

**UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU – NATAL**

**PARENTAL ROLE IN LEARNER SCHOOL  
ACHIEVEMENT IN RURAL SCHOOLS:  
PARENTS' AND EDUCATORS' PERSPECTIVES**

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Exploring the parental role in learner school achievement in rural schools: parents' and educators' perspectives.

BY

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## **SUPERVISOR'S STATEMENT**

This dissertation has been submitted with / without my approval.

.....  
Mr S.D. Bayeni

.....  
Date

## DECLARATION

I, KHAIZENI FREDDY MASWANGANYI, declare that:

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this research study to my family: Tinyiko (wife), Nyiko, Lesedi and Mkatoko (children), my late father Hanyani William Maswanganyi and my mother Patironi Elizabeth Maswanganyi.

My sincere thanks to God who gave me strength to complete this research study. I say 'Amen' to Him.

## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

**HOD:** Head of Department

**SGB:** School Governing Body

**SMT:** School Management Team

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## **ABSTRACT**

This research has been done in Pinetown District in Kwazulu-Natal in South Africa. Its aim was to investigate how rural parents could play a meaningful role in assisting their children to achieve more academically. The study was conducted in three secondary schools and twelve participants were interviewed, four from each school, two School Governing Body (SGB) and two School Management Team (SMT) members from each school.

In this research study, it was established that parental involvement is very important in the learning process of the children. This involvement, amongst others, includes the provision of learning materials, assistance with homeworks, the provision of conducive study place at home for children, motivation and taking part in school's activities.

Parents and educators do agree that there is a gap existing between them. Educators also agree that they have not done enough to encourage parents to assist their children in school work. Parents also agree that they never approached educators about assisting their children, but said it was the educators' responsibility to approach the parents first since it is the educators who need the parents' assistance.

Some of the parents did not know exactly how they could assist their children because they were illiterate, others could not master or understand the subject matters and some believed it is the educators' task to teach and assist learners academically, not theirs.

This research study has established that there is a challenge faced by both educators and parents in rural schools in this issue and further research on it is recommended with the hope that it could shed more light and bring about some possible solutions.

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# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **INTRODUCTION AND ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY**

### **1.1 Introduction**

This is a research study conducted in three secondary schools that are located in Pinetown District in the province of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. This chapter is an introductory one that provides an orientation and background to the study. The purpose, rationale, research problems, objective, as well as critical research questions driving the study are presented.

### **1.2 Background of the study**

I regard schools as being part of the fabric of society. One of the most important elements of society are the parents and the educators. Parents and educators are able to shape the society, and equally the society also shapes them, Sallay, 2000. Parents and educators have to collaborate to improve children's educational achievement. Henry (1996, p. 177) states that, "education is no longer seen narrowly as a set of managerial and pedagogical skills, but rather as a caring, collaborative profession which works with families and others to make decisions about pedagogy and curricula, in order to best meet the needs of all children". Parents are expected to have an overview of what happens at school in order to play a role in helping their children with academic work in the learning process, IEP, 2010.

Parents can assist their children in many different ways. According to Johnson (1990, p. 57) "parents can assist by disciplining them, encouraging them to do their school work at home, assisting in fundraising events, taking part in school activities like sports and evening parents' meetings, and so on". Wiklund (2005, p. 29) further says that "children understand things better when their parents read, talk, listen, tell them stories and share hobbies with them". He further says that "in order to assist them academically, parents must provide books, monitor the amount of time spent on watching television, observe routine for meals, bed time and homework" (Wiklund, 2005, p. 29). Emerging Voices, A Report on Education in South African Rural Communities (2005, p. 119) also says that "it is important for parents to be involved with, and supportive of their children's education. Children feel encouraged when their parents are informed about their progress in school" (Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2005, p. 119). It is also

the responsibility of the parents to bring up their children in a healthy environment, send them to school and give them academic support. Parents, especially those who can understand the subject contents, must assist their children with their homework (Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2005).

It is also important to understand how the concept of “parent” is used in this study. It refers to the biological parents, guardians, step fathers or mothers, grandparents and anyone who is responsible for the children. Parents who cannot understand the subject content can also play a role in motivating their children to perform better in schools and to ask their neighbours who can assist their children academically. Educators, as one of the most important stakeholders in schools, also need to know and understand the roles that parents have to play in learners’ school achievement. It was crucial to get the educators’ perspectives on the contribution parents should make in the education of their children. Jones (1993, p. 48) asserts that “teachers must make parents aware that true involvement by parents will have a positive effect on learner academic achievement”.

Thurlow (2003, p. 78) contends that “since 1994, the National Department of Education has refocused the vision and direction of the South African education system through policies, initiatives and innovations”. The change of party politics and power shift in South African society meant that these innovations had to be implemented in order to be in line with the vision and direction of the new government. Christie (1998, p. 41) maintains that “the South African Schools Act (No. 84 of 1996) stipulates that all schools must establish school governing bodies in which parents have the largest numerical representation. The role of parents in the education of their children has increased more dramatically in schools. This is in line with the democratic principles of the new constitution and with the international trend of increasing certain powers at school level”. The establishment of the School Governing Bodies (SGB) was meant to increase democracy and representation of school stakeholders (Christie, 1998).

This body is composed of parents, educators, non-teaching staff and learners in secondary schools. When one looks at the stakeholders involved, it is evident that this body meant to operate in a transparent manner. These parties are expected to work collaboratively as a team for the sake of the children. Unfortunately, competition for power has been observed and written by



Lekalakala (2009), Mncube (2009) and Maluleke (2009). Each group wants to dominate the other stakeholders in order to have their views considered and objectives realised, and this has resulted in undesirable competition. This undesirable competition often puts parents in a difficult position in terms of meaningful contribution to the education of their children. From the researcher's observation, as an educator in rural schools and a member of the SGB, most parents are illiterate or semi-illiterate and this has tended to compromise their active participation in the SGB meetings (Mncube, 2009). They are dominated by the educator component. In some situations, both learners and parents are dominated by the educators. The researcher's tentative conclusion is that parents and learners regard educators as the members in the SGB who know more about school issues than they do. Because of this, they are afraid to differ with educators when discussing school issues, and this makes parents passive participators or lack confidence to participate actively. Such observations have been commented upon by some scholars Mncube (2009), Segwapa (2009) and Maluleke (2009).

This lack of confidence to participate actively in SGB meetings might lead to parents not raising the issue of parental involvement from educators and on what they should do to assist their children with academic work (Ndlovu, 2011). This might be another reason why most rural parents in particular do not play their role when it comes to assisting their children with school work, which is aimed at improving the performance of learners at school. It is clear that there are problems that exist between the parents and the school, which need to be addressed if parents and educators are serious about working collaboratively with the parents the interest of their children's education. There could be a number of factors that cause this practice. Olmstead and Rubin (1993, p. 5) argue that "there is one thing that is known, that all parents, poor or rich, rural or urban, want their children to be successful in schools". The involvement of rural parents has been highlighted as an important in the education of their children, however, "it is still a fact that parents' involvement in the schools is surprisingly minimal"(Olmstead & Rubin, 1993, p. 5).

Enough research has been conducted focusing on school-parent relationships and parental involvement. Swap (1993, p. 2) explains that "many different rural communities have experimented with parent involvement to improve student achievement, aimed at particular goals, such as improving children's reading". Other authors who conducted research on school-

parent relationships and parental involvement include Bush, and Heystek, (2003); Heystek, (2003); Bhengu, (2007); Christie, Butler and Potterton (2007) Brown, and Duku, (2008), and Mncube (2009), to cite just a few. They all emphasise the importance and benefits of parental participation in the schools' affairs. For instance, Christie, et. al. (2007) maintains that "promoting parental involvement encourages children to be fond of their school work because they know parents will be at school to find out about their performances"; LaBahn (1995, p. 41) asserts that "parental involvement is a combination of commitment and active participation on the part of the parent to the school and to the student". However, the role that parents can play in helping their children to achieve more academically in schools has not been investigated. This is where the gap lies. Most parents, especially the less educated ones, might not know exactly what role they can or should play. This study attempted to close this gap by attempting to get answers about parents' roles in learners' school achievement in rural areas.

### **1.3 Rationale**

There have been wide spread complaints about the perception that parents in rural communities are not fully involved in the education of their children (David, 1993). As an educator teaching in rural schools, the researcher has noticed that some parents hardly assist their children to improve on their academic performance. David (1993, p. 165) contends that "most parents in rural communities do not participate in school work such as homework". This may be caused by a lack of skills that are needed to help, or that parents do not have interest in doing so. However, parental contribution is significant in learner achievement. Desforges (2003, p. 116) agrees that "evidence from research over long periods has consistently shown that parental involvement and support makes a significant impact on school improvement". Parents can assist in homework and motivating their children to have more interest in learning. This has prompted the researcher to undertake this study in order to get the perspectives of both the parents and the educators on the roles parents can play to assist learners to improve on their academic performance.

According to Mona (2003, p. 28), "the parents' role is very important in improving the academic performance of the learners". Lack of parental assistance or interest can lead to learners' low academic achievement. Wolhunter, Lemmer and Wet (2007, p. 191) state that "good partnership between the home and school in rural communities ought to be encouraged". This can enhance

the effectiveness of teaching and learning processes. Beare (2002, p. 165) contends that parents' involvement in children's academic lives, "puts value on the contributions they make to the progress of their children. Parents can be part of policy decisions relating to the learning programmes which keep parents informed. Parents are regarded as important partners in the learning processes". This means that parents' involvement is acknowledged and appreciated.

This study therefore, sought to investigate how parents assist their children in their academic achievement. Henry (1996, p. 75) is of the view that "most schools complain that there is a lack of adequate support on the side of the parents. If only parents play their role, children's performances and attitudes towards school work could improve dramatically".

#### **1.4 Research problem**

Most parents in rural areas do not know exactly how they can better assist their children with their school work. From the experience of the researcher as an educator in rural schools, most parents believe that they can make a meaningful contribution in the education of their children if they themselves have the capacity and proper education to do so. To them, the word 'educated' refers to a certain professional or academic qualification. The majority of the parents do not seem to have such qualifications, and as such, they tend to undermine themselves and believe that their role in assisting their children to perform better in schools is of less value.

#### **1.5 Objective of the study**

The objective of the study was to investigate the parental role in rural community schools. The focus is on the parents' role in the achievement of learners in rural schools.

#### **1.6 Research questions**

The objective of the study is to raise awareness about the significance of home-school partnership in rural schools. The key research questions are as follows:

- 1.6.1 What role do parents play in contributing to learner achievement in rural schools?
- 1.6.2 How is parents' involvement contributing to learner achievement in rural schools?

1.6.3 How can parental involvement be enhanced and managed for supporting learner achievement in rural schools?

## **1.7 Context of the study**

The research study was conducted in three secondary schools in KwaZulu-Natal province in South Africa. These schools were situated in rural areas in the historically disadvantaged communities where the majority of the people belong to the working class and lower income group. All learners and educators were Africans. There were many schools that qualified to be included in the study, but only three were chosen because they were manageable given that this was a small scale qualitative study. Another reason for the choice of these schools was proximity to the researcher which made them more accessible in terms of distance and costs implications.

Since this was a case study, a purposive sampling was used in selecting schools for participation in the study. Suter (2006, p. 212) says that “purposive sampling means that participants are selected because of some defining characteristics that make them holders of the data needed in the study”. In this study, a purposive sampling was used to select the schools and the participants holding relevant information regarding the study, and these participants were parents and educators.

## **1.8 Overview of the study**

This study consisted of five chapters and these are outlined below.

### **1.8.1 Chapter One**

This chapter outlines the background to the research problem and the rationale for the study. The main focus was on parental involvement in supporting their children learning and ensures improved achievement in their school work.

### **1.8.2 Chapter Two**

Chapter Two discusses first, the theoretical framework underpinning the study and then the literature review which captures current issues and debates around parental involvement in supporting learners achieve better results. The role that parents play or can play in supporting their children is discussed.

### **1.8.3 Chapter Three**

This chapter outlines the steps that were followed in carrying out the study. Issues of research design and methodology that was used are discussed in detail.

### **1.8.4 Chapter Four**

This chapter presents the data in the form of narratives and tables that captures the main message that was elicited through interactions with participants in the field of study.

### **1.8.5 Chapter five**

Chapter Five is the culmination of the study. it presents the summary of the study, the analysis, the data and recommendations.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Introduction

The last chapter dealt provided an orientation to the study. Chapter Two focuses on the conceptual framework that was used to inform the study and also presented some current debates on the subject of parental participation in the education of their children. There is one theoretical construct that has been chosen to inform this study, and that is Democratic Participation. This construct was deemed relevant mainly because, participation in the education of the children is a democratic right for all citizens of this country, whether educated or not.

#### 2.2 Theoretical Framework: Democratic participation

Democratic Participation concept was deemed appropriate in examining the extent to which parents in the case study schools were involved in the affairs of the school. Participatory democracy refers to a form of direct democracy that enables all members of a society to participate in decision-making processes within institutions, organisations, societal and government structures (Myburgh, 2004). This concept was advocated by Myburgh (2004, p. 12). Through this concept Myburgh (2004) argues that there is an on-going ideological battle over the meaning of democracy. The South African Constitution includes an unequivocal commitment to representative and participatory democracy, incorporating the concepts of accountability, transparency and public involvement (Republic of South Africa, 1996a). This means that parents' participation in the education of their children is not just a privilege that can be enjoyed by certain people and not the others, but it a Constitutional right that must be enjoyed by all. Adams and Waghid (2005, p. 25) regard participation, community engagement, rationality, consensus, equality and freedom as the constructive principles of the South African democracy. Grant-Lewis and Naidoo (2004, p. 1) state that "with the increasing decentralization of fiscal, political and administrative responsibilities to local spheres of government, local institutions and communities, the notion of participation and deliberation have emerged as fundamental tenets in the promotion of the local governance of schools".

Democratic Participatory framework comes from participatory democracy theories as shown in Figure 2.1 below, where power sharing within organisations and systems, participatory management and governance and partnership and joint decision-making are the key principles. In schools, parents and educators are equally responsible for the success of learners in their academic work, though parents do not get into the classrooms and teach. Nelson Mandela Foundation (2005, p. 119) asserts that “how involved parents feel with the teaching and learning of their children is partly reflected in the relationship they have with the schools and teachers”. This means that the failure of parents to play a meaningful role in learner school achievement is due to the failure to implement the principles of participatory democracy theories.

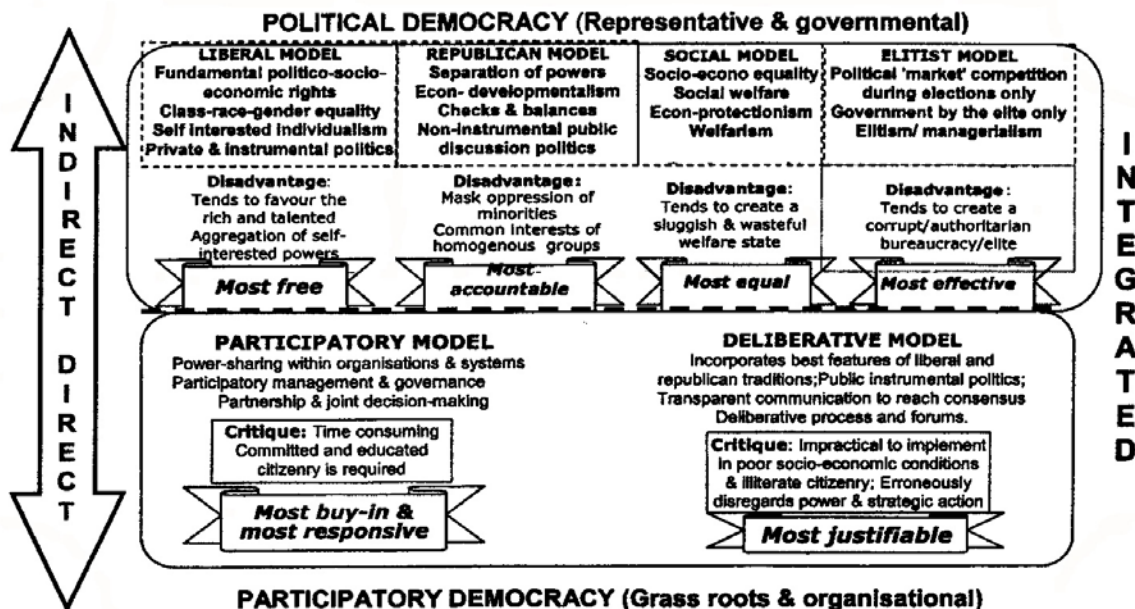


Figure 2.1: Theories of democracy (adapted from South African Journal of Education)

There is abundant evidence that suggests that parental participation in the education of their children is beneficial to them (For example, Allen, 1992; David, 1993; Henry, 1996; LaBahn, 1995; Sattes, 1997; Martinez, 1997; Venter, 2004; Christie, Buttler & Potterton, 2007; Ndlovu, 2011). For instance, Olivos (2006, p. 108) argues that “there is a strong consensus among many in the field of education that involving parents in their children’s education is beneficial to student success, particularly if the students come from historically disenfranchised groups”. In support of Olivos’ views (2006), Wiklund (2005, p. 176) maintains that “children understand

things better when their parents read, talk, listen, tell them stories and share hobbies with them”. Such literature is relevant for this study because it also deals with ‘disenfranchised groups’ according to Wiklund (2005) characterisation. Rural communities have consistently been referred to facing a number of deprivations and marginalisation which is associated with being rural (Bhengu, 2005; Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2005). Olivos (2006) further contends that despite this stated enthusiasm for involving parents, educators must ask themselves why it is that the public school system has consistently been unsuccessful in establishing an authentic relationship with the communities it serves (Vandeyar, 2002; Heystek, 2002; Smit & Liebenberg, 2008; Tsoetsi, van Wyk, & Lemmer, 2008; Ndlovu, 2011).

The democratic participatory theory can help us understand the extent to which parents are or are not involved in the life of the schools. This theory can assist in exploring what parents actually do in schools that can or does contribute to the academic achievement of their children. This theory seeks to pose questions and possible paths that could lead to a more meaningful form of parental participation. This study is about parents’ roles in learner school achievement, and Myburgh (2004) offers a framework in which the parents’ role could be vigorously challenged, questioned, monitored, evaluated and be improved. This theory proposes a more functional and transformational view of parent involvement; one that offers historically disempowered parents the opportunity to become meaningful and active participants in the education of their children.

### **2.3 Literature review**

Menchaca and Ruiz-Escalante (1995, p. 151) assert that “children of rural parents, more than other children, confront a number of risk factors for school failure”. Some of these factors include poverty and illiterate or semi-illiterate parents who can hardly assist with school work. However, Menchaca and Ruiz-Escalante (1995) argue that educators frequently attribute school failure of rural children to a lack of parental involvement. This means that educators in rural areas are not involving parents in their children’s education. Parents cannot involve themselves if they do not know what to do in their involvement. Educators, as experts in the education field, need to take a leading role of assisting parents to know and understand the roles they must play in their children’s education. Parents must be made aware by educators that knowing how to read



and write are not the only ways to contribute to the education of their children. They can also motivate their children and give them enough time to study and to provide them with necessary learning materials. Beckmann (2007, p. 188) agrees that “literacy extends far more beyond the skills of reading and writing”.

It is widely believed that literacy and being educated is about being able to read and write. This assumption means that only parents who can read and write can make a meaningful contribution to their children’s achievement in school work. Most parents in rural areas are not literate. Does this rule them out in playing a supportive role in their children’s education? It involves the socio-cultural context as it is relevant to the person involved. People’s awareness of their socio-political environment, their participation in it and the meaning they ascribe to it bear significantly on the process of becoming literate’.

Parents’ participation in the education of their children should not be limited to reading and writing, but be extended to school governance, school events, activities and fund-raising. These do not have a direct influence on learner achievement; however they play a vital role in motivating learners to work hard in their school work by seeing their parents showing interest and being personally involved in school activities. David (1993, p. 165) states that “parental involvement in children’s education can be based on developing the quality of education for the children”. The children whose parents often communicate with the school feel obligated to achieve academically when their parents are involved. Through a home-school partnership, parents are empowered. Home-school partnership refers to the relationship or bond that is formed between the school (particularly, educators) and the community (particularly, the parents of the learners). This relationship is aimed at closing the gap between parents and educators, and to help these two parties to work together in order to assist the learners to perform better in their school work. According to Fleisch (2006, p. 49), the concept of “empowerment is fundamentally related to participation”. Parents have the right to participate in the education of their children. Delgado-Gaitan (1990, p. 99) contends that, “parental involvement is difficult for some parents who do not have the command of the language used at school”.

Allen (1992, p. 149) refers to the “collaboration between the parents and educators as the building of educational partnership by the Department of Education to involve parents in the schooling of their children”. The more parents assist learners in their homework, the more parents learn and develop interest in the education of their children.

Wiklund (2005, p. 99) argues that “the home-school collaboration benefits parents with skills and knowledge”. This collaboration is done through the determination between educators and parents to work together with the common objective of assisting the learners to perform well at school. This is confirmed by Wiklund (2005, p. 123) when he realises that “parental involvement in their children’s education is very imperative because parents have a great influence on children and their behaviour. A high level of parental involvement is associated with great academic knowledge, increased awareness and more informed perceptions of school activities”. The benefit of parental involvement is that parents are actively involved in school activities, because they become motivators of their own children. However, there may be other factors that come into play to enhance learner achievement at school, such as learners’ self-motivation, and role models who are educated and successful.

It is widely believed that being educated is to have the ability to read and write. This assumption means that only parents who can read and write can make a meaningful contribution to their children’s achievement in school work. Similarly, there is wide perception that most parents in rural areas are not educated. Given that scenario, the main question to ask is whether or not parents’ literacy levels should exclude them from playing a supportive role in their children’s education. Fletcher (2002, p. 67) argues that “literacy cannot be confined within the skills of reading and writing, but goes far beyond that”. It involves the socio-cultural context as it is relevant to the person involved. People’s awareness of their socio-political environment, their participation in it and the meaning they ascribe to it, bear significantly on the process of becoming literate. Dieltiens (2000, p. 104) has the same view as Fletcher (2002) and states that “most parents, especially in rural areas, have shown the skills of teaching people to participate in any given society by first teaching their children to become conscious about their role and position at home”. Therefore, parents’ participation in the education of their children should not

be limited to reading and writing, but should be extended to school governance, school events, activities and fund-raising.

The major challenge faced by most parents in rural areas is that they have not mastered the English language well, yet this language is used in teaching almost all subjects except IsiZulu, in secondary schools. This is not a challenge faced by parents only, but also by learners. Follesdale (2004, p. 133) says that “children can learn best when using their mother tongue”. Theorists have also argued that children can learn best in the contexts in which language is culturally and linguistically meaningful. Follesdale’s (2004) statement focused much on learners, but the same applies to parents as well. They can assist their children better in contexts in which language is culturally and linguistically meaningful to them (parents).

The family literacy plays a vital role in assisting the learner to achieve more academically or to perform poorly. Gutman (2003, p. 209) says that “education in a family happens from time to time, unlike in schools”. He further says that “parental educational attainment, parent-child interaction, and parental aspirations characterize the levels of interaction within the family” (Gutman, 2003, p. 209). This plays a major role especially if parents are educated, and their children see them as their role models and aspire to be like their parents. It must be noted that not all children from educated families achieve better in schools. Bachar (1997, p. 16) argues that “a parent’s interest in the education of his or her child is greater than his or her educational attainment in influencing and motivating his or her child to do well or do more at school”. By this statement, Bachar (1997) is refuting the assumption which says that family literacy plays a vital role in learner achievement in schools. Mabovula (2004, p. 284) says that “parents promote children’s education through their emotional and material support systems, which are largely influenced by their own educational attainment and the knowledge involved in providing their children with the necessary material, psychological and cognitive resources”. Both statements of Bachar (1997) and Mabovula (2004) point to the notion that parents’ interest in the education of their children is greater, but also that differs when it comes to the issue of parents’ level of educational attainment. Bachar (1997) believes that the family literacy level plays no role in learner achievement in school or motivation to the child, while Mabovula (2004) argues that

family educational attainment plays a vital role especially in providing the necessary support through availing the required materials.

My view is that educated and uneducated parents, or families with high educational attainment and those that do not have, all want their children to do better than they (the parents) did in schools and in their lives. I partly agree with Mabovula (2004) when he says that family educational attainment plays a role in the education of the children. This comes from my experience as an educator. Most educated parents tended to know what was expected of them and also tended to know the challenges that are faced by educators and learners at school. They also provide their children with the necessary learning materials. The unfortunate part is that there seems to be not many of these parents in rural schools. From my experience in working with parents who have less or not formal education, I have observed that many of uneducated parents were determined to see their children doing well in schools.

Delgado-Gaitan (1990, p. 28) further says that “parents’ participation in their children’s schooling takes on many forms in the home and in the school depending on factors such as parents’ knowledge of the school, their ability to communicate in the same language as that of the school, and the school’s receptivity in involving parents”. Venter (2004, p. 119) says that “research literature has indicated that there is an overwhelming need for parents to become involved in the education of their children because of the positive results on learners’ academic attainment”. This means that parents have greater influence (which most of them, especially in rural areas, are not aware of) in the achievement of their children at school. This literature points to the positive effect of parents’ involvement in their children’s schooling, and the influence it has on their achievement.

## **2.4 Challenges faced by rural parents**

Parents in rural areas must be empowered so that they will be able to assist their children with school work as well as to participate in school activities. Young (2000, p. 11) says that “empowerment brings about change which is often realised through the improved interaction between people or interactions”. Once parents are empowered, they will feel more confident to

assist their children with school work and often communicate with the school. Delgado-Gaitan (1990, p. 42) says that “learner achievement in rural areas can be understood within the concept of empowerment and helps to explain how children learn to read in the classroom, how parents teach their children at home and how parents and teachers communicate with each other about the children’s schooling”.

The major challenge faced by most parents in rural areas is that they have not mastered the English language well, which is used in teaching almost all subjects, except IsiZulu, in secondary schools. This is not a challenge faced by parents only, but also by learners. Fletcher, (2002, p. 89) say that “theorists have argued that children can learn best in contexts in which language is culturally and linguistically meaningful”. Cole and Griffin’s (2006) statement focused much on learners, but the same applies to parents as well. Parents can assist their children best in contexts in which language is culturally and linguistically meaningful to them.

Martinez’s (1997, p. 18) statement, as that of Follesdale (2004),points to the fact that, “lack of English proficiency limits the extent to which rural parents can help their children with homework and can also limit parents’ ability to communicate with teachers. Lack of educational skills becomes an even greater factor when helping their older children”. These authors make it clear that language is one of the major challenges faced by rural parents in contributing to the education of their children. It is not that all rural parents do not care about the education of their children, but some of them are nonetheless aware of the schools’ expectations of them. Martinez (1997) further says that most rural parents cite some barriers such as lack of time and illiteracy that impede them from participating in their children’s educational activities. Martinez (1997, p. 22) argues that “lack of time, frequently cited as a barrier to parent involvement, presents particular hardships to rural parents who leave for work before dawn and return home late in the evening”.

Olmstead and Rubin (1993, p. 5) reported on four evaluation studies that specifically linked parent involvement in schools to child achievement. In their conclusion, they emphasised, “the strong relationship between parent involvement and child school achievement”. Even though rural parents’ involvement has been found to be important in the education of their children, it is

still a fact that “parent involvement in the schools is surprisingly minimal” (Olmstead & Rubin, 1993, p. 5). Parents continue to be kept at a distance in most schools. Hafner (1990, p. 144) says that, “one must conclude that there are powerful barriers that are inhibiting educators from reaching out to parents”. These barriers, according to Hafner (1990), include changing demographics, school norms that do not support partnerships, limited resources to support parent involvement, and lack of information about how to establish partnerships.

Heystek and Louw (1998, p. 27) cite some of the reasons for challenges that rural parents face such as “parents’ preconceived, negative attitudes towards schools in general; parents’ feelings of inferiority towards academic staff members; parents’ lack of knowledge about the effective functioning of schools; parents’ feeling that teachers are qualified to ensure learners’ academic achievement, and parents may feel that teachers are paid to educate their children, hence there is no need for them as parents to be actively involved in the education of their children”.

## **2.5 Literacy levels of the family**

There is a general belief that parents in urban areas are more responsible, affectionate and effective in their parenting practices compared to rural parents. Olmstead and Rubin (1993, p. 154) say that “urban parents, who are often educated, are more passionate and affectionate about the education of their children when compared to rural parents”. This belief does not end there, but continues to include the way in which rural parents fail to provide their children with emotional and material support and cognitive resources. Delgado-Gaitan (1990, p. 45) points to the same fact as Olmstead and Rubin (1993), by saying that “parents in rural areas fail their children linguistically and cognitively by not providing them with the middle-class language and values which tend to prevail in middle-class families”. This perspective on child development in the home is important to understanding the role of parents in their children’s education because it may influence the school’s view of communication with parents.

Nelson Mandela Foundation (2005, p. 119) asserts that “how involved parents feel with the teaching and learning of their children is partly reflected in the relationship they have with the schools and teachers”. This relationship is often poor in rural areas, as Olmstead and Rubin

(1993) and Delgado-Gaitan (1990) have attested to, by comparing rural and urban parents on passion and affection in education. Nelson Mandela Foundation (2005, p. 119) further says that “parents should continually assess the progress of their children. If they are not satisfied, they should get closer to the educators for clarity. However, the reality is that many parents do not set foot on the school premises”. Macbeth (2003, p. 13) from Daily Dispatch says that “parents’ feelings of inferiority towards academic staff members and lack of knowledge about the effective functioning of schools keeps them away from schools”. Lack of knowledge on what to do and how creates a barrier between parents and teachers.

## **2.6 How rural parents could contribute to the education of their children**

Cotton and Wikelund (1996, p. 17) agree that “not all rural parents are illiterate. There are many among them who are highly educated and can become more involved in helping their children improve in their school work by providing encouragement, arranging for appropriate study time and space, and modelling desired behaviour such as reading for pleasure, monitoring homework and actively tutoring their children at home”. According to Allan (2003, pp. 16-17), “parent involvement as perceived by educators involves preparing children for school, such as teaching the children the alphabet, talking and reading to children to promote language development and attending school events such as parent-teacher conferences, which can give parents an opportunity to express ways they believe they can contribute to their children’s education, and fulfilling any requests teachers ask of parents, such as buying textbooks, school uniforms and paying school fees, fees for educational tours and to assist their children with homework”.

Delgado-Gaitan (1993, p. 17) argues that “rural parents’ contributions to the education process can be accessed through emotional and motivational resources. Motivational and emotional resources refer to parents’ perceptions of education as important for socio-economic success. Emotional support is provided through stories of how difficult life was without an education”. Although most rural parents may lack education, they nonetheless provide a wealth of emotional resources to their children, which motivate their children to perform even better in schools. Murray and Velazquez (2000, p. 115) argue that “rural parents may contribute a lot to the education of their children through child care, especially in pre-schools, providing safe transport

for their children to and from schools and by attending evening and weekend school activities”. These authors further argue that “curriculum that reflects the culture, values, interests, experiences and concerns of rural people can enhance parents’ involvement and they will be more inclined to help their children with subjects that affirm their experiences” (Murray & Velazquez, 2000, p. 115). This will increase their confidence and self-esteem.

## **2.7 Parent involvement and children’s achievement in schools**

Swap (1993, p. 2) explains that “many different rural communities have experimented with parent involvement to improve student achievement, aimed at particular goals, such as improving children’s reading”. Vilakazi (2000, p. 189) concludes through her research that “the evidence is now beyond dispute; parents’ involvement in rural and urban areas improves student achievement. When parents are involved, children do better in schools”. She further explains that “there is no one best way to involve parents, but what works is for parents to be involved in a variety of roles over a period of time” (Vilakazi, 2000, p. 189). Sattes (1997, p. 65) has the same view as Vilakazi (2000, p. 190) and says “parent involvement in rural schools has positive effects on the achievement of children, either when parents are trained as tutors or when they are simply informed about and support their children’s learning”.

Sattes (1997) also argues that rural parent involvement impacts student achievement when that involvement is meaningful to parents. The highest achievement gains occur when parents are involved in pre-school or elementary grades as home tutors. However, gains are also reported when parents are involved as supporters and re-inforcers of their child’s school learning and when parents are informed about their child’s school progress.’ The results of Henderson’s research and those of Sattes (1997) affirm the importance of parental role in schools, and that their involvement contributes a lot to the achievement of their children in rural schools. Parents become even more committed when they feel that their involvement makes a difference in schools, and that they are appreciated and accepted by the educators and administrators.

Epstein (1990, p. 89) says that “parents from all backgrounds and economic levels are willing to become involved in their children’s schooling”. She further argues that almost all parents, even



those from the most economically depressed communities, are committed to their children's education. By this statement, Epstein (1990) dismisses the assumptions that rural parents are not interested in the education of their children. She is saying that all parents, rural and urban, poor and rich, want the best out of their children's education. She concluded by saying that 'rural parents say they want their children to succeed, they want to help them, and they need the schools' and teachers' help to know what to do with their children at each grade level'. This statement is in sharp contrast with the claim made by educators in Menchaca and Ruiz-Escalante's (1995, p. 124) research findings where educators indicated that "rural parents just do not care about the performance of their children in schools simply because most of the parents cannot read or write".

Wolhunter, Lemmer and Wet (2007, p. 189) state that, "parental involvement is a necessity for children because parents have a right to information regarding their children's work at school". They further state that, "when parents are actively involved in their children's education, there is an increase in the learners' performance" (Wolhunter, Lemmer & Wet, 2007, p. 189). The parents' experiences can be positive or negative. It is a question of whether parental involvement is worthwhile in the children's education. There can be challenges in the limited knowledge that will be displayed by parents especially where the learners themselves need help with their homework.

Henry (1996, p. 76) argues that, "parental involvement is a collaborative profession, where the parents work together with the school management to create collaborative institutions, where parents are part of the decision making body in the school". This is where educators, parents and administrators are able to make decisions in a shared environment. In this study the researcher will be referring to the schools as interwoven with the homes where children speak the same language at home and at school. The researcher needed to know how much the parental factor would help learner support and achievement.

There is a problem of learners not doing well in most rural schools because there is inadequate support either from home or in schools. Wolhunter, Lemmer and Wet (2007, p. 92) state that, "parents play a significant role in their children's education". They have a legal right to be

involved in their children's education. This research topic shows that parental involvement is a necessity in schools because the children whose parents do not take part in their education seem to be two faced, which means they behave in different ways at school and at home. It is very imperative for parents to be a part of what goes on in schools.

Christie, Butler and Potterton (2007, p. 18) state that "promoting parental involvement encourages the children to be fond of their school work because they know parents will be involved at school and will know about their performances". Decker and White-Clark (1999, p. 25) contend that "there is overwhelming evidence indicating that students benefit from parent involvement in schools. The parents play a critical role in both their children's academic achievement and their children's socio-emotional development". LaBahn (1995, p. 41) asserts that "parental involvement is a combination of commitment and active participation on the part of the parent to the school and to the student". Henry (1996, p. 54) refers to "parental involvement as collaboration of the school and the home working together". The study should assist parents to find out what they know and understand about their involvement. Dixon (1992, p. 16) argues that "parental involvement in almost any form produces measurable gains in student achievement". Mona (2003, p. 24) says that "in fact, parental involvement in education gives meaning to parents as citizens in the fullest sense as change agents who can transform schools and make them better places". What is lacking in the literature on parental involvement is how rural parents could be best involved in assisting their children to achieve more academically in schools. This study looks at the involvement of parents and at how they can engage themselves in closing this gap.

## **2.8 Summary**

This chapter provided the literature from different authors on parental involvement in schools and also revealed what is lacking in the literature such as how rural parents could get involved in learner school achievement in rural schools.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter provides a detailed explanation of the processes that were followed in collecting data that was used to answer research questions. It presents a clear picture of how this study was conducted from the beginning to the end. It begins with the context of the location where the study was conducted, followed by pilot study, lessons learnt from the pilot study, research paradigm, theorising research design and methodology, the case study design and the methods. It also explains how interview dates, time and venue were set. Other important steps in the research process like data analysis are also discussed.

#### **3.2 The context of the location of study schools**

The study was conducted in schools that were located in a rural area, approximately 26 kilometres from the nearest town. In this rural area there were low cost houses provided by the government to low income earners and the unemployed. Most parents were employed in the factories and some as domestic workers in the suburbs around the town, while most of the young men worked as taxi drivers. There were a few individuals that were generally known as financially well off and their houses were of modern designs. The tarred streets were few and very narrow, and the rest were gravel roads. The area had five primary schools and three secondary schools. Those primary schools were well distributed in terms of the distance and that all sections in this rural area had one primary school each. Two secondary schools were close to each other, that is, about a kilometre apart, and the other secondary school was far away from the rest. All of these three secondary schools were selected for the study.

#### **3.3 The pilot study**

I did pilot interviews in order to find out possible challenges that I could possibly face, to check whether my tools of data collection captured what I sought to. I also wanted to check if the questions I had constructed were relevant and easily understood by the participants. The pilot research project entailed conducting semi-structured interviews with four of my friends who were not affiliated to the participating schools. Two of them were educators and the remaining two were parents. This pilot project helped to get a picture of possible challenges lying ahead.

Finding a suitable venue for an interview proved to be a big challenge. Three of the interviewees also wanted money for transport to go to the venue, and the other one wanted me to pick him up at his home. Time was also a challenge. It was difficult to get hold of the interviewees even though I thought it was an appropriate time for an interview, especially on weekends when they were not working. Two of them said they could not be interviewed on a weekend, especially on Sundays because they would go to church, and that after the church service, they wanted to go home to relax and prepare themselves for work on Monday. They also said that Saturdays were used for attending meetings, funerals, doing household duties and visits. The other two interviewees always drove to their homes on Fridays, which were far away. They spent their weekends with their families in small towns more than 150km away from the school. The other challenge was time scheduling on my side in order to suit theirs. This process was frustrating. It was not easy because I had to cancel and postpone some of my other commitments.

When the pilot project was finally done, it provided a picture of the cost involved in doing research. The pilot interviewees wanted me to buy them food and to transport them to and from interviews. All the expenses were carried out by me. It was not as easy as I had initially anticipated. The first pilot interview was done on 15 June 2011 in an open area in a park at 4.30 pm with my colleague. It was quiet, but there were a few individuals who, from time to time, would pass by, but did not cause much distraction. It lasted for 28 minutes. The second pilot interview took place at my house on 18 June 2011 with a parent who was a neighbour. It took approximately 31 minutes to complete. The third one took place in a restaurant in Pinetown at 6.30pm on 23 June 2011. The interviewee was an educator who was teaching in one of the schools in the Pinetown District. It lasted for 35 minutes. The last pilot interview was conducted in my house with a parent who also worked in Pinetown District offices. That pilot interview took place on 29 June 2011 at 7.00pm. It was the longest interview and it took 38 minutes to complete. All the interview questions were covered in all the pilot interviews. I did probing to get more clarity on certain issues.

Semi-structured interviews were used as a tool to gather data in the pilot interview. The reason was that I was going to use the same semi-structured interview to obtain data from the research study participants. I chose semi-structured interviews because it allows me to solicit the parents' and educators' opinions, ideas and thoughts about the study topic. This was very crucial because it added depth in data. Patton (2002, p. 55) argues that "semi-structured interviews add depth, detail and meaning at a very personal level of experience". This proved correct during the pilot interview when one of the parents was asked how parents' contribution was received by educators in rural schools. She spoke more about her personal experience with the educators and

how she felt about the treatment she received from them. She claimed that educators were arrogant. She said her son fought with another learner in school and he was suspended, but never mentioned the manner or procedures followed to suspend him. She said that from that day, she never wanted to be in school or to attend the parents' meetings.

Smith, Maclennan and Bordonaro (1995, p. 41) claim that “semi-structured interviews are used to gain a detailed picture of participant’s beliefs about perceptions of those involved in a particular topic”. Therefore, the semi-structured interviews were appropriate to the pilot interviews and they assisted to investigate the experiences of the parents and educators involved in the pilot interviews in their role of assisting learners to achieve better in their academic work in schools.

### **3.4 Lessons learnt from the pilot study**

Not all questions were clearly understood by the participants. Some of the questions had to be restructured. Two of the participants felt that I was rushing them, and never gave them a chance to think. I had to learn to do the interview according to the pace of the participants.

Through the pilot interviews I learned that some of the interviewees could be emotional and angry during interviews. One of the parents was emotional and spoke as if she was quarrelling with the educators who wronged her in the past. This taught me to handle emotional interviewees and to expect such behaviour during the interviews. Time was also a challenge as one of the participants told me that he had no time and I had to make sure that I rush through the questions in order to cover them all because he wanted to be somewhere else soon. I learned to manage time, to be punctual for all interviews in order to avoid inconveniencing the interviewees. The whole exercise of pilot interviews was a good learning curve that prepared me for the research study interviews that were to come, and most importantly, it helped me to sharpen the data collection tools based on the responses of the interviewees.

### **3.5 Research paradigm**

In this research study, an interpretive paradigm is the most appropriate one because according to Angen (2000, p. 379), “interpretive approaches rely heavily on naturalistic methods (interviewing, observation and analysis), and seek to explain the stability of behaviour from the individual’s viewpoint”. Interviews were used as a tool to gather data in this study, promoting a dialogue between the researcher and the respondent. Angen (2000, p. 379) further says that “it is through this dialectical process that a more informed and sophisticated understanding of the

social world can be created”. For any researcher to be able to explain any behaviour of the respondent, a dialogue has to be fostered.

Angen (2000, p. 378) further argues that “all interpretations in interpretive paradigm are based on a particular moment, that is they are located in a particular context or situation and time”. Since this study is focusing on the role of parents on children’s achievement in schools, the interpretations from this study are based on schools studied and the time of study. Parents and educators’ experiences of the parents’ role in learner school achievement were interpreted within the context of their schools’ location and time of study. Angen (2000, p. 379) argues that “interpretive inquiries are most interested in understanding the subjectively created world as it is in terms of on-going processes”. This means that it focuses on the everyday experiences of the individuals studied and seeks to understand their world from their views.

### **3.6 Theorising research design and methodology**

This section outlines the research design, methodology and the methods that were used. Issues of research design are discussed first followed by the discussion of the methods.

#### **3.6.1 The case study design**

This study is qualitative in nature. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2006, p.197), qualitative research is “aimed at describing and analysing people’s social actions, beliefs, thoughts and perceptions”. By the end of this study, questions about the beliefs, thoughts and perceptions of parents on their role in learner school achievement in rural schools should be answered or attempted to be answered, depending on the outcome of the study. According to Picciano (2004, p. 205), “qualitative research requires seeing and hearing, touching and experimenting activities in the natural environment”, and these are the characteristics of a case study, where thick data is produced. Since interviews were conducted to gather the data, it was the issue of face-to-face interaction between the researcher (interviewer) and the participants (interviewees), which offers the researcher a good opportunity to probe and to make follow-up questions. Dawson (2002, p. 34) says that “research is a structured enquiry that utilizes acceptable scientific methodology to solve problems and create new knowledge that is generally applicable”. This is what this study attempted to achieve through interviewing the participants.

This is a case study research comprising three secondary schools. Thomas (2011, p. 17) describes case study as a research methodology common in social science. He further states that it is based on an in-depth investigation of a single individual, group, or event, and that a case

study may be descriptive or explanatory. Gerring (2005, p. 68) contends that “a case study should be defined as a research strategy, an empirical inquiry that investigates a phenomenon within its real-life context. It should involve an in-depth, longitudinal examination of a single instance or event: a case”. Case studies provide a systematic way of looking at events, collecting data, analysing information and reporting the results. As a result the researcher may gain a sharpened understanding of why the event happened as it did and what might become important to look at more extensively in future research. Wholey, Hatry and Newcomer (1994, p. 123) agree that a “case study research excels at bringing us to an understanding of a complex issue or objects and can extend experience or add strength to what is already known through previous research”. They further say that “case studies emphasise detailed contextual analysis of a limited number of events or conditions and their relationships”. The content within a case study may include information about the objectives, strategies, challenges, results and recommendations of the phenomenon studied.

### **3.6.2 The methods**

Data was collected through the use of semi-structured interviews. Trochim (2006, p. 193) contends that “a semi-structured interview is a method of research used in the social sciences”. Lindlof and Taylor (2002, p. 195) argue that “semi-structured interviews are conducted with a fairly open framework which allows for focused, conversational, two-way communication”. In semi-structured interviews there is an interview guide with specific themes to be explored. However, interview guide is flexible to allow new questions to be brought in during the interview process. A semi-structured interview was a suitable and a relevant tool of data collection in this study due to its flexibility. A tape recorder was used to capture the responses of the interviewees. This was very important because it became easy to quote exactly what the participant (interviewee) had said during the interview.

### **3.7 Sampling methods**

The research study was conducted in three secondary schools within the Pinetown District in KwaZulu-Natal Province in South Africa. Those schools were included in the research study because they were accessible. The distance in between two of them was approximately 1km apart and the other school was approximately 6km away from the two schools. This helped to cut the cost of travelling and time. Those schools were labelled as School-A, School-B and School-C. Only members of the SGB and SMT were selected because they represented parents and school governance and educators and school management, which could shed more light on the

parental role in learner school achievement. Twelve participants were included in the study, four members from each school. Each school was represented by two SMT members and two SGB members. This small sample size was chosen due to constraints of financial costs and time.

The table below presents the composition of participants in terms of their positions in their respective schools,

Table 3.1 Participants and the schools they come from.

NO.	PARTICIPANT	SCHOOL
1	Principal	A
2	Head of Department (HOD)	A
3	SGB Chairperson	A
4	SGB Treasurer	A
5	Deputy Principal	B
6	Principal	B
7	Deputy Chairperson	B
8	SGB Secretary	B
9	SGB Secretary	C
10	Head of Department (HOD)	C
11	SGB Chairperson	C
12	Head of Department (HOD2)	C

Very often it is not possible to study the entire population. It may turn out to be very expensive and also time consuming. It may take such a long time that the data might become obsolete. Hence a sample which is representative of the population is studied. According to Ramak (2009, p. 11) “a sample is that part of a population which is actually observed”. A sample is a subset of a manageable size of the population. Wiley (2007, p. 21) explains that “typically, the population is very large, making a census or a complete enumeration of all the values in the population impractical or impossible”. He further says that “samples are collected and statistics are calculated from the samples so that one can make inferences or extrapolations from the sample to the population” (Wiley, 2007, p. 21). Nieuwenhuis (2007, p. 97) contends that “sampling is a process which is used to select a portion of the population for the study”.



Purposive sampling was applied in this study. According to Suter (2006, p. 212) “purposive sampling means that participants are selected because of some defining characteristics that make them holders of the data needed in the study”. Purposive sampling was used in selecting parents and educators as relevant holders of information regarding the role of parents in learner school achievement. Parents and educators were relevant to the study due to parents being constitutionally required to play a role in the education of their children, and educators being formal professionals in educating the learners.

### **3.8 Permission letters and negotiating entry to research sites**

There are three main gatekeepers from whom a permission to conduct the study was sought. First, I solicited permission from the University’s Research Ethics Committee. Once the permission was granted by the University’s Research Ethics Committee, I wrote to the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education to seek a permission to conduct the study in the selected schools. Thirdly, I talked to the principals of individual schools about my study. This was followed by a formal letter asking a permission to conduct the study in their schools.

After obtaining permissions, I visited schools to introduce myself to the participants. The principal of each school helped me to identify the relevant participants with rich information regarding the phenomenon under study. I gave participants a consent form where they declared that their participation in the study was voluntary and that they had an option to withdraw from participation at any time.

The intimate relationship between the researcher, the participants and what is studied is very critical because if the participants do not trust the researcher, they may withdraw a lot of information and even withdraw from the study completely. In this study, I initiated and built trust between myself as a researcher and the participants by, among other things, explaining what the research was all about, and that their names would never be exposed.

### **3.9 Interviews in School-A**

In this section I discussed the interviews starting with the school setting.

#### **3.9.1 School setting**

The school is situated in a poor rural community, composed of mainly black or African population. It had 18 classrooms, a new building for administration consisting of SMT offices

and a staff room. The number of learners enrolled was 431 and the number of educators was 18. Most of the classroom window panes and the classroom doors were broken and some missing and the fence almost lying on the ground. The premises were clean and there were two sport fields for soccer and netball. The grass was well cut. In this school, the principal, the HOD, the SGB chairperson and the SGB treasurer participated in the study.

### **3.9.2 Principal: School-A**

I went to the school to make an appointment for the interview with the principal. The date set for the interview was the 30 July 2011 at 9am in his office. Before the interview started I sought a permission to tape-record the interview proceedings. Permission was granted and the interview begun. The main questions were: (i) How parents should involve themselves in the education of their children to enhance their academic achievement? (ii) What kind of support does rural schools needed from parents to improve the academic performance of learners? (iii) How can the school help parents to get involved better to enhance learners' achievement? These are some of the questions asked to all principals, deputy principals and HODs who participated in this study. The principal was friendly and even welcomed more probing questions. I was satisfied with the kind of interaction I had with him. The interview continued without any interruptions. It lasted for 33 minutes. .

### **3.9.3 HOD: School-A**

The interview with the HOD was sought over the phone and was scheduled for 12 o'clock on 30 July 2011 in her office. The interview started on time. I asked the permission to tape record the interview process and she agreed. The focus of the questions was about the support schools needed from parents in order to help learners achieve better. The HOD gave brief answers and was a bit irritated when I asked some probing questions. There was no interruption during the interview and it lasted for 22 minutes.

### **3.9.4 Chairperson of the SGB: School-A**

An appointment was made with the SGB chairperson through the principal. It was set for the 6 August 2011 at 5pm at the park next to a soccer field. The interviewee had come from work where he worked as a security guard. The interview was conducted inside the car. I asked for a permission to tape record the interview proceedings and it was granted. Conducting interviews in the car made it less formal and the interviewee was more comfortable, relaxed and friendly.

The questions covered parents' contribution in the education of their children that led to their academic achievement. Further, the questions addressed the challenges rural parents faced in trying to assist their children to achieve more academically in schools. The rest of the interview went on well without any interruptions. The interview lasted for 37 minutes.

### **3.9.5 Treasurer of the SGB: School-A**

The arrangement for the interview was made through the principal. The interview was scheduled for the 10 August 2011 at his home at 3pm at the garden. I solicited a permission from him to tape record the proceedings of the entire interview.

Some of the questions were: (i) How do parents contribute in the education of their children in schools? (ii) How parents' contribution was received by the educators in rural schools? (iii) What schools should do to encourage parents to be involved in the education of their children? (iv) What do you think parents in rural schools should do to involve themselves better to improve learner achievement? The purpose of these questions was to find out what parents did to assist their children to achieve more academically, and the type of assistance parents needed from educators which will enable them to play a meaningful role in the education of their children, and also to find out if schools accepted the contributions made by parents, and parents' expectations from educators. The interview was occasionally interrupted by the barking of the three dogs whenever a person passed by the road. It took 34 minutes.

### **3.10 Interviews in School-B**

In this section I started with the school setting followed by interview discussions.

#### **3.10.1 School setting**

The school is situated in a poor black rural community. School-B had 24 classrooms and an administration building. The number of learners was 731 and the number of educators was 24. It had a library with no books. Library was turned into a classroom. There was a non-functioning laboratory. The school had a high fence but with many holes in it. The premises were also clean and had many trees and flowers planted and taken care of. The classroom window panes were not broken, compared to School-A. The principal, deputy principal, SGB chairperson and the SGB secretary from this school were selected to take part in the study.

### **3.10.2 Deputy Principal: School-B**

On the 5 August 2011 I went to the school to make an appointment for an interview with the deputy principal. We agreed on the date of the 14 August 2011, at 10.30am in her office. She was ten minutes late and apologised for keeping me waiting. I sought for her permission to tape record the proceedings of the interview, and she agreed.

The main questions asked were about how children performed whose parents were involved in school's activities. These questions were asked to establish if there was any noticeable improvement in learners whose parents were involved in school work and activities. The interview went smooth without interruptions and it lasted for 27 minutes

### **3.10.3 Principal: School-B**

The appointment for an interview with the principal was sought over the phone and agreed on the date of the 16 August 2011 at his home. The interview was set for 4.30pm and it was conducted in the study room. I solicited a permission from him to tape record the entire interview proceedings.

Some of the questions the deputy principal was asked about were on the kind of support the school needed from parents so that learner achievement can improve. The questions were meant to establish the type of support the school needed from the parents. The principal was confident of what he was saying and he was very friendly. The interview continued without any interruption and it took 36 minutes.

### **3.10.4 Deputy Chairperson of the SGB: School-B**

The arrangement for an interview with the deputy chairperson of the SGB was done through the principal. The interview took place on the 20 August 2011 at 10am in the principal's office. Before the interview started I sought a permission from the interviewee to tape record the interview process and permission was granted. She sounded not confident and looked as if she was checking for my approval of her responses. I had to stop the interview and asked her to be free and to give honest answers from her best knowledge. After that, she looked relaxed with improved confidence than before. Some of the questions she was asked about were on challenges faced by parents when assisting their children with their school work. The interview lasted for 28 minutes without any interruptions.

### **3.10.5 Secretary of the SGB: School-B**

The appointment for an interview with the SGB secretary was sought through the principal. The date set was 26 August 2011 at 6.30pm at his home. Before the interview began, I sought a permission to tape record the interview proceedings and he agreed. I did not do a lot of probing because he answered each question in detail. He was asked about the kind of assistance parents gave to learners to achieve more academically. The interview went smooth and lasted for 27 minutes.

### **3.11 Interviews in School-C**

In this section I have started by discussing the setting of each school. This was followed by the interviews.

#### **3.11.1 School setting**

The school is centrally situated in a poor rural community with 22 classrooms. The total number of learners was 520 and the number of educators was 20. It looked neglected. Desks and chairs used by learners were all over the school premises. Most of the window panes for both the administration building and the classrooms were broken. The fence was no longer there, only the poles remained standing to show where the fence was. The premises were dirty and drains were filled with papers that blocked the flow of water. The participants selected from this school to take part in the study were two heads of department, the SGB chairperson and the SGB secretary.

#### **3.11.2 Secretary of the SGB: School-C**

The date for an interview with the SGB secretary was sought over the phone. We agreed on the date of the 4 September 2011. The interview took place at Wimpy during her lunch time at 2pm in a quiet corner. Before the interview started, I sought a permission to tape record the interview process and it was granted. The questions asked were on how parents should involve themselves in the education of their children. The interview lasted for 33 minutes without any interruptions

#### **3.11.3 HOD: School-C**

I went to the school on 3 September 2011 to make an appointment to interview the HOD. We agreed on the date of the 10 September 2011 at 9am in his office.

On the day of the interview I arrived early at 8.30am. Before the interview begun, permission was sought to tape record the interview. The questions were on the challenges or limitations parents faced when involving themselves in learner school achievement. The interview went well without interruptions and lasted for 38 minutes.

#### **3.11.4 Chairperson of the SGB: School-C**

I made an appointment for an interview with the SGB chairperson through the HOD. The date agreed upon was the 16 September 2011 at 12pm in the HOD's office.

Before the interview begun, I solicited the permission from the SGB chairperson to tape record the proceedings of the interview. Focus of the questions was whether the parents' views and ideas were considered in the school decision making. The interview went well and lasted for 32 minutes.

#### **3.11.5 HOD-2: School-C**

The date for an interview with the HOD-2 was sought over the phone and agreed on the date of the 21 September 2011 at 9am in his office.

Before the interview begun, I asked permission from him to tape record the proceedings of the interview, and he agreed. He was asked on how best parents could play a meaningful role in the education of their children in rural schools. The questions were meant to establish if there were any plans to support parents in their meaningful role in the education of their children. The interview went well without interruptions and lasted for 35 minutes.

### **3.12 Data analysis**

In this case study inductive analysis was used. Bogdan and Biklen (2008, p. 145) define inductive data analysis as 'working with data, organizing it, breaking it into manageable units, synthesizing it, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what you will tell others'. Qualitative researchers tend to use inductive analysis of data so that the critical themes emerge out of the data (Patton, 1990). Patton further says that qualitative analysis requires some creativity; the raw data was placed into logical, meaningful categories to examine them in a holistic fashion; and to find a way to communicate this interpretation to others. In this study, I used inductive analysis as I found it more appropriate. It

allowed me to extrapolate important data for provision of thick description. The themes were not influenced by any literature I read or theory, but emerged themselves from raw data.

Thomas (2004, p. 43) says that ‘the primary purpose of the inductive approach is to allow research findings to emerge from the frequent, dominant or significant themes inherent in raw data, without the restraints imposed by structured methodologies. Key themes are often obscured, reframed or left invisible because of the preconceptions in the data collection and data analysis procedures imposed by deductive data analysis such as those used in experimental and hypothesis testing research’.

I used an inductive approach as it enabled me to condense extensive and varied raw text data into a brief, summary form. I allowed the themes to emerge from the raw data, a process that Strauss and Corbin (1990) referred to as "open coding". During open coding, I identified the conceptual categories into which important issues about the phenomenon were grouped. The goal was to create descriptive, multi-dimensional categories which form a preliminary framework for analysis. Words, phrases or events that appeared to be similar were grouped into the same category. These categories were gradually modified or replaced during the subsequent stages of analysis that followed. In this case study, there were six themes that emerged from data. Such themes will be discussed in detail in chapter four.

### **3.13 Trustworthiness of the findings**

I ensured that the findings of the study were trustworthy by applying four criteria of trustworthiness from Guba and Lincoln (1985) model, namely: dependability, transferability, confirmability and credibility.

(Guba, 1997, p. 90) viewed dependability “as a substitute for reliability which measures replicability”, while Lodico (2006, p. 36) refers dependability to “a situation where one can track the procedures and processes used to generate and interpret the data”. In this study, dependability was addressed through the triangulation of participants where different participants were asked the same prepared questions.

Transferability in qualitative research discourse is an alternative to generalisability of the study (Rule & John, 2011, p. 92). Since this was a case study, the findings of the study were not generalisable to all other situations. However, the lessons learned from this case study could be useful in other similar situations, especially in rural schools.

Confirmability is defined by Guba (1997, p. 68) as ‘a way of addressing concerns about the researcher’s influences and biases on the study’. The concerns of confirmability in this study were addressed by doing member-checking, which means going back to the participants to check if what they said during the interviews was correctly interpreted.

Credibility, according to Lodico (2006, p. 91) refers to ‘the extent to which a case study has recorded the fullness of the case reality’. In this study, credibility was addressed by ensuring that participants had access to the data generated, the multiple data sources, such as the literature read and the participants interviewed and by applying inductive analysis which allowed the themes to emerge by themselves without any influence from the researcher.

### **3.14 Ethical issues**

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007, p. 99) state that “ethical issues refer to moral principles or rules of behaviours which researchers have to take into consideration before conducting research, particularly with the research involving humans and animals”. They further state that, “the informed consent declaration form for participants to sign will be part of the instrument that will be used for data production” (Cohen, *et. al.* 2007, p. 99). I wrote letters to the gatekeepers, namely: University’s Research Ethics Committee, Department of Education and school principals, requesting them to give permission to conduct a study in schools. The letters were accompanied by consent forms to be filled in and returned by those who were involved in the study. It was also clearly stated that the participants had the right to withdraw from the research study if they felt that they were no longer interested or for any other reason.

### **3.15 Limitations of the study**

This study has its own limitations as it applied qualitative research methods. ‘The main disadvantage of qualitative approaches is that their findings cannot be extended to wider populations with the same degree of certainty’, (<http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/web.html>). This implies that the findings from this study cannot be a representative of all rural secondary schools. The other limitation is the small number of participants in the study. There were only 12



participants involved in the study and other people who might have added more value in the study might have been left out. This is a case study which relies on information from the participants. Most people often say things which are the opposite of what they actually do. The truth about the credibility of the study is actually known by the participants, who are the givers of information, not the researcher or any other person.

There might be a possibility that the questions asked during the interviews were biased as well as the interpretation of data. The fact that some of the participants knew that the researcher was an educator might have played itself out as a limitation element hindering participants, especially parents, from speaking freely without the fear of being judged. Doubts and suspicions concerning the motive of the investigation might have caused fear for some of the participants even after the researcher had explained the purpose of the study.

### **3.16 Summary**

This chapter has presented all the elements of the research process that were addressed during the study. The next chapter focuses on the data presentation and discussion.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF DATA

#### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the discussion of the data that was generated through the interviews of the 12 participants in the research. Parents' and educators' responses were analysed and interpreted to give meanings regarding their parental involvement in school achievement of their children in selected rural schools of KwaZulu-Natal's Pinetown district.

In order to understand what parents did to help their children improve their scholastic achievement, raw data was collected using semi-structured interviews which were analysed and interpreted. In this research study, interpretation of the data involves giving explanations and meanings to the data generated. The data is presented in a narrative way to illustrate emerging themes in a summarised format.

#### 4.2 Themes and discussion

There are six major themes that were delineated from the interview data and these are as follows: (a) the nature of parental involvement in supporting learner achievement (b) learner performance and the role of parents (c) educators' views about the role of parental involvement (d) how schools can promote parental involvement (e) successes and challenges of parental involvement (f) how parents can assist in improving learner performance.

##### 4.2.1 The nature of parental involvement in supporting learner achievement

The way in which parents supported their children in order to achieve expected outcomes was largely confined to providing somewhat logistical support rather than direct academic support. For instance, the data indicates that parents provided study materials for their children. This may be regarded as a normal parental obligation. However, when looked at from a rural poverty perspective and a lack of technical skill and insights by the parents, such support may be regarded as significant. One educator from School-A had this to say about the nature of support that they as educators and schools needed parents to provide:

*We need parents to help us by assisting their children with school homework; they also need to provide study materials and motivation to their children. Although we try to do*

*that here at school, but re-inforcing these things by parents at home is crucial (Principal school-A).*

The above extract is supported by some scholars who view parental involvement as the provision of learner support materials. Such a finding is congruent with the viewpoint of Dixon (1992) who argues that parents' role is not and should not be confined to sending children to school only, but also that it should extend to providing the learning materials.

Besides providing materials, some parents also provide motivation to their children to continue schooling and dedicate more energy to learning. In addition to this, parents supported their children by coming to the schools to check on the progress that was being made by their children. This claim was supported by some educators who explained that some parents involved themselves in this way. This response shows that some of the rural parents were taking responsibility for the education of their children. I found it interesting that rural parents, while most of them are said to be illiterate, they did take time to go to the schools to check on the academic progress that was being made by their children. This can be regarded as a positive step towards playing a meaningful role in the education of their children even though some of the educators viewed these activities as less important, as long as motivation of the learners was low. For instance, an educator from School-C, while commending parents for their support, also raised his concerns about priorities that parents should consider. He said that motivation should come first, otherwise everything one does is of no use. This is how this educator responded:

*While I do welcome the contributions made by other parents but the provision of study materials and assistance in homework to an unmotivated or unwilling child is a waste of time (HOD school-C).*

Nevertheless, the findings of this study indicate that parents did also motivate their children, although, to some educators, that was not sufficient, and should be prioritised.

#### **4.2.2 Learner performance and the role of parents**

There was unanimity among participants that parents play no direct role in supporting learner performance. By direct role, is meant, parents helping learners with subject content, especially homework for example. Parents mentioned three factors which they maintained inhibited them from supporting the learners in any effective ways. These factors were levels of illiteracy, not being able to understand the subject content and lack of time to assist the learners. This is what an educator from School-A had to say:

*Illiteracy was the major challenge faced by parents in assisting learners to achieve more academically in rural schools. Because of high levels of illiteracy parents did not understand the subject content. To make a bad situation worse, subject content that is taught in schools has changed so much compared to what most parents learned when they were still learners (HOD-School A).*

The issue of illiteracy among parents in rural communities was not the only challenge to assisting the children with their school work. Time factor was found to be one of the major issues that negatively affected parental support to their children. Unemployed parents usually lacked knowledge and skills but did have time. Parents that were employed spent most of their time at work and by the time they come home, it is usually late and they are exhausted. It was noted that even the educators shared these sentiments. For instance an educator from School-C argued that:

*Parents don't have enough time to assist their children with school work due to long hours spent at work and travelling long distances between work and home (HOD2 school-C).*

The issue of inability to assist due to high levels of illiteracy and availability of time were not the only issues raised by educators. Some believed that in fact, even the non-availability of time had more to do with parents' negative attitudes towards the educators rather than anything else. His views were that it was the parents' attitudes that contributed to their 'unwillingness' to assist their children. On this issue an educator from School-A claimed that:

*Parents were faced with the challenge of unwillingness to assist their children with their school work and had negative attitudes towards educators. This resulted in parents not playing their role in learner school achievement (HOD school-A).*

It was not clear as to why educators did not accept parents' predicament when it comes to their involvement in educational activities of their children. However, when I asked educators about the benefits of parental involvement for the school and the learners, it became evident that parental involvement had a profound value. In fact, most parents that were interviewed saw the value of participating in the educational activities of their children. This is what one of the educators noted: "*Learners whose parents were involved in schools improved in their performance*". However, there was no agreement among participants whether high levels of learner achievement could be attributed to parental involvement in their academic lives. In fact, it was a surprise to find that most educators agreed with the parents that, where parents were involved, learners achieved better. Only one educator was adamant that learner achievement had

nothing to do with parental involvement. Such a claim was based on the view that some learners performed very well despite the fact that their parents were not involved in the academic activities of their children. To argue this point, an educator from School-A pointed out that, “*there were some learners, whose parents were not involved in schools, who performed better than learners whose parents were involved*”.

Although as a researcher and author of this report, I am not expected to share my views about this issue, but it can be highlighted that, in most schools where I taught, the trend of good performance by children whose parents were involved in schools was the same. That is why such a positive response about the usefulness of parental involvement was not in anyway, surprising. This view is supported by Dixon (1992, p. 16) when he maintains that “parental involvement, in almost any form, produces measurable gains in student achievement”.

#### **4.2.3 Educators’ views about the role of parental involvement**

It was noted that educators seemed to share understanding about what parents were going through in terms of work commitment and time spent between work and home, and that there was no sufficient time to assist learners with their school work. However, overall, educators’ views were negative towards parents. For instance, what parents and some educators highlighted as inability on the part of the parents to assist the learners was interpreted by some educators as unwillingness to provide support. In short, inability has quickly become a lack of commitment by the parents. This is a less sympathetic position adopted by an educator from School-B when he claimed that:

*Time is a challenge to everybody. It does not matter whether you are working or not, literate or illiterate, it depends on how determined an individual parent is to assist his or her children to achieve more in schools. Parents must make time for children if they are determined to play their role in learner school achievement (Principal school-B).*

Despite such negative sentiments from various educators about parents, an educator from School-A, agreed with the parents that their views were not considered and that such a tendency did not assist the school or the learners. In fact, the argument raised by this educator is that parental involvement may even be improved if educators could change their attitudes towards parents that were considered illiterate. This is what this educator suggested:

*The best way to help parents to involve themselves better in the education of their children was by accepting their contributions and involving them in most of the school*

*activities... if parents were involved in school activities, and their contributions were valued, they were more likely to feel encouraged to involve themselves in the education of their children (Principal school-A).*

The above extract is indicative of the fact that parents remain the key stakeholder in the education of their children, and that educators, even though some have negative views about parents, they nevertheless acknowledge the positive role that parents can play in supporting learner achievement.

#### **4.2.4 How schools can promote parental involvement**

It has emerged in the data that both school-based participants, that is, educators, HODs, principals as well as parents, seem to agree on the need for parents to be more involved in the activities of the school, particularly those that are aimed at supporting teaching and learning of their children. It has also emerged that none of the two key stakeholders has done anything to ensure that parents are actively involved in such activities. This view was expressed by an educator from School-C when he said that “*not much was done in their respective schools to encourage parents to involve themselves in the education of their children*”. They both expressed ideas about how this has to happen, but no visible action has been taken. What seems to dominate the discourse about parental involvement is finger pointing, accusations and counter accusations. For instance, four parents, including SGB chairperson, and four educators agreed on this. A parent who is a member of the SGB said that “*parents should involve themselves better in the education of their children through co-operation with educators*”. Such a statement is similar to the one made by the principal when he said:

*Parents should involve themselves more in the education of their children through supporting educators and learners in their school work.... this could be possible if educators and learners could mention the kind of support they needed from parents (Principal school-B).*

The two extracts indicate that communication between the two stakeholders was not effective at all. The parent raised an issue of co-operation with the educators while the principal raised the same issue but from a slightly different angle. What the principal has raised is that parents were not properly informed about what educators and learners need parents to do; what kinds of support they required. Given the fact that educators have, in different parts of this document, highlighted areas where parents could provide assistance, this concern raised by the principal could be indicative of the extent of the problem of communication between the schools and the

parents in the case study sites. The issue of communication remains a major problem that inhibits co-operation between educators and the parents. This was raised by one of the parents when he argued that:

*Effective and efficient communication between parents and the educators was needed in order for the parents to be more involved with the school (SGB chairperson school-B).*

Another parent went on to explain some of the benefits of improving communication between the school and the parents. Her views were that:

*Parents can only feel needed in schools if educators involve them in school activities and communicate with them. Effective and efficient communication would assist to bridge the gap that exists between educators and parents (SGB deputy chairperson school-C).*

It is evident from the perspectives of the parents and the educators that poor communication stood between what they could achieve working collaboratively, and between their understandings of one another's position as well as, some concerns that they may have regarding various issues pertaining to the education of the children.

#### **4.2.5 Successes and challenges of parental involvement**

This theme disturbingly and consistently dominated by negativity and pessimism rather than positivity and optimism. In fact, there was hardly any success that stands out clearly as an achievement by the parents. One of the only success stories could be the fact that parents, did not only support their children by buying them learning materials and motivating them, they also came to schools to monitor progress and talk to the educators about progress that children were making. This was confirmed by educators who indicated that some of the parents came to the schools to check on the progress of their children. These are the basic responsibilities of parents to their school-going children. Visiting the school to check on the progress of your children and to provide study materials to your children does not depend on a parent being literate but it is motivation to the children to work harder in their school work. It is even more encouraging to find that there were some rural parents who spent time with their children assisting them with their school work as well.

Despite such a positive comment, negative ones seemed to dominate. For instance, parents' perceptions about their inputs and their reception by the educators can be characterised as lukewarm at best, and negative at worst. A dominant view was that parents' suggestions or

inputs were not received by the educators and schools. Reasons advanced by the parents were that selective recognition of the parents' inputs prevailed. A dominant view held among parents was that a parent had to be a prominent member of the community in order for his or her views to be taken seriously. Citing his scepticism, a parent from School-B said:

*I'm not sure whether parents' contributions were well received or not...only educators could honestly tell if they welcomed parents' contributions or not.... But I can tell that the contributions of the educated or influential people in the community were accepted (SGB secretary school-B).*

Similar to this issue was the whole question of accepting ideas or opinions from the parents. High social standing seems to be the main benchmark for considering ideas of others. Lowly educated parents are not considered and end up not getting involved in the affairs of the school. Consequently, poor communication between schools and the parents seems to be a major persisting challenge. A parent from School-C commented that:

*There is a communication gap that exists between parents and schools. Schools that accept parents' ideas or opinions are those that co-operate and communicate with parents (Secretary school-C).*

The above extract does not make sense. It is more confusing now, because, it is not clear as to whether, it is schools where there is good communication between schools and parents where ideas are accepted, or vice versa. What can be observed from the discussion is that co-operation and good communication are congruent with acceptance of ideas, although the question of causality may not be resolved at least for a time being. What is evident though is that there is a need for a relationship between schools and the parents to be addressed and then, a platform for collaboration can be created, and perhaps, trust established.

A number of scholars have highlighted the difficulties that parents faced. For example, Heystek and Louw (1998) have generated a long list of issues that presented challenges for parents, and negatively that impacted on their participation in the schools' activities. Some of these challenges included the attitudes that educators have towards parents, inferiority complex suffered by the parents, and also the view that teaching was actually the responsibility of the educators, and therefore, that parents should be left alone. Similar findings have also been raised by Bhengu (2005).



#### **4.5.6 How parents can assist in improving learner performance.**

The data indicate that parents can play a prominent role in improving learner performance. Both the educators and the parents have talked positively about this. However, what seems to be at the root of this challenge is the fact that relationships between schools and the parents was not good; there was no visible mutual trust between them. To rectify the problem the principal of School-A suggested that:

*In order for them to be better involved in the education of their children, schools must form a close and meaningful relationship with parents. This can lead to motivating parents to play a better role in assisting their children to achieve more academically in schools (Principal school-A).*

This view was broadly shared by all the parents that participated in the study. For instance the parent who was also a member of SGB argued that:

*Schools must assist parents to assist their children academically, and by so doing, schools would be encouraging parents to be involved in the education of their children (SGB Deputy Chairperson school-B).*

It was evident from the data that all the parents made a similar proposal about the close relationship that needed to be established and promoted between them and educators. The fact that parents were willing and actually did come to the schools to monitor their children's work was one positive factor that schools could build on and improve. In addition, the fact that both the parents and the school-based participants raised the issue of establishing a positive relationship between them implied that parents were aware of the gap that existed between them and the school, and that such a gap affected their role as parents. This notion of a gap or fence that separates schools from parents and communities in which schools are located has been written about in the past few years (See, Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2005; Bhengu, 2005; Bhengu, 2007; Ndlovu, 2011).

Lack of communication and trust between educators and parents were a major barrier that separated the two, resulting in children not getting sufficient assistance from their parents. This also led to parents feeling being looked down by educators. One of the parents claimed that:

*It will never be easy to have a good relationship or co-operation with educators until educators stop undermining parents. Educators must first recognize and acknowledge*

*that parents are there, whether educated or not. Once they genuinely accept parents, a good working relationship could be established (SGB Treasurer-School A).*

When the relationship has been sorted out, there was unanimous agreement among various participants that parents could contribute a lot in improving the performance of their children. One of such areas for contribution was the inculcation of learner discipline and respect for others. One of the educators highlighted that:

*Parents have to teach their children discipline and respect....if parents can instil discipline and respect in their children, it will be easy to teach their children, and this can lead to learner school achievement (HOD school-A).*

The view expressed above was shared broadly across by all the educators that participated in the study. It also needs to be highlighted here that most of the literature consulted pointed to the fact that parents, whether educated or not, do play a crucial role in supporting academic achievement of their children. Christie, Buttler and Potterton (2007) for example, argue that even if parents are not educated, when they are closely involved in school activities where their children are enrolled in; that encourages their children to be fond of their school work. There are many authors who see a positive role to be played by the parents in supporting their children's education, including those schools and parents in rural communities, (for example, Allen, 1992; David, 1993; LaBahn, 1995; Henry, 1996; Sattes, 1997; Martinez, 1997; Venter, 2004; Christie, Buttler & Potterton, 2007; Ndlovu, 2011).

The responses from both parents and educators addressed one of the key research questions: "What role do parents play in contributing to learner achievement in rural schools?" Comparing what Myburgh (2004) said from the democratic participatory theory on what parents should do to assist learners to achieve more academically, only two roles mentioned by both parents and educators were also mentioned by Olivos (2006). Those were "motivation" and "assisting children with school work". This means that there is limited knowledge by both parents and educators on the role parents should play in assisting their children to achieve more academically, hence the responses were few and similar.

### **4.3 The interpretation of the results of the study**

This research study was successful in establishing challenges that parents faced in playing their role in learner school achievement, such as illiteracy, not understanding the subject contents, lack of time and failure to motivate their children. The research study also established how parents

contributed to the education of their children by providing study materials, assisting their children with homework and by visiting schools to check on the academic progress made by their children.

#### **4.3.1 Parents' challenges and successes in their involvement in learner school achievement**

Through interviews conducted during the research study, it was established that there was failure to understand the subject content by some of the literate parents and through the illiteracy of some parents, but there are other means of supporting their children to achieve more academically. These included the provision of study materials and motivation. Parents also indicated that they did not have time to assist their children with school work due to leaving their homes early in the morning for work and coming back home late and tired. This is a challenge that could easily be addressed if parents were determined to assist their children with school work. People spend more time on things that are valuable to them. If parents could start making their children their most valuable assets they would start making time for them, especially in assisting them with schoolwork.

#### **4.3.2 Educators' views on the parental role in learner school achievement**

All six educators concurred that rural parents have a role to play in learner school achievement by providing study materials to their children, teaching their children discipline and respect, and assisting their children with homework. Educators have highlighted the kind of assistance parents should give to their children in their school work, but they seem reluctant to take the first step to address the issue of lack of communication between them and parents. Once the challenge of a lack of communication is addressed, educators will be able to help parents learn how best they can assist their children to achieve more academically.

Educators also mentioned the lack of discipline and respect in learners which are issues both parents and educators need to address. Discipline and respect are needed at home and in school. Educators do not teach children to read and write only, but also build the character of the learner holistically, so that he or she will become a better member of the community and society at large in the future. Both parents and educators must work together to instil discipline and respect in children, and to motivate them to love education and to understand the purpose of schooling. Schoolwork, whether at home or in school, needs discipline, and as such, educators cannot leave the issue of discipline and respect to parents only; they are equally responsible in addressing this challenge.

#### **4.4 Summary**

According to this research study and the results of other research studies conducted prior to this research, the results show that there is a significant relationship between parental involvement and learners' academic achievement in rural secondary schools. Jones (1993, p. 46) emphasises active parent involvement as the one factor that probably affects learner academic progress most, and concludes that a lack of active parental involvement has an adverse effect on learner academic achievement. Jones' conclusion supports this study's findings on the relationship between parental involvement and learners' academic achievement.

It was established that some of the rural parents did play their role in learner school achievement, even though their contribution may not be enough, due to lack of knowledge of what to contribute and how. This study also established that there is a communication gap between parents and educators, which leaves parents without guidance from educators on how best parents could get involved in their children's education.

## CHAPTER 5

### RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

#### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a summary of the research findings and making recommendations for further research and a conclusion.

#### 5.2 Main findings from the study

In Chapter Four, one of the interesting findings that was highlighted was that there was a strong relationship between parental involvement and learner academic achievement in rural the secondary schools that participated in the study. However, despite this relationship, the level of parental involvement in homework, provision of school materials and involvement in school activities by parents was found to be low. This low level of parental involvement is a disadvantage to the children whose parents were not involved in school activities, because it took away the motivation and encouragement that they needed. The researcher is making such a claim basing it on evidence in the literature (see example Bush & Heystek,2003; Heystek, 2003;Brown & Duku, 2008; Mncube, 2009). It is unfortunate that the overall perception is that the number of parents who are not involved in school activities in rural secondary schools is higher than those who are involved. It must be pointed out that, this particular study did not establish the truthfulness of that, but, the impression that the researcher got by talking to various categories of participants indicated that. Children whose parents were involved in school activities had more sources of encouragement and motivation from parents, hence they achieved more academically.

The findings also showed that some of the semi-illiterate parents played a significant role in the achievement of their children through motivation and provision of study materials. This is quite an important point to note that although these parents were semi-illiterate, some of them were able to contribute to the achievement of their children. To enhance this, it is important that parents liaise with educators, particularly with regards to the kind of support that educators

require the parents to provide to their children. Another finding was that parents played their role in learner school achievement in rural secondary schools through visiting schools to check on the progress that was made by their children in school work. This finding was interesting in the sense that it brought educators and parents together where parents had a chance to ask educators anything about their children's school work and any untoward behaviour that could negatively affect their children's performance in the school work.

While the practice of visiting schools to check learners' progress was found to be bearing positive result, some educators claimed that some of the parents failed to play that meaningful role in the education of their children. The perceptions among educators were that, such parents had developed negative attitudes towards the educators. They claimed that this negative attitude was caused by tensions between parents and educators. Such tension had been witnessed whenever the parents' and educators' meeting was held. In such meetings, parents had a tendency of making a number of accusations, including, theft of school fees by educators and having sexual relations with school girls. Parents would even say that educators were not needed in the community because they were outsiders who had come to take jobs. These tensions had developed to a point of what can be termed power struggle between educators and parents. Some educators made serious claims that the accusations by the parents were untrue and baseless, but that parents just wanted to take over the running of the school, ignoring the fact that schools are professional institutions which must be run and led by professionals.

This finding was a surprise since parents and educators are expected to work together and to be involved in school governance through the SGB, as it was a constitutional obligation. If these claims were true, it is surprising as to why the SGB did not take any action such as following the procedure of dealing with the misbehaving educators, and still encourage parents to play their role rather than stopping the much-needed support they give to their children. This finding is an indication that some schools were experiencing major challenges not only in assistance in learner school achievement, but also in school governance. These are serious accusations that deserve a thorough investigation because if true, they have a potential to destroy any effort to improve learner school achievement in those schools.

A few parents said that they did not have time to assist their children with homework. This reason was not convincing because there is always time. The researcher feels that some of the parents failed to manage their time and to prioritise school activities over other commitments. Generally, academic success of the children receives high priority in certain communities. Clearly, if parents who said they did not have time were serious about the success of their children, they would behave differently and make for the sake of their children. The researcher assumed that some parents left everything academically in the hands of educators, and put other activities as their first priorities.

### **5.3 Recommendations**

Chavkin and Williams (1993, p. 76) argue that “schools that are serious about developing partnerships with parents can provide information to parents about different ways they can be involved, and understand the barriers that keep parents from being more active”. Based on the data presented in Chapter Four, that parental involvement in rural secondary schools was still low, then, the researcher suggests that both the SMT and the SGBs take the responsibility of creating a platform whereby parents and educators could meet and discuss issues like poor or lack of communication and co-operation which has created an imaginary fence (Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2005; Bhengu, 2007) gap between them. Such platforms have a potential of improving communication and understanding between these two important stakeholders.

Linked to this recommendation is another interesting finding which suggested that schools took note of ideas and opinions that were raised by educated, and those that were influential or rich in their respective communities. If a platform for continuous communication between the educators and the parents could be established and sustained, it could be feasible for SGB members to take up the issue with the SMT and educators in the school without raising more tensions between them. The SMT and educators have the responsibility to ensure that feel welcomed in the school; therefore, it is important that parents are treated in such a way that they feel undermined due to their levels of education. The SMT needs to impress on educators about values of democracy and transparency; that whether parents are educated, influential or not, it is their democratic right to participate in the education of their children. However, if they feel unwelcome, and looked down

upon, parents are not likely to contribute anything positive to the school; instead, they need to feel comfortable enough to participate in school activities and decision-making processes.

It is recommended that educators need to encourage parents to focus on other ways of supporting learners such as creating an environment in their homes that is conducive studying, and motivating them to work hard on their school work and to encourage them to attend winter and holiday schools. This recommendation is based on the findings that clearly indicate that many parents were either illiterate or semi-illiterate, and therefore, could not understand the subject content. Failure to understand subject content renders them incapable to effectively support their children with their school work.

#### **5.4 Recommendations for further research**

Based on the findings that have been highlighted regarding tensions and misunderstandings between the parents and the educators, there is a need to further investigate this phenomenon. This is both urgent and important in view of the fact that such tensions affected the role that parents can play on learner achievement.

Further research that will focus on learners' perspectives regarding the role that parents play or can play in supporting their scholastic achievement is necessary. This study only examined the parental role in learner school achievement using parents and educators as the main data source. The researcher feels that the inclusion of learners in the study could enhance our understanding of the learners' views as well.

It is also recommended that future research could focus on the question of school governance on learners' achievement. It was evident from the findings that the relationship between parents and educators was not good. And poor relationship between educators and the parents could lead to poor school governance, which ultimately could result in poor academic achievement by the learners.



## 5.5 Summary

Parental involvement in rural secondary schools is very important for learner achievement. A lot has been written about the importance of parental support that children, irrespective of whether they are in primary or secondary schools, need. It has also become evident that whether parents are educated or not, and they are influential in their respective communities or not, they can still give their children educational support in various ways.

The findings of this research study have definitely put into perspective the challenges that are faced by parents in parental involvement in rural secondary schools. Interestingly these challenges were mentioned by both the parents and the educators. There could be many more challenges other than the ones mentioned in this research study. Further research on this research area could uncover other factors that hinder parental involvement in rural secondary schools. In line with current trends in literature, this researcher sees parental involvement as beneficial to both the learners and the parents. It is very possible that the involvement of parents in their children's education may change learners for the better.

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## **APPENDIX 1**

### **Interview questions for educators**

1. As an educator, what kind of support do you need from parents in order to help learners achieve better?
2. Is there any improvement in learners' achievement as a result of parental involvement?
3. How do learners, whose parents are involved in school, perform?
4. How do you think parents in rural schools should involve themselves better to improve learner achievement?
5. Currently, in your school, how are parents involved in the education of their children to enhance their achievement?
6. What are the challenges and limitations that parents face in their involvement at schools?
7. How can the school help parents to get involved better to enhance learners' achievement?

### **Interview questions for parents**

1. How do you contribute to the education of your children in the schools?
2. How is parents' contribution received by the educators in the rural schools?
3. How are your ideas or opinions as a parent accepted by the schools?
4. What challenges do you face in trying to assist learners to achieve in rural schools?
5. How do you think parents in rural schools should involve themselves better to improve learner achievement?
6. What do you think schools should do to encourage your involvement in children's education?

## **APPENDIX 2**

### **Letter of consent to the parents and educators**

32 Shepstone Road  
New Germany  
3610

Dear Sir / Madam

### **Request to the parents and educators to take part in my research project**

I wish to request permission from you to conduct interviews for my research study.

My name is **Mr Khaizeni Freddy Maswanganyi**, a student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal studying a Masters Degree specialising in Education Management and Leadership. As part of the requirement to complete my degree, I am required to conduct research in schools. The data collected will be analysed and be made available to you to confirm that what you presented during the interviews is truly reflected. However, your name and the name of the school will not be divulged and linked to the information you provide. Findings will only be used in writing up my dissertation. You are also not obliged to answer all questions.

My research topic is: **PARENTAL ROLE IN SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT IN RURAL COMMUNITIES: PARENTS' AND EDUCATORS' PERSPECTIVES.**

If you have any questions or issues to be clarified you are free to contact my supervisor, Mr Sibusiso Bayeni at: 031 260 7026.

I am looking forward to your response.

Yours faithfully  
Khaizeni Freddy Maswanganyi

### **Declaration**

I \_\_\_\_\_ (please write your full names) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project and I consent to participate in the research project.

I fully understand that I am free to withdraw my participation from the research project at any time should I feel so.

Signature of participant \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

### APPENDIX 3

#### Letter of consent

32 Shepstone Road  
New Germany  
3610

Dear Sir / Madam

#### Request to the Department of Education for permission to do research in schools

I wish to request permission to conduct interviews for my research study in schools in Pinetown District.

My name is **Mr Khaizeni Freddy Maswanganyi**, a student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal studying a Masters Degree specializing in Education Management and Leadership. As part of the requirement to complete my degree, I am required to conduct research in schools.

My research topic is: **PARENTAL ROLE IN SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT IN RURAL COMMUNITIES: PARENTS' AND EDUCATORS' PERSPECTIVES.**

If you have any questions or issues to be clarified you are free to contact my supervisor, Mr Sibusiso Bayeni at:  
031 260 7026.

I am looking forward to your response.

Yours faithfully  
Khaizeni Freddy Maswanganyi

## **APPENDIX 4**

### **Letter of consent**

32 Shepstone Road  
New Germany  
3610

Dear Sir / Madam

### **Request to the school principal for permission to do research in his / her school**

I wish to request permission to conduct interviews in your school for my research study.

My name is **Mr Khaizeni Freddy Maswanganyi**, a student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal studying a Masters Degree specializing in Education Management and Leadership. As part of the requirement to complete my degree, I am required to conduct research in schools.

My research topic is: **PARENTAL ROLE IN SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT IN RURAL COMMUNITIES: PARENTS' AND EDUCATORS' PERSPECTIVES.**

If you have any questions or issues to be clarified you are free to contact my supervisor, Mr Sibusiso Bayeni at:  
031 260 7026.

I am looking forward to your response.

Yours faithfully  
Khaizeni Freddy Maswanganyi

23 October 2011

**To whom it may concern**

This serves to confirm that I have completed a language editing process of the MEd dissertation, at the request of the author, Mr K. F. Maswanganyi.

I am satisfied that the process has been accorded the appropriate time and attention it deserves. The English language allows for a variety of personal styles and I have not attempted to alter Mr Maswanganyi's even though it is possible that another editor might suggest further editorial language corrections. I believe Mr Maswanganyi's writing is essentially linguistically correct in its presentation. Changes suggested by me were technical and were not intended to alter the content, style or interpretation of the text.

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