Parental Involvement and Academic Achievement: Voices of Role-Players in Secondary Schools in Mpumalanga, South Africa

Ntokozo Dennis Ndwandwe[a]

a. Department of Educational Foundation, College of Education
Email: ndwannd@unisa.ac.za

How to cite
Ndwandwe, N. D. (2023). Parental involvement and academic achievement: Voices of role-players in secondary schools in Mpumalanga, South Africa. *Research in Social Sciences and Technology*, *8*(4), 237-256.
https://doi.org/10.46303/ressat.2023.41

ABSTRACT

Parents are broadly acknowledged to be essential partners in the schooling process of their children, with parental involvement being linked to positive impact on academic achievement. Regrettably, poor parental involvement remains significate and an unfortunate challenge in South African schools, as well as a contributing factor to high failure rates in schools. Therefore, this study investigated the relationship between parental involvement and the academic achievements of learners in secondary schools in the Ehlanzeni District, Mpumalanga, using Epstein's theory of overlapping spheres of influence as a theoretical lens. A qualitative research design underpinned by the interpretive paradigm was employed, using a sample of two secondary schools with a purposive sample of principals, teachers and parents. Data for the study was obtained through semi-structured interviews conducted with the principals and through focus group discussions conducted with teachers and parents, respectively. The data was gathered through thematic analysis approach. The findings obtained reveal that parental involvement improves discipline and learner achievement. However, various factors hindered parent involvement, such as the lack of confidence in providing assistance to children with homework, conflicts in home–school scheduling, ineffective communication, and reluctance to attend parent meetings and to serve on governance structures. The study recommends that both teachers and parents should establish good home–school relationships, teacher training for parent involvement should be organised, with schools developing a parent involvement programme, so that a viable collaborative partnership can be established between school and home.

KEYWORDS

Parental involvement; parents; academic achievement; learners; secondary schools.

INTRODUCTION

The significance of parental involvement in children's education is well-documented worldwide (Hill, 2022; Mazikana, 2023; Mehta & Kaur, 2022; Schmid & Garrels, 2021; No single definition of the concept of parental involvement exists (Erdem & Kaya, 2020; Shute et al., 2011). In Grant and Ray's (2010) view, parental involvement is widely described as encompassing a broad range of all types of parental participation in children's education. Such involvement entails parents' attendance of school events and their responses to the school's obligations, providing continuous encouragement to children, creating study time and space for their child(ren), monitoring homework, serving as their role model by means of engaging in enjoyable reading activities and providing academic support to their children. According to El Nokali, Bachman and Votruba-Drzal (2010), the concept of parental involvement is viewed as involving various activities in which parents participate either at home or at school, and either directly or indirectly, so as to support the learning of their children, including in terms of their formal home–school relations, in relation to which both teachers and parents collaborate in supporting the interests of the child(ren) involved. Parental involvement also refers to parents utilising their resources to offer the needed support to their children's academic accomplishments (Thuba, Kathuri & Mariene, 2017). This involves the engagement of children in cognitively stimulating activities at home, ensuring that children are able to access a variety of community resources that enhance their schooling experiences or parenting activities, such as monitoring homework, television, and social activities (Harris & Goodall, 2008). These definitions demonstrate the multifaceted nature of parent involvement and indicate that the concept subsumes a wide variety of home–school activities and parenting practices (Harris & Goodall, 2008; Roy & Giraldo-García, 2018). However, while definitions of parent involvement may vary, researchers unanimously agree that when schools, families and community members collaborate to provide support for their children's education, the children involved tend to perform better academically, the level of school dropout is reduced and the children's positive behaviour and self-esteem are enhanced (Chemagosi, Odongo & Aloka, 2016; Epstein, 1987; Kibaara & Ndirangu, 2014).

In the South African context, after the first democratic election in 1994, deliberate prioritisation of parental involvement, as part of the education-transforming agenda, emphasised the need to make parents crucial partners in the education of their children (Msila, 2012). Prior to such reforms, the traditional role of parents as the primary educators in the home was stressed, while the teachers concerned were regarded as being responsible for offering formal education to children at school (Sibanda, 2021). In addition, the inherited, fragmented and racially divided education system of the apartheid period was blamed for weak parent involvement, particularly in the case of rural schools and communities (Matshe, 2014). However, the implementation of South African Schools Act, No. 84 of 1996 (Republic of South Africa [RSA], 1996) presented parents with a newfound possibility of actively being involved in their children's education and in school governance through mandatory parent representation

on School-Governing Bodies (SGBs). Thus, a system where parents should collaborate with teachers, so as to ensure the provision of quality education, was envisaged. Furthermore, in 2016, a handbook of guidelines for parental involvement in children's education, both at school and at home, was developed by the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT), in collaboration with the South African Department of Basic Education (Mavuso & Malahlela, 2022). Notwithstanding such endeavours, a gap still exists between policy and practice in terms of school–parent relationships, especially in rural South Africa (Matshe, 2014; Munje & Mncube, 2018; Sibanda, 2021). As a result, parental involvement in the nurturing of learners towards academic achievement, and their cooperation with the school, is minimal, with it largely contributing to children's poor performance at schools (Mbokodi, 2008).

Against the above-mentioned background, this paper reports on a study that examined the relationship between parental involvement and the academic achievement of learners in rural secondary schools in the Ehlanzeni District, Mpumalanga, South Africa. This main research question was formulated as follows: How does parental involvement affect the academic achievement of learners in the selected schools? What are the experiences of the role-players concerned regarding parental involvement? What are the common barriers to parental involvement in schools? To address such questions, a qualitative inquiry explored parental involvement in the selected schools, using interviews as a method of gathering data from a small sample of purposively chosen principals, teachers and parents.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The qualitative inquiry was informed by the theory of overlapping spheres of influence, which formed the theoretical framework for the study, which is postulated by Joyce Epstein (1987, 2018) of Johns Hopkins University, who is a global prominent scholar in the field of parental involvement. The theory involved suggests that academic achievement development is influenced by three interconnected settings, namely the family, the school and the community. According to Epstein (2018), such interconnection is known as the overlapping spheres of influence, due to the three contexts involved that influence the learners' development. Such research is founded on a similar principle, namely that effective families and schools share an overlapping goal when it comes to caring and developing their children (Epstein, 2018).

According to Epstein (1995), within the area of the overlap between families, school and community, a range of activities and interactions occurs. Instead of merely listing the diverse activities involved, as illustrated in the aforementioned definitions of parental involvement provided in the Introduction, she categorises related activities into a typology of six areas, or types, of parental involvement, known as Epstein's typology of family–school community relations. Type one, Parenting, includes parental cooperation with the school, through creation of a conducive learning environment at home. Parenting can also involve attending parents' meetings, ensuring that the children concerned are provided with the necessary resources that promote learning at home and the meeting of children's health,

nutritional and practical needs. The second type is Communication, in terms of which the parents regularly communicate with the teachers at school regarding the progress of the learner and school-related matters; likewise, the school is obliged to communicate regularly with the family in a form of two-way process. The third type, Volunteering, entails the parents demonstrating commitment to the participants, in terms of volunteering their time in supporting school activities and attending school events for the betterment of their children, without expecting to be compensated or rewarded for doing so. The fourth type is termed Learning at home, which includes the inputs of both working and nonworking parents, according to their circumstances, in relation to supporting children's learning at home with schoolwork, so as to reinforce the school curriculum. Their doing so provides the learners with an opportunity to discuss what they are learning and assists the family to keep abreast of the content that children are learning at school. It also encompasses informal learning, which concerns parents taking their children on excursions, making them aware of their environment and jointly accessing community resources, like libraries. The fifth type refers to Decision-making, which relates to schools involving parents in decision-making related to the curriculum and to the planning of their children's education. This extends beyond the formal membership of mandatory SGBs to the developing of parents as leaders and parents. Finally, the sixth type of parent involvement is termed Collaborating with the community, which refers to the idea that parents and community members can work together to support and enhance the educational experiences of children, by means of identifying and integrating resources and enlisting the services from the community to strengthen school programmes, family practices and children's learning in its totality. Crosnoe and Ressler (2019) note that, within Epstein's typology, such factors as economics, education, time constraints, culture and socio-economic status shape the extent to which parents become involved.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A review of relevant literature was carried out to establish the effects of parental involvement on academic achievement and the barriers to parental involvement in schools.

Effects of parental involvement on academic achievement

This section deals with the benefits of parental involvement for children's academic achievement. The concept of academic achievement is often presented as being synonymous with the academic performance, or level of attainment, attained in carrying out a task or assignment, or in completing a course (Onyedikachim & Ezekiel-Hart, 2021). Mehta and Kaur (2022) indicate that a learner's academic achievement refers to the amount of knowledge acquired during the process of learning at school, with such achievement most often tending to be defined by report cards and grades, attendance levels and improved behaviour, as well as promotion to the next grade.

The substantial body of research available on the topic tends to support the significant amount of impact that parents often have on their children's school-based academic

achievement (Ndwandwe, 2014) improved attendance levels (Rose, 2017) and sense of self-esteem (Garbacz, Herman, Thompson & Reinke, 2017). Nadenge (2015) reports the existence of a significant positive relationship between parental involvement and good parent–teacher relationships. In addition, the learners concerned reported that, when their parents were involved in their education, they felt supported and guided, enabling them to make informed decisions regarding their career paths, which led to their enhanced academic performance (Gil-Galván & Martín-Espinosa, 2023). Another study associated parental involvement with fewer child behaviour problems in schools than would probably otherwise have been the case (El Nokali et al., 2010). Harrington's (2022) study found a strong positive relationship between the supervision of homework by parents and the level of academic achievement of the learners involved, particularly in terms of reading competency. Another study conducted in Mogadishu, Somalia concluded that there was a significant positive relationship between parental involvement and academic achievement (Dahie, Mohamed & Mohamed, 2018). Parental involvement clearly significantly impacts on learners' behaviour, academic achievement and homework-related performance.

Barriers to parental involvement

Despite the widespread acknowledgment, among the relevant scholars, of the potential benefits that come from parents being actively engaged in their children's education, noticeable gaps still exist between theory and parental involvement practice in schools (Cantu et al. 2021; Durmuşoğlu et al., 2022; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Munje & Mncube, 2018; Sibanda, 2021). According to, Gonzalez DeHass, Willems and Holbein (2005), the low income, or poor financial background, of families tends to hamper effective parental involvement, since the parents involved are then compelled to work extended hours or multiple jobs, which leads to them having less time for involvement at home to assist their children with homework. Hornby and Lafaele (2011) affirm that logistical issues among low economic status families can result in reduced opportunities for the parents involved to engage with teachers, to exchange information and to attend school events, due to their limited financial resources and the cost of transport, demanding work schedules, or the need to care for their other children. Similarly, Luxomo and Motala (2012) indicate that, in areas experiencing high level of poverty, such as, especially, the townships in South Africa, the prioritisation of income-engaging activities can lead parents to neglect their obligations to engage in their children's education. Such neglect increases the burden placed on the teachers concerned, as they are then expected to produce good results without receiving full parental support (Bozhkova et al., 2020; Mampane, 2023; Singh et al., 2004). As a result of the above, teachers tend to voice their concerns about the poor level of parental involvement in their children's education (Mapp, 2003), with the parents involved sometimes barely managing to collect their children's progress reports, and to remain informed about what the child is doing, or whether they need to repeat a grade (Naicker, 2013).

Parents with a limited educational background level, or who are illiterate, tend to experience more hindrances when it come to their involvement in their children's schooling

than do those who are educated (Oranga, Obuba & Boinnet, 2022). In Kimaro and Machumu's (2015) view, parents with a lower-level education and with an inadequate income tend to be preoccupied with survival strategies, with, as a result, many often having little time for becoming involved in school-related activities. The scheduling conflicts that can arise from work–school demands tend to pose competing demands on parents' time and on their availability for becoming involved in their children's education (Baker, 2000; DeLeon et al., 2022; Onwughalu, 2011). Such conflicts occur mostly among parents who are overcommitted to working double- or night-shift work. LaRocque, Kleiman and Darling (2011) underscore that parents with busy schedules and current life contexts can encounter reduced opportunities to be involved in the education of their children. Consequently, the parents' level of education determines the extent and level of their involvement in their children's education (Anderson & Minke, 2007), with it also serving as a decisive factor in their children's educational attainments (Mensah & Kuranchie, 2013). For example, Greenwood and Hickman (1991) underscore those parents who, themselves, did not complete secondary school can struggle with assisting their children with their homework, once they enter secondary school. In the same vein, Hornby and Lafaele (2011:43) affirm that it is common for parents without a university education to undermine their own value in terms of the need for them to work with their children's teachers, since they feel inferior to them and believe that the teachers are better qualified than they are to assist their own children. Otermans, Sharma and Aditya (2022) concur that poorly educated parents can avoid visiting their children's school, because of the stigma associated with illiteracy; basically, they do not feel confident to communicate with their children's teachers, as they feel that they are incompetent speakers of the language medium of the school concerned, which is often English. In this regard, Selolo (2018) suggests that school management should encourage collaboration with parents who are poorly educated by informing them of the value of their involvement, and explaining their constitutional obligation to become involved in, their children's education.

Ntekane (2018) revealed that, in South Africa, some parents choose not to engage themselves in their children's education, because they believe that the teachers know everything and are capable of handling all learner-related matters on their own; consequently, they tend to distance themselves from their children's education. In this regard, Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009) argue that it imperative for the schools concerned to offer support to the parents, because some parents have insufficient time and resources to manage on their own, and they need to develop their own skills, so that they can become able to assist their children with their schoolwork. Schools need to devise some strategies to assist the parents with lower educational levels, by means of assisting to enroll them in free adult basic education classes (Mbatha, 2018).

Several researchers blame teachers for contributing to poor parental involvement in their children's schooling by their disregarding the value of parent involvement (Adigun & Ndwandwe, 2022; Appiah-Kubi & Amoako, 2020; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Ndwandwe, 2014),

with such a phenomenon being especially prevalent among parents with low socio-economic status. Research also indicates that teachers might, due to the lack of time and resources, maintain some distance from parents, which can prevent them from becoming involved in their children's education (Boonk, Ritzen, Gijselaers & Brand-Gruwel, 2021). Gonzalez-De Hass et al. (2005) concur that some teachers fear that the parents of their learners might criticise their teaching methods, curriculum-related decisions and classroom techniques, and interfere with their authority as teachers. Turney and Kao (2009), who conducted a United States-based study with low-income immigrant households, indicated that the parents concerned were unable to involve themselves in school matters, due to their own marginalisation, which was noticeable in terms of the teachers' hesitation to engage them as partners and their limited communication regarding issues pertaining to their children's performance and activities in school. According to Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009), such reluctance was blamed on the parents' and teachers' failure to understand each other's interests in children and schools. To address the problem, Epstein (2018) suggests improving communication with parents and training teachers to enable them to identify the parents' potential to forge partnerships for the benefit of the learners and schools concerned. The lack of teacher training is a recognised barrier to parental involvement in schools (Borup, 2016). The teachers' desire to promote parental involvement can be constrained by lack of skills and knowledge. Epstein (2018) affirms that very few teachers, prior to starting their profession, are knowledgeable about how to establish and implement partnership programmes, and about how to sustain the engagement of parents in their children's education throughout the entire school career. The following section presents the research methodology adopted in this study.

STUDY CONTEXT AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Following on a brief outline of the study, the research methodology, data collection process and analytical framework are outlined. An account of how the participants were selected is also provided.

This study was conducted in the rural Ehlanzeni district located in eastern Mpumalanga province, South Africa, with low socio-economic status. The education system in Ehlanzeni faces various challenges, as is the case in many rural areas in the country. The challenge includes lack of infrastructure, a shortage of learning resources, a high dropout rate and other social challenges, like teenage pregnancy. Many schools also suffer from inadequate facilities, including libraries, laboratories and sports facilities. Furthermore, the Ehlanzeni District is plagued by a relatively high level of poverty and unemployment, which negatively impacts on the educational system at play.

The empirical enquiry employed a qualitative research methodology (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), which allowed the researcher to examine the phenomenon in terms of its natural setting, so as to be able to make sense of the experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018), which, in the present instance, consists of the voices of stakeholders and their experiences of parental

involvement. A case study research design was adopted within the interpretivist paradigm (Babbie, 2017).

Two rural secondary schools were purposively selected, because they were among the schools where parental involvement was reported to be unsatisfactory. Thereafter, the researcher employed a purposive sampling method to select participants from the selected schools, with the aim of studying their experiences of parental involvement. The use of purposive sampling was deemed suitable for this study, because the researcher wanted to collect data from information-rich participants, who were considered to be knowledgeable about the phenomenon under investigation (Bless, Higson-Smith & Sithole, 2013). The sample consisted of the school principal (N=2), five teachers (N=10) and six parents (N=12) from each of the two schools involved. The sample size of the study was determined by the complexity of the research problem, as well as by the issue of parental involvement and the availability of the parents.

In order to generate data for the research, two face-to-face data collection strategies were employed, consisting of semi-structured interviews (held with the principals) and focus group interviews (held with the parents and teachers). The interviews were advantageous, because they enabled the researcher to obtain reliable data on the experiences of, and the barriers to, parental involvement (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). The researcher was familiar with the area, which is close to his hometown, with him having worked there during his previous employment as a teacher in a neighbouring school.

The main focus of the current study was to examine the relationship between parental involvement and academic achievement, with the examination being guided by three questions: What are the effects of parental involvement in the academic achievement of learners? What are the experiences of the role-players regarding the issue of parental involvement in schools? Which barriers limit parents from being involved in the schools? The participants were invited to provide their insights and to share their personal experiences in accordance with the previous formulated research questions. After obtaining their consent, an electronic digital recording device was used to capture what they had to say. The semi-structured interviews held with the principals and the focus group interviews held with the teachers were conducted during school breaks and outside working hours, so as to minimise the amount of disruption of the regular school schedule. The focus group interviews held with the parents were conducted outside normal working hours at the schools concerned. Each interview lasted between 40 and 90 minutes.

Data obtained from both the individual and the focus interviews were transcribed and analysed thematically through the coding and categorising employed in the inductive analysis method (Bless et al., 2013). So as to ensure the data trustworthiness, confirmability and credibility of the findings made, the analysis process was conducted rigorously. Thereafter, the researcher generated patterns of ideas, themes and categories, by means of thoroughly

examining the interview transcripts and continuously listening to the recorded voices of the participants, so as to be able to understand the topic of study.

The researcher observed all ethical procedures both prior to and throughout the data collection process. Ethics refers to a set of beliefs and values regarding what is considered to be either wrong or right from a moral perspective (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). Ethical approval for the study was granted by the researcher's institution, being the University of South Africa (Unisa). The Mpumalanga Department of Education and school principals provided approval for accessing the schools. The selected participants were assured by the researcher that the information that they shared was strictly for research purposes. Prior to the interviews, the participants were assured of strict confidentiality, as stipulated in the consent form signed by both parties. The participants were duly informed of their entitlement to voluntary withdrawal from the study without prior notification and without incurring any penalty. The anonymity of each participant was assured by means of the use of codes. The principals were coded as SP1 and SP2, the teachers as T1:S1, T2:S1 and so on, and the parents as P1–10, with the identity of the schools involved not being disclosed.

FINDINGS and DISCUSSION

This section presents a synopsis of the findings and of the three themes, based on the previously formulated research questions. A discussion and conclusion based on the findings follow. The three themes were: (a) the effect of parental involvement on the academic achievement of learners; (b) the experiences of the role-players regarding parental involvement in the schools; and (c) the barriers that limit parental involvement in the schools.

The effect of parental involvement on the academic achievement of learners

The findings suggest the existence of a positive relationship between parental involvement and the academic achievement of learners in schools. For example, one principal (P1) remarked that their school had experienced some progress in terms of learner achievement. Due to the parental involvement, the discipline at the school had improved, which had resulted in fewer behavioural problems. The above findings are noted in the following statements made by the participants:

> "We always experience improvement of a learner's progress when parents are involved and lesser behavioural problems in our school." (Participant P1)

> "I think there is greater relationship between the two. Children whose parents [are] involved tend to excel academically, because of knowing that their parents care. This I have noticed through the years of my profession." (Participant P2)

The findings also indicate that parental involvement tends to lead to improved test scores, a more positive school atmosphere than before and improved attendance. A teacher said:

> "Parents' involvement greatly improves the academic performance of our learners; there is improvement in the learning for all. I will say higher test scores are one of the benefits

of this involvement. More than [that], our school [has] become better, [as] class attendance improves when parents are closer." (Participant T1:S2)

The above findings confirm the findings made in Nadenge's (2015) study, which reported the existence of a significant positive relationship between parental involvement, good parent–teacher relationships and academic performance. Similarly, Chemagosi, Odongo and Aloka (2016) found collaborative effort among school, family and community to enhance children's learning always results in the improved academic performance of children, reducing the chances of dropout and children enjoying schooling. Likewise, Kibaara and Ndirangu (2014) found a remarkable boost in learners' academic performance, when there is positive parental involvement in their academic journey. Such findings also concur with those made by Epstein (1987), who argues that children whose parents are significantly involved in their schooling tend to demonstrate higher-level achievement in comparison to those whose parents are minimally involved in their schooling Furthermore, this finding is in keeping with the findings of Odchique, Ebcay and Quirap (2023), who affirm that children with engaged and active parents tend to remain in school for longer, and to produce higher academic results, than others do.

Experiences of role-players regarding parental involvement

The findings obtained in the current research indicate that parental attendance at school meetings in the selected schools was poor at the time of the study. The parents involved tended to attend such meetings when they were invited to hear good news, such as about their child's good behaviour, or so as to fetch a certificate of excellence from their children's teachers. Some parents complained about not receiving any correspondence, such as letters, because the children forget to give them the school correspondence. A parent said:

"Sometimes, when doing their washing, I will find some of these letters [too] late in their school uniform pockets." (Parent 3)

However, the parents concerned mentioned that they provided guidance and support to their children regarding their homework and learning at home. Some of the parents mentioned the following:

"I sometimes try to give examples for the homework that he is writing, and then [I] let the child complete the rest of the work given." (Parent 4)

"I don't wish my children to grow and suffer like me, when they grow up, so I always tell them to read their books, and I also make sure that they write their homework [down] in order to succeed in life." (Parent 3)

The above findings link to Grant and Ray's (2010) assertion that the parents become involved through providing constant encouragement, through affording sufficient time and space to their children for study, through monitoring their homework, and through serving as a role model by means of engaging in recreational reading and actively providing educational support to their children.

The current study also discovered that at-home parental involvement, which involves providing support to children on their homework, is the most commonly practised form of involvement by parents. A parent described the situation at home as follows:

> "I was good at school with Maths, so I will assist my child when [I] am free, and my son has really improved in his performance and confidence in Maths." (Parent 7)

The findings involved agree with Rodriguez et al.'s (2017) assertion that parents who communicate their interests in the subject of Mathematics help to instil a sense of confidence in their children, as well as helping to boost their academic performance. Similarly, Yan and Lin (2005) demonstrate that learners whose parents are actively engaged in their children's education are more inclined to excel in Mathematics than do their fellow learners.

Building a true teacher–parent partnership necessitates the collaboration of parents and educators, so as to be able to develop shared meaning about education. By means of opening up communication channels between school and home, parents can learn to understand the educational objectives of the school and to strive to achieve those objectives relating to their children, thereby helping to build up a true partnership. Majola (2008) concurs with the above when mentioning that communication is a vital tool for achieving the effective functioning of any institution. In this regard, the present study discovered that the schools communicated with the parents through letters, which were viewed as being the cheapest mode of communication. However, the most pressing challenge to emerge from such findings was the failure by the schools involved to ensure that the parents received the letters. One participant said:

> "Learners take letters to their parents, but we are not sure whether they receive these letters." (T4:S1)

The South African Schools Act No. 84 of 1996 stipulates the inclusion of parents in the SGB. Such participation involves planning, organising, leading, supervising, policymaking, decision-making, controlling and coordination, which are the primary management duties of the SGBs (Lemmer & Van Wyk, 2010). The findings made in the current study reveal that parents tend to have only a limited understanding of all their duties, with them being reluctant to volunteer for service on the SGB. Parents who members of the SGB stated the following:

> "The principal of this school is doing things his own way; we are not involved in anything." (Parent 2)

> "We are not consulted in anything in this school, as member[s] of [the] SGB, we are called [only] for signatures." (Parent 6)

Dodd and Konzal (2000) confirm that teachers can sometimes display the wrong attitude towards parents, tending to view them as intruders, rather than as partners in the governance of their school. As a result, parents can sometimes choose to distance themselves from becoming involved in school governance.

Barriers that limit the extent of parental involvement in schools

The principals, who described the extent of the involvement of parents in their schools as being unsatisfactory, mentioned that poor parental involvement was a key challenge faced by schools.

They indicated that the lack of parental involvement was one of the biggest challenges in their schools. For example, one principal indicated that parents were not prepared to become involved in their children's education, in the following words:

"I think attitude is a problem here. Parents are lacking the zeal to be involved in their children education. They only leave the whole burden of teaching their children to the school, and they distance themselves [from it]." (P2)

Similarly, a teacher stated that parents tend to be uninterested in becoming involved in their children's schools, adopting a negative attitude towards such involvement. Raising the issue of poverty as a contributory factor towards the non-involvement of parents, one teacher noted the following:

"[The m]ajority of our parents here are uneducated, which really result[s] in [a] lack [of] … interest to involve themselves [in the schooling of their children]. Some decide to distance themselves due to [adopting a] wrong attitude. Poverty causes some to think that they are less needed by [the] schools [than they would like to be]." (T3:S1)

Such findings concur with those of Oranga et al. (2022), that parents with a poor educational background, or who are illiterate, generally suffer from more hindrances than do those who are better educated, in terms of their involvement in their children's schooling. In addition, Hornby and Lafaele (2011) support the view that parents sometimes undermine their own potential, feeling that they are not suitable to serve as partners with educators in education, resulting in them distancing themselves from them.

One teacher shared her dissatisfaction with the lack of parent support, saying:

"Parents of this school are uncooperative; they only care about the drinking [*umqombothi*] traditional beer, and, when you try to work with them, they are not available. Again, sometimes when you try to correct the child's wrong behaviour, they normally side with their kids." (T2:S1)

The above-mentioned finding links well with Rogers et al. (2009), who confirm that parents are needed in schools to assist their children's teachers with the shaping of learner behaviour, with the providing of discipline, and with the discouraging of misbehaviour in classrooms. In addition, Ndwandwe, (2014) reveals that some parents hold the belief that teachers know everything and can handle everything themselves, so that they conclude that their involvement is redundant to the schooling of their children.

The current study's findings highlight the issue of illiteracy as being the cause of many parents' lack of involvement in their children's homework. The participants interviewed indicated that illiteracy is a challenge to many parents, as some cannot understand the subjects that their children are studying. For example, one teacher said:

"Some parents still struggle to fill even a simple form; they … always seek our help. I think the problem is the majority are not educated." (T3:S2)

The present study also discovered that some parents struggle to comprehend various subjects their children are studying, as in the following example:

"I used to assist my child while [they were] still in … primary [school], but now the material is [too] difficult for me [to understand]." (Parent 4)

Hornby and Lafaele (2011:43) affirm that parents without a high school education commonly tend to undermine their own potential of working with their children's teachers, feeling too inferior to work with them, and believing that the latter are better qualified to deal with the situation than they are.

Time was voiced as being a hindrance to effective parent involvement, with one participant remarking that school meeting times coincided with their hours at work. The parents in such communities tended to work at some distance from their homes, with there being little time available for them to attend school meetings. In connection with the above, a parent noted:

"I don't have [enough] time. Usually my child reads in his room late, and I will be tired. Every time I asked [about] them … not having homework, they would simply tell me that they have [i.e. had] done them [i.e. it] at school. I [am] also working, [and] the school meeting sometimes clash[es] with working time." (Parent 6)

A teacher expressed a similar view:

"Parents are not involved due to time constraints, and I think [that] the problem [is that] they have a lot on their hands." (T3:S4)

The above finding is in line with the findings made by Onwughalu (2011), who confirms that time acts a barrier to parental involvement, due to the conflicting work schedules involved. as a result, parents often tend to be overcommitted to their work, such as working both double and night shifts. Likewise, LaRocque et al. (2011) reveal that parents might be too busy to become involved in their children's education.

The present study found that teacher training was the most frequently voiced barrier to parental involvement in their children's schools. None of the teachers who formed part of the current research was trained to work with parents, and none had previously attended any parental involvement workshop. In relation to the above, some of the teachers involved commented as follows:

"The school never provided us with training. We want parents to provide support to [i.e., for] their children's learning at home." (T2:S2)

"I have never been invited to any parent involvement training. Maybe if they can organise workshops, maybe we can do things better." (T4:S2)

The above-mentioned findings are consistent with those of Borup (2016), who argues that inadequate preparation is another noticeable barrier to parental involvement in schools. The desire of teachers to promote parental involvement might be hindered by the parents' lack of skills and knowledge regarding how to involve the parents in the schooling of their children. Epstein (2018) notes that few novice teachers know either how to establish and implement partnership programmes effectively, or how to sustain the involvement of parents in their children's education throughout their schooling.

CONCLUSION

The present study examined the relationship between parental involvement and the academic achievement of learners in selected secondary schools. Parental involvement was seen to be more than ever required in South Africa, since such involvement provides multiple benefits for the functioning of a school and for improving learners' academic performance. The extensive research that has been undertaken in the past indicates that parental involvement tends to have a positive impact on children's academic achievements. However, despite acknowledging the significance of parental involvement as being the most powerful tool available, in terms of influencing children's education, both academically and behaviourally, the current study revealed that the extent of parental involvement in the selected schools remained unsatisfactory. The parents concerned failed to take an active role in their children's education, with them distancing themselves from school matters. As informed by the theory of overlapping spheres of influence, the above research argues that parents, through the various types of parental involvement, can build up their confidence as active participants in their children's education. They can do so by means of becoming involved in school-related decision-making processes, by being willing to take on leadership roles related to the school that their children attend, and by means of establishing effective communication channels with educators at the school to discuss matters related to their children's education. In addition, parents can render support to schools and educational programmes in the community, thereby becoming active school community members. Only limited research has, as yet, been undertaken into examining the relationship between parental involvement and the academic achievement of learners in the Ehlanzeni District, Mpumalanga, South Africa. The present paper has served to close the existing gap, with it having made a valuable contribution to the existing body of knowledge, by means of examining the relationship between parental involvement and academic achievement. Another contribution made by the paper lies in its exploration of various barriers that are still hindering the effective implementation of parental involvement in schools. The findings made have revealed that the lack of parental desire and confidence, conflicts in home–school scheduling, negative teacher attitudes, the lack of appropriate teacher training and illiteracy all hinder effective parental involvement.

Recommendations

Based on the present findings, the following recommendations are aimed at promoting effective parental involvement:

- Teachers and parents should establish good home–school relations, with parents and schools collaborating closely, so as to improve their interpersonal relations for the benefit of learners in Ehlanzeni-based secondary schools.
- The government should use retired or unemployed teachers to educate and empower illiterate parents. The school management team and the SGB should both provide special adult literacy classes for the parents involved.

- Busy and committed parents should reschedule their commitments and strive to set aside time to assist their children with their schoolwork. Schools need to reschedule meeting times to accommodate the parents' busy schedule and to ensure that the site of such meetings is flexible enough to meet the parents' needs, as well as family obligations.
- Both teachers and parents need to be provided with training on parental involvement for capacity-building.

REFERENCES

Adigun, O., & Ndwandwe, N. (2022). Academic Resilience among Deaf Learners During E-Learning in the COVID-19 Era. *Research in Social Sciences and Technology, 7*(2), 27-48. https://doi.org/10.46303/ressat.2022.8

Anderson, K. J., & Minke, K. M. (2007). Parent involvement in education: Toward an understanding of parents' decision making. *Journal of Educational Research*, *100* (5), 311–323. https://doi.org/10.3200/joer.100.5.311-323

Appiah-Kubi, J., & Amoako, E. (2020). Parental participation in children's education: Experiences of parents and teachers in Ghana. *Journal of Theoretical Educational Science*, *13*(3), 456–473. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1288696.pdf

Babbie, E. R. (2017). *The basics of social research* (7th ed.). Cengage Learning.

Baker, A. J. (2000). Making the promise of parent involvement a reality. *High School Magazine*, *7*(5), 14–17.

Bless, C., Higson-Smith, C., & Sithole, S. L. (2013). *Fundamentals of social research methods: An African perspective* (5th ed.). Juta.

Boonk, L. M., Ritzen, H., Gijselaers, H. J. M., & Brand-Gruwel, S. (2021). Stimulating parental involvement in vocational education and training (VET): A case study based on learning histories of teachers, principals, students, and their parents. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *100*, 103279. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2021.103279

Borup, J. (2016). Teacher perceptions of parent engagement at a cyber high school. *Journal of Research on Technology in Education*, *48*(2), 67–83. https://doi.org/10.1080/15391523.2016.1146560

Bozhkova G., Shatunova O., Shastina E. (2020). Influence of the family on the process of forming a child's personality: Types of families: A case of modern youth prose. *Journal of Social Studies Education Research, 11* (3), 220 – 241. https://jsser.org/index.php/jsser/article/view/2243/467

Cantu, N., Varela, D., Jones, D., & Challoo, L. (2021). Factors that Influence School Choice: A Look at Parents' and School Leaders' Perceptions. *Research in Educational Policy and Management, 3*(1), 19-41. https://doi.org/10.46303/repam.2021.2

Chemagosi, M. J., Odongo, B. C., & Aloka, P. J. O. (2016). Parent strategies enhancing level of involvement among pre-school learners in Nandi Central Sub-County, Kenya. *International Journal of Education and Research, 4*(1), 123–136.

Creswell, J.W. & Creswell, J.D. (2018) Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches. Sage, Los Angeles.

Crosnoe, R., & Ressler, R. W. (2019). Parenting the child in school. In *Handbook of parenting* (pp. 410–430). Routledge https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429401695-14

Dahie A.M, Mohamed R.A. (2018). The role of parental involvement in student academic achievement: Empirical study from secondary school in Mogadishu-Somalia. International research journal of human resources and social sciences, 5(7):1-24.

DeLeon, E., Varela, D., & Jones, D. (2022). Impact of School Calendar on Academic Performance: A Comparative Study of the Year-Round and Traditional Calendars. *Research in Educational Policy and Management, 4*(1), 65-79. https://doi.org/10.46303/repam.2022.11

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.). (2018). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (5th ed.). SAGE.

Dodd, A. W., & Konzal, J. L. (2000). *Making our high schools better: How parents and teachers can work together*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Durmuşoğlu, M. C., & Yıldız Taşdemir, C. (2022). Determining the parent education preferences and needs of parents with children in preschool education institutions in Turkey. *Theory and Practice in Child Development, 2*(1), 1–21. https://doi.org/10.46303/tpicd.2022.7

El Nokali, N. E., Bachman, H. J., & Votruba-Drzal, E. (2010). Parent involvement and children's academic and social development in elementary school. *Child Development*, *81*(3), 988–1005. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2010.01447.x

Epstein, J. L. (1995). School/family/community partnerships: Caring for the children we share. *The Phi Delta Kappan*, 76(9), 701–712. https://doi.org/10.1177/003172171009200326

Epstein, J. L. (1987). Parent involvement. *Education and Urban Society*, *19*(2), 119–136. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013124587019002002

Epstein, J. L. (2018a). School, family, and community partnerships in teachers' professional work. *Journal of Education for Teaching*, *44*(3), 397–406. https://doi.org/10.1080/02607476.2018.1465669

Epstein, J. L. (2018b). *School, family, and community partnerships: Preparing educators and improving schools*. Routledge

Erdem, C., & Kaya, M. (2020). A meta-analysis of the effect of parental involvement on students' academic achievement. *Journal of Learning for Development*, *7*(3), 367–383. https://doi.org/10.56059/jl4d.v7i3.417

Garbacz, S. A., Herman, K. C., Thompson, A. M., & Reinke, W. M. (2017). Family engagement in education and intervention: Implementation and evaluation to maximize family, school, and student outcomes. *Journal of School Psychology*, *62*, 1–10. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2017.04.002

Gil-Galván R., Martín-Espinosa I. (2023). The influence of the parents' socio-educational level and parental encouragement on university students' motivational profile for learning English. *Journal of Social Studies Education Research, 14* (1), 17 – 46. https://jsser.org/index.php/jsser/article/view/4515/604

Gonzalez-DeHass, A. R., Willems, P. P., & Holbein, M. F. D. (2005). Examining the relationship between parental involvement and student motivation. *Educational Psychology Review*, *17*(2), 99–123. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-005-3949-7

Grant, K. B., & Ray, J. (2010). *Home, school, and community collaboration: Culturally responsive family involvement*. SAGE.

Greenwood, G. E., & Hickman, C. W. (1991). Research and practice in parent involvement: Implications for teacher education. *Elementary School Journal*, *91*(3), 279–288. https://doi.org/10.1086/461655

Harrington, B. (2022). Class, family involvement, and Asian American four and two-year college students' experiences of advantage and disadvantage (Doctoral thesis). University of Massachusetts.

Harris, A., & Goodall, J. (2008). Do parents know they matter? Engaging all parents in learning. *Educational Research*, *50*(3), 277–289. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131880802309424

Henderson, A. T., & Mapp, K. L. (2002). *A wave of evidence*: *The impact of school, family and community connection on student achievement.* http://www.sedl.org/connections/resources/evidence.pdf

Hill, N. E. (2022). Parental involvement in education: Toward a more inclusive understanding of parents' role construction. *Educational Psychologist*, *57*(4), 309–314. https://doi.org/10.1080/00461520.2022.2129652

Hornby, G., & Lafaele, R. (2011). Barriers to parent involvement in education: An explanatory model. *Educational Review*, *63*(1), 37–52. https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1080/00131911.2010.488049

Kibaara, T. M., & Ndirangu, L. M. (2014). Parent involvement in their children's academic achievement in public secondary schools: A case of Kieni-West Sub-County, Nyeri County-Kenya. *International Journal of Education and Research*, *2*(11), 411–422

Kimaro, A. R., & Machumu, H. J. (2015). Impacts of parent involvement in school activities on academic achievement of primary school children. *International Journal of Education and Research*, *3*(8), 483–494.

LaRocque, M., Kleiman, I., & Darling, S. M. (2011). Parental involvement: The missing link in school achievement. *Preventing School Failure: Alternative Education for Children and Youth*, *55*(3), 115–122. https://doi.org/10.1080/10459880903472876

Lemmer, E. & Van Wyk, N., (2010). *Themes in South African Education,* Pearson, Cape Town

Luxomo, G. & Motala, S. (2012). The return home: Parental involvement in children's education. In *Finding place and keeping pace: Exploring meaningful and equitable learning in South African schools* (pp. 135–150). Edited by Motala, S., Dieltiens, V. & Sayed, Y. (Eds.). Human Sciences Research Council,

Majola, J. (2008). The role of the school management in the promotion of parental involvement in township schools in George (Masters in Education). Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, Port Elizabeth.

Mampane, M. (2023). Perceptions of Academic Resilience by Senior Phase Learners and Teachers from Low Socioeconomic Schools. *Journal Of Curriculum Studies Research, 5*(1), 63-81. https://doi.org/10.46303/jcsr.2023.6

Mapp, K. L. (2003). Having their say: Parents describe why and how they are engaged in their children's learning. *The School Community Journal*, *13*(1), 35–64.

Matshe, P. F. (2014). Challenges of parent involvement in rural public schools in Ngaka Modiri Moleme District of Northwest Province (South Africa). *International Journal of Humanities Social Sciences and Education*, *1*(6), 93–103.

Mavuso, F. T. N., & Malahlela, T. (2022). Barriers to parents supporting children's learning in Volksrust circuit, Gert Sibande District in Mpumalanga Province. *The 7th annual international conference on public administration and development alternatives (IPADA), 14–16 September 2022.*

Mazikana, A. T. (2023). *The role of parent involvement at ECD level at your school*. https://ssrn.com/abstract=4378470 or http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4378470

Mbatha, Z. M. (2018). Developing a framework of parent involvement to enhance academic performance of learners in schools (Doctoral dissertation). University of the Free State, Bloemfontein.

Mbokodi, S. (2008). Black parent involvement in education (Doctoral thesis). Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, Port Elizabeth.

McMillan, J. H., & Schumacher, S. (2014). *Research in education: Evidence-based inquiry*. Pearson.

Mehta, A., & Kaur, S., (2022). The relationship between parent involvement and academic achievement among 8th Grade students. *International Journal of Creative Research Thought (IJCRT), 10*(8), 47–57.

Mensah, M. K., & Kuranchie, A. (2013). Influence of parenting styles on the social development of children. *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, *2*(3), 123 https://doi.org/10.5901/ajis.2013.v2n3p123

Msila, V. (2012). Black parent involvement in South African rural schools: Will parents ever help in   enhancing effective school management? *Journal of Educational and Social Research*, *2*(2), 303–313.

Munje, D. P. N., & Mncube, P. V. (2018). The lack of parent involvement as hindrance in selected public primary schools in South Africa: The voices of educators. *Perspectives in Education*, *36*(1), 89-93. https://doi.org/10.18820/2519593X/pie.v36i1.6

Nadenge, M. G. (2015). *Relationship between parent socio-economic status and student academic achievement: A case study of selected schools in urban informal settlements in Westlands division, Nairobi County*. Nairobi: University of Nairobi.

Naicker, K. (2013). The factors promoting parent involvement at a secondary school in KwaZulu-Natal (Unpublished Masters of Education thesis). University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban.

Ndwandwe, N. D. (2014). Relationship between parent involvement and academic achievement of learners in Ehlanzeni secondary schools (Masters of Education). Pretoria: University of South Africa.

Ntekane, A. (2018). Parent involvement in education. *Research Gate*, *1*, 1–5.

Odchique, C. M., Ebcay, J. C., & Quirap, E. A. (2023). Parent involvement and student academic performance. *Global Scientific Journals*, *11*(2), 723–732.

Onwughalu, O. J. (2011). *Parents' involvement in education: The experience of an African immigrant community in Chicago*. iUniverse.

Onyedikachim, E. N., & Ezekiel-Hart, J. (2021). Educational level of parents on students' academic achievement in secondary school in Abia State. *African Scholars Journal of Contemporary Education Research* (JCER-8), *21*(8), 55, 66.

Oranga, J., Obuba, E., & Boinnet, F. (2022). Barriers to parental involvement in the education of learners with intellectual disabilities. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, *10*(02), 410–423. https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2022.102029

Otermans, P. C. J., Sharma, S. & Aditya, D, (2022). Challenges faced by students with illiterate parents: Insights from teachers – An interview. *Educational Quest – An International Journal of Education and Applied Social Sciences*, *13*(2), 456–473. https://doi.org/10.30954/2230-7311.2.2022.2

Rodríguez, S., Piñeiro, I., Gómez-Taibo, M. L., Regueiro, B., Estévez, I., & Valle, A. (2017). An explanatory model of maths achievement: Perceived parent involvement and academic motivation. *Psicothema*, *29*(2), 184–190 https://doi.org/10.7334/psicothema2017.32.

Rogers, M. A., Theule, J., Ryan, B. A., Adams, G. R., & Keating, L. (2009). Parental involvement and children's school achievement. *Canadian Journal of School Psychology*, *24*(1), 34–57. https://doi.org/10.1177/0829573508328445

Rose, M. F. (2017). Parent involvement and positive behaviour for learning in two Australian schools (Doctoral thesis). Western Sydney University, Sydney, Australia.

Roy, M., & Giraldo-García, R. (2018). The Role of Parental Involvement and Social/Emotional Skills in Academic Achievement: Global Perspectives. *School Community Journal*, *28*(2), 29-46.

Schmid, E., & Garrels, V. (2021). Parental involvement and educational success among vulnerable students in vocational education and training. *Educational Research*, *63*(4), 1–18. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131881.2021.1988672

Selolo, R. E. (2018). Factors influencing parent involvement in the education of their children at primary school level in Bahananwa Circuit in Blouberg Municipality, Limpopo Province (Unpublished Doctoral dissertation). University of Limpopo, Mankweng, South Africa.

Shute, V. J., Hansen, E. G., Underwood, J. S., & Razzouk, R. (2011). A review of the relationship between parental involvement and secondary school students' academic achievement. *Education Research International*, *2011*, 1–10. https://doi.org/10.1155/2011/915326

Sibanda, R. (2021). "I'm not a teacher": A case of (dys)functional parent-teacher partnerships in a South African township. *South African Journal of Education*, *41*(3), 1–13. https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v41n3a1812

Singh, P., Mbokodi, S. M., & Msila, V. T. (2004). Black parental involvement in education. *South African Journal of Education*, *24*(4), 301–307. https://doi.org/10.4314/saje.v24i4.25005

Tárraga García, V., García Fernández, B., & Ruiz-Gallardo, J. R. (2017). Home-based family involvement and academic achievement: A case study in primary education. *Educational Studies*, *44* (3), 361–375. https://doi.org/10.1080/03055698.2017.1373636

Thuba, E., Kathuri, N. J., & Mariene, J. G. (2017). Impacts of parents' academic socialization in promoting quality of education in public day secondary schools in Meru County. *International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications,* 7(8), 600-611.

Turney, K., & Kao, G. (2009). Barriers to school involvement: Are immigrant parents disadvantaged? *Journal of Educational Research*, *102*(4), 257–271. https://doi.org/10.3200/joer.102.4.257-271

Van Wyk, N., & Lemmer, E. (2009). *Organising parent involvement in South Africa*. Cape Town: Juta.

Yan, W., & Lin, Q. (2005). Parent involvement and mathematics achievement: Contrast across racial and ethnic groups. *Journal of Educational Research*, *99*(2), 116–127. https://doi.org/10.3200/joer.99.2.116