

Lack of Parental Involvement in the Education of Their children in the Foundation Phase: Case of Selected Schools in the Thabazimbi Circuit

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ABSTRACT

The importance of parental engagement in a child's life is well-documented in academic literature, with studies linking it to positive outcomes such as improved academic achievement, higher self-esteem, better school attendance, enhanced work performance, and improved social behaviour in children. The purpose of this study is to examine the challenges faced by schools in the Thabazimbi circuit due to a lack of parental involvement in their children's education and to suggest potential solutions. This research employed a qualitative design, guided by Epstein's model of parental involvement, to examine practices related to parental involvement in the foundation phase of public primary schools in the Thabazimbi circuit. The study's participants included teachers, Heads of Department (HoDs), school principals, and parents. Purposive sampling method was used to select the study sample. Data was collected through questionnaires, focus group interviews, and face-to-face interviews. The study revealed that parents value parental involvement and wish to engage in their children's education during the foundation phase. However, they reported several obstacles to greater involvement, such as a lack of time and uncertainty about how to assist their children effectively. Additional challenges included high levels of illiteracy and parental substance abuse. The study recommended extensive training for both principals and teachers to enhance parental involvement. Furthermore, the Department of Basic Education and the participating schools should adjust their approaches to better fit parents' life circumstances, supporting their involvement in their children's education.

KEYWORDS

Parental involvement; parent; foundation phase; learner; learner performance.

INTRODUCTION

The South African Schools Act [84 of 1996] specifies that schooling and education are mandatory for all learners between the ages of 6 and 14. South Africa's education system is structured according to two fundamental documents. The first is the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996), which serves as the supreme law of the land, and the second is the South African Schools Act (84 of 1996), which governs the operation of schools and education.

Parental participation in a child's education is crucial and requires collaboration between parents and teachers. Children spend about half of their day in school and the other half at home, making it essential for both parties to work together to support the development of individual learners. Parents should become actively involved in their children's education from an early age, particularly during the foundation phase. This early engagement allows parents to understand the educational expectations and helps them guide their children effectively through the curriculum, from primary school to university. By embracing their role in their children's education, parents can play an important part in shaping their children's academic journey, ensuring a more comprehensive understanding of their child's development, and providing consistent support throughout their educational career.

Despite challenges like poverty and long working hours, parents must create a plan to collaborate with teachers and allocate time to support their children's education. This approach boosts learners' self-esteem, confidence, and motivation to work hard. Parents should encourage full-day school attendance and set clear rules for completing homework and school activities on time.

In the Thabazimbi circuit, some parents neglect their responsibility to participate in their children's curriculum development. However, there are also parents who, despite challenging living conditions, wish to engage in their children's education. This case study aims to help foundation phase teachers understand how parents can become involved in their children's academic journey and identify ways to support parents in participating more effectively. The study also seeks to explore strategies to improve the reputation of Thabazimbi Circuit schools, raise the quality of education, and boost teachers' morale. Data collection will be conducted using qualitative methods, including interviews, focus group discussions and questionnaires.

Background of the Study

The 21st century is a period marked by rapidly expanding access to technology across various sectors, unlike any previous era. This is the first time in history that the way we work, communicate and shop has been profoundly influenced by technological tools used to access and manage information. Each day brings new technologies, and by the time they hit the market, many are already out-dated. Numerous studies and reports have been conducted to identify the essential life, career and learning skills necessary to succeed in this fast-paced world. Parental participation is a traditional approach that has long been used to promote the advancement of education, student development and school improvement. In the 19th century,

teachers often served as missionaries, preparing students for manual labour. Additionally, dame schools were established, serving as early child-minding services for young children.

Problem Statement

Thabazimbi is a semi-urban area where many parents work on farms, dedicating more time to their jobs than to their children's curriculum development. This lack of parental participation at primary schools in the Thabazimbi Circuit may negatively affect learners' progress. Several other issues have been identified, including high levels of illiteracy among parents, poverty and unemployment, extended work hours, and inadequate communication methods among parents, learners, teachers and the community. Parents are not fulfilling their roles by collaborating with teachers, leading to negative outcomes for learners. This insufficient parental engagement can hinder academic success and limit the expected achievements of the learners.

This lack of parental involvement contributes to decreased attendance and, ultimately, higher dropout rates among learners. The study aims to foster a collaborative spirit among parents, teachers, and the broader community to improve school attendance and curriculum development. By exploring different roles and effective strategies, the study aims to identify how parents and teachers can creatively support learners, allocate time effectively, and accommodate overtime needs. The study also examines the underlying gaps, causes and impacts of low parental involvement and proposes solutions to address these challenges. By promoting a culture of cooperation and shared responsibility, the study hopes to improve the curriculum development in the Thabazimbi Circuit, which will have implications for other circuits facing similar issues.

Aim and Objective of The Study

Aim of the study

The aim of this study is to examine parental participation in-depth, focusing on curriculum development, the benefits of participation, and the disadvantages of a lack of parental participation in the foundation phase. Additionally, the study explores how parents in the Thabazimbi Circuit can be encouraged to participate in their children's educational plans and how stakeholders can collaborate to engage parents in their children's education and schooling.

Objectives

- To evaluate the role of parents in the education of their children during the foundation phase and identify ways they can actively participate.
- To examine the challenges that schools face due to limited parental involvement.
- To propose strategies to enhance parental engagement, with the aim of improving the performance and functionality of the circuit.

Research Questions

Main research question

- (i) How can parents be motivated and encouraged to participate in the education and schooling of their children during the foundation phase?

Research sub-questions

The following three sub-questions were developed from the aim and objectives:

- What roles can parents play in the education of their children during the foundation phase?
- What challenges do schools face due to a lack of parental participation?
- What strategies can be implemented to improve parental participation in schools within the Thabazimbi circuit?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK UNDERPINNING THE STUDY

Theoretical framework

A theoretical framework provides a foundational structure for research, guiding the development of the research problem, data collection, and analysis. It is distinct from a conceptual framework, although the terms are sometimes used interchangeably. According to Jabareen (2009), a theoretical framework relies primarily on established theories to explore and understand the research problem. This study draws upon the following theories to frame its investigation:

The social capital theory

James Coleman's social capital theory connects the sociology of education with public policy, suggesting that a child's well-being and educational success are influenced by family income and parental educational background concepts referred to in the theory as 'human' and 'financial' capital. Coleman introduces a third factor, social capital, which refers to the relationships and networks among parents, teachers, learners, and the broader community (Coleman, 1988). According to Coleman, social capital plays a crucial role in a child's education because it facilitates the transfer of human capital from parents to children. A strong connection among parents, teachers, learners, and the community leads to better academic outcomes. However, work schedules and other obligations can limit parental involvement, reducing the opportunities for social capital. When parents engage more with their children and schools, the social capital is strengthened, leading to increased academic success. Gordon's (1977) theories were ground breaking because they centred on group dynamics rather than individual perspectives. He posited that human development is influenced by various factors, but emphasised the importance of the home environment. According to Gordon, a stable and supportive home environment is crucial for a child's development; when it is well established, learners are more likely to make progress and exhibit considerable improvement in their educational outcomes.

Swap's model of parental participation

Swap's (1993) theory provides four models for home-school cooperation: the partnership model, the protective model, the curriculum enrichment model and the school-home transmission model. These models emphasise collaboration, protection, curriculum

involvement, and reinforcing school values at home. They advocate for mutual support, effective communication, and shared responsibility between schools and families.

Comer's theory of parental participation

Comer's theory of parental participation explores how parents and teachers can be empowered to foster the development of learners, particularly in low-income contexts. In his study, Comer (1978) examined six interconnected pathways that affect academic achievement: language, physical, ethics, cognitive, social and psychological development. According to Comer, when one pathway is underdeveloped, it can affect a child's motivation to learn and progress. Therefore, it's vital for educators to address all six pathways to ensure holistic development. Comer also emphasised that teachers should prepare learners for success beyond the classroom by equipping them with skills and behaviours that help them cope with real-world challenges.

Epstein's theory related to parental participation

This theory suggests that parental participation should extend beyond the school and home to include the broader community (Wright, 2009). It is based on six frameworks for parental participation: effective communication, parent participation, volunteering, decision-making, learning at home, and collaboration with the community. These frameworks help define the roles and responsibilities of parents, guide their behaviour, and promote cooperative efforts among schools, families, and the community (Epstein et al., 2002). In summary, these frameworks encompass a wide range of family participation and support, emphasising effective communication between schools and parents about student progress, active participation in school and extracurricular activities, and involvement in policy-making decisions. Additionally, the frameworks promote providing resources to help parents support their children's learning at home and encourage collaboration across schools, families, and the community to achieve shared goals.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature addresses topics that relate to the research questions and align with the aims and objectives of the study.

The role of parental participation

Parental participation is defined as the process that encourages the overlapping spheres of influence such as schools, families, and communities to work collaboratively for the academic success of learners (Lemmer, 2012). It provides all parties with a platform to communicate with parents and address any critical issues that require parental involvement. Consistency and transparency between teachers and parents are key to this process. This definition suggests that when parents understand their roles, they are more likely to support their children in reading and writing, leading to improved academic outcomes.

Also, other researchers link parental participation with student achievement, particularly in the context of parents' engagement in the foundation phase curriculum. Bachman et al. (2010) stress that parental participation encompasses a parent's behaviour both in school

settings and at home to support their child. Parents play a crucial role in shaping their children's social behaviour and affecting how they present themselves at school.

International perspectives on parent participation

Efforts to transform education and strengthen parental participation have been implemented in different countries. International researchers suggest that parental participation in education depends on the community and families, emphasizing the importance of building trust and fostering mutual engagement among educators (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Literature indicates that several countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, and others, have implemented reform movements to support and promote parental participation (Ng & Lee, 2015). In Chicago, the establishment of Child-Parent Centres (CPCs) aimed to encourage parental participation to boost academic progress (See & Gorard, 2015). These CPCs were designed to improve parenting skills and provide teachers with the necessary skills to enhance classroom quality. Studies examining the impact of social class on education in the United States have shown that parental participation is important and is not dependent on social groups (Lareau, 1987; McGrath & Kuriloff, 1999)

Research shows that in the United Kingdom, parental participation leads to positive outcomes. According to Gwija (2016), learners' attendance rates have improved, their overall academic performance has increased, and their behaviour has shown rapid changes. Similarly, the European Commission reported comparable positive effects of parental participation (Desforges & Abouchar, 2003), suggesting that greater engagement by parents can have a beneficial impact on multiple aspects of a child's educational experience.

Parental participation in South Africa

Comprehensive legislative guidelines are discussed, which are outlined as follows:

The governing legislative framework

South Africa has an education system governed by legislation, through specifically the South African Schools Act (SASA) of 1996 under Section 18. This section mandates parental participation in their children's education, allowing them to raise concerns, agree or disagree with decisions, and have a voice in the final decision. Additionally, South Africa introduced outcomes-based education (OBE), which encourages parental participation in schools. OBE gives parents a platform to engage in the education system and share responsibilities with the Department of Education (Department of Education, 1997). OBE requires parents to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding to promote education in their communities. However, several parents struggle to understand the new curriculum and to actively participate in school governing bodies. OBE assigns parents specific roles and responsibilities related to their children's education. The three spheres community, schools and families are encouraged to become a unified component to establish a comprehensive and effective curriculum (Department of Education, 1997). Parents are encouraged to participate in the following aspects:

- Ensuring that the educational standards are high, and the results are satisfactory.

- Assisting in determining the school's vision and mission.
- Promoting a culture of learning and creating a supportive environment.
- Identifying community resources that can be used to promote education.

Two classifications of parental participation

According to Dookie (2013), parental participation is defined as 'the activities that parents engage in, both at home and school, to support their children's educational achievement'. The following two types of parental participation are discussed:

School establishment parental participation

School-based parental participation is considered a crucial factor in improving learner performance. It involves parents engaging with learners and developing communication skills, which are useful not only in the school context but also for managing various home activities. Parents can participate in additional activities beyond classroom involvement, such as volunteering, attending school events, or joining parent-teacher associations. This approach creates a collaborative environment where the experiences of all participants can serve as valuable learning resources. When parents act as both educators and learners, drawing on their own experiences to contribute to the educational process, it enhances the learning experience for everyone involved.

Home establishment parental participation

Home-based parental participation plays a vital role in shaping parent-child interactions, allowing parents to identify barriers that their children might encounter in their learning journey and discuss them with the school. Parents can help clarify concepts and explain topics that might have been unclear during class. By offering additional examples or breaking down complex ideas into simpler terms, parents can support their children's understanding. However, one of the challenges of home-based parental participation is the high illiteracy rate among some parents. Parents with limited literacy skills might understand certain concepts differently or ask questions in a way that could mislead the learner. To overcome this barrier, parents can be encouraged to use a variety of resources to support their children's learning, as suggested by Higgins and Katsipataki (2015). This approach can include attending after-school classes to improve their own skills, using additional resources, referring to simplified versions of homework, or relying on supplementary dictionaries.

The benefit of parental participation

Parental participation benefits learners' academic progress (James, 2008). When students direct their learning through projects or community service, they can better apply classroom concepts, making learning more engaging and realistic. Adults, with their accumulated life experiences, can offer valuable insights to enhance this process. Parents should engage with their children during the foundation phase. Teaching young learners can be enjoyable because they are enthusiastic and energetic, eager to participate in any activity that captures their interest.

The benefit to both parents and teachers

When parents and teachers collaborate, they can achieve a common goal: fostering the academic and personal success of learners. This partnership can reduce stress for parents, contribute to a brighter future for children, create a consistent routine, and promote lifelong learning and knowledge improvement. Teachers play a critical role in this partnership by providing quality education and monitoring learners success as they progress through different grades or schools. Although teaching young learners can be challenging, with the right support and parental involvement, these learners have the potential to become highly successful learners. When parents willingly engage in their children's education, learners tend to experience the following benefits: These outcomes reflect the positive impact that active parental involvement can have on a child's educational journey.

- Improved academic performance:
- Homework completion
- Enhanced self-esteem
- Positive social behaviour
- Adaptability
- Reduced dropout rates

Collaboration between parents and teachers benefits both parties. Teachers note that their effectiveness partly depends on the foundation set at home. When parents teach their children to behave and respect their teachers, classroom management becomes easier, allowing teachers to focus on instruction and conserve time.

POPULATION AND SAMPLING

Study population

The study population is defined by a specific group, geographic location, age, sex, boundaries, and roles. The geographic scope is confined to the administrative boundaries of the Thabazimbi Circuit. The target population consisted of three principals, three heads of department, three educators, and nine parents. The study involved three primary schools within the Thabazimbi Circuit, though, for confidentiality, the school names are not disclosed.

Sampling

Sampling involves selecting a smaller subset of cases from a larger population, allowing researchers to generalise their findings to the broader group (Neuman, 2006:219). There are two primary sampling methods: probability and non-probability. In this study, a non-probability sampling method was employed, where participants volunteered to take part. The sampling process involved selecting three schools from nine primary schools within the Thabazimbi Circuit. These schools were chosen because they share similar socioeconomic conditions and face similar issues with parental participation. Additionally, they are located within the same geographic area. For each of the three selected schools, the sample included one principal, one head of department, one teacher, and three parents with children in the foundation phase.

Table 1.
Participants' Biography

	Participants	Gender	Experience	Name of school	Age group
Principals	Princ 1	M	20	A	50-59
	Princ 2	M	9	B	40-49
	Princ 3	F	17	C	50-59
HODs	DH 1	F	11	A	50-59
	DH 2	F	8	B	50-59
	DH 3	F	1	C	50-59
Educators	Edu 1	F	19	A	50-59
	Edu 2	F	9	B	30-39
	Edu 3	F	4	C	30-39
Parents	Parnt 1	F	-	A	40-49
	Parnt 2	F	-	A	30-39
	Parnt 3	F	-	A	30-39
	Parnt 4	F	-	B	30-39
	Parnt 5	F	-	B	20-29
	Parnt 6	F	-	B	20-29
	Parnt 7	F	-	C	40-49
	Parnt 8	F	-	C	20-29
	Parnt 9	F	-	C	30-39

Data collection instruments

Data must be processed to extract meaningful information, which requires the use of appropriate instruments to collect data that align with the study's aims and objectives. To understand perceptions on parental participation, qualitative investigative techniques were applied, using group discussions and individual feedback through semi-structured interviews. The instruments and tools used to collect data included:

- Interview sessions with principals;
- Interview sessions with teachers;
- Interview sessions with parents;
- Group discussion rules for the participation of teachers and parents

The use of different techniques helped determine whether the collected information was sufficient for the researcher to draw a conclusive summary or if further investigation was needed. Additional analysis was conducted through direct field observations.

Interviews

Interviews are a method to gather information from participants, designed to address the objectives of the research. Different types of interviews were used, categorized as follows:

Figure 2.

Methods Used for Qualitative Analysis



Focus group discussions

A small group of participants can be described as a focus group, a common qualitative research strategy typically representative of the study's purpose. The group consists of individuals from the population sample who are most affected by or closely related to the topic. The interviewer leads the group discussion on the topic, asking questions to elicit responses from the group. The following aspects outline the process of conducting the focus group discussion:

- The discussion topic was selected.
- Discussion prompts or questions were prepared in advance.
- A focus group questionnaire was developed.
- The researcher took notes during the discussion.
- Participants were recruited and scheduled.
- Consent from participants was obtained.
- Equal representation from different segments of the group was ensured.

Group discussions offer a structured and flexible format for gathering information. They enable the host to manage dominant and submissive participants, ensuring balanced participation. Additionally, group discussions can yield a substantial amount of information in a short period.

Face-to-face interviews

Semi-structured or face-to-face dialogues use open-ended questions, providing flexibility in conversation flow. Face-to-face interviews are preferred because they allow researchers to gather more detailed information. Participants can ask questions and seek clarification, leading to a deeper understanding of the topic. This format also enables researchers to use illustrations or gestures to explain concepts, enhancing communication and reducing misunderstandings.

Observation

Observation is a crucial element in interviews and site visits. While some parents or teachers may find it difficult to express their feelings or raise their points during focus group discussions, observation allows researchers to detect these unspoken cues and schedule one-on-one appointments for further insights. Observation was used to assess various factors, such as:

- The school's physical environment, including its surroundings and resources available to learners.
- The community where learners live and spend time.
- The facial expressions and body language of parents and teachers during discussions.
- The duration of lessons and the overall classroom dynamics.
- How parents and teachers address non-participation in their children's education.

Notes taken during the interview

During interviews, group discussions, and site observations, detailed notes were taken to capture key information. These notes included data on the native language spoken by participants and the language used for teaching. The notes were organized based on the scheduled appointments, and the corresponding dates were carefully recorded to maintain accuracy and context.

Data analysis

Participants were interviewed to discuss parental participation in their children's education. They were briefed in advance, and the purpose of the research was clearly explained. The researcher obtained consent from all participants before the interviews. For data analysis, information was organized in a table format, allowing for clear and significant information. Values were assigned to individual participants to reflect their unique experiences. Qualitative research is assessed for verifiability through validity and reliability. This study ensured trustworthiness by applying a truth value model, emphasizing consistency, neutrality, and applicability to establish a credible and reliable research process.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in research involves ensuring data credibility, generalisability, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. To establish trustworthiness, the researcher must have confidence in the research findings, demonstrating that they are valid and reliable. This involves evaluating whether the data accurately represents the studied context and can be applied to other contexts.

Credibility

Data credibility refers to the extent to which data analysis is conclusive, accurate, and free from bias (McMillan, 2012). Credibility in this study was achieved by using the same set of questions across the three selected primary schools. This consistency allowed for valid comparisons based on the findings and the feedback received from participants, helping to ensure that the analysis was reliable and unbiased.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Results

The primary objective of this study was to investigate and engage with parents, schools, and the community to understand the lack of parental participation in their children's academic plans and progress as early as the foundation phase in three selected primary schools within the Thabazimbi circuit in the Waterberg District, Limpopo province. Empirical research indicates that limited parental participation can negatively impact both school performance and learners achievement. This study aimed to explore the reasons for this lack of involvement and identify ways to encourage greater parental engagement in the educational journey of children.

Table 2.

Educators', Department Heads', and Principals' Feedback on Parental Involvement in Student Academic Progress.

Participants	Feedback
Edu 1 and Edu 2	'Parental participation refers to parents' involvement in their children's school activities. It involves parents cooperating with schools and actively engaging in their children's learning'.
DH 1, 2 and 3	'Parental participation is when parents take responsibility for assisting their children with schoolwork'.
Princ 1 and Princ 3	'Parental participation is the involvement of parents in their children's schoolwork. It means parents ensuring they support their children at school and at home, providing them with parental care'.

Reflecting on the above quotations, parental participation involves supporting the child both at school and at home.

Challenges experienced by schools with a lack of parental participation

Schools in semi-urban areas often face challenges due to poor socioeconomic backgrounds, leading to consistent underperformance compared to schools in affluent urban areas. Parental illiteracy is common among most parents in these areas, which can further complicate educational progress. Given these circumstances, schools should serve as extensions of the home, particularly for foundation phase learners. As the primary educators, parents play a

crucial role in providing foundational education, and learners often thrive when taught by their parents. To explore this dynamic, parents were interviewed to gather insights into how they support their children's education, recognizing that 'Charity begins at home'. Educators, principals, and heads of departments were also interviewed to understand the level of support they provide to parents and the strategies they use to engage with them when initial outreach efforts fall short.

Table 3.

Participants' Measures to Address Student Non-Participation in Academic Performance

Participants	Feedback
Parnt 3, Parnt 6 and Parnt 8	'We support our children by providing them with school materials, ensuring they meet the educational standards set by the school, and checking that they are actively engaged in their classwork. We emphasise the importance of listening to educators if they want to succeed academically. Additionally, we encourage them to complete their homework before engaging in after-school activities.'
Edu 2	'I try to give learners homework to involve parents in their education, especially since they don't show up when called. By assigning homework, I aim to encourage parents to participate in their children's learning. However, many students return with their homework undone, and only a few complete it with parental help'.
DH1	'I call meetings with parents of learners who are not completing schoolwork to discuss how we can collaborate to support them, but several parents don't attend. We also invite parents on open days to review their children's work and understand where they might need help, but only a few show up, and most are parents of high-performing learners'.
Princ 1	'I call parents' meetings to discuss learners' progress. This helps parents understand their children's work, track their progress, and learn about the challenges they face. However, parents often raise concerns about the timing of the meetings, citing work commitments, household responsibilities, and safety issues. Many work during the day, need to cook and prepare for the next day after work, or live far from the school, making evening meetings risky. When meetings are scheduled during the day, they are at work; on weekends, they are busy with house chores'.

Reflecting on the above statements, one could argue that the more parents are involved in supporting their children at home, the more learners will develop a love for school and education. To address the issue of illiteracy and support students with their homework, establishing community literacy centres and after-care programs could help alleviate the pressures on schools.

Parental participation barriers

When parents participate and cooperate with teachers to support their children's education, illiteracy can be addressed more effectively.

Table 4.

Parental Participation Barriers

Participants	Feedback
Parnt 2, Parnt 5 and Parnt 9	'We buy necessary school equipment for our children, including books and school uniforms. We help them with their homework and check their daily schoolwork. We ensure they are not late for school. If they are unwell, we communicate with the teachers'. Parent 8 mentioned, 'We want to help our children with their schoolwork, but the problem is that we don't know how. This new curriculum is difficult for me because of my educational background. I don't want my children to follow my path'.
Edu 2 and Edu 3	'We regularly assign homework for learners to complete at home, but we face a significant challenge: sometimes, parents do the homework for them instead of helping them understand the work. When we give homework, many learners are not assisted, and some do not complete it at all. Parents often say they're too busy with work to help, and others claim they're too tired when they come home. Additionally, absenteeism among learners is a problem, further hindering their progress'.
Reckon that DH 1 and DH 2 said:	'Teachers assign homework to learners, but they often return with it incomplete. Learners say, 'My mom said she doesn't understand it.' Illiteracy is an issue parents find the new curriculum challenging. When we call meetings, many parents don't show up'.
Princ 3	'Many of our children's parents don't understand what's expected of them when learners are assigned homework'.

Reflecting on the above quotations, one might argue that parents need encouragement to be more hands-on with their children's schoolwork.

Suggestions for overcoming barriers

Parents should take an active interest in their children's schoolwork and inquire about what they do during the day. This practice can motivate learners, knowing that their parents will ask to see what they worked on at school. One might argue that schools should support parents by providing information on how to create a conducive learning environment at home to help learners with their schoolwork.

Disadvantages of lack of parental participation

Parental participation is crucial for a child's academic success. Parents, serving as motivators play an important role in encouraging learners to strive for achievement.

Table 5.

Disadvantages of Lack of Parental Participation

Participants	Feedback
Parnt 8	'I'm not educated, so I want my children to be educated so they can help me in the future'.
Edu 1	'Many parents in our community are illiterate; they can't read or write and didn't progress far in school. Some parents work on farms, leaving before

their children go to school and returning late, so they don't have time to sit down and help with schoolwork. This affects learners' performance, and many children who struggle academically tend to cause trouble and misbehave'.

DH 2 'Children whose parents are not involved in their education often don't value it. They are frequently absent, neglect their schoolwork, underperform, and ultimately drop out'.

Princ 2 'Non-participation of parents in their children's academic performance often leads to poor results. When learners don't perform well, they tend to misbehave in class.'

Reflecting on the above quotations, one might argue that it's true that many parents are illiterate due to factors beyond their control, such as socioeconomic conditions or limited educational opportunities. Given this, parents should seek support to help their children with schoolwork and ensure they maintain discipline at home to foster a positive learning environment.

Measures to improve parental participation in Thabazimbi Circuit schools

An open book day can be held once a term, providing a platform for parents and teachers to connect and discuss learners' educational progress. This event can facilitate better communication and collaboration, allowing both parties to share insights and offer guidance to support the academic development of learners.

Summary

As a child's first learning environment is the home, the responsibility for educating learners is shared between parents and teachers. To ensure the success of learners' education, parental participation is essential in all areas. The research emphasized the importance of collaboration between parents and schools in South Africa, where parental participation presents challenges. Different structures can motivate parents and guardians to engage in their children's education. Parental participation is a shared responsibility. A critical issue is that parents need guidance on what's expected from them. It takes a community to educate a child, so schools need support from both parents and the community.

Discussion

The following discussion of key findings connects the results from the literature review and the empirical study. The main issues identified include understanding the term 'parental participation', the roles of parents, contributing barriers, the roles of the school, and suggested strategies for enhancement. An understanding of the term parental participation

Parental involvement and participation have been recognised as vital in facilitating the collaborative process between teachers and parents to achieve a common goal that benefits learners (Lemmer et al., 2012). The literature review shows that parental involvement is crucial for a child's educational success. Parents must take responsibility for checking their children's

books, assisting with homework, and communicating with teachers about their children's progress and possible solutions if they encounter difficulties. However, several factors contribute to a lack of parental participation, including high illiteracy rates, parents' demanding work schedules, and the complexity of the new curriculum, which has resulted in a considerable decline in parental teachers to shoulder most of the responsibility, often seen as 'jacks of all trades' expected to manage all aspects of a child's education.

The data collected revealed that the participants' understanding of the term 'parental participation' was limited. The participants shared their views, and it became apparent that their understanding of their responsibilities towards their children's educational progress was narrow. They associated parental participation primarily with home-based and school-based activities, such as helping with homework and providing teaching and learning resources. This spectrum is not only limited to those factors; it is broad and can be integrated into a single view to track performance progress.

The characters of parents' participation in the education of their children in the foundation phase

The primary gap identified in the interviews and questionnaires concerns the new curriculum with parents indicating they lack the knowledge to support their children and often don't know where to start. Many parents hesitate to ask for help, fearing it could harm their image. This reluctance hinders effective communication with teachers, who are typically open to helping and encouraging parental participation. If parents knew that teachers are ready to help, they might be more willing to seek guidance. Improved learner outcomes are beneficial not only to the learners themselves but also to the school, the community, and the parents. Parents should invest in their children's education not only financially but also through moral support and by seeking assistance from teachers when needed.

Barriers to lack of parental participation

A barrier is something that restricts or prevents individuals or groups from achieving their goals. Each person has unique constraints and limitations, and parental participation barriers can vary from one person to another. However, in the Thabazimbi Circuit, these barriers are often quite similar. Unemployment is an important barrier in this circuit, affecting parents' ability to participate in their children's education. Many parents work on farms, facing heavy workloads, long hours, and exposure to harsh conditions like intense sun. The commute from their homes to the farms can be exhausting, further limiting the energy and time they have to engage in their children's education.

Participants identified various barriers to effective parental participation. In summary, parents and teachers often did not recognise the gaps contributing to the issue. Parents blamed the new curriculum, while teachers pointed to parents' lack of involvement as the root cause. One principal suggested that early interventions are more cost-effective and have lasting effects. Out of nine participating parents, forty (40%) indicated that they are willing to engage and be involved but struggle with low self-confidence and self-esteem.

Strategies to improve parental participation

All participants mentioned that 'we need learning centres where parents can learn to read and write'. They also added that 'social development must assist schools in addressing parents who misuse children's funds for selfish reasons and those who neglect their children's basic needs, such as food, education, cleanliness, and homework'. To improve parental participation and ensure proper child care, workshops, teacher patience, and clear policymaking are essential for fostering a conducive environment for learners' educational development and improvement (Bachman et al., 2010).

The participants agree that parental participation in the foundation phase or early childhood education can significantly enhance a child's mental, social, and emotional development. Schools should consider home visits for parents who request them and are open to accommodating teachers in their homes, rather than solely relying on school-based meetings. These meetings could also rotate in terms of timing and location to accommodate parents with varying work schedules. Early stimulation for learners is crucial for their long-term academic performance. Teachers should inform parents that their role goes beyond providing for their children's basic needs; they should be active participants in their children's education to ensure learning continues beyond the classroom.

It is evident that a conference or workshop is needed to empower HODs, principals, teachers, staff, parents, community members, and families to foster greater participation in the education of learners. Parents would benefit from seminars where they could learn how to support their children, whom to contact for guidance, and how to collaborate with other parents who have children in the same class. Establishing a network among parents can enhance communication and create a support system. This approach could improve the relationship among parents, allowing them to share information and work collaboratively. If Parent A is unavailable, Parent B could assist or pass on important information, thus ensuring that everyone stays informed and engaged in their children's education.

CONCLUSIONS

The study aimed to explore parental participation, focusing on case research findings and suggested recommendations to improve parents' involvement. The major challenges identified were substance abuse, the new curriculum, lack of commitment from working parents, and illiteracy. To address these issues, support is needed from schools, DBE and other stakeholders to improve the circuit's performance. The research found that many parents are interested in participating in decision-making, learning more about their children's education, and becoming more hands-on. However, the main barrier to parental participation is a lack of knowledge and inadequate information. Therefore, providing parents with more comprehensive guidance and resources could enhance their participation and, ultimately, support their children's academic success.

Recommendations

After analysing the research findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

- (i) Partnerships among families, teachers, and community members are essential. Parents must change their approach and prioritise education, avoiding the tendency to shift their responsibilities onto educators due to their own levels of illiteracy or lack of self-confidence.
- (ii) Cooperation and collaboration among all stakeholders are critical. To tackle illiteracy, walk-in centres could be established where parents can learn to read, write, and do basic mathematics. These centres would not require formal programmes, tests, or scheduled times, allowing parents to attend at their convenience and learn at their own pace. This flexibility can encourage participation from those who might avoid traditional adult basic education training (ABET) due to its school-like structure.
- (iii) Schools should foster stronger community ties by creating school reading programmes that encourage parental participation. Through a 'Reading for Enjoyment' program, parents can visit schools monthly to read to children, fostering a love of reading and building their own self-worth and confidence. The education department and stakeholders could expand existing community reading campaigns and organize reading competitions to engage parents further. Increased parental participation can lead to improved academic performance in children, enhanced school reputations, boosted educator morale, and ultimately better-performing schools in the Thabazimbi Circuit.
- (iv) The Thabazimbi community would benefit from mobile libraries where parents can bring their children to read with them. These libraries should offer a variety of books and require children to be accompanied by their parents. Additionally, they should provide school-related materials such as prescribed reading books, textbooks, and lesson plans used by educators. This approach can guide parents who want to help their children with schoolwork but might not know where to start. By improving access to educational resources, mobile libraries can enhance the quality of education and parents' understanding of the curriculum, encouraging greater parental involvement in their children's learning.
- (v) Families should consider investing in various learning materials and activities, such as magazines, newspapers, and books, if they can afford to do so. Engaging in family literacy activities, such as reading together or discussing current events, can also promote a learning-focused environment.
- (vi) The DBE organises workshops for educators through subject advisers, providing strategies to help learners understand different concepts. Parents need similar induction to understand how to actively participate in and contribute to their children's education. Workshops or informational sessions for parents can offer guidance on supporting homework, engaging with teachers, and promoting a conducive learning environment at home. This can empower parents with the knowledge and tools to play a more active role in their children's academic journey.
- (vii) Schools typically communicate with parents only during open book days, but there are other effective ways to maintain communication. Strategies like individual meetings, annual and

quarterly workshops, training sessions, awareness programs, and providing additional resources can promote parental participation and improve literacy levels. Additionally, members of school governing bodies could be compensated for their efforts to encourage their participation. Schools might also consider organising transport for parents who live far from the school, reducing barriers related to distance and transportation. These measures could create a more inclusive environment that fosters parental involvement in school activities and governance.

(viii) Departmental policies need to be reviewed. All schools must comply with the governing constitution and legislation to compile a documented policy on parental participation. All educators and principals must attend workshops on parental participation. Parental participation should also be included in the curriculum of teacher training institutions to prepare teachers for real-life situations.

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