Parental involvement in rural schools: A case study in Limpopo Province

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Abstract

The importance of parental involvement in children's education cannot be overstated, as it enhances academic performance and the timely completion of studies. This study explores teachers' perceptions of the involvement of parents in their children's education in Greater Giyani in Limpopo Province, South Africa. Purposive sampling was employed to select four principals and nine teachers from four distinct schools participating in this qualitative study. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, and thematic analysis was used for data analysis. The findings reveal that teachers in rural Limpopo schools perceive parental involvement in two categories: supportive and partially supportive. Parents with formal education are actively engaged, attending meetings and assisting with schoolwork, while illiterate parents show lower levels of involvement. This study assumes significance in its contribution to the conceptualization and execution of pioneering programs aimed at enhancing parental involvement in schools situated in rural areas of Limpopo Province. The findings suggest that schools should establish targeted parental training programs and improve communication strategies to enhance parental involvement. Considering these results, the study recommends the formulation of clearer policies to guide both parents and teachers in school practices, fostering an environment that promotes the improvement of children's performance in schools.

Keywords: *children's education, academic performance, parental involvement, teachers, perceptions*

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1. Introduction

Parental involvement, such as reading to children at home and providing encouragement, significantly contributes to a child's educational success (Sengonul, 2022). This involvement holds greater importance in shaping a child's interests and self-efficacy, particularly in STEM education (Salvatierra & Cabello, 2022). Park and Holloway (2017) assert that parental involvement is a crucial element in school reform. Acting as their children's initial teachers, parents play an instrumental role in ensuring academic success (Anicama et al., 2018; Caasi & Pentang, 2022). Additionally, Cojocariua and Mareș (2014) emphasize that the flexibility of parents' attitudes toward their child's learning process is a key factor in fostering the child's harmonious educational development.

The post-apartheid South African government introduced the South African Schools Act of 1996, which encouraged parental participation in school affairs. Parents must engage in activities such as fundraising, selling food on school premises, and serving on school committees (Mbatha, 2018). However, there is scarcity of research on how teachers perceive parental involvement in their children's education in rural schools in Giyani, Limpopo Province. Most studies on this subject focus on how parents engage in their children's education from the parents' perspective (Mbatha, 2018; Ngozwana et al., 2024). Therefore, there is a need to address this important area of educational research by understanding this phenomenon from the teachers' perspective in rural-based schools.

Previous studies have explored the realm of parental involvement; however, a limited number have specifically focused on garnering insights from the viewpoints of teachers and schools' management teams within the context of rural schools. Consequently, the current study endeavors to address this gap by elucidating parental involvement through the lens of school management teams and teachers. This study assumes significance in its contribution to the conceptualization and execution of pioneering programs aimed at enhancing parental involvement in schools situated in rural areas of Limpopo province, South Africa.

This study is important for rural education as it explores teachers' perceptions of how parents get involved in their children's education in rural schools. Understanding this matter through teachers' lived experiences helps in proposing effective measures that could be implemented in rural schools to enhance parental involvement in their children's education. This study is important in the rural education setting, as it has the potential to influence both policy and practice. Additionally, the findings of this study could encourage schools in Giyani,

Limpopo Province, to design collaborative policies tailored to rural schools that foster strong working relationships between parents and teachers. Such policies would ensure effective teacher-parent collaboration, ultimately enhancing learners' academic performance in rural schools.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Conceptualizing and Contextualizing Parental Involvement in Children's Education

Bromley and Yazdanpanah (2021) highlight the significance of parental involvement in children's education, encompassing active support in school events such as sports days, assemblies, and concerts. These occasions provide parents with opportunities to observe their children's interactions with peers and teachers, contributing to crucial aspects of a child's developmental and educational progress. Khalid and Singal (2022) and Andrew et al. (2020) emphasize the pivotal role parents play as essential partners in their children's schooling, emphasizing the support provided at home. However, sociopolitical factors, including parents' educational background, limited knowledge about the curriculum, and time constraints, can influence the extent of parental involvement in their children's education (Jafarov, 2015).

In rural schools, Luxomo and Motala (2012) observed that a substantial number of children hail from non-intact families, extended families, or are being raised by grandparents who exhibit limited investment in their children's education. The challenge is compounded by illiterate parents struggling to provide academic support for their children (Audu, 2016). In addition, parents' low self-esteem, stemming from a lack of formal education, hinders their active engagement in their children's educational pursuits beyond the payment of school fees (Appiah-Kubi & Amoako, 2020). Recognizing the importance of parental involvement, particularly in positively influencing the behavior of disadvantaged students, it becomes imperative to address these factors (Maldonado et al., 2022).

2.2. Importance of Parental Involvement in Children's Education

Active parental involvement is crucial for fostering children's confidence, which is a key factor in academic success (Caasi & Pentang, 2022; Park et al., 2017; Naite, 2021). Garcia and Thornton (2014) emphasize the role of education in reducing absenteeism and restoring parents' confidence in engaging with their children's education. Moreover, parental

involvement significantly contributes to school improvement performance and infrastructure development (Llamas & Tuazon, 2016). According to Hamidun et al. (2019), it serves as a learning platform, propelling children to excel not only in education but also in broader aspects of life. Recognizing the importance of parental involvement, Sapungan and Sapungan (2014) highlight its significance to teachers and schools, facilitating a better understanding of diverse parental cultures and fostering improved communication and collaboration between parents and educators.

Actively engaged parents contribute to better academic outcomes than their less involved counterparts (Naite, 2021). This involvement not only impacts academic achievements but also fosters the child's social and emotional growth (Antony-Newman, 2019). Recognizing parents as primary teachers, their active role is crucial for enhancing the overall quality of academic success. Active parental involvement, including high expectations, a positive attitude, assistance with assignments, communication, and attendance at school activities, positively influences a child's academic achievement (Haisraeli & Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2021). It is a crucial factor in ensuring students' success, growth, and life development (Sobri et al., 2022), leading to improved academic performance, better behavior, and increased responsibility (Crosby, 2021).

Kingston (2021) contends that encouraging parental investment in children's academic performance assumes the importance of academic success for child development. It asserts that parents bear the responsibility to integrate school requirements into parenting to avoid raising unprepared children for adult life. Moreover, Kingston (2021) argues that contemporary parents are tasked with fostering self-motivated, self-responsible children, aiming to equip them with the necessary skills for independent success, ultimately shaping ideal future neoliberal citizens. The concepts of school– parent partnerships and support are used to align parental involvement with school objectives, including improved attendance, academic achievement, and positive attitudes toward school (Bradbury, 2019).

Parental involvement in children's education leads to academic, personal, and social advantages (Yamauchi et al., 2017). Actively engaged parents contribute to improved attendance, higher graduation rates, fewer grade retentions, increased school satisfaction, reduced negative behavior reports, and higher test scores (Purola & Kuusisto, 2021). Furthermore, family participation foster empowerment and the development of leadership and collaboration skills.

2.3. Teachers' Perceptions of Parental Involvement in Children's Education

To enhance parental involvement, teachers should maintain politeness, foster a welcoming school environment, and implement engaging activities for parental participation (Bromley & Yazdanpanah, 2021). Mathekga (2016) underscores teachers' perception that parental involvement is crucial for improving children's educational performances. Notably, primary school parents are more actively engaged in school governance than those with secondary school children. Conducting pre-school meetings with parents of primary school children is a pivotal step in establishing a collaborative relationship between teachers and parents (Ahtola et al., 2011).

Teachers employ telephone communication to engage parents in discussions about their children's education (Besi & Sakellariou, 2019). Regular meetings are held where teachers actively listen to parents, allowing them to express their thoughts without encountering a defensive response. This approach enhances parental involvement in their children's education (Penn, 2019). Moreover, Eaford (2018) highlights the crucial role parents play in imparting life lessons to prepare their children for the future, as perceived by teachers. According to Majozi (2014), positive teacher attitudes toward parental involvement extends beyond the school and involve the broader community. Jones (2022) emphasizes that teachers consistently communicate with parents, particularly when addressing inappropriate behavior within the school premises. This communication fosters a crucial parent–teacher relationship that significantly contributes to academic success. Hence, Ismail et al. (2022) recommend regular parental attendance at school meetings as a beneficial platform for face-to-face discussions on children's development.

Effective parent–teacher relationships rely on regular and transparent communication, mutual respect, and a shared understanding of each child's best interests (Besi & Sakellariou, 2019). Improved communication occurs when parents and teachers are cognizant of their values, opinions, expectations, perceptions of children, and educational values (Sibanda, 2021). Collaboratively establishing academic and social goals fosters continuity between home and school, aiding in a smooth transition for the child (Anastasiou & Papagianni, 2020; Kalaycı & Ergül (2020). Parents should actively engage in assisting their children with activities and homework during the learning process (Kalaycı & Ergül, 2020). Consequently, teachers advocate for a supportive parental environment to enhance the learning process for children.

While previous studies (e.g., Garcia & Thornton, 2014; Park & Holloway, 2017) highlight the general benefits of parental involvement, research specific to South African rural schools remains scarce. This study builds on the work of Mbatha (2018) and Luxomo and Motala (2012), who identified structural and socioeconomic barriers limiting parental engagement in rural settings.

2.4. Sociopolitical Factors Influencing Parental Involvement

There are a number of sociopolitical factors that influence parents' involvement in their children's education in rural schools, such as parents' level of education and economic status. A qualitative study conducted in Alefa district, Central Gondar Zone, Ethiopia, sheds light on the challenges faced by parents in rural areas. The study reveals that parents with lower incomes are significantly less likely to engage in their children's education compared to their financially stable counterparts. This disparity is largely due to the limited resources available to low-income families, which restricts their ability to provide essential educational support, such as purchasing learning materials or paying for school-related expenses. In contrast, parents who are financially stable are in a better position to support their children's education, offering them the resources and opportunities that can foster greater academic success. This situation shows the broader issue of how economic disparities can create barriers to parental involvement, ultimately affecting the educational outcomes of children in rural communities (Chekol, & Ayane, 2019).

Du Plessis and Mestry (2019) explain that financial limitations prevent provincial governments from adequately supporting rural schools, hindering the delivery of quality education. In addition, education authorities are unable to supply essential physical and human resources, shifting the responsibility to parents to provide basic necessities like stationery and cleaning supplies. However, many parents in rural South Africa are engaged in low-paying jobs, have limited education, and often do not prioritize schooling. As a result, they are unable to afford the extra materials teachers need, which adversely affects both teaching and learning in these schools. Consequently, parents from marginalized communities might encounter challenges like illiteracy and limited awareness about how they can support their children's education (Oranga et al., 2022). This is packed with poor school infrastructure, weak communication between teachers and parents, and few chances for parents to take part in decision-making all lead to low levels of parental involvement (Katel & Katel, 2024).

The literature review in this study supports the objectives and research question. It explores the various ways in which parents are involved in their children's education. However, since there is limited research on teachers' perspectives, the findings of this study help fill that gap in the existing literature.

2.5. Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1995, 1997, 2005) theoretical framework on parental involvement. This model elucidates the factors influencing parents' engagement in their children's education and their subsequent impact on children's outcomes. Originally comprised of five sequential levels, the authors, informed by empirical findings, later refined constructs within the first two levels. Level 1 incorporates three parental belief systems that shape involvement decisions: (a) motivational beliefs, encompassing role construction and self-efficacy; (b) perceptions of invitations to participate from teachers, children, and schools; and (c) perceived life contexts, encompassing parents' assessments of their time, energy, skills, and knowledge for involvement. Level 2 delineates specific forms of involvement, encompassing school-based behaviors (e.g., attending events, volunteering) and home-based behaviors (e.g., assisting with homework, reading to children) (Yamauchi et al., 2017).

Parental involvement impacts children's outcomes at various levels, as outlined in Hoover– Dempsey and Sandler's model. Level 3 encompasses modeling appropriate behaviors, reinforcing positive conduct, and providing instructional support for children (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, 1997). Moving to Level 4, mediating variables come into play, such as parents employing developmentally appropriate strategies and aligning their actions with school expectations (Liu & Leighton, 2021). Finally, Level 5 focuses on student outcomes, encompassing knowledge, skills, and self-efficacy related to academic success. The Hoover–Dempsey– Sandler model elucidates the psychological constructs driving parental involvement in both home and school educational activities. These constructions are measurable and have spurred research, leading to model refinement. The framework provides a comprehensive depiction of how family beliefs and experience influence involvement, linking these practices to student outcomes (Yamauchi et al., 2017).

The model captures the intricate nature of family–school partnerships and diverse engagement approaches. It incorporates factors such as parents' perceptions of their resources

for participation in both home- and school-related activities, as well as their sense of invitation from school staff and their children (Boonk et al., 2018). The research derived from this model implies strategies for fostering robust family school partnerships, such as creating a positive school climate that encourages and welcomes family involvement (Liu & Leighton, 2021).

This study adopted the model as its theoretical framework, given its comprehensive integration of two pivotal dimensions of parental involvement. Parental involvement with the educational institution and the inherent personal attributes of parents contribute to fostering their children's active agency in the learning process. The model was deemed pertinent to this study because it delves into the multifaceted factors shaping parental involvement in their children's education, emanating from parental belief systems and perceptions regarding the significance of their involvement. Notably, Level 2 of the model delineates specific modalities through which parents participate in their children's education, aligning with the focal areas of investigation in this study. Exploration of the predictive factors influencing school-based parental involvement is significant for informing educators about potential strategies to bolster collaboration with parents. It is noteworthy that owing to the model's comprehensiveness, extant research often concentrates on specific facets thereof.

The findings of this study validate the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model by showing that teachers in rural schools play a vital role in encouraging parental involvement in their children's education through welcoming invitations. However, the findings also challenge the model by indicating that, while parents in rural schools do wish to participate in school activities to support their children's education, their socio-economic backgrounds such as poverty and illiteracy often prevent them from doing so.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

Although the sample consists of only 13 participants, this aligns with qualitative research standards emphasizing depth over breadth. The small sample allowed for rich, detailed insights, making it appropriate for an exploratory study. This study used an interpretative paradigm through a qualitative research approach conducted on a small scale within the Hlanganani School District in Limpopo Province, South Africa. In order to gather an in-depth understanding of teachers' perceptions of parental involvement in the context of rural schools in Limpopo Province, South Africa, a case study design was employed. This

research design was deemed appropriate as the study aimed to explore parental involvement in their children's education as a complex social phenomenon situated within teachers' real-life contexts.

3.2. Participants of the Study

The participants included four principals and nine teachers from three primary schools and one high school, who were purposively selected as key informants. Purposive sampling was employed to choose three primary schools and one high school in Hlanganani, Greater Giyani, Limpopo province, based on accessibility and their capacity to offer a diverse range of research techniques. Purposive sampling was used to select teachers who have knowledge of parental involvement in their children's education. This knowledge was gained through their experience working with parents on projects that actively involve them in the school environment. The inclusion criteria required participants to be teachers with over six months of teaching experience in rural schools, whereas the exclusion criteria excluded those with less than six months of teaching experience in rural settings. The demographic characteristics of the participants are summarized in table 1.

Table 1

Demographic characteristics of the participants

School	School A Higher Primary	School B Primary	School C Primary	School D High School
Teachers in the SGB	3	1	2	3
Principals	1 Female	1 Female	1 Female	1 Male
Qualifications- Principals	BA Degree	Honours	BA Degree	Honours
Experience- Principals	28 years	11 years	28 years	12 years
Total Interviewees	**4**	**2**	**3**	**4**

3.3. Instrumentation and Data Gathering Process

Interviews were conducted with all 13 participants using a semi-structured interview guide at their respective schools. Participants were interviewed in English with the option to respond in their home language, Xitsonga. A team comprising three researchers and one research assistant proficient in Xitsonga facilitated the translation of the participants' responses. Semi-structure interview was used in this study because it provided the researchers with the opportunity to ask teachers predetermined open-ended questions and follow-up

questions based on teachers' response. To ensure the reliability of the study findings, several strategies were employed. Triangulation was used by comparing responses across different schools to identify consistent patterns and discrepancies in teachers' perspectives. Member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary interpretations with selected participants to validate the accuracy and credibility of the findings. Additionally, inter-coder reliability was established through the involvement of four researchers in the thematic analysis process, ensuring that the coding of data was consistent and free from individual bias.

3.4. Data Analysis

This study employed inductive thematic data analysis, involving transcription, coding, and categorization, to identify themes and sub-themes addressing the research questions. Subsequently, researchers rigorously examined emerging subthemes, comparing them with previous studies to validate the findings. Adhering to all six steps of thematic analysis, researchers iteratively read and re-read the transcribed data, identifying codes crucial for distilling raw data relevant to research questions. Clear code definitions were established to align with the study objectives. The named codes were used in the final report writing phase. Quotations were incorporated to prevent misinterpretation of participants' views and to establish connections between various subthemes.

3.5. Research Ethics

The study adhered to ethical protocols, with participants providing consent before data collection. Ethical clearance (Ethics certificate no: 2016/09/14/90171969) was obtained from the University of South Africa. All thirteen participants consented to signing consent forms and were assured of the right to withdraw at any point during data collection without consequences. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained using pseudonyms, which dissociated participants' information from their identities.

4. Findings and Discussion

This study explores teachers' perceptions of the involvement of parents in their children's education in Greater Giyani in Limpopo Province. The responses indicated that teachers perceived parents to be supportive of their children's education by assisting them with their homework, providing educational support, attending meetings, and taking part in

voluntary work at school. On the other hand, teachers showed that some parents partially supported their children in their education as the latter misbehaved and performed poorly in schools. Both categories will be presented, followed by the emanating themes and the selected quotations from participants from different schools. Organised themes are summarized in table 2.

Table 2
Organised themes

Category	Themes/Findings	Teacher/Principal Quotes	School (s) Represented	Analysis
Supportive Parents	- Increased Participation	"I'm comfortable with my parents. We work hand in hand because each time we call them to come and support us, they come." (Principal, School A)	School A, B, C	Parents actively participate in meetings, contribute to the school community, and show interest in children's progress. Increased attendance and engagement in school functions.
	- Improved Performance	"When parents attend, the performance also improves; they support the idea of monthly tests and giving awards to their children." (Teacher, School A)	School A, B, C	Parent participation is associated with better student performance. Invitations to meetings and rewards systems help maintain engagement.
	- Voluntary Work	"They also do voluntary work in case we need assistance instead of hiring people from outside." (Teacher, School B)	School B	Voluntary participation in school activities strengthens the relationship between parents and the school.
	- Relationship Building	"We establish a relationship with them by meeting them regularly...respect is essential." (Principal, School A)	School A	Regular interactions and respect for parents build strong relationships and facilitate communication.
Partially Supportive Parents	- Lack of Parental Support	"They're partially supportive because most of them are not around the village…they're in Gauteng and they left [their] child alone in the family." (Principal, School D)	School D	Some parents are absent or unavailable, leaving children under the care of relatives, which limits involvement in the school.

Category	Themes/Findings	Teacher/Principal Quotes	School (s) Represented	Analysis
	- Behavioral Issues and Poor Performance	"We have issues of bullying... this child started to isolate herself from other children." (Teacher, School A)	School A, B, C	Misbehavior and poor performance are linked to a lack of parental support and family dysfunction.
	- Difficulty in Engaging Parents	"It is difficult to get them [parents]... we tried all things, to allow someone with a loudspeaker to move around." (Principal, School D)	School D	Lack of response from parents, despite efforts such as food or loudspeakers to call them to meetings.
	- Social and Economic Barriers	"Kids are on their own; whether the kid is at school the mother does not care... social grants go to play cards, go to buy liquor..." (Teacher, School B)	School B	Social and economic struggles affect parental involvement, with some parents focusing on survival rather than their children's education.
General Analysis/Patterns	- Comparison Across Schools	Direct quotes from various schools, including insights on parental involvement levels and challenges.	School A, B, C, D	Some schools (e.g., School D) have lower engagement, potentially due to geographical or economic factors. Female teachers are more active in guiding students and engaging parents.
	- Need for More In-depth Analysis of Patterns Across Schools	N/A	All Schools	Further analysis is needed to identify patterns across schools, such as the impact of geographical location, school leadership, and teacher gender.

Theme 1: Supportive Parents in Their Children's Education

Increased participation. This theme yielded responses such as increased participation, improved performance and communication. For increased participation by parents, the principal for School A indicated that parents always listen and attend meetings whenever they call a meeting at school. In her words, she said, "*I'm comfortable with my parents. We work hand in hand because each time we call them to come and support us, they come.*" She also

stated that parents give their children words of encouragement and follow their progress by regularly going to school to check their children's work. The same notion was raised by a teacher from School C when he indicated the following:

> *Through the learners, we do call them [parents], and they respond… And then by so doing we all see that they love what we're doing about that is all I can say that the interaction between us as teachers and parents is good. If you want to call the meeting, they will respond (Male teacher, School C).*

This study found that the level of supportiveness in parental involvement is often gauged by their participation in school-initiated meetings. Significantly, teachers and the school management team emphasized the critical role of parents in encouraging their children to complete homework (Ceka & Murati, 2016). The study affirms the importance of parents as vital educational partners, providing support for their children's education at home (Andrew et al., 2020; Caasi & Pentang, 2022; Khalid & Singal, 2022). Moreover, teachers perceive parental support to encompass parents who purchase school uniforms for their children and ensure that they attend school wearing clean uniforms and polished shoes. This observation of parents actively involved in their children's education is supported by studies conducted by Crosby et al. (2021) and Clinton and Hattie (2013). This study affirms the claim made by Schmid and Garrels (2021), demonstrating that parental involvement enhances children's academic performance, as it correlates positively with students' academic achievements (Naite, 2021).

A similar perception came from the principal of School B:

> *Okay, like I've indicated that the SGB is treating them [parents]that they are allowed to be part of the meetings. They don't just come to be spectators. They allow them to voice their problems about the school. They also allow them to come up with solutions toward the problems concerning their kids in the school. It might be about the teachers, it might be about the principal, then they know that whenever the meetings are called, they're going to participate there (Principal, School B, female).*

Another teacher from the same school notes,

> *The parents of my school are very engaged in the activities of the school while they are being invited to attend the meetings. They form part of education and in*

the improvement of the school, they also do voluntary work in case we need
assistance instead of hiring people from outside (Female teacher, School B).

This finding aligns with the study done by Penn (2019) suggesting teachers hold regular meetings where they attentively listen to parents, creating a space for them to share their views freely and without facing defensive reactions. This strategy fosters greater parental engagement in children's education.

The same was echoed by the School A principal, who is also a female.

We establish a relationship with them by meeting them regularly. We call them
when we have functions and then also sometimes, we have this thing of end of the
year function with them just for them only where we thank them for the good work
done. Also, we always do that and respect them, and respect is essential. When
you talk to these parents, you should have respect, you should come to their levels
… Yeah, that's the only secret that I can say yah. Okay… uhm they like coming to
the meeting every quarter. They show their support for buying uniforms [for
children], washing, cleaning, like ensure they're always clean every day. You can
go to the classes and check our kids. They are unique out of this village. You can
think they're coming from Model C school, they're all in ties. Their shoes are
shining. And it's because of their parents because you cannot do that alone.
(Principal, School A).

Ismail et al. (2022) examine how parents and teachers work together to build a strong moral foundation in preschool children. The study highlights that teachers encourage parents to actively participate in nurturing positive moral values in their children.

Improved performance and communication. It can be noted that the teachers perceived the attendance of meetings by parents as an important role in showing support for their children's education. This could mean that showing up in the meetings enables teachers to share important information with parents on their children's performance at schools. These findings are supported by the work of Anastasiou and Papagianni (2020), and Kalaycı and Ergül (2020), who emphasize that parental involvement in children's education helps improve learners' academic performance It came out clearly that teachers perceive the parents to be assisting in their children's performance. The principal for school B put more emphasis on the catering provided by the school whenever there was a meeting. The same sentiment was shared

by the other school principals, who, according to their perception, attended in large numbers when food was provided. As for the improved performance, a teacher from school A said,

> "*When parents attend, the performance also improves; they support the idea of monthly tests and giving awards to their children.*"

The teachers mentioned that they usually invite parents to attend the award giving so that they can receive and keep them for their children. This activity of providing awards could serve as motivation for all children as it can inspire them to work hard and perform better. However, teachers also associated the lack of parental support with poor performance in their schools. Jones (2022) highlights that teachers maintain consistent communication with parents, especially when dealing with instances of inappropriate behavior at school. This ongoing dialogue helps build a strong parent–teacher relationship, which plays a vital role in supporting academic achievement.

Theme 2: Partial Parental Support in Their Children's Education

Lack of parental support. The three main themes of lack of parental support, and insecurity, dysfunctional families emanated from this theme.

The findings of this study under this sub-theme revealed that parents do not fully support their children's education.

> "*They're partially supportive because most of them are not around the village…they're in Gauteng and they left [their] child alone in the family.*"

On the second fold, the study revealed that teachers perceived only partial support from other parents in their children's education. This is in contrast to the recommendations emphasizing that to enhance parental involvement, teachers should persist in being polite, ensure a welcoming school environment for parents, and implement activities that encourage parental participation (Bromley & Yazdanpanah, 2021).

Another sentiment from a teacher at School C:

> *The relationship with the parent's lives is complex. Okay, there are those[parents] that understand the role of a teacher, and those who do not. For those who understand, it makes my role as a teacher visible. Okay, for those who do not understand, it's a bit complex because that's because of their education level.*

Conversely, the principal of School D highlighted a different scenario, indicating that the school encounters challenges in garnering support from parents despite efforts such as using loudspeakers for reminders or organizing events such as cooking for them. Research indicated that various sociopolitical factors can influence parental involvement in their children's education, including the educational background of parents, a lack of understanding of the curriculum, and time constraints (Jafarov, 2015). Notably, a significant number of children reside with their grandparents, who may exhibit a diminished interest in their grandchildren's education due to lower levels of literacy. This corroborates the findings of Luxomo and Motala (2012), who demonstrated that numerous children in rural schools originate from non-intact families, extended families, or are being raised by grandparents with limited investment in their educational pursuits. This scenario has far-reaching implications, restricting parental engagement in school-related matters. The outcomes of this study align with concerns raised in other scholarly investigations, where it is observed that parents with limited literacy skills encounter challenges in assisting their children with academic tasks. Furthermore, the absence of formal education contributes to a sense of inadequacy among parents, hindering their active participation in their children's education beyond the financial aspect of paying school fees (Appiah-Kubi & Amoako, 2020; Audu, 2016).

Insecurity. It is assumed that parental participation in School D could be affected by factors such as parents' insecurity because children are left under the guidance and guardianship of their grandparents who might fear the school level of being a high school. This could also be triggered by the level of education, in which parents might think that they might not easily understand the information shared by the school. It was noted that the social and economic background of the entire community around the Giyani area is classified as poor, and the literacy levels of most parents are low. The background could play a major role simply because the attendance of parents to the meetings is perceived to be poor, despite the school's efforts to provide food and refreshment for parents, just like in the other three schools where parents attend in a satisfactory manner. The lack of participation by parents in their children's education has an implication on how learners behave in school premises. Furthermore, the study highlights the issue of parental feelings of inadequacy in supporting their children's educational endeavors, particularly when they lack proficiency in the requisite skills. This sense of inadequacy results in minimal to no involvement in their child's education (Crosby,

2021). Consequently, parents who perceive themselves as lacking mastery-level skills in an educational context tend to refrain from actively participating in their child's academic pursuits.

Dysfunction families. The teacher from school B indicated the problem of dysfunctional families. She said,

> *We've got dysfunctional families they've got pockets of them…. like find that now in that family maybe there are about three ladies all of them, they've got kids and all of them they play cards and are drunkards…. Kids are on their own; whether the kid is at school the mother does not care, whether the kids come to school without uniform, the mother does not care… so that leads to when I identify that the learner drops out… Hence social grants go to play cards, goes to buy liquor such things… playing cards as a gambling (Female teacher, School B).*

The findings indicate that a lack of comprehensive parental engagement in children's educational pursuits contributes to the manifestation of behavioral issues and subpar academic performance among students (Maldonado et al., 2022). This affirms the detrimental impact of insufficient parental involvement, which poses a disadvantage to students' behavioral outcomes. This study elucidates that educators and school administrators underscore the pivotal role of parents as primary role models for their children. They emphasize the importance of fostering attitudinal harmony between home and school environments to create an optimal setting for children. Additionally, the research underscores the critical nature of parental support, with educators highlighting the necessity for parents to acquire knowledge on effectively assisting their children in attaining the objectives of parental involvement. Seemingly, teachers engage parents when they observe the issue of poor performance by the learners. Since most teachers who participated in the study were females, this could mean that females with their nurturing and caring attributes are strategically placed to continue to groom and guide the children at their elementary levels, hence the reason why they engage parents when children do not perform well.

This study was conducted using a small-scale qualitative research design that focused on four schools only; therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to all schools in Limpopo Province. Most teachers in primary education are mainly females; therefore, gender may be a factor when interacting with parents, specifically those of the opposite gender. The other

limitation is that this study focused only on rural-based schools, while deliberately omitting urban-based schools in Limpopo Province. The study's findings align with Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1995) model, particularly in demonstrating how parents' self-efficacy and perceived school invitations influence engagement. However, the findings suggest that in rural South African schools, economic factors play a more significant role than previously emphasized in this model. There is a critical need for rural schools to organize structured parental involvement workshops aimed at equipping parents with the knowledge and skills necessary to actively participate in their children's education. These workshops should empower parents by providing practical guidance on how to support their children's academic development. Furthermore, there is a need for the development of a rural teacher–parent engagement policy. Such a policy should outline clear strategies that teachers can employ to foster meaningful parental involvement in the educational process. In addition, the policy should place particular emphasis on the implementation of targeted programmes designed to empower illiterate parents, enabling them to participate effectively in their children's education.

5. Conclusion

This study, conducted in rural schools in Limpopo Province, South Africa, revealed that teachers underscore the influential role played by certain parents, particularly those with formal education, in actively supporting their children's education within the home environment. Furthermore, parents with formal education collaborate with educational institutions by actively participating in school meetings. Conversely, parents lacking formal education tend to exhibit limited involvement in their children's educational pursuits, notably by not attending school meetings.

Insights drawn from qualitative data, obtained through teacher and school management team responses, indicate a consensus among teachers regarding the substantial significance of parental involvement in the educational process. This study was conducted using a small-scale qualitative research design that focused on four schools only with small sample size of 13 teachers; therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to all schools in Limpopo Province. Most teachers in primary education are mainly females; therefore, gender may be a factor when interacting with parents, specifically those of the opposite gender. Therefore, there is a need for similar studies to be conducted in urban schools. The other limitation is that this study

focused only on rural-based schools, while deliberately omitting urban-based schools in Limpopo Province.

Schools in Limpopo Province should collaborate with educational stakeholders to design and launch parent-teacher workshops and community engagement events. These programmes should include practical strategies for increasing parental involvement in school activities, such as homework support, attending meetings, and volunteering at school events. Regular sessions should be scheduled throughout the academic year, with a clear focus on creating a two-way communication channel between parents and teachers. Educational authorities should prioritise professional development for teachers by offering training sessions that focus on effective methods of engaging parents. This training should cover communication skills, cultural sensitivity, and strategies for involving parents in school activities. Teachers should also be provided with toolkits or resources that outline best practices for involving parents, and school leadership should establish a system for monitoring the success of parental engagement efforts. Schools should partner with local community centers and Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) providers to offer accessible programmes for parents who lack formal education. Schools could host information sessions or community outreach events to raise awareness about the benefits of ABET. Incentives, such as flexible class schedules or transportation support, could be offered to ensure parents can access these educational opportunities. Schools should also actively encourage parents to participate by explaining how ABET programs will help them become more involved in their children's education.

Institutional Review Board Statement
This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines set by University of South Africa. The conduct of this study has been approved and given relative clearance(s) by University of South Africa.

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