

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS: A CASE STUDY OF THE
ZAKA DISTRICT OF ZIMBABWE

BY

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SUBMITTED IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

IN THE SUBJECT

EDUCATION MANAGEMENT

AT THE

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

PROMOTOR: PROFESSOR F.J. PRETORIUS

OCTOBER 2011

DEDICATION

To my father and mother

Wife and children

Brother and sisters-

True friends are life's greatest treasure

They give without demanding

They love without condition...

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My deepest gratitude goes to the following special people:

- Professor F.J. Pretorius whose expert advice and encouragement inspired me to complete this work with a lot of enthusiasm
- My father and mother who instilled the love for learning in me at a tender age
- My wife who has always looked forward to being “in charge of” a doctor – thank you for accompanying me on my field trips and for being a critical friend
- My children who have always expressed pride in my love for learning
- The Ministry of Education, Sport, Art and Culture for granting me permission to conduct this research in their schools
- School Heads, teachers and parents who willingly participated in this research
- Professor O.E. Maravanyika who referred to me as DOCTOR in order to challenge me to embark on doctoral studies - thank you for granting me leave to do the requisite field work

I can never thank these people enough. May the Dear Lord bless them abundantly.

Thank you Lord for enabling me to undertake this fulfilling task.

ABSTRACT

There is compelling evidence that parental involvement positively influences children's academic achievement. Its benefits occur across all socio-economic classes. In spite of its significance, parental involvement has received scant attention in Zimbabwe. This qualitative study sought to establish how parents in a materially poor rural district of Zimbabwe were involved in their children's education. Barriers to their involvement were investigated with the view to overcoming or mitigating them for the benefit of the affected primary school pupils. The attribution theory was used not only to substantially explain the status of parental involvement in Zaka District, but also to generate strategies to promote parents' participation in their children's school education. Observation, semi-structured interviews (for school heads), focus group interviews (for parents) and the open-ended questionnaire (for teachers) were used in this qualitative study covering ten primary schools. Respondents were selected through the use of chain reference sampling and sampling by case. A total of one hundred and forty (140) participants were selected. It emerged from the research that parents, teachers and school heads/principals had very limited understanding of parental involvement. They generally thought that it was confined to activities done at school such as payment of school fees and levies, providing labour for the construction or renovation of school buildings and providing teaching/learning resources. Most teachers, school heads/principals and parents believed that parents were too poor and too lowly educated to meaningfully be involved in their children's education. However, there were a few parents who believed that their socio-economic status did not prevent them from participating in their children's education. They actually indicated useful ways in which they could be involved. The research also revealed that parents, school teachers and school heads/principals made wrong attributions about themselves and each other in connection with limited parental involvement in their schools. Both school staff and parents, after identifying barriers to involvement, were willing to learn about how they could overcome or mitigate the barriers. They believed that the challenges they were facing regarding parental involvement were capable of resolution.

KEY WORDS

Parental involvement; academic achievement; attribution theory; socio-economic status; homework; home supervision; home discussion; determinants of parental involvement; barriers to parental involvement; teacher education curriculum; good parenting.

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CHAPTER 1

ORIENTATION OF THE RESEARCH

1. Introduction

There is compelling evidence that parental involvement has a positive effect on children's academic achievement. In the timeless words of Henderson and Berla [1994:1]: "When schools work with families to support learning, children tend to succeed not just in school, but throughout life". Many studies corroborate this link between parental involvement and learner achievement [Houtenville and Conway 2008:437; Lemmer and Van Wyk 2004:259; Parhar 2006:1; Vassallo 2001:1; Jeynes 2005:1; Desforges & Abouchaar 2003:28].

Among the benefits accruing from parental involvement are: improved attitudes of learners to their studies; improved behaviour; decreased truancy; a decrease in the drop-out rate, improved school performance, a decrease in delinquency and a more positive attitude towards the school [Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003:28; McNeal, 2001:132; Lemmer and Van Wyk, 2004:259]. These benefits occur across all socio-economic classes [Jeynes 2005:2; Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003:37]. Most parents care about their children's welfare and well-being. The tiny minority of parents who appear not to care are those who at the time are overwhelmed by stressful life-events and financial pressures, and whose own experience of schooling was too negative for them to overcome fears and anxieties about school and teachers. This observation is supported by Trewby (2004) cited in Siririka (2007:27) and Banks (2001) in Parhar (2006:3). Generally, parents want to do what they believe to be in their children's best interests. It is clear from the remarks above that parental involvement has advantages to the teacher, the learner and the school. Hence its significance can scarcely be over emphasised.

The 1987 Education Act [Zimbabwe] provides for parental involvement in a variety of ways that include fund-raising, management of school resources, infrastructural development and maintenance. The said act and related statutory instruments fully acknowledge parents' rights to be involved in school governance.

It is clear from the foregoing that parental involvement is recognized as being critical to pupil achievement. In consequence of this realisation, this research sought to establish the nature of parental involvement in schools in the Zaka District of Zimbabwe with the view to

determining how parents, teachers and school heads/principals could be motivated to promote parental involvement in their schools.

1.1 Background to the problem

This researcher overheard on at least two consecutive occasions some of the parents who attended consultation days (term one and term two of the 2008 academic year) at a primary school in Masvingo express disappointed surprise at their children's below-expectation performance, while others complained that the teachers were too lazy since they tended to give children too much homework (which the parents had to help their children with). This generated some interest in the researcher who went on to arrange an interview with the school head (headmaster or principal) a week after a mid-term consultation day to establish whether the apparently serious problem related to a lack of a meaningful partnership between parents and the school caused some concern. The semi-structured interview with the school head centred on such questions as: How good was parents' attendance of consultation days, sports days and school development meetings called by the School Development Committee? What sort of impact did the level of attendance have? What could be the reason for the level of attendance the school experienced? What measures could be taken to address the problem?

It emerged from the interview that, in the school head's estimation (based on parental attendance records), at least 40% of parents did not regularly attend the said meetings; the reasons for this were varied; it was difficult to establish what measures could be taken to address the problem. This motivated the researcher to engage in a preliminary survey of at least three primary schools in Zaka District (before focusing on the ten schools later sampled for the research as indicated in chapter 3). The survey took the form of semi-formal interviews with school heads, some teachers and, where this was possible, some parents. The interviews gravitated around parent's attendance of consultation days, sports days, school development meetings and the issue of homework. The researcher was interested in finding out why parents were not cooperative in the areas identified. It was established through interviews that some parents did not appreciate the value of such participation while others did not know exactly what their function would be in such matters. It clearly emerged from the interviews that the problem was widespread enough to deserve attention, hence the decision to undertake this research.

Related literature confirms that there are many barriers that stand in the way of effective parental involvement (PI). They could be attitudinal (Singh and Mbokodi 2004 in Siririka 2007:81), institutional (Zoppi 2006:16), logistical (Trewby 2004:21) or expectations-related (Parhar 2006:2). The barriers are more extensively discussed in Chapter 2.

It is apparent from the foregoing that strategies to overcome barriers to parental involvement cannot be applied in an arbitrary manner, but need to be context-based. This makes the need for this research self-evident.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Although the literature and the government of Zimbabwe acknowledge that parental involvement undoubtedly enhances pupils' school performance, some parents, teachers and school heads apparently neither appreciated this fact nor knew what role they could play [and how they could play it] to optimise children's learning in Zaka District.

Briefly, the problem can be articulated in question form thus:

How can parents, school heads and teachers be motivated to enhance PI in their schools?

1.2.1 Sub-problems

Emanating from the research problem are the following sub-problems:

- Do parents, school heads and teachers know what parental involvement entails?
- Do parents, school heads and teachers know how parental involvement impacts on pupil's education?
- In what ways can parents participate in their children's school education?
- What are the barriers to effective parental involvement?
- What intervention measures can be taken to improve PI?

1.3 Aim of the research

The primary aim of the research is to establish strategies that can be used to motivate parents, teachers and school heads to enhance PI in their schools.

1.3.1 Secondary aims

Emanating from the research aim are the following secondary aims:

- To establish whether parents, school heads and teachers know what parental involvement entails
- To establish if parents, school heads and teachers know how parental involvement impacts on children's school education
- To determine ways in which parents can participate in their children's school education
- To identify barriers to effective parental involvement
- To establish intervention measures that can be taken to improve PI.

1.4 Definition and explanation of concepts

In this research the intended meaning of the following concepts is as defined below:

- **Parental involvement:** the engagement of parents in home-based and school-based activities aimed at enhancing children's school performance (Holloway, Yamamoto, Suzuki and Mindnich (2008:2)
- **Parent:** the father or mother (biological or surrogate) of a child or any adult who is responsible for the welfare and education of a child (Education Act {Zimbabwe}, 1987).
- **Empower** means to give lawful power or authority to someone to act. It is to enable someone to act in a certain capacity (Oxford Dictionary 1997).
- **School Development Committee** is a committee comprising parents elected by their fellow parents, the school head, deputy head, senior teacher and bursar (Education Act {Zimbabwe}, 1987).
- **School Head** is the person who heads a school and is known as principal or head teacher/mistress in some countries (Education Act {Zimbabwe}, 1987).
- **Consultation days** are days when parents go to school to see the work of their children and discuss with the teacher the children's strengths and weaknesses and how the two parties can collaborate for the benefit of the child (Education Act {Zimbabwe}, 1987).

1.5 Related literature sources and rationale for the study

1.5.1 Preliminary literature review

A number of sources were initially used to illuminate the following:

- Definition of parental involvement
- The significance of parental involvement
- The forms parental involvement takes
- Barriers to effective parental involvement
- Parental attitudes towards parental involvement
- Teachers' attitudes towards parental involvement
- Ways to promote parental involvement / empowering parents and school staff to enhance PI in their schools

Briefly, the preliminary literature overview confirms the following: (a) parental involvement involves the active and willing participation of parents in a wide range of school-based and home-based activities which may be educational or non-educational and extends from supporting and upholding the school ethos to supervising children's homework (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003:12; (b) parental involvement is critically important since it impacts directly on a child's academic achievement (Jeynes 2005:1); (c) there are various forms parental involvement takes (Shah 2001); (d) there are numerous barriers to parental involvement (Vogels 2002:8); (e) some parents have negative attitudes towards parental involvement (Parhar 2006:3); (f) some teachers have positive attitudes while others have negative attitudes towards parental involvement (Parhar 2006:2; Zoppi 2006:16); (g) and there are various ways, contingent upon circumstances, to promote / enhance parental involvement (Shah 2001:1; Nye, Turner and Schwartz, 2006:1; Parhar 2006:7, Mansfield, 2009:7).

1.5.2 Rationale for conducting this research

Some researchers (for example, Mansfield, 2009; Siririka, 2007; Kaperu, 2004; Zoppi, 2006; Hill and Taylor, 2004; Shah, 2001) have researched and published on parental involvement. From the literature available, it is clear that this particular research is of additional value as it contributes a different angle due to the peculiarity of the geographical area and the needs of the people it focuses on. The solutions in the literature apply to situations quite different from the one this research focused on, in other words, this research has its own unique context. An examination of each context-based barrier to involvement would make the creation of new context-based approaches that foster optimal parental involvement possible.

It would appear that no comprehensive research on PI has been carried out in Zimbabwe. Chinamasa's (2008) research confines itself to consultation days, thereby excluding other important aspects of PI. Chikoko's (2007) research also focuses on school governance at the exclusion of other key facets of PI. This study sought to identify barriers attaching to PI in the Zaka District of Zimbabwe and to recommend ways to remove such barriers. Some of the recommendations based on the research findings touched on policy relating to PI, curriculum of Teachers' Colleges and university departments responsible for Teacher Education, staff development, workshops for parents, and generation of a guide on PI for both teachers and parents. The goal was to bring about change "in a difficult situation" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008:ix). In other words, the researcher sought to alleviate the PI challenges facing the people of Zaka District.

Since this was a qualitative case study, no "overweening claims about generalisability or conclusiveness" about what the researcher has learned would be made (Marshall & Rossman, 2006:42). According to Marshall & Rossman (2006:42), qualitative studies are not generalisable in a "probabilistic sense", but their findings may be transferable (see also Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

Zaka District has one hundred primary schools. While admitting that the problem of inadequate PI might occur in all schools in the district, this research covered ten schools purposively selected to represent parents of socio-economic and educational backgrounds typical of the people of the district (see chapter 3). From each school the following respondents participated: the school head, four teachers and nine parents, making it a total sample of one hundred and forty participants. The scope of the responses was largely guided by (but not limited to) the research problem and sub-problems indicated in 1.2 above.

1.6 Research sites

The schools chosen for this research are located in the south eastern part of Zimbabwe known as Region Four. This is a semi-arid region where peasant farmers subsist on drought resistant small grains. Harvests are typically poor (see Annexure 8); hence the unemployed parents struggle to raise school fees and levies. The socio-economic status of these parents is low. There are no school or public libraries. The people do not have electricity in their homes. They walk long distances to fetch water and gather firewood (see Annexure 7). Most of the

[Department of Geography: Great Zimbabwe University. 2010]

1.7 Research methodology

The research was located within the interpretive paradigm where the researcher sought to understand the phenomenon and to interpret meaning within the social and cultural context of the natural setting (McMillan and Schumacher, 2010:321-322). To understand and interpret social situations, the researcher interacted with people in such situations, listening to them and trying to make sense of their perceptions and experiences (Cohen and Manion, 1994; McMillan and Schumacher, 2010:322). The interpretive paradigm allowed the researcher to investigate how parents were involved in the school education of their children and how teachers supported them.

The qualitative methodology was used in this research as it allowed the researcher to gain first-hand information about perceptions of participants and thus “...understand human and social behaviour from the insider’s perspective” [Ary, Jacobs and Razavieh, 1996:479; McMillan and Schumacher, 2010:322]. In the words of Hoberg[1999:76], its main goal is to understand the problem from the research participants’ perspective as they experience the problem as it is related to their reality “...and as they view the problem and ascribe meaning to their life world” (see also McMillan and Schumacher, 2010:322).

Considering that barriers to parental involvement are context-based, the qualitative methodology was eminently placed to reveal the barriers research participants faced and how they experienced them.

Consistent with qualitative research, multi-method strategies such as focus group interviews, individual semi-structured interviews, open-ended questionnaires and observation were used to gather data. Interactive strategies (focus group interviews and semi-structured interviews) were mainly used as they allowed the researcher to systematically observe, interview and record processes as they occurred naturally (Hoberg, 1999:76; McMillan and Schumacher, 2010:322). The chosen data-gathering strategies were used as follows: focus group interviews [in respect of parents], individual semi-structured interviews [in respect of school heads], open-ended questionnaires [in respect of school teachers] and observation [mainly in respect of activities happening at children’s homes].

Focus group interviews generate data on people's perceptions of phenomena, products and services (Hoberg, 1999:76; Marshall and Rossman, 2011:145). Being an open conversation on a specific topic in which each participant may make comments, ask questions of other participants or respond to comments by others, including the moderator (Bryman, 2004:346), the focus group interview had many advantages in terms of this research. Some of these advantages are listed below [Hoberg 1999, Bryman, 2004:347-348, McMillan and Schumacher, 2010:145] {it}:

- enabled the researcher to develop inductively concepts, generalizations and theories that were grounded in, or reflected the intimate knowledge of the people participating in the interview
- utilised group dynamics to produce new and additional data
- was conducted at a relatively modest cost and in a relatively brief span of time
- exposed the researcher to participants' world-views, permitted considerable probing and shed light on the nature of relationships in the field
- facilitated the interaction between subjects and enhanced the capturing of data generated by group interaction
- allowed the moderator to probe, creating flexibility that was so important for exploring unanticipated issues
- allowed participants to react and build upon the responses of the other participants- this resulted in the generation of opinions and information which might have remained undiscovered in individual interviewing
- added to the understanding and interpretation of a specific phenomenon and was a source of validation for data gained by means of other qualitative research methods
- provided speedy results

The semi-structured interview used in the research had the advantage of being reasonably objective "while permitting a more thorough understanding of the respondents' opinions and reasons behind them than would be possible using the mailed questionnaire" [Borg and Gall, 1989:452, (McMillan and Schumacher, 2010)].

The open-ended questionnaire was also used since it is an instrument generally used to gather qualitative data. Respondents used their own words, revealed their thoughts, provided

answers that fell within their frame of reference and gave the reasons for their responses (Borg and Gall 1989:428, McMillan and Schumacher, 2010:322).

Triangulation was used to enhance the trustworthiness of the research. It involved the four data-gathering methods that were used and the different settings that were focused on. Purposive sampling, which is inclusive of sampling by case and network sampling, was also used to enhance the trustworthiness of the research [McMillan and Schumacher 2010:331].

Ethical considerations provided for the researcher revealing his status, explaining the purpose and nature of the research, undertaking to reveal the research findings to the participants and assuring them of the confidentiality of their responses (Marshall and Rossman, 2011:47-49).

Analysis of the data obtained from focus group interviews, individual interviews, responses to open-ended questions in the questionnaires and observation was done through content analysis, which entailed identifying, coding and categorizing the primary patterns in the data [Miles and Corbin 1990, Marshall and Rossman, 2011:209-210]. Data analysis is discussed in detail in chapter four.

1.8 Organisation of the study

Chapter 1 explains the researcher's awareness of the problem and puts the problem into context. The problem statement and sub-problems, the aim and elucidation of concepts for common understanding are contained in this chapter. The value of the research is also indicated, as is the suitability of the research method chosen.

Chapter 2 gives a literature review to illuminate the problem and bring the research in line with local and international trends. The literature provides a framework within which research findings are discussed.

Chapter 3 explains and justifies the research methodology used. It also deals with research ethics and the trustworthiness of the research.

Chapter 4 presents and analyses data.

Chapter 5 reflects on the whole completed research process, summarising the main findings. On the basis of the data analysis, conclusions are drawn and recommendations made. The limitations of the research are pointed out and recommendations for further related research are made.

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CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE OVERVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews related literature. The purpose of the literature review was manifold. Among other purposes, it provided an understanding of the concept *parental involvement*; informed the development of the interview schedules/questionnaires; and provided a theoretical framework in terms of which the research findings were to be analysed. Briefly, the chapter defines parental involvement; establishes the significance of parental involvement; discusses the forms it may take; establishes its determinants; identifies barriers to parental involvement; and explores intervention measures. Attribution theory is used not only to substantially explain the low levels of PI in Zaka District, but also to generate solutions to the problem of limited PI.

The main sources used in this research focus on parental involvement in Southern Africa (Namibia, Uganda and South Africa) and in Japan and the United States of America. Using sources from developing Southern African countries was meant to give the researcher an insight into how parental involvement occurred in countries similar to Zimbabwe in terms of history and stage of economic development. This gave the researcher some ideas relating to the main issues involved regarding the matter being studied (PI). Sources from developed countries were used additionally in order to help establish universal trends related to parental involvement.

2.2 Definition of parental involvement

The multiple perspectives of teachers, administrators, parents, and even children, make PI rather difficult to define. That notwithstanding, the definitions given in the succeeding paragraphs capture the essence of PI.

Myeko (2000:12) sees PI as a process through which parents meaningfully participate in the various educational activities of their children. The activities range from occasional

attendance of school functions to intense efforts aimed at helping parents become better educators of their own children.

Nye et al (2006:1) additionally view PI as ‘the effective engagement of a parent with their child outside of the school day in an activity which centres on enhancing academic performance’. Here emphasis is on out-of-school activities such as a trip to the zoo where the child is meant to go and learn something, or playing such games with the child at home as would improve the child’s reading or mathematics. Holloway et al (2008:2) also regard PI as typically definable as the initiation of home-based behaviours like monitoring homework as well as school-based activities such as attending school events and communicating with teachers. The same authors also give prominence to the general degree of cognitive stimulation, among other things, provided in the home setting.

Pate and Andrews (2006:1) enlarge on the definitions given above by regarding PI as having an awareness of and involvement in schoolwork, understanding of the interaction between parenting skills and pupils’ success in schooling, and a commitment to consistent communication with educators about pupils’ progress.

Apparently it is Desforges & Abouchaar (2003:12) who put it most succinctly by regarding PI as a catch-all term for a variety of activities including at-home good parenting, assisting with homework, talking to teachers, attendance of school functions, through to taking part in school governance. This is supported by Zoppi (2006:14) who refers to Cotton and Wikelund (2001) when coming up with a definition which indicates that PI is an all-encompassing term which includes attending school functions, responding to school obligations, helping children improve their school work, providing encouragement, arranging for appropriate study time and space, modeling desired behaviour, monitoring home-work and actively tutoring children at home.

It is clear from these definitions that different writers accentuate different aspects of PI. This is because their perspectives are influenced by the contexts in which they live. The nature of and barriers to PI are context-based, hence the need for this research to assume context-based approaches in order to address context-based challenges of PI.

For the purpose of this study, a working definition of PI culled from the literature referred to above regards it as the engagement of parents in home-based and school-based activities aimed at enhancing children's school performance. Both teachers' and children's cooperation is essential for its effectiveness.

The significance of PI can scarcely be overemphasized.

2.3 Significance of parental involvement

The involvement of parents in their children's education has long been considered by researchers as "a significant factor in positively impacting children's school success" (Parhar, 2006:1). Vassallo (2001:1) confirms that PI in a child's education is a strong predictor of learner achievement. Characteristically, the more involved the parent, the more the child achieves. Houtenville and Conway (2008:437) concurringly mention PI as an important factor in pupil achievement. For example, if a parent sets apart a time to help a child with homework, that child will most likely develop interest in schoolwork and will apply himself/herself to schoolwork more diligently. Lemmer and Van Wyk (2004:259) also see PI as a prerequisite for improving the culture of teaching and learning in schools. Jeynes (2005:1) further confirms that PI is associated with higher pupil achievement outcomes. For example, when parents buy their child books to augment those provided by the school, provide a conducive learning atmosphere at home and give themselves time to positively discuss with the child issues relating to school, the child is likely to learn effectively. In consequence, such a child will produce good results. If parents secured for their children a quiet place to study and do homework, review children's homework and talk about what happened at school, children will appreciate the importance of education and in consequence will be good learners. The results of Jeynes' (2005:1) study also consistently confirm that PI is related to higher pupil achievement outcomes whether the outcome measures were grades, standardised test scores, or a variety of other measures, including teacher ratings.

Referring to research in the United States of America, Holloway et al (2008:1) affirm that PI has a positive effect on children's achievement. Parents who are more involved in their children's education tend to be more knowledgeable about school goals and procedures (Hill and Taylor, 2004 in Holloway 2008), communicate the importance of education to children (Lareau, 2000 in Holloway 2008), assist children to learn strategies to enhance their perceptions of competence and control over achievement outcomes (Grolnic and Slowlaczek,

1994 in Holloway 2008), and structure learning experiences that result in skill development (Keith et al, 1993 in Holloway 2008). In other words, such parents make an effort to know what the school aims to achieve in relation to the education of their children and how it seeks to achieve its goals. They then engage their children in discussions aimed at making the children appreciate the value of education. They go on to help children to develop strategies to take charge of achievement outcomes and organize learning experiences in a manner that facilitates the development of various skills.

Siraj-Blatchford et al (2002) in Desforges & Abouchar (2003:24) affirm that when a special relationship between parents and professional educators obtained in which both parties aim to achieve the same goals relating to the child's education, good learning progress could occur. For example, if both parents and teachers want to develop in children such attributes as resourcefulness, dependability, honesty or orderliness, they will work collaboratively to achieve their goal. The significance of PI is further elucidated by Desforges & Abouchar (2003:28) who conclude that PI in the form of interest the parent has in the child and manifest in the home as parent-child discussions can have a significant positive effect on children's behaviour and achievement even when the influence of background factors such as family size or social class are factored out.

It is important to appreciate the universality of the significance of PI. In the words of Desforges & Abouchar (2003:37), "Whilst there are important differences between ethnic minority parents in how they express their support and involvement, the basic mechanism and the scale of impact is constant across all ethnic groups studied." In other words, while parents from different ethnic backgrounds may support their children in apparently different ways, the effect of such efforts is the same. Jeynes (2005:2) also confirms the positive impact of PI across social and ethnic groups. In short, the significance of PI cannot be disputed. What is significant is to take account of different contexts in which it occurs, as this research sought to do, so as to generate recommendations that were compatible with the context under review.

According to Nye et al (2006:2), the impact of PI outside of school on children's academic performance in school is sufficiently significant to claim practical implications for parents, educators, administrators and policy makers. Some of such implications are revealed in the fourth chapter of this research.

2.4 Types of parental involvement

There are, broadly speaking, two types of PI, namely school-based involvement and home-based involvement. They both impact on pupil involvement, albeit differently.

2.4.1 School-based involvement

Desforges & Abouchaar (2003:20) and Hoell (2006:7) identify two types of **school-based involvement**, namely *school communication* (which involves contact between parents and school personnel aimed at sharing information that includes the child's progress, establishing good relations between teachers and parents as well as discussing emergent problems) and *school participation* (which involves volunteering for school activities and attending school functions as well as participation in school governance [Jeynes, 2005:2, Houtenville and Conway, 2008:441]). Material resources provision or contributions such as paying for teaching material, maintenance of buildings or furniture and fittings constitute important school based involvement too (Vogels, 2002:4). Vogels (2002:4) also mentions social activities such as parties, excursions and school trips, classroom teaching, supervision of children at lunchtime as well as practical things like cleaning and odd jobs.

Desforges & Abouchaar (2003:30) confirm that studies show that PI "acted out in the school confers little or no benefit on the individual child." This finding is replicated extensively in the research. However, this merits cautious interpretation. In-school manifestations of PI cannot be completely unrelated to pupil achievement. There are side benefits such as the potential to help schools link better with the community, contributing to the openness and accountability of the schools and the parent getting pleasure, self-fulfillment and so forth from such involvement (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003:30). Desforges & Abouchaar (2003:30) argue that such benefits have not yet been proven to be making a salient contribution to children's school achievement (see also Trotti, 2008:25). Yet parental involvement in the classroom activities, school activities and functions, and governance and advice has the potential to benefit all children at school, admit Desforges & Abouchaar (2003:35-see also Trotti, 2008:25-26). They further state that the effect of each parent's involvement mainly accrues to their own children. Such individual benefits for children may come at the expense of other children. For example, a parent can exert such pressure on a teacher that the teacher may end up giving that parent's child additional attention at the expense of other children in the same classroom. This puts the spotlight on the need to be

circumspect when encouraging certain forms of PI such as allowing parents to visit the school and talk to the teacher any time they want.

While some research, as shown by Singh et al in Desforges & Abouchar (2003:25), indicate that PI in the school has little, if any, effect on pupil achievement, it is not entirely without significance. Whatever amount of school based PI can go far as a conduit of information through which teachers and parents can work collaboratively to support children's education. The effect of this kind of school involvement can act as a necessary lubricant for at-home involvement (Desforges & Abouchar, 2003:36).

2.4.2 Home-based involvement

Home-based involvement, according to the literature referred to below, has greater positive impact than school-based involvement. Hoell (2006:7) and Desforges & Abouchar (2003:20) identify two types of home-based involvement, namely *home discussion* (which is associated with discussing school related activities) and *home supervision* (which involves monitoring the child's out-of-school activities, inclusive of homework).

2.4.2.1 Home discussion

Houtenville and Conway (2008:441-445) say parental effort, which includes how frequently parents discuss activities or events of particular interest to the child or things the child studies in class, is positively related to student achievement. This view has a lot of support from various sources, both old and new. Jeynes (2005:2), for example, confirms that investing a lot of time in activities such as reading and communicating with one's child and the more subtle aspects of PI, such as parental style and expectations, have a greater impact on pupil educational outcomes than some of the more demonstrative aspects of PI such as having household rules. Senechal (2006:3) and Catsambis (2001) in Desforges & Abouchar (2003:26) lend credence to Jeynes' views by affirming that home-based involvement positively impacts on school achievement, whether directly or indirectly. Such involvement includes parents actively encouraging children to engage in learning in the home setting and providing learning opportunities for children. Reviewing children's homework, spending time working with a child on reading and writing skills, bringing home learning materials such as books and talking to a child about the parents' love for learning (and modeling that love for learning) are examples of the provision of learning opportunities for children at home.

The way parents interact (inclusive of home discussion) with their children is more important in predicting child academic outcomes than the extent to which they are involved in school. Holloway et al (2008:2) affirm that the general degree of cognitive stimulation provided in the home is critical in relation to pupil achievement. Home discussion has its impact on the pupils' self-perception as learners and on their motivation, self-esteem and educational aspirations. According to Desforges & Abouchar (2003:35), through home discussion PI shapes how pupils perceive education and schoolwork and bolsters their motivation to succeed. For younger children this motivational and values mechanism is supplemented by parental promotion of skills acquisition (for example, in respect of early literacy). McNeal (2001:131) adds that apart from improving achievement, parent-child discussion also consistently reduces problematic behaviour such as laziness or lack of application.

It must be noted, however, that there are families facing challenges such as homes without electricity, space for quiet study, or where parents are illiterate, or where time is constrained in respect of both parents and pupils. Such realities are a reminder that the issue of PI is context-bound, a fact that is fully recognized by this research (as seen in chapter 4). Notwithstanding these constraints, it remains incontestable that the more parents and children conversed with each other at home, the more the pupils achieved at school regardless of social class.

2.4.2.2 Home supervision

Home supervision, which involves monitoring the child's out-of-school activities, impacts immensely on student achievement (Desforges & Abouchar, 2003:20). Singh et al (1995) in Desforges & Abouchar (2003:39) refer to home structure as relating to the degree discipline is exerted by the parents to insist on homework completion and to limit potentially distracting activities such as watching television. This can be seen as part of providing a positive home learning environment (HLE). Activities such as reading to and with the child, library visits with the child and playing with letters and numbers, painting and drawing, teaching the letters of the alphabet through play, playing with shapes, teaching nursery rhymes and singing constitute the provision of a good HLE (Desforges & Abouchar, 2003:23;

Armbruster:2003:8, see also Trotti, 2008:20-25). Melhuish, Sylva, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford and Taggart (2001:26) confirm that the effect of HLE on cognitive development is stronger than that of either socio-economic status (SES) or mother's qualifications. It is notable that there are parents high on SES and qualifications who provide a home environment low on the HLE index while there are parents low on SES and qualifications who provide a home environment high on the HLE index (Melhuish et al 2001:9). In other words, there are parents who have a high socio-economic status and are highly educated who provide a poor home learning environment for their children while some parents with a low socio-economic status and low qualifications provide a good home learning environment for their children.

Some schools use the expert model where professionals are placed in the super-ordinate role of *expert* or as disseminators of specialized information and services, and parents are placed in a subordinate role of recipient of information and services. Under this model recommendations for PI in instruction have been limited to supervising completion of teacher-directed homework assignments or providing extra-curricular enrichment of activities during out-of-school hours (Radaszewski-Byrne 2001:2). This is clearly restrictive and apparently based on often unjustified lack of trust on the part of schools (teachers) regarding parents' ability to come up with useful initiatives.

In brief, it can be affirmed that home-based involvement "clearly and consistently has significant effects on pupil achievement and adjustment which far outweigh other forms of involvement" (Desforges & Abouchar 2003:31). This is generally because supportive parenting provides the child with a context in which to acquire school-related skills and to develop psychological qualities of motivation and self-worth.

2.5 Determinants of parental involvement

Home environment, parents' cognitions about their role, parenting and family demographical variables such as socio-economic status (SES), and maternal employment status are important determinants of PI.

2.5.1 Home environment

Kajinga (2005:15) says home environment plays a crucial role in early child literacy development. He mentions aspects of the home environment such as mother reading to child

or making provision for reading materials or story-telling. In Sweden the number of books and reading material in a family was found to be a factor influencing the reading scores of pupils (Lesen, 2004:56) as cited in Krolak (2005:3-4). This suggests that children growing up in a literate home environment are at an advantage and are more likely to be successful throughout formal schooling than their peers from non- or semi-literate home environments (Kajinga, 2005:18). Cognitive stimulation at home, for example engaging with a child in reading, using the computer, playing cards or board games, visiting the library and bookstore, or the museum or zoo can go a long way towards enhancing children's school achievement / performance.

2.5.2 Parents' cognitions about their role in their children's formal education

Parents' cognitions about their role constitute a major contributor to their willingness to engage in supportive parenting (Holloway et al, 2008:2-3). According to Khol and McMahon (2000:503), parents' views of their role as teachers and their degree of comfort in communicating with teachers might be in part a reflection of their own educational experience. A poor or limited personal education might leave the parent lacking in vision as well as confidence, or competence in supporting their own children. Melhuish et al (2001) in Desforges & Abouchaar (2003:32) corroboratively state that higher quality parenting is associated with parental level of education. They go on to say the mother's education influences the quality of interaction between parent and child in problem-solving and intellectual stimulation.

Holloway et al (2008:2-3) identify three forms of parental cognition, namely *parents' aspirations* concerning their children's future occupation, *parents' self-efficacy* in rearing and educating their children, and *parents' perceptions of the school*. These are briefly described below.

2.5.2.1 Parents' aspirations

Parental aspirations are idealistic hopes or goals parents may form regarding the attainment of their children. Parents holding high aspirations for their children's future are likely to be more willing to exert efforts to ensure that these aspirations are realized (Holloway et al 2008:2-3). The reverse is true for parents with low or no aspirations for their children's future.

2.5.2.2 Parents' self-efficacy

Parenting self-efficacy is constituted by beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the actions required to produce given attainments. Parents with high self-efficacy are generally more optimistic, authoritative, and consistent in their interactions with their children than those with lower parental self-efficacy (Ardelt and Eccles, 1996:945). Quoting research studies, Holloway et al (2008:3) affirm that parenting self-efficacy is a key determinant of PI in schooling. It makes it more likely for parents to monitor their children's schoolwork and to participate actively at the school site.

Desforges & Abouchar (2003:45) fittingly comment that apart from parental role construction in relation to their children's education, the other powerful PI determinant is their sense of *personal efficacy*. This, enlarging on an earlier definition, refers to the extent to which one feels capable of making a difference in regard to the education of one's child. It depends on a number of related beliefs, attitudes and skills. If one regards achievement as related to luck or to innate ability, one will not expend effort in trying to enhance it. Again if one thinks achievement is related to *who one knows* instead of *what one does*, efforts to promote it will be made in the context of establishing the perceived necessary relationships. When one lacks such connections but believes that they are essential, one would scarcely bother to be involved. Beliefs about achievement, ability, luck, intelligence and social interaction are all implicated in one's sense of efficacy (Desforges & Abouchar, 2003:45—see also Holloway, 2008)). Encouragingly, Desforges & Abouchar (p33) state that good and enthusiastic parenting is spread across mothers of all social classes and ethnic backgrounds—where it is absent, “it can possibly be taught.”

2.5.2.3 Parents' perceptions of the school

Perceptions of the school constitute another important determinant of PI. The extent of parents' involvement is likely to be affected by the school itself. If teachers are perceived as caring about the welfare of children, communicate respect for parents, and establish effective ways of communicating with families, parents become more inclined to be involved in their children's schooling (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler,1997). If the reverse is the case, parents would tend to have a disinclination for PI.

2.5.3 Family demographic variables

Family demographic variables such as socio-economic status (SES), maternal employment status and the sex of the child are also important determinants of PI. Desforges & Abouchaar (2003:42) see parental socio-economic status (SES) as a major factor mediating PI, whether indexed by occupational or parental (especially maternal) level of education. SES mediates both parental involvement and pupil achievement.

Sucker et al (2002) in Desforges and Aboucher (2003:43) reveal that in the United Kingdom low income is often associated with material deprivation, which in turn affects the impact of PI on pupil achievement and adjustment. They also show that SES has its impact in part negatively through material deprivation and in part positively through PI and aspiration.

2.5.3.1 Socio-economic status

Vogels (2002:2) affirms that parents with poor SES are more likely to have a low level of education, a low income and no job. All this does have implications on the self-esteem, competence and disposition to be involved. This is accentuated by Houtenville and Conway (2008:448) who affirm that parents' education and family income is positively related to parental effort. The study (in the United States of America) by Holloway et al (2008:4) established that college educated, relatively affluent parents are more involved in educational activities at school than are lower SES parents although some research suggests that lower SES parents engage in certain aspects of parent involvement as frequently as their middle class counterparts (Weiss, Heidi, Mayer, Kreider, Vaughan, Dearing, Hencke and Pinto, 2003).

2.5.3.2 Maternal employment status

Maternal employment status was found to be a significant determinant of PI among Japanese woman (Holloway et al, 2008:4). The women find it difficult to balance the roles of wife, mother and employee. One factor making it so difficult for the women is the disinclination of Japanese men to take on much responsibility for child rearing or housework (Ishii-Kuntz, Makino, Kano and Tsuchiya, 2004 in Holloway et al, 2008:4-5). Demanding long hours of work result in the reduction of the amount of time and energy such women have for interacting with their children and become meaningfully involved in their schooling. It is noteworthy that in the Zaka District of Zimbabwe (the area covered in this study) many mothers, although not formally employed, spent a lot of time and energy in the fields working

the land and walking long distances to fetch water and gather fire wood. This also tended to leave them with little time and energy to engage in meaningful PI.

2.5.3.3 Sex of the child

The sex of the child is also an important determinant of PI. Japanese parents have higher aspirations for the male child and are more willing to support schooling in respect of the male child (Brinton and Lee, 2001) in Holloway et al (2008:4). This has been the case mainly in rural Zimbabwe where boys' education took precedence over girls' education. The girl child is viewed as someone who will soon get married and leave the family to join her husband's family whereas the boy would marry and continue to be with "his family" thereby being able to help "his family" financially and materially. The efforts of the government to rectify the situation are still some way from achieving equal treatment of boys and girls.

It is apparent from the foregoing that culture influences PI in no small measure and it is thus easily inferable that PI is context-bound. Problems and solutions attaching to PI are not easily transferable from one unique context to another.

2.6 Barriers to parental involvement

Given the significance of PI confirmed by research across continents, Lemmer and Van Wyk (2004:261) wonder why there is so little PI in schools. It is apparently because there are powerful, mostly context-bound, barriers to PI. Barriers can originate from beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes of teachers, administrators, parents and even pupils. It is thus noteworthy that such barriers resulting from the attributions parents, school heads and teachers make about low level PI in their schools may be valid or invalid.

In the context of this research, barriers to PI will be located in four broad categories, namely attitudinal, resources-based/logistical, institutional, and expectations. The categories are, however, not truly discreet since they are liable to overlapping.

2.6.1 Attitudinal barriers

Attitudinal barriers may be shaped by various factors. Limited parental educational experience resulting in the lack of relevant skills to get involved constitutes a serious barrier.

As Siririka (2007:161) reveals, parents with limited educational experience do not know why and how they can be involved in school activities. They are unsure of their responsibility as parents. They also hardly appreciate how education at home serves as the basis for education at school. In most cases they are unaware of practices essential to helping their children develop academic skills. In consequence, they are uncertain about how to help their children. This is corroborated by Singh and Mbokodi in their 2004 study. They found that disadvantaged black parents did not seem to understand their roles as parents in the education of their children. Kaperu's (2004) Namibia-based research also confirms that parents were not quite sure of their role while Zoppi (2006:16) states that some parents think their own lack of education precludes them from participating in their children's education. Quezada Diaz and Sanchez (2003) in Zoppi (2006:13) assert that language also constitutes a barrier with parents feeling that no one will listen to them if they cannot speak English. Their feelings of self-worth are diminished because they do not understand forms that are sent home and cannot help their children with homework. Feeling poorly equipped, uncomfortable, or lacking confidence in their ability to help their children with school assignments, they are intimidated and believe that they have no right to interfere with a school's practices. Resultantly, they avoid contact with the school and its teachers (Zoppi, 2006:15). This is also replicated in Parhar's (2006:3) study which reveals that their own uncomfortable feelings and apprehension alienate parents from the school.

Such parents as characterized above end up with an indifferent or fatalistic, if not antagonistic attitude to PI. They are unlike parents who have "can do" attitudes and believe they have an active role to play in their children's education.

There are also parents who simply believe that the responsibility for education belongs to the school (Williams, 2002) in Siririka (2007:27). This finding is replicated by Delgado-Gaitan (2004) in Zoppi (2006:4) who reveals that Latino parents have a high level of respect for teachers and treat them as professionals who should be left alone to do their job. Such parents often feel interference with school activities would be counter-productive. Viewing teachers as the experts, these parents feel uncomfortable questioning educators. Writing on experiences in South Africa, Phendla (2004:167) confirms that some parents think educators know all. They do not realise that education is a team effort.

It is not only parental attitudes that impact on parental involvement. Children's attitudes also matter a great deal. Children have a significant influence on the degree to which their parents get involved (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003:41). They have the potential to nurture or to inhibit PI. They can lubricate or break connections between teachers and parents.

Deslandes and Cloutier (2002:226) affirm that there are children who are not too keen on parental involvement in the school. They would not want parents in their classroom or on a class trip. Edwards and Alldred (2000) in Deslandes and Cloutier (2002:47) confirm that children are just as active in discouraging, evading and obstructing their parents' involvement as they are in its promotion. There are pupils who perceive themselves as autonomous and with a right to some privacy. They can thus perceive PI as constituting an intrusion into their affairs. On occasion, such pupils actively evade or block home-school connections by dumping notes or newsletters or censoring discussions of "bad days" at school (Edwards and Alldred 2002) in Deslandes and Cloutier (2002:47). The same authors reveal that girls are more likely to initiate involvement and boys more likely to block it. The mediating roles of the child are often overlooked, important though they are.

The attitudes of teachers also impact both positively and negatively on PI. Ng (1999:552) in Lemmer and Van Wyk (2004:261) affirm that the attitudes of schools towards active PI are frequently ambiguous. While the official rhetoric claims that the home-school relationship should be collaborative, equal and reflect an even distribution of power, this is often absent in the schools.

According to Parhar (2006:2), teacher ideology plays a fundamental role in excluding PI in schools. Bartolome and Trueba (2000) in Parhar (2006:2) argue that deficit ideologies that are still held by teachers today continue to have harmful effects on teacher-parent relations. The deficit theory holds that minority parents fail to be involved in schools because they are "deprived of cultural and social advantages" necessary for involvement (de Marrais and LeCompte,1995:238). In other words, they are not cultured into the system for them to be able to competently participate in their children's education.

Teachers may reinforce practices of exclusion in relation to uneducated and socio-economically disadvantaged parents. Seeing parents as deficient in terms of school

experience/education results in teachers initiating inequitable relations where they exercise power over parents.

Parhar (2006:2), citing a number of sources, asserts that negative attitudes and behaviours of teachers in relation to disadvantaged parents impact negatively on efforts to involve such parents thereby further marginalising them. Zoppi (2006:16) also decries school personnel's negative or condescending attitudes towards parents. Such attitudes cripple efforts aimed at increasing parental involvement. Desforges (2003:41) confirms that many parents feel put off in regard to involvement by the way some teachers treat them. The teachers' attitudes may be a result of inadequate training in respect of PI.

There are teachers who genuinely fear that parents in the school or classroom may undermine their professionalism. These teachers fear that parents' view may clash with theirs (Parhar, 2006:4). Whether these fears are misguided or not is immaterial. What is important is that they are real and that they severely compromise PI. Teachers who hold a "protective perspective" fail to encourage disadvantaged parents' participation because they (teachers) regard themselves and schools as having the primary responsibility for educating children.

2.6.2 Expectations barriers

The expectations of teachers, parents and children in relation to PI may be incongruent. In consequence, the three parties may work at cross purposes.

According to Siririka (2007:81), there are teachers who have expectations which are beyond the capabilities of parents. To aggravate the situation, such teachers may do nothing to enhance the capacity of the concerned parents to be involved. The said teachers may demand that parents help children with homework while doing nothing in terms of how they can do it. This inevitably frustrates the parents, the teachers themselves and ultimately the pupils.

Owing to poor communication between teachers and parents, the two parties end up blaming each other for the lack of support parents should receive from the teachers in order for them to participate meaningfully in their children's education (Siririka, 2007:81). Some teachers strongly believe that there are parents who neglect doing their share of the work but scarcely communicate what they want the parents to do. No wonder why some parents only visit the school if they are called in or if there is a problem with their children (Siririka, 2007:81). The

parents who only come to school “to shout at teachers” (Siririka, 2007:81) do so most likely because of frustration regarding what role they ought to play in their children’s education. As Zoppi (2006:13) says, parents need to know what the school means by PI and what the school expects from parents.

Negative teacher expectations, according to Parhar (2006:2) also influence teachers’ efforts to involve disadvantaged parents. Such parents are perceived as being uneducated and poor, thereby presuming that they will not be involved in their children’s education. This deprives the parents of the opportunity to learn, or to be helped to learn, how best they can help their children with their education.

The multiple perspectives of teachers, administrators, and parents easily yield a multiplicity of expectations, some of which may be conflicting. Vogels (2002:8) talks of every school having to deal with different types of parents who have different desires and interests and are by no means equally capable of making them known. What each party expects of the other must be clearly articulated to facilitate effective PI.

2.6.3 Institutional barriers

The oft-cited communication gap between the school and parents is the chief culprit when it comes to PI barriers associated with the school as an institution. Schools and their teachers have the potential to nurture or inhibit fruitful connections between parents and teachers. Some parents are wary of overstepping some unwritten mark in terms of their relations with teachers (Williams et al, 2002) in Desforges & Abouchaar (2003:43). This causes frustration and confusion on the part of parents.

Some parents are put down by schools and teachers (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003:5). There are teachers who feel that their work must be protected against unwarranted intrusions from parents. Such teachers invite parents only when there is a problem. Zoppi (2006:16) notes that parents are precluded from participating if the only contact they receive from the school is over something negative or if they are unaware of their right to ask about their children’s education. It is little wonder that many low SES parents find home-school contacts empty, contrived, unsubstantial and awkward (Henry,1992) in Desforges & Abouchaar (2003:46).

The degree to which parents see a role for themselves in their children’s education and the extent to which they feel self-assured in being able to participate may constitute a barrier.

Since parents need to know what the school means by PI and what it expects of them (Zoppi,2006:1), schools that do not communicate their perception of PI and their expectations regarding the role of parents are culpable in relation to the creation of barriers to PI.

Nechyba et al (1999) in Desforges & Abouchaar (2003:42) refer to schools accepting PI only on their own terms which are non-negotiable. Those parents not conforming to these values are quickly “put in their places.” This does not encourage parents to be proactive in partnership. Rather, it encourages parental fatalism regarding their children’s education. Such schools clearly have perspectives that are inimical to PI. It is necessary for schools to adopt perspectives that promote PI since the realisation of a willingness to be involved is dependent on the invitations, demands and opportunities generated by the school (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003:45). Having activities that have been institutionalised to involve parents in limited ways that tend to relegate all the power to the institution and neglecting the needs and interests of parents gravely compromises PI (Parhar, 2006:13).

It emerges from the above that schools that behave in a manner that imposes restrictions on PI do a great disservice to school children.

2.6.4 Resources-based/logistical barriers

Lack of resources of various kinds impact negatively in large measure on PI. Intellectual resources are a major factor regarding parental involvement. Siririka (2007:26) mentions that parents with more education will provide a home atmosphere that is more conducive to learning than parents with lower levels of education. They are likely to help their children in many ways with their learning. This is corroborated by Kohl et al (2000:503) who state that a poor or limited personal education might leave the parent lacking in vision, confidence or competence in supporting their own child. They further state that parental education is positively related to parent-school contact. The more educated the parent, the greater is their involvement in their children’s education. A lack of extended personal educational experience has, according to Kohl et al (2000:503) rendered some parents lacking in relevant skills or appropriate conception of parents as co-educators. Lemmer and Van Wyk (2004:263-264) concur with the said view when they say many working class and rural black parents in South Africa face constraints in terms of participation in school as a result of poor skills.

Lack of material resources also impacts negatively on PI. Magara (2005) in Siririka (2007:28) comments in respect of the Ugandan situation to the effect that some parents are so poor that they cannot provide essential facilities for their children. Such parents are associated with poor provision of scholastic materials which compromises their participation in their children's education. Magara (2005) in Siririka (2007:70) also refer to lack of reading materials. Materially deprived families have neither access nor capacity to buy such materials. This compromises PI. Trewby (2004:21) in Siririka (2007:28) states in relation to Namibian parents that some had only hymn books and bibles in their homes. In relation to the Ugandan situation, Magara (2005) in Siririka (2007:28) bemoans the lack of home libraries. Magara (2005:2) says lack of libraries results in parents and children not developing love for reading. In the absence of books at home and in libraries, children can hardly develop reading skills. Krolak (2005:2) also decries the serious lack of reading materials in developing countries which results in a lack of a reading culture. In such a situation PI in respect of a child's reading is severely limited.

Desforges & Abouchar (2003:42), Lemmer and Van Wyk (2004:262-263), Magara (2005:2) and Parhar (2006:3) all mention parents' lack of time as an impediment regarding PI. Zoppi (2006:16) also affirms that economic challenges adversely affect parent's ability to be meaningfully involved in their children's education since it may be necessary for such parents to hold more than one job.

From the foregoing, it is clear that resource-based or logistical barriers pose a serious challenge to parental involvement in their children's education at primary school level.

2.7 Parental involvement interventions

Given the barriers discussed above, it is imperative that some intervention measures be taken to mitigate their impact. Such measures need to be context-based for them to be effective.

Liontos'(1992:30-31 in Desforges & Abouchar (2003:49) timeless affirmations that all families have strengths; parents can learn new techniques; parents have important perspectives about their children; most parents really care about their children; cultural differences are both valid and valuable and many family forms exist and are legitimate are notable. Desforges & Abouchar (2003:49) lend credence to these affirmations when they assert that different parents evince different capacities for parental involvement in the

education of their children. Capacity here refers to an amalgam of skills, values, motivations and opportunities. While some aspects of capacity are shaped by personal attributes, others are shaped by social structures. Most factors attached to PI are modifiable by educational process, in other words by the process of teaching and learning. Desforges & Abouchar (2003:51) assert that the key processes of positive and respectful parenting can, at least in principle, be learned.

It is in the context outlined above that Nye et al (2006:1) advocates for education and training programmes that provide parents with skills, abilities and materials to work with their children on academic skills outside of school. Nye et al (2006:1) and Desforges & Abouchar (2003:52) suggest teaching parents to play mathematics and reading games with children; provide rewards or incentives for school performance; read collaboratively with their children and engage their children in mathematics or science-related activities outside of school.

Parhar (2006:7) refers to four intervention approaches, namely the empowerment approach, the deficit approach, the political action approach and conceptualising PI to include the intangible ways parents are involved. The utility value of these approaches will be interrogated in relation to findings of this research.

2.8 A brief comparison of PI in developing and developed countries.

A quick comparison of PI in developing and developed countries focusing on parents' educational levels, teacher attitudes, communication between parents and teachers/school heads, home environment, poverty and resources is quite revealing.

2.8.1 Parents' educational level

In relation to Namibia, a developing country, Trewby in Siririka (2007:27) found that parents with limited or no education may have the will to help their children but are constrained because they are convinced that they are incapacitated by their limited school education to help their children with their learning. Lemmer and Van Wyk (2004:2610) and Phendla (2004:167) confirm this situation with regards to another developing country, South Africa. On the other hand, in developed countries like Japan and the United States of America parents generally confidently participate in their children's education because they are sufficiently educated to help their children with their schooling (Holloway et al 2008:2).

2.8.2 Teacher attitudes

With regards to teacher attitudes, Parhar (2006:2) affirms that some teachers reinforce practices of exclusion in relation to uneducated and socio-economically disadvantaged parents. They initiate inequitable relations where they exercise power over parents. Such negative attitudes and behaviours of teachers negatively impact on efforts to involve parents in their children's schooling in developing countries such as South Africa, Namibia, Uganda and Zimbabwe.

Unlike in developing countries, in developed countries such as Japan teachers make explicit and exacting demands on parents in relation to PI in the form of attending school activities, monitoring homework and communicating with teachers (Holloway et al 2008:2).

2.8.3 Communication

In relation to communication between school and home in developed countries such as Japan and the United States of America, several channels are used. These include regularly scheduled parent-teacher conferences, the use of newsletters, circulars and even telephone and internet.

In developing countries like Uganda, Magara (2005) found that there is a communication gap between schools and homes. This is the case owing to lack of facilities that are easily available in developed countries. The communication gap makes parents and teachers strangers to each other instead of partners in the education of children.

2.8.4 Home environment

Regarding home environment, the general degree of cognitive stimulation provided in the home setting has substantial impact on the child's cognitive development. The number of books and reading materials in a family is a strong factor influencing the reading scores of pupils (Lesen 2004 in Krolak 2005). This implies that pupils reared in a literate home environment (typical of developed countries) are more advantageously placed than those from non- or semi-literate home environments (typical of developing countries) (Kajinga 2005:18).

2.8.5 Poverty

Poverty in developing countries also impacts negatively on PI. Some parents cannot pay school fees and levies in developing countries such as Zimbabwe, Uganda, Namibia or South Africa. In developed countries like Japan parents can fund, pay for and monitor their children's involvement in supplementary classes (Holloway et al 2008:7). In short, PI occurs quite differently in developed and in developing countries.

2.9 Parental involvement and attribution theory

Attribution theory (Weiner, 1974{a}; 1985 following Heider, 1958 and Rotter 1965) is useful not only in explaining the lack or low rates of PI in Zaka District, but also in generating solutions to the problem. The theory was basically used in the context of motivation and academic learning. It was also used to explain other people's behaviour and can thus be used to explain the status of PI in Zaka District. It can also be used to explain the behaviour of school heads, teachers and parents in relation to PI.

2.9.1 Attribution theory in the context of motivation and academic learning

According to attribution theory, people (pupils, teachers and parents) attribute success and failure to different things. In other words, they give different reasons why a pupil has performed well or badly (Haack, 2007:47). Attributions associated with achievement tasks include *ability*, *effort*, *task difficulty*, and *luck*. Success attracts attributions of high ability, a lot of effort, easy tasks or luck. Conversely, failure attracts attributions of low ability, little effort, difficult tasks, or no luck. Ability attributions are internal, stable and *uncontrollable* while effort attributions are internal, *unstable*, and controllable (Simmering, 2011:1).

When failure is attributed to internal, uncontrollable and stable causes such as low ability, it is interpreted as a consequence of a fixed characteristic over which an individual has no control. Having no control predisposes one to feelings of hopelessness and expectations of continued failure. It makes one feel shame and humiliation. It also renders one reluctant to expend effort or to be persistent in terms of future tasks. On the other hand, when failure is attributed to internal, unstable, and controllable causes such as lack of effort, it is considered redeemable since one can do something about it. Having control, therefore, stimulates feelings of hopefulness in relation to future outcomes (Haack 2007:48).

Attributing success to internal and controllable factors such as effort kindles feelings of pride, satisfaction and confidence. It also generates a sense of self-esteem. Consequently, one is inclined to initiate achievement activities, choose to work on more difficult tasks, persist longer in the face of failure and expend greater energy in tackling difficult tasks. On the other hand, attributing success to external causes such as task difficulty (for example an easy exercise) will not engender self-enhancing emotions such as satisfaction, pride, confidence or self-esteem.

Attribution theory was also found to be useful in explaining people's behaviour (Simmering, 2011; Kelly and Michela, 1980).

2.9.2 Attributions about other people's behaviour

People make causal attributions in regard to other people's behaviour. Such attributions result from what the observer (of someone's behaviour) knows about the other person's behaviour, the observer's beliefs about the causes of behaviour, and the reasons the observer wants to explain the other person's behaviour (Kelley and Michela, 1980). What people perceived and believed about what they saw dictated how they would act, even if their beliefs about what they perceived were invalid (Simmering, 2011:1).

According to Nisbett et al (1973), people have a tendency to use internal attributions to explain the negative behaviour of others and external attributions to explain their own negative behaviour.

Overestimating the influence of internal attributions on others and underestimating the influence of external attributions is referred to as the *fundamental attribution error* (Simmering, 2011:1). The fundamental attribution error occurs because (a) observers would not have the same information relating to the observed behaviour as those being observed would have, (b) the observer and the observed focus on different things, (c) observers may expect others to behave as they would in a given situation and (d) internal attributions allow for improved future predictions of behaviour than external attributions and consequently, observers may expect the same behaviour from that particular person in future, similar situations (Haack 2007:48, Simmering, 2011:1). The way people make attributions in regard to others' behaviour (and how this could be erroneous, as discussed in this section) holds significant implications for explanations relating to lack or low rates of PI.

2.9.3 Application of attribution theory to PI

As has already been established, attribution theory is useful, not only in explaining the status of PI in Zaka District, but also in generating strategies to enhance it. This is mainly because the attributions made by parents and teachers about PI tend to influence their actual behaviour of being involved or of initiating involvement activities (Haack 2007:53, Simmering, 2011:1).

Both parents and teachers make internal and external attributions in regard to PI activities. Attribution theory would predict that school heads, teachers and parents would be susceptible to the fundamental attribution error (described in 2.9.2 above). When teachers, for example, attribute low PI to factors that are internal to parents, they are inclined to conclude that they are helpless to deal with the situation and that it is entirely up to the parents to redeem the situation. Likewise, when parents attribute low PI to reasons that are external to them, they may believe that they are impotent to improve PI and that the responsibility to resolve the problem resides in other people such as teachers, or even government.

From the discussion above, it seems likely that attributions held by parents and teachers could cause conflict between them resulting in low levels of PI. According to Christenson and Hirsch (1998); and Eccles and Harold (1993) in Haack (2007:53), beliefs held by teachers and parents translate into actions that can either enhance or inhibit PI. Teachers' strategies for involving parents are liable to be influenced by their beliefs while parents' involved practice is likely to be determined by their own beliefs. The different attributions parents and teachers make for low levels of specific PI activities may lead to conflict between them, to the detriment of PI. Some teachers believe that lowly educated low-income parents have low educational aspirations for their children, lack the requisite skills to help their children, are not concerned about their children, and therefore are generally less involved in schooling (Caspé, 2003; Dauber and Epstein, 1993). On the other hand, there are some parents who believe that teachers are responsible for their children's education and blame teachers when their children experience difficulties (Haack, 2007:55).

2.10 Conclusion

Having defined parental involvement, established its significance, identified the various forms it may take, shown its determinants, identified possible barriers, indicated possible intervention measures, and having shown how attribution theory is useful in explaining and improving PI, the chosen research paradigm, research design and methodology are discussed in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the choice of the qualitative research methodology in relation to the goals of this research; the choice of the interpretive paradigm and qualitative case study research design; sampling procedures; gaining access and research ethics; data collection strategies and the trustworthiness of the study.

3.2 Qualitative research and research goals

The qualitative research methodology was used in this study. It is based on a naturalistic phenomenological philosophy that views reality as multi layered, interactive and “a social experience” , McMillan and Schumacher, 2010:322-323). This entails the use of multi-method strategies of data collection such as structured and semi structured open-ended interviews, participant observation and open-ended questionnaires to study the problem from the participants’ perspective.

The qualitative research methodology was chosen because it uses an emic perspective, in other words, it derives meaning from the research participants’ perspective (Schurink in De Vos, 1998:242, McMillan and Schumacher, 2010:321, 323). This research focused on parental involvement in their children’s education at primary school level with the view to identifying barriers to involvement as perceived by parents themselves, school heads, and teachers. When the barriers to involvement were thus identified, it was possible to generate relevant solutions in relation to the research participants.

Within the qualitative research methodology there are a number of perspectives or paradigms. The interpretive paradigm was chosen for this study. The paradigm is briefly described and reasons for its choice are given below.

3.3 The interpretive paradigm

A paradigm, in the timeless words of Patton (1990:479) is “a world view, a general perspective, and a way of breaking down the complexity of the real world”. In other words, it is a way of looking at the world, taking account of the assumptions people have about what is important and what makes the world work. It is a theoretical orientation (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992:33—see also Bogdan and Biklen, 2007).

The interpretive paradigm is inspired by the belief that there are significant social dynamics that are poorly served by the logic and rationality of the scientific method. The scientific method aims at discovering laws and principles of general validity (Hoberg, 1999:56, McMillan and Schumacher, 2010:323). It often confines itself to the *where* and *how* and neglects the *why* (McMillan and Schumacher, 2010:323—see also Rezal, 2007 ; Hausbeck, 2005 and Cohen and Manion, 1994). As an example, the scientific method often neglects to

address why certain behaviours were present in a setting. It is thus open to argument that methods appropriate to natural sciences cannot elucidate the meanings of human actions. The positivist method strips contexts of meanings in the process of developing quantitative measures of phenomena. Unlike the positivist method, the interpretive paradigm includes research participants' meanings and interpretations in the data that are collected. It does not impose outsiders' meanings and interpretations on data (which scientific enquiry does) thereby compromising discovery (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010:323). In the words of Corbin and Strauss (2008:13), "Qualitative researchers enjoy serendipity and discovery" and resonate to "the endless possibilities to learn more about people." Unlike quantitative researchers, qualitative researchers do not want distance between themselves and their participants, but want the opportunity to "connect with them at a human level" (Corbin and Strauss, 2008:13).

Since this research acknowledges that parental involvement barriers are context-based and thus strategies to deal with them need to be context-based, the interpretive method was deemed to be preferable because it fully takes into account the significance of context in relation to meaning. It assumes that all human action is meaningful and has to be interpreted and understood within the context of social practices. In keeping with the interpretive tradition, this researcher sought to understand individuals' interpretations of the world around them (Cohen and Manion, 1994:37) in relation to their involvement in their children's education at primary school level. As the researcher sought to access the meanings participants assigned to the matter being investigated (for example, some parents with little or no formal education thought that PI was restricted to the payment of school fees/levies and providing labour for the construction or repairing of school buildings), he interacted with the participants and created knowledge that was transactional and subjective in nature (Rezal, 2007:27-34). In other words, the researcher and the participants had the same characteristic of being interpreters or sense-makers. This really meant that as an interpretive researcher, this researcher sought a shared understanding with the participants regarding what constituted PI, what barriers stood in the way of PI and how such barriers could be overcome. In pursuit of that shared understanding, the researcher was mindful that history, cultural and social forces might influence the outlook and interpretation of both researcher and participant (Rezal, 2007:27-34;). For example, some parents thought that in the context of their culture, mothers should be more involved in the primary school education of their children than fathers. This

is based on the contestable belief that if fathers interacted with children too much, they would lose their authority in respect of their children and end up failing to discipline them.

According to the interpretive paradigm, all knowledge is perspective-bound and partial. Meaning is fuller, however, if intention is known. Cohen and Manion (1994:36) lend credence to this point when they contend that actions are meaningful to the extent that one is able to ascertain the intentions of actors (participants) and thus share their experiences. This way the *why* the positivist method neglects is addressed and the researcher avoids being unduly judgemental.

Since the intent of this research was to understand the social context of the phenomenon (parental involvement) and the process whereby the phenomenon influenced and was influenced by the social context (Rowlands, 2005:82 in Rezal, 2007:27-34), the paradigm chosen assumes a naturalistic methodology that emphasises inquiry in natural settings. Thus multiple data-gathering strategies were used in participants' natural settings (Hoberg, 1999:76, McMillan and Schumacher, 2010:321,331). The focus was on understanding the life world of the participants from their perspective and to make suitable recommendations to alleviate the problem being addressed (inadequate parental involvement).

This approach allowed the researcher to establish what the participants regarded as barriers to PI. Since barriers to PI are context-bound, it was possible to generate appropriate strategies to mitigate or eliminate the barriers. In brief, this research was located within the interpretive paradigm with the view to gaining understanding of the phenomenon (parental involvement) and to interpret meaning within the social and cultural context of the natural setting. To this end, the researcher interacted with the participants, observing them, interviewing them, listening to them and attempting to make sense of their perceptions and experiences (Cohen and Manion, 1994). The interpretive paradigm was meant to enable the researcher to investigate how parents were involved in their children's education and how they could, if necessary, enhance their involvement for the benefit of their children.

In the context of qualitative research, the qualitative case study was chosen for this research.

3.4 The qualitative case study

The qualitative case study method was chosen since it entails the collection of very extensive data in order to produce an in-depth understanding of the entity being studied (Borg and Gall, 1989:402). It investigates contemporary phenomenon within a real life context using multiple sources (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2005:18) in order to produce a case description and case-based themes (Creswell, 2007:73). In Cohen and Manion's (1994:106) time tasted words, it probes deeply and analyses intensively.

In the context of this research, in order to help research participants generate solutions to their parental involvement challenges, the researcher needed to thoroughly understand what the participants perceived to be barriers to PI and what they thought needed to be done to break down the barriers and enhance PI in their children's education. This made the case study suitable for this study because it focuses on contextual meaning-making rather than generalised rules. In other words, it concentrates on making or generating meaning within a context. For example, some participants in this study regarded disciplining a child as the responsibility of the whole community and not just that of the parents of that child. In this context they believed that parents and teachers should work together to ensure that children behaved well at all times.

Furthermore, the case study examines the individual or small groups in naturalistic settings (O'Hanlon, 2003). A naturalistic setting allows the researcher to *discover* the phenomenon being investigated. The researcher will be dealing with real people and events in real situations (Cohen, Manion and Morris, 2000:181). He (the researcher) can observe the participants' reaction to naturally occurring events. In a natural setting, human behaviours can be genuinely reflected on and their meanings interpreted in their true perspective (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994:45). This research sought to understand *why*, among other reasons, the participants behaved the way they did in relation to their involvement in their children's education. They had their own reasons for their behaviour in relation to PI. For example, 60% of the participants in this study confined their participation in their children's education to paying fees and levies and providing labour for building projects because they thought that they did not have the expertise to help children understand the content of what was taught at school. They believed that teachers who were trained to teach children should be left alone to do their job.

The intense probing characteristic of the case study usually leads to the discovery of previously unsuspected relationships relating to the matter under investigation (Ary, Jacobs and Razavieh, 1996:484). To illustrate this point, it emerged from this study that teachers who were politically active were regarded with extreme suspicion by parents who perceived them as trouble-makers. This soured relations between such teachers and parents and inevitably interfered with effective PI. So the case study allowed the researcher to get a thick description of participants' lived experiences of their situation and their thoughts about and feelings for their situation (Cohen, Manion and Morris, 2000:181). In other words, the case study made it possible to get a detailed description of participants' way of life and how they perceived their situation. For example, around 60% of participants in this research lived a typical peasant life in which they mainly relied on peasant farming as a source of life. They considered themselves to be too poor and uneducated to meaningfully involve themselves in their children's education. Some school heads and teachers said the same thing regarding parents' ability to participate meaningfully in their children's education. Parents, school heads, teachers and pupils were speaking for themselves. Emphasis was not only be on understanding *why* the participants did what they did, but also on how their behaviour changed as they responded to their environment. The researcher was able to gather data about the participants' present state, past experiences, environment and how these factors related to one another (Ary, Jacobs and Razavieh, 1996:484) in relation to parental involvement in their children's education at primary school level. This was done by means of focus group interviews, semi-structured interviews, open-ended questionnaires and observation.

Participants in the case study had to be chosen carefully in order to reveal as much about the case as possible. Sampling procedures used for this study are described in the next section.

3.5 Sampling

Sampling is "the procedure a researcher uses to select people, places, or things to study" (Siririka, 2007:34). The quality of a sample determines the quality of the research findings in large measure. Sampling and selection of a site will to a large extent be influenced by the strategy of enquiry used by the researcher (Schurink, 1998:254 in De Vos, 1998; Merriam, 2009:77).

In qualitative research a small, distinct group of participants is commonly investigated to enable the researcher to “understand the problem in depth”(Hoberg, 1999:57). Purposeful sampling is usually employed. This is the process of “selecting information-rich cases for study in depth”(Patton, 1990:169). The information-rich participants who are selected are “knowledgeable and informative about the phenomena the researcher is investigating”(McMillan and Schumacher, 1993:378—see also McMillan and Schumacher, 2010). These participants are expected to be willing to talk (Patton, 2002:230 in Merriam, 2009:77).

Purposeful sampling is briefly described below.

3.5.1 Purposeful sampling

Purposeful sampling constitutes the selection of information-rich cases (McMillan and Schumacher, 2010:325-326, Merriam, 2009:77, Patton, 2002:230; Johnson & Christensen, 2000:175). It enables the researcher to handpick the cases to be included in the sample on the basis of her/his judgement of their typicality. It is inclusive of sampling by case (a process where the researcher selects at random cases that will in all probability yield the information that is required), network (snowball or chain reference) sampling (which is participant referral where each successive participant or group is named by a preceding group or individual—the researcher identifies and develops a certain profile of attributes or traits that is sought and each participant is asked to suggest other participants who might fit the profile), comprehensive sampling (a process where each participant or group, setting or other relevant information is examined) and maximum variation sampling (which is a strategy to represent sub units of the major unit).

Network sampling (also known as snowball or chain reference sampling) and sampling by case were chosen to select parents and teachers in this research.

3.5.1.1 Network sampling and sampling by case

With network sampling the researcher began with the identification and development of a profile of the attributes or traits of participants who were sought (Hoberg, 1999:59). Then with the help of three insiders (a teacher and two parents) he identified a small number (three) of individuals who had the characteristics the researcher required (Hoberg, 1999:169). The characteristics are indicated in 3.5.1.2 below. The three persons so identified acted as informants who suggested other participants who might, according to their judgement, fit the

established profile. Each respondent was asked to give five names instead of one to ensure that the chain was not broken (De Vos, 1998:200). The process was repeated until eighteen potential participants (parents) per school were identified. It is noteworthy that some names kept coming up, thereby indicating the thoroughness of the process of identifying potential participants. Whenever this happened, informants were asked to give other names in place of those already mentioned. Since nine participants per school were deemed to be ideal for focus group interviews (Hoberg, 1999:139), the figure of eighteen parents per school was chosen in case some of the potential participants declined to participate in the research. The number of participants required for the research was then randomly selected from the pool of eighteen potential participants. The identified potential participants who declined the invitation to participate for various reasons were replaced through random selection from the pool of identified potential participants.

3.5.1.2 Profile of the attributes of parents sought

Attributes of parents who participated in the study included the following:

- Having at least one child attending primary school
- Having no formal employment
- Having no regular income
- Having below O-level qualification
- Having no electricity at home
- Having no piped water at home
- Having the willingness and ability to talk about their situation
- Being accessible

3.5.1.3 Profile of the attributes of teachers sought

Teachers who were selected for this research needed to have the following characteristics:

- Be educated up to at least Diploma level
- Have at least three years teaching experience
- Be knowledgeable about the conditions in which their pupils live
- Be willing to be interviewed
- Be willing to complete a questionnaire

- Be disposed to expressing their views without fear or favour
- Be regarded as thoughtful, perceptive and serious minded by their colleagues
- Be respected by their colleagues for their opinions in staff meetings and outside meetings.

Steps similar to those described in 3.5.1.1 above were followed in the selection of teachers for this study.

In the purposeful sampling employed in this research, sampling by case and chain reference sampling (as described above) were employed in a complimentary manner. The schools selected for the study were also purposefully sampled. Schools at mission stations, the growth point (village town) and townships with electricity and piped water were excluded. This was because of their superior infrastructural provisions and a sizeable number of formally employed parents, which rendered them atypical of the schools in the Zaka District. Such schools constituted about 15% of the schools in the district. From the remaining 85% of the schools, those relatively accessible in terms of roads were chosen. These amounted to 60% of the schools in the district. With these schools purposeful sampling was done at random (Hoberg, 1999:59) to identify ten schools for the study. The school heads of the selected schools had to unreservedly confirm that their schools indeed typified the schools in Zaka District.

Having selected the research site and research participants, the issue of gaining access to the research setting and research ethics was addressed.

3.6 Gaining access and research ethics

3.6.1 Gaining access

Before any data were collected access was gained by seeking the written permission of the Secretary of the Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture, the Provincial Education Director of Education, relevant school heads, teachers and the parents who were potential participants (McMillan and Schumacher, 1997:195). The permission of participating parents was sought from them directly and not through third parties in order to enhance the voluntary nature of their participation. The aims of the research and what was expected of the potential participants were clearly communicated to them (Marshall and Rossman, 2011:47-48, Ary et

al, 1996:18; Schurink in De Vos, 1998:258). How the investigation would be undertaken and the envisaged purposes of the results were set out clearly (Schurink in De Vos, 1998:258, Marshall and Rossman (2011:47-48). Practical aspects of the research such as data collection methods and recording of data were discussed with the potential participants in detail (Schurink in De Vos, 1998:258, Marshall and Rossman, 2011:47-48). If they were uncomfortable with any aspect of the research procedures, they were free to discuss the matter with the researcher, or even to decline participation.

3.6.2 Research ethics

Ethics in research are principles of right and wrong that a particular group (such as educational researchers) accepts (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992:49, Marshall and Rossman, 2011:47-49). These principles compel researchers to respect the rights, dignity, privacy and sensitivity of participants (Ary et al, 1996:514).

Important matters relating to research ethics include informed consent, the right to privacy and protection of participants from harm, be it physical, psychological or social (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992:515).

3.6.2.1 Informed consent

In this research, in respect of informed consent, the researcher informed potential participants both verbally and in writing that participation was voluntary (Christians, 2005:144; Bogdan and Biklen, 1992:53; Tuckman, 1994:13, Ary et al, 1996:484) and that they could withdraw from the research at any time (Borg and Gall, 1989:15; Ary et al, 1996:484). It was made clear that choosing not to participate held no adverse consequences for (potential) participants. The nature of the study, its aims, possible advantages to each participant and risks, dangers and obligations that would be involved were also revealed to participants (McMillan and Schumacher, 2001:421, Cohen et al, 2003:292, Bogdan and Biklen, 1992:53; Borg and Gall, 1989:84-85; Ary et al 1996:515). This meant that their consent was based on full and open information (Christians, 2005:144). As an example, they were informed about how focus group interviews would be conducted and how the researcher would appeal to members of the focus group to exercise mutual respect during and after the interviews. This information was verbally passed onto potential participants when they were being invited to participate in the study. They were also informed that research findings would be published

but their identities would be protected. Participants were given the opportunity to seek clarification on any matter of concern to them (Borg and Gall, 1989:84).

As Borg and Gall (1989) advise, caution was taken to ensure that informing participants was not done in a manner that would invalidate research findings. In other words, participants were not made to think or feel that they had to respond in certain ways.

3.6.2.2 The right to privacy

In respect of the right to privacy, participants were informed verbally and in writing that their right to remain anonymous would be fully respected (Tuckman, 1994:13; Bogdan and Biklen, 1992:49) and pseudonyms would be used in the research report. They were assured at the outset of privacy, as this is a highly sensitive issue (Cohen et al, 2005:292, McMillan and Schumacher, 2001:422). Disclosure of confidential information could prove to be most harmful and damaging to an individual's person (Christians, 2005). Therefore, reassurance of privacy would also work to the researcher's advantage, as participants would invariably respond more vividly to questions and discussions. To protect participants' dignity and identity, this researcher would ensure that all research material collected would be in safe keeping even after the study had terminated (Creswell, 2007:141-142; Christians, 2005:146).

3.6.2.3 Protection from harm

In terms of the protection of participants from harm, be it physical, psychological or social, participants were informed, verbally and by means of an agreement form which they were to sign after agreeing to participate in the study (*see Annexure 3*) that they would be fully protected (Creswell, 2007:141-142; Berg, 2001:232; McMillan and Schumacher, 2001:421). They were also verbally advised that they should expect to be treated with respect (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992:54), not to be imposed upon or embarrassed in any way. Questions would not be insulting or unnecessarily intrusive. Participants were encouraged to indicate when the research procedures would be threatening to embarrass them or cause some discomfort (Borg and Gall, 1989:85).

3.6.2.4 Terminating the study

Terminating the study when the data are theoretically saturated (when no new insights will be gained) has ethical implications. The researcher needed to leave the field without making

research participants, with whom he had formed a relationship, feel cheated and/ or exploited, or let down (Schurink in De Vos, 1998:262). The researcher eased out of the setting in such a manner that it would be possible for him to return to collect more data or to confirm findings (Schurink in De Vos 1998:262).

Data collection strategies chosen for this research were used in the context of the research ethics considerations discussed above.

3.7 Data collection strategies

Consistent with the qualitative research methodology, the following data gathering strategies were chosen for this study: observation, focus group interviews (in respect of parents), individual semi-structured interviews (in respect of school heads), open-ended questionnaires (in respect of school teachers). The reasons for choosing these strategies are discussed in 3.7.1 to 3.7.4 below.

In keeping with Bogdan and Biklen's (1992:97) thinking, different types of interviews were used at different stages of this study. The informal unstructured interview was used before the literature review when the researcher was still trying to establish whether the problem of low rates of PI was serious enough to warrant research. The focus group interview and the formal semi-structured interview were used after the literature review and when the interviewees (participants) were asked to confirm and disconfirm the transcribed responses.

3.7.1 Focus group interviews

Focus group interviews were used to get the views of parents on their understanding of PI, its benefits, their involved practice, what they considered to be barriers to PI and what they thought could be done to enhance it.

Schurink, Schurink and Poggenpoel (1998:314 in De Vos, 1998) succinctly define a focus group interview as a "purposive discussion of a specific topic or related topics taking place between eight and ten individuals". Each participant may make comments, ask questions of other participants or respond to comments by others, including the moderator (Marshall and Rossman, 2011:145)

Choosing the group focus interview (*Annexure 6*) as a means of gathering data in respect of parents, the researcher had considered the advantages this data collection strategy had in relation to the research problem. These included the following (McMillan and Schumacher, 2010:363-364, Nieuwenhuis in Maree, 2010; McMillan and Schumacher, 2001:455; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2005:288; Hoberg, 1999):

- It generates qualitative data (words, categorizations and expressions that are used by participants themselves) thereby acquainting the researcher with the language that his populations use to describe their experiences as well as their cultural values and styles of thinking and communicating about the research.
- It uses open-ended questions which allow the participant to answer freely, thus enhancing the *validity* of the findings.
- It uses group dynamics to produce new and additional data which could enhance the researcher's understanding of the phenomena being studied.
- It allows participants to react and build upon the responses of other participants, which may result in the generation of opinions and information which might have remained undisclosed in individual interviewing.
- The largely unstructured nature of the questions and the informal group situation encourage participants to disclose behaviour and attitudes they might not disclose during individual interviews.
- It is a form of triangulation if one employs the interview and questionnaire as well.

Additionally, since some of the parents who participated in the study were scantily educated, it was decided that answering an open-ended questionnaire might be too demanding a task for them, hence the choice of the focus group interview.

According to O'Hanlon (2003:79), a number of focus groups may be used to enhance the validity of the findings. In this research ten focus groups were used. These were deemed to be sufficient "to balance the idiosyncrasies of individual focus group sessions" (Hoberg, 1999:146, Bryman, 2004:349). Each group comprised nine people. Such a group was small enough to allow all the participants to have the opportunity to share insights and sufficiently

large to provide diversity of perceptions (Schurink et al, 1998:314, Marshall and Rossman, 2011:149).

Following Hoberg's (1999:140) recommendation, twelve topics/questions per focus group interview session were used. The topics/questions were carefully predetermined and sequenced in an understandable and logical way so as to facilitate the natural, spontaneous discussion of events or experiences by the participants (Schurink et al, 1998:315). This enhanced the validity of the findings.

Throughout the focus group interviews, the researcher was aware that focus group members needed not reach consensus since emphasis was placed on finding out as much as possible about a specific aspect of social reality (Schurink et al, 1998:315 in De Vos 1998). Focus group members were made aware of this fact.

When a session elicited little or no new information, it signalled that data generation had reached saturation point.

3.7.1.1 Selection of the interview location and sitting arrangement

Since there are factors related to the interview location that may threaten the validity of the findings, this researcher ensured that the interview location was easy to find, close to the homes of participants, free from outside distractions and noise that might interfere with the tape recording of discussions (Schurink et al, 1998:318 in De Vos 1998).

With regards to sitting arrangement, chairs were so arranged that participants were able to lean forward "without being self-conscious about their bodies" (Schurink et al, 1998:318 in De Vos 1998, Bryman, 2004:348-349). This helped participants to sufficiently relax to express their views freely.

3.7.1.2 Designing the focus group interview guide

The focus group interview guide sets down specific issues for the group to discuss. It not only establishes the agenda of the group interview, but it also provides the structure within which members of the focus group will interact (Stewart and Shamdasan, 1990 in De Vos 1998).

In the interview guide design concepts to be investigated were clearly defined and questions that captured the intent of the study were identified (see annexure 6). The meticulously

selected questions were carefully phrased prior to the focus group interviews in order to elicit the maximum amount of information). Care was taken to ensure that no leading questions were used. Open-ended questions that allow respondents to describe their views were employed. The questions were ordered carefully, from the more general to the more specific. Questions of the greatest significance were placed at the beginning and those of lesser significance near the end more sensitive issues were dealt with last (Schurink et al, 1998:318 in De Vos 1998; Bryman, 2004:356; Bryman, 2004:346-352). Follow-up questions and probing to gain an understanding of the critical issues were also used.

The moderator (researcher) clearly set the goals and objectives of the interview and also the ground rules for participation during his introduction. This assisted in regulating the interaction of participants (Schurink et al, 1998:321 in De Vos 1998; Bryman, 2004:352). Questions were organized into categories in order to enhance the validity of the findings.

3.7.1.2.1 Categories of questions

For categories of questions this researcher followed the guidelines given by (Schurink et al in De Vos, 1998:319). These are as follows:

- Opening questions (which are factual and are to be answered quickly to establish which characteristics group members have)
- Introductory question (which introduces the general topic of discussion and is not critical to the study because it is intended to foster conversation and interaction among group members)
- Transitional question (which provides the logical link between the introductory question and the key questions)
- Key questions (which require the greatest attention in the subsequent analysis)
- Ending questions (which close the discussion and are of three types, namely *the all-things-considered question* which allows participants to identify the most important aspects that were discussed; *the summary question* which is asked after moderator has given a short summary of the significant ideas of the discussion and confirm or

disconfirm whether the summary is adequate; and *the final question* asked following an overview of the purpose of the study by the moderator, for participants to confirm if everything considered important has been covered).

The interview guide was tested before it was used. It was tested with respondents who were representative of those who participated in the actual focus group interviews (Marshall and Rossman, 2011:95). The language used in respect of parents was Karanga, which they understood better than English. The focus group interviews were recorded.

3.7.1.3 Recording the focus group interviews

The focus group interviews were audio taped and notes were taken with the aid of an assistant moderator. The notes helped in capturing non-verbal communication. Participants were informed at the outset that the discussion was going to be recorded so as to capture everyone's comments. For recording purposes only one participant spoke at a time.

3.7.2 The unstructured interview

In this research the unstructured interview was used at the beginning of the research in an effort to establish the research participants' own perspectives and perceptions regarding parental involvement in children's education at primary school level. Factors they thought enhanced or depressed parental involvement were sought. With its great flexibility and freedom, the unstructured interview best fits the qualitative paradigm (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992:397—see also Bogdan and Biklen, 2007). It allowed the researcher to gain understanding, in considerable detail, on how parents, teachers and school heads thought and how they came to develop the perspectives they held. Rather than employ a detailed guide, this researcher used a general plan, asked questions and made comments meant to lead the respondents/ participants toward giving data to meet the researcher's objectives. Karanga and English were used in relation to parents and educators respectively. Some of the questions used in the semi-structured and focus group interviews in this research were conceived as a result of the unstructured interviews.

3.7.3 The semi-structured interview

Semi-structured interviews were used in respect of school heads with the view to establishing their understanding of PI, its benefits, how they promoted it at their school, what they thought were barriers to PI and how they thought PI could be improved at their schools.

The semi-structured interviews (lasting about sixty minutes each) allowed for consequential interaction between the researcher and participants (Babbie and Mouton, 2001:278; McMillan and Schumacher, 2001:269—see also McMillan and Schumacher, 2010). Their advantage was that, while they were reasonably objective, they also permitted “a more thorough understanding of the respondents’ opinions and reasons behind them than would be possible using the mailed questionnaire” (Borg and Gall; 1989:452). The semi-structured interviews combined objectivity and depth, and generated valuable data that could not be successfully obtained using any other approach (Borg and Gall; 1989:452). They enabled the researcher to elicit meaningful data through a comprehensive strategy in the form of open-ended questions (Creswell, 2007:130; Burck, 2005:240).

The researcher introduced the topic and thereafter guided the discussion by asking specific questions. He ensured that he did not control the content so rigidly that the interviewee could not tell his/her story personally in his/her own words (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992:97 in De Vos 1998). Words (language) familiar to the participants were used during the interview so that they could respond to something they understood. Although an interview guide was used, the semi-structured interviews offered the interviewer considerable latitude to pursue a range of topics and offered the interviewee the opportunity to shape the content of the interview (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992:97, Bryman, 2004:352).

3.7.3.1 The semi-structured interview guide

The semi-structured interview guide enabled the researcher to obtain the data needed to meet the specific objectives of the study and to standardize the interviews to some degree (Borg and Gall; 1989:451). The interview guide listed the questions that were asked during the interview in the desired sequence and it provided guidelines to the researcher regarding what to say at the opening and closing of the interviews. The questions were asked as they appeared in the guide but the interviewer had the latitude to pursue a range of topics.

3.7.4 Observation

Observation, in the words of Marshall and Rossman (2006:107), entails “the systematic noting and recording of events, behaviours and artefacts (objects) in a social setting chosen for the study”. It embraces muted cues, facial expression, gestures, tone of voice and other unverballed social interactions “which suggest the subtle meanings of language” (Hoberg, 1999:103). Used to discover complex interactions in natural social settings, observation is “a fundamental and highly important method in all qualitative inquiry” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006:99). As Corbin & Strauss (2008:29) put it, observations are important because “it is not unusual for persons to say they are doing one thing but in reality they are doing something else”. The only way to know this is through observation. People may also not be consciously aware of, or be able to articulate “the subtleties of what goes on in interactions between themselves and others” (Corbin & Straus, 2008:30) The researcher, however, did not give meaning to action/interaction based on observation without checking out that meaning with participants. The researcher combined observation with interviews and questionnaires. He also left open the possibility to verify interpretations with participants (Corbin & Straus, 2008:30). This was important because non-verbal behaviours are easily misinterpreted, especially cross culturally (Patton, 2002:291).

Naturalistic observation was also used in this research.

3.7.4.1 Naturalistic Observation

With naturalistic observation, events were observed and recorded as they naturally occurred. The people being observed were unaware of the observation, and thus their behaviour did not change on account of the researcher’s presence (Ary et al, 1996:483).

When participants were being recruited for this research, the researcher spent some time at their homesteads keenly observing (*inter alia*) the following:

- The quality of houses/huts the family lived in
- The kind of furniture the family possessed
- The chores children were expected to do before leaving for school
- The chores children were expected to do after returning from school
- The activities that claimed the greatest time of the parents

- The way parents and children communicated generally and in relation to school-related matters.

These elements that were observed constituted an observer guide that captured participants' own words and was flexible enough for the observer to note and collect data that might have been unanticipated (Bogan and Biklen, 1992:77; Creswell, 2007:130). The observational protocol used facilitated the recording of information that could be corroborated with other data that were collected using other methods.

While admitting that it was not easy to observe all the elements indicated above at every homestead visited, useful data was obtained using this method. Some unstructured interviews were provoked by observations made this way. During interviews observation allowed the researcher to note the interviewees' body language, tone of voice, gestures and facial expression in addition to their words. This illuminated the interviewees' responses.

Associated with observation, and indeed interviews as well, are field notes and personal journal. Writing notes, reflective memos, thoughts and insights is invaluable for generating "the unusual insights that move the analysis from the mundane and obvious to the creative" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006:161).

3.7.5 Field notes

Field notes constitute detailed, non-judgemental, concrete descriptions of what has been observed (Marshall and Rossman, 2006:98).

Field note-taking was invaluable for this study for it allowed the researcher to note down things that could not be recorded by the tape recorder (for example the interviewee's anxiety). The qualitative researcher's field notes contained what had been seen and heard by the researcher without interpretation (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994:73). As usual, field notes were filled with descriptions of people, places, events, activities and conversations. They contained ideas, reflections, hunches, feelings impressions and notes that seemed to be emerging (Hoberg, 1999 in Chindanya, 2002:61).

The field notes were used in compiling findings and enabled the researcher to explore his own biases and clarify earlier interpretations. Where the researcher could not write notes as events occurred, he wrote them soon afterwards, in fact the same day when the memory was still fresh. The researcher focused on words frequently used in or unique to the setting. Such terms helped in wording interview questions and became participant-generated analytic categories in the final write-up

3.7.6 Personal journal

The personal journal augmented the depth of other information obtained and allowed the researcher to record personal interpretations that might expose any biases (Creswell, 2007:130). The researcher kept a personal journal or reflexive log where he recorded accounts of his thoughts, feelings, assumptions, motives, and rationale for decisions. Ary et al, (1996:479) assert that this is “one way the qualitative inquirer addresses the issue of the inquiry being value-bound”. The personal journal helped the researcher to understand the participants’ attitudes, feelings, comments and behaviour. Some focus group questions were provoked by what was contained in the personal journal. For example, after observing and reflecting on the fact that some parents expected their children to do household chores before going to and after returning from school, the question why they had such an expectation emerged.

3.7.7 Literature review

Among the manifold purposes of the literature review the following were given prominence (Cresswell, 1998:20):

- Enabling the researcher to access the results of other studies that are closely related to the study that is being undertaken (Cresswell, 1998:20)
- Relating the study to a larger study that has been done on the topic and endeavouring to fill in gaps and extend prior studies (Cresswell, 1998:20)
- Providing a framework within which the significance of the study is established and further serving as a benchmark for comparing the results of the study with findings from other studies (Cresswell, 1998:20)

- Facilitating the identification of methodological techniques which have previously been used to research similar phenomena as well as the identification of contradictory findings (McMillan, 1992:44).

In this research literature review was also used to provide an understanding of the concept *parental involvement*; inform the development of the interview guide and questionnaires; and provide a theoretical framework in terms of which the problem was substantially explained, research findings analysed and solutions generated.

3.7.8 The open-ended questionnaire

The open-ended questionnaire used in respect of school teachers is an instrument generally employed to collect qualitative data. Participants used their own words, revealed their thoughts, provided answers that fell within their frame of reference and gave the reasons for their responses (Borg & Gall, 1989:428) (see Annexure 4).

3.7.9 Piloting

As Denzin & Lincoln (1994:21-30) advise, one should do a pilot study before embarking on an arduous and time-consuming qualitative study.

The purpose of the pilot study was manifold. It helped to establish the feasibility of the planned study (Ary et al 1996:115; Huysomen in De Vos 1998, Marshall and Rossman, 2011:95). It also afforded the researcher the opportunity to assess the appropriateness and practicality of the data collection instruments (Ary et al 1996:115). This led to the refining of the questionnaires and interview schedules (Sampson 2004:383 in Marshall and Rossman, 2011:95). Effecting the necessary alterations on the data collection methods resulted in the data in the main study being analysed more efficiently (Borg & Gall 1989:78).

Piloting also foreshadowed research problems and questions (Sampson 2004:383 in Marshall and Rossman, 2011:95). Such unanticipated problems were fairly easily resolved when they emerged in the main study, thereby saving time and effort (Borg & Gall 1989:78). The ideas, approaches and clues the pilot study provided greatly increased the chances of obtaining “clear-cut findings in the main study” (Borg & Gall 1989:77). Piloting also helped to

eliminate barriers such as resistances to tape recorders and mistrust of the researcher's agenda (Marshall & Rossman 2006:57).

Three pilot interviews were conducted, not only to assess the suitability of questions and to determine the length of the interviews, but also to explore ethical and practical issues related to the use of the tape recorder. All this was done to establish areas that would need attention and to make the necessary adjustments. The pilot interviews involved three school heads (headmasters) selected purposively and conveniently so as to meet the needs of the research and for accessibility. The selected school heads were deemed to be capable of giving the necessary feedback. The feedback received led to the rephrasing of two questions which were judged not to be sufficiently clear.

Piloting was also done in respect of focus group interviews. Two focus groups consisting of nine members each were conducted. The participants were also selected purposefully and conveniently. It emerged from the pilot interviews eye contact and a simple word, *zvanzwika*, (a polite way to say "we have heard you clearly") were very useful in controlling members who were inclined to talking endlessly without offending and embarrassing them. It also emerged from the pilot interviews that once the need to use a voice recorder was made clear to participants, they were comfortable with it. The researcher was also able to decide how best to position the voice recorder during the interviews.

The three schoolteachers who completed the questionnaire in the pilot study confirmed its clarity and sufficiency in terms of the scope it covered. The pilot study also helped the researcher in understanding himself as a researcher (Marshall & Rossman, 2010:95). The researcher got some ideas on how to behave prior to and during interviews as well as how to relate to participants. As an example, it was clear that when the researcher became too formalistic participants tended to be tensed up. This would compromise their participation.

In brief, piloting helped the researcher to determine the feasibility of the study and adjust data collecting instruments in order to get reliable data. It also helped the researcher to deal with ethical and practical issues ahead of the main study.

3.7.10 Trustworthiness of the research

It is essentially important to examine qualitative methods and look for ways to ensure the quality of the findings. Doing so enhances the trustworthiness of the research. The data collection strategies chosen for this research have been described in ways that indicate how they enhance the trustworthiness of the data collected (3.7.1 to 3.7.7).

Trustworthiness can be further strengthened by the employment of *triangulation* (the use of multiple sources of data, multiple observers, and multiple methods-the act of bringing more than one source of data to bear on a single point) (Ary et al, 1996:480; Creswell, 2007:129; Marshall and Rossman 2006:202, McMillan and Schumacher, 22010:331). With triangulation, data collected with one procedure or instrument is confirmed by data collected using a different procedure or instrument. As O’Hanlon (2003:76) states, studying a situation from multiple perspectives aids the detection of bias through divergent or contradictory data. If divergence is minimal then validation is assured whereas if it is noticeably divergent further investigation is called for. Triangulation of research methods is desirable to overcome over dependence on one method. Different sources of data provide a wider means of verification (O’Hanlon, 2003:77). As Marshall & Rossman (2006:202) put it, data from different sources can be used to “corroborate, elaborate, or illustrate the research question.”

In this research triangulation was achieved through data collection from different groups and sites as well as the use of multiple methods described above. By designing a study that makes use of multiple cases, multiple informants and varied data-gathering methods, the researcher greatly strengthened the study’s usefulness for other settings (as Marshall & Rossman, 2006:202 affirm).

Submitting one’s interpretations to members in a setting for their validation is another way of enhancing the trustworthiness of the research. This was done in this research. Carefully formulating interview questions so that meaning is crystal clear as described in 3.7.1.2 also helps the *validity* of the research (Hoberg, 1999:89-90).

Validity, which is an important aspect of trustworthiness, is generally concerned with the extent to which an instrument measures what it is supposed to measure (Ary et al, 1996:268). Concurringly, De Vos, 1998:83) affirms that a valid measuring instrument does what it is supposed to do, measures what it is supposed to measure and yields scores whose differences reflect the true differences of the variable being measured rather than random and constant

errors. How the data collection instruments were used in this research has already been described in paragraphs 3.7.1 to 3.7.7.

Another important aspect of trustworthiness is *reliability*. According to McMillan (1992:223), reliability is describable as the extent to which what is recorded as data is in fact what occurred in the natural setting. Denscombe (1998:213) amplifies McMillan's description by describing reliability as achieving the same findings even though another researcher did the research. The reliability of a measuring instrument is the degree of consistency with which it measures whatever it is measuring. De Vos (1998:95), in what is arguably one of the most explicit description of reliability, defines it as "the extent to which independent administrations of the same instruments yield the same results under comparable conditions and it is synonymous to dependability, stability, consistency, predictability, accuracy, reproducibility, repeatability and generalisability". It emerged from this research that the same instruments yielded the same results in settings (schools and villages) as far apart as thirty kilometres.

Guba's model of trustworthiness, according to De Vos (1998:303-305), identifies four criteria, namely truth-value, applicability, consistency and neutrality. The criteria are briefly described below.

- Truth-value

The truth-value seeks to establish if the researcher has established confidence in the truth of the findings in relation to participants and the context in which the research was undertaken. It establishes "how confident the researcher is with the truth of the findings based on the research design, informant and context" (De Vos, 1998:349). Truth-value is usually obtained from the discovery of human experiences as they are lived and perceived by research participants. This research meets this criterion since it was conducted in naturalistic and not contrived settings. Participants confirmed the findings and a "critical friend" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006) confirmed that the logical inferences and interpretations of the researcher made sense.

- Applicability

Applicability refers to “the degree to which the findings can be applied to other contexts and settings or with other groups”. It is the ability to generalise from the findings to larger populations (De Vos, 1998:349). By triangulating multiple sources of data (as described earlier in this section-3.7.9) the study’s usefulness for other settings was greatly strengthened (Marshall & Rossman, 2006:202).

- Consistency

Consistency refers to whether the findings can be consistent if the inquiry were replicated with the same subjects or in a similar context (De Vos, 1998:350; Babbie & Mouton, 2001:278). In this study results were consistent in schools and villages more than thirty-five kilometres apart.

- Neutrality

Neutrality is the freedom from bias in the research procedures and results. It refers to the degree to which the results are a function solely of the informants and conditions of the research and not other biases, motivations and perspectives (De Vos, 1998:350). To address the issue of biases, this study used strategies which included the use of “a critical friend” who confirmed that the logical inferences and interpretations of the researcher made sense to her; using participants to confirm the findings; clearly indicating how data was handled; providing examples of explicitly descriptive, non-evaluative note taking and reflexive journal, and providing explicitly detailed research design and methods so that the reader can judge whether they are adequate and make sense (Marshall & Rossman, 2006:203).

In brief, the trustworthiness of this research was enhanced by the use of “a critical friend”, triangulation, submitting the researcher’s interpretations to members in the setting for their validation, and formulating interview questions carefully to achieve clarity.

3.8 Data analysis

In order to generate findings that transform raw data into new knowledge, a qualitative researcher must engage in active and demanding analytic processes throughout all phases of the research). Qualitative research usually generates voluminous data (Patton, 2002:440). The data needs to be sorted out. The sorting out of the data involves physically organising and subdividing the data. It also entails dividing data into meaningful segments, “which is already part of data analysis” (Bergh and van Wyk in Hoberg, 1999:64).

Data collection, analysis and recording ought not to be considered in isolation but rather as interrelated simultaneous procedures that are ongoing (Creswell, 2007:150-151; Marshall & Rossman, 2006:155). In other words, data collection and data analysis occur simultaneously. Right from the first interview or observation, the researcher reflects on the meaning of what he /she has heard and/or seen, “developing hunches (working hypothesis) about what it means and seeking to confirm or disconfirm those hunches in subsequent interviews or observations” (Ary et al, 1996:481). This is inductive data analysis (proceeding from data to hypothesis to theory).

Bogdan and Biklen (1992:153) elucidate the concept of data analysis by describing it as the process of systematically searching and arranging interview transcripts, field notes and other materials that the researcher accumulates to increase his/her understanding of them and to enable him/her to present what he/she has discovered to others. Typical of qualitative research, data analysis is a rigorous process involving working with the data, organising them into manageable units, categorising, comparing, synthesising them, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned and deciding what the researcher will tell others (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992:153 and Bergh and van Wyk in Hoberg, 1999:65). It is noteworthy that qualitative researchers integrate the operations of organising, analysing and interpreting data and call the entire process “data analysis” (Bergh and van Wyk in Hoberg, 1999:64).

One way of organising qualitative data, which this researcher used, was to develop and use coding categories. Marshall & Rossman (2006:160) refer to coding of data as the formal representation of analytic thinking. According to them, generating categories and themes constitutes the tough intellectual work of analysis. Since coding is not a merely technical task, as data is coded new understandings may emerge thereby necessitating adjustments or changes to the original plan. The researcher began coding soon after the first interview and

observations were completed since the first data served as “a foundation for data collection and analysis” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008:63). The researcher read through the data noting certain words, phrases, patterns of behaviour, subjects’ way of thinking, and events that were repeated or which stood out. Regularities, patterns and topics emerged. The words and phrases referred to above are coding categories. They are the means of sorting the descriptive data collected (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992:166).

According to (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992:167), some coding categories will emerge while data is being collected. These coding categories need to be jotted down for future use. Particular research questions and concerns also generate categories. Bogdan and Biklen (1992:172) suggest a number of coding families that provide the researcher with some tools for developing coding categories that will be helpful in sorting out qualitative data. This researcher used some of the codes described below (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992:167 in Chindanya, 2002:69-70) alongside new codes that were suggested by emerging data.

- *Setting/context codes* (here the most general information on the setting, topic or subjects can be sorted. An example of particular codes in this family might be labelled: “Descriptions of rural schools”, “Descriptions of rural homes);
- *Definition of the situation codes* (here the aim is to place units of data that tell the researcher how the subjects define the setting or particular topics – their worldview, how they see themselves in relation to the setting or the topic);
- *Perspectives held by subjects codes* (this family includes codes oriented towards ways of thinking subjects share that are as general as their overall definition of the situation but indicate orientations toward particular aspects of a setting),
- *Subjects’ way of thinking about people and objects codes* (the subjects’ understandings of each other, of outsiders, and of objects that make up their world);
- *Process codes* (refer to coding words and phrases that facilitate categorising sequences of events, changes over time, or passages from one type or kind of status to another etc.);
- *Activity codes* (directed at regularly occurring kinds of behaviour, for example, *drawing water from the well, cultivating the fields, etc*);

- *Event codes* (for example, *sports day, consultation day, school development meetings*);
- *Strategy codes* (tactics, methods, ways, techniques, etc.);
- *Relationships and social structure codes* (units of data that direct one to cliques, friendships, romances, coalitions, enemies, etc.).

These codes gave the researcher ideas of what to look for when coding.

3.8.1 The process of data analysis

Analysis involves interpretation and interpretation, according to Corbin & Strauss (2008:480), implies the researcher's understanding of events "as related by participants." Data analysis was done by means of examining the field notes on observations made and responses of each participant observed and interviewed. In analysing the data, the researcher followed the steps (the constant comparative method) presented by Maykut and Morehouse (1994:135) as cited in Chindanya (2002:71-72).

The steps followed in this research are outlined below:

Step 1

Conducting the interview, recording it and reflecting on it in writing immediately after the interview (carrying out observations, writing field notes, observer comments and memos)

Step 2

Transcribing data verbatim immediately after the interview and placing additional comments in brackets

Step 3

Reading through the data and coding of data according to emerging categories

Step 4

Unitising the data and identifying units of meaning in the context of the research questions and the topic

Step 5

Identifying provisional categories and sub categories. (The phenomenon represented by a category is given a conceptual name.) Matching unitised data cards to a category

Step 6

Refining categories and making a list of key items (main ideas), words, and phrases. Doing a literature check to confirm whether the respondents' responses during the interview bear some similarities to the research topic and what other respondents conclude in similar studies. This is a final check for *validity*.

Briefly, in following the steps outlined above, the responses from the interviews were transcribed verbatim from the audiotape. The audiotape is creditable to the extent that it facilitates both the collection and analysis of data as preconceived ideas are discarded (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994:127). An inductive analysis of the data was done to reveal the emergent themes coming out of the interviews and field notes. In the words of Patton (2000:453), inductive analysis entails the discovering of patterns, themes, and categories in one's data. It is unlike deductive data analysis where analytic categories are stipulated beforehand, "according to an existing framework." The constant comparative method (Maykut and Morehouse 1994:135) was used where the researcher first read the data over quickly to yield an impressionistic view of recurrent themes/categories generated by the data. At this stage the aim was to utilise the data "to think with". This tentative analysis was followed by intensive and repeated reading of the responses. Reading, rereading, "and reading through the data once more" (a process often referred to as immersion in the data) forced the researcher to become "intimately familiar with those data" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006:158). The intensive and repeated reading helped to remove the problem of relating the material too hastily to the researcher's own questions and to prevent over-looking material whose connection to the researcher's questions (indicating researcher's own expectations or prior beliefs) had not been immediately obvious to the researcher (Schmidt in Flick, 2005:255). Asking questions in relation to the data and making comparisons were used as major analytic strategies for elaborating the analysis, as recommended by Corbin & Strauss (2008:199). It needs to be noted that as categories and themes were developed and coding was well underway, the researcher started making integrative

interpretations of what had been learned. Interpretation, according to Marshall & Rossman (2006:161-162), “brings meaning and coherence to the themes, patterns, categories, developing linkages and a story line that makes sense and is engaging to read.”

To account for the openness of the interviews, the researcher not only considered categories or repetitive themes suggested by the questions presented to the respondents, but also took account of “new” themes/categories which had not been foreseen in the interview guide but emerged from the collected data – hence the use of open coding which provided for examining in detail the interviews, field notes and personal diary. The analytic process of generating categories and themes demanded “a heightened awareness of the data, a focused attention to this data, and an openness to the subtle, tacit undercurrents of social life” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006:158-159). Through prolonged engagement with the data (text) the researcher generated the categories, which augmented those suggested by the questions presented to participants. Category generation involved noting patterns evident in the setting and expressed by participants.

The naturalistic observation data was analysed based on the steps described by Omery (1982:57-58) and Giorgi (1985:10-40—see also McMillan and Schumacher, 2010:331 and Marshall and Rossman, 2011:209-201), namely identifying repetitive themes or categories in field notes and personal diary or reflexive log or journal. Finally, the themes were integrated, cross-validated and compared with the themes that had emerged from the interviews, after which they were synthesised in a descriptive analysis.

3.9 Conclusion

In sum, the qualitative researcher meticulously chose a research design that was most likely going to generate and transform raw data into new knowledge. The sampling procedures for the case study, research ethics, data collection methods and data analysis procedures were all carefully considered to assure the trustworthiness of the study.

Chapter four focuses on data presentation and analysis.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter data generated from semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews, questionnaires, observation, field notes and personal journal are presented and discussed. Quotes are used extensively to provide a qualitative “feel” of the responses. Only quotes representing common, rather than idiosyncratic responses are used.

Altogether one hundred and forty participants were involved in this research. For teachers and school heads English was used as a medium of communication. For parents Karanga was used because most of them would understand their mother tongue much better than English, given their educational background. Their responses were translated into English by the researcher and the translation was confirmed by a critical friend.

4.2 FINDINGS

Sub-headings representing the themes/categories that emerged as the main or repetitive themes are used to facilitate the presentation and discussion of the findings. The emergent categories are:

- Stakeholders’ understanding of the concept PI
- Ways in which parents are involved in their children’s education in Zaka District
- Benefits of parental involvement
- Determinants of parental involvement
- Barriers to parental involvement
- Strategies to overcome barriers to parental involvement.

These categories or themes are presented and discussed in the order given above.

4.2.1 School heads’ and teachers’ understanding of the concept PI

School heads (headmasters or head teachers or principals), teachers and parents were the stakeholders this research focused on. Table 4.2.1 shows the understanding school heads and teachers had of the concept PI.

Table 4.2.1 School heads' and teachers' understanding of the concept PI

Activities associated with school heads & teachers' understanding of PI	Frequency		%	
	N=10 School heads	N=40 Teachers	School Heads	Teachers
School development and infrastructural maintenance	5	10	<i>50</i>	<i>25</i>
Payment of fees and levies	5	22	<i>50</i>	<i>55</i>
Homework supervision	5	16	<i>50</i>	<i>40</i>
Provision of teaching and learning resources	4	22	<i>40</i>	<i>55</i>
Motivating pupils to learn	4	6	<i>40</i>	<i>15</i>
Parents serving as resource persons	3	6	<i>30</i>	<i>15</i>
Teaching children at home	3	6	<i>30</i>	<i>15</i>
Collaborating with teachers to enhance children's learning	3	12	<i>30</i>	<i>30</i>
Attendance of school events	2	10	<i>20</i>	<i>25</i>
Contributing towards teachers' incentives	2	6	<i>20</i>	<i>15</i>
Good parenting	2	8	<i>20</i>	<i>20</i>
Providing for children's basic needs	2	16	<i>20</i>	<i>40</i>

Responses by school heads and teachers relating to their understanding of PI point to the fact that both school heads' and teachers' understanding of PI is limited. Less than 50% of the school heads and teachers managed to mention more than four of the twelve activities associated with PI indicated in the table above. This showed that they were aware of just a

few ways in which parents could be involved in the education of their children. In fact, during the interviews more than 60% of the school heads struggled to articulate their understanding of the concept PI. In the words of one of the school heads typifying many of these school heads' responses, "*It's really difficult to say what PI is. Umm...it depends on the school ... or perhaps the parents. But basically it's about contributing in cash or in kind towards helping the school to function well.*" An equally typical quote from one of the teachers was: "*Parental involvement should mean parents helping the school, for example building classrooms and the like.*" These were clearly not very confident answers, betraying a very limited understanding of PI.

Most school heads, when indicating their understanding of PI, referred more to school-based involvement than home-based involvement. For example, PI activities such as *parents helping with school development and infrastructural maintenance; paying school fees and levies* and *helping with the provision of teaching and learning resources* featured more prominently in school heads' responses than such activities as *teaching children at home; good parenting* and *providing for children's basic needs*. Apart from *homework supervision* and *motivating pupils to learn*, little mention was made regarding home-based involvement (such as *home discussion*, which is associated with discussing school related activities, and *home supervision*, which involves monitoring the child's out-of-school activities).

Teachers differed from school heads in that they gave less prominence to *school development and infrastructural maintenance* (which they apparently regarded as the school heads' concern). They also gave less prominence to the issue of *parents motivating pupil to learn* (apparently because they thought parents were hardly playing such a role). Teachers gave more prominence than did school heads to activities such as *parents providing teaching/learning resources* and *providing children's basic needs*. This was apparently because they thought that their job as teachers would be made easier if these two issues were addressed. A typical answer was given by a teacher who said, "*It (PI) involves parents helping us by buying books and stationery so that teaching and learning becomes easier.*"

It is noteworthy that few school heads and few teachers mentioned PI activities such as *parents serving as resource persons* (N = 3 or 30% and N = 6 or 15% respectively); *teaching children at home* (N = 6 or 15%) (N = 3 or 30% and N = 6 or 15% respectively); *collaborating with teachers to enhance children's learning* (N = 3 or 30% and N = 12 or 60% respectively).

30% respectively); *attendance of school events* (N = 2 or 20% and N = 10 or 25% respectively), *contributing towards teachers' incentives* (N = 2 or 20% and N = 6 or 15% respectively), and *good parenting* (N = 2 or 20% and N = 8 or 20%). This does not mean that these PI activities are insignificant. It simply means that school heads and teachers who did not mention them may have been unaware that they constituted PI activities.

What emerged from the responses of school heads and teachers was that their knowledge of PI was limited and teachers and school heads gave more prominence to different PI activities. This clearly indicated the need to staff develop both school heads and teachers so that their understanding and appreciation of PI coincided. In the absence of a common understanding and appreciation of PI, school teachers and school heads may work at cross purposes to the detriment of pupils.

Parents who participated in focus group interviews thought they were duty-bound to participate in their children's education but were ignorant of how they should be involved. In the words of one parent: "*As parents we have a responsibility to do everything possible to promote our children's learning, but we are not sure what we should do*". In another focus group interview another parent lamented: "*We are willing to help teachers but our little education stands in the way*". Such responses as these strongly indicated that parents felt incapacitated to participate in their children's education either because they did not know how they could be involved or they believed that they were constrained by the limited education they had. The parents' understanding of PI was clearly limited.

The literature confirms and illuminates these findings. Gregoire (2010:31) affirms that some parents felt ill equipped to assist their children with homework completion. However, despite their own feelings of inadequacy, an overwhelming majority expressed that it was their duty and responsibility to participate in homework.

It emerged from the focus group interviews that some parents thought of PI as having to do more with infrastructural development than anything else. A typical statement from a parent relating to such thinking was: "*If we don't build classrooms our children will learn in the open, if we don't build staff houses qualified teachers may not want to come to our school and those already here may get fed up and leave!*" They did not think much about PI as

involving home-based activities they could engage their children in for the purpose of enhancing the children's school achievement.

There were other parents, however, who indicated during focus group interviews that they understood PI to refer to *the provision of teaching and learning resources* (although they were limited by financial constraints), *helping children with homework* (although they were constrained by their own limited education), and *motivating children to learn*. This meant that parents did not have a common understanding of PI. In consequence of this fact, the need to educate them in respect of PI became self-evident. While it was acknowledged by this researcher that parents had variegated needs in terms of participation in their children's education, there was need to bring them to a level where they had a common appreciation of PI—a level that would enable teachers to collaborate with all of them without too much difficulty. Parents' individual differences/needs could be attended to after establishing the said common understanding.

It was also notable that in virtually all focus group interviews with parents there were some conflicting responses. While some parents thought they were morally bound to be involved in their children's education, there were others who thought that school matters were best dealt with by school teachers and school heads. As one parent typically said: *“Teachers must not expect us to teach children. We are not qualified to do so. It's the teachers' job. Are they not paid for it?”* Such parents were more aware of their perceived limitations than their potential to be meaningfully involved in their children's education. They sounded rather desperate about their perceived limitations. Clearly, they needed to be disabused of such a misplaced perception of their situation.

Refreshingly, some parents thought that their limited education did not entirely prevent them from helping their children learn. As one parent said, *“Though we are barely educated, we can secure help from our neighbours' children who are attending the nearby secondary school.”* Other like-minded parents said there were things they could do to promote children's learning, notwithstanding their limited education. A response which typified this attitude was: *“We can teach our children folktales which teach good morals. This could also develop their listening and speaking skills. We can teach them Karanga proverbs which teach wisdom, and also riddles which sharpen thinking skills”*. Others mentioned that they could teach children crafts, traditional music and dance as well as poetry. Some

parents could be seen nodding their agreement, with a few remarking that they had never thought of doing all these things but were going to try such kind of involvement. They seemed quite excited to learn from their peers that they were not helpless regarding involvement after all. It would clearly be prudent for school heads and teachers to learn from parents what they (parents) could do comfortably by way of helping children with their learning.

There were some male parents who thought PI was more a mother's duty than a father's duty. A response which typified this kind of thinking was: *“A mother must be more involved because culturally a father represents authority in the family. To play with small children would undermine that authority, resulting in indiscipline on the part of children”*. The majority of the parents disagreed, with some vigorously shaking their heads to register their disagreement. However, the fact that some parents held this rather inexplicable view meant that such parents needed to be disabused of such misconceptions. This type of thinking, maybe, resulted from a distortion of the Karanga culture, just as many other parents in the focus group interviews thought it did.

What emerged from focus group responses by parents was that, like school heads and teachers, their understanding of PI was limited. Some parents accentuated their feeling of personal inadequacy while others focused on what they could do to help enhance their children's schooling. It also became apparent from the responses that some parents acted in a reactive manner to schools' demands while other parents were proactive and eager to act on their own initiative.

From the discussion above, it has emerged that school heads, teachers and parents had a limited understanding of what PI entailed and they did not have the same understanding of PI.

4.2.2 Ways in which parents were involved in their children's education in Zaka District

Table 4.2.2 shows what school heads and teachers said about how parents were involved in their children's education.

Table 4.2.2: Ways in which parents were involved in their children's education in Zaka District according to school heads and teachers.

PI activity	Frequency		%	
	N=10 School Heads	N=40 Teachers	School Heads	Teachers
School development & maintenance	8	10	80	25
Payment of school fees and levies	7	20	70	50
Providing resources for teaching and learning	6	20	60	50
Attendance of school meetings and events	2	10	20	25
Visiting school when there is a problem	2	0	20	0
Identifying learners' problems and suggesting solutions	2	0	20	0
Homework supervision	0	18	0	45
Provision of uniforms and food for lunch and break-time	0	14	0	35
Encouraging school attendance	0	6	0	15
Moulding pupils' character	0	4	0	10

Responses by school heads and teachers regarding how parents were involved in their children's education indicated that the respondents were aware of a few ways in which the parents of the children they taught were involved in their children's education. School heads mentioned no more than six ways (PI activities). PI activities mentioned most frequently by school heads were school based and not home based. Eight (80%) school heads mentioned *school development and maintenance*. Seven (70%) of them mentioned *payment of school fees and levies* and six (60%) mentioned *providing resources for teaching and learning*. The other three ways in which parents were involved were mentioned by no more than two (20%) school heads. These were *Identifying learners' problems and suggesting solutions* (20%), *Visiting the school when there was a problem* (20%) and *Attending school events* (20%).

School teachers mentioned eight ways in which parents were involved in their children's education. What some of them mentioned which school heads did not mention were

Homework supervision ($N = 18$ or 45%), **Provision of uniform and food provisions to take to school** ($N = 14$ or 35%), **Encouraging school attendance** ($N = 6$ or 15%) and **Moulding children's character** ($N = 4$ or 10%). It was not clear why school heads did not mention these PI activities. It might be an indication that they were not very sure of what constituted PI.

It is noteworthy that school heads mentioned **Visiting the school when there was a problem**, which school teachers did not mention. This may be because parents making such visits were mostly attended to by the school head and hardly found their way to teachers. Teachers also mentioned more school based PI activities than home based ones.

What stands out prominently from the school heads' and teachers' responses is that PI in Zaka District was not given sufficient attention. Parents were involved in a very limited, if not peripheral, way and schools did not seem to be unduly bothered by this state of affairs.

Parents gave responses that were to some extent consistent with school heads' and teachers' responses. Prominent in their responses were the following ways in which they were involved: **School development and maintenance** (such as helping with the construction of classrooms, teachers' houses, and toilets by means of providing money, materials and labour), **Payment of school fees and levies**, **Provision of teaching/learning resources**, **Buying school uniforms and food provisions to take to school**, and **Encouraging pupils to attend school**. They conceded the point that money was not always easy to come by.

Less prominent in parents' responses were such PI activities as **Homework supervision**. This was mainly because they felt constrained by their own limited education. The few who indicated that they helped children with their homework said they did so by providing children with space and time to do homework undisturbed. Some of them said they told children answers to their homework problems, thereby betraying the fact that they were not quite aware of what they were supposed to do by way of helping children with their homework. Even those who said they sought help from neighbours' children who were attending secondary school could not determine how such help would be rendered.

Not many parents indicated much in terms of what they discussed with their children before they left for school and after they returned from school. The majority of the parents indicated

that before their children went to school in the morning and after the children returned home in the evening, they engaged them in routine conversations which were restricted to routine questions like (in the morning when children left for school): *“Have you put all your books and food in your bag?”* or *“Don’t play along the way...you must get to school in time.”* The same thing happened in the evening when children got back home. The routine questions asked or remarks made included: *“Eat your food quickly so that you go and draw water from the borehole before it gets dark”* or *“Did you learn well today?”* The conversations were mainly ritualistic and thus meant very little to the children. They lacked motivational potency. The parents were not aware that daily conversations about the school, alongside supervision and monitoring, were associated with children’s higher achievement scores in reading and writing (Hoell 2006:7). The need to impress upon parents the importance of engaging their children in motivational conversations cannot be overemphasised. It is also notable that daily conversations about the school provided opportunities for parents to identify their children’s learning problems and generate solutions to such problems.

Parents also mentioned that they tried as much as they could to provide teaching and learning resources although they had real problems in getting money for this purpose. They were grateful that UNICEF was helping them out by donating books and stationery. (In fact, UNICEF was distributing books and stationery in Zaka District during the period the researcher was doing field research for this study.) The parents were very clear that they considered it their responsibility, albeit a difficult one, to provide teaching and learning resources for their children.

Regarding attendance of school events/meetings, the parents conceded that their attendance was irregular or inconsistent. This may be the reason why only two (20%) school heads and ten (25%) teachers mentioned attendance of school events as one of the ways in which parents were involved in their children’s education. Most parents did not see much reason in attending school meetings because at such meetings they were hardly given the opportunity to express their views on pertinent matters.

Only a few parents indicated that they visited the school when there was a problem. It is notable that only two (20%) of school heads mentioned that parents visited the school when there was a problem and no teacher mentioned this. The parents’ attitude was that school

related problems were best left to school heads and teachers to resolve. The same is true regarding the idea of *Parents identifying learners' problems and suggesting solutions*. Only two (20%) school heads and four (10%) teachers mentioned this PI activity. Most parents would rather leave such matters to school heads and teachers. They felt ill equipped to handle them.

Very few parents mentioned **moulding pupils' character** as a PI activity they engaged in. This may be because they could not relate this to school education.

4.2.3 Benefits of parental involvement

As reflected in chapter 2, research across the continents confirms that PI has immense benefit to school children. Table 4.2.3 shows what school heads and teachers in Zaka District regard as the benefits of PI.

Table 4.2.3: Benefits of PI

PI Activity	Frequency		%	
	N=10 School Heads	N=40 Teachers	School heads	Teachers
Maintenance and development of School infrastructure	7	20	70	50
Promotion of trust between parents and teachers	7	16	70	40
Promotion of pupils' motivation	5	10	50	25
Promotion of teachers' motivation	4	10	40	25
Improved school attendance	4	6	40	15
Promotion of good behaviour	3	12	30	30
Payment of fees and levies in time	3	6	30	15
Provision of teaching and learning resources	2	10	20	25

Regarding the benefits of PI, school heads mentioned the following in descending order (in other words, the most frequently mentioned benefit being indicated first and the least frequently mentioned benefit being mentioned last): *maintenance and development of infrastructure* (N=7 or 70%); *promotion of trust between teachers and parents* (N=7 or 70%); *promotion of pupils' motivation* (N=5 or 50%); *promotion of teacher motivation* (N=4 or 40%); *improved school attendance* (N=4 or 40%); *promotion of good behaviour* (N=3 or 30%); *and payment of school fees and levies in time* (N=3 or 30%); *and provision of teaching and learning resources* (N=2 or 20%).

This order of PI benefits given by school heads approximates to that given by teachers. School heads and teachers differed on *the provision of teaching and learning resources* which was given more prominence by teachers than by school heads. This may be because teachers believed that if parents contributed to the provision of teaching and learning resources, teaching and learning would be greatly facilitated.

What was clear from the school heads' and teachers' responses was that, although these respondents had limited knowledge about the benefits of PI, with some failing to come up with more than three benefits, they were somehow aware that PI had benefits and was thus important. It is therefore possible to staff develop them to a level where they would be aware of the immense benefits of PI and take advantage of this knowledge to enhance the performance of pupils under their charge.

During focus group interviews some parents demonstrated a remarkable awareness of the benefits of PI. They indicated that PI fostered a positive relationship between parents and teachers which would result in teachers being more inclined to help pupils. In other words, teachers would have increased work motivation. They also thought that collaboration between parents and teachers resulted in mutual respect, trust and joint (teacher-parent) efforts aimed at enhancing pupils' learning. As one parent typically put it, "***When we work together with teachers, we are bound to understand each other, respect each other and trust each other. This will no doubt result in children's performance getting better.***"

These findings are corroborated by Haack (2007:11) who observes that PI results in parents becoming aware of what teachers do, what their children are learning, and how the school

functions. They develop more positive feelings about their children’s teachers and school. Additionally, parents who are involved feel useful and have better understanding of how they can help their children succeed in school.

According to the parents interviewed, when pupils saw parents and teachers collaborating, they developed greater appreciation of education and, in consequence, would take schooling more seriously. In other words, pupil motivation would be increased. This view is supported by Davis (2004:21) who observes that PI creates a feeling of caring and belonging towards the school and makes pupils more aware of the importance of schooling. Parents also believed that if they were involved in their children’s education, teachers would act more responsibly in relation to their job. Other benefits they mentioned included reduction of absenteeism, the promotion of good behaviour in pupils, and pupils not creating disharmony between parents and teachers. They would not be able to play parents against teachers. As one parent typically put it, *“When children see us working collaboratively with teachers they will take schooling seriously and won’t attempt to create disharmony between parents and teachers. They will realise we are a team.”*

School development and maintenance was also mentioned as a benefit accruing from PI, so was the boosting of parents’ self confidence in getting involved in their children’s education.

It must be noted, however, that not all parents mentioned all the PI benefits indicated above. Some conceded that they did not know much about PI benefits but said they had really been enlightened by their counterparts. In the words of one of the parents: *“We certainly need more interactions like this one. We have learned a lot regarding our role in our children’s education.”* Such an attitude is an indication that parents were prepared to learn what they could do to enhance the education of their children.

4.2.4 Determinants of parental involvement

Table 4.2.4 Determinants of PI

Determinants of PI	Frequency		%	
	N= 10 School Heads	N= 40 Teachers	School Heads	Teachers
Home environment	6	14	60	35

Parents' cognitions about their role in their children's formal education	6	10	60	25
Family demographical variables	4	10	40	25

School heads (N=6 or 60%) mentioned *home environment* as a determinant of parental involvement. Aspects of home environment that they mentioned included reading materials in the home, story- telling, and cognitive stimulation at home. Teachers (N=14 or 35%) also mentioned home environment as a determinant of PI. Some parents in the focus group interviews mentioned home environment too. There was general agreement that most home environments in rural Zaka district were deprived. In the words of one school head: *“There are no such things as computers, playing cards, board games...no library or museum nearby. This places pupils at a disadvantage. It limits opportunities for parent-child interaction.”*

It is incontestable that when opportunities for parent-child interaction are limited, parental involvement is also limited.

Parents' cognitions about their role in their children's formal education was also mentioned by school heads (N=6 or 60%) and teachers (N=10 or 25%) as a determinant of PI. The three forms of parental cognition were parents' aspirations concerning their children's future occupation, parents' self-efficacy in rearing and educating their children and parents' perceptions of the school.

One teacher gave a typical answer when he mentioned, in relation to parents' aspirations concerning their children's future occupation, that when parents *“do not have high aspirations for their children's future they do not exert efforts to ensure that their children reach lofty goals”*.

In relation to parents' self-efficacy in rearing and educating their children, one parent spoke for many when she said: *“When you do not believe that you have the capacity to influence things in the direction you want, then you are not confident to help your children with their*

schooling.” It is thus essential to help parents have self-belief in regard to the education of their children.

Parents’ perceptions of the school was the third PI determinant mentioned by school heads (N=4 or 40%), teachers (N=10 or 25%) and parents in focus group interviews. In relation to this determinant, one school head’s remark was quite revealing. He said, *“If teachers are perceived as welcoming, concerned about children’s educational needs, respectful to parents and communicate freely with parents, then parents become inclined to participate in their children’s education.”* Whatever the school does, it must be perceived as welcoming by parents for them to voluntarily participate in their children’s education. So the perceptions the school creates must be positive.

4.2.5 Barriers to parental involvement

Notwithstanding the immense benefits of PI, there are strong barriers to it which need to be surmounted. Table 4.2.5 barriers to PI mentioned by school heads and teachers.

4.2.5: Barriers to parental involvement

PI activities	Frequency		%	
	N=10 School Heads	N =40 Teachers	School heads	Teachers
Absence of a clear government policy	10	29	100	72,5
Absence of a clear school policy	10	29	100	72,5
School heads’ limited knowledge of the concept PI	10	28	100	70
School teachers’ limited knowledge of the concept PI	10	26	100	65
Parents’ limited education	9	30	90	75
Parents’ financial constraints	8	26	80	65
Negative parental attitudes	7	28	70	70

Negative teacher attitudes	5	14	50	35
Teachers' bad behaviour	5	14	50	35
Parents' disrespectful attitude towards teachers	5	16	50	40
Poor communication between home and school	5	20	50	50
Teachers' active participation in politics	4	16	40	40
Irresponsible pupils	3	14	30	35
Lazy/incompetent teachers	3	12	30	30
Culture	3	10	30	25
Autocratic school leadership	0	10	0	25

School heads mentioned the following barriers to PI in descending order (in other words, the most frequently mentioned barrier being indicated first and the least frequently mentioned barrier being mentioned last): *absence of clear government policy/guidelines* (N=10 or 100 %); *school heads' limited knowledge of the concept parental involvement* (N=10 or 100%); *school teachers' limited knowledge of the concept parental involvement* (N=10 or 100%); *parents' limited education* (N=9 or 90%); *parents' financial constraints* (N=8 or 80%); *negative parental attitudes* (N=7 or 70%); *negative teacher attitudes* (N=5 or 50%); *teachers' bad behaviour* (N=5 or 50%); *parents' disrespectful attitude towards teachers* (N=5 or 50%); *poor communication between home and school* (N=5 or 50%); *politics* (N=4 or 40%); *irresponsible pupils* (N=3 or 30%); *lazy/incompetent teachers* (N=3 or 30%); *culture* (N=3 or 30%) and *autocratic school leadership* (N=1 or 10%).

This order of barriers to PI given by school heads approximates to that given by teachers. For teachers the picture emerged as follows: *absence of clear government policy/guidelines* (N=29 or 72,5 %); *school heads' limited knowledge of the concept parental involvement* (N=28 or 70%); *school teachers' limited knowledge of the concept parental involvement* (N=26 or 65%); *parents' limited education* (N=30 or 75%); *parents' financial constraints* (N=26 or 65%); *negative parental attitudes* (N=28 or 70%); *negative teacher attitudes* (N=14 or 35%); *teachers' bad behaviour* (N=14 or 35%); *parents' disrespectful attitude towards teachers* (N=16 or 40%); *poor communication between home and school* (N=20 or 50%); *teachers' active participation in politics* (N=16 or 40%); *irresponsible pupils* (N=14 or 35%); *lazy/incompetent teachers* (N=12 or 30%); *culture* (N=10 or 25%) and *autocratic*

school leadership (N=10 or 25%). Differences occurred where both school heads and teachers were apparently reluctant to blame themselves for hindering PI in their schools. These differences are borne out in the discussion below.

4.2.5.1 Absence of a clear government policy or guidelines

The school heads thought that in the absence of a clear government policy or guidelines, schools were constrained to generate effective PI strategies. This was the case because nobody felt that they were obliged to make PI part and parcel of pupils' learning experience. Since both school personnel and parents did not know how to set boundaries relating to PI, there was potential for confusion and ultimately conflict between parents and teachers (and even between teachers and school heads). In the words of one school head: ***“I seriously think that without a clear policy one would grope in the dark and end up defeating the purpose of parental involvement.”***

Teachers thought pretty much the same as school heads. Their thinking was typified by the words of the teacher who said, ***“Without guidelines from government we are bound to make mistakes for which we will be ruthlessly blamed...so it is better to leave it (PI) alone.”***

Parents thought similarly. They felt that without government giving direction or guidance, confusion prevailed. One parent put it succinctly when she said: ***“In the absence of government guidelines school heads and teachers were bound to be inconsistent in their handling of parental involvement. This inevitably confused us parents.”***

4.2.5.2 Absence of a clear school policy on PI

School heads and teachers thought that in the absence of a clear school policy or guidelines, schools could not generate effective PI strategies. This was because nobody would be clear on what needed to be done. Efforts would not be coordinated and frustration and confusion would reign. In the words of one school head: ***“Without a clear school policy confusion prevails. Teachers and parents wouldn't know how to collaborate.”*** This was supported by the teacher who said: ***“With both school personnel and parents not knowing how to determine PI, there was bound to be confusion and ultimately conflict between parents and teachers (and even between teachers and school heads).”***

Parents also thought the absence of a clear policy on PI resulted in confusion and misunderstanding. In the words of one parent: ***“We end up confusing and misunderstanding***

each other.” Lemmer and Van Wyk (2004:261) confirm that the attitudes of schools towards active PI are frequently ambiguous. This is mainly because of the absence of a clear school policy on PI. Without a clear policy the school climate is affected in that some teachers, ignorant of how to handle PI issues, would not welcome parents to school. On this matter Haack (2007:45) declares that parents were more likely to become involved at school if the school welcomed them and made it easy for them to be involved. In support of the need for a clear school policy on PI, Hoell (2006:7) observes that while many factors affected a parent’s involvement, it was the teachers and school officials’ responsibility to encourage the interactions between school and home. This can be effectively done if there is a clear school policy or guidelines to guide both school personnel and parents.

4.2.5.3 School heads’ limited knowledge of the concept PI

Both school heads and teachers thought that the school heads’ limited knowledge of the concept PI constituted a barrier to parents’ involvement in their children’s education. Their argument was that the school head was supposed to give direction and guidance especially on such matters as PI which involved non-professionals (parents) so as to avoid confusing the parents. In other words, the school head was expected to (be able to and) spearhead the formulation of a school policy on PI. With his/her limited knowledge, the school head was ill equipped to play such a role. In any case, he/she would not be competent to monitor and evaluate PI activities at his/her school. In the rather severe words of one school head, ***“How can one blind man lead other blind men?”*** A school teacher went a step further and said, ***“Management functions such as planning, motivating, monitoring, controlling and evaluating cannot be carried out in terms of an issue the school head is uninformed about.”***

The school climate in relation to PI is obviously influenced by the school head’s limited knowledge of PI. For example, with the school head not knowing what procedures needed to be put in place for communication to flow from school to family and from family to school, an uninviting school climate may prevail (Haack 2007:45).

Parents also thought that if school heads were unclear about PI, it would be difficult for them to participate meaningfully in their children’s education. One parent put it aptly by saying: ***“Because of our limited education, we very much depend on the advice we get from school heads and teachers in relation to matters to do with our children’s education.”***

The need for school heads to be staff developed on PI emerged from such responses as those cited above.

4.2.5.4 Teachers' limited knowledge of

It was not only the school heads' limited knowledge that impacted negatively on PI in schools, but also the teachers' limited knowledge. School heads and teachers thought that teachers could not be accountable in relation to something they were uninformed about. They would be hesitant to introduce something they had a hazy idea about. If they dared to introduce PI activities, they risked being criticised by both school heads and parents. As one school head put it, *"Teachers teach what they were trained to teach. They won't experiment with things that may poison relations between parents and themselves."* Concurringly, one teacher said: *"We were not exposed to any meaningful content relating to PI at college. It would be a great risk to grope in the dark."*

From such responses it was clear that there was need for staff development for teachers on PI. It also emerged from the responses that there was need for Teachers' Colleges and Universities' Teacher Education Departments to incorporate PI in their curriculum. This would greatly enhance PI in schools. Teachers needed to initiate communication between schools and parents in order to find out what parents were doing and to let them know how to help (Haack 2007:46). When teachers are barely informed about PI, they are likely to be disinclined to reach out to families and offer them support and feedback for what they would be doing to help their children learn (Hoover-Dempsey et al 2005 in Haack 2007:46). Clearly, teachers needed to be knowledgeable about PI for them to facilitate it in their schools. As Hoell (2007:7) affirms, when teachers made PI part of their regular teaching practice, parents became more involved and felt more positive about their abilities to help.

Parents also thought that teachers' limited knowledge of PI impacted negatively on their (parents') ability to be involved. In one parent's words typifying parents' thinking: *"If teachers are not sure about they what should do and what we should do in relation to PI, then obviously we can't talk of any meaningful PI taking place."*

School heads, teachers and parents all shared the view that teachers' limited knowledge impacted negatively on PI.

4.2.5.5 Parents' limited education

Parents' limited education was also viewed as constituting a barrier to PI by teachers (N=30 or 75%), school heads (N=9 or 90%) and parents. Hanni and Phippen (2010) found that most parents felt that PI is important to them and they wanted the teachers to show them or give them things that they could do with their children at home or as an activity in the classroom. Indeed barely educated parents were ignorant of what PI entailed. Siririka (2007:161) confirms that limited parental educational experience resulted in the lack of relevant skills to get involved. As one parent expressed it, ***“We are not very much educated. We don't know what we are supposed to do...and we are not sure if we can do what the school may expect us to do.”*** The parents did not know why and how they could be involved in school activities. Such parents were also ignorant of their rights in relation to involvement in their children's education. Some parents, the respondents submitted, had an inferiority complex resulting from their own unhappy experience with school education. As a result, they tended to shun the school.

Issues like homework supervision were viewed by school heads and teachers as beyond the capacity of uneducated parents (although this view is contestable since uneducated parents can still do quite a lot in terms of children's homework, as was shown in parents' own responses given below).

Owing to their limited education, some parents thought that school matters were best left to school teachers who were trained to deal with them and were also paid to do so. Zoppi (2006:16) affirms that some parents think that their own lack of education precludes them from participating in their children's education. As one school head put it, ***“Parents literally surrender their children to the school and expect the school to handle all matters relating to their children's learning.”*** This was corroborated by the teacher who said, ***“Uneducated parents cannot help children with their schooling simply because they have no capacity to do so.”*** The need to capacitate parents so that they meaningfully participate in their children's education is self evident in these responses. Hoell (2006:7)

Most parents also felt that they were inhibited by their limited education in relation to PI. As one parent put it: ***“Much as we would want to help our children with their schooling, we are constrained by our own limited education.”*** Such responses as this one confirm the need

to mount workshops for parents to empower them to meaningfully participate in their children's education.

The literature confirms and illuminates these findings. Mansfield (2009:21) observes that parent educational level has been positively correlated to PI (see also Depleanty et al 2007). Depleanty et al (2007) in Mansfield (2009:21) found that parents with a higher degree of education are more likely to be active in school activities, PTA meetings and parent-teacher conferences. On the other hand, parents with low educational level were unable to provide their children with the skills to negotiate the school system successfully, which could in turn impact negatively on the children's school performance. Such parents tended to be less involved when it came to homework (Tam and Chan 2009:81).

It was equally true that that parents with a higher educational level were better qualified than less educated parents to help children with homework (Depleanty et al 2007 in Mansfield 2009:21). It was therefore essentially important that teachers have an understanding of pupils' and parents' background in order for them to be able to adequately determine the best learning methods for pupils and how to include parents in the children's education.

4.2.5.6 Parents' financial constraints

Parents' financial constraints were regarded as constituting a barrier to parental involvement by teachers, school heads and parents. As one school head expressed it, *"Most of the parents are too poor to pay their children's fees and levies in time...that is if they pay at all. That is why they dare not set foot on the school yard."* This implies that some parents shunned the school because they were afraid of being asked about the money they owed the school! In a typical response, one teacher lamented parents' untenable situation: *"They contribute precious little in terms of school infrastructural development, hence their children learn in terrible conditions! They also don't buy the required stationery."* So in terms of such school based activities as referred to above, the financially constrained parents were not meaningfully involved in their children's education.

Some parents believed that their poor financial standing immeasurably compromised their ability to meaningfully involve themselves in their children's education. In the rather severe words of one parent: *"We don't have anything...we are an embarrassment when it comes to contributing to our own children's education. It makes it difficult for us to claim a say in*

how our children are educated at school". Quite a number of parents in the focus group interview this parent participated in nodded their agreement with this remark. This implies that some parents were rendered impotent by their lack of money. They felt that they had no basis on which to claim their right to participate in their children's education. It sounded like their financial constraints stripped them of their right to be involved in their children's education.

These findings have support in the literature. Haack (2007:47), for example cites family characteristics such as financial standing as a determinant of PI. Notable here is the fact that parents' financial standing was usually related to their education level. Vogels (2002:2) confirms that parents with poor socio-economic status were more likely to have a low level of education, a low income and no job. This impacted negatively on their self esteem.

4.2.5.7 Negative parental attitudes

Negative parental attitudes were also cited by school heads and teachers as constituting a barrier to parental involvement. The negative attitudes manifested in a number of ways. There were parents who simply believed that the responsibility for education belonged to the school (Siririka 2007:27; Zoppi 2006:4).

Some parents were alleged to be so overprotective of their children that they did not send them to school if it was cold, or they prohibited their children from participating in sports in case they would get injured. *"There are parents who think we are not sufficiently concerned about their children's welfare that they prohibit their children from participating in sports for fear that they might be injured,"* said one school head.

Other parents were said to be uncooperative—they never bothered to attend school events such as parents' meetings, consultation days or open days. Some were even said to frequent village beer parties where they purchased beer while they owed the school money in terms of fees and levies. One teacher put it thus, *"Some parents are so irresponsible that they prioritise beer drinking ahead of payment of fees."* This, according to school heads and teachers, frustrated teachers to the extent that it impacted negatively on their performance. Some teachers thought that their poor remuneration resulted in parents failing to respect them. Said one disillusioned teacher, *"You even hear some parents say, 'I am broke like a*

teacher.' They no longer respect us...it's so sad." It is clear that where there is no respect cooperation is compromised.

It is also notable that some parents thought that teachers and school heads were likely to view them in bad light with regards to PI. In the words of one parent: *"Because of our situation in terms of education level and poverty, school heads and teachers somewhat blame us for our children's failings."* Such parents assumed the attitude that they were not appreciated by school personnel and thus did not need to make the effort to be involved.

This finding is supported in the literature. Haack (2007:13) notes that some parents believed that teachers would judge them negatively, blame them for their children's learning difficulties and would not value their input. This view is also supported by Holloway (2008:4).

4.2.5.8 Negative teacher attitudes

Beliefs held by parents and teachers about each other contribute to the potential conflict among them and result in limited parental participation in specific PI activities (Haack 2007:13). The beliefs yielded various attitudes which impacted either positively or negatively on PI.

Negative teacher attitudes were seen in this research as constituting a barrier to parental involvement. Some teachers looked down upon parents whom they regarded as uneducated and so incapable of meaningful PI. In the words of one teacher: *"The parents are not sufficiently educated to be helpful in terms of their children's schooling. Involving them will just make things worse."* Most teachers thus did not bother to communicate with parents on pupils' academic progress and behaviour. Such teachers did not want parents in their classrooms because they thought they would be disturbed since the parents did not have anything helpful to offer. This negative attitude also meant that parents were not given the opportunity to communicate their expectations, or even their concerns, regarding their children's education. This had the potential of frustrating the parents.

The literature lends credence to these findings. Haack (2007:45) confirms that some teachers view parents as unable to work collaboratively with them and may not try to involve them or tell them how they could help. Parhar (2006:2) notes that teacher ideology played a

fundamental role in excluding PI in schools. Teachers holding deficit ideologies believed that deprived parents lacked cultural and social advantages necessary for involvement. In other words, they were not cultured in the system for them to be able to competently participate in their children's education. Teachers subscribing to this view may reinforce practices that excluded uneducated and socio-economically disadvantaged parents. According to Haack (2007:45) some teachers do not know how to involve parents, believe parents do not have the skills, or do not think it is fair to ask parents to spend time on school related activities at home.

Some teachers felt that their heavy workloads made it impossible to take PI seriously. This gave them a resigned attitude. As one teacher put it: *“When you teach 56 pupils how many parents have you to deal with... and where do you get the time to do so?”* Mansfield (2009:18) affirms that school size, and by extension class size, could impact negatively on PI. When teachers believed that their teaching loads were barely manageable, they regarded PI as a luxury.

Parents believed teachers had either a condescending attitude towards them, or they simply did not think parents had the capacity to be meaningfully involved. One parent typically said, *“Some of these teachers really despise us because of our limited education and limited means. They don't see anything good coming from us.”* Most parents thought that teachers' negative attitudes convinced them that they were not welcome to actively participate in their children's education. As one parent put it: *“It is teachers who are supposed to guide us regarding how we could be involved in our children's education. If they demonstrate a negative attitude towards parental involvement, then there is no way we can be meaningfully involved.”*

Clearly, the responses of parents indicate that teachers have an obligation to convince parents through word and deed that they were appreciated as people who could make a contribution to their children's education.

4.2.5.9 Teachers' bad behaviour

Teachers' bad behaviour was also considered a barrier to PI by school heads, teachers and parents. It is notable that as few as 35% (N=14) of teachers mentioned teachers' bad behaviour as a barrier to PI. This is apparently because they did not want to lay the blame on

themselves. The bad behaviour manifested in several ways. It was alleged that some teachers had unsavoury relationships with pupils or with wives of people who were working outside the country or in cities. This led to teachers being held with suspicion by parents. One parent aptly expressed it thus: ***“When teachers become a threat to morality we can’t see them as partners in whatever regard.”***

There were also teachers who were said to be lazy and negligent of duty. They were seen away from school during working hours. A disillusioned parent commented: ***“When teachers demonstrate that they are not committed to their work you don’t expect parents to take such teachers seriously.”*** Others drank beer to the extent of losing their dignity, thereby tarnishing their image. As one school head put it, ***“Some teachers over imbibe to the extent of acting like village buffoons. No parent would respect such teachers.”*** It was also said there were teachers who abused school children by asking them to fetch water from wells or boreholes or to gather fire wood for the teachers’ personal use. Some teachers were said to be guilty of asking pupils to sweep or clean their houses. This constituted unprofessional conduct and irked parents. One teacher put it thus: ***“Treating pupils like little slaves is simply not on. It creates bad blood between parents and teachers.”***

It is clear that from the responses given above that when teachers misbehaved they attracted negative attitudes from parents and thus inhibited PI.

4.2.5.10 Parents’ disrespectful attitude towards teachers

Parents’ disrespectful attitude towards teachers was also cited as a barrier to PI. Teachers’ bad behaviour contributed to parents becoming disrespectful towards them. As one school head put it: ***“Respect is earned. It cannot be taken for granted.”***

There are, however, other factors that contributed to parents being disrespectful to teachers. Poor working conditions inclusive of low salaries made teachers paupers. People were making jokes about teachers’ meagre salaries (***“Ndakachona sa ticha”***—meaning ***“I am broke like a teacher”***). Parents were being asked to contribute incentives to augment teachers’ meagre salaries. This has angered some poor parents who thought that teachers had assumed a mercenary attitude towards their profession. The resultant disrespect of teachers by parents (and society at large) had a demoralising effect on teachers. Instead of regarding

each other as partners, some teachers and parents were antagonistic towards each other. This inevitably impacted negatively on PI.

4.2.5.11 Poor communication between school and home

Poor communication was seen as a barrier to PI by stakeholders. All parties (school heads, teachers and parents) were guilty of not communicating with each other.

Teachers felt that parents did not communicate about important issues such as a child's health problems or grief in the family. This made it difficult for teachers to handle children appropriately. As one teacher said, *"Sometimes you push a pupil too hard not knowing that he/she is unwell or is grieved."* It was also felt by all stakeholders that neither teachers nor parents communicated their expectations or concerns to each other. This was caused by various reasons. In some cases teachers thought that parents had too little education to be able to help with the education of their children (*"The parents of the children we teach are not educated enough to be able to meaningfully help their children with their learning. There is no point bothering them with school matters"*, said one teacher). In other cases parents themselves thought that all matters relating to school should be left to teachers who were knowledgeable and were actually paid for it. In the words of one parent, *"What can we tell teachers about education? They are sufficiently educated to deal with all matters relating to school. We should not interfere with their work"*. Such thinking on the part of teachers, school heads and parents tended to build barriers between school and home instead of building bridges. They became frustrated with each other because they operated unaware of each other's expectations or concerns. There were also cases where parents simply did not know how to communicate their expectations and concerns to the school. They ended up regarding teachers with suspicion and vice versa.

The literature illuminates the findings. Haack (2007:30) confirms that home-school collaboration includes communication between home and school or teachers and parents, decision-making and school collaboration with the community and families. The problem is that the culture of the school tends to mimic white, middle class cultural values, resources and communication methods which could be alien to some communities (Haack, 2007:30). This may impact negatively on PI relating to parents belonging to other cultures. Communication to parents should be open and stress free. Open communication between

parents and teachers can help parents feel at ease about receiving needed help with their children's academic work (Tam and Chan 2009:81). Communication should not only be about negative things that occurred at school concerning the pupil but also about special things or positive things that happened in class (Tam and Chan 2009:81).

Teachers need to provide other means of communicating with parents, whether it is through phone calls, mail, home visits or meeting at a popular shopping centre. That way they could reach out to difficult-to-contact parents (Tam and Chan 2009:81). The burden to communicate is more on teachers than on parents.

4.2.5.12 Teachers' active participation in Politics

Politics was also viewed as a barrier to PI by school heads, teachers as well as parents. Four (40%) school heads and sixteen (40%) teachers and parents saw politics as interfering with PI. This was mainly because when parents and teachers supported different political parties they saw each other as adversaries.

Some school heads recalled the time when civil servants were barred from actively participating in politics. In the words of one school head, ***“In the past civil servants were not allowed to actively participate in politics. This helped in that they never got into conflict with people they were supposed to serve.”*** However, teachers thought that it was their right to participate actively in politics. Parents were thus not supposed to expect them to support the political parties they supported. As one teacher put it, ***“It is a violation of my human rights for anyone to require me to support a political party they support—that is not what freedom and independence mean.”*** As much as teachers thought that participating in politics was in accordance with their human rights, some parents thought that teachers were in danger of teaching their children political ideologies they did not believe in if they belonged to political parties they did not agree with. One parent put it strongly when he said, ***“Teachers need to be discreet when they participate in politics lest we suspect them of sending to our children messages that contradict what we believe in.”***

What emerged from the responses of school heads, teachers and parents was that active political participation on the part of teachers had the potential effect of generating suspicion and antagonism between teachers and parents. This obviously impacted negatively on PI.

4.2.5.13 Irresponsible pupils

School heads (N=3 or 30%), teachers (N=14 or 35%) and parents also saw irresponsible pupils as another barrier to PI. They all agreed that there were some pupils who deliberately distorted information that was sent from school to home and vice versa. *“Some mischievous pupils distort information we send to parents, and this causes unnecessary misunderstanding between school and home,”* affirmed one school head. The irresponsible pupils were alleged to talk negatively about school, the school head and teachers. Such negativity was bound to sour relations between school and home. One teacher put it succinctly when she said, *“Sometimes your pupil’s parents develop an inexplicable negative attitude towards you and you will only discover later that it was because of some falsehoods peddled by the child.”* The irresponsible children were also said to hide homework from parents thereby creating the impression that parents were irresponsible and were unwilling to assist their children in their learning. This was confirmed by parents, with one of them saying, *“Some of these children hide homework from us, and teachers may think that we have an uncaring attitude towards our children’s education.”*

There were some pupils, however, who were acknowledged as facilitators of PI. Such pupils talked positively about school, school head and teachers. They demonstrated a healthy relationship with their teachers. As one parent put it, *“My child actually initiated a positive relation between me and her teacher when she asked if she could bring her teacher some ground nuts. It made me want to meet the teacher and a good relationship between us developed.”* Such pupils also demonstrated a love for learning. In the words of an animated parent participating in a focus group interview, *“My child always desires to talk to me about what she would have learned at school. She is so proud of her school achievements.”* Other parents confirmed that their children would nag them in an effort to persuade them to attend school events.

While there are pupils who actively, even if unwittingly, promote PI, there are others who actively create barriers to PI. In the words of Edwards and Alldred (2002) in Deslandes and Cloutier (2002:47), there are children who are just as active in discouraging, evading and obstructing their parents’ involvement as they are in promoting it.

4.2.5.14 Lazy and incompetent teachers

Lazy and incompetent teachers were viewed by school heads (N=3 or 30 %) and teachers (N= 12 or 30%) as barriers to PI. This was so because they frustrated pupils by not preparing for their work seriously and by not marking children's books thoroughly, or in time. Such laziness and/or incompetence resulting in pupils' performance going down made pupils speak negatively about school and teachers. In consequence, parents assumed a negative attitude towards school and teachers. As one parent aptly put it, ***“When a child demonstrates hatred for school and speaks negatively about teachers, as a parent you will end up resenting the school and teachers.”*** Corroboratively, one teacher said, ***“Lazy and incompetent teachers give teachers a bad name. Parents cannot work with such teachers, obviously.”***

4.2.5.15 Culture

Culture was also seen as a barrier to PI by some parents. There were some parents who thought that it was more a mother' duty than a father's to be involved in the primary school education of their children. The implausible reason for this was expressed by one parent who said that a father should not interact too closely with young children because they would not respect his authority and end up ill-disciplined. Such parents also thought that mothers were supposed to take care of the education of young children such as those attending low grades (one to about five). They would be involved when the children got older. As one parent put it, ***“When a child gets to twelve, thirteen...fathers will become involved. Mothers will have done their bit, but I am not saying they will cease being involved, no. That's our culture”***. Although some parents supported this view, most shook their heads in disagreement to this kind of thinking. This was clearly a minority view. However, the fact that there were some parents who thought that way meant that this misrepresentation of culture was an issue deserving attention.

4.2.5.16 Autocratic school leadership

Teachers (N=10 or 25%) and parents in various focus group interviews cited autocratic school leadership as a barrier to PI. As one teacher put it, ***“There are school heads who believe that they possess the school. They don't consult and people lose interest in matters relating to the school”***. This was corroborated by parents, one of whom said, ***“The school head thinks we are too uneducated to contribute ideas for the development of the school. He makes us feel irrelevant”***. From these responses it is clear that autocratic school leadership impacts negatively on PI. Parents subjected to such autocratic school leadership

did not feel free to communicate their expectations as well as their concerns. They did not consider themselves partners with the school in their children’s education. School heads were deafeningly quiet about this barrier. This could be because they did not realise the full impact of an autocratic leadership style on PI, or they were autocratic themselves..

It emerges from the discussion above that barriers to PI result from varied situations such as lack of clear government (and consequently school) policy on PI, lack of knowledge related to PI on the part of school heads, teachers and parents, financial constrains, negative attitudes of school heads, teachers and parents (apparently caused by a lack of appreciation of the significance of PI), poor communication, politics, irresponsible pupils, lazy and incompetent teachers, distortion of culture and autocratic school leadership. It is also clear that these barriers are contextually based. Consequently, strategies to mitigate or overcome them need to account for the unique situation of Zaka District.

4.2.6 Strategies to overcome barriers to parental involvement

Notwithstanding the apparently formidable barriers to parental involvement in Zaka District, strategies can be formulated to mitigate or overcome the barriers. Table 4.2.6 shows some of such strategies indicated by school heads and teachers.

Table 4.2.6: Strategies to overcome barriers to parental involvement.

Strategy to overcome barriers to PI	Frequency		%	
	N=10 School heads	N=40 Teachers	School heads	Teachers
Workshops/meetings for parents	10	28	100	70
Generation of clear government policy on PI	9	20	90	50
Reassuring parents that the school needs their support in its educative purpose	7	22	70	55
Schools to have policy/guidelines on PI	7	20	70	50

Enhancing communication between home and school	7	20	70	50
Inclusion of PI in teacher education curriculum	6	20	60	50
Schools and parents to encourage pupils to take messages from school to parents seriously	6	20	60	50
Pupils to be encouraged to speak truthfully and positively about the school, teachers and the school head	6	18	60	45
Workshops/seminars for teachers	5	12	50	30
Giving pupils homework parents are competent to help them with	5	0	50	0
Teachers to be discreetly involved in politics	5	0	50	0
Government to help with capital for income generating projects	5	12	50	30
Government to remunerate teachers adequately	5	10	50	25
Learning from other schools reputed to have vibrant PI	4	10	40	25
Teachers to desist from unbecoming behaviour	4	0	40	0
Teachers to make home visits when it is desirable to do so	4	10	40	25
Schools to be transparent, especially regarding use of school funds	3	10	30	25
Government to introduce fees/levies for work programme	0	10	0	25
Reducing teacher/pupil ratio	0	10	0	25

School heads mentioned the following strategies to mitigate or overcome barriers to PI in descending order (in other words, the most frequently mentioned strategy being indicated first and the least frequently mentioned strategy being mentioned last): **mounting workshops for parents (N=10 or 100 %)**; **generation of a clear government policy on PI (N=9 or 90%)**; **generation of school policy or guidelines on PI (N=7 or 70%)**; **reassuring parents that the school needs their support in its educative purpose (N=7 or 70%)**; **enhancing**

communication between home and school (N=7 Or 70%); inclusion of PI in the teacher education curriculum (N=6 or 60%); schools and parents to encourage pupils to take messages from school to parents seriously (N=6 or 60%); pupils to be encouraged to speak truthfully and positively about the school, teachers and school head (N=6 or 60%); mounting workshop seminars for teachers (N=5 or 50%); giving pupils homework parents are competent to help them with (N=5 or 50%); teachers to be discreetly involved in politics (N=5 or 50%); government to help with capital for income generating projects (N=5 or 50%); government to remunerate teacher adequately (N=5 or 50%); learning from other schools reputed to have vibrant PI (N=4 or 40%); teachers to desist from unbecoming behaviour (N=4 or 40%); teachers to make home visits when it is desirable to do so (N=4 or 40); and schools to be transparent especially regarding the use of school funds (N=3 or 30%).

Teachers' responses followed pretty much the same pattern (order) as those of school heads. Notable differences relate to three strategies which were mentioned by school heads but not by teachers (*giving parents homework parents could help them with, teachers to be discreetly involved in politics and teachers to desist from engaging in unbecoming behaviour*) and two strategies which were mentioned by teachers but not by school heads (*namely, government to introduce a fees/levies for work programme, and teacher/pupil ratio*).

The reasons why teachers did not mention the strategies indicated above were apparently because (a) they did not think that they were guilty of giving pupils homework their parents could not help their children with, (b) they believed that they were entitled to participate in politics like any other citizen and (c) they did not want to create the impression that teachers' unbecoming behaviour was a big issue. The reason why school heads did not mention the two strategies indicated above were apparently that they simply did not think of them as pertinent strategies.

The strategies to mitigate or overcome barriers to PI are discussed in descending order (in other words the most frequently mentioned strategy being discussed first and the least mentioned one being discussed last) in 4.2.6.1 below.

4.2.6.1 Mounting workshops for parents to learn about PI.

This strategy was mentioned most frequently by both school heads and teachers. They apparently believed that parents' ignorance of the significance of PI, or their ignorance of how to be involved, constituted the biggest problem. This kind of thinking was consistent with responses like, "*Most parents are blank when it comes to PI...they have no idea as to how to be involved*" (the words of one school head), or "*Most of these parents are too ignorant to be involved in their children's education*" (the words of one teacher). Such responses give credence to the belief that some teachers and school heads tended to blame parents for lack of meaningful PI. This was unfair since school heads and teachers elsewhere in this research acknowledged that they did not know enough about PI to initiate effective PI activities.

Although teachers and school heads tended to blame parents for lack of meaningful PI in their schools, parents exonerated themselves by indicating that they needed workshops where they could be enlightened on how to be meaningfully involved in their children's education. In the words of one parent, "*We are not sure how we are supposed to be involved in our children's education, but we want to be involved. The government or the school should organise workshops or seminars to help us understand what we are supposed to do.*" This is a clear indication that parents were desirous of being assisted to improve their participation in the education of their children.

The strategy is supported by the literature. Haack (2007:47) acknowledges that parents may not have the skills (and knowledge) that they need to help with their children's school work or may believe that they will not be effective at helping their children. Workshops could take care of these impediments to PI. Michael (2004) corroborates this view by affirming that while all parents irrespective of race or culture have an interest in their children's education, they require guidance and support in parenting skills. Such guidance may be given at workshops and subsequent engagements with parents. Those parents who believed that school matters must be left to school personnel (Siririka 2007:27; Zoppi 2006:16) would also be enlightened at such workshops.

4.2.6.2 Generation of a clear government policy on PI

School heads (N=9 or 90%) and teachers (N=20 or 50%) thought that a clear government policy on PI was indispensable. In its absence, it was difficult to generate a school policy or

guidelines in relation to PI. One school head put it thus, ***“One has to be clear where PI starts and ends. The government should provide the guidelines so that schools are clear about the matter.”*** This was corroborated by a teacher who said, ***“We do not want to do something we are not too sure about. If things go wrong we will be blamed for it.”***

Parents thought if government enunciated policy on PI, not only will it (PI) be taken seriously, but also all stakeholders will stand guided by such policy. One parent put it thus, ***“They (government) make the law on important issues...this seems like an important issue to me.”***

4.2.6.3 Generation of school policy and guidelines on PI

School heads (N=7 or 70%) and teachers (N=20 or 50%) believed that schools needed to have a clear policy to provide guidance regarding PI. Without such guidance there could be confusion. As one school head expressed it, ***“In the absence of a clear school policy or guidelines, teachers may attach varied importance to PI and approach it very differently, resulting in confusing parents.”*** One teacher put it thus, ***“Without a school policy on PI, parents can get confused when their child moves to the next grade where there will be a different teacher with a drastically different approach to PI.”***

Some parents also thought that government needed to take the initiative and provide guidelines that schools and parents could follow. ***“We don’t know what we are supposed to do. We look up to the government to show us the way,”*** said one parent.

The literature gives credence to these findings. Hoover-Dempsey et al (2005) in Dogaru (2008:26) assert that the practices that the schools employ to involve parents influence parents’ decisions about whether to become involved as well as their choice of involvement type and amounts. Dogaru (2008:24), however, argues that from a symbolic interactionism perspective, it is not the school practices in themselves that are the most important influence on PI, rather, more significant are the parents’ perceptions of school practices for stimulating PI in the school. If parents did not perceive that the school was inviting and offered opportunities for parents, the PI with the school will be low, regardless of the number of invitations and opportunities that the school actually offers. In other words, for schools to be successful in their attempts to involve parents, the message of welcome has to be received by the parents. The way the message was conveyed to parents depended on many factors which

include parents' characteristics and the school climate, as well as teachers' beliefs and actions. These, one could argue, would be imbedded in the school policy document governing PI.

4.2.6.4 Reassuring parents that the school needs their support in its educative purpose

Both school heads (N=7 or 70%) and teachers (N=22 or 55%) thought that parents needed to be reassured that the school needed them in educating their children. They felt that parents sometimes thought that they were not needed by school teachers who were professional enough to competently deal with all matters relating to school. In the words of one school head, *“Some parents see involvement as interference with the teacher’s work.”* This view was supported by teachers, with one of them saying, *“When parents think that involvement will antagonise teachers, they simply do not get involved.”*

Some parents expressed the view that they needed to be assured by teachers that they were needed as partners in their children’s education. They said teachers must not have a condescending attitude towards them. They also needed to demonstrate a welcoming attitude towards parents who visit the school instead of looking at them as if they were intruders. In the words of one parent, *“When teachers look at you as if you were a stranger (raising her hands in apparent resignation), you tend to be put off. Uneducated though we are, we have our own pride.”*

The literature (Siririka 2007; Parhar 2006) also refers to parents who think that their limited education made them incapable of participating in their children’s education. Such parents may be disabused of such thinking at workshops.

4.2.6.5 Enhancing communication between home and school

Teachers (N=20 or 50%) and school heads (N=7 or 70%) believed that communication between home and school was poor. Both parties (parents and the school) did not communicate as effectively as was desirable. The desire to communicate as well as the ways of communication needed to be given greater attention than is currently the case. In the words of one school head, *“We must not only seek to address the issue of ways of communication between home and school...we also need to focus on clarifying the need to*

communicate to both parents and teachers.” One teacher went further and said, *“The desire to communicate on the part of teachers is lacking because of ignorance about what needs to be communicated. Parents are also unsure about what they should communicate.”*

From responses like those mentioned above, it emerged that the desire to communicate could result from knowing the significance of communicating as well as knowing what needs to be communicated. Ways of effectively communicating would become important once the need to communicate has been established.

Parents were quite forthcoming in suggesting ways to improve communication. They suggested that pupils must be taught the importance of communicating messages between school and home. This would make them try to communicate as accurately as they could. Teachers could also write memos or notes to parents on important matters. Some parents also thought that church leaders could be used to make important announcements from the school to their congregants. School teachers thought that apart from memos and notes, a newsletter could be used. Some teachers even recommended that money generated from the suggested income generating projects (see 4.2.) could be channelled towards the writing of newsletters. Some parents thought that with mobile phones getting their way into rural areas, in the near future communication should be easier.

The significance of communication is captured in Pate and Andrews (2006) when they assert that PI involves commitment to consistent communication with educators about pupils' progress.

4.2.6.6 Inclusion of PI in teacher education curriculum

Very little space is given to the issue of PI in the teacher education curriculum. This was confirmed by school heads (N=6 or 60%) and teachers (N=20 or 50%). As one teacher typically said, *“I was not exposed to much learning content on PI at college. The little I know about it came from passing remarks during Sociology of Education lectures.”* The researcher was an external examiner for teachers' colleges in Zimbabwe over the years and was aware that there was very little provided for in terms of PI in the teacher education syllabuses. This meant that teachers graduated without having learned much about PI. In consequence, they found it quite a challenge to deal with the matter when they were deployed

in schools. School heads were in the same situation because they went to the same colleges as their teachers. One school head put it thus, *“I have just registered for an in-service Bachelor of Education degree. I hope we will learn a lot about parental involvement at your university. At college level...ah...it was not given any meaningful attention.”*

Zoppi (2006:16) and Parhar (2006:2) observe that negative teacher attitudes and behaviours in relation to disadvantaged parents impact negatively on efforts to involve such parents. Such negative attitudes result from lack of adequate training in respect of PI.

4.2.6.7 School heads, teachers and parents to encourage pupils to take messages from school to their parents seriously

School heads (N=6 or 60%), teachers (N=20 or 50%) and parents in various focus groups concurred that some pupils did not take messages from school to parents seriously. Some pupils deliberately distorted the messages while others simply did not transmit the messages. One school head expressed it thus, *“There are basically three types of pupils—one type simply does not pass on the messages while the other type deliberately distorts the message. The last type distorts the message unwittingly.”* What this meant was that sometimes parents did not get to know what the school was expecting of them. This resulted in teachers and school heads being disappointed and concluding that the parents did not care enough about their children’s education. This situation was, however, mitigated by the fact that some school heads and teachers were aware that some pupils distorted messages and others did not transmit the messages at all. It, however, remained a cause for concern for teachers, parents and school heads.

Parents agreed with teachers and school heads that it was crucially important for all parties to encourage pupils to transmit messages from school to their parents accurately and without fail. This would promote understanding between school and home and such understanding would form a solid basis for meaningful PI. Holloway et al (2008:2), among other authors, acknowledge the centrality of communication in relation to PI.

4.2.6.8 Pupils to be encouraged to speak truthfully and positively about the school, the school head and teachers.

School heads (N=6 or 60%), teachers (N=18 or 45%) and parents in various focus groups agreed that there was need for all of them to encourage pupils to speak truthfully about the school, teachers and the school head. Doing otherwise was bound to create suspicion and antagonism between parents and teachers as well as school heads. As one parent put it, *“When a child tells me that his teacher ill treats him I get angry with that teacher because it’s my responsibility to protect my child...but then the child might be lying in order to conceal his own laziness. Children need to be taught the importance of speaking the truth all the time.”* One teacher expressed the matter succinctly when she said, *“Some non-performing pupils lie to their parents about their teachers so that the teacher is blamed for their poor performance. Parents err when they do not bother to establish the truth with the teachers concerned...it poisons relations between parents and teachers..it impacts negatively on pupils’ learning.”* A school head put it thus, *“Some mischievous pupils enjoy playing teachers and parents against each other in order to escape blame for poor performance. It’s necessary to teach such children not to lie because it ultimately impacts negatively on their learning.”*

Some parents thought that it was necessary to impress upon pupils the need for them to behave well at school, look after books, do their homework and be punctual so as to promote good relations with their teachers and thereby avoiding provoking their (teachers’) anger. When there are good relations between pupils and teachers, pupils would not be inclined to lie or talk negatively about their teachers. That way, relations between teachers and parents would not be unnecessarily strained.

The fact that pupils have a role to play in promoting PI is underscored by Edwards and Alldred (2002) in Deslandes (2002:47).

4.2.6.9 Mounting workshops for teachers

Some school heads (N=5 or 50%) and teachers (N=12 or 30%) thought that there was need to mount workshops aimed at educating teachers on the importance of PI and what it entailed. In the words of one school head, *“Teachers are largely ignorant of the concept PI, and so are most of us. Workshops will go a long way towards addressing the problem.”* The desirability of this strategy cannot be contested because teachers confirmed that they were exposed to very little content on PI at college. One teacher typified the responses of teachers

in the following words, *“PI was treated as a peripheral issue at college...we never got to appreciate its significance.”*

When teachers were not well grounded in the concept PI, they could not be expected to be enthusiastic about introducing it in their practice. They would not have the expertise and confidence to do so. Authors like Parhar (2006:2) acknowledge the fact that teachers with misguided ideologies tend to reinforce practices of exclusion in relation to uneducated and socially disadvantaged parents. There are also teachers who genuinely fear that parents in the school or classroom may undermine their professionalism (Parhar 2006:4). Workshops would obviously address such problems.

Parents did not mention this strategy apparently because they regarded teachers as highly qualified and knowledgeable about all matters relating to their job.

4.2.6.10 Giving pupils homework parents are competent to help them with

School heads (N=5 or 50%) and some parents thought that it would be a good idea to give pupils homework parents would be able to help them with. Notably, no teacher mentioned this strategy. School heads argued that some parents were put off by the homework pupils brought home. It made them feel impotent and left them frustrated. This was confirmed by a parent who said, *“When a child brings homework you have no idea how to help the child with, you feel stupid...somehow humiliated.”* This kind of thinking betrays the fact that some parents—and school heads—had limited knowledge about what parents were supposed to do in relation to helping pupils with their homework. Parents are not expected to simply provide answers to the homework children would have brought home. Apart from directly helping children tackle problems, they are also supposed to provide autonomy support and structure (Tam and Chan, 2009:87). Where they do not know how to tackle certain problems, they can encourage and facilitate for the child to get peer assistance, among other things.

This is not to underplay the concern that some parents have, namely that children be given homework the parents are competent to help them with. The researcher was pleasantly surprised when some parents indicated areas they thought they were competent to handle. These included the narration of folktales which did not only teach morals but also promoted listening and narrating skills. They also said they could teach their children traditional music and dance, poetry, craftwork like basket weaving and mat making. Teachers should be

mindful of the fact that parents indeed have a lot to offer in terms of homework regardless of their level of education and socio-economic status.

4.2.6.11 Teachers to be discreetly involved in politics

School heads (N=5 or 50%) and parents concurred that when teachers robustly got involved in party politics, relations with parents belonging to different political parties tended to become antagonistic. One school head put it thus, *“When teachers openly support a political party that opposes the party the majority of the parents support, there is bound to be suspicion and antagonism between parents and teachers.”* This view was confirmed by parents, with one of them saying, *“When teachers robustly participate in party politics...it’s a recipe for trouble because if we don’t belong to the same party as the teachers, we become suspicious that they will teach our children something we don’t believe in, something we are opposed to. It is better for them to be involved discreetly.”* The majority of the parents in one focus group nodded their agreement.

It is noteworthy that teachers did not mention this strategy to mitigate or overcome barriers to PI. This was apparently because they thought nobody had the right to prescribe to them how they should participate in politics. One teacher typically expressed it thus, *“It is our right to participate in politics the way we feel we should. Prescribing how we should be involved constitutes a violation of our human rights.”*

In spite of the teachers’ strong sentiments, it would appear prudent for them to be discreet in their involvement in politics. During the last elections (2008) some of them were brutally beaten by villagers, among other assailants. This left relations between parents and teachers quite bitter. This was confirmed by parents who revealed that they were misled by some misguided elements to intimidate or even assault teachers who supported a political party different from theirs in the days preceding the last election. *“We antagonised teachers and they retaliated by being indifferent to our children’s learning needs...and who can blame them? We will never be that misguided again. Teachers, however, should also be discreet with regards to this emotive issue,”* ruefully commented one parent.

4.2.6.12 Government to help with capital for income generating projects

School heads (N=5 or 50%), teachers (N=12 or 30%) and parents all thought that it was desirable for government to provide capital to start income generating projects. Such projects

would be jointly run by the school and parents. Among income generating projects mentioned by school heads, teachers and parents were chicken rearing (for meat and eggs for sale), piggery, and irrigated vegetable gardens. The projects would generate money to help with infrastructural development, purchasing of stationery and other facilities that would enhance teaching and learning. One parent expressed it succinctly when she said, ***“We are poor but we don’t want handouts. We want government to help us help ourselves. Giving us capital for income generating projects would make it easier for us to work collaboratively with teachers in improving the teaching and learning in our schools.”***

Financial constraints on the part of parents was mentioned as a barrier to PI. Capital for income generating projects seems to be a plausible solution. Parents would then not shun or avoid the school on account of owing the school some money. Teachers would be encouraged by seeing parents doing something to enhance teaching and learning. This would result in them collaborating with parents more freely and willingly. In the words of one teacher, ***“When parents demonstrate their commitment to help in the improvement of their children’s learning, teachers are inspired to work with more commitment.”***

4.2.6.13 Government to remunerate teachers adequately

School heads (N=5 or 50%), teachers (N=10 or 25%) and parents in focus groups felt that it was essential that government remunerates teachers fairly and adequately. They had various reasons for advocating for teachers’ adequate remuneration. School heads’ reasons were captured in the words of one of them when she said, ***“Since teachers are poorly remunerated, they spend some of the time they are supposed to be teaching or preparing their lessons looking for ways to augment their meagre salaries. This upsets parents who see them as being negligent to duty.”*** Some school heads indicated that they had received complaints from some parents in this regard. It is thus evident that PI inevitably suffered as a result of the poor remuneration of teachers.

The typical reason given by teachers was reflected in one of the teacher’s words when he said, ***“With the peanuts that we earn, parents no longer hold us in high esteem. They even make derogatory jokes about teachers...no respect, no cooperation.”*** The teachers felt strongly that their position was seriously compromised. With parents making derogatory jokes about teachers, pupils’ respect for, and confidence in, teachers also suffered.

Parents gave prominence to the issue of incentives that they were expected to contribute towards the supplementing of teachers' salaries. A typical comment from one of the parents was, *“Government must pay teachers adequately. We hardly afford the incentives we are expected to contribute towards teachers' remuneration. It just makes relations between us and teachers bad. Some of us now see teachers as mercenaries with no regard to our situation. On the other hand, teachers may see us as totally unconcerned about their situation.”*

It is clear from the responses referred to above that teachers' poor remuneration in one way or the other impacted negatively on relations between teachers and parents. The negative impact on relations no doubt adversely affected pupils' learning.

4.2.6.14 Learning from other schools reputed to have vibrant PI

School heads (N=4 or 40%), teachers (N=10 or 25%) and parents agreed that it would be a brilliant idea for all parties (school heads, teachers and parents) to learn from schools reputed to have effective parental involvement. *“Schools such as Victoria or Musiso can give us useful ideas regarding PI”*, said one school head. Using a well known Karanga saying, a parent remarked, *“Zhira inovhunzwa vari mberi”*, meaning *“You seek advice from those who have the relevant experience.”* Parents emphasised the desirability of consulting schools which were not very different from theirs in terms of the parents' socio-economic status so that they did not end up with strategies beyond their means.

Teachers also thought that schools reputed to have vibrant PI programmes could assist them a great deal in terms of introducing effective PI at their schools. One school teacher put it thus, *“We can learn a lot from those who have been doing it...we can adopt their strategies to suit our own situation”*. Like parents, teachers were aware of the need to be mindful of their unique situation when consulting other schools.

4.2.6.15 Teachers to desist from unbecoming behaviour

School heads and parents concurred that teachers needed to abandon unbecoming behaviour. School heads (N=4 or 40%) felt that when teachers behaved in violation of expected standards, parents tended to regard them as a danger to their children. *“Who can trust badly behaved teachers with their most treasured ‘possession’—their child?”*, typically asked one school head. It is difficult to see how cooperation can prosper where there is no trust.

Parents were particularly emphatic about this point. In some focus group interviews some parents indicated that some teachers either had affairs with some married women whose husbands worked in urban areas or outside the country. This soured relations with relatives of both the erring women and the relatives of the absentee husbands. As one parent put it, ***“Who can work with someone who is being immoral with his/her relative? You will be enemies!”***

In other focus group interviews some parents expressed concern regarding teachers who were suspected of having unsavoury relations with school children. This resulted in strained relations between teachers and parents. ***“We are intolerant of teachers who are a menace to our children...we obviously can’t work with them.”*** Teachers needed to behave in a manner that removed such suspicion which emanated from the fact that some of them had, in the past, been caught having affairs with pupils.

Other parents also expressed concern in relation to teachers who accosted prostitutes and others who failed to contain themselves after drinking too much beer. All this bad behaviour scandalised parents who thought that some teachers were no longer interested in being role models to pupils. In consequence, such teachers lost the respect and trust of parents. This, in turn, impacted negatively on PI. In the words of one parent, ***“When teachers behave badly, they lose our trust and respect. It becomes difficult for us to work with them.”***

Notably, no teacher mentioned this strategy of mitigating or overcoming barriers to PI. This was apparently because they thought that the problem was not widespread enough to warrant much attention.

4.2.6.16 Teachers to make home visits when it is desirable to do so

Some parents, school heads (N=4 or 40%) and teachers (N=10 or 25%) thought that it would help improve collaboration between teachers and parents if teachers made some home visits whenever they could or whenever it was desirable to do so. As one teacher said, ***“Knowing the situation of the pupils in terms of the conditions in which they lived at home would help the teacher understand the child and his parents better. Teachers will not have unrealistic expectations of both pupil and parents.”***

While some (N=10 or 25%) teachers concurred, others felt that there were some factors that made it difficult for them to visit their pupils’ homes. Prominent among such factors was the

burdensome teacher- pupil ratio of around one to fifty. It would take quite an effort to undertake the visits. Addressing the teacher-pupil ratio would go a long way towards making home visits manageable.

Some (N=4 or 40%) school heads also thought that home visits were desirable. As one of them said, *“Sometimes it is useful to visit homes in order to fully appreciate the circumstances in which the child lives...it will promote understanding between parents and teachers.”* School heads did not mention any constraining factors attaching to home visits. This may be because they agreed with the idea but did not give attention to its practicality or they thought that whatever constraints existed, they could be overcome.

Parents strongly felt that home visits were essentially important because they would enable teachers to appreciate the situation of the pupils and their parents in terms of the conditions in which they live. As teachers also thought, parents were of the view that the visits would help teachers have realistic expectations regarding both parents and their children. One parent put it thus, *“Teachers sometimes think that we don’t care enough about our children’s education. If they visit our homes they will realise how materially deprived we are. That way they will become more empathetic.”*

4.2.6.17 Schools to be transparent especially regarding the use of school funds

Some (N=3 or 30%) school heads and some (N=10 or 25%) teachers thought it was important for schools to demonstrate transparency, especially with regards to how school funds are used. Parents would be motivated to look for the hard- to- get money to pay fees and levies if they felt assured that their hard earned money was not abused. It would also make them feel they were part and parcel of the school if they were consulted on and appraised of how funds were being used. In the words of one school head, *“These parents are not fools. They may have limited formal education but they think deeply about matters of concern to them. They should not be excluded from decision making processes where they have a stake because doing so will have adverse consequences.”*

Parents felt very strongly about the need for transparency, especially where money was concerned. One parent put it succinctly, *“Like anybody else, we need to have the assurance that our hard earned money is used properly...otherwise we will become suspicious and withhold our cooperation.”*

4.2.6.18 Government to introduce “fees/levies-for-work” programme

Some (N=10 or 25%) teachers thought that since the government introduced the “food-for-work” programme (where people repaired roads and reclaimed dongas for a ration of food from the government), a “fees/levies-for-work” programme (where parents can work as indicated and get money from government to pay their children’s fees and levies) could be introduced. One teacher put it thus, *“We have food-for-work, why can’t we have fees/levies-for-work?”* That way, parents would be able to partner with the school in infrastructural development and procurement of stationery and other facilities meant to enhance teaching and learning.

Parents themselves thought that this was a helpful way of enabling them to participate in their children’s education. As one parent said, *“It would help some of us who have no easy ways of getting money if government gave us money for mending roads and reclaiming dongas, just as they give us food for the same jobs.”*

Some school heads were sceptical about the fees/levies programme arguing that government would not afford it. However, it looks like a viable strategy if government planned and budgeted for it.

4.2.6.19 Reducing teacher-pupil ratio

Some (N=10 or 25%) teachers thought that it was imperative to reduce the teacher-pupil ratio as one of the ways to mitigate or overcome barriers to PI. In the words of one of the teachers, *“Working with parents of as many as fifty pupils is no doubt a daunting task. They are simply too many... where can one get the time considering that one will have to mark the work of so many pupils?”* The argument here is that dealing with too many parents would not have a positive impact on PI since the teacher will be too stretched to give the parents due attention.

School heads did not mention the teacher-pupil ratio. This may be because, being non-teaching, some of the practical issues are not immediately apparent to them. Parents, however, thought too large classes placed a heavy burden on teachers. In consequence, teachers would not find sufficient time to attend to individual parents. *“We appreciate the*

workload of teachers is quite burdensome. This may well be the reason why they seem unenthusiastic about welcoming us to school.”

From teachers' and parents' responses, it was clear that the issue of teacher-pupil ratio needed to be addressed in order to mitigate barriers to PI. That it hindered PI cannot be contested.

4.2.7 Conclusion

In this chapter data relating to stakeholders' understanding of PI; ways in which parents were involved in their children's education in Zaka district; benefits of PI; determinants of PI; barriers to PI and strategies to overcome barriers to PI were presented and discussed. It emerged from the data that school heads, teachers and parents had limited knowledge/understanding of the concept PI. Parents were involved in their children's education in a very limited way. Very few benefits accruing from PI and determinants of PI were known to school heads, teachers and parents. The respondents, however, identified important barriers to PI and suggested strategies to overcome the barriers.

In the next chapter conclusions regarding the findings and recommendations based on the findings will be made.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

It is confirmed in this chapter that the research problem has been addressed and the research aim achieved. The chapter mainly focuses on the conclusions drawn from, and the recommendations based on the literature reviewed in the second chapter and the empirical data presented and discussed in chapter four. Reference is also made to the attribution theory (discussed in chapter 2) not only in terms of how it could in large measure explain the lack or low rates of PI, but also in relation to how it could be used to generate solutions to the problem.

5.2 Research problem and the research aim

The concept *Parental Involvement* was defined with the help of several authorities. In the context of this research, parental involvement was defined as embracing a variety of activities such as:

- at-home good parenting,
- monitoring and providing encouragement,
- arranging for appropriate study time and space,
- tutoring children at home,
- modelling desired behaviour,
- talking to teachers,
- attendance of school functions,
- taking part in school governance, and
- responding to school obligations.

PI was not just about what parents did, but also about the relationship between staff and parents.

The research problem (*How can parents, school heads and teachers be motivated to enhance PI in children's education at primary school level?*) was addressed and the related aim of the research (*To establish strategies that can be used to motivate parents, school heads and teachers to enhance PI in their schools*) was achieved. While addressing the research

problem and the related aim of the research, sub-problems (1.2.1) were attended to and so were the related secondary aims (1.3.1). For example, in relation to the sub-problem *Do parents, school heads and teachers know what PI entails?* and the related secondary aim (*To establish whether parents, school heads and teachers know what PI entails*) it was established in 5.3.2. and 5.3.3 that teachers, school heads and parents had a limited understanding of PI. Strategies to address the problem were subsequently given in the said sections of the chapter. To give a few further examples, sections 5.3.4 and 5.3.5 dealt with the second sub-problem (*Do parents, school heads and teachers know how PI impacts on children's school education?* and the related secondary aim (*To establish if parents, school heads and teachers know how PI impacts on children's school education*) while section 5.3.6 dealt with the third sub-problem (*In what ways can parents participate in their children's education?*) and the related secondary aim (*To determine ways in which parents can participate in their children's education*). The fourth sub-problem (*What are the barriers to effective PI?*) and the related secondary aim (*To establish the barriers to effective PI*) was dealt with in sections 5.3.6, 5.3.7, 5.3.8.1 to 5.3.8.12. The fifth sub-problem (*What intervention measures can be taken to improve PI?*) and the related secondary aim (*To determine intervention measures that can be taken to improve PI*) were dealt with in 5.3.2 up to 5.3.8.12.

It is explicated in 5.3.2 up to 5.3.8.12 how the sub-problems and the related secondary aims were addressed.

5.3 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions drawn from the related literature and the empirical data are briefly presented below. It was in the context of these conclusions that recommendations to address the problems were made.

5.3.1 Parental involvement and the Attribution Theory

As described in 2.9, attribution theory is, *inter alia*, about the inferences we make about other people's behaviour (and our own). Behaviour remains meaningless until we attribute a cause for it. The causes to which we attribute the behaviour of ourselves or others influence how we behave towards others and also influence our future performances.

It emerged from the research that there were several possible attributions for limited PI in some PI activities. Some of the attributions were circumstantial while others were related to personal characteristics. The characteristics of parents influenced the attributions made by parents and teachers. It also emerged from the research that both teachers and parents drew uninformed conclusions regarding lack of or limited PI. They tended to attribute the restricted PI to several internal and external reasons based on their beliefs about themselves and others.

Internal attributions included failure to realise that there was a problem, believing that it was the schools' responsibility, an uncaring attitude, ignorance of how to help, lack of parenting skills, being ill at ease at school and other personal issues. External attributions covered such reasons as children keeping away information relating to school from parents, lack of resources, teacher negativity and the consequent poor relations with teachers. Such attributions might be valid in relation to some parents but they might be based on misunderstandings and baseless conclusions in relation to others.

Attributions made by parents to factors external to them were likely to make them leave the responsibility to correct the state of affairs to school staff. The views upon which the attributions were made, potentially and really strained relations between parents and teachers. The resultant conflict or strife exacerbated the situation.

Apart from helping to explain lack of or limited PI and the strained parent-teacher relationships, the Attribution Theory could be used to improve parental participation in their children's education. As an example, teachers, school heads and parents could be made aware of the attributions that might be inhibiting PI. When all the parties were aware of and appreciative of what they and others attributed limited PI to, it would be possible for them to openly discuss the matter and generate solutions to the problem rather than apportion blame. Intervention could include attribution re-training—a technique used to modify an individual's established attributional style to increase perceived self-control (Weiner, 1974a).

Conclusions drawn from the findings and the attendant recommendations are briefly discussed below.

5.3.2 School heads' and teachers' limited understanding of PI

Conclusions

This research has established that school heads and teachers had a limited understanding of PI. This was to some extent because teachers' colleges and university teacher education departments did not give PI sufficient space in their curricula. This has contributed towards making school heads and teachers struggle when it came to involving parents in their children's education. In some cases school heads and teachers resented PI because they viewed it as constituting interference with their work. They believed that it was their sole responsibility as specially trained professionals to handle matters relating to children's school education. They also regarded parents as inadequately educated to meaningfully contribute to their children's education. In other cases they simply were uncomfortable to deal with something they were not too sure about. School heads and teachers also did not have a common understanding of PI and so could hardly work in unison to promote PI. Most of them were alarmingly unaware of many of the benefits of PI. Thus they were not inclined to promote PI.

Recommendations

In the context of conclusions drawn here, it is recommended that teachers' colleges and universities teacher education departments give PI sufficient attention in their curriculum. This would allow educators to appreciate its importance, recognise the critical role parents need to play to enhance their children's learning—no matter their level of education, learn about various ways parents can participate in the education of their children and acquire a common understanding that would enable them to work in unison for the benefit of the pupils. With regards to educators already in the field, workshops and seminars could be organised at district, cluster and school levels to achieve a comprehensive understanding of PI and acquire the requisite skills to handle it. This would make the educators disposed to the promotion of PI in their schools. It would also disabuse them of their bias relating to some of the attributions they made regarding low rates of PI.

5.3.3 Parents' limited understanding of PI

Conclusions

Most of the parents demonstrated a very limited understanding of PI, although a few of them indicated a remarkable appreciation of the concept by suggesting interesting ways in which

they could be involved. Some parents thought that they were morally bound to be involved in their children's education while others thought that school matters were best left to school heads and teachers who were trained to do the job and were indeed paid to do it! Like school heads and teachers, parents did not have a common understanding of PI. This made it necessarily difficult for teachers to collaborate with them. Most parents were also woefully ignorant of the benefits of PI. Thus they were not disposed to participating in their children's education.

Recommendations

Recommendations to enhance parents' understanding of PI include school based workshops where the concept would be explicated to the parents so that they fully grasped what it entailed. Use could also be made of parents who indicated the kind of activities which they could engage in in the context of their limited school education. This would ensure that educators would not dominate parents at the workshops. Adults generally resent being dominated. The content of the workshops would include such matters as the chores children were expected to do before and after school and the need to forge positive relations between parents and teachers. If children did too strenuous work before or after school, it might impact negatively on school performance. Equally true, if relations between parents and teachers were negative, PI is compromised and by extension pupil achievement is compromised.

5.3.4 Conversations between parents and children before children went to school and after their return from school

Conclusions

It emerged from this research that parents engaged their children in routine conversations in the morning before the children went to school and in the afternoon/evening when they returned from school. The conversations were mainly ritualistic and so did not mean much to both the children and their parents. They lacked motivational potency. Owing to their brevity, these conversations did not afford parents the opportunity to identify their children's learning problems and try to generate solutions to such problems.

Recommendations

The workshops suggested in 5.3.3 above could include such content as the quality of conversations between parents and their children before the children went to school in the morning and after their return from school in the afternoon/evening. The parents' level of education does not matter much with regards to the quality of motivational conversations they could engage their children in. Such conversations may result in parents identifying their children's learning problems and trying to generate solutions to them. This could also lead to the parents alerting the teacher to the child's learning problems. The teacher could then suggest ways parents could help pupils in terms of their problems as a way of complimenting the teacher's efforts.

5.3.5 Parents' attendance of school meetings and school events

Conclusions

Most parents did not attend school meetings because at such meetings they were hardly given the opportunity to express their views on pertinent issues. Others tended to avoid the school because either they felt unwanted there or they were afraid of being asked about the fees that their children owed the school. The resultant lack of interaction between parents and the school (school heads and teachers) promoted suspicion between parents and the school. Consequently, PI involvement suffered. This in turn impacted negatively on children's learning.

Recommendations

To increase parents' attendance of school events, parents must be afforded the opportunity to articulate their expectations and concerns. They should also be given space to suggest how certain problems could be tackled. This would make them feel needed and useful in their children's education and disabuse them of some of the misplaced attributions they and teachers made regarding low rates of PI. Parents should not be embarrassed or "exposed" when they visited school. Rather, they should be shown respect.

5.3.6 Poor home environment/parents' financial constrains

Conclusions

In respect of home environment (a determinant of PI), it emerged from this research that most homes in Zaka district were deprived. They lacked such things as computers, playing cards, board games, and reading materials. They were also not anywhere near such facilities as a library or a museum. Thus children from such homes were disadvantaged in comparison with

their counterparts who lived in homes and places where the said facilities were available. Such facilities allowed for educative interaction between parents and children. When opportunities for educative interaction between parents and children were limited, PI would be limited.

Recommendations

To address the challenge of poor home environment, teachers and parents should jointly explore how parents could optimise the use of what is available to them. For example, traditional games can be used to enhance pupils' reading and mathematics skills. As suggested by some parents, they could enhance pupils' listening and narrative skills as well as morals through folktales. Like some parents suggested, they could also use riddles to promote logical thinking. All these activities would increase opportunities for educative interaction between parents and their children thereby removing feelings of helplessness among some parents with a low level of education.

Government could also help schools by giving seed money to set up income-generating projects such as poultry, piggery and market gardening to be run jointly by parents and the school. This would help in augmenting teaching and learning resources while reinforcing PI.

5.3.7 Parents' cognitions about their role in their children's formal education

Conclusions

In relation to parents' cognitions about their role in their children's formal education, this research established that (a) when parents did not have high aspirations about their children's future they did not exert efforts to ensure that their children reached lofty goals, (b) when parents did not believe that they had the capacity to influence things in the direction they wanted then they were not confident to help their children with their schooling and (c) if teachers were perceived as welcoming, concerned about children's educational needs, respectful to parents and communicate freely with parents, parents became inclined to participate in their children's education.

Recommendations

To address this situation, parents need to (a) be motivated to aspire for their children to reach lofty heights. This can be done through making them realise that their children had the potential to achieve great things and to that end they needed their parents' support, (b) be

shown that they could influence things in the direction they wanted (as explicated in 5.3.3, 5.3.4 and 5.3.5 above), and (c) teachers must create the perception that they are welcoming, concerned about children's educational needs, respectful to parents and communicate freely with parents.

With respect to family demographical variables, it was established that the parents with a poor socio-economic status had a low level education, and low or no income. This impacted negatively on the self-esteem, competence and disposition to be involved.

To improve this situation, school staff need to reassure parents that they were essentially important as partners in their children's education despite their low level education and poor economic status (as explicated in 5.3.6 above).

5.3.8 Barriers to PI

This research established that there were many factors that inhibited PI. These are indicated below.

5.3.8.1 Absence of a clear government policy on PI

Conclusions

There was no clear government policy relating to PI. In consequence, school heads, teachers and parents could not determine what their responsibilities were. They did not know what to expect of each other. This contributed to all parties being reluctant to promote or engage in PI.

Recommendations

Government should formulate a research based policy on PI. Such a policy would give stakeholders some guidelines as to their role or responsibility.

5.3.8.2 Absence of a clear school policy on

Conclusions

The absence of a clear school policy impacted negatively on PI. School heads, teachers and parents had nothing to guide them in relation to parents' participation in their children's

education. Not many people were willing to operate in a haphazard way. This made all parties disinclined to embrace PI to the detriment of pupils' interests.

Recommendations

Guided by the government policy on PI, schools should craft their policies which take account of the realities attaching to their environment. The policies should have realistic expectations and stakeholders should be involved in their formulation. A clear PI policy is likely going to impact positively on the school climate. When parents and teachers are clear about what PI entails, they will not step on each other's toes.

5.3.8.3 Parents' limited education

Conclusions

This research has revealed that parents' limited education was perceived as an inhibiting factor regarding PI. While this fact could not be contested, it was clear from some parents' responses that, notwithstanding their low level of education, most parents could do quite a lot in helping their children with their school education. Some parents actually came up with useful suggestions of how they could be involved. These included teaching children folktales which teach good morals, proverbs which teach wisdom and riddles which sharpen thinking skills (see 4.2.1).

Recommendations

To mitigate the effects of parents' limited school education, committees comprising parents, teachers and school administrators could establish what hindered PI. Their findings could constitute content to be discussed at joint workshops and/or seminars with the view to up-scaling

the PI skills of both parents and school staff. It is important to get from parents what they think they can comfortably do rather than impose on them. They can also be taught skills they lack. School staff needs to be aware of pupils' and parents' situation so as to be able to determine, and give advice on, what parents can do to enhance their children's school education. Parents can also be taught how to provide autonomy support and facilitate for peer assistance where they find themselves out of their depth.

5.3.8.4 Negative parental attitudes

Conclusions

Parents exhibited negative attitudes which manifested in the following ways: parents being overprotective of their children to the extent of preventing them from going to school when it was cold or telling their children not to participate in sporting activities they thought could bring injury to their children; parents not bothering to attend school meetings/events; parents being disrespectful towards teachers; parents thinking that school heads and teachers were likely to view them in bad light with regards to PI because of their limited school education and material deprivation, and resenting contributing towards teachers' incentives (given teachers' woefully low salaries). Such attitudes impacted negatively on relations between parents and the school (school heads and teachers) and by extension on PI.

Some parents were culpable of being disrespectful of teachers because of the poor working conditions, inclusive of desperately low salaries. Some cracked jokes denigrating teachers who have been reduced to paupers. Most parents did not want to contribute to teachers' incentives meant to augment their salaries. It made them feel that teachers had become mercenaries. All this impacted negatively on relations between teachers and parents and compromised prospects for vibrant PI.

Recommendations

To address negative parental attitudes a number of things need to be done. Most important, trust must be built between parents and school staff. Parents need to perceive teachers as responsible, caring, and respectful. This will give them the confidence that they can entrust their precious children in the hands of "those strangers". Parents need to be assured that the school needs their support in its educative purpose. Teachers must therefore not be judgemental on the basis of parents' socio-economic status. Parents also need to respect teachers because respect tends to be reciprocal. Teachers must also bear in mind that respect is earned and must therefore desist from behaving in a manner that is reproachable. Parents must also not despise teachers on account of the low salaries teachers currently get. Government, on its part, needs to remunerate teachers adequately so that poor parents are not compelled to augment teachers' salaries.

As has emerged from the research, teachers can also pay home visits whenever opportunity allows so that they can have a full appreciation of the circumstances in which the parents and pupils live. This would help them to realistically advise parents and to have realistic expectations.

5.3.8.5 Negative teacher attitudes

Conclusions

Teachers were sometimes guilty of negative attitudes towards parents' participation in their children's education. They looked down upon parents whom they regarded as uneducated and thus incapable of meaningful PI. Most teachers did not bother to communicate with parents on pupils' academic progress and behaviour. Such teachers did not want parents in their classrooms because they thought they would be disturbed since the parents did not have anything to offer. This negative attitude resulted in parents not being given the opportunity to communicate their expectations or concerns regarding their children's education. This frustrated parents and rendered them impotent in terms of participation in their children's education. It is not surprising that in the end they became indifferent to matters relating to school. Some teachers did not know how to involve parents; believed parents did not have the requisite skills to be involved or simply thought it unfair to ask parents to expend time and energy on school related activities at home. There were some teachers who felt that their workloads made it impossible for them to embrace PI in their practice. They felt that the number of parents they were supposed to deal with was just too big. All this made them disinclined to promote PI.

Recommendations

Teachers can turn around their negative attitudes towards parents by valuing them in spite of their low level of education. This is possible when teachers are adequately exposed to knowledge about PI through initial training, in-service training and staff development workshops. They would then realise that parents are indispensable partners in the education of their children no matter their education status. It is also essential for teachers to communicate with parents about their children's education and behaviour. Parents should be given the opportunity by the school to communicate their joy and lack thereof in respect of their children's education and behaviour. This promotes understanding and mutual respect between the two parties. The teacher-pupil ratio also needs to be addressed so that teachers are not burdened to the extent that they become apathetic towards their work.

5.3.8.6 Teachers' bad behaviour

Conclusions

Some teachers engaged in bad behaviour such as unsavoury relationships with school children or wives of men working in towns and cities or outside the country. One teachers' bad behaviour could give teachers a bad name. It led to teachers being regarded with suspicion by parents. There were teachers who drank too much alcohol thereby compromising their standing in the eyes of parents and even pupils. Some teachers were guilty of abusing pupils by asking them to fetch water or gather fire hood or clean houses for them. Such unethical behaviour attracted negative attitudes from parents thereby diminishing prospects for useful PI.

Recommendations

Bad behaving teachers must mend their ways by desisting from behaviour that fell below societal expectations. They must behave ethically all the time. The relevant government ministry, school administrators and teachers' associations must demonstrate to such teachers that there are consequences if they behaved below expected standards (as contained in the relevant statutory instruments).

5.3.8.7 Poor communication between school and home

Conclusions

All parties (school heads, teachers and parents) were guilty of not communicating. Many reasons were given for that. On the one hand, there were some teachers who thought the parents had too little education to be able to help with the education of their children. On the other hand, there were parents who thought that all matters relating to school should be left to teachers who were knowledgeable and were paid for it. Lack of communication between school and home bred suspicion between teachers and parents. In consequence, PI suffered.

Recommendations

To improve communication between home and school, joint committees comprising school staff and parents can be instituted to generate ways of communication between home and school. When teachers and parents (or their representatives) are involved in generating such communication strategies, they are likely going to respect and use them. It is unilaterally prescribing ways of communication that creates problems.

5.3.8.8 Teachers' active participation in politics

Conclusions

Some teachers were too robustly involved in politics. They attended to political matters during teaching time — for example, neglecting their teaching responsibilities while attending political meetings. Parents were unhappy with teachers who actively belonged to rival political parties because they feared that such teachers could be a bad influence on their children. In the 2008 presidential elections a substantial number of teachers fell victim to violence perpetrated by political thugs and some parents from a rival political party. This sadly soured relations between parents and teachers to the detriment of PI.

Recommendations

To address this problem, parents must respect teachers' rights to belong to a political party of their choice. On their part, teachers need to be discreetly involved in politics. They should not abuse their privileged position to try and unduly influence parents and pupils to subscribe to their political parties.

5.3.8.9 Irresponsible pupils

Conclusions

School heads, teachers and parents saw irresponsible pupils as a barrier to PI. Such pupils deliberately distorted information that was sent from school to home or vice versa. This caused unnecessary misunderstanding between parents and teachers.

While some pupils deliberately sabotaged PI, others actively promoted it. Such pupils spoke positively about school, demonstrated a love for learning and persuaded parents to attend school events.

Recommendations

To deal with this problem, both parents and teachers need to impress upon pupils the need for them to carry messages to and from school responsibly. The consequences of failure to do so must be spelt out to them. Parents also need to demonstrate a love for education so that pupils fully appreciate their responsibilities. They should speak positively about school and teachers.

5.3.8.10 Lazy and incompetent teachers

Conclusions

Some teachers did not take their work seriously. This was manifested in failure to prepare for their work thoroughly and not marking children's exercise books in time or thoroughly. This frustrated pupils who consequently spoke ill of school and became indifferent to their school responsibilities. Their performance went down. All this made parents assume a negative attitude towards school and teachers thereby diminishing prospects for PI.

Recommendations

To deal with the problem of teachers who are lazy and incompetent, the provisions of the staff appraisal system should be fully implemented. This implies that lazy and incompetent teachers will not get annual bonus. Areas of weakness will be identified and staff development in those areas will be instituted to help the concerned staff to improve their practice. This will bring joy to all parties (stakeholders).

5.3.8.11 Culture

Conclusions

A few parents thought that it was cultural that a mother be more involved with a child attending low grades and the father would be more involved when the child grew older. Although this was a minority view, parents who subscribed to it needed to be disabused of it.

Recommendations

Workshops and seminars would go a long way towards making fathers appreciate the role they need to play in the education of their children. Fathers who are actively involved in the education of their children should be given the opportunity to share their experiences with the other parents in order to motivate the non-involved fathers.

5.3.8.12 Autocratic school leadership

Conclusions

Parents subjected to autocratic school leadership were not at liberty to express their thoughts and feelings or expectations and concerns regarding school matters. They became aloof.

Recommendations

School staff must assume a democratic or participative approach to school affairs so that parents do not feel excluded or disregarded. When parents are involved in decision making, they take ownership of the decisions and try to secure their implementation.

From the foregoing it is quite clear that government, school heads/principals, teachers, parents and teacher education institutions can employ a variety of strategies to enhance PI in schools. The strategies are summarised below:

- Teacher education institutions need to give PI sufficient space in their curriculum
- District education officers and schools should organise workshops/seminars to enhance parents', teachers' and school heads/principals' understanding-and skills- in relation to PI
- Parents must be encouraged to improve the conversations they have with their children, especially with regards to the children's schooling
- Parents must be afforded the opportunity to express their expectations, concerns and views in relation to their children's education
- Schools must create the perception that parents are welcome to schools, thereby reassuring parents that they are essentially important partners in their children's education despite their own limited education
- Government must formulate a clear and realistic policy on PI
- Schools must generate policy guidelines to help in the promotion of PI
- School staff must assume a democratic or participative approach to school affairs so that parents do not feel excluded or disregarded
- Parents must be encouraged to engage their children in traditional games that enhance reading and mathematics skills; tell children folktales that teach morals, improve listening and oral skills; teach them proverbs that enhance wisdom and riddles that sharpen thinking skills-that way they create educative interaction with their children
- Parents need to be motivated to aspire for their children to reach lofty heights, be shown that they can positively influence the learning of their children
- Teachers must take their teaching responsibility seriously so that parents perceive them as caring
- Teachers must behave in a manner beyond reproach and must be respectful towards parents no matter their level of education
- Teachers must undertake home visits whenever it is desirable to do so

- Joint committees of teachers and parents can be instituted to generate ways of communication between home and school
- Teachers must discreetly participate in politics
- Pupils must be made to appreciate the significance of communication between home and school

5.4 Limitations and future directions

This study did not include pupils who are an important stakeholder. It was confined to a relatively small sample of people and places in poor rural Zaka District. The researcher could only spend five weeks in the field because of work commitments and financial resource limitation.

Future studies could include pupils and include more participants. A more comprehensive sample of parents with different levels of involvement and different socio-economic status may generate more interesting results.

5 Conclusion

It is clear from this research that school heads and teachers had a limited understanding of PI. This was mainly because teachers' colleges and teacher education departments of universities did not give it sufficient space in their curriculum. It is thus incumbent upon the said colleges and university departments to give PI the attention it deserves. For practising teachers, it is necessary to mount workshops and organise seminars to enhance teachers' and school heads' competences in relation to PI.

It also became apparent from the research that parents had a limited understanding of PI. It was therefore necessary to organise workshops for them so as to enhance their appreciation of PI. This could lead to parents engaging in behaviours that promote children's learning, for example, engaging their children in motivational conversations and desisting from giving children strenuous work before going to school or after school. Some parents who had practical ideas relating to how they could participate in their children's education should be allowed to present their ideas at such workshops so that (they) parents do not feel they are being imposed upon by school staff (school heads and teachers). From this research it became

clear that parents' socio-economic status did not render them impotent in relation to involvement in their children's education (see 4.2.1). They have a lot to contribute.

Lack of a comprehensive government policy on PI meant that stakeholders did not have guidelines regarding how parents could be involved in their children's education. Parents did not know their rights, obligations and responsibilities. The same could be said about school heads and teachers, as well as district (and even national) education authorities. Government needs to quickly generate a policy that would enable all stakeholders to promote PI in rural primary schools.

In a nutshell, it emerged from this research that PI was very limited in Zaka District. There were several reasons attributed to the limited PI by stakeholders. Some of these attributions were not based on fact but on parents' and teachers' perceptions. Facilitating for parents and teachers to interrogate their perceptions has the potential of making them realise the validity or lack of validity of their attributions. Such realisation would positively change their attitude towards PI. Making stakeholders aware of what they and others attributed limited or lack of PI to could also help them address the attributions and change them accordingly. Placing blame for limited PI does not help the situation. What does is for everyone involved to work collaboratively to improve the situation.

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ANNEXURE 1

LETTER OF PERMISSION TO CARRY

OUT RESEARCH

IN MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, SPORT

AND CULTURE INSTITUTIONS

ANNEXURE 2

PARTICIPATION REQUEST
LETTER TO SCHOOL TEACHERS



Faculty of Education
Department of Teacher Development

P O Box 1235
MASVINGO
Zimbabwe
Tel: 263 (0)39-253507
Fax: 263 (0)39-253504
E mail: masu@comone.co.zw

Off Old Great Zimbabwe Road
MASVINGO, Zimbabwe

GREAT ZIMBABWE UNIVERSITY

Date: 06 January 2009

Ms. Shumba
Nemauku Primary School
P.B.4 Z
Jerera

Dear Madam

**RE: REQUEST FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION IN A RESEARCH STUDY ON
PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN THEIR CHILDREN'S EDUCATION AT
PRIMARY SCHOOL LEVEL**

I am a lecturer and Chairperson (Department of Teacher Development) at Great Zimbabwe University. I am doing doctoral studies with the University of South Africa and my research topic is: **Parental Involvement in Primary Schools: A Case Study of the Zaka District in Zimbabwe.**

My research will be confined to ten purposefully and conveniently selected primary schools in Zaka District. The overarching aim of the research is to establish the nature of parental involvement in their children's education with the view to helping them enhance their involvement for the benefit of the children.

If you were agreeable, I would need you to **honestly** complete an open-ended questionnaire that will be distributed to you shortly. You are at liberty not to participate.

The research findings and the attendant recommendations will be made available to you in keeping with research ethics.

Yours sincerely


A. Chindanya (Mr)

CONSENT FORM

I,....., **accept/ decline the invitation to participate in the research indicated above.(Delete as appropriate)**

Name:.....Signature.....

Date:.....

ANNEXURE 3

RESEARCH PARTICIPATION REQUEST LETTER TO PARENTS



Faculty of Education
Department of Teacher Development

P O Box 1235
MASVINGO
Zimbabwe
Tel: 263 (0)39-253507
Fax: 263 (0)39-253504
E mail: masu@comone.co.zw

Off Old Great Zimbabwe Road
MASVINGO, Zimbabwe

GREAT ZIMBABWE UNIVERSITY

Date: 06 January 2009

Dear Madam

**RE: REQUEST FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION IN A RESEARCH STUDY ON
PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN THEIR CHILDREN'S EDUCATION AT
PRIMARY SCHOOL LEVEL**

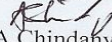
I am a lecturer and Chairperson (Department of Teacher Development) at Great Zimbabwe University. I am doing doctoral studies with the University of South Africa and my research topic is: **Parental Involvement in Primary Schools: A Case Study of the Zaka District in Zimbabwe.**

My research will be confined to ten purposefully and conveniently selected primary schools in Zaka District. The overarching aim of the research is to establish the nature of parental involvement in their children's education with the view to helping them enhance their involvement for the benefit of the children.

If you were agreeable, I would need you to attend a focus group interview on a date and at a location to be agreed.

The research findings and the attendant recommendations will be made available to you in keeping with research ethics.

Yours sincerely


A. Chindahya (Mr)

CONSENT FORM

I,....., accept/ decline the invitation to participate in the research indicated above.(Delete as appropriate)

Name:.....Signature.....

Date:

ANNEXURE 4

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR TEACHERS

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR TEACHERS

As part of a doctoral study, this questionnaire seeks your views regarding parental involvement in children's education at primary school level. Your responses will be treated with absolute confidentiality in keeping with research ethics. Kindly answer the questions as fully and honestly as possible. Thank you for your voluntary participation.

1. What is your understanding of the concept parental involvement in children's education?

This is when parents take part in their children's education. It might be material involvement where the parents make it a point that their children do have all the necessary materials needed by pupils at school.

2. What are the benefits of parental involvement?

It motivates pupils. Thus, it gives pupils the eagerness or it makes pupils see the importance of education. This therefore will lessen the teachers' burden on trying to make pupils see the importance of education.

3. How do the parents of the pupils you teach involve themselves in their children's education?

- By providing necessary materials for their children's education.
- By talking to the child's teacher on how best the child can be helped.
- By talking to the child in front of the teacher on the importance of education.

4. Do you think these parents are equipped to be meaningfully involved in their children's education? Motivate your answer.

The parents are not meaningfully equipped because most of them are illiterate. They don't see the importance of education.

5. What exactly do you expect parents to do by way of involving themselves in their children's education?

They should provide their children with necessary materials needed at school.
- They should always discuss with their children on the importance of education, ^{motivate}
- Talk to the child's teacher so as to help the child by seeing where the child needs help.

6. Are your expectations relating to parental involvement congruent with those of the parents?

They are not because parents believe that education is all about pupils and their teachers. They don't believe that they play a pivotal role in their children's education.

7. Do you communicate what you want parents to do or you take it for granted that they know what they should do?

Sometimes there is communication but, failure of parents to respond positively make the teacher reluctant to become. In other words, parents do not respect the views of the teacher in their child's education.

8. Do you encourage parents to suggest what they think they can do to help their children with their education?

Yes parents are encouraged to suggest, but the unfortunate part of it is that they are not eager but, those who suggest and discuss with the teacher get positive results on their children.

9. When would parental involvement constitute interference with your work as a teacher?

On materials needed at school you will find one child going the whole year without books and thus, the teacher won't be able to see how that child will be progressing in that grade. If the child is emotionally unstable it also disturbs him/her at school.

10. What do you think parents should not do in the name of parental involvement?

They should not tell their children on what the teacher should do and what not to do to their children.
- Should not discredit education to their children.

11. Kindly identify barriers to parental involvement in the context of your experience.

- illiteracy is one contributing factor.
- Economic hardships.
- Marriage breakages.

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12. In what ways are parents guilty of inhibiting parental involvement?

- They don't listen to their children's request,
- They don't do follow ups on their children progression,
- They don't listen to the (children's) teachers suggestions on their children.

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13. In what ways are teachers guilty of hindering parental involvement?

- They don't sit down and explain to the parents the importance of their involvement in their children's education.
- They are not patient with parents,

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.....
14. In what ways are schools to blame for creating barriers to parental involvement?

- They don't involve parents much so that they are able to understand that their involvement in their child's education is of paramount importance.
- They just feel for parents that they are illiterate most of them hence become reluctant on their involvement.

15. What role do pupils play in facilitating or hindering parental involvement?

- By not telling their parents the necessary requirements needed at school.
- by being in between school and home.
- By discrediting education to their parents so much that parents become reluctant.

16. What strategies can be used to break down barriers to parental involvement?

- Involve them in each and every activity of the school.
- To have more parents days where teachers and parents would mix and try to make parents feel they have a role to play in their children's education.

17. What should government do to enhance parental involvement in Zaka District?

- Involve the parents in school fees and explain to them the importance of paying the fees.
- Allow schools to have more parents days.

18. What can be done to help uneducated poor parents learn how best they can help their children with their education?

Workshops should be held on trying to equip the poor parents with different ways of helping their children.

19. What would you say were the determinants of parental involvement?

Economic hardships have caused parents to be very much involved in their children's education. E.g. schools could not buy stationery which the parents were now providing. Teacher not being paid satisfactorily to such an extent that parents were to take money from their parents so as to help the teacher.

20. While training to become a teacher were you exposed to learning content related to parental involvement?

Yes, in Sociology

THANK YOU

ANNEXURE 5

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR INTERVIEWS WITH SCHOOL HEADS

INTERVIEW GUIDE: SCHOOL HEADS/PRINCIPALS

1. What do you understand by the concept PI in children' s education?
2. What are the benefits of PI?
3. In what ways are parents involved in their children' s education at your school?
4. What would you like parents to do to enhance PI?
5. In the context of your school, what are the barriers to PI?
6. What can be done to overcome the barriers you have indicated?
7. In what ways can you say parents create barriers to their own involvement in children' s education?
8. In what ways can you say teachers create barriers to parental involvement?
9. In what ways can you say school heads create barriers to parental involvement?
10. During your training to be a teacher, did you learn about parental involvement?
11. As school head have you attended any workshops on parental involvement?
12. Have you ever organised workshops for teachers and parents on parental involvement?
13. Have district or provincial education officers ever organised workshops for teachers and parents on parental involvement? If so, how many?
14. Are you aware of any government policy relating to parental involvement? If so, what does it say?
15. Is a policy on parental involvement desirable? Why?
16. What can government do to enhance parental involvement in primary schools?
17. Are there parents who cannot be meaningfully involved in their children' s education? Explain.
18. What strategies can be used by (a) teachers and the school, (b) government to empower parents to become effectively involved in their children' s education?
19. What role do pupils play in either facilitating or hindering parental involvement?
20. How would you describe the communication that goes on between the school and parents? How can you improve the communicatyion?
21. Is there anything related to parental involvement we have not covered which you consider important?

Thank you for participating in this interview

ANNEXURE 6

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW GUIDE

FOR

INTERVIEWS WITH PARENTS

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW GUIDE: PARENTS

1. What do you do at school and at home to help children succeed in their schooling?
2. How do you help children in terms of homework and general study at home? Do you feel competent to help children with homework and general study at home? Elaborate.
3. Does the school communicate its expectations in relation to parental involvement?
4. Do you feel duty-bound to be jointly involved with teachers in your children's education?
5. Do you sometimes visit the school uninvited to discuss your children's education?
6. What are the benefits of parental involvement in children's education?
7. What are the barriers to parental involvement? How can they be overcome?
8. Is parental involvement more of a mother's duty than a father's at primary school level?
Explain.
9. How would you describe the state of the relationship between parents, teachers and the school head?
10. Do you have opportunities to discuss with your children what they would have learned or experienced at school? If so, how often?
11. What are the benefits of such discussion?
12. Can you describe how you typically part with your child in the morning when s/he goes to school and in the afternoon/evening when s/he returns home?
13. What chores do you expect your child to do before going to school and after returning from school? What effect do you think such chores could have on the child's schooling?
14. How does your individual situation affect the way you are involved in your child's education?
15. What should be done to enable you to participate more in your children's education?
16. Is there anything important relating to parental involvement which we have not covered?

Thank you very much for participating in this interview.

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ANNEXURE 7

**A NEAR-DRY DOMESTIC WATER
SOURCE
CONFIRMING THE ARIDITY OF
THE RESEARCH SITE**



ANNEXURE 9

FARM

IMPLIMENTS



ANNEXURE 10

HOMESTEAD



ANNEXURE 11

DOING READING HOMEWORK



ANNEXURE 12

**READING TO PARENT AS PART
OF HOMEWORK**

ANNEXURE 12

READING TO PARENT AS PART OF HOMEWORK

