parents to support their children in their academics for better achievement. This study forms part of a master's project; however, this article focuses on educators' perceptions of parental involvement towards learners' academic work at a rural primary school.

Setting: The research was conducted at a rural primary school in the Palala circuit located in Limpopo.

Methods: This study was approached by means of a phenomenological research design. Phenomenology seeks to comprehend the phenomena from those who live in the setting under study. The article used questionnaires to collect the data, and convenient sampling was employed. For this research we interviewed Grade 6 and 7 educators.

Results: It was found that most educators are concerned with the lack of parental involvement in learners' academic work.

Conclusion: The article recommends that illiterate parents be brought closer to the teachers and be assisted on how they could be actively involved in their children's schoolwork. The school staff, including educators, need to be workshopped on how to address parents equally and with respect, to feel welcome.

Contribution: This article therefore seeks to promote awareness and devise ways to enhance rural parental involvement in children's schoolwork and school life.

Keywords: educators' perspectives; parental involvement; parental literacy; parent-teacher relationship; rural primary schools; rurality; socio-economic; theory of planned behaviour.

Introduction

Teachers play a crucial role in the process of developing learners' academic excellence and success, as well as overall deportment. With this mammoth task of teachers to build lives, educators are often overwhelmed because of a lack of parental involvement in rural schools. Educators take on the tasks alone with a lack of support from the parents (Durisic & Bunijevac 2017).

However, educators sometimes do contribute little to insufficient parental involvement by being intimidating and unwelcoming towards parents (Baker et al. 2016) who are not educated or well-off. However, some parents do not participate, because they do not see the need, as their inputs are not taken into consideration by schools (Baker et al. 2016). According to Khumalo and Mji (2014), parental involvement boosts learners' morale towards their school endeavours. However, in cases where parents in rural areas are uneducated or without formal education, or even unemployed, this support is limited. Msila (2012) adds that a lack of parental involvement in South African rural schools is exacerbated by various factors such as poverty and limited basic social services, including accessibility of schools from other residential areas.

The aforementioned deficiencies in rural communities do not exclude learners from bearing the brunt of these strenuous circumstances, resulting in behavioural problems as a reflection of learners' frustrations regarding schooling (Deater-Deckard Petrill & Thompson 2007). It could

therefore be deduced that the lack of parental involvement towards their children's academic work affects learners at school negatively. Therefore, enhanced parental involvement is a necessity for a conducive learning environment in rural schools.

Furthermore, enhanced parental involvement would assist in alleviating strains on educators caused by overwork and dedicate more time to learner behavioural correction before dwelling on teaching and learning in the classroom (Deater-Deckard et al. 2007; Mafumbate & Mkhatjwa 2020). The South African government, through the introduction of the *South African Schools Act [SASA] of 1996* (RSA 1996) tried to enhance parental involvement in schools (Singh, Mbokodi & Msila 2004) to improve learners' academic performance. Educators therefore need to encourage parents to work alongside in helping learners to perform well in their academics and uphold acceptable deportment. The academic success of learners requires a mutual commitment from both parents and teachers (Singh et al. 2004).

Research conducted by Whitaker and Hoover-Dempsey (2013) found that in order for educators and parents to build a strong relationship, there should be workshops for all parties to be trained to work together. Myende and Nhlumayo (2022) add that parents in rural South African areas believe that schools should initiate ways of empowering them to be more participative in schools and in their children's education.

Although this commitment may pose a time challenge to both parties, it is quite important to strive for a common goal of assisting learners to flourish in their academic work (Moneva, Villaro & Malbas 2020). These studies indicate that children with involved parents have high self-esteem, whereas those with parents who are not involved have low self-esteem (Moneva et al. 2020), which have an impact on learners' academic performance. Parents may not be aware that their involvement helps their children to reach their full potential at school but we as educators can see the difference parents' role can make in the academic achievement of learners.

When parents assist their children, teachers frequently notice a difference in behaviour and academic performance. Therefore, when parents are interested in their children's education and provide them with the necessary encouragement, learners frequently succeed academically at all grade levels and grow to have strong self-esteem (Moneva et al. 2020). While it is well-established that absenteeism is lower when parents are actively involved, children's perspectives about themselves and life in general also change for the better (Myende & Nhlumayo 2022).

When dealing with a challenging learner and having tried every other option, instructors always turn to the learner's parents as a last resort. There are ample data demonstrating the value of schools and parents working together to enhance learners' learning, and parental engagement can be a potent

lever for increasing achievement in schools. Parents should be given more direct access to their children's education, rather than just being involved in the school's activities. The co-researchers as teachers also have repeatedly discovered that the majority of these learners' parents do not communicate with the school to solve their children's issues.

Problem statement

Haines (2012) posits that rural schools in South Africa face a challenge of a lack of resources, basic services, infrastructure, being geographically isolated and rendering services to mostly impoverished communities because of a lack of employment opportunities. These factors add to the lack of parental involvement in their children's day-to-day educational needs, leading to poor academic performance and poor school attendance (Msila 2012). Moreover, teachers at rural schools are also affected negatively by these daunting conditions and are prone to burnout because of distress and demotivation (Du Plessis & Mestry 2019), causing neglect to involve parents and the community in the running of the schools. Venter (2013) further adds that parental involvement at most rural schools is directed towards serving meals to learners and perhaps security around school premises, ignoring leadership and governance responsibilities that the *South African Schools Act* (RSA 1996) expects of parents. The findings of Mathekga (2016) indicate that teachers at rural schools perceive the involvement of parents in their children's education as inadequate. However, Myende and Nhlumayo (2022) have found that parents also believe that it is the schools' responsibility to educate and enlighten them regarding assisting their children with homework, as well as going via the traditional leaders in the region to encourage parental involvement in schools. At the school where this research was conducted, the principal's concern was a lack of parental involvement in their children's education, boiling down to low academic achievement among learners and high absenteeism. Griffin and Galassi (2010) argue that parental involvement has a positive influence towards learners' academic performance and general deportment at school. Educators seem to face numerous challenges in schools. These are not limited to disobedience, bullying, below-average performance and low self-esteem. In some cases, educators are bullied by learners, either physically or emotionally, which creates a toxic work environment for teachers. This is a result of a hostile environment at some learners' homes. Parents fail to recognise the fact that the homes they create for their children do affect educators in a way. Hence, the existence of the parent-teacher relationships is very important.

The context of rurality in South Africa

The rural phenomenon in South Africa is defined from a plethora of lenses, including a lack of, or no access to social services, socio-economic development structures, demographically poor black South Africans, low-quality educational status and infrastructure for elementary services

(Myende & Nhlumayo 2022) to mention but a few. Seroto (2012) defines rural context as being in an isolated geographical location or a long distance from urban areas such as cities, where there is a lack of proper infrastructure for societal well-being and economic advancement. Hlalele (2012) views rurality from a perspective of livelihood, how these communities derive their way of survival and run their societal affairs with minimal possibilities for agricultural advancement or growth into economic markets. Gardiner (2008) is of the opinion that the rural phenomenon within the South African context is complex, as it carries the apartheid legacy that drove black communities into mountainous and inaccessible homelands with a lack of developmental resources.

Therefore, it could be deduced from the aforesaid that rurality encompasses a plethora of negativity and lacks in most perspectives used to define the context. Rurality focusing on schools is defined as unsatisfactory school infrastructure, a lack of proper educational resources and schools settling for unqualified teachers (Ahmed, Rönkä & Perälä-Littunen 2022), as qualified teachers shy away from these rural places.

Parental involvement

Parental involvement could be regarded as the participation of parents and societies within the surrounding areas in the life of the school for the betterment of children's education. Myende and Nhlumayo (2022) denote that parents should be encouraged to become involved in various levels of running the schools and ensuring that learning continues at home as well. This way, learners will be more committed to their studies, thereby encouraging teachers to apply themselves more to facilitate the achievement of their learners' educational goals. Haines (2012) further adds that because of the socio-economic status of most parents in rural areas, taking part in school life may be a challenge as a result of an inferiority complex. Therefore, schools need to create a welcoming environment to get these parents to participate. However, Isaacs (2020) expounds on this by enlisting the typology for parental involvement in a child's school life as 'parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making and collaboration'. The explanation of these aspects could then be contextualised within the school life of a child, as this article is focused on parental involvement in his or her child or children's education (Haines 2012).

Xaba (2015) views the concept of parental involvement as an overarching intertwinement and interwoven unity among the school, parents, the community and the children for promoting a conducive educational environment in schools.

Parental involvement in homework

Deriving from the Department of Basic Education (DBE 2012), homework in the South African context could include development tasks to build learners' understanding of the content, preparation tasks for formal assessment and projects

that may be for formal assessment purposes. Chophel and Choeda (2021) describe homework as tasks given to learners by teachers to do at home with the expectation of parental involvement to enhance comprehension and confidence of the child on the schoolwork. Therefore, for parents to be involved in their children's homework they need to be literate, have time to assist or passion to work with their children. According to Walker et al. (2004) parental involvement in homework requires constant communication with the teacher about the child's progress, provides a conducive environment allowing psychological and emotional harmony to work together. Walker et al. (2004) further encourages a parent to create democratic and interactive sessions and learn how to help the child derive his or her own understanding and interpretation of the content. Thus, parent's involvement in a child's homework could enlighten the parent on a child's academic successes and challenges for applauding or improved assistance. Tam and Chan (2009) assert that parental involvement in primary school homework is fundamental to the Chinese community to enhance learning.

Theoretical framework

According to Epstein's framework of 'overlapping spheres of influence', parental involvement at schools takes place in three contexts: family, community and school, with the child at the centre of it all (Haines 2012; Newman et al. 2019). Epstein and Sheldon (2006) contend that a school, family and community partnership has more potential for connectedness, which could influence children positively at schools, at home and within the society at large. According to Harris (2019), Epstein's framework on parental involvement stipulates six aspects of typology of involvement as parenting, communication, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making and collaborating with the community. These pillars enhance a shared responsibility among all the stakeholders for the successful implementation of teaching and learning processes at various contexts. The cohesion thereof assists children to take their education seriously (Epstein 2005).

Parental involvement and parenting constitute helping parents to nurture rearing skills at various stages of a child's life. These also assist parents to observe the maturity of their children towards their schoolwork to provide a conducive environment and support suitable for learning (Carño et al. 2016; Patton 2019), while parental involvement and communication entail differentiated and effective ways of disseminating information among the stakeholders for the proper running of children's education at school, at home and within the community (Carño et al. 2016). Communication also includes the employment of various technological platforms such as WhatsApp and short message services (SMSs) in facilitating accessibility of information between the school and the parents (Patton 2019). Parental involvement and volunteering encompass the recruitment of stakeholders to support school programmes, activities and initiatives to enhance learning and partnership (Carño et al. 2016; Newman et al. 2019; Patton 2019). Parental involvement and community

participation in a school's extra-curricular activities bring about unity and build children's confidence to reach their full potential in their schoolwork (Salac & Florida 2022).

Parental involvement and learning at home involve assisting and motivating parents to create a conducive learning environment at home to assist learners to do their homework effectively, as well as monitoring and conversing with their children about schoolwork (Caño et al. 2016; Harris 2019). Research has shown that this partnership between the school and home fosters positive academic performance and the deportment of learners in general (Newman et al. 2019). Parental involvement and decision-making encourage participation of parents and the community in the school governance and leadership to help improve educational resources at schools (Lemmer & Van Wyk 2004). Collaborating suggests the coordination and access of resources and services that the community may render to the school (Epstein 2005; Haines 2012; Lemmer & Van Wyk 2004; Newman et al. 2019).

For the purpose of this article, the researcher focused only on the 'learning at home' aspect of the Epstein's parental involvement framework. Five questions relating to this aspect of 'learning at home' were asked to teachers using a questionnaire according to a five-point Likert scale, ranging from *Strongly Agree*, *Agree*, *Uncertain*, *Disagree* and *Strongly Disagree*.

Research methods and design

This research was conducted to measure and get educators' views on parental involvement within a specific school. This consisted of 10 Grade 7 and 6 educators from a rural primary school within the Palala Circuit in Limpopo province. Although this research included both quantitative and qualitative data, interpretation and analysis were qualitatively inclined, as the study was performed in a natural setting to comprehend the participants' experiences (Hancock, Windridge & Ockleford 2007). The research was guided by an interpretivism paradigm, meaning that the researchers are of the view that knowledge is socially created (Omodan 2022; Rehman & Alharthi 2016). There are various ways of determining the truth about a given phenomenon through the use of a bricolage of methods (Leavy 2014). This phenomenological research sought to comprehend the experiences of rural primary school teachers pertaining to parental involvement at their school (Creswell 2009; Creswell & Creswell 2018). A questionnaire was administered to the schoolteachers, followed up by interviews to get an in-depth understanding of their views regarding parental involvement phenomena (Creswell & Creswell 2018; Spencer, Pryce & Walsh 2014).

Ethical considerations

The following were obtained prior to the research: an ethical clearance certificate number HREIC 26/21/04 ST; an M.Ed. issued by the Faculty of Humanities Research and Innovation Committee at the university. Furthermore, permission was

obtained from the District Director, Department of Education Waterberg District committee responsible for granting permission, provincial or district Department of Education. The researcher handed in the letter requesting access to the school from the school principal and the school governing body. The researcher also submitted the consent letters for the principal, the governing body as custodians of the school and to the participants as well. The study maintained the anonymity of participants, and participation in the study was on a voluntary basis so that participants could retract their involvement at any stage (Traianou 2014).

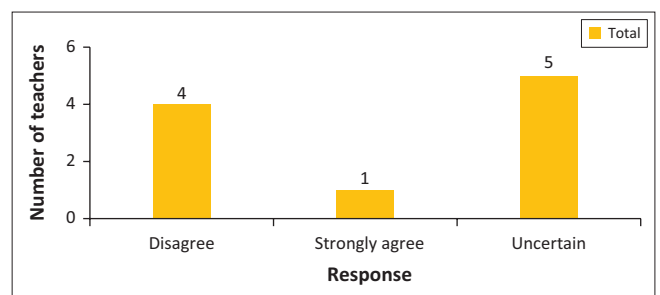
Limitations

The study's findings cannot be generalised for other similar phenomena of rural primary schools, as it was only carried out at one rural primary school. However, the findings thereof may be of assistance to the enhancement of parental involvement within the local school system.

Data from quantitative questions

Responses of the educators on the five questions are displayed in charts discussed further in the text, showing the count per response.

The chart in Figure 1 displays the responses of teachers' observations and experiences concerning the consistency of learners doing their homework. Only one (10%) of the teachers indicated that learners in his or her classes consistently did their homework. However, most colleagues ($n = 4$; 40%) disagreed about the notion of learners being consistent with their homework, while 5 (50%) of the teachers tended to be uncertain regarding learners' consistency in doing homework. It could therefore be understood from Figure 1 that in the majority of cases, learners do not do their homework. Uncertainty was also regarded as disagreement, because it is expected of a teacher to know how learners perform in his or her classes. Uncertainty is therefore seen as modesty in disclosing the situation. Khumalo and Mji (2014) are of the opinion that it is highly unlikely to expect parental involvement from uneducated parents because they may not comprehend the work that their children have to do for homework. Hence, the teachers contend that learners' homework is inconsistent in their classes.



Note: This figure represents the count of Q12 teachers regarding learners that do homework consistently.
Q, question.

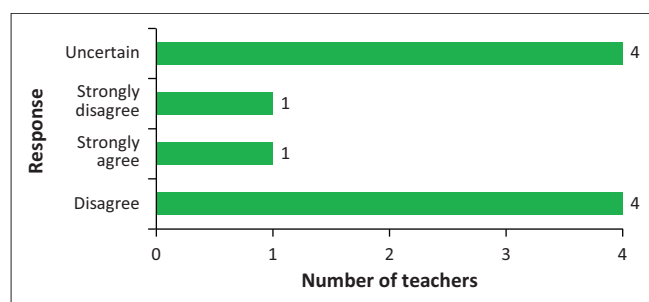
FIGURE 1: Homework consistency.

The chart in Figure 2 displays data on teachers' observations regarding whether parents are actively involved in helping their children with homework. The majority (40%) of teachers disagreed, one (10%) strongly disagreed and four (40%) were uncertain. Only one (10%) of the teachers at the school seems to be getting a positive feedback from his or her learners. Similar to Figure 1, Figure 2 also reveals consensus among the majority of the Grades 6-7 educators that parents at their school are not actively involved with their children's homework. In their findings, Khumalo and Mji (2014) confirm that the teachers at the rural school where their study was carried out, identified a lack of parental support towards their children's homework.

The pie chart in Figure 3 seeks to understand teachers' evaluation concerning the comprehension of learners on the work they were given to do as homework. Two teachers (20%) agreed that their learners did show an understanding of the work performed as homework, while four teachers (40%) disagreed and four (40%) were uncertain. It can therefore be deduced that eight (80%) of the teachers had observed learners to be lacking any comprehension of work done as homework. Therefore, if learners did not understand a teacher's explanation in class, it was difficult for them to acquire clarity on the content from parents.

The chart in Figure 4 seeks to understand if educators find their learners to come with broader or expanded knowledge on their homework as a reflection that parents take time to enlighten their children on aspects of their homework. Only two (20%) of the teachers agreed that their learners indicated that their parents took time to assist them with homework. However, four teachers (40%) disagreed, one teacher (10%) strongly disagrees and three (30%) were uncertain that parents took time to assist their children with homework.

The educators' responses to the fifth question on the reflection of parental involvement on learners' homework in Figure 5 seem to follow a similar trend than previous responses. Two (20%) of the teachers still agreed that learners in their classes reflected signs that their parents were involved with homework, while five (50%) were uncertain, two (20%) disagreed and one (10%) strongly disagreed that parents were involved with their children's homework. Table 1 displays the summary of the quantitative data from the 10 school teachers.



Note: This Figure represents the count of Q13 parents that helps with homework. Q, question.

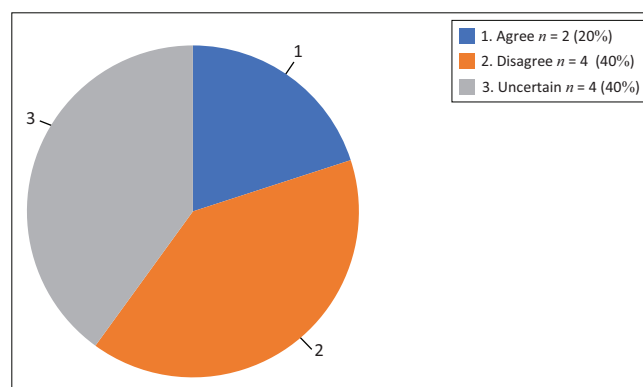
FIGURE 2: Parents help with homework.

Data from open-ended question

Table 2 shows the responses of participants to the open-ended question.

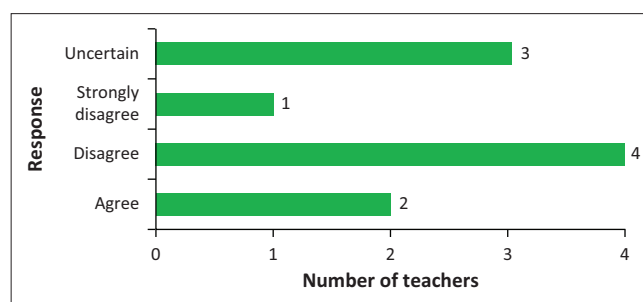
Table 2 is a list of teachers' responses to an open question of the survey relating to the aspect of 'learning at home'. Notably, these responses are brief for an open question that seeks an understanding on processes and actions followed by individual teachers to enhance parental involvement in their classes. However, several themes are identified from these responses: *communication, encouragement, contact and responsibility*.

Regarding communication, the teachers seem to be suggestive of implementing better or effective channels of



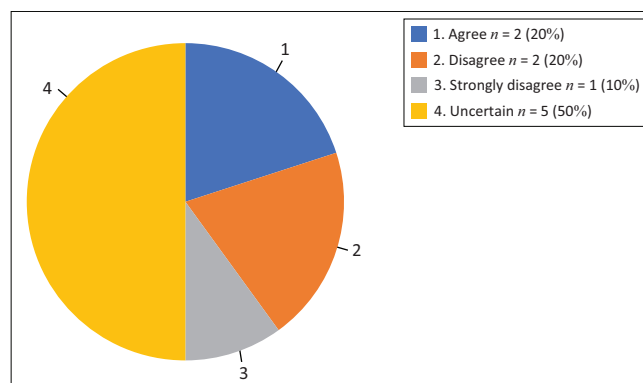
Note: The Figure represents the count of Q14 Learners that understand completed homework. Q, question.

FIGURE 3: Learners' understanding of homework.



Note: This Figure represents the count of Q15 parents that broadly explain to learners. Q, question.

FIGURE 4: Parents explanation of homework.



Note: This Figure represent the count of Q16 Homework reflect parental involvement. Q, question.

FIGURE 5: Reflection of parental assistance.

TABLE 1: Summary of quantitative data.

Categories	Q12	Q13	Q14	Q15	Q16	Total
Strongly agree	1	1	-	-	-	2
Agree	-	-	2	2	2	6
Uncertain	5	4	4	3	5	21
Disagree	4	4	4	4	2	18
Strongly disagree	-	1	-	1	1	3
Total	10	10	10	10	10	50

Q, question.

TABLE 2: How do teachers implement parental involvement?

Respondent	Response
Respondent 1	'Implementation of better communication channels.'
Respondent 2	'Encouragement to parent so they get to participate.'
Respondent 3	'Advice learners to try and encourage parents to help with schoolwork.'
Respondent 4	'Schedule meetings with parents in regard to anything relating to behaviour or academics.'
Respondent 5	'Contact parents when needed.'
Respondent 6	'Contact parents by calls to help them get involved more.'
Respondent 7	'Implementation of better communication channels.'
Respondent 8	'Encouragement to parent so they get to participate.'
Respondent 9	'Communication and encouragement to parents.'
Respondent 10	'Parents should get involved at all times.'

Note: Q50: How do you enhance parental involvement in classes you teach?

Q, question.

communication. It could therefore be interpreted that communication between teachers and parents is impaired or non-existent and needs to be revived towards enhancing parental involvement in their children's education. Thus, educators and/or parents have not initiated proper communication measures at the school, as the teachers could not elaborate on existing channels and their challenges. On the theme of encouragement, the teachers persisted on showing the need and necessity of encouraging parents to be involved at school. The teachers did not stipulate the steps of encouragement they had ever taken or perhaps suggested ways they thought might be effective to have parents on board concerning learners' education. Lastly, the shift of responsibility for encouraging parental involvement as it is now, is thrown into children's laps to encourage their parents. Some of the teachers indicated that they contact parents, when necessary, via telephonic calls or meetings. According to these teachers, parents should only be involved in their children's academic endeavours when the teacher deemed it fit to do so based on his or her needs. The other teacher excluded himself or herself from this equation, suggesting it was the parents' responsibility to get involved in their children's education. Bearing in mind the fact that the majority of parents in rural areas have undergone only primary education, with few receiving beyond secondary education, they regard teachers as having the upper hand when it comes to their children's education.

The open-ended questions did not shed much light on the phenomena. Therefore, it was followed up with face-to-face interviews with three of the teachers to gain insight into in-depth experiences and views of the teachers at the school under study. Pseudonyms have been used for the interviewees. From these interviews emanated few themes and subthemes. The themes include communication,

TABLE 3: Face-to-face interviews, ensuring parental involvement.

Participant	Response	Theme: Common practices – Subthemes
Mr. Ngwenya	'Okay, mmm I enhance parental involvement in my classes by ensuring that every home activity given to learners has questions that can be answered by assistance from parents.'	Use of homework
Ms. Pule	'The school has also scheduled a time within which parents may walk in and inquire or give information pertaining to their child, this also helps in enhancing parental involvement in my class.'	Scheduled times
Ms. Ndlovu	'I use; open communication channels that's number one, establishing open communication lines from the beginning of the school year.'	Continuous reporting

Note: The theme common practices speaks to actions and activities that teachers use to enhance parental involvement in learners' schoolwork. Question: How do you ensure parental involvement to learners' academics in your classes?

encouraging parental involvement and challenges. Under the theme of communication, subthemes such as methods of communication, frequency of communication and accessibility of parents were identified. Within the theme of encouraging parental involvement the following subthemes were generated: strategies used by teachers and strategies used by the school. Regarding the theme on challenges, there emerged the following subthemes: poverty, illiteracy, child-headed homes and teacher resolutions.

Theme: Common practices

Emanating from the Table 3 under the subtheme of 'use of homework', Mr. Ngwenya has indicated various and unique ways, which he has found to be helpful in enhancing parental involvement in learners' education. He indicated the structuring of homework in a manner that would prompt the learner to find an adult close by for assistance, even if the child lives in a child-headed household or with uneducated parents:

'I sometimes give activities which require learners' responses and parents' responses separately and that helps in improving parental involvement.' (Mr Ngwenya)

The researchers believe that this strategy has the potential of yielding tangible evidence on the extent of parental involvement in learners' academic work. Moreover, purposeful structuring of tasks to require an adult input seems to be an innovative teaching strategy. This innovative approach to involve parents comes with a vast experience in rural education.

Under the subtheme of 'scheduled times' it could be deduced that Ms. Pule who is the least experienced among her colleagues with less than 5 years of experience, is currently reliant on the school's set times for meeting with parents. The participant is therefore meeting and updating parents on learners' academic performance three times a year because meetings are scheduled at the beginning of each quarter (term):

'The parents of these struggling learners are invited to a meeting with teachers to discuss how best they could both [parent and a teacher] assist the child to learn to read.' (Ms. Pule)

Thus, it shows that the participant has not yet grown experientially to initiate creative and innovative ways of involving parents during the course of the term or to realise the need of continued parental involvement in learners' schoolwork.

However, Ms. Pule highlighted another form of getting hold of the majority of parents to discuss educational matters pertaining to the learners, such as when parents come to collect report cards of their children on a quarterly basis. This exercise assists her to be able to set up regular meetings with parents talking to them face-to-face.

Participant 3 under the subtheme of 'continuous reporting' alluded that she applies an open-door policy whether through in-person or employing other communication methods to reach out to parents or for parents to contact her. This method could make parents feel at ease and be comfortable with her and therefore open the channels of communication easily. Her approachable attitude or strategy may enhance parental involvement in their children's schoolwork:

'Then number two, provide regular updates on both academically and behaviourally, this could include sending home mark report and scheduling regular check-ins.' (Ms. Ndlovu)

Ms. Ndlovu stipulated the numerous ways she uses to enhance parental involvement in learners' education. The outstanding method involves providing regular updates on learners' achievements and behaviour for parents to follow up on, where necessary, as well as encouraging parents to volunteer in school activities to improve their sense of belonging within the school community.

She further highlighted the issue of celebrating her learners' achievements in class and informing parents of such achievements:

'The last one is celebrating achievements, recognise and celebrate learners' achievements in classroom and at home, this could involve sending books home with the kids.' (Ms. Ndlovu)

It could also be deduced that when parents see such gestures regularly, they may be encouraged to be more involved in their children's academic work. They also develop more interest towards hearing from the teacher regarding how they could improve their participation in learners' schoolwork. Parental interest would also encourage learners to improve and work harder to impress their parents and the teacher, therefore yielding good results for the school.

Discussion

This study focused on educators' perceptions on parental involvement towards learners' academic work at a rural primary school. Regarding the learners' consistency in doing their homework, the majority of the teachers concurred that the learners are inconsistent with their homework, revealing that most parents were not actively involved with their children's homework. Khumalo and Mji (2014) also concur that at rural schools it is highly likely to experience low

parental involvement towards learners' homework because of fewer parents having a proper educational background to assist their children. Regardless of unexpected low parental involvement, parents and families are essential resources for schools to achieve their educational and social goals within the communities they are founded in (Witte & Sheridan 2011). The perception of teachers concerning evidence of parental assistance on learners' homework reflects teachers agreeing that parental assistance is untraceable. On the contrary, the Chinese parents in Hong Kong have strong cultural values of placing high importance on education, and therefore tend to set aside time dedicated to supervising children's homework on daily basis (Tam & Chan 2009).

According to Msila (2012), this lack of academic support is a result of the majority of parents in rural contexts being mostly concerned about the basic physiological needs of their children due to fewer life-enhancing opportunities such as employment. Although this may be a prevalent situation in rural schools, some educators have shown that being innovative to enhance parental involvement is possible and can be traceable in learners' schoolwork. The opinions of the majority of teachers also coincide with the notion of learners not understanding the schoolwork to be done at home. It could be deduced that children may not have understood in class and thus scribble anything to have something written to present to the teacher the following day. Msila (2012) found that teachers at the rural school where his study was conducted found it unproductive to keep giving homework to their learners. The frustration of these teachers is also backed by findings of Witte and Sheridan (2011); Yulianti et al. (2018) that rural parents are less keen to interact with their children concerning their academic work than parents in urban areas. Núñez, Pascual and Rosárlo (2021) in their study conducted in Spain, revealed that just above 50% of 433 learners agreed to parental involvement in homework although it is not a rural area. The frustration could be curbed or remedied by implementing innovative strategies of structuring homework in such a way that it demands parental involvement. On both questions the teachers still agreed on the lack of a parental presence in these aspects. Although their study was focused on maladaptive behaviour of children, Mafumbate and Mkhatjwa (2020) point out that parental socio-economic status and a relationship with the child and child's activities influence the deportment of a child towards life in general and schooling as a life-enhancing activity. It could therefore be established that ill behaviour of children towards their homework emanates from how they observe the attitude of their parents towards the same homework. Magwa and Mugari (2017) further add that factors leading to a lack of parental involvement in learners' academic activities emanate from the low educational level, which impacts on literacy abilities, and low income (Ndebele 2015) that causes parents to work overtime eventually arriving in late afternoons. However, there is a consistent 20% of teachers who indicated that parents of the learners in their classes are fully committed to their children's academic endeavours.

From the open-ended question, it could be deduced that teachers somehow feel helpless or discouraged because they could not elaborate on the measures or strategies they implement to enhance parental involvement. Instead, they suggested what could be done. Myende and Nhlumayo (2022) argue that the success or failure of parental involvement at schools is dependent on the school leadership and teaching staff.

The follow up face-to-face interviews also reveal that teachers are aware of the challenges regarding parental involvement in learners' schoolwork. The teachers indicated some creative strategies they employed to try enhancing parental involvement. The teachers' strategies include structuring homework to require parental responses or engagement, consultations on days when the quarterly reports are collected and providing regular feedback to parents for checking and signing of learners' work.

Conclusion

The study revealed that parents at the rural primary school in Palala District where the study was conducted are not as involved in their children's academic work as the school expects them to be. However, more experienced teachers tend to be innovative and open-minded in ways they individually employ as measures to enhance parental involvement. It could therefore be concluded that experience has been a great teacher to these educators. The principal may also motivate young teachers to adopt strategies employed by more experienced teachers to improve parental involvement in their classes. Therefore, the school principal and the teachers are encouraged to devise ways to bring parents on board, such as constant communication, building closer relationships with the entire community and their cultural leadership surrounding the school and their cultural leadership thereof. The school should make the parents and the community welcome to bring their inputs towards the running of the school despite their educational and socio-economic statuses.

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Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Authors' contributions

H.A.S. wrote the article and C.S.M. served as the study supervisor, who guided the writing and the analysis of data to help H.A.S. produce this final article.

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Data availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, C.S.M. upon reasonable request.

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