Perceived home and school integration through parental participation in rural primary school governance in Amathole East District, South Africa

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ABSTRACT

The literature links significant parental involvement in school activities to good school outcomes. The two-fold study examined factors affecting parental participation in rural primary school governance and its advantages. The qualitative case study method was used to collect data from nine purposively recruited individuals from three rural elementary schools. Individual semi-structured interviews collected thematically analyzed data. The study found that negative school attitudes caused parental animosity toward school. Lack of role awareness, inadequate professional connections caused by academic gaps, and language difficulties also discouraged parental involvement in school governance. Parental involvement promotes collective accountability and school-home integration. Home and school characteristics affected parental participation in school activities, the study found. Based on the findings, recommendations included improving parent-teacher interactions to help students succeed and training SGBs to improve their performance.

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Introduction

“Physically active school cultures have school leaders who agree upon and promote common goals for school-based physical activities, educate new students and staff on the value of physical activity and encourage collegial relationships among students, teachers, parents, administrators, and community partners” (Rickwood, 2015:3). Hamlin (2017) states that parent participation results in improved student achievement and behavioral outcomes.

Van Wyk (2010) concurs with Henderson and Berla’s (1994) assertion that students are more likely to succeed in school and in life when parents and schools collaborate to facilitate learning. Parents in certain communities, especially those with rural schools, seem to depend more on teachers when it comes to issues of school governance, according to Duku (2006) and Mncube (2009). This might be triggered by several factors including parents entrusting teachers to run the affairs of the school based on literacy levels, time, and confidence to make lasting decisions. As a result, particularly in rural regions, school governance does not proceed as intended under the South African Schools Act (SASA) (Mavuso & Duku, 2014). This arises as parents’ contribution towards school governance takes an inclination against them thus nodes towards teachers and school administrators.

As such, parents should add their voice to encourage and/or support schools to promote active mindsets for the development of mentally strong learners. In this study, involvement and participation are synonymously used.

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Existing literature posits a correlation between favorable academic results and extensive parental engagement in school-related endeavors. The study had a dual purpose: first, to identify the characteristics that influence parental involvement in the governance of rural primary schools, and second, to assess the advantages of such parental participation. The study employed a qualitative research methodology and employed a case study framework to gather data from nine participants who were purposefully selected from three rural elementary schools. The data was collected through individual semi-structured interviews and then analyzed thematically.

**Literature Review**

**Factors that Affect Parental Participation in School Governance**

There are several advantages to parents becoming involved in their children's education (Borgonovi & Montt, 2012). It has been determined that significant factors influence parents' propensity to practice supportive parenting is their perception of their position. As stated by the Department of Education (2020), parent participation and engagement refer to the ways in which families and parents encourage their kids' academic success and general well-being. The three types of parental cognition that Đurišić and Bunjevac (2017) concentrate on are parents' expectations for their children's future careers, their confidence in their ability to raise and educate their kids, and their opinions of the school (Eccles, 1999; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Okagaki & Frensch, 1998).

**Parental Aspirations:** Idealistic hopes or objectives that parents may have for their children's future accomplishment are referred to as parental aspirations. High aspiration parents are probably more prepared to put up the work necessary to see that their children's dreams come true (Murphey, 1992). **Parenting Self-Efficacy** – The construct of self-efficacy refers to “beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments” (Bandura, 1997:3). Studies carried out across multiple nations reveal that people with strong self-efficacy in a certain domain dedicate themselves to that domain, persist when faced with challenges, and react robustly to misfortune (Bandura, 2002). Research indicates that parents who possess a high level of self-efficacy are inclined to actively participate in school activities and keep an eye on their kids' academic progress (Ardelt & Eccles, 2001). **Perceptions of the School** – The level of parental participation is probably influenced by the school. Parents are more inclined and capable of getting involved in their children's education if teachers demonstrate concern for the child's well-being, show respect for parents, and establish efficient channels of communication with families (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Despite this, parents in the twenty-first century are frequently consumed by the responsibilities and diversions of everyday life, which weakens the effort that should be invested towards their involvement in their children’s education. Some parents find it difficult to regularly attend school functions or be involved in their children's education due to limited income, rigid work schedules, and language barriers (Ho, 2009). Parental involvement in school is hindered by cultural norms, lack of financial means, and low educational achievement, according to Bacck (2010) and Lee and Bowen (2006).

Parents who did not achieve academic accomplishment could have a bad opinion of it (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991). Parents may avoid communicating with the school because they are intimidated by the teachers, the curriculum, and the language (Flynn, 2007). According to Rutherford and Edgar (1999), parents find it more difficult to be active in their child's secondary education because it can be difficult to decide which teacher is in charge of what aspects of the child's academic program. According to Ascher (1988), urban low-income parents can and should take an equal role in their children's education as middle-class parents. She also notes that childcare obligations and rigid leave policies frequently make it difficult for single parents to participate in society. It is common for school administrators to make presumptions such as single parents and low-income working parents are unreliable and should not be approached. It is not required of them to help with home learning activities, attend meetings, or engage in their children's classroom (Ascher, 1988).

Williams and Sanchez (2011) delineate four domains that pose obstacles to engagement: insufficient time, restricted accessibility, inadequate financial means, and insufficient knowledge. Johnson (1994:46) asserted that “feelings of inadequacy, limited school background, or preoccupation with basic necessities may prevent parents from communicating with schools”. According to Lee and Bowen (2006), social capital within families has a favorable correlation with students' academic success, graduation rates, better academic performance, inspiration, and involvement in the classroom. According to Bayat (2014), it is discovered that SGBs are not functioning effectively because they lack the required skills and are unsure of their exact duties and accountability. According to Chaka and Dietiens (2006), efforts to encourage parental involvement in schools that have historically served underprivileged students have been hampered by issues with education. It seems that not everyone has the same definition of "participation," despite the fact that SASA was established on the ideals of representation and an active role in governance (Brown & Duku, 2008).

According to Mncube (2009), the reasons for low engagement include parents' general educational attainment, their ignorance of the need of parental involvement in school affairs, their concern of their children being victimized in the classroom, and the challenge of attending meetings. Parents believe that teachers are more suited to perform these responsibilities because they have a greater understanding of school governance (Duku, 2006). Mabasa and Themane (2002) argue that low literacy levels of the parents have sometimes resulted to lack of commitment. Some teachers and principals promote the low amount of meaningful communication that exists between the school and parents, particularly black parents (Michael et al., 2012). Mabovula (2008) research, elementary school teachers hold a stronger belief than middle school teachers do about the value of parental involvement in their students'
education and the need for greater chances and support for parents to get involved in their kids' education. Teachers' attitudes and behaviors must shift significantly if they are to have a true collaboration with parents (Mestry & Grobler, 2007).

**Benefits of Parental Participation in School Governance**

The School Governance Starter Pack (1997) argues that the participation of parents and broader community in the school is regarded as the key to effective learning. In Portugal, the increase of parent and community participation bring multiple benefits to teachers and schools. When parents participate, their perceptions of the instructor and school are more positive, and the teachers' workload can be less overwhelming (Working Group Schools Policy, 2014). The governments of Australia acknowledge the vital role that families and parents play in promoting the education and general well-being of children. Additionally, research shows that when parents and educators see parental involvement as a collaboration, it works best (Davies, 1996; Emegwali, 2009; Epstein, 2009).

Literature reveals that parent participation in school governance is a critical component of education in South Africa (Duma, 2013). Parental participation and students' academic achievement levels are correlated. It is true that kids with involved parents are more likely to succeed academically, particularly in reading, and to be more engaged and motivated in the classroom (Borgonovi & Montt, 2012; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). In her discussion of the advantages of parent involvement in schools, Ho (2009) points out that it helps parents in overcoming a deficiency in social capital. According to Hill and Taylor (2004), parents' increased social capital results from their involvement in the school, which in turn helps pupils succeed more. When it comes to school programs, activities, and events, students are frequently in charge of informing and corresponding with parents (Epstein, 1995). In addition to being very good for the child, parental involvement is also a very important tool for building parent-teacher connections (Brownlee, 2015).

**Problem Statement**

The South African public school system is faced with lack of parental participation in school governance. Yet, literature argues that positive school outcomes are related to high parental involvement in school activities. Sanders and Sheldon (2009) and Sheldon (2009) argue that parents' participation in school activities is seen to benefit children. Despite frequently operating in impoverished social and economic areas, research on successful schools—those where pupils are learning and succeeding in their broad academic pursuits—has repeatedly demonstrated that these institutions have solid and supportive school-home ties. Mavuso and Duku (2014) deduced that there are differences in the perceptions and presumptions held by parents, educators, and principals on the roles that parents play in school governance. Effective schools with a healthy school climate, according to Đurišić and Bunijevac (2017), have made a genuine effort to reach out to the families of their kids in order to foster excellent cooperation. However, despite the positive impact of parents' involvement in school activities on learners, many parents seem not to participate in their children's school academic life. Out of this concern, the current study, which was part of a larger master’s study in which the first author was supervised by the second author, sought to explore parental participation in rural primary school governance in Amathole East District, South Africa. The two-fold study sought to establish factors that affect parental participation in rural primary school governance, and then determine the benefits of parental participation in rural primary school governance.

**Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework is the structure that can hold or support a theory of a research study (Labaree, 2009). This study was framed by Epstein et al. (1995)’s Typology which is widely admired and recognized as the global standard for parental engagement, thus served as the foundation for this exploration. The results of numerous studies on the best practices for children's education serve as the foundation for this framework (Epstein 1995, 1996, 2001, 2003, 2009). According to Epstein (2001, 2009), there are numerous reasons for school, family, and community to form and maintain a partnership. The primary goal of this kind of collaboration is to support students in their academic success. Developing parental skills and leadership, helping families interact with others in the school and community, supporting teachers in their work, and enhancing the school environment and programming are additional reasons. For the reasons listed above, it is crucial that parents stay involved in their children's education and maintain a solid rapport with the educational institutions. The six components of parental participation identified by Epstein et al. (1995) include decision-making, parenting, volunteering, communicating, at-home learning, and community collaboration. According to Epstein (2001, 2009), it is important for each school to determine which factors are thought to be most likely to help it achieve its academic achievement goals and to foster an environment of cooperation between the family and the school. The six steps outlined by Epstein et al.’s (1995) typology are very important in addressing issues related to parents’ participation in schools and are also central to creating effective home-school relations necessary for promoting successful children.

**Research Methodology**

**Approach**

The qualitative approach was found appropriate for this study as Seale (2012) argues that the researcher explores voices and experiences which have been ignored or misrepresented.

**Design**

A case study research design was used in the study. The goal of a case study is to comprehend the situation and acquire a thorough description of it (McMillan, 2008).
Sample

From three conveniently chosen elementary schools, one parent who served on the School Governing Body (SGB), one member of the School Management Team (SMT), and one teacher were chosen through purposeful sampling. Choosing respondents with essential expertise or knowledge about the study's goal is known as purposeful sampling (Lodico et al, 2010).

Data Collection Procedures

The study used semi-structured interview schedules. Galletta (2013) mentions semi-structured interviews give participants the chance to clarify, offer feedback, and express their perspectives on subjects pertaining to research misconduct. They also aid in addressing particular aspects of the research question and shed light on the subject matter of the study.

Data Trustworthiness

The first researcher used inquiry audit to establish dependability of the research process and the data.

Data Analysis

Verbatim transcription was adopted in this study. Content analysis was used for transcribed participants’ responses to generate the themes.

Ethical Considerations

Leedy and Ormrod (2001) state that research respondents should be informed about the nature of the research to be conducted and be given the choice of their participation or not. Permission to gather data was sought from participants through informed consent.

Results

Participants from the first school were identified by pseudonyms as E1, SMT1 and SGB1, whereas those from the second school were identified as E2, SMT2 and SGB2. Thus, the study's conclusions are given.

Factors that affect parental participation in school governance

There were different factors which influence parental involvement in school governance.

Negative school attitude towards parental participation in schools

Parents' involvement in school governance was shown to be hindered by principals' and teachers' attitudes toward it. For instance, it was raised that, “Teachers do not like parent participation, saying that it makes them to work under pressure and that they cannot be judged by illiterate persons. They say that parents should not infringe on their terrain. There are things that teachers are hiding from parents such as corruption” (E1). “Educated people at times undermining those that are not educated” (E2). Educators also argued that some parents overstepped boundaries by responding that “Sometimes parents behave as if they are employers and that behavior is not accepted by principals and teachers and even forget their boundaries” (E2). This is in line with Đurišić and Bunijevac's (2017) emphasis on parental cognition whereas perceptions of the school is one of the three kinds and holds that the school itself is likely to have an impact on parents' level of involvement. Parents are more inclined and capable of getting involved in their children's education if teachers demonstrate concern for the child's well-being, show respect for parents, and establish efficient channels of communication with families (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997).

Parents' lack of clear role awareness

Educators also had a negative attitude due to perceived parents' lack of role awareness. As it emerged, “Parents sit in classrooms, observing teachers while teaching and taking some notes, teachers show bad attitude towards parents because of their unprofessional conduct with their behavior” (E2). “School governing body do not have a clear understanding of their role, you will notice that they do most of the time the over stepping of the duties which leads to tensions, conflicts, discrimination, negative attitudes towards their participation in the governance of the school” (SMT3). “There is always a negative attitude because some of the principals are not clear about the roles of the SGBs in the school governance also the SGBs do not have a clear picture of their role” (SGB3). Similarly, “Parents are not familiar with their roles and responsibilities so it is not easy for them to participate effectively” (E2). E1 also raised that “Parents are easily convinced by teachers to do something without the benefit of intellect, they do not even understand anything about governance, they are just tools or white elephants, you will find that schools are doing bad in their presence”. The lack of role knowledge supports the claim made by Mabasa and Themane (2002) that SGBs are undertrained before beginning employment, which shows up as issues like not understanding meeting protocols, having trouble handling a lot of paper, and not knowing how to contribute.

Weak professional relationships triggered by academic differences

The study found that “Academic differences may lead to less active participation of parents” (SMT2). The principals and teachers do not recognize the strengths of professional relationship in creating an approach that best meets the needs of parents and learners so that there should be effective teaching and learning (SGB1). It also emerged that “Teachers do not bother to communicate with
parents in connection of their children’s academic performance because they are undermining the parents by saying that parents are not well educated, to communicate with them is just a waste of time” (SGB1; SGB2). This contradicts Brownlee’s (2015) view that educators must also support and encourage parental involvement, which is essential for navigating New Zealand’s shifting student body and national makeup. Another view was that teachers had poor reception for parents. Thus, “Parents sometimes have problems of not being accepted by some of the teachers together with the principal, thus some parents ended up resigning from SGB” (SMT1). Equally, “Parents are not comfortable to voice out their views because they think that teachers know all” (E2). In accordance to research by Davies (1996), a large number of parents have low self-esteem, while others lack the knowledge and self-assurance to support their kids because they themselves did not succeed in school. Parents who did not achieve academic accomplishment could have a bad opinion of it (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991).

Language issues

Language emerged as a barrier to parental involvement in schools. The responses were, “Most of the parents are illiterate, some of the schools are conducting the school meetings in English, so parents are there in the meetings but they do not contribute anything, they do not participate fully” (E3). “There is a challenge of language whereby school meetings are conducted in English so that parents cannot be able to participate or avail themselves in those meetings, due to lack of understanding English properly” (SGB3). Parents may avoid communicating with the school because they are intimidated by the staff, the curriculum, and the language (Flynn, 2007).

Socio-economic challenges and poor motivation

Financial instability was cited as a determinant of poor parental participation in schools. “Money is always a problem, there is no remuneration that is given to us for the work done in the school so that we can develop more appetite to participate fully in the things of the school, some of us are far from the school, we do not have money to pay for transportation to attend school meetings” (SGB2). “The SGBs are discriminated in the school because of socio-economic conditions based on income, education, poverty and health” (SGB3). “Competing daily routine tasks versus school governance responsibility makes parents failing to attend to school governance issues. Money issues can lead to high rate of absenteeism of parents in attending school meetings” (SMT3). “They are staying far from the school, they do not have money to pay the transport because are not working”. (E3). A According to Ascherer (1988), a lot of school administrators have a tendency to determine ahead of time that working parents who are single and have low incomes cannot be trusted or approached. They are not required to help with homework assignments, attend meetings, or take part in their kids’ classroom activities.

Lack of induction workshops

Participants also blamed shortage of induction workshops to acquaint SGBs. “No proper training of SGBs so that we can be able to differentiate the school governance and the school management to avoid doing the work of the school principal” (SGB3). “Some parents are elected as chairpersons of committees which they have no knowledge about and have nothing to report at the end of the day” (E1). “Lack of capacity and developmental workshops are not organized to help and equip SGBs with necessary skills and knowledge” (SMT3). These results support the theory that parents’ perceptions of their roles have been found to be a significant factor in influencing their desire to practice supportive parenting. One of the three types of parental cognition identified by Đurišić and Bunijevac (2017) is parents’ expectations for their children’s future careers. Williams and Sanchez (2011) delineate four domains that pose obstacles to engagement: insufficient time, restricted accessibility, inadequate financial means, and insufficient knowledge.

Benefits of parental participation in school governance

It emerged that the benefits of parental participation in school governance were varied.

Participation assists taking collective responsibility

Participants felt that parental involvement in the school assisted in decision making. As E1 noted, “Although teachers do not show positivity on the part of parent participation in school activities, as a school management team member, I do appreciate parental participation in the school activities. It is very much important to put them in a round table and tell them that no one is perfect and not to use the word I so that they own all the decision making. When the problem comes, they will not say, what have you done, but what have we done. If you involve them, parents will be able to account and take responsibilities and support in your endeavors”. SGB1 also agreed, saying, “The smooth running of the school depends on active parental engagement, looking thoroughly on programmes and activities of the school that are functioning at the right time”. This was supported by SMT1 who acknowledged, “Parental participation in the school governance is very good because education without parents cannot function, they are having a big stake in education because it involves their kids.”

Therefore, participants positively viewed the role of parents in school governance. Despite frequently operating in low socioeconomic and economic communities, research on effective schools—those where children are learning and achieving—has repeatedly demonstrated that these schools have solid and favorable school-home relationships (Sanders & Sheldon, 2009; Sheldon, 2009). More significantly, in order to foster excellent cooperation, these successful schools with a great school climate have really tried to connect with the families of their kids (Đurišić & Bunijevac, 2017).
Helps integration of school and home

The fact is homes influence schools, and schools influence homes, so their integration has a positive effect on education. As such, through parental participation, “The activities that are taking place at school are different with the one at home, once parents are participating fully in school governance, the difference that is there will no longer be there, will come to an end simple because, there will be an integration between the school education and home education” (E2). “Education is a societal issue it starts at home and that’s where the parents fit, so their participation is important” (SMT1). “It also ensures that children sent to school are monitored and motivated for their community development and realisation of their dreams of the parents who want to see their children succeeding in their academic life” (SMT2). “Parental participation in school governance further strengthens communication between the school and the community” (SGB3). This is in line with Van Wyk’s observation in Mwai Kimis (2012) that parent involvement in schools should be used to support families with family support, parenting and child-rearing skills, knowledge of child and adolescent development, and setting up the home environment to enhance learning at all grade levels and stages. Assisting all families in creating environments at home where kids may engage as learners would be the aim.

Visibility improves school focus

Some participants were of the view that parental participation visibility was good enough to keep the school focused on its vision. SGB1 indicated, “With their visibility in the school, the school will be able to accomplish their goals, the school will perform better even to their children’s academic results”. SMT2 agreed saying, “Without the participation of parents in the school, there will be no smooth running of the school”. E3 was of the view that, “Learners fear their parents once they become participated in the school governance, learners behave well and performs better in their school work”. SGB3 similarly said, “Teachers and learners will attend school regularly because parents are more actively in their children’s education”. Equally, SGB2 noted that parental participation is assurance “To look for better future and education of our children, and children not to be abused by educators”. Sanders and Sheldon (2009) schools succeed when there is a solid foundation of mutual respect and cooperation amongst the community, parents, teachers, and students.

SGBs develop and implement school policies

Parents were also critical as enforcing adherence to school policies. [Parents] “Determine the admission policy and the language policy. Also prepare the school budget and presents annual financial statement to the parents meeting” (E1). “They develop the constitution to run the school and implement discipline to the learners, that is learner conduct and offenders. Also, they coming to school to attend meetings with management and discussing issues like fundraising” (E2). “In my view SGB assist in managing and controlling finances of the school” (SMT2). “They are responsible for the policy development of the school” (SMT3) “…and make sure that are implemented” (E3). Page (2013) governance comprises using networks, contracts, and coalitions to formulate and carry out public policies across organizational and sectoral borders. A governing board should be able to create the proper tone for the school and concentrate on codes of conduct. They ought to be crucial to the school’s advancement. To guarantee school development and improvement, an efficient and competent school governing body is essential. According to Surty (2018), parents who are involved in school governance do more than only support the nation’s Constitutional ideals and students’ rights to an education; they also serve to ensure their children’s future and collaborate with administrators to lead the school to success.

Parents design school code of conduct and encourage voluntary services

It was also raised that, “Parental involvement help in making the school code of conduct that must be upheld always by learners and teachers. Without a code of conduct there will be no school at all because it sets the rules that governs the school and it binds every learner” (SMT2). “Parents should be given annual reports to report directly to them as to how school programmes must be handled and executed as the task of the SGB which should be guided by its constitution” (SGB3). “The SGB should encourage parents, learners and educators and other staff at the school to offer voluntary services to the school” (E1). This is consistent with Fullan (2007) who argues that parental participation is inclusive of home-based activities that support learners’ academic achievement or help learners to engage in school activities. Studies also indicate that parental involvement is most effective when viewed as a partnership between educators and parents (Davies, 1996; Emegwali, 2009; Epstein, 2009).

Conclusions

The following conclusions were established from the study: Factors that affected parental participation in school activities emanated both from homes and schools; Teachers’ attitudes towards parents arising from views that parents were unclear about their roles negatively weighed against positive parental involvement in schools; Parents viewed themselves as poorly educated compared to teachers and principals thus were demotivated to raise critical arguments on the basis of being criticised for lack of informed knowledge; there were different views about the significance of parental participation in school governance as SGB members, principals and teachers held different views towards parental participation in school governance.

The study recommends that:

i. There is need for improved parents and teachers’ relationships for learners to be given the support they deserve to be successful.
ii. Parents must be encouraged to visit schools not only to attend school meetings but as and when necessary, and the school must be able to provide parents with clear information, rules and ways that parents can participate in education of their children.

iii. Training programmes should be established pertaining to SGB responsibilities so that they may function more effectively.

iv. Teachers should always display positive attitudes towards parents not to see parents as competition who aim to take their positions at school.

v. Rural schools should introduce community-based programmes to work with parents and motivate them to see the value in getting involved in their children’s education.

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References


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