# PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN KENYA

by

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**DECLARATION**

I declare that **PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN KENYA** is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.


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**Signature**                                                         **Date**

**Kimu A.M.**

**DEDICATION**

To Kimu, my late father and Muthoni, my mother who have always encouraged me to excel, the next generation including my upcoming children, nieces and nephews and all the family members who often weep and laugh with me.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| ASAL | Arid and Semi-arid Land |
| ATS1 | Approved Teacher Status 1 |
| CIS | Chief Inspector of Schools |
| DEB | District Education Board |
| DEO | District Education Officer |
| EFA | Education for All |
| FPE | Free Primary Education |
| G&C | Guidance and Counseling Teacher |
| Med | Masters Degree |
| NEAB | National Educational Advisory Board |
| PEB | Provincial Education Board |
| P1 | Primary Teacher 1 |
| PIS | Provincial Inspector of Schools |
| SDP | School Development Programme |
| SMC | School Management Committee |
| SIMSC | School Instructional Materials Selection Committee |

**ABSTRACT**

Parental involvement in education in Kenya is mainly limited to financial contributions and teacher-parent meetings. Given the high cost of education and the need to improve quality of education, parental involvement is important. The effectiveness of educational restructuring initiatives therefore would depend on more comprehensive parental involvement in schools. A literature study investigated existing programmes and models of parental involvement in schools as well as legislation as pertaining to parental involvement in Kenya. A qualitative design utilising Epstein's model of parental involvement was used to examine parental involvement practice in public primary schools in Kenya. Accordingly, a qualitative approach within purposefully selected schools study was conducted. The findings suggested that parental involvement activities in the study sample fitted Epstein's typology comparatively well. Based on the findings recommendations for the improvement of parental involvement practice were presented.

Key Words: Kenya, public primary schools, free primary education, parental nvolvement, parents, principals, teachers, pupils.

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**CHAPTER 1**

**PROBLEM FORMULATION, AIMS AND THE RESEARCH DESIGN**

**1.1 INTRODUCTION**

Traditionally, education has been viewed as the exclusive job for the experts in the education sector (Bridgemohan, 2002:1). As a result, parental involvement has not been enough. Of late, schools have shifted from restricted professionalism to open a debate on actual parental involvement in school life, which has enabled closer ties to be developed between the home and the school, translating into enhanced attendance and higher academic achievement.

Hung (2007:116) states that parental involvement is a democratic concern in terms of individual rights and as a way of making the educational system more self-governing and developing more power at the local level, allowing for greater accountability by schools to the society. He adds that in general, society needs to increase its level of educational involvement, and that this starts with the support by the parents. The endeavour of schools to realise higher standards and greater accountability requires the commitment from the school staff, families and communities (Machen, Wilson & Notar, 2005:14). In this regard, parent-school linkages can be enhanced through the teacher/parent relationship. Because teachers are the main linkage of parents with a school, the teacher/parent relationship is critical to pupils' success and parent involvement. Kgaffe (2001:1) points out that there is need to influence the professional attitudes of teachers and convince both parents and schools of the value of mutual cooperation. According to Mirons (2004:56), if there is positive contact between parents and teachers initially, future negative incidents are not likely to change the initial positive notion. In many countries, one of the strongest trends has been to give parents and community members an increased role in governing schools (Lemmer, 2007:218). Many governments now have legislation to ensure that parents are involved in their children's education more than before (Naidoo, 2005:28; Friedman, 2011:1). The concept of 'parental involvement' in education, benefits accruing from this involvement and the relevance of parental involvement in terms of Kenya's education are discussed in this chapter.

## 1.2 PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION

According to Bridgemohan (2002:1) and Jeynes (2010:749), 'parental involvement' means different things to different individuals while the degree of parental involvement in different phases of education also varies. The study of parental involvement is complex, given the range of activities undertaken, the differing perspectives held by the parties involved and the disparate nature of much of the work.

Parental involvement is the awareness of and participation in schoolwork, understanding of the interaction between parenting skills and student success in schooling and a commitment to consistent communication with teachers about students' progress (National Middle School Association Research Summary (NMSA), 2006:1). Research undertaken recently has led to a paradigm shift from exclusive professionalism and opened up discussion on the importance of parental involvement (Bridgemohan, 2002:2) and that parents have the right to play an active role in their children's education (Wolfendale, 1999:164). According to Symeou (2003:473) parents, at nearly all levels, are concerned about their children's education and success and want advice and help from schools on ways of helping their children. Quiocho and Daoud (2006:256), and Brannon (2008:57) note that parental involvement leads to higher academic achievement and improved perceptions of children's competence. They add that the increasing evidence of the sustained benefits of parental involvement in the higher primary grades and in high school, calls for continued research in this area and the necessity of implementing parental involvement programs at all levels of school education.

Research suggests that parents, pupils and teachers benefit from increased parental involvement (Zelman & Waterman, 1998:371; Lemmer, 2007:218). MacNeil and Patin (2000:1) have identified several purposes of parental involvement in schools, including motivating schools to function at a higher level by constantly improving teaching and learning practices, creating higher student achievement and success in school and also in the general development of the child as well as preventing and remedying educational and developmental problems of pupils. There is also decreased truancy, improved attitudes of pupils to their studies, improved behaviour and a decrease in the dropout rate in pupils. Moreover, these benefits occur irrespective of the socio-economic group to which the family belongs (Van Wyk, 2008:5). Further, better parental involvement could be of assistance in

lessening various problems faced by communities in which there is material, emotional and/or educational deprivation in the children, thus promoting equal opportunity among such disadvantaged communities (McKenna & Willms, 1998:22; Desimone, 1999:12; Mahoney, Schweer & Staffin, 2002:72; Greer, 2004:6).

Parents benefit from an improved parent-child relationship. A sound parent-child relationship leads to increased contact with the school and to a better understanding of the child's development and the educational processes involved in schools, which could help parents to become better 'teachers' at home, for example, by using more positive forms of reinforcement (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

Furthermore, greater parental involvement leads to teachers having better relationships with parents and pupils, fewer behavioural problems, a reduced workload and a more positive attitude towards teaching (Fan & Williams, 2010:53; Monadjem, 2003:7). Kgaffe (2001:3) and Tan and Goldberg (2009:442) state that in this case, teachers get support and appreciation from parents, broaden their perspectives and increase their sensitivity to varied parent circumstances, gain knowledge and understanding of children's homes, families and out-of-school activities. Teachers also receive higher ratings from parents, in other words, teachers who work at improving parental involvement are considered better teachers than those who remain cut off from the families of the pupils that they teach.

Schools are faced with the task of implementing various strategies to involve parents in the education of pupils. Eldridge (2001:65) and Niemeyer, Wong and Westerhaus (2009:632) observe that programs involving parents who volunteer to work in the classroom have definite benefits; they indicate the need to have a welcoming classroom environment as well as being sensitive to parent diversity and availability. According to Calhoun, Light and Keller (1998:329), most parents want their children educated and would like to be involved. However, low levels of education in some parents thus feeling incapable; perceiving that they belong to a lower social rank compared to the teachers, unavailability because of schedule conflicts and school resistance to complete parental inclusion are barriers to the involvement of parents in the classroom.

At present, the Kenyan education system is experiencing the challenge of providing access to quality education to all children of school-going age on an equitable basis (Republic of Kenya, 2001:25). Because of the free primary education (FPE) initiative, a rapid rise in enrolments at primary school level has been realised. However, this sector of education is facing serious problems in both qualitative and quantitative growth in terms of access and the fact that the retention, completion and attainment rates are declining, while geographical and gender disparities are becoming even more marked. It is important to note that the sector has not responded adequately to population growth and continues to record low enrolments. Resources are inadequate; classrooms are overcrowded, and are insufficient or are lacking in some cases, while the number of teachers is not adequate. Heavy workloads demoralise teachers (Mwangi & Kimu, 2003:36). Parents still have to provide funds for desks, uniforms, books, and building funds. This places a heavy burden on them, resulting in most pupils being taken out of school (Oketch & Rollerston, 2007:10). Efforts to improve the quality of education in Kenya have been made by phasing out untrained teachers and providing teacher training, providing funds for instructional materials, paying teachers' salaries and employing quality assurance staff. Sadly, none of these efforts have focussed on parental involvement beyond the role of providing funds for schools. The Education Act, Cap. 211 part III, 9(2), Legal Notice 190/1978 provides for parents to be represented on the School Management Committee (SMC). Nevertheless, only a few parents are legally involved in school management activities. The effective role of parents in school has not been recognised.

According to Desimone (1999:12) and Van der Warf, Creamers and Guldemont (2001:447), parental involvement is not only necessary but it is also one of the most cost-effective means of improving quality in education. Van der Warf *et al.,* (2001:461) found that although parental involvement requires a modest budget, it is more useful and cheaper as compared to other interventions, such as teacher development, improvement in education management, books and learning materials. Thus, parental involvement is a particularly suitable means for improving education in a developing country like Kenya. The schools have an obligation to improve the education of all pupils, yet they cannot accomplish this task without parental involvement. The move towards higher standards and greater accountability in schools requires a commitment from school personnel, families and communities (Machen *et al.,* 2005:14). The development of a comprehensive program that focuses on the provision of

many opportunities for parental involvement, providing parenting training that will increase awareness of their child's potential and removing obstacles to effective parental involvement, is a key strategy in education transformation in a country with inadequate resources like Kenya.

Epstein and Jansorn (2004:19-23) observe that there is no common model for parental involvement and a school's needs will differ from one another and will therefore be determined by each school's strengths and backgrounds. Bridgemohan (2002:3) observes that parental involvement is practised in many different ways. Moreover, a variety of models exist, such as: Gordon's 1977 Family Impact, the School Impact and the Community Impact models (Gordon, 1977:74-77), Swap's School-to-Home Transmission, the Curriculum Enrichment and the Partnership Models (Swap, 1992:57); Comer's School Development Programs (1988:24) and Epstein's Model (1995:704) involving parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community.

While each of these models has its merits, the theoretical stance adopted by the stakeholders towards home-school relations influences the level and extent of these relations. Thus, the specific theoretical stance held by the school will determine the extent to which collaboration between the home and the school will exist (Bridgemohan, 2002:3). Clearly, in its education system, Kenya has provided for various roles that parents can play in education. Institutional governance structures such as school committees, parent-teachers-associations and school board-of-governors reflect the interests of all stakeholders and the broader community served by the school. The education system also assigns a role to parents in establishing the infrastructure, particularly in the construction of schools and ensuring that sound educational programs take place in schools. Kandel (quoted in Phillips and Schweisfurth, 2006:18) sums this aspect up as follows:

  In order to understand, appreciate and evaluate the real meaning of the education system of a nation, it is essential to know something of its history and traditions, of the forces and attitudes governing its social organisation, of the political and economic conditions that determine its development.

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The same can be said regarding the way in which a country involves parents in the education of their children. With this in mind, it is essential to highlight the historical and cultural contexts in which parental involvement has developed in Kenya. The evolution of education with specific reference to public primary schools in Kenya, will be investigated in the following section.

## 1.3    BRIEF HISTORY OF EDUCATION IN KENYAN SCHOOLS

Although the history of Western education in Kenya dates as far back as the colonial era, this overview will only concentrate on developments since the first post-independence commission on education, namely the Ominde Commission of 1964. The Commission's mandate was to correct the flaws existent in the education system before independence. These flaws included racial segregation in education, poor accessibility to education, especially by the majority Africans and a rigid examination system, which tended to restrict completion of primary education, but also led to high failure rates among the Africans (Oketch & Rollerston, 2007:11). The Commission therefore endorsed the provision of free primary education, which was a valid educational objective. It also laid the foundation for the pattern of education in independent Kenya by abolishing racial segregation in schools and established a standardised national curriculum. Moreover, it recommended the management of public primary schools by local education authorities, namely the District Education Board (DEB). Further, the consolidation of primary teacher training colleges to upgrade teachers for better quality of education was recommended (Republic of Kenya, 2007:116). To improve the completion rates in the primary school cycle, the Common Entrance Examination which was done in the primary fourth grade (standard IV) was abolished together with the intermediate classes V, VI, VII and VIII and was replaced by a consolidated seven years' primary school course 1966 (Oketch & Rollerston, 2007:10).

Although the government improved access to the better-equipped formally European-only and Asian-only schools to Africans by providing bursaries or subsidies, the ideal of primary education for all was not immediately achieved. Most parents could still not afford school fees for their children. Initially, only elite African parents, who could afford to pay the fees of previously European-only and Asian-only schools, got free access to schooling for their children (Oketch & Rollerston, 2007:11).

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The Ndegwa Commission of 1971 recommended the streamlining of facilities in primary schools and also called for an increase in the size of the inspectorate to monitor the quality of education. While the government recognised the importance of primary education, it was not ready to provide it free in the short-term, stating that primary education was largely the responsibility of parents and that, while free primary school education remained the policy of the government, for purely economical reasons, the development of primary school education could not be given priority over secondary, technical and higher education. However, in the same year, the ruling KANU government, in pursuit of its objective of free primary school education, abolished tuition fees in the arid and semi-arid land (ASAL) areas (which were the most geographically disadvantaged areas) by a presidential decree. This was followed in 1974 by the declaration of free education in the first four primary school grades in all other areas in the country. The following grades were to be made free progressively in the successive years. The government set a fee of 60 shillings for standards V to VII countrywide (Oketch & Rollerston, 2007:11).

The move towards free primary school education in a poor developing nation such as Kenya was bound to fail because it had been implemented without a strategic plan (Ngaroga, 2006: 52). Following this measure, there was a rapid increase in enrolment, which outstripped the available resources. Classrooms were overcrowded or even lacking in some cases and there were too few teachers, the available teachers suffered from a low morale due to too much work and parents had to provide desks, uniforms, books and buildings - a burden which resulted in parents taking their children out of school. Moreover, the quality of education remained a challenge to the government (Oketch & Rollerston, 2007:10). Thus, free primary education was difficult to sustain and eventually it collapsed (Ngaroga, 2006:52).

The Mackay Report of 1981 marked a new decisive moment for education when its recommendations were implemented in 1985. The restructuring of the education system to eight years of primary school, four years of secondary school and a minimum of four years of studying for a university bachelor's degree (the 8-4-4 system) was carried out because it was perceived that the education system up till then had not addressed the questions of quality, relevance and equity of education adequately. Following its recommendations, the curriculum had to emphasise practical subjects at all school levels, which would provide

technical and vocational skills. Schools were required to improve their facilities in order to provide the newly introduced practical subjects, which further increased the fees' burden of parents (Republic of Kenya, 2001:8).

The Report of the Presidential Working Party on Manpower Training for the Next Decade and Beyond (Kamunge Report of 1988) focussed on improving the financing, quality and relevance of the education system of Kenya. Further, it aimed to address the problem of wastage in schools, which resulted from the repetition of grades and dropouts. The recommendations of the Working Party led to the government producing the Sessional Paper Number 6, which recommended the policy of cost sharing between the government, parents and the communities in the provision of educational services (Ngigi & Macharia, 2006:4). With regard to the cost-sharing strategy (Sessional Paper No. 6), the government committed itself to reducing the share of its budget to education by shifting recurrent costs such as book purchases, fees, uniforms and other private costs like transport and meals to parents and the community. In addition, the schools were expected to depend entirely on the parents' contribution for non-teaching staff costs (Republic of Kenya, 2007:117).

In 1990, the government of Kenya committed itself to the Education for All (EFA) initiatives that were discussed at a UNESCO World Conference at Jomtien, Thailand. Since then, various strategies have been attempted to achieve this goal (Republic of Kenya, 1999:86). In the effort to meet this commitment, the government set out certain goals and targets in its Interim Poverty Reduction Strategic Paper 2000. These goals included:

- To achieve Universal Primary Education by 2005,

- To enhance access, equity and quality at all levels of education and training by 2010.

- To realise adult literacy by 2015.

- To boost the quality and relevance of basic education, especially for the poor and needy children over the six years of the plan (Republic of Kenya, 2001:9).

With this backdrop, the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) government in 2002 pledged that they would provide full free primary education (FPE) for all in its manifesto (OWN Associates, 2004:1).

The goal of primary education is to provide access to quality education to all children of school-going age on an equitable basis, ensuring education for all at this level (Republic of Kenya, 2001:25). Because of the FPE initiative, a rapid rise in enrolments at primary school level has been realised. However, this sub-sector of education is facing the same serious problems in both qualitative and quantitative growth today as during the 1970s: access, retention, completion and attainment rates are declining, while geographical and gender disparities are even more marked. It is important to note that the sub-sector has not responded adequately to population growth and continues to record low enrolments. Only about seventy-five percent of primary school age children have access to education at this level and of these, less than fifty percent complete the primary school cycle. Traditionally, the girls were disadvantaged, but a new phenomenon has developed in some areas where the enrolment of boys is declining in comparison to that of girls. Increasing poverty and the rising HIV/AIDS scourge has resulted in high dropout and non-completion rates. In order to meet EFA goals, it is important to increase the current eighty-eight percent enrolment and forty-seven percent completion rates to reach the EFA target of universal primary education as well as improve the quality of education at this level (Republic of Kenya, 2001:25).

Research has shown the value and cost-effectiveness of parental involvement, but many of the reforms in education have not been successful in meeting the challenges in the sector. Consequently, the development of a comprehensive program, that focusses on providing multiple opportunities for parental involvement and on removing obstacles to effective parental involvement, is necessary in education reform in a nation that has inadequate resources like Kenya (Machen *et al.*, 2005:14). The importance of bringing about efficiency in the education sector is critical if the EFA goal of universal education is to be attained. The state's policies, guidelines and bylaws for the educational programs strongly influence or determine the degree and type of parental involvement practised by schools.

This brief historical background shows the commitment of the state to the provision of education to all children over the years. In the Vision 2030, Kenya will provide 'a globally competitive quality education, training and research for development'. The overall goal for 2012 is to reduce illiteracy by increasing access to education, improving the transition rate from primary to secondary schools and raising the quality and relevance of education (Kenya Vision 2030 July-August, 2007:12). Although there is evidence of the government's commitment to the provision of education, the need for school facilities and services far exceed the provision thereof. This is the reason for the development of private schools, which offer better facilities and a lower pupil-teacher ratio. Of particular significance is that a big proportion of school-going age children still do not have access to primary education. The author believes that even with FPE in place, we are still grappling with how to attain the goal of ensuring accessibility of quality education for all.

In the next section, the Kenyan policy on parental involvement and the role of parents in education are explored.

## 1.4 PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN KENYA

Since independence, in 1963, the Kenyan government has committed itself to the provision of education to all its citizens in order to eradicate illiteracy, poverty, ignorance and diseases (Republic of Kenya, 2001:73). About thirty five to thirty eight percent of the national recurrent expenditure is spent on education. The main feature of expenditure in education, however, is the dominance of emoluments to teachers and the inspectorate so that the share left for teaching/learning materials is low. Consequently, parents must meet the costs of book purchases, building and activity funds, uniforms and other private costs like transport and meals for their children. In addition, schools have to depend entirely on the parents' contribution for the maintenance of non-teaching staff (Republic of Kenya, 2007:117).

In order to reduce the financial burden on parents, the government introduced Free Primary Education (FPE) in all Kenyan public primary schools in 2003 (The Kenya National Commission for UNESCO, 2005: 62). Following the implementation of FPE, enrolment in primary school increased by 18 percent from 5.9 million children in 2002 to 7.2 million in

2004 (Oketch & Rollerston, 2007:6). There have been many challenges, however, in the implementation of FPE, such as:

- Obtaining capital to sustain the education expenditure.

- Prompt imbursement of funds to schools.

- Seeing that funds sent to schools are spent for the planned purposes.

- Coping with the high enrolment of pupils, particularly in schools where facilities are not enough.

- Providing sufficient teachers and motivating them.

- Maintaining education quality as enrolment increases in schools.

- Ensuring that retention rates are maintained in areas where factors such as famine, nomadism and female genital mutilation counter retention of pupils in school (Republic of Kenya, 2008:16).

In addressing these challenges, the government has continued to employ more teachers, enacted the Children's Bill in which it encourages various communities to send their children to school; initiated the School Feeding program in ASALs (arid areas) to enhance retention and completion in schools and has encouraged parents to raise funds for improving infrastructure in schools (Ngaroga, 2006:52). However, the need for effective involvement of parents in the education of their children (apart from meeting costs) in schools has largely been unrecognised in Kenya. Furthermore, it is difficult for teachers to deal with factors of educational disadvantage caused by family factors such as poverty, ethnicity, lack of parental education, marital status, and so on, while the degree to which parents are involved in their children's education is manipulable and changeable (Zelman & Waterman, 1998:389; European Commission, 2000:45).

Good parental involvement programs have been shown to increase the levels and types of parental involvement occurring in schools substantially (Desimone, 1999:12; European Commission, 2006:46). Moreover, some types of parental involvement have been found to

have a greater effect on school achievement than family background variables. Therefore, increased parental involvement may provide an avenue to address the problems of disadvantaged Kenyan primary school pupils. Thus, a program that enables Kenya's primary school parents to be involved effectively in their children's education would provide a practical and cost-effective means to address Kenya's educational deficiencies. This study attempts to investigate parent involvement in education, with specific reference to public primary schools in Kenya.

Bridgemohan (2002:2) notes that strong parental involvement is essential for educational progress and success. It has the potential to lessen the gap in achievement between children from high and low-income families respectively and is an important component of academically and socially effective schools. Machen *et al.*, (2005:14) observe that although effective parental involvement is crucial in the education of children, it is far from a reality in most primary schools.

Various governments now have legislation to ensure that parents are more intensively involved in their children's education (Naidoo, 2005:28). There is a strong trend involving educational transformation in many countries (Lemmer, 2007:218). Given the benefits outlined above, effective parental involvement would be a particularly suitable means for improving education in a developing country like Kenya. Consequently, a program that would enable Kenyan parents to be effectively involved in their children's education would provide a practical and cost-effective means to address Kenya's educational deficiencies.

## 1.5 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A theoretical framework positions research in the discipline or subject area in which one is working and provides an orientation to a study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006:333). This study pertains to the ecological systems theories, with special reference to primary schools. As Barton, Drake, Perez, St. Louis and George (2004:3-12) explain, parental involvement theories are often applied in order to help show ways of improving the state of parental involvement in school.

Theories on parental involvement are important to improve understanding of this critical issue in education. Schools are an inextricable part of society as well as the community in

which they belong and are thus seen as social sub-systems, which cannot function in isolation in their social environments. According to Hoy and Miskel (2001:252), schools are open systems and depend on exchanges with environmental elements to continue to exist. Numerous environmental influences come from different levels of society and affect what happens in schools. Likewise, families are also seen as social systems, which can influence what happens in schools. In this regard, Senge, Cambron-McCabe, Lucas, Smith, Dutton and Kleiner (2000) suggest that schools and those within schools are 'living' systems that are strongly influenced by their interaction at three levels: the classroom, the school and the community.

According to Bronfenbrenner (1994:39), learning is a social process affected by forces at many levels, including government policies and the society. His ecological theory on education recognises that among the many different spheres of social influences that create contexts for learner development, there are many possibilities for intervention (Lambert & Sturt, 2005:89). The involvement of parents in the education of their children is one example. In this study, a bio-ecological model is adopted to develop a theoretical framework for the investigation. The bio-ecological model suggests that intervening intermediate and immediate family and school contexts are likely to mediate the parents' decision to become involved in the education of their children. Further, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1995:310-331) model focuses more closely on the parent involvement process. The model identifies several factors that influence a parent's decision to become involved with the child's learning. Parents are more likely to become involved if they:

- Think that such involvement is part of the work of being a parent

- Believe they can be effectual in helping the child

- Are asked to become involved

- Are given opportunities for involvement.

The parent's choice of the form of involvement is influenced by the parent's skills and knowledge, other demands on the parent's time and energy and the specific invitations for involvement from the child or the school. For this study, a model is presented that suggests

possible relationships among parents' social status, family structure, school environments, pupils' invitingness and parent involvement. The framework is presented in figure 1.
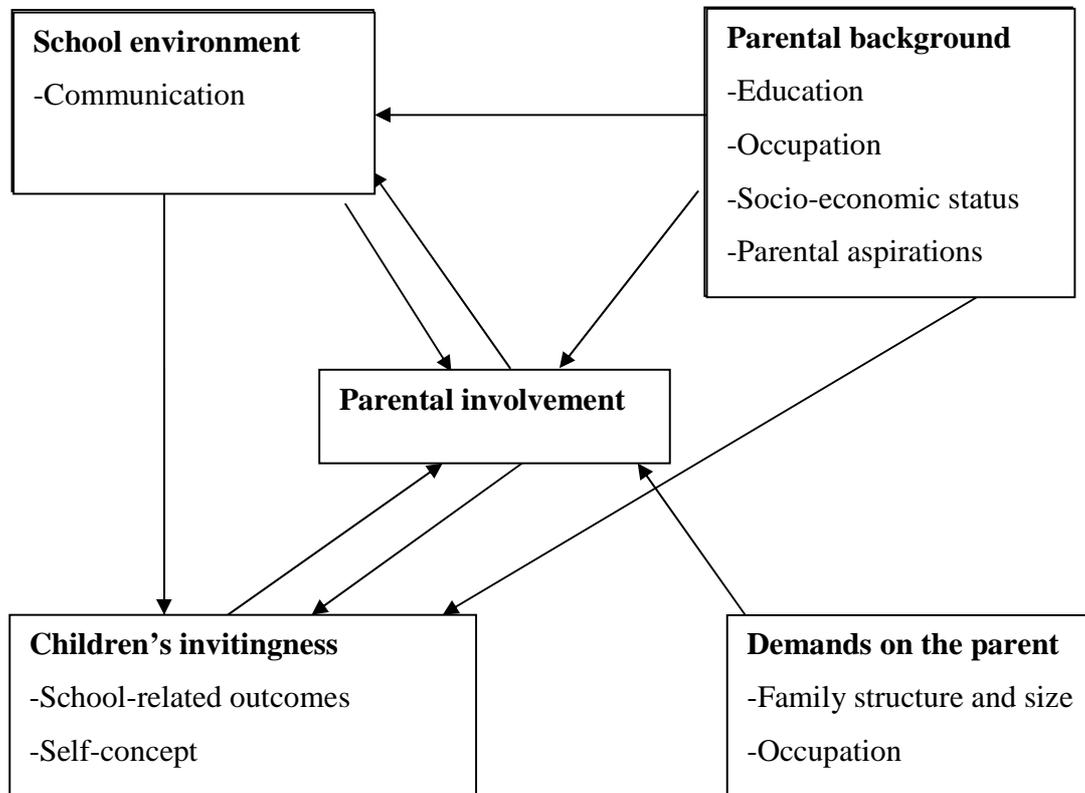


**Figure 1.1: The theoretical model of the relationships between parental background, children's influence, school environmental influences and parent involvement (After Hung, 2007:118)**

This model provides a useful background for understanding parents' decisions regarding involvement and for designing and developing tools to promote involvement. The ways in which the parents are involved is determined by the efforts that the school makes to involve parents and also by the willingness of parents to embrace opportunities to get involved. The model provides a structure around which a school can organise, implement and evaluate its efforts to involve parents and communities in children's education. Therefore, this study will use this model for investigating the relationship between the parents and the school and parental involvement in public primary schools in Kenya.

The statement of the problem is spelt out in the next section.

**1.6 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Parental involvement in Kenyan public primary schools dates back to pre-independence. Since independence in 1963, little research has been carried out to determine the extent to which it serves to improve the quality of education effectively. This study attempts to investigate this issue: How can an effective parental involvement program be designed to benefit Kenyan public primary school pupils, their parents and teachers maximally? In order to develop recommendations for the design of an effective parent involvement program for the Kenyan community, a number of sub-questions must be answered:

- In what ways do public primary schools attempt to involve parents in their children's education?

- What are the teachers' perceptions on parental involvement in Kenyan public primary schools?

- What are the parents' perceptions on their involvement in Kenyan public primary schools?

- What factors hinder the involvement of parents in Kenyan public primary schools?

- How does family background influence the extent to which parents are involved in their children's education in public primary schools?

- How can these findings contribute to the planning of an effective parental involvement program for public primary schools in Kenya?

The aim of the study is laid out in the section that follows.

**1.7    AIM OF THE RESEARCH**

The aim of this research is to develop recommendations for the design of an effective parental involvement program suited to Kenyan public primary schools so that pupils, teachers and parents will derive the greatest possible benefits from the implementation of this program. Specifically, the study will seek to:

- Identify the ways that public primary schools attempt to involve parents in their children's education.

- Assess teachers' perceptions on parental involvement in public primary schools.

- Examine parents' perceptions of their involvement in public primary schools.

- Establish the factors that hinder the involvement of parents in public primary schools.

- Find out how the family background influences the extent to which parents are involved in their children's education.

- Find out how these can be integrated with the literature recommendations for the design of an effective parent involvement program for public primary schools in Kenya.

## 1.8 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Since independence in 1963 the vision for the transformation of education has always been articulated. However, internal constraints related to planning, management and financing have been constant challenges to the education sector in regard to boosting pupil retention and completion in schools (Ngaroga, 2006:52). Accordingly, creative and divergent solutions to meet the challenges are necessary. National education policy and legislation calls for increased involvement of parents in order to facilitate a culture of effectiveness in schools (Republic of Kenya, 2004a:96-99). However, the contribution by parents in the education of their children has largely been seen in terms of meeting costs. According to Bridgemohan (2002:2) effective parental involvement is essential for success in schools as well as to lessen the gap in achievement between children from high and low-income families. This study is significant because current information on the extent of involvement of parents in public primary schools is not well understood. Additionally, the findings of this study would be used to recommend relevant approaches which when implemented would help improve parental-school involvement in schools in Kenya.

## 1.9 RESEARCH METHODS AND DESIGN

### 1.9.1 Research methodology

In this study, qualitative approaches will be used to gather data. Qualitative research is loosely defined as a collection of approaches to research, all of which rely on verbal, visual, tactile, auditory, olfactory and gustatory data (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001:147).. These data are preserved in descriptive narratives such as notes, recordings or other transcriptions from audios and videotapes and other written records, pictures or films. Qualitative approaches usually focus on phenomena that occur in their natural settings, that is, in the real world; and they involve studying such phenomena in all their complexity (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001:147).

### 1.9.2 Population

According to De Vos (1998:190), the population refers to the people, events, organisational units or other sampling units with which the specific research problem is concerned. In this study, the population was all the public primary schools in Kenya. For governance purposes, Kenya is divided into eight provinces, thereby taking care of the 19,000 government-aided primary schools. The catchments of these schools include rural, urban and semi-urban backgrounds.

### 1.9.3 Sample selection

Kumar (1999:148) defines sampling as the process of selecting a few units from a bigger group (the sampling population) to become the basis for estimating or predicting a fact, situation or outcome regarding the bigger group. A sample is therefore a portion of the elements in a population that is studied in an effort to understand the population from which it was drawn (De Vos, 1998:190). The sampling population for this study is the Embu West District, which has five education zones, namely the Manyata, Central, Nembure, Kyeni and Runyenjes zones, with a total of 141 public primary schools and 1,307 teachers. Out of these, the schools in the Central education zone will be studied.

The schools in the Central education zone in Embu West District are typical of public primary schools in Kenya in terms of staffing and parental involvement. The area has permanent residents comprising different ethnic groups representing various socio-economic

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backgrounds. Such typicality increases the external validity of the sample. The Embu area is also chosen because the researcher works as a primary school teacher trainer in the region, which would make it easier to negotiate for access into the schools.

Nine schools for the study sample will be selected purposively based on socio-economic classification: three from a marginalised/low income rural area, three rural schools that are well established, and three urban schools. A profile of each school will be developed by the researcher in terms of the buildings, number of staff, classrooms, number of students, learning facilities and extra-mural activities.

The sample that will be used in this study will be:

- Nine public primary schools in the Central Division of Embu West District.

- The principals from the nine public primary schools in the Central Division of Embu West District.

- Sixteen teachers: eight class teachers, six panel heads, the senior teacher and the guidance/counsellor (from each of the selected schools).

- Fourteen parents: six parents with children in lower classes, six parents with children in the upper classes, the chair of the School Management Committee (SMC) and the treasurer of the SMC (from each school).

### 1.9.4 Data collection

Blaxter, Hughes and Tight (2001:153) state that all research involves the collection and analysis of data, whether it is through reading, observation, measurement, asking questions or a combination of these approaches. The following data collection techniques will be used in this study: a literature review, interviews, observations and focus group discussions.

### *1.9.4.1 Literature review*

According to Fink (1998:3), the literature review is a systematic explicit and reproducible method for identifying, evaluating and interpreting the existing recorded work by scholars, researchers and practitioners. Primary and secondary sources will be studied in order to

gather information about parental involvement in public primary schools. Information from journals, newspaper articles, theses, books and the Internet will be studied and the data collected will be integrated with the field data.

### 1.9.4.2 Interviews

In addition to the data collected from the literature sources, individual interviews will be conducted. Leedy and Ormrod (2001:159) point out that interviews in qualitative research are rarely as structured as in quantitative research studies. Rather, they are semi-structured and revolve around a few central questions. Unstructured interviews are more flexible and are more likely to yield information that the researcher is seeking. According to Rubin and Rubin (1995:5), in semi-structured interviews the researcher introduces the topic and then afterwards guides the discussion by asking specific questions. McMillan and Schumacher (2006:353) and O'Donoghue and Punch (2003:19-21) state that during the interview, establishing trust, being sincere, maintaining eye contact and conveying meaning through rephrasing the question for clarity elicits more valid data than using a rigid approach. Should the interviewee deviate from the topic, the interviewer should tactfully steer him or her back. This enables the interviewer to obtain an inside view of the social phenomenon that is being investigated.

The researcher will identify and study in-depth information-rich participants who are effective sources of data on parental involvement in each of the selected schools (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006:332). The principal in each school will be interviewed while purposive sampling will be used to enable the identification of parents (whose children are in the particular school) and teachers who teach in the school as sources for qualitative data. Accordingly, a total of nine principals, eighteen teachers and eighteen parents will be interviewed. Accessibility and willingness to participate will play a key role in determining the participants to be included in this study. In each school, the principal will be approached to suggest parents who live near the school premises and are willing to be part of the study. Importantly, participants will be assured of the confidentiality of the data gathered.

In this study, the researcher will interview the participants (parents, teachers and the principals) in order to get their perceptions, beliefs and attitudes about parental involvement

(McMillan & Schumacher, 2006:333). If there is any misunderstanding in the interview, the researcher will clarify it immediately. The information concerning parental involvement will be attained from both worlds (that is, from the parents and the teachers) in order to understand the two worlds of the parental involvement process. The participants will also get the opportunity to describe their own problems and suggest solutions to them, thereby reducing the risk of the researcher providing ready-made solutions to their problems (Lemmer, 2000:294).

An instrument, comprising of interview guides for the principal, teachers and parents respectively, will be modified for use in the study. The instrument will measure the involvement of pupils' parents in Kenyan primary schools. It will include a biographical section in each interview schedule. The interview guides will include items from Epstein's (1995:704) six areas of parental involvement. Piloting of the instruments will be done on teachers and parents in different schools from the targeted schools in order to ensure their validity and reliability.

### 1.9.4.3 Observations

Observations will also be used as a way of gathering primary data. Kumar (1999:105) indicates that observation is a purposeful, systematic and selective way of watching and listening to an interaction or phenomenon as it takes place. The qualitative researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. Accordingly, the researcher will visit the participants' natural environment to record specific behaviour in its natural setting.

### 1.9.4.4 Focus group discussions

Two focus group discussions with teachers (the subject panel heads and the class teachers) and parents (with children in lower classes and those with children with children in upper classes) will be conducted in each school after informing them about parental involvement. The discussions will be designed to probe how teachers and parents envisage an effective parental involvement program for Kenya. The researcher will conduct each of the interviews, acting as the medium through which the interpreted world is presented (Van der Mescht, 2002:46-47).

**1.9.5 Data analysis**

Rubin and Rubin (1995:226-227) argue that data analysis begins while the interviews are still underway. The tape-recorded interviews will be transcribed verbatim and analysed. Notes of non-verbal behaviour will be typed and studied. Data will be analysed holistically using phenomenology where the researcher constructs a picture that takes shape as he or she collects data and examines the parts (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006:373). The final analysis will be done by a process of systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts, tapes and other materials accumulated by the researcher to increase the understanding of them and to enable the researcher to present the information that was uncovered to others (Bridgemohan, 2002:12).

The above approaches will be used to realise the primary purpose of this study, which is to measure parental involvement dimensions, according to which parents are grouped in terms of their personal variables of gender, age, marital status, education level, socio-economic status and child's class. The other aim is to understand and describe how parents and educators experience parental involvement from their own perspective in public primary schools in the light of the types of parental involvement (parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making and collaborating with the community) identified in Epstein's typology, and to give recommendations for a parental involvement program in primary schools in Kenya.

The population and sampling, data collection techniques and data analysis procedures will be discussed in detail in chapter four.

**1.10 DEFINITIONS**

**1.10.1 Parents**

A parent refers to a person responsible for a child's welfare, upbringing and education. It may embrace other members of the family, such as grandparents, older siblings, aunts and uncles; close family friends, neighbours and members of the community who care about the school (Lemmer & Van Wyk, 2004:262). This broader definition encourages schools to

acknowledge a variety of family types and household structures and to develop a versatile range of caregiver involvement practices (Van Wyk, 2001:117).

**1.10.2 Parental involvement**

Some authors equate parental involvement with chaperoning field trips or volunteering for parents'-teachers'-associations (PTAs) or parents' committees. Others define it as attendance at an open house or signing homework folders (The Centre for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement Newsletter of September, 2006:1).

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act (2002, as cited in The Centre For Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement Newsletter of September, 2006:1) defines parental involvement as "the involvement of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities" (Sec. 9101 [32]). The law advocates that parents should be full partners in their child's education,should play a key role in assisting in their child's learning and should be encouraged to be actively involved at school (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Therefore, parents, are entitled to participate with the school in their children's education and they should provide the necessary support required by their children for learning.

Parental involvement in education refers to the involvement of parents in terms of one or more of Epstein's (1995:704) categories of activities. Epstein's 1995 model for comprehensive parental involvement is the most widely used and accepted model and it outlines six types of parental involvement in child support and provision of suitable activities for learning. These types of parental involvement include:

- Helping all families establish home environments to support their children's learning,

- The basic obligation of the school to focus on effecting communication between home and school.

- Volunteering to assist teachers and attending to learner performances and other events at the school.

- Involvement in decision-making (that is, in school governance and advocacy) at the

school, district or state levels.

- Involvement in learning activities at home

- Involvement in collaboration and exchange with the community organisations.

However, parent involvement does not imply a full partnership between parents and the school (MacNeil & Patin, 2000:1).

## 1.10.3 Parental participation

Parental involvement and parental participation are used synonymously in studies to refer to the support of parents in school activities in and out of school for the benefit of the pupils (Kgaffe, 2001:9; Lanther, Wright-Cunningham & Edmonds, 2003:1). The term "parental participation" describes a wide variety of parental behaviours, some of which take place at home while others take place at the school. These include working in the children's canteen, fulfilling children's basic needs, providing clerical support for teachers, attending school social activities, supervising children on school excursions, helping with homework, making decisions on the nature of the curriculum, amongst others. Although there is considerable disagreement on how much power parents should really have in their participation in schools, few advocates of parental participation truly see parents as equal partners with teachers in their children's education (Monadjem, 2003:19).

For the purpose of this study, "parental participation" is a comprehensive and inclusive term that includes all types of parental behaviours at home and at school that relate to children's education. They include decision-making between the school and parents as equal partners in children's education across all of the six of Epstein's (1995:704) types of parental involvement activities.

## 1.10.4 The primary school

According to the Kenyan Education Act of 1968 (revised 1980), the school refers to an institution in which not fewer than ten pupils receive regular instruction. For a school to exist and remain functional, several key players must play their roles in their different capacities

so that it can serve the purpose for which it is intended in society (Republic of Kenya, 2004a:94-95). These players include teachers, pupils and parents.

### 1.10.5 Principals

A principal is the person responsible for all matters pertaining to the smooth running of the school. Such matters include school development planning, management and implementation of the curriculum, management of people in the school, management of resources, teaching, and overseeing of school governing bodies such as the SMC's and the SIMSC, (Republic of Kenya, 1999:11). The term may also refer to the school manager, school head, headmaster or the headmistress.

### 1.10.6 Teachers

These are the persons offering direct tuition and training to pupils/students in an educational institution (Republic of Kenya, 2004a:95). Other duties of teachers include the moral, mental, intellectual and physical development of the pupils (Republic of Kenya, 1999:11).

### 1.10.7 School community

The school community refers to the key players or stakeholders in the school such as the pupils, teachers, parents, religious groups, local leaders, business people, politicians, religious groups, old students and other interested persons (Republic of Kenya, 1999: 75). It is important that a school functions in harmony with these persons because they are possible sources of funds, material and moral support.

### 1.10.8 The Education Act (1968)

The Education Act (Cap 211) of 1968, (amended in 1980), guides the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MOEST) in directing the development of education in the country. The act provided for the establishment of the School Management Committee (SMC) and the inspectorate of schools and the control of school examinations.

According to the act, the permanent secretary is the accounting officer (finance and budgeting) and also the authorising officer in personnel matters. The Director of Education is

the chief advisor to MOEST on all professional matters relating to education in Kenya. The Chief Inspector of Schools (CIS) is in charge of quality control and assurance. At provincial level, the provincial director of education (PDE) who is both the administrative and professional head of education at provincial level, assists these officers. The provincial inspector of schools (PIS) is responsible for the quality control of education. At district level, the district education officer (DEO) directs and guides education assisted by the district inspector of schools. Three advisory bodies are established by the MOEST to assist, give guidance in education development at various levels: the District Education Board (DEB) (an advisory body that guides primary school management), the National Educational Advisory Board (NEAB) and the Provincial Education Board (PEB).

### 1.10.9 School management committee (SMC)

The school management committee is the legal trustee of the school. Its functions and responsibilities are spelt out in the Education Act (1968), (Revised 1980). The SMC consists of eight parents, while the school principal acts as an *ex-officio* member and secretary to the committee, two members of the District Education Board (which is the local education authority), three members of the school sponsor (which commonly is the Church that started the school). The SMC members serve for a minimum period of one year and a maximum of eight years as stated in the Education Act (Republic of Kenya, 1999:80-81). The role of the SMC is to advise the school principal, who is the secretary to the SMC on matters affecting the general development of the school and the welfare of the pupils, the collection and accounting for all funds accruing to the school and the provision of facilities such as buildings, furniture and equipment from the funds collected.

The outlay of the present study will be given in the next section.

### 1.11    CHAPTER DIVISION

This thesis will contain six chapters. The contents of these chapters are outlined in the following paragraphs.

Chapter one serves as an introduction and it describes the general orientation of the research. It outlines the background of the study, describes the problem statement and states the objectives of the research. Definitions of key concepts used in the study are also given.

Chapter two presents a review of the literature on parental involvement in schools. It will refer to similar studies conducted in various countries. It will include the following aspects:

- Applicable and successful parental involvement models.

- The importance of parental involvement with special focus on primary schools;

- Creating a culture of parental involvement in schools.

Chapter three presents a review of the literature on the Kenyan education system, with reference to policies regarding the development of education and parental involvement in education.

Chapter four outlines the research design and research methods. The sampling and data collection methods, as well as the data analysis techniques will be explained. The specifics on how these methods were implemented will also be described in this chapter.

Chapter five contains the data analysis, findings and discussion of the data obtained from the interviews and observations. The strategies and methodologies outlined in chapter four will be related to a summary of the findings of all the sources, the literature, interviews, document analysis and observations and the data analysis applied to create a logical understanding of the findings. The instrument used in the analysis of the data will be discussed in this chapter. The reliability of the investigation with respect to value, consistency and applicability will be established in this chapter.

Chapter six contains the summary, conclusion and recommendations for further research while reflecting on the aims of the research as well as stating how these have been addressed.

## 1.12 SUMMARY

This chapter provided the background to the study by highlighting the importance of parental involvement in schools in general, and then focussed briefly on the Kenyan situation. In

addition, the problem statement and the reason why parent involvement are important in schools were described. A brief description of the methods of investigation was given and important concepts were defined. The necessity for including parents in decision-making processes in the education of pupils cannot be overemphasised as undoubtedly, all the stakeholders benefit when teachers work with parents. Effective involvement of parents by schools is far from a reality and it requires a determined and sustained effort from schools and teachers as well as statutory support. In countries such as Kenya, it would be a cost-effective strategy in terms of the improvement of school standards and accountability to the society. This study, therefore, will attempt to investigate how parental involvement in public primary schools is experienced by teachers and parents with the aim of making recommendations for an effective parental involvement program.

# CHAPTER 2

# THEORIES AND THE PRACTICE OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

## 2.1 INTRODUCTION

The concept of 'democratic participation' of stakeholders in the education of children has always been a continuous tag in educational policy as a central purpose in educational transformation, especially with the parents (Naidoo, 2005:28). Various nations have given parents an enlarged role in governing schools as a result (Lemmer, 2007:218). Zelman and Waterman (1998:370) and Monadjem (2003: 22) observe that parents globally typically only assist with homework, help in correcting discipline, pay school levies and visit schools during the times set by teachers as their role in school governance.

Because of this, Naidoo (2005:28) suggests that parents should play a more dynamic role in their children's education because teachers, pupils and the parents themselves gain from increased parental involvement and this could alleviate some of the problems faced by communities facing difficulties tackling children's material, emotional and learning needs (Lemmer, 2007:218; Wolfendale, 1999:164; Zelman & Waterman, 1998:371). This would then help to achieve equality among the members of these communities (Desimone, 1999:12; Mahoney, Schweer & Staffin, 2002:72; Greer, 2004:6). Michael, Dittus and Epstein (2007:567) as well as Greer (2004:6) add that involvement of parents might improve learning outcomes by better attendance rates, literacy, numeracy outcomes, self-esteem, social behaviour and completion rates in children's school education or movement from school to work.

However, Bridgemohan (2002:3) observes that schools practise parental involvement in different ways, even as Epstein and Jansorn (2004:19-23) add that a school's strengths and backgrounds is the main determinant of its practices in this regard. Several models of parental involvement, such as Gordon's Family Impact, School Impact and Community Impact models (Gordon, 1977:74-77), Swap's School-to-Home Transmission, the Curriculum Enrichment and the Partnership Models (Swap, 1992:57), Comer's School Development Programs (1988:24) and Epstein's Model (1995:704) exist.

While these models have their individual merits, the adopted theoretical stance of the stakeholders, is the determinant of the type and extent of parental involvement that the school will envision and consequently assume. Thus, for instance, if teachers make parental involvement part of their regular school practice, parents interact and work together more with their children at home, feel more confident in assisting their children with schoolwork and this improves their attitudes towards the teachers (Bridgemohan, 2002:15; Imgram, Wolfe & Lieberman, 2007:479).

Several theories on parental involvement are discussed in this chapter, although the focal point is Epstein's Model of Home-School Involvement. The Joyce L Epstein's (1995:704) theoretical Model of Parent/School/Community Relationships is one of the most inclusive models and is referred to in the United States' Project Appleseed (2007:4). It has, therefore been selected for this study and its six areas (namely, parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making and collaborating with the community) will be used as the framework for the study of parental involvement in primary schools in Kenya. Therefore, it will form the basis of this chapter.

## 2.2 PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOLS: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.2.1 Theoretical stance of the school, teachers, parents and other stakeholders

The parent-teacher relationship in a school is the upshot of the theoretical perspective held by the stakeholders, and their specific standpoints influence the extent to which collaboration between the parent, and school occurs. According to Lemmer (2000:62) the most notable theories on teacher-parent interactions are those of Coleman (1987:32-38), Epstein (1995:701-702), Swap (1993:28-58), Gordon (1977:72-78) and Comer (1987:32-38). All provide useful insights into the relationship between schools and parents. These are presented in the following sections.

## 2.2.2 Theories of parental involvement

### *2.2.2.1 The Coleman theory of parental involvement*

Coleman's "social capital" theory (1987:32-33) asserts that changes in the parents' workplace, especially the mother to work outside the home, and the simultaneous shift to mass education outside the home, and which used traditionally to be done at home has weakened the family structure. Consequently, families have become unable to carry out proper socialisation of their children. Education has also, as a consequence moved from the home to formal schools because socialisation of the child is not effectively possible in the household. The school as a new organisation has been established that offers resources that produce attitudes, effects and conception of self, to provide the necessary social capital for the next generation that the home was unable to provide any longer (Coleman, 1987:38).

According to Martinez, Martinez and Peres (2004:24), social capital refers to the quality and depth of relationships among people in a family or in a community. This capital is created by the relationship between children and parents (and other family members) and the resources that are generated for meeting the child's welfare. Coleman (1987: 36) observes that families lay the foundation for their children's progress by building their self-confidence, self-concept and self-reliance and that if these home-training aspects are not completed by the time the child begins school, they become a shared responsibility of the family and the school. Parents, therefore provide the building blocks that make learning possible: if positive influences from the home are lacking, problems will arise.

Coleman (1987: 37) adds that social capital is also found outside the family in the religious, political, economic and social institutions in the community that give it stability and organisation, and that the community can increase its resources by contributing to the development of its members, thereby providing social capital to its members. Moreover, a strong sense of community, common values, and willingness to cooperate are necessary in establishing a positive environment for children.

Coleman (1987:35) states that schools and homes socialise the child through inputs such as the opportunities, demands and rewards that are provided by schools as one category of inputs, and the intimate and more persistent environment offered by the family as the other

category of inputs. The household's social environment is the foundation of the child's attitudes, effort and conception of the self, that is the child's attitudes toward and expectations from education are rooted in the home, as well as its future effort towards scholastic attainment. The expectations and beliefs of the parents, families and communities instigate the child's attitudes towards schooling and learning. These form the building blocks or social capital that makes learning achievable. Accordingly, the mutual interaction between the qualities the child brings from home and the qualities provided by the school determine its learning outcomes.

Van Wyk (2008:14) notes that schools socialise the learner by offering the communal ground for the children to learn in various ways, building upon the socialisation that occurs at home. Coleman (1987:36), on the other hand observes that family socialisation has a superior influence on the child's attitude, learning ability and aptitude in school subjects than the school does. Thus, linking home and school is essential for the child's academic performance improvement.

According to Halpern (2005:4), families provide the financial, human and social capital. The author compares financial capital to the family income, which is a strong predictor of children's educational success. Additionally, parental aspirations and the levels of parent-child interactions, on the other hand, play a large educational role in the child (Majoribanks & Kwok, 1998:100). Thus, financially poor families with high educational aspirations for their children, and who interact regularly with them will 'produce' successful scholars irrespective of their poverty.

According to Coleman (1987:37), the social capital obtainable from the family and community was declining and this mostly hurts children with little human and social capital in their families. Therefore, he advocated religious instruction in public schools because the church, as a fundamental driving force in the community, traditionally plays a major role in the lives of poor African-Americans in the United States of America. He observes that Catholic school pupils performed better compared to public schools, as a result of the good relationships created between the schools, the families and the communities they served. According to Halpern (2005:4) human capital may also include the parents' level of education. Hence, parents with a higher level of formal education are able to provide home

environments that encourage and support learning. However, the author adds that financial and human capital alone do not wholly explain the educational performance of children.

Coleman suggests that the social capital offered by a school is also important because the achievement of pupils is the consequence of the mutual interaction between the qualities that the learner brings from home and the qualities that the school offers. Hargreaves (2001:506) adds that while some schools that are richer in social capital are able to build their pupils' intellectual capital, those with poor social capital weaken pupils' achievement, propagating mediocrity among their pupils. Significantly, the social capital of schools serving poor families is important. Sun (1998:432) argues that poor families that live in deprived areas face the disadvantages of their own poverty and that of their environs. According to Sun, this social effect is often reflected in poorer performance in children from such backgrounds in subjects such as science, mathematics and reading. Moreover, as the social capital in the home and neighbourhood decline, achievement in school is also bound to decline because there are fewer opportunities, demands and rewards available for pupils. Therefore, to improve achievement in children involving the family and community is very important. This would stir up the right attitudes, effort and conception of self that the children and youth require in order to succeed in school and as adults later in life. For this therefore, schools should offer parental workshops and newsletters to enable parents share useful information in order to make them effective mentors at home for their children. Halpern (2005:157) observes that family, school and community social capital are complementally and that the more family, community, or school capital that is available, the more beneficial it would be for the pupils.

In Kenya, low community and parental participation are constraints in the development of education in general (Republic of Kenya, 2001:9). Moreover, communication between schools and parents is seldom on friendly basis since most schools ask parents to come only when their children have discipline issues or are performing poorly. Schools therefore should realise that developing extensive parental involvement and affirming parents' rights to be involved in the education of their children would result in enduring benefits. This would also guarantee pupils' ability to release their potentialities with time.

*2.2.2.2 The Gordon theory of parent involvement*

According to Gordon (1977:72), the home is necessary for human development; the formative years are important for lifelong development, and parents require assistance in creating effective home environments for their children's development. Therefore, Gordon's theory (1977:74-78) proposes three different ways in which the family and the school can be related to each other and affect each other.

In the Parent or Family Impact Model, by means of home visits or other means of contact schools can reach out and educate parents on effective parenting and supporting of their children's education. This model assumes that teachers have the knowledge to teach the parents, while the latter are capable of learning and applying that knowledge for effective living. The model was designed to enable parents to cope with the social and education systems to change their behaviour in order to raise socially acceptable and academically successful children (Gordon, 1977:72).

Gordon suggested several programmes for achieving the above in the parents. In the Parent Education Follow Through Program (Monadjem, 2003:65), parents were trained by a parent teacher to assist their children during their primary years of schooling. However, this model may have difficulties because of three reasons, namely: disagreement between experts on the best ways for parents to support their children, the possibility that unfamiliar values are imposed on parents and the doubt about whether these efforts address superficial rather than root problems (Monadjem, 2003:65).

The School Impact Model refers to parents' impact on the school (Gordon, 1977:76). In this model, the teachers and the parents mutually learn from one another. Thus, the school becomes more in step with the family culture leading to a better working relationship between parents and children enabling learning that is more effective. In this model, parents are involved as volunteers or in parent advisory committees in the school in order to make the school become more responsive to the needs of the home.

According to Monadjem (2003:65), a number of programmes employ this principle and educate parents on how to make decisions. Parents may be included on decision-making committees, that enable them to learn skills in decision making and working in the school's

power structures. Parents, in this way develop more positive attitudes about the school and teachers, while the latter are able to get greater support from the community for the school and parents may seek further education for themselves when they are involved in such an affirmative way. However, Monadjem adds that difficulties with this model can arise because teachers and schools may not readily accept parents in this role and that parents may not utilise their power helpfully (Monadjem, 2003:65).

Gordon's (1977:77-78) Community Impact Model assumes that factors in the home, school and the broader community are all interrelated and thus the community's resources are focussed on facilitating the community-school-home partnership. Therefore, according to this model, the influence goes to and from the home, the school and the broader community respectively. A comprehensive programme is therefore envisioned so that parental education efforts are not conducted piecemeal and sporadically, but are placed within a broader social systems context. However, Monadjem (2003:65) observes that the resources required for carrying out such programmes may be overwhelming.

Gordon (1977: 59) observes that parents participate in diverse roles: as policy-makers, volunteers or paid workers in the school, as an audience, which requires informing them about school activities or calling them to school as bystanders or observers, teachers of their own children and providing or contributing resources within the parameters of the three models above. Consequently, this type of parental involvement will influence not only parents' behaviour and children's work, but also the quality of the schools and communities with which families interact.

While this model identifies several roles for the parents, the crucial role of parents in their children's education is unrealised in Kenya. According to Oketch and Rollerston (2007:6) parental roles have been narrow, and limited to enrolling their children at school, paying school fees in order to support the maintenance of teaching facilities and providing teaching/learning equipment or paying school staff remuneration since independence. The introduction of free primary education in all public primary schools in 2003 further reduced parental participation in the management of education. Believing that the government had relieved them of their responsibility towards their children's education, parents have largely ignored schools (The Kenya National Commission for UNESCO, 2005:62). Moreover, only

a few parents are legally involved in school management activities (Ngaroga, 2006:349). This limited involvement denies schools the benefits of involving parents, which have been found to be wide ranging. Meaningful parental involvement in schools has been shown to improve student achievement, decrease the dropout rate and improve behaviour regardless of the socio-economic class of the family. These benefits can accrue to pupils, teachers, parents and the community. Parents whose participation is impeded by the lack of time, energy, self-confidence or by fear of the school due to previous negative experiences, should be involved through pro-active effort from the school.

### 2.2.2.3 Swap's models of parental involvement

Swap's theory (1993:28) presents four models of home-school partnerships: the Protective Model, the School-To-Home-Transmission Model, the Curriculum Enrichment Model and the Partnership Model.

### a. The Protective Model

This is the leading model dealing with home-school relationships. According to Swap (1993:28-29), the Protective Model aims at reducing conflict between the school and parents through protecting the school from parental interference, mainly by separating the parents and teachers' functions. The model assumes that parents delegate the responsibility of educating their children to the school; parents hold the school responsible for academic results and that teachers accept this assignment of responsibility. According to this model, parental involvement in decision-making or collaborative problem solving would be taken as improper and as interfering with the teacher's work. Swap (1993:29) indicates that many teachers encompass this attitude holding that they are responsible for teaching and that parents' responsibility is confined at home where they should be actively involved with pupils. The model has the advantage that it effectively protects the school from parental interference in most situations. However, it allows many conflicts between the parents and teachers because it does not provide opportunities and structures for effective problem solving between the two parties. It also ignores the potential of home-school collaboration for improving student achievement; and does not utilise the resources from families and the community that could be available to support schools.

**b. The School-to-Home Transmission Model**

In Swap's (1993:28-38) School-To-Home Transmission Model, the aim is to spell out what parents will do to help their children at home by extending the expectations and values of the school to the family so as to improve pupils' performance (Swap, 1992:58). Accordingly, teachers should find out what are the suitable values and practices outside the school that support school success. Parents are required to give support to schooling, highlight expectations of the school to their children, and support their children by creating an environment at home that nurtures learning and guarantee that the child meets the minimum academic and social expectations. Through talking and mixing with the people, especially with parents and members of the community, schools hope the parents will transfer the cultural capital to their children (Swap, 1992:58). This cultural capital includes the ways of knowing, writing and talking as expected in the society. Parents may give cultural capital by means of visiting the museum with their children and assisting with homework. If parents have not transferred the cultural capital to their children by the time they come to school from home the latter will not be able to interact with and succeed well in the larger society. According to Epstein (1987:120) teachers who hold this model have parents underpin those values and attitudes that the teachers consider to be vital for academic attainment to their children.

Quite the opposite of the protective model, the School-to-Home Transmission Model takes that parents have a significant role in enhancing their children's performance academically and thus endorses the constant exchange between home and school. Parents must help their children to perform well within the guidelines established by the school. Accordingly, parents should bring their children to begin school, encourage them to work hard at school and transmit values, attitudes and skills that lead to success Two-way communication is not encouraged because the goal is for parents to understand and support the school's objectives. A few parents may be involved on decision-making committees, but are expected to play a supportive and secondary role.

According to Comer (1980:192) parents who would like their children to be part of the social mainstream must work to acquire the school skills that will lead to school and life success. They should support the school's effort and their children in acquiring the skills that the

school offers to them. Swap (1993:30) suggests that the school must provide a suitable climate that accommodates parents from whatever background and enhances children's social skills. Comer (1980:192) notes that this model would be of benefit to parents who do not have access to the social mainstream and are seeking such access for their children.

This model however has four potential demerits. Firstly, reluctance to regard parents, as equal partners, has significant ramifications. Since the aim is to create awareness in parents and solicit their support of school objectives, mutual contact between teachers and the parents is not required in this model (Swap, 1992:60-61). Parents' input about what has to be done at home, and how it should be done is not required, and parents may be expected to meet their obligations as defined by teachers. Secondly, it is not always possible to clearly demarcate the roles of the teachers and parents in formal education. Thirdly, not all parents can dedicate adequate time to parental involvement activities, due to factors like illness, lack of skills or funds and job requirements that may restrict their desire to be involved (Swap, 1992:61). Fourthly, disregard of the value of and thus the importance of the parents/family's mores may occur as the school aims at transmitting its own standards and goals to pupils.

## c. The Curriculum Enrichment Model

Swap's Curriculum Enrichment Model (1993:38-46) acknowledges parental input and encourages the interaction between them and school which leads to the implementation of a revised programme of study, which incorporates the contributions of parents. This enables the enhancement of the school's educational objectives. This model aims at making the programme of study reproduce the values, history and learning styles of the families of the pupils, and principally those of immigrants and minority background. The model acknowledges the importance of the continuity of learning between school and home in encouraging learning. Furthermore, schools are able to improve their programmes by incorporating parents' own skills that from their backgrounds. Accordingly, both teachers and parents are viewed as experts and resources in the implementation of the school curriculum; they mutually respect each other and actively interact to enrich the curriculum objectives and content.

## d. The Partnership Model

The key purpose in Swap's (1993:47-59) Partnership Model, is families and the school to accomplish a common mission for the school by working together to realise success. According to Swap (1993:49) the basic assumption here are that the joint mission requires teamwork, for its success among parents, teachers and community representatives especially because it necessitates various resources that must come from all the stakeholders involved.

Accordingly, school-family partnership is an essential element of pupils' success, and teachers welcome parents as experts and resources in the implementation of the school curriculum (Swap, 1993:48). Swap (1993:49) indicates that unlike the school-to-home transmission model the Partnership model emphasises two-way contact, acknowledges parental input in all areas, welcomes and works with them. Therefore, parental involvement is seen as a key element of school transformation.

Swap (1992:65) also notes that all the stakeholders in the school require local independence and control in this model in order for the school to react in a flexible manner to changing requirements. Therefore, the budget, curriculum and schedules are mutually made so as to develop ownership in both the family and school. Furthermore, cooperation between teachers, parents and community is maintained so that goals are clarified and consensus built among the teachers, parents and the community on the standards of success and how to create that success for the pupils (Swap, 1992:65). A comprehensive, intensive curriculum is used that often takes into account pupils' progress, and provides individual support by peer or teacher tutoring Effective programmes also make use of other resources within the community such as business agencies and health services so that funding and materials can be obtained for the pupils in a non-bureaucratic way.

### 2.2.2.4 Comer's theory of parental involvement

According to Comer (1996, in Monadjem, 2003:67), each school is an ecological system and pupils' behaviour, attitude and achievement levels mirror the climate of that school and the community in which that school is set in. To transform the learner's attitudes, performance and achievement, therefore, the interactions that take place within the school system, that have an influence on the individual pupils must be changed. Consequently, Comer's Social

Action Model asserts that pupils must be taken as components of a family unit, neighbourhood and as an element of the school society.

The school development programme according to Comer attempts proposes that learning takes place through building supportive bonds among all stakeholders in education (Monadjem, 2003:67). This model requires the formation of a school planning and management team, a mental health team and a parent programme. The teams work together to support all the participants' needs. Parents and teachers are empowered to work in full partnership in order to realise the developmental needs of pupils. The essential elements of this approach are a comprehensive school plan, staff development activities, a monitoring and assessment program that focuses on the social and academic goals as well as the activities of the school. According to Comer (1987:15-16) consensus decision making, a no-fault approach to problem solving, and actual collaboration are the guiding principles in this model. However, the parents' influence is subordinated to that of the principal and teachers (Comer & Haynes, 1991:271). Importantly, this programme is currently being implemented in the United States of America (Van Wyk 1996 in Monadjem, 2003:67).

This theory could be important for addressing educational issues in Kenya. For example, in order to instil effectual obedience amongst pupils in schools, putting punitive measures as a means of dealing with delinquency in schools or merely asking parents to improve discipline at home or urging the community to improve social values would all be futile efforts. Rather, for successful implementation, interventions must take place at all levels and in all contexts.

In this section, various theories of parental involvement in education have been explored. Epstein's theory (1995:704) and its six types of parental involvement provide a comprehensive model. Most authors show that the more the types of involvement schools include both at home and at school, the greater are the benefits (Fuerstein, 2000:29). Accordingly, Epstein's theory and the six types of parental involvement are discussed in the following sections.

*2.2.2.5 Epstein's theory of parent involvement*

Epstein maintains that teachers usually see the relationship between schools and parents in three different ways: they have either sequential responsibilities, separate responsibilities or shared responsibilities (Epstein, 1995:701-702).

 **a. Sequential responsibilities of families and schools**

According to Van Wyk (2008:12), this approach emphasises the order of responsibilities of the family and the school, and the critical stages of parents and teachers' contributions to child development. Parents teach the needed skills to children until their formal education begins at about five or six years of age. Teachers then assume the primary responsibility for children's education as the duty of the school. However, Epstein (1995:701-702) notes that if schools see pupils as students they are likely to see families as separate from the school and the families are then expected to do their job and leave the child to the school.

**b. Separate responsibilities of families and schools**

In this perspective, schools stress the distinct tasks of the role players, and this implies that teachers must keep a professional distance from parents, while the latter should work with their children at home. Teachers and parents are thought to achieve their different roles best separately and independently so as to curtail the inherent conflicts, competition and incompatibility between them (Epstein, 1987:121).

**c. Shared responsibilities of families and schools**

Unlike the sequential and separate responsibilities, the shared responsibility of the families and schools emphasises the coordination, teamwork, collaboration and harmonising of schools and families. Both share the responsibility for the socialisation of the child as teachers and parents work jointly each recognising their shared interest in and duty for the pupils to build better programmes and opportunities for the children (Epstein, 1987:121).

When teachers see pupils as children, they are likely to see the families and community as partners in educating the children and hence, encompass shared responsibilities and

overlapping spheres of influence (Epstein, 1995:701-702). Consequently, an overlap of responsibilities between parents and teachers is expected.

**d. The theory of overlapping spheres of influence**

The model of overlapping spheres of influence recognises that while some practices of the family and the school are done separately, others reflect the shared tasks of the parents and teachers. If both parties, that is the parents and teachers hold the viewpoint of separate responsibilities, and therefore emphasise on their specialised skills, then the respective spheres of the family and the school are drawn away from each other implying that the two work separately. Conversely, if the teacher and the parent uphold their shared responsibilities, they amass together their combined skills to turn out better and successful pupils. Their collective effort brings the spheres of family and school influence together, thereby increasing the relations between parents and schools and this creates school-like families and family-like schools. The Epstein model shows that the extent of overlap among these three spheres in different schools may vary and it can be enhanced or decreased by the practices of teachers, parents or the children (Van Wyk, 2008:13).

All the perspectives above do not clarify how boundaries between schools and families can be removed, or how patterns in home-school relations can be improved, nor do they take into account the learner's development and the effect it has on home-school relations. Accordingly, Epstein (1987:121) proposed an integrated theory of family-school relations comprising areas of overlapping spheres of influence, which provides a social organisational viewpoint, which states that the most successful families and schools are characterised by having overlapping mutual goals and missions relating to children. Epstein's (1996:214) model of overlapping spheres of influence emphasises the overlapping and similarities of school and family goals.

According to Epstein, change is always happening in the overlapping spheres of influence: all the components of schools, families and communities vary constantly. The model recognises various contexts and interpersonal relations among all the parties involved. It includes external and internal structures.

FORCE B
Experience,
Philosophy,
Practices
of Family

FORCE C
Experience,
Philosophy,
Practices
of School

FAMILY          SCHOOL

FORCE D
Experience,
Philosophy,
Practices
of Community

COMMUNITY

**FORCE A**
Time/Age/Grade Level
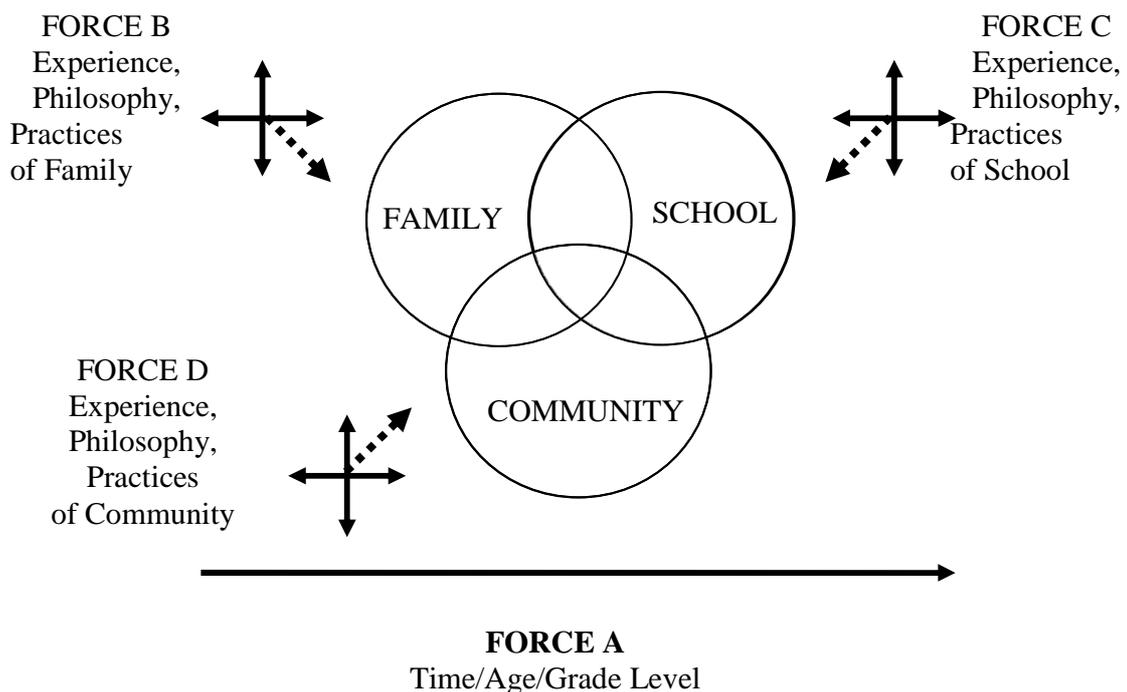
**Figure 2.1: Epstein's overlapping spheres of influence: External structure (After Van Wyk, 2008:12)**

The external structure (figure 2.1) consists of spheres representing the family and school environments. According to Epstein (1987:128), the extent of overlap depends on three forces: A, B and C. Force A refers to changes in time, age, grade level and the historical influence on pupils, families and schools. Epstein explains that depending on the age of the child, school level or grade, and the historical stage when the child is in school a degree of separation or overlap will be noted.

Force B and Force C, on the other hand signify the experiences and demands placed on families and schools respectively, which can change the family-school partnership. Epstein explains:

> When parents maintain or increase interest in their children's schooling (Force B), they create greater overlap of the family and school spheres than would be expected on the average. When teachers make parents part of their regular teaching practices (Force C), they create greater overlap than would be typically expected (Epstein, 1987:128).

Force D represents the community's influence on the family and school through its philosophy and practices.

In this dynamic developmental model, parent involvement is seen as a process that can be open to growth and be changed over time. The players recognise their mutual interest and responsibility to the child, and work jointly to build better opportunities and programs for the learner's success. This may be through shared activities intended to engage, guide, and motivate pupils to produce their own success in school (Epstein, 1995:1).

The internal model (illustrated in figure 2.2) of the overlapping spheres of influence, on the other hand, shows how essential interpersonal relations and patterns of influence occur among the individuals at home, school, and in the community (Kgaffe, 2001:13). The connections between teachers, parents and community groups, agencies, and services may also be represented and studied within the model.

Schools might conduct only a few communications and interactions with families and communities, thereby keeping the three spheres of influence relatively separate, alternatively, they might conduct many high-quality communications and interactions which bring all three spheres of influence closer together. With frequent interactions among the three parties, more children are likely to learn about the importance of school, work hard, think creatively, help one another, and stay in school.

The community, which is the third sphere of influence, can also create school-like opportunities, events and programmes that reinforce, recognise, and reward pupils for good progress, creativity and excellence (Van Wyk, 2008:13).

KEY
f/F = Family
c/C = Child
s/S = School
p/P = Parent
t/T = Teacher

*Intra*-institutional interactions

*Inter*-institutional interactions
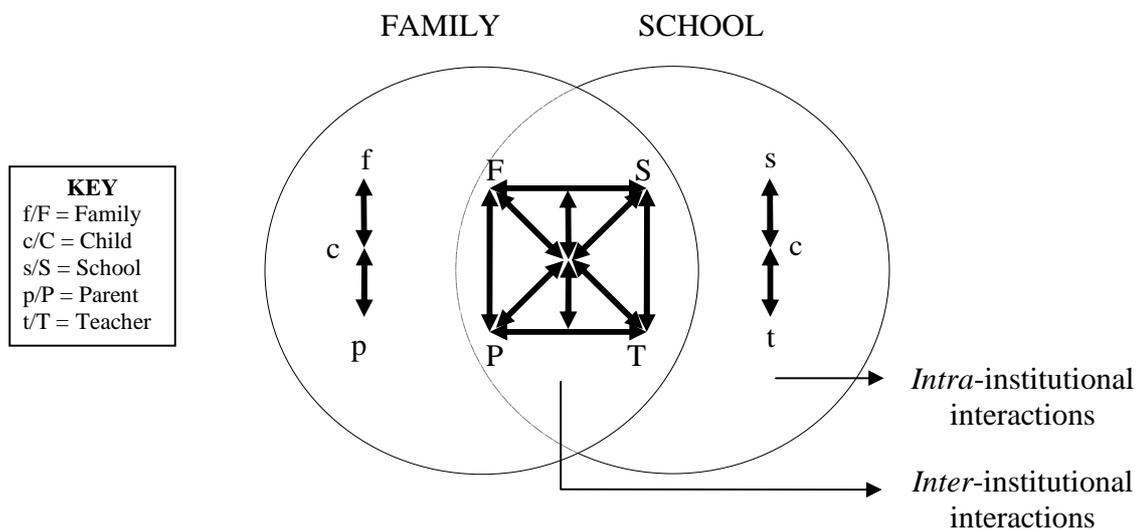
 *Note: In the model the internal structure can be extended to include the community:
     Co/CO = Community a/A = Agent from Community/Business

**Figure 2.2: Epstein's model of overlapping sphere of influence: internal structure (After Van Wyk, 2008:13**

Communities can also create family-like settings and events to enable families to better support their children. Community-minded families and schools help their neighbourhoods and other families. A school-like family recognises that each child is also a student. Families reinforce the importance of school, homework and activities that build student skills and feelings of success.

The concept of the community school or full-service school is gaining acceptance (Doyle & Slotnik, 2006: 300). This refers to a place where programs and services for students, parents, and others are offered before, during, and after the regular school day. Schools and communities talk about programs and services that are family friendly, that are considerate of the needs and realities of family life, and are feasible to conduct. When this occurs, children are able to learn effectively in caring communities (Epstein, 1995:703).

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- **How partnerships work in practice**

According to Epstein (1995:702), in a partnership, teachers create more family-like schools. A family-like school recognises each child's individuality and makes each to feel special and part of the school and welcome all families, regardless of their background. In a partnership, parents create more school-like families, which recognise that each child is also a learner. Families emphasise to the child the importance of school, homework and other school activities that develop pupils' skills and feelings of accomplishment. Communities also create school-like opportunities and programs that recognise and reinforce pupils for creativity and excellence.

The above is a pointer to the possibility for schools, families and communities to create caring educational environments. Thus, a school that is academically excellent but ignores families will build barriers between teachers, parents and children, which will negatively affect school life and learning. On the other hand, a school that is ineffective academically but involves families in many ways would also impede students' learning because of its weak academic program. Both schools will not sustain an educational environment that provides for academic excellence, good communications and useful relations involving the school, family and community. In a caring school community, the participants work continually to improve partnerships through establishing mutual respect and trust. Moreover, structures for solving problems are maintained and strengthened. This enables disagreements and problems that are likely to arise about schools, families and students to be easily solved.

There are many reasons for developing school, family and community partnerships: they can improve school programs, school climate, provide family services and support, increase parent skills and leadership, link families in the school and in the community and help teachers in their work. However, the main reason is to help all pupils to succeed in school and later in life. When pupils, parents, teachers and others view each other as partners in education, a caring community forms around the pupils and they all benefit.

Schools usually adapt their family and community involvement programs and practices according to the needs and interests, time and talents, and ages and grade levels of its pupils. According to Epstein (1995:705), some commonalities have been identified across successful

partnership programs at all schools. These include attention to the overlapping spheres of influence on student development; promotion of various opportunities for schools, families, and communities to work together; and having an Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) to coordinate each school's work and progress on family and community involvement. Moreover, community leaders are also involved in supporting such programs, in planning, implementing, and evaluating their programs and sharing best practices.

This model holds important possibilities for Kenya. With the foregoing as a guide each school can choose its own collaboration approach and identify its own strategies to encourage parent involvement, after-school programs and other non-formal education settings.

The following section will examine the Epstein's typologies of parent involvement.

## 2.3 EPSTEIN'S TYPOLOGY OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT

According to the Epstein's 1995 (701-705) theoretical model, the extent of overlap and shared responsibility in the spheres of influence is determined by which practices of the six types of involvement are implemented. These types include parenting (assisting families with parenting and child rearing skills, family support, understanding child and adolescent development and setting home conditions to support learning at each stage and grade level), communication, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making and collaborating with the community. Each practice that is implemented avails opportunities for varied interactions of teachers, parents, pupils and others across contexts (Epstein & Sheldon, 2005:7). Moreover, each type poses specific challenges that must be met in order to involve all families it is likely to lead to different results for pupils, parents, for teaching practices and for school climate. The six types of parent involvement are explored according to their definition, practice, challenges and expected results in the following section. Views of other researchers on home-school relations are also included.

**2.3.1 Type 1: Parenting**

*2.3.1.1 Definition, practices, challenges and benefits*

According to the Project Appleseed (2007:4) (which followed Joyce L. Epstein's (1995) theoretical model of parent/school/community relationships), parenting aims to help all families establish home environments that will be able to support children as students. Parents can show involvement by establishing appropriate guidelines for their children; talk with them at home about their interests, activities and their friends, and explain their hopes and goals to their children.

Monadjem (2003:28) indicates that parenting includes, parent supervision and provision of a home environment that enables children to become responsible, self-confident, self-reliant persons with socially acceptable behaviour and who are able to learn. In practice, schools can encourage parental involvement by organising programs that offer family support to assist families with child rearing skills, health and nutrition, and giving tips for creating conditions that sustain learning at each stage and grade level. The most basic involvement of parents is meeting children's need for food, clothing, shelter and medical care (Bridgemohan, 2002:21). Home visits to help families of pupils understand schools as well as enable schools understand families are essential (Epstein & Sheldon, 2005:7). Schools also provide clear information through documents, workshops, discussion groups, videotapes, or classes to all the parents. Schools must show respect for the diversity of cultures, beliefs, values, needs and goals as well as training and other courses for parents (Project Appleseed, 2008:6). Moreover, parents must also supply school-related needs to their children. Furthermore, to enable families to share information about culture, children's talents and needs with schools, all information for and from families must be clear, usable, and linked to children's success in school (Epstein, 1995:705).

Epstein and Sheldon (2005: 8) have mentioned the benefits of parenting for pupils, parents and teachers as follows:

- For pupils, respect for parents is created, and the awareness that family supervision is ongoing becomes obvious. Positive personal qualities, behaviour, beliefs, and family values develop. Management of time for home chores, homework and other activities

becomes possible. Awareness of the importance of school is created and attendance improves.

- Parents have an awareness of their own and other parents' challenges in parenting. They feel support from the school and from other parents generating greater confidence and understanding of parenting, child and adolescent development, and how to change home conditions for their children to learn as they proceed through school.

- Teachers gain an understanding of families' backgrounds, cultures, concerns, goals, needs and views of their children.

Similar benefits have been identified by other researchers on parenting programs. Innes (1999:6) found that there is a positive relationship between parents who provide school-based learning materials and books for their young children at home and learner achievement. In addition, the Australian Council of State Schools' Organisation, ACSSO (2006:6) observed that improving the home environment increased pupils' school achievement, parents' confidence to consult teachers and their understanding of their children, and it resulted in closer relationships between parents and teachers. Such improvements in the home environment have lasting effects (Program Appleseed, 2007:7).

Monadjem (2003:30) found that a positive parenting style was more important for children's reading achievement reduced learning difficulties than the extent to which parents were involved at school. She adds that parenting moderates the impact of parent involvement by influencing the extent of the parent-child interaction. Englund, Egeland and Collins (2008:77) also observed that the expected graduates had higher levels of parent involvement in middle childhood, more supportive parent/child relationships in early adolescence and higher levels of social competence with adults than unexpected dropouts.

Georgiou (2008:109) found that anxious parental pressure on the child relates negatively to children's achievement, while pupils whose parents adopt an authoritative parenting style, accept, nurture, encourage, and are emotionally responsive to their children had positive achievements. Children whose parents attribute their achievement to the child's own effort

have been found to have better academic results than those whose parents attribute their achievement to luck, ability or other people (Georgiou, 2008:124).

Zellman and Waterman (1998:378) observed that parenting enthusiasm motivated parental rather than child behaviours enabling parents to see themselves as effective teachers for their children and possibly leading to other positive child outcomes such as a more positive attitude to school. Home supervision and modelling the child's learning, encourages the child to read at home, limits its time to watch television resulting in positive child outcomes (Peterson & Ladky, 2007:892). Baily (2006:155) notes that parenting impacts student learning outcomes for children at-risk of failing academically especially through their interactions with their children as they complete home learning activities.

Imgram, Wolfe and Lieberman (2007:479) suggest that schools having low learner achievement could benefit from focusing parent involvement efforts on building parenting capacity and encouraging learning at home activities. A survey by King, Kraemer, Bernad and Vidourek (2007:606) showed that parents prefer authoritative parenting style and were interested in receiving training in parenting, which developed feelings of efficacy and closer relationships inside the family and which will, in turn, influence the achievement of children.

The foregoing suggests that pupils succeed academically, socially and emotionally when their parents are involved in their education or social activity to become more well-rounded and balanced individuals. Pupils realise their parents are concerned in their education, and that remaining and succeeding in school is worthwhile (High School Completion Rate Task Force Report Recommendation II, 2005:4). Teachers and parents also respect and understand each other (Project Appleseed, 2008:6).

### 2.3.1.2 Support for parenting by other theoretical models

The Gordon's Family Impact Model (1977:74-78) which suggests that the school can reach out to the home through home visits or other communication techniques offers support to parenting. This model assumes that there is a body of knowledge (derived from books or experts) that should be passed to children for learning and both teachers and the parents should work together to apply it to pupils. The model was designed to enable families to work in support of the education system, mainly through creating a positive learning

environment at home to influence student achievement. To enable families to give their support to the education system, parent education is provided to help children to acquire the prerequisites for success (Van Wyk, 2008:5).

### 2.3.2 Type II: Communication

#### 2.3.2.1 Definition, practices, challenges and benefits

The objective in this type of parent involvement is to design more effective mutual communications between school and home with all families, all year round, on school programs and pupils' progress.

This requires that schools conduct conferences with each parent at least once a year, with follow-ups if needed. Language translators are provided to assist parents if considered necessary. Weekly or monthly folders of pupils' work are sent home for parents' to see it and their comments sent back to the teacher. Useful notices, memos, phone calls, newsletters, and other communications are regularly sent out to families and the latter together with pupils can pick up report cards, and attend meetings on improving grades. Clear information on selecting of schools, courses, programs, should also be provided.

The challenges posed to schools in achieving this type of parent involvement include: the readability, clarity, form and frequency of all memos, notices, and other print and non-print communications should be reviewed to take consideration of all parents including those who are unable to speak or read well the school's instructional language (Epstein & Sheldon, 2005:8). Communications on the programme, content and structure of conferences; newsletters; report cards and others should also be reviewed and clear two-way channels of communication from home to school and school to home should be established.

According to Nistler and Angela (2000 as cited in McNeil & Patin, 2005:4), communication is the major reason for lack of parent involvement, especially the lack of clear straightforward and helpful information. Epstein and Sheldon (2005: 5) found that most communication that occurs between parents and schools is often from the school to parents. Such communication takes place in situations where children of those parents have behavioural or learning problems or with parents who have shown interest in helping their

children (Letsholo, 2006:4). Additionally, as Letsholo (2006:4) observes concerning a survey done in the United States, most parents did not communicate with the school during the year and also did not have a meeting or conference with teachers over the year. Monadjem (2003:32) adds that while over 95% of teachers reported having communicated with parents, it was seldom, not regular, or detailed.

The benefits associated with effective two-way communication are outlined below:

- Pupils become aware of their own progress and their requirements for them to maintain or improve grades. They understand school expectations and procedures for behaviour and attendance as well as other policies. Moreover, they have informed decisions about school courses and programmes, as well as an awareness of their own role in partnerships, serving as couriers and communicators.

- Parents gain understanding of school programmes and policies as well as the capability of monitoring their child's progress. They are able to conduct activities in reaction to their children's learning problems as needed. Mutual interactions with and ease of communications with school and teachers becomes possible.

- Teachers are able to communicate with the diverse families, and gain awareness of their own ability to communicate clearly. They are able to make use of parent networks for communications and conduct mutual communications for understanding family views of pupils' programmes and progress.

Other researchers suggest similar benefits as stated above. Both school to home communication, where teachers inform the parents about school programs and pupils' progress, and home to school communication, where parents contact teachers about their children's school life, have been correlated with positive child outcomes (Monadjem, 2003: 32; Lemmer & Van Wyk, 2004:183).

Bridgemohan, Van Wyk and Van Staden (2005:1) suggest that improved communication between the school and the home strengthens social networks, enables access to information and materials, allows parents appreciate their own essential roles and personal efficacy and

motivates them to continue their own education. Similarly, the contact with other parents experiencing comparable problems is also beneficial.

Leitch and Tangri (in Bridgemohan, Van Wyk & Van Staden, 2005:1) add that teachers feel more positive about teaching and about their school when there is effective communication. Swap (1992:58) observes that when parents and teachers know each other through informal communication, shared projects or volunteering in the classroom, children's behaviour and learning problems tend to decrease.

The necessity for improving and sustaining parent involvement through the development of a collaborative programme of effective communication, providing various opportunities for involvement, removing obstacles to involvement and providing parent training that will increase awareness of their child's potential is evident from the foregoing (Machen *et al.,* 2005:15).

Bridgemohan (2002:31) suggests that most schools do send written information to parents. However, receiving written information does little to increase parents' understanding, implying that they have little knowledge of what actually happens in the classroom.

### 2.3.2.2 Support for communication by other theoretical models

Other researchers have also identified the important role of communication. Thus, for instance, Coleman (Soyoung, 2005:300) asserts that parents' main interest is to know their children's performance in school and they are ready to help where possible. Schools should, thus communicate with parents so that the latter can participate actively in school-based activities. Usually, the interaction between home and school is often antagonistic or unpleasant and this is because schools summon parents when the learner does not meet the school's expectations, while parents contact the school only when they feel the learner's education is problematic. Coleman (Soyoung, 2005:300) concludes that parental involvement should be encouraged as an ongoing process; whether there are good or bad things as this ensures that pupils can gradually be helped to unlock their potentialities. Swap (1992 in Bridgemohan, 2002:28) observes that effective communication should be based on a relationship of mutual respect between teachers and parents. The reason for communication

is that parents and teachers are able to nurture the growth and learning of individual children by sharing information, insights and concerns.

## 2.3.3 Type III: Volunteering /parental involvement at the school

### 2.3.3.1 Definition, practices, challenges and benefits

This type of parent involvement aims at recruiting and organising parent help and support in assisting teachers in the classroom, on class trips or parties (Monadjem, 2003:32); assistance in the library, cafeteria, supervising pupils' sport and cultural activities, assisting in fund raising, community events and political awareness (Barrera & Warner, 2006:72). This may involve creating a school and classroom volunteer program to help the teachers, pupils and parents and setting aside a parent room or centre for volunteer work, meetings, resources and for families. The identification of the volunteers and the talents that they will contribute to their child's success at school, and the times when they will be available is conducted by a survey. The recruiting and organising of the volunteers then follows, and a class parent, telephone tree, or other structures are set up to provide all families with needed information. Parent patrols or other activities to aid safety and operation of school programs are established (Project Appleseed, 2008:6).

The challenges that schools may need to handle in recruiting the volunteers effectively include ensuring that all families know that their time and talents are welcome; creating flexible schedules for volunteers, assemblies and events to enable parents who come to contribute. Organising volunteer work, providing training, matching time and talent with school, teacher, and student needs, and recognising efforts so that participants are productive is also critical for effective implementation of this type of parental involvement (Bridgemohan, 2002:32).

The benefits associated with this type of parent involvement are:

- Pupils develop an awareness of many skills, talents, occupations and contributions of parents and other volunteers. They also gain skills in communicating with adults, which is important for life in society in future.

- Parents gain an understanding of the teacher's job; are more comfortable interacting with school and carry over school activities at home. They gain confidence in their ability to work in school and with their children, or take steps for their own education. Families gain feelings of being valued and welcomed at school and they acquire specific skills during volunteer work (Epstein, 1997:10).

- Teachers are able to involve parents in new ways, including those who do not volunteer at school, become aware of parents' talents and interest in school and children and are able to provide greater individual attention to pupils, with help from the volunteers.

Ma (1999:75) indicates that the presence of the parents as volunteers in the classroom results in positive child outcomes at all levels of education. Bridgemohan (2005:1), on the other hand, observes that where parental involvement programs are established in early childhood education programs, the benefits are apparent throughout the child's school career and include higher learner achievement, lower dropout rates and a decline in behavioural problems, academic initiative and persistence.

In their longitudinal study on parental involvement in kindergarten, Miedel and Reynolds (1999:379-402) found that parents' participation in activities such as volunteering in the classroom, attending events such as school meetings or assemblies, going on field trips and having parent-teacher conferences, was closely associated with higher reading achievement, lower rates of grade retention, and fewer years of special education.

Brannon (2008:56) notes that parental involvement is linked with character education in children which results in pupils attaining higher academic achievement, more positive attitudes about homework, and improved perceptions of their own competence. On the other hand, Peressini (1998:323) observed that encouraging parents to become active in the math classroom is a powerful way of helping them understand the changes in their children's math education. Ma (1999:75) adds that parent volunteer work greatly reduces dropouts from mathematics in high school. Lemmer (2000:73) reported that pupils whose parents volunteered on school grounds had lower incidents of truancy and tardiness, and had slightly higher grades if their parents even simply attended events such as drama and athletics.

Fishel & Ramirez (2005:371) found that, controlling for socio-economic status, increased parental involvement was associated with stronger pre-literacy skills and that it predicted pre-literacy development. Lemmer (2000:71) explains the positive association between parents' attendance and their children's school grades as due to their actively demonstrating that they value education and their gaining a better understanding of the school situation. She further adds that having some parents at the school reversed poor trends in school, it restores the culture of teaching and learning in school draws parents into the life of the school, and in this way, teachers' professionalism is strengthened. Moreover, it positively influences teachers' interactions with other parents as the volunteers demonstrate parents' willingness to help, and thus teachers were encouraged to ask other parents to help their children with home-based learning activities (Lemmer, 2000:71).

Ho and Willms (1998:33) and Buchman (2000:1349) observe that parent involvement in lower grades is stronger and more comprehensive than involvement in the middle grades which implies that parents of children in the middle grades receive less information and guidance precisely when they need it most in order to understand the school subjects and schedules for their children. Monadjem (2003:34) indicates that in the United States most parents do not take part in activities in the school, even when they believe school involvement is important, and that only four percent of parents of primary school children were highly active in school. McKenna and Williams (1998:33) state that volunteering tends to be limited to activities such as assistance with group teaching, library resource work, remedial teaching, clerical work, and supporting special education.

Most parents are unable to come to school to assist teachers and to attend meetings during the school day. Low income, parental depression, single-family status, economic and educational differences between parents and their children's teachers as well as discrepancies between the home culture and the school culture were identified as factors that hinder their involvement at school (Sheehey, 2006:3). Moreover, lack of both human and material resources reduced their ability to participate in the school (Arnold, Gaddy & Dean, 2006:28).

Bridgemohan (2002:34) notes that parents are untapped resources in schools whose skills and talents multiply the people's resources that are available to pupils. Volunteers serve as

additional human resources to school programs, which enables the extension of the reach of these programs, making it possible for pupils to receive more.

### 2.3.3.2 Support for volunteering by other theoretical models

Other models have supported volunteering as a type of parent involvement. In the School Impact Model, parents are involved in the school as volunteers, and most of the influence goes from the home to the school (Gordon, 1977:76). The goal is to make teachers and schools more attuned to the families and the culture of the home through learning from each other, which creates a better relationship with parents leading to greater effectiveness in educating the learner.

In Swap's Curriculum Enrichment model, parents and teachers recognise the importance of maintaining the continuity between the home and the school (Swap, 1992:62). Learning is more effective when volunteers who resemble the pupils, in culture and in language assist them (Bridgemohan, 2002:33). This model therefore, supports the recruitment of more teachers who reflect and value the pupils' culture and of parent volunteers in schools in order to solve behaviour and learning problems of pupils.

In Comer's School Development Program (SDP), parents are involved through active participation in the pupils' daily school activities. The model emphasises that parents and teachers must work together in addressing the developmental needs of the learner, thus improving the learner's chances of success. By this way, parents help to change the school climate, and to eliminate harmful stereotypes in teachers about the community served by their school. This helps to facilitate authentic learning and teaching to take place.

### 2.3.4 Type IV: Parental involvement in learning activities in the home

### 2.3.4.1 Definition, practices, challenges and benefits

The goal is to provide information and strategies to families on how to help pupils at home with homework and other curricular-related activities. Epstein and Sheldon (2005:7) suggest that schools put this type of parent involvement into practice by providing information to families on skills needed by pupils in each subject and class. This involves how to handle fundamental obligations such as preparations for the child for school, discussing and

monitoring schoolwork at home with the child, reading to the child, how to coach the child in specific skills, buying books, organising times for study and free time, and taking the child to the library (Monadjem, 2003:34; Epstein & Sheldon, 2005:7). These activities can be organised and coordinated by the teacher or initiated by the parent independently of the teacher's knowledge. Teachers can arrange regular schedules of homework that require pupils to discuss and interact with parents about what they are learning in school. Additionally, schedules of activities to be carried out by the parents and pupils at home in subjects such as family math, science and reading are organised. Goal setting for pupils with their parents each year and for future plans for college or work is also done.

The challenges that schools may face in the implementation of this type of involvement include designing and organising regular programmes of interactive homework (weekly or bimonthly) that obligates pupils to discuss important things that they are learning with their parents and keeping them aware of the content of their class work. How to involve families in vital curricular decisions and coordinating family linked homework activities from several teachers requires consideration (Epstein, *et al.* 2005:7).

The benefits in implementing this type of involvement are as follows:

- Pupils are able to complete homework; have positive attitudes toward schoolwork, gain confidence of their ability as learner, improve in skills, abilities, and test scores linked to homework and class work. They also view their parents as real teachers and their homes as learning areas just as the school. There is awareness of their obligation in sharing schoolwork at home with their parents as well as linking learning to real life situations.

- Parents understand the instructional program each year, what the child is learning in each subject and as a result, can encourage and provide necessary support to the learner at home each year. There children become aware they are pupils and gain appreciation of teaching skills, and thus they can carry out effectively discussions of school, class work and homework.

- For teachers there is respect of family time and a better design of homework assignments. Moreover, the teachers appreciate the concern of single parents,

working mothers, and less formally educated families to motivate and reinforce learning of their children (Project Appleseed, 2008:8).

Research indicates that parental involvement by parents in academics at home is more important for academic achievement than involvement at school (De Planty, Coulter-Kern & Duchane, 2007:361). Only at home does parental involvement have positive effects on achievement and adjustment (ACSSO, 2006:6). Further, parent involvement in children's learning, in literacy and numeracy in the primary school years is likely to enhance their achievement and to improve their attitudes towards learning which many parents do welcome (McCormick in ACSSO, 2006:4).

Frederick (2007:27) observes that parent involvement in the home influences not only children's emotional growth and academic achievement, but also provides schools with opportunity to understand families and refer them to available services as needed. She stresses that children need parental guidance. Parental involvement has an impact on student learning outcomes and at-risk children could fail academically if their parents are not involved in their schooling (Baily, 2006:155). For such pupils, parents can help to increase their learning through their interactions with them as they complete home learning activities.

Desimone (1999:23) indicate that home discussion (which includes verbal encouragement and guidance, mealtime conversation and the discussion of the school program and activities), has the strongest relationship with academic achievement, while volunteering at school had little effect on academic success. Moreover, it has a stronger effect on academic outcomes than monitoring homework and supervising activities.

Parent and child interactions were significantly correlated with child adjustment, positive self-esteem development in pupils and their emotional adjustment (Williams, 1999:1). Moreover, parental involvement in well-designed interactive home learning activities (that is, specially made up home packages for parents and pupils to work together) improves pupils' performance, their enthusiasm in specific subject areas and behaviour and this is regardless of the family, racial or cultural background or the parent's formal education. (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001:187-189; Jones, 2001: 19). According to Fishel and Ramirez (2005:371) pupils gain most as their parents serve as teachers helping their children at home,

contributing their skills and knowledge to their children at home. Moreover, while students attain higher academically, parental enthusiasm and confidence are increased too (Brannon, 2008:62).

### *2.3.4.2 Support for learning at home by other theoretical models*

Swap's School-To-Home Transmission Model emphasises what parents should do to support their children's learning at home. Parents are expected to help pupils by emphasising the importance of schooling and ensuring the child meets minimum academic and behavioural requirements. The parents should work with their children so that they can transfer the cultural capital to the learner, that is the ways of being, knowing, writing, talking and thinking that characterise those that succeed in the culture (Swap, 1992:72). The author asserts that the most commonly used activity in this model is a request from schools for parents to support their children in supplementary reading activities either by reading to the child and child reading to them, or monitoring the child's silent reading for specified periods per day or week.

The importance of the child's home environment and his or her learning at home is also emphasised by the Australian Council of State Schools Organisation (ACSSO) (2006:2), which observes that families have the biggest influence on the child's development, and that learning language and social discourse occurs at home in non-formal by talking across the breakfast table, chatting on a bus ride, or reading a bedtime story ways during the first years and it actually continues virtually all the time even as the child gets older and demands to be independent.

### 2.3.5 Type V: Decision-making

### *2.3.5.1 Definition, practices, challenges and benefits*

This type of involvement aims to include parents in school decisions, develop parent leadership and representatives of the parent body (Epstein & Sheldon, 2005:8). Naidoo (2005:37) explains that parents may participate in parent advisory committees, serve as school board members, be included in the local school improvement council or act as active members of the parents-teachers association (PTA). In these structures, parents are able to

take part in goal setting, development and implementation of program activities, assessment, personnel decisions and fund allocations for school programmes.

Naidoo (2005:36) indicates that involving parents in activities like parents-teachers conferences, school functions, volunteering in the classroom, tutoring children at home, and so on, might prepare parents to play an active role in decision making at their child's school. Parents then are able to understand the instructional programs, school structures, and receive basic experience in working with teachers, and this expands parents' knowledge and their credibility with teachers as they move into decision-making roles.

Schools, therefore for effectiveness should set up networks to link all families with parent representatives as well as providing information on school or local elections for school representatives (Project Appleseed, 2008:9). They require to establish active parents-teachers' associations/organizations (PTA/PTO), school advisory councils, or committees for parent leadership and participation, establish independent advocacy groups to lobby and work for school reform and improvements, district level councils and committees for family and community involvement. In addition, it is important for schools to include parent leaders from all racial, ethnic, socioeconomic and other groupings in the school and offer training to enable the leaders to serve as representatives of the other parents, with input from and return of information to all parents. (Project Appleseed, 2008:9).

The benefits of successfully involving parents in decision making include:

- Pupils become aware that the parents are involved in school decisions and that their rights are protected. Pupils have specific benefits linked to policies enacted by parent organisations and experienced by students.

- Parents feel their input is valued in making school policies that affect their children's education and gain the perception of owning their school. Being aware of the importance of their voices in school decisions, they are able to share experiences and connections with other families as well as awareness of school, district and state policies.

- For teachers, understand parental perspectives in policy development and decisions.

Moreover, the view of equal status of family representatives on committees and in leadership roles is well-established (Project Appleseed, 2007:7).

Other researchers observed similar benefits in their studies. McKenna and Willms (1998:23) note that parents who are involved in decision-making get a greater sense of ownership of the school, are more connected with other parents and have more grasp of the school's educational policies. This translates into a better fit between the needs of the children and school policies, curriculum and practices, which helps to improve pupils' attitudes to the school and learning outcomes (McKenna & Willms, 1998:23). Naidoo (2005:35) adds that parents and teachers mutually are able to understand each other's motives, attitudes and intentions and parents' are more able to serve as resources for the academic, social and psychological development of their children with the potential for much longer-term influence. Moreover, parents gain more confidence of their own learning skills, and may even sometimes further their own education and obtain better jobs – becoming even better role models for their children and advocates for the school throughout the community.

When parents participate actively in school decision-making, they can foster improvements in school performance and school/community relationships and can contribute more effectively to community development (Shatkin & Gershberg, 2007:582). Naidoo (2005:37) observes that such parents can help effectively in the determination of the budget, school discipline, staffing, curriculum, school policy, teaching strategies, school programmes and student allocation to different types of schools and programmes.

In Cotton and Wikelund's (2001:8) study, parents indicated that they like to play a more active role in school decision making. Hanafin and Lynch (2002:45), on the other hand, found that although parents in some communities wish to make decisions it was necessary to motivate others to participate in the same role. Crozier (1999:113) found that few parents, irrespective of class, wanted to become involved in decision-making and committee work.

Joubert (2006:1) observes that decision-making is primarily about distribution of authority and voice among the stakeholders in the school, and that the underlying principle is to ensure that teachers, parents and pupils actively participate in the decision making and management of schools with the goal of providing a better teaching/learning environment.

*2.3.5.2 Support for decision making by other theoretical models*

Comer's School Development Program includes parental involvement in decision making with the aim of enhancing the educational standard and improve the overall school climate (Comer & Haynes, 1991:271-277). In the School Development program, three models approaches of parent involvement are involved: active involvement of parents in the school planning and management team, helping in the classroom or sponsoring and supporting school programs and general participation (Bridgemohan, 2002:40). In all, parents are actively involved in decision-making.

In Gordon's School Impact Model, parents take part in the school's parent advisory committee in an effort to make the school more responsive to the needs of the family. Particularly low income families may be involved at policy councils, committees and boards to impart in them skills in decision-making and school structures (Gordon, 1977:77). Bridgemohan (2002:41) notes that governing bodies are concerned not with the individual parents' interest but the collective wellbeing of the school, and do go beyond the parents-teachers association in having clearly defined statutory responsibilities which include making decisions for such areas as ensuring a broad and balanced curriculum, managing the school budget, hiring and firing of school staff.

## 2.3.6 Type VI: Collaboration with the community

*2.3.6.1 Definition, practices, challenges and benefits*

This type of involvement includes identifying and integrating the community resources and services in order to strengthen school programs, family practices, and children's learning and development (Epstein & Sheldon, 2005:8). Accordingly, schools are required to provide information for pupils and families on community health, cultural, recreational, social support, and other programs or services as well as community activities that are linked to learning skills and talents, including summer programs for students. They should arrange service integration of school in partnership with businesses, civic, counselling, cultural, health, recreation, and other agencies and organizations. Schools should also organise services for the community and families through the students, such as art, music, drama, and

other activities. The alumni may also be invited to participate in school activities in order to link school programs with the community (Epstein & Sheldon, 2005:8).

The challenges in implementing this type of parental involvement include how to solve problems of responsibilities, funds, staff and locations for collaborative activities. Informing families of community programs for pupils, such as mentoring, tutoring, business partnerships, and other programs is another challenge. Schools should ensure equity of opportunities for pupils and families to participate in community programs or to obtain services and they require to match community contributions with school goals and to integrate child and family services with education.

Epstein and Sheldon (2005:8) list the benefits linked to this type of involvement as follows:

- Pupils gain improved skills and talents through enriched curricular and co-curricular experiences. They understand opportunities available for future careers, and the prospects for future education and work. They gain specific benefits linked to programs, services, resources and opportunities that connect students with the community and take pride in their community and in their own service to the community.

- Parents acquire knowledge, use local resources in order to increase skills and talents and are able to obtain the needed services. They interact with other families in community activities and have family pride in their contributions to the community. They are also aware of the school's role in the community, and community support and contributions to the school.

- For teachers, awareness of community resources to enrich curriculum and instruction is gained. They are able to utilise mentors, business partners, community volunteers, and others to assist pupils in learning and teaching practices. Moreover, they are able to make helpful referrals of children and families to needed services as required and they take pride in their participation in their community (Project Appleseed 2007:4).

Further benefits from collaborating with the community are also suggested by research. Monadjem (2003:41) observes that the success of the school depends on the support from the

community as its influence overlaps with the extended family, the church, local businesses, volunteer organisations and neighbourhood communities. Accordingly, communities have powerful influences on children's development through raising of funds, serving as advocates for children's rights, providing learning opportunities outside the school, providing general social support, providing recreational, social and health services, canvassing on behalf of community organisations, organise neighbourhood clean-ups and art or music programs for the elderly (McKenna & Willms, 1998:35).

Schools collaborating with families by means of constantly communicating with them and providing various opportunities parental involvement would help to remove barriers between the community and the classroom, and offer support to young adolescents whether inside or outside the school walls (Doyle & Slotnik, 2006: 30). This would also lead to positive outcomes for young people including academic achievement and academic motivation. Furthermore, perceiving of family connectedness can help to control high-risk behaviour in adolescents, which would help such children succeed in future (Brown, 2010:4).

Buchman (2000:1349) notes that the relationship between the school climate and family involvement is positive. A positive school climate that encourages family involvement, also improves parents' perceptions of the school. Positive family and community involvement are key components of successful schools that lead to higher achievement, improved behaviour and greater overall support for schools (NMSA, 2003b:1). Brown and Beckett (2007: 499) states that community connectedness promotes constructive outcomes for young adolescents such as better grades, peer relationships, leadership and conflict resolution skills. Additionally, community-based after-school programs, co-curricular activities and apprenticeships improve young adolescents' sense of belonging in the communities in which they live. Epstein (1995 in Monadjem 2003:40) points out that involvement of families in schools leads to overlapping spheres of influence between the home, school and the community. Accordingly, primary schools should therefore promote parental involvement by organising parent education programs, creating and maintaining links between the home and school, initiating volunteer programs, establishing coordinated home/school learning experiences and developing activities that involve community business and cultural and civic groups if they will succeed. Schools and families may work together to improve children's

learning by developing formal family-school compacts for learning. Such compacts will involve defining goals, expectations and responsibilities of schools and families in educating the children through school-family partnerships (MacNeil & Patin, 2000:4).

When schools and parents are connected solid relationships develop, attendance at conferences and meetings are better, parents are willing to help, there are varied methods of communication and collaborative relations between home and school is successful. With these elements in place the school and home will be connected and the outlook for parent involvement would be promising (Wherry, 2005:7). However, overall, connections between schools, families and other community groups have been few and inconsistent (Downrick & Maynard, 2007:67).

### 2.3.6.2 Support for collaboration with the community by other theoretical models

In Gordon's Community Impact model which supports this type of parent involvement, the resources of the community are utilised to establish community-home-school partnerships (Gordon 1977:77). This model works on the assumption that factors in the home, school and the community are all inter-related and all mutually interact together to create the partnership.

In Swap's Partnership Model, parents are viewed as assets and resources that are fundamental components of children's success. The school, parents and the community therefore, must have a shared sense of vision about creating success for all children. They also utilise resources within the community, such as business agencies and medical partnerships so as to provide services to children in a non-bureaucratic way and needed funding and materials can be obtained for meeting challenges in education (Swap, 1992:64-65).

In the Comer's School Development Program, parent and community involvement is encouraged (Bridgemohan, 2002:44). Families need to be involved in meaningful ways in children's school experiences, as the family is central to the child's self-definition and developmental needs. The child is assumed to be the reason for the connection between home and school, therefore the model focuses on the key role of the child as learner in the interactions between families and schools, parents and teachers or other influential

participants (Bridgemohan, 2002:44-45). Although the model focuses on the individual child, it views the child as part of the family unity, neighbourhood as well as part of the school community. Therefore, the model provides a framework within which teachers, parents and the community members can collaborate.

Although Epstein's typology of parent involvement is comprehensive and allows for parent involvement in a wide variety of programmes both at home and at school, it may not be effective if it is not organised and sustained. For this, Epstein suggests the establishment of an Action Team consisting of parents, teachers and school pupils (Epstein, Coates, Salinas, Sanders & Simon, 1997:56). The Action Team can organise parent involvement according to two strategies:

1      Find out first the state of the school on each of the six types of involvement and what it would like to implement or improve on in each of those six areas in general.

2      The school can then settle on specific issues, and work on the plan of action on how to tackle each. The Team then should determine how each of the six areas can be utilised to improve each of the specific issues identified in the school.

If done well, the impact on pupils, teachers and parents will be positive. The well-designed and well-implemented program will include all six types of parent involvement and will be linked to the individual school goals.

Epstein's typology provides a structure around which a school can organise, implement and evaluate its efforts to involve parents and communities in children's education. This model is therefore, useful for implementation in both poorly resourced as well as well-resourced schools in Kenya. It has been selected as a basis for this research study.

The proposed focus of action is presented in the next section.

## 2.4 A RESEARCH AGENDA FOR PARENT INVOLVEMENT WITHIN THE KENYAN CONTEXT

The preceding section has given an overview of the theories, policies and practices of parent involvement in education. What needs to be done regarding parent involvement in Kenyan

schools is a possible starting point in meeting the challenge of improving the quality and quantity of education in Kenya. Research conducted in senior primary and secondary education suggests that the benefits of parent involvement continue up to and throughout high school (Ma, 1999:61). Parent involvement programs are needed because it is in primary school stage that parents tend to stop being spontaneously involved in their children's education and there is also a decline in practices to involve parents (Monadjem, 2003:78). Moreover, children are believed to be particularly sensitive to home influences when young and, therefore, parent involvement would have the greatest effect when aimed at this level (Monadjem, 2003:78).

The factors associated with lower levels of involvement include:

- inherent school climate that discourages parental involvement;

- perceived disinterest or helplessness of parents in assisting schools with their children's education;

-  parents' discomfort in their relationship with the school ;

- parents' perception of the teachers not informing them of their children's education (Knopf & Swick, 2007:291).

Parent involvement progressively declines as children proceed to higher grades making the kinds of involvement that were used in lower grades inapplicable anymore (Ma, 1999:61). This is because schools get bigger and are located further from home; the curriculum is more difficult for the parents than it is in elementary school; there are teachers that are teaching each learner forcing the parent to relate to more teachers unlike in elementary school; parents are employed and not readily available to be involved with education, and children develop some sense of independence from their parents as they grow older. Therefore, Symeou (2003:473) indicates that in spite of this all parents with children at any grade remain interested in their children's schooling and success and like information and guidance from schools on how to help their children. Because parental involvement leads to higher scores and better pupils' perceptions of their own competence, continued involvement of parents is important (Quiocho & Daoud, 2006:256; Brannon, 2008:57). Thus, the foregoing together

with the benefits obtained from parent involvement in the higher primary grades and throughout high school call for continued research into parent involvement and the need to implement parent involvement programs at the higher grades.

Martinez, Martinez and Peres, (2004:24) observes that different cultures, societies and their education systems may differ in the ways their families, schools and communities work together, a study on the factors influencing such functioning is vital in order to understand and provide insight into family-school-community partnerships. Such a study would be helpful in effective and efficient problem-solving and creating sustainable partnerships in Kenya.

Likewise, more research is needed on the social capital embedded in different contexts in Kenyan society. This is in regard to how the social capital of the home could be strengthened– particularly in the light of challenges such as illiterate or semi-literate rural populations, poverty and the impact of HIV/AIDS (MOEST, 2001:29). This is essential especially because the success of pupils is reliant on the social capital of the school, home and community. The community requires becoming more involved in education in order to share its social capital with the school especially in determining a relevant curriculum suitable for the society (MOEST, 2001:29). Likewise, the social capital of many schools should be improved. Therefore, research is required in order to determine how society could strengthen the social capital of the home, the school and the community to support pupils.

In a study by Prof. Lemmer and Van Wyk in 2007 on teachers who received training on parent involvement, positive results were noted in a diversity of South African schools indicating that training of teachers in all-inclusive parent involvement could bring positive outcomes for pupils (Van Wyk, 2008:14). Moreover, the European Commission asserts that the degree of parental involvement and participation is a significant indicator of the quality of schooling (Desforges and Abouchar, 2003:2). Additionally, spontaneous parental involvement has a significant impact on pupils' behaviour and achievement levels even when the effects of other factors such as social background or family size are neutralised. Semela (2004:6) asserts that parent involvement should not be merely serving on a school committee, but active and willing participation of parents in a wide range of school and home based activities.

Since parent involvement is related to achievement in pupils, Kenya also needs to look at prevailing theories on parent involvement and contribute to this debate. Hallinan (2000:5) suggests that inequalities in academic achievement of pupils are best understood when research constructs stronger theoretical orientations to examine associations between family backgrounds and outcomes. Kenya, which needs to empower all its pupils to compete in a global market, must be part of this debate.

In Kenya, parent involvement has traditionally been limited to raising school funds, attending meetings called by teachers or limited membership in the school management committees (SMC's), comprehensive involvement programs would be essential for meeting the challenge faced by the education sector of ensuring quality and quantitative growth. Research will therefore, need to be done on how comprehensive parent involvement programmes can be initiated in schools.

## 2.5 SUMMARY

This chapter has described various theories of parental involvement, emphasising the Epstein's theory. All these theories have provided evidence suggesting that their particular categories of parental involvement play critical roles in child outcomes. Many of these categorisations do overlap, but all provide greater insight into the phenomenon of parental involvement.

The six types of parent involvement as described in the Epstein's model provide a wide range of practices in which schools can involve a wider group of parents at school and at classroom level. How schools can work with families and communities to assist them to become or stay involved in their children's education at home and school has been described. The practices, expected benefits and challenges of effective implementation of each type of parental involvement as espoused by Epstein have been provided. It seems, therefore, that parents are a valuable resource and when tapped can help teachers, pupils and parents themselves to improve educational quality and standards.

For this to be effective, all stakeholders, especially the school, should make an active effort. The school policy contributes to the perception of the importance of parent and community involvement, the way schools define what the various roles and relationships should be, and

to the explicit strategies that have to be developed in order to assure that parents will be involved. The attitudes and practices of teachers and schools are an important determinant of parent involvement. High teacher efficacy and thorough teacher training in parent involvement are vital for effective involvement of parents. Monadjem (2003:78) observes that the majority of teachers are not adequately trained in parent involvement, and as a result lack the knowledge, skills, attitude and confidence required for implementing effective parent involvement. If this training is not provided, teachers and schools may adopt consciously or unconsciously a theoretical stance that is detrimental to the practice of parent involvement.

Schools and teachers who adapt a stance similar to either Gordon's Family Impact model, Swap's Protective or School-to-Home Home-Transmission model, Epstein's Separate Spheres of Influence, would either prevent parent involvement entirely, or at best limit it to only one or a few types of involvement. Comprehensive parent involvement, even though not guaranteeing full partnership for parents can only hope to be achieved if the school and teachers adapt a theory either similar to Gordon's Impact model, Swap's Partnership model, Comer's Approach, or Epstein's Overlapping Spheres of Influence.

The next chapter will examine parental involvement policies in education, and particularly their role in the provision of education in Kenya.

# CHAPTER 3

# EDUCATION AND PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN KENYA

## 3.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, various theories of parental involvement are presented, providing insight into the phenomenon of parental involvement. Parents are an important resource which should be developed to help teachers, learners and even the parents themselves to improve educational quality and standards. In addition, the previous chapter undertook an exploration into how schools, families and communities can work together and how the families and communities can be helped to become and continue to be involved in their children's education at home and school.

In this chapter, the problem will be put into context with respect to the public primary education phase in Kenya. The question of how to involve parents in school governance and other activities in school and the amount of power they should have, has been a longstanding debate throughout the world (Lemmer & Van Wyk, 2004:260). According to Monadjem (2003:20), parental involvement in schools reflects a country's national values, political ideology and approaches to educational theory. Moreover, official policy in terms of parental involvement has a considerable effect on the practice in a country's schools.

In designing an effective programme for parental involvement, the Kenyan culture and education system and in particular, how parental involvement in education has been conceived and practised at different periods, pre-and post-independence should first be investigated. Therefore, this chapter will examine the changing nature of parental involvement in the educational policy of Kenya.

## 3.2 THE KENYAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

### 3.2.1 Socio-economic background of the country

Kenya lies on the east coast of Africa, astride the Equator. In addition, it lies next to Uganda in the west, with Tanzania in the south, while Somalia is in the north east, with Sudan in the

north and the Indian Ocean lies in the southeast. The land area is about 582,366 square kilometres and the population is about 40 million consisting of forty-two indigenous communities, making up about 97 percent of the population. The rest of the population consists of Asians, Europeans and other immigrants. While the official language is English, the national language spoken by most of the indigenous groups is Kiswahili. The majority of the population is Christian, while minority religions include traditional African religions, Islam and Hinduism. The northern arid and semi-arid sectors are under-populated. Most people live in the southern part of the country, which has a tropical climate (Onsomu, Mungai, Oulai, Sankale & Mujidi, 2004:1).

There are eight administrative provinces, namely Coast, Central, Eastern, Nairobi, Western, Rift Valley, Nyanza and North Eastern, which are further subdivided into 75 districts, including municipalities (Inyega & Mbugua, 2005:3). The climatic conditions play a deciding role in the country as people engage in various socio-economic activities in different parts of the country: productive agricultural and commercial activities are carried out in high-potential areas while nomadic pastoralism is the main occupation in the arid and semi-arid areas. Agriculture is the mainstay of the economy with tea, coffee and horticulture as major crops. Tourism follows agriculture in foreign exchange earnings and the industrial sector has been picking up slowly. Poverty especially in the rural areas, semi-arid areas and poor urban slums has adversely affected educational participation among the Kenyans (see 1.4).

The "8-4-4" school system has been adopted that entails "a broadly-based practical curriculum at all levels and consists of eight years in primary school, four years in secondary and four years minimum" at university. Furthermore, significant developments have been achieved "with the number of learning institutions increasing gradually since independence" (Onsomu, *et al.,* 2004:1).

In 2002, there were 19,127 primary schools with 6.3 million pupils. In addition, there were approximately 3,667 secondary schools with 847,287 students (Oketch & Rollerston, 2007:6). Furthermore, the gross primary enrolment rate decreased from 93.9 percent in 1999 to 91.2 percent in 2002. The primary school completion rate for primary education stood at 49.8 percent while that of secondary schools was about 78 percent. About 52 percent

progressed from primary to secondary school, while less than 20 percent made it to university at that time. In 2002, the ratio of pupils to teachers in Kenya was about 31 and 16, for primary and secondary schools respectively (Onsomu, *et al.,* 2004:1*).*

### 3.2.2 Structure of the education system today

According to MOEST (Republic of Kenya, 2001:8), Kenya is committed to the Education for All (EFA) goals which stipulate that by 2015, all children of school going age should be provided with quality education. Enhancing access and quality at all levels of education, especially for girls and children from difficult circumstances and ethnic minorities are the main goals (Republic of Kenya, 2007:13). Declining economic growth has necessitated diversification of education funding sources. Therefore, the government, parents, communities, NGOs and private entrepreneurs in partnership through the cost-sharing policy have provided primary and secondary education in Kenya (Republic of Kenya, 2006a:7). Low-cost boarding schools are subsidised further by the government in arid and semi-arid areas (ASALS). In addition, special grants are given for special needs education, a primary school curriculum has been designed for slum areas, furthermore, school health and nutrition are promoted in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and HIV/AIDS education have been introduced to the regular school curriculum to address these challenges (Republic of Kenya, 2005:40).

Yet, despite the prioritisation of provision of quality education to all school-going age children by the government, not all learners' needs are being met at present (Republic of Kenya, 2007:24). Moreover, the lack of adequate funding for teaching resources and teacher education (which would improve the quality of education) has been persistent problems that adversely affect education for all children. In primary education alone, a considerable number of learners repeat each year while nearly half of the learners do not complete their primary education (Republic of Kenya, 2007:14).

### 3.2.3 Levels of education

The first level of education in Kenya is pre-primary school education with a target age of 3-6 years. It is provided by private individuals, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the government. However, attendance of pre-primary education is not a requirement for entry to

the primary education level. Recently, pre-primary education has been emphasised as a part of the primary school course with a target to reach 2.8 million children (68%) who are unable to access early childhood education (Republic of Kenya, 2007:12).

The reception age for the primary education level is six years, which takes eight years with the official age cohort of 6-13 years, although in many cases, over-aged children are enrolled. Primary education is provided by partnerships by the government, communities, parents, private entrepreneurs and NGOs. Most of the schools are public day schools, with private and boarding schools forming a small percentage. In 2002, there were about 6.3 million pupils enrolled in 18,000 primary schools. In public schools, the government meets teacher remunerations, supervision, inspection and management (Onsomu, *et al.,* 2004:1).

Rapid economic growth realised during the first two decades after independence enabled rapid improvement in primary education in terms of infrastructure, teachers and learner enrolments. For instance, in 1989, gross enrolment rates (GER) in primary schools was 101.8 percent compared to 47 percent at independence. In recent years, this trend has decreased, requiring intervention in policy measures. The completion rate of pupils in standard one who actually complete their eight years of primary education is less than 50 per cent with the completion rate for 1998 averaging 47.2 percent (Republic of Kenya, 2007:13; Onsomu, *et al.,* 2004:1).

Successful learners are enrolled in secondary schools, which constitute a transitional stage between primary and tertiary education/higher education and training and the world of work (Republic of Kenya, 2007:15). The government policy is to make secondary education part of basic education and to achieve a 70 percent transition rate by 2008 (Republic of Kenya, 2007:17). The MOEST (Republic of Kenya, 2007:15) adds that, "the four years of secondary education are an important stage of physical, intellectual and psychological development when youth mature into readiness for adult roles." Most secondary schools are public boarding but private and day schools constitute a significant proportion. At the end, learners sit the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education examination (KCSE) (Onsomu, *et al.*2004:1).

University education is the apex of formal education and training (Republic of Kenya, 2007:28). Apart from preparing high-level work force for national development, universities carry out research, storage and dissemination of knowledge.

Vocational and technical-training education is recognised and youth who are unable to enrol or continue in "the general school education system either at primary or secondary school levels" are eligible for vocational and technical training (Republic of Kenya, 2007:26). These are usually non-formal education programmes (NFE) and according to the MOEST (Republic of Kenya, 2007:26) they, "provide alternative learning opportunities for the youth who cannot afford, or do not have the opportunity to pursue formal education." NGOs and community-based organisations (CBOs) that are registered with the Ministry of Culture and Social Services (MCSS) provide most of these programmes. Dropouts at any level of education are encouraged to enrol at these institutions.

Onsomu *et al.* (2004:1) remark as follows about the system of education that is characterised by low transition rates, namely 44.8 % in 1998:

> ...from primary level to secondary level, which reveals high wastage rates, especially at primary school. This is the only level of education open to the majority of children, besides being the foundation of higher levels of learning and the only formal education that the majority of citizens would have for their lifetime.

The next section will examine the history of formal education and the role of parents in education during pre- and post-colonial periods.

## 3.3 HISTORY OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN KENYA

### 3.3.1 Parental involvement before 1963

 When European missionaries first introduced western schooling to sub- Saharan Africa, they assumed that they were bringing education to uneducated Africans (Ngaroga, 2006:7). This author goes on to add that the missionaries and the colonial educators had a narrow conception of the meaning of education, equating it with literacy and schooling. Except for pockets of Arabic literacy along the East African coast and Amharic in Ethiopia, missionaries and colonial educators assumed that no education existed among Africans. However,

according to Ngaroga (2006:9), parents, grandparents, elder brothers, sisters, aunts and uncles were the chief teachers of the young, and through the centuries, children have learnt the first essential social, economic and cultural skills, including speech and toiletry, through their guidance. Importantly, moral, social and vocational training formed the basis of this domestic curriculum. Furthermore, education was accessible to all members of society and was offered free of charge (Ngaroga, 2006:10). In addition, the entire community was the teacher. One learnt from one's elders as well as from one's parents, grandparents and older siblings. Children also learnt through interaction with their peer groups. Thus, young girls emulated the behaviour and activities of older females, while boys imitated older males. The first President of Kenya, Jomo Kenyatta (1966:100) observes that the mother took charge of the child's early education, while the father took over the son's education when the child was about six or seven years old. Kenyatta also notes that grandparents were responsible for the transmission of folk literature, usually through stories told around bonfires at night. He adds that the family predates schooling and it may well outlast schooling. It is the natural means of rearing the young among the higher mammals and in the extended human family. Thus, each individual is a learner as a child and as an adult, a potential teacher.

Indigenous Africans educated their children very effectively. Traditional education was a life-long process and as individuals progressed from one age to another, they acquired more education. Old age was equated with wisdom, with elders being recognised as repositories of knowledge in their societies. Undoubtedly, traditional education was effective, utilitarian and relevant to everyday life (Ngaroga, 2006:8). Importantly, it aimed at perpetrating the culture of the ethnic group, preserving the ethnic boundaries and inculcating feelings of group supremacy and community living. Individualistic tendencies were discouraged and instead education aimed at harmoniously integrating individuals into the social group.

Informal methods were predominant in traditional society (Ngaroga, 2006:77). The child was cherished by and of concern of the whole society and belonged to all although it naturally had a special relationship with its parents. Everyone wanted to ensure that this child grew up and became a person they could trust to take over from him or her. Moreover, education of the child was aimed at equipping the individual to make the right choices, exercise good judgment, be a responsible parent, participate effectively in all social affairs of the village

and clan, and to become a whole person as desired by society. Education began with the parents of the child and continued until old age. It was different from today's formal education in that though there were specialists in various areas, every member, even a teenager who was still learning, was a teacher in some areas to those who were younger than him or her.

In most Kenyan societies, specific teachers could be identified and employed to guide children within formal settings (Ngaroga, 2006:20). Furthermore, several formal educational institutions existed in pre-colonial Kenya. In societies where the attainment of puberty was celebrated with a special ceremony as with the Kikuyu and the Masai of central and southern Kenya, pubertal initiation institutions were of considerable educational significance. The place and duration of instruction were well defined as well as the curricula followed. Both the age of entry and completion were generally regulated and education was not free. Fees were collected from the "pupils" and their families either in the form of labour or in kind. Further, an oath of secrecy was generally taken by the students not to disclose the details of the content or the teaching methodology employed at these institutions (Ngaroga, 2006:21).

Ngaroga makes two very significant observations about the persistence and disappearance of traditional education in Africa. He notes that it is impossible to find traditional African education in its original form, and secondly, western education has not managed to oust indigenous education entirely from African societies. The extent of change or persistence however, varies from one region to another. Traditional African education therefore, usually manifests itself in the learning that a child acquires within the home and the community. Ngaroga (2006:23) remarks that:

> Though pure indigenous education is no longer existent today, nowhere has it completely disappeared to give way to Western education. Thus, contemporary Africanists have suggested that traditional and western forms of education are actually supplementary and should be synthesised for maximum effectiveness.

Therefore, education is more than just literacy and schooling and it refers to the process of cultural transmission from and within one generation to another. Moreover, it can be

described as the vehicle by means of which individuals are integrated into their social group, community and society.

The researcher believes that, since informal traditional education generally tends to be more resistant to change than formal education, it could make important contributions to the development of science and literature in Kenya today, especially in fields such as language and literature, religion and ethics, sexual morality and family education, medicine as well as teaching methodology itself. The identification of this home learning and its use will be important, especially for the potential teacher because of the impact of such learning on the formal academic performance of the child. A discussion of the development in primary education since independence will follow.

### 3.3.2 Parental involvement in Kenyan schools: the situation since independence in 1963

Kenya is among the African countries that have implemented free primary education (FPE) recently. Since independence in 1963, attempts have been made to expand access to various levels of the education system (Oketch & Rollerston, 2007:6). Following the 1961 Conference of African States on the development of education in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, the main aim of which was to provide a forum for African states to establish their own priority education standards to promote socio-economic development in Africa. Furthermore, the aim was to institute tentative short and long-term plans for educational development that exemplifies the plans made for socio-economic growth in the region, the idea of universal primary education (UPE) in Kenya was born (Oketch *et al.,* 2007:9).

Kenyatta's Kenya African National Union (KANU) government declared education one of the key priorities for national development after independence (Oketch *et al.,* 2007:10). The education policies laid out then were aimed at addressing ignorance and illiteracy to meet the workforce needs for the nation. Significantly, expansion and access to primary education was linked with the notion of development and therefore, became the focal point of the government.

The colonial government had denied access to education to the Africans for both practical and political reasons. Oketch *et al.,* (2007:10) explain that the rural subsistence economy did not require well-educated people, while an educated population may not have served the

interests of the colonial system. Therefore, to stop most Africans who managed to gain access to primary education, learners were first put through the stringent standard IV examination process after four years of education. Only those who were successful could proceed further with their education. Because of the extent of the restrictions, those who made it to secondary school education were regarded as members of an elite group. Such persons were then rewarded with civil service jobs. Accordingly, this set them apart from the rest of the people (Oketch *et al.,* 2007:10).

Secondary education access therefore became imperative if one wanted to get a job in the government; therefore, the demand for it rose. On the other hand, admission to secondary education required access to primary education first. Thus, the demand for primary education was motivated by the benefits that could ensue after obtaining a secondary education. Education consequently became a source of contention between Africans and the colonial administration and it became a prerequisite in the quest for political independence. Therefore, after independence, expanding access to education to all became an important means of legitimising the new government and reassuring the citizens that political independence was not a mere facade (Bogonko 1992 in Oketch, *et al.,* 2007:10). Accordingly, the erstwhile racial schooling system was abolished and in its place, the new education system was introduced. However, while richer Africans, could afford access to education in what had been well-equipped European-only schools for their children, access for the majority remained a barrier because of the unattainable school fees. (Oketch *et* al., 2007:11).

In due course, the restricting standard IV examinations were abolished and a consolidated seven years primary school course, was implemented in 1966 (Bogonko 1992 in Oketch, *et al.,* 2007:10). Subsequently, the number of children proceeding to the final class VII Kenya primary examinations (KPEs) taken at the end of the primary cycle, increased rapidly. This raised the number of children taking the final examination from 62000 in 1964 to 133000 in 1966 (Bogonko 1992 in Oketch, *et al.,* 2007:10). Although the government did acknowledge the significance of primary education, it was not ready to offer it free from the outset. Primary education therefore, remained the responsibility of the parents.

Subsequently, in 1971, a presidential decree abolished fees in the ASAL areas, which were the most geographically disadvantaged areas. Following this action, the enrolment in the arid

and semi-arid lands (ASALs) areas and in poor communities throughout the country rose (Oketch, *et al.,* 2007:11). In 1973, the payment of fees was abolished from standards I to IV, but a fee of 60 shillings was imposed for standards V to VII throughout the country (Republic of Kenya 1974 in Oketch *et al.*, 2007:11). Although the enrolments initially doubled (Muthwii 2000 in Oketch, *et al.,* 2007:11), they fell back to the former level due to the introduction of the "building levy" fees, because the government could not sustain the "free" education at that time. Therefore, parents had to contribute this fee through cost sharing, which resulted in the stagnation of enrolment and completion rates. Following this, the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) administration in its manifesto pledged full free primary education (FPE) for all during its campaign for election in 2002 (OWN Associates 2004 in Oketch, *et al.,* 2007:18).

Achieving universal primary education (UPE) by 2005 is a key strategy in terms of realising the education for all (EFA) objective by 2015 and attaining UPE will ensure that all children eligible for primary education can enrol and remain in school (Sessional Paper No. 1 of 2005:39). In pursuit of this goal, the new (NARC) government introduced FPE in January 2003. Consequently, 7.2 million children enrolled in formal public primary schools in 2004, this was a substantial increase from the 5.9 million in December 2002 (Republic of Kenya, 2007:13). In fact, this was an increase of 18 percent (Sessional Paper No. 1 of 2005:39). However, Kenya continues to face a major challenge regarding enrolling and retaining children in school and ensuring meaningful learning for all because of poverty, HIV/AIDS and negative parental attitudes towards education.

### 3.3.3 Parental involvement in the free primary education era since 2002

Following the new changes in education, many schools found themselves with more learners than they could handle and principals had to turn many children away because of limited space and facilities. Many parents were disappointed and they kept moving from one school to another as they sought places for their children. Since the government had not set an age limit, even "over-aged" pupils were enrolled and this worsened the congestion in schools (Kenya National Commission for UNESCO, 2005:8). While there is consensus that FPE was an appropriate policy addressing the problem of declining primary school enrolment in Kenya, school principals were required to implement the FPE policy without prior

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preparation. Furthermore, the government was not ready to implement the policy at such short notice (Kenya National Commission for UNESCO, 2005:8).

In a study in 2001 on education for all in Kenya, it was found that 50 percent of Kenyans lived below the poverty line. This has led to persistent poverty with such people being unable to access basic services such as food, education, shelter and health. As many parents are unable to afford basic education for their children, especially in the rural areas, marginal areas and slums in urban areas; their children are not provided with the necessary education. Furthermore, most parents in the study were not involved in the education of their children because of illiteracy, the long working hours and getting home late and children in the care of grandparents or older brothers and sisters. Other problems were the extreme poverty of the communities, which forced parents to marry their children off before they had completed schooling or the fact that they were sent them to work on the farms as a family or employed casual labour (Republic of Kenya, 2001:12). In 2005, a Kenyan survey found that most teachers and principals attributed the lack of parental involvement to the parents themselves. Parents were not aware of their responsibilities as parents, and they were not concerned about the quality of education provided to their children. Teachers in one school complained: "The government should clarify the role of parents as they are not taking anything the teachers tell them seriously" (Republic of Kenya, 2005:62).

Although, many parents are extremely interested in and wish to ensure their children's progress, they cannot do so because of the lack of stability in the broader socio-economic as well as the political context prevailing at the time of the study (The Kenya National Commission for UNESCO, 2005:63). Nevertheless, schools are society's property, in spite of it being controlled by the government. Importantly, parents (as parts of society) have supported the school, by sending their children and by paying school fees and have controlled them through the school governing boards. The public calls for accountability, but this should not divorce the school from them (Ondiek, 1986:99).

The research reveals that most parents believe that education is free and therefore, they do not want to be involved in the running of schools anymore (The Kenya National Commission for UNESCO, 2005:75). Consequently, few parents attend school meetings. Because of parents' unwillingness to contribute funds, together with inadequate government funding and

ambiguous policies governing parental involvement, school projects stall. Furthermore, in some communities, because of religious and cultural reasons, parents do not see the value of education and are therefore unwilling to send their children to school or they may take their children out of school before they have completed their school careers. In addition, some members of the community sell drugs to pupils, which contributes to disciplinary problems such as absenteeism, teen pregnancies, school dropout and the non-completion of school (The Kenya National Commission for UNESCO, 2005:75).

Clearly, the parental role in school is important, yet most parents feel that since their role as fund-raisers have been taken over by the government, they do not have to participate actively in schools and classrooms. Parents need to be made aware that their voluntary and meaningful involvement plays a decisive role in developing their children's potential and they need to be guided to fulfil their role.

The government, therefore, has policies and legislation in place that make it obligatory for parents to send their children to school and to ensure their retention and completion. The evolution of education, noting the legislation in the form of acts, reports and papers and particularly, the part of parental involvement in these types of legislation is evaluated.

## 3.4 EDUCATIONAL POLICY EVOLUTION

Education and training to all Kenyans is a prerequisite to the success of the government's overall development and strategy. According to Ngigi and Macharia (2006:3), the goal is "to provide every Kenyan with basic quality education and training," including two years pre-primary, eight years' primary and four years' secondary and technical education. They add that, "Enhancement of the ability of Kenyans to preserve and utilize the environment for productive gain and sustainable livelihoods is equally important" (Ngigi & Macharia, 2006:2). The government also aims at realising universal access to basic education and training for all children including the disadvantaged and vulnerable groups. They add that this is because "education is necessary for the development and protection of democratic institutions and human rights" (Ngigi & Macharia, 2006:3).

The Education Act (1968) governs all education and training. Other related acts of parliament such as the Teachers' Service Commission Act (TSC), the Kenya National Examinations

Council (KNEC) Act, the Adult Education Act, the University Act and the various Acts and Charters for universities also guide education and training in the country. However, the Education Act of 1968 and the related acts are not coordinated with one another. Importantly, Ngigi and Macharia (2006:3) argue that these acts are "no longer adequately responsive to the current and emerging trends in education and training. In fact, the legislation governing the sector" has not kept up with new developments (Ngigi & Macharia, 2006:3).

Since independence, the government has addressed the challenges facing the education sector through commissions, committees and task forces. After independence, a commission produced the Report of the Kenya Education Commission (Ominde Report of 1964) that sought to reform the inherited colonial government education system. It aimed at making it more responsive to the needs of the new country. The Commission therefore proposed "an education system that would foster national unity and the creation of sufficient human capital for national development." It abolished segregation in schools and also recommended that management of public primary schools (previously done by missionaries) was to be under public authorities. School management committees (SMCs) and parents-teachers-associations (PTAs) were to be formed to assist in managing schools. The medium of instruction was to be English from standard 1 onwards. Education was to be seen as the means of producing workers for economic growth and development, as well as narrowing disparities among the citizens (The Kenya Handbook for Teachers, 2007:116).

The 1976 Report of the National Committee on Education Objectives and Policies (Gachathi Report of 1976) focussed on defining "Kenya's educational policies and objectives, giving consideration to national unity and the economic, social and cultural aspirations of the people of Kenya." It led to the government's support for 'Harambee' schools in which parents donated the funds for erecting secondary schools. It recommended the expansion of FPE to the upper levels (V to VII) in primary education by 1980. Further, it recommended the use of the vernacular from standard I to standard III instead of English as the medium of instruction. It also proposed the restructuring of the education system to the 9-4-3 system. However, the recommendations of this Commission, were not adopted as the government could not afford the costs (The Kenya Handbook for Teachers, 2007:117).

The Report of the Presidential Working Party on the Second University in Kenya (Mackay Report of 1981) led to the scrapping of the advanced level in secondary education and the expansion of other post-secondary training institutions, such as the establishment of the second university (Moi University). Furthermore it recommended a 8-4-4 system (entailing eight years' primary, four years' secondary and four years' university education) and the establishment of the commission for higher education (Ngigi & Macharia, 2006:3).

The Report of the Presidential Working Party on Manpower Training for the Next Decade and Beyond (Kamunge Report of 1988), focussed on improving financing, quality and relevance. This was because the government scheme for provision of instructional materials through the national textbook scheme was proving inefficient and therefore hampering the quality of teaching and learning. The recommendations of the Working Party led to the government producing the Sessional Paper Number 6, which, among other things, proposed the policy of cost sharing between the government, parents and the communities in the provision of educational services (Ngigi & Macharia, 2006:4). In terms of the cost-sharing strategy (Sessional Paper No. 6), the government decided to reduce its share of the budget it contributed to education by transferring the ongoing costs such as book purchases, fees, uniforms and other private costs like transport and meals to parents and the community. In addition, schools were to depend entirely on parents' contribution for non-teaching staff costs (The Kenya Handbook for Teachers, 2007:117).

The Commission of Inquiry into the Education System of Kenya (Koech Report of 2000) recommended "ways and means of enabling the education system to facilitate national unity, mutual social responsibility, accelerated industrial" and technical development, life-long learning and adaptation in response to changing circumstances. It proposed total integrated quality education and training (TIQET), reduced the total number of examinable subjects at primary and secondary levels of education. The primary level curriculum load was reduced in terms of the number of subjects and their content. This was to ensure mastery of "the knowledge, skills and attitudes required at the end" of the primary cycle. Thus, the cost of education on both the government and parents was to be reduced (Kenya Institute of Education (KIE), 2002:iii).

The government remains committed to providing quality education and training for all Kenyans and it views education as a human right. According to the Children's Act No. 8 of 2001, the Kenyan Parliament made provision for parental responsibility regarding the fostering, custody, maintenance, guardianship, care and protection of their children. Section 7 indicates that every "child is entitled to basic education which is the responsibility" of the government and the parent, while section 8 provides for every child's right to religious education, subject to appropriate parental guidance (The Kenya Handbook for Teachers, 2007:110-111). This is in accordance with Kenyan law and international conventions such as the EFA, an initiative following a forum that discussed EFA at Jomtien (Thailand) in 1990 and whose focus was to attain UPE by 2005 and EFA (that is, its children, youth and adults) by 2015 (The Kenya Handbook for Teachers 2007:118). Accordingly, Kenya geared itself in terms of developing strategies for moving the country regarding the attainment of these goals. The government recognises the role of parents in the education of children and has legislation in place governing the involvement of families in the achievement of its goals. The policy for parental involvement is discussed below.

## 3.5 PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT POLICY

In an effort to improve the delivery of education and training services, the government has embarked on a number of reform initiatives. One such initiative is legislation that provides for the involvement of parents and the community in school management. The Education Act (1968) governs all aspects of education in Kenya and has been amended several times (1980, 1986) to take account of changing socio-economic circumstances. According to the MOEST (Republic of Kenya, 2001:62-67) the education system is mainly characterised by control from the centre and a top-down approach. Many of the amendments made to the act have not adequately addressed the governance, administration and management of education.

Kenyan educational policy advocates for parental involvement, although its emphasis is mainly on better quality teaching and greater administrative efficiency. In public schools, community involvement in the financing and management of schools takes the form of participation in school management committees. This includes parent teachers associations (PTAs) in primary schools and boards of governors (BOGs) in secondary schools. Such

bodies involving parents mainly fulfil the function of funding, management and operation of schools through the provision of teaching/learning materials (Onsomu, *et al.* 2004:17).

Through legislation, the Kenyan government provides for the democratic management of primary schools by the stakeholders, involving the school managers, parents and the community in schools (Republic of Kenya, 2001:7). This implies the creation of an environment conducive to parental involvement in schools. Accordingly, school management committees (SMCs) were established by the Education Act to oversee the management of primary schools. They consist of fourteen members, eight being parents who represent each of the eight classes in primary school, two appointees from the district education board (DEB) or the municipal education committee (MEC) and three members from the school sponsor, which is usually the religious organisation that established the school. The principal is the secretary of the SMC (Republic of Kenya, 1999:14). The SMC is the legal trustee of the school and is responsible for running the school: it discusses and approves the budget, manages school funds and resources and oversees the general welfare of the school staff and pupils. Furthermore, it liaises with the principal to maintain the school ethos and discipline, and solicits support for the school from the community, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the sponsor. Additionally, it participates in the formulation of the school development plan and it's resourcing (Republic of Kenya, 2004b:126).

Under the FPE programme, disbursement of funds is done directly to primary schools and the SMC is involved in order to enhance resource utilisation and increased transparency and accountability at school level. Direct disbursement of resources to schools aims at fostering increased participation of parents and communities and empowering them to make decisions and implement them as well (Republic of Kenya, Strategic Plan, 2006-2011:4-5). Additionally, the government provides additional support to schools in economically disadvantaged areas through the basic school infrastructural improvement grants, which are paid to schools in poorer areas annually in order to finance substantive upgrading or refurbishment works (Republic of Kenya, 2006b:4)

The Education Act also provides for parental involvement in the school instruction materials selection committee (SIMSC), which consists of elected parent representatives who have to be literate. The SIMSC is to oversee the selection, procurement and care of instructional

materials (Republic of Kenya, 2003:50; Republic of Kenya, 1999:30). According to the Education Act, for the SIMSC to be effective, the principal calls members to discuss the procurement of required instructional materials after which parents are invited to a special meeting to be informed about the importance of caring for the textbooks and other instructional materials. Parents are asked to help by supervising book use at home and to help repair or replace badly damaged books (Republic of Kenya, 2003:50; Republic of Kenya, 1999:30).

In addition, the Education Act assigns a role for parents in the management of schools, especially regarding the determination of fees. Currently, parents do not pay primary school fees. However, the principal determines school levies for infrastructural improvement and the school management committee (SMC) of each school and parents are then required to pay as decided. The act also provides for communication of information to parents, the community and other stakeholders. Individual parents, have the right to decide for themselves which school their child will attend. From the foregoing, it does appear that parents are involved in schools. However, the degree of involvement is not comprehensive. Accordingly, the limitations of the Kenyan parental involvement policy are examined in the next section.

## 3.6 LIMITATIONS OF KENYA'S PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT POLICY

Kenya has installed policies that advocate parental and community involvement in school governance (Sifuna, 1990:186). These strategies include creating sensitivity in communities about the benefits of EFA for both boys and girls (at present, gender disparity still favours boys) and the promotion of school and community partnerships by encouraging the utilisation of school space for community activities. Other strategies are training school managers and administrators regarding resource management and ensuring community participation in determining a curriculum that is suitable for the community while retaining the national syllabus (Republic of Kenya, 2001:29; Republic of Kenya, 2007:14).

Undeniably, the government does not place sufficient emphasis on parental involvement and does not seem to realise the benefits of involving parents more fully in their children's education. Instead, it emphasises improved achievement for learners by the use of continuous assessment, teacher training and economic and administrative restructuring (Republic of

Kenya, 2007:14). It is a fact that the government does provide for parents to play a role in their children's education as they are consulted when school levies are determined and they are informed about funds usage by the school. In addition, not only do they play a role in establishing and financing schools; they are chosen as representatives of the school and the larger community on school governance committees. Nevertheless, these roles are limited. The official policy denies parental involvement in all six types of involvement listed by Epstein (1995:704). Learners benefit most from a comprehensive programme that incorporates all Epstein's levels of involvement and it is apparent that Kenya's educational policy neglects these types of involvement, which have been found to benefit learners the most, especially parenting and parental involvement in learning activities in the home. As a result, the benefits of this limited policy pertaining to parental involvement are also likely to be limited.

It appears that the state, however, sees parental involvement as a way of financing schools: parental responsibilities are mainly perceived to involve the payment of school fees payment, attendance of school events and fundraising (Republic of Kenya, 1999:88). While legislation has created an environment conducive to parental involvement, actual parental involvement in Kenyan primary schools remains limited. Accordingly, this limited involvement in schools by parents in Kenya indicates the need for broader participation in school governance by these stakeholders (Republic of Kenya, 2001:89; Republic of Kenya, 2004b:96-99). Active parental involvement in schools is important to cultivate a culture of ethics and integrity in schools and to promote professionalism, accountability and transparency in the management of education (Kiprono, Ngware & Sang, 2009:iv). Undoubtedly, the participation of parents (together with teachers) in the management of funds and the procurement of the required instructional materials is important. Besides augmenting the education programme, parental involvement helps to actualise the potential of parents, enabling them to discover their strengths and talents that will benefit both them and their families (Republic of Kenya, 2003:vii). According to Patten (1999), partnerships formed between the home, school, and community not only improve academic achievement, but also foster the development of leadership and other social skills in learners. Moreover, such partnerships could help reduce drug use, crime, violence and sexual activity among young people; in addition, it could lead to other benefits for learners, such as, lower dropout rate and higher grades through parental

involvement (Cooper, Valentine, Nye & Lindsay, 1999:369-78). Most importantly, parental involvement would provide a means to help Kenyan learners achieve their potential.

While parental involvement in the management of schools is supported by policy, it is still not enough, as only a small proportion of parents are involved and this has little impact on the abilities of all parents to monitor and help their children in school. This is unfortunate as parental involvement should include all parents and most parents prefer to be involved in their own children's learning rather than in school governing bodies (Epstein, 1995:704). Furthermore, Lemmer (2000:61) notes that the parental role in school governance is only weakly related to teaching and learning.

Lemmer and Van Wyk (2004:262) assert that real change must take place at the school level where the school management plays "a crucial role in translating national initiatives into meaningful local policy and practice." This will ensure that parents and other members of the school community understand the school's intentions and reasons for its actions, for them to be able to discharge their responsibilities more effectively. The involvement of parents in governing bodies such as the SMC and the SIMSC is constrained by a lack of skills and training in management, a lack of time for working parents and the long distance to and from school (Crozier, 1999:112). Parents' ignorance, especially if they are members of school management bodies, results in them often being unable to contribute effectively to the school's management. Parents may also perceive teachers to be apathetic, indifferent or hostile to their participation. Therefore, the influence of parents in those management bodies in schools is limited. Moreover, only a few parents are represented on such governing bodies. Not surprisingly, the preference of most parents is not for involvement through the governing bodies, but for involvement in their own children's learning (Epstein, 1995:704).

The initiative to welcome, support and use parents in schools remains in the hands of the individual school. Moreover, schools have the responsibility of implementing all the school policies, including those pertaining to parental involvement, and as part of the school management, they have the power to promote or to frustrate the aims of the national policy makers (Republic of Kenya, 2004a:110). The implementation of free education and the challenges associated with them are examined in the next section.

## 3.7 CHALLENGES FACING FREE PRIMARY EDUCATION

Since independence, the primary school enrolment figures have grown from 897,533 in 1963 to 7.2 million in 2004 (Republic of Kenya, 2007:14). Unfortunately, access, equity and quality pertaining to educational services have been affected adversely by overstretched facilities, overcrowding in schools (especially in urban slums), high pupil-teacher ratios in densely populated areas, and diminishing community participation (Republic of Kenya, 2005: 40). Moreover, gender and regional disparities and an increased number of HIV/AIDS orphans in and out of school aggravate the challenges. Furthermore, the lack of economic ability and awareness among parents and the community regarding the importance of primary education exacerbate the challenges faced by schools (Ngigi & Macharia, 2006:5).

The implementation of FPE brought an upsurge in enrolment in public primary schools resulting in a gross enrolment rate (GER) of 99% in 2003 (Ngigi & Macharia, 2006:5). Traditionally, the more fertile regions of Kenya have higher enrolment rates than the arid and semi-arid land (ASAL) areas where communities practise a pastoral economy. Bunyi (2006:5) remarks that, "The direct cost of education is not the only reason that keeps children out of schools" as evidenced by the regional disparities.

Although Kenya has attained gender parity at primary level, regional gender imparity persists (Republic of Kenya, 2007:12). Thus, for instance while the Eastern, Rift Valley and Western provinces have very small gender disparity (less than 3 percent), the Coast and North-Eastern provinces have big gender disparities (greater than 10 percent). Bunyi (2006:5) notes that these are the socio-econo-politically neglected and largely Islamic areas where low economic productivity and the lack of social services has been the lot of these regions. On the other hand, the Central, Eastern and Nairobi Provinces with the highest GER in 2000 also experienced a reversal of gender disparity, which slightly favoured girls (Republic of Kenya, 2007:13). The loss in boys' enrolment is attributable to child labour, which often affects boys more than girls (Bunyi, 2006: 5). Lack of appropriate gender responsive infrastructural facilities make it difficult to mainstream gender in primary education (Republic of Kenya, 2007:14). Therefore, internal efficiency in the education system is important.

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The issue of completion is a problem. For instance, the cumulated dropout rate in primary schools has been as high as 37 percent, the repetition rate at 14 percent between standards I and VII while the survival rate stands at 40 percent (Ngigi & Macharia, 2006:6). This implies that less than half of the children who enrol in standard I grade complete the eight-year cycle. Moreover, the dropout rates vary considerably from one region to another. In 1999, Nairobi had the lowest dropout rate at 1.5 percent, while Eastern and North-eastern Provinces had the highest at 6.1 percent and 6.0 percent respectively (Republic of Kenya, 2003, in Bunyi, 2006:7). In this regard, Bunyi (2006:5) comments that, "There is no significant difference in completion rates by gender" according to the survey done by MOEST in 2003.

Deninger (2003:295) indicates that the reasons for reduced enrolment figures include the cost of education, the lack of interest especially in the northern marginal areas because of the lack of economic opportunities and the fact that diseases like HIV/AIDS contributed to reduced economic opportunities. Other reasons are the decline in the quality of education, the rise in the number of pupils per school without a commensurate rise in qualified teachers, which resulted in a rise in the pupil-teacher ratio and reduced learning facilities. In addition, teacher training is not adequate for the teacher to acquire mastery in subject content and pedagogic skills. Leading to the quality of teaching and learning being compromised (Republic of Kenya, 2005:40). Additionally, poor resource management in primary schools, inadequate in-service training of teachers, poor learning environments due to overcrowding, inadequate facilities, poor health and sanitation, gender-insensitive environments and "barriers for those with special needs and inadequacies in quality assurance' contribute to the poor quality of education (Republic of Kenya, 2005:40).

Deninger (2003) notes that, despite a reduction in the costs of education for the household, little real benefit has ensued from education. In fact, Grogan (2006:44) observes that the mean ability level of learners may decrease; thereby reducing levels of attainment, because education quality declines if the resources available per pupil are reduced. Raja and Burnett (2004:4) state that the major determinants of enrolments are domestic income, schooling costs and the presence of schools in the area, community involvement, transportation, education quality and relevance. Therefore, low enrolment may reflect a lack of available schools in the vicinity, the cost of attending school, perceived low returns from schooling in

the labour market or other factors such as distance from school and for girls, the lack of separate toilets. In poor households, child labour has become essential for the survival of the family and parents. Often, girls are sent out as domestic workers in urban centres (The Kenya National Commission for UNESCO, 2005:218). In situations where parents have a negative attitude towards education or where they do not see its immediate benefits, the consequence is a high dropout rate.

Moreover, factors such as initiation ceremonies and gender socialisation are responsible for pupils' failure to complete primary education. In communities where traditional circumcision is practiced, some pupils are taken out of school to participate in these rites. After being initiated, some pupils develop negative attitudes towards teachers and the school. In addition, these pupils are pressurised to leave school to meet traditional expectations (The Kenya National Commission for UNESCO, 2005:218, 238-239).

Today, many of these problems are evident in the light of the large number of children that have dropped out of school and in the light of the fact that of those who enrol, less than half complete the primary education cycle. Even those who do complete primary schooling leave with unacceptably low levels of knowledge and skills (Johnson, 2008:cover page). Johnson adds that the problems of access to education and the quality of learning opportunities and learning outcomes are unevenly spread between the urban and rural areas and between the agriculturally superior and poorer regions and also between boys and girls. Moreover, the Republic of Kenya (2007:14) warns that without a working partnership between parents and schools, it will be difficult "to address the problems of inadequate access, inequity, low quality and the current heavy household financial burden." These are issues requiring urgent attention if wastage and the cost of education are to be contained.

To improve school facilities in order to reduce overcrowding in classrooms, and to meet the need for the furniture and equipment needed to improve the teaching and learning environments, community and family finances are required. In addition, It is necessary to make parents sensitive about the necessity of girls also receiving an education, to make schools gender sensitive, to integrate alternative modes of education provision such as mobile schools among nomadic communities and to pay attention to factors that enhance gender parity (Republic of Kenya, 2005:42).

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The government is already undertaking measures such as providing additional support to low cost boarding schools in the arid areas, conducting school mapping, improving the skills of school managers and extending the school feeding programmes. In addition, it is introducing HIV/AIDS education into the regular mainstream school curriculum and taking pro-active action in support of equal educational opportunities for girls and providing funds to help meet water and sanitation needs in schools (Republic of Kenya, 2005:39). The government also meets the cost of providing education in primary schools by covering teachers' salaries, including benefits, teaching and learning materials and other operating costs (Republic of Kenya, 2005:91).

However, the education sector faces challenges that require to be addressed these achievements notwithstanding. These are overstretched facilities, teachers shortages, overcrowding in schools, high pupil-teacher ratios and the diminished community support following the misconstrued role of government vis-avis that of the parents and communities in FPE implementation. Moreover, the increasing number of orphans due to the HIV/Aids scourge, children with special needs, negative cultural practices and gender-insensitive environments all require new strategies for intervention (Republic of Kenya, 2006b:16).

In the light of the discussion above, it is evident that the importance of "parental involvement in the education of their children" is recognised and the need for even greater parental involvement in various aspects of educational activities is justifiable. A discussion on the parental involvement in the research area follows.

## 3.8 THE ROLE OF PARENTS IN THE EDUCATION IN EMBU AREA

The Embu area is a rural community in the Eastern Province of Kenya. This researcher has been teaching primary teacher trainees since 1998 in the area and the present study will be conducted in this area. The problems experienced with parental involvement in public schools in the Embu area seem to be the same problems experienced by the rest of Kenya and the world. There is limited current literature on parental involvement in the Embu area due to the lack of research studies in the area. The literature review therefore focusses on the broad literature about Kenya.

In a study by The Kenya National Commission for UNESCO (2005:125) in 2002, 7587 pupils were enrolled in the Embu District primary schools with 3355 boys and 4232 girls. All schools experienced increased enrolment figures totalling 8913 (a 17 percent rise) following the introduction of FPE by January 2004. Parents reported their gratefulness to the government for introducing FPE since it relieved them from the burden of paying school fees, which had affected the poor in the past. The government also provided textbooks and other learning materials that would otherwise have been bought by the parents. Pupils reported that teaching had improved because they now had textbooks and exercise books. Some schools bought radios and introduced radio lessons (The Kenya National Commission for UNESCO, 2005:116). However, parents transferred their children from schools that had semi-permanent or temporary buildings to other schools with better facilities; some moved their children to schools nearer home, while some parents transferred their children from private to public schools, which were declared free. Furthermore, there were new enrolments of pupils that had previously dropped out of school. Consequently, some newly enrolled pupils were over-aged.

The implementation of FPE is the collective responsibility of the government, parents, sponsors and the local community. At school level, the SMC is in charge on behalf of parents for FPE implementation. The concept of the SMC requires that all stakeholders work democratically and cooperatively as a team. (Republic of Kenya, 2001:88). Their responsibilities include whole-school development including determining the school policy, admissions and code of conduct and maintenance of school physical facilities. Additionally, members are involved in determining fees, the appointment and dismissal of non-teaching staff, amongst others. The Education Act of 1968 stipulates that parents must ensure school attendance of every child for which they are responsible and providing them with uniforms, meals and accommodation (The Kenya National Commission for UNESCO, 2005:118). Moreover, they are responsible for discipline in their children and are expected to participate in all school activities and to provide materials to support the schools (The Kenya National Commission for UNESCO, 2005:118). The principal, as a member of the SMC, is entrusted with the custody and maintenance of school materials, keeping records and accounts. He or she is also responsible for purchasing and distributing the materials, supervising teachers and guiding parents regarding the implementation of FPE. The local community also has a role to

play in terms of providing resources and creating an enabling environment for FPE implementation. The government, on the other hand, is responsible for policy formulation, supervision, monitoring and funding.

Most schools held SMC meetings that mapped development plans out and though some parents reported satisfaction with the way the funds were used, others reported their concerns about the mismanagement of the funds, while others suggested that schools should be assessed differently and be given funds depending on specific individual needs (The Kenya National Commission for UNESCO, 2005:113). Most parents reported that the money provided was inadequate, so school buildings were dilapidated, and there was no money to repair them or to complete stalled projects. Some parents expressed concern about the fact that there was a lot of disunity between principals, teachers and parents over the use of school funds, while other parents felt excluded from FPE implementation and were not able to assist in developing the schools. However, some parents want everything "free of charge," which is a great obstacle for FPE.

School management committee (SMC) members and other parents expressed concern that, in general, parents need to be educated regarding their role in the implementation of FPE. In certain schools, some parents were ignorant and negligent regarding their roles and when invited to meetings, they refused to attend feeling that school business was the work of the teachers. A lack of cooperation from the parents was also reported in the area (such as refusing to allow their children to repeat grades even when they were performing poorly in class). This caused a certain amount of hostility between teachers and parents. Some parents demanded uniforms from the schools since the government had announced that there would be "free education." Due to the rampant poverty in the area, some parents took their children out of school and sent them to pick tea on their own farms. Parents without permanent homes, especially single parents, kept on moving with their children as they sought tea-picking jobs and this tended to break continuity in the education of such children (Republic of Kenya, 2005:108). Many children stay with their grandparents, who are old and unable to take proper care of them and such children have to go to school without food.

In a survey done on the experiences of parents, teachers, pupils and members of SMCs in Kenyan primary schools in the free primary education (FPE) era in 2004, parents perceived

that the SMCs role had diminished under FPE, as all financial transactions were being done by the school head. As a result, the school head is overworked and cannot perform his/her teaching and administrative duties effectively. As key components of school management, the SMC should take a more proactive role and organise fund collection projects to provide school facilities for pupils to learn in environments more conducive to teaching and learning. Teachers interviewed in the survey, on the other hand, felt that parents had withdrawn from school affairs as they were under the misconception that FPE meant the government provided funding for all facilities (Kenyan Commission for UNESCO, 2005:204-205). Prior to FPE, the communities had contributed over 95% of non-salary recurrent expenditure (Abagi, 1997). Moreover, communities had provided labour during the construction of school buildings (classrooms, teachers' houses, toilets and dormitories). In some cases, communities had also paid the teaching staff, supported the school feeding programme and hired and paid support staff.

Despite FPE, most schools reported problems with staffing. Teachers were not prepared for the large number of pupils, often there were diverse age groups in one class, and this was difficult. Consequently, the morale among teachers was low due to the heavy workloads and the large classes. Furthermore, the classroom furniture was not adequate and the existing desks were too few in some schools (The Kenya National Commission for UNESCO, 2005:108). It was also noted that a lack of individualised attention (due to the large number of pupils) had a negative impact on teaching in public schools.

On the other hand, most parents did not seem to be involved in the education of their children. This compromises student discipline in most schools since there is no effective learning when pupils are undisciplined. Furthermore, most parents do not attend parents' meetings when requested to do so (The Kenya National Commission for UNESCO, 2005:112). A learning culture is not being created effectively when parents are not involved in the schools and fail to participate in school activities. Although the government has legislated parental involvement in schools and the community in the Embu area support the idea of parental involvement, some are not aware of the fact they could be involved in the education of their children. The following section explores the factors that have an impact on parental involvement in the education of their children.

## 3.9 CONTEXTUAL FACTORS INFLUENCING PRIMARY EDUCATION AND PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Onsomu *et al.,* (2004:5) reveal that free primary education takes place in a wide societal context, in which large proportions of the population suffer from extreme deprivation, malnutrition, inadequate housing, mediocre civic amenities, poor health services and inadequate education facilities. Some of the factors that influence the roles that parents play in their children's education are discussed below.

### 3.9.1 Family structure

More and more women in both the developed and developing world face the challenge of combining economically productive work with the care and nurture of children. In addition, factors such as urbanisation and industrialisation have given rise to a greater number of women working away from home (Bridgemohan, 2002:72). In this regard, a large number of women in Kenya have entered the labour market over the past few decades. There is also a sharp rise in the number of female-headed households in diverse cultural settings.

In Kenyan traditional society, extended families, kinship bonds, family roles and emotional support united the society. People lived in close proximity and during the early years of a child's life, he or she learnt the values within the family's situation. However, at present, more Kenyan families participate in several levels of society and the result is that little time is devoted to the child's upbringing. Therefore, the family has limited charge over their children including how they are learning in school because they lack time, money or emotional resources to get involved (Semela, 2004:11).

### 3.9.2 Societal factors

According to Bridgemohan (2002:73), family systems have changed as well as the local communities on which families depend for help, for networking and for social participation. In Embu, at present, there are urban communities with large numbers of the population concentrated in urban centres with few amenities available. In addition, housing is limited, leading to overcrowding. Furthermore, there is too little water and sanitation facilities are scarce. Furthermore, the values of these social groupings differ markedly in terms of their

religion, culture, language and political views. Each group is convinced that their own values are the best and are not concerned about the values of other groups. This attitude has precipitated cultural separateness and the tendency for individuals to categorise themselves in accordance with their religion and cultural beliefs. Floyd (1998 in Bridgemohan, 2002:74) observes that the ability of parents from diverse cultures to interact comfortably with schools depends on their past educational backgrounds and whether their native community was urban or rural. Thus, if they face language and cultural barriers that prevent them from communicating effectively with the teachers they may feel that schools do not really want them to be involved (Semela, 2004:11). Moreover, most teachers have not learnt how to communicate and work with parents.

### 3.9.3 Poverty

Schools face additional challenges as many of the communities face problems regarding housing shortages, unemployment; and the fact that they live in overcrowded environments. The income in households is low and many parents find it difficult to provide a day's meal for their families. Accordingly, attending a school function or getting involved in a child's education concerns is not a priority in these poverty-stricken homes. Such parents due to poverty are unable to pay fees and to buy uniform for their children and they may force them to drop out of school (Republic of Kenya, 2001:91).

### 3.9.4 HIV/AIDS pandemic

The National Policy on HIV/AIDS for learners and teachers in all institutions through the MOEST is to minimise the socio-economic and developmental consequences of the pandemic to the education system (Republic of Kenya, 2001:82). Coombe (2000:5) has drawn attention to "the reality of the impact of the HIV/AIDS" on education. She warns that HIV/AIDS reduces the number of parents who are twenty to forty years old, increases the number of orphaned children, deepens poverty and negatively affects school enrolment rates. Coombs adds that, "Dropouts due to poverty, illness, lack of motivation and trauma are set to increase along with absenteeism among children who are heads of households," those who are helping to supplement family income and those who are ill. Parents who are faced with

the problems related to the pandemic have little time to become actively involved in their children's education (Bridgemohan, 2002:75).

### 3.9.5 Illiteracy

In Kenya, illiteracy levels are high, especially in the pastoral communities. The majority of those who are illiterate are women (Republic of Kenya, 2001:51). According to Strauss and Burger (2000:41), parental literacy levels can affect learners' performance negatively. In their research, these authors found that nearly half of the parents studied never completed primary education; whereas a large proportion were illiterate and had difficulty helping their children with homework. This illiteracy among parents implies that efforts to involve them in their children's education may not have the desired effect.

The above-mentioned factors adversely affect involvement of parents in schools. Kenya would benefit from adopting an explicit parental involvement policy where government and advocacy are concerned. Policy communication and implementation, teacher education and detailed and clear guidelines for policy implementation are necessary to make this possible. While schools predominantly only use methods such as fund-raising or parent-teacher conferences, parents never get an opportunity to volunteer to assist in the classroom (Van Wyk, 2001:123). Moreover, community involvement in schools is limited to the use of the school premises by outside groups for sports or field days that are unrelated to the school curriculum.

Adequate funding is necessary for a parental involvement policy to be implemented (Epstein, 1991:348); otherwise, such programmes will only be effective in schools whose administrators are well motivated in this regard. Epstein suggests that the participation of paid parental involvement coordinators is crucial for the widespread implementation of such programmes. Such coordinators would be needed to provide in-service training for teachers, coordinate school staff and offer specific services to parents (Epstein, 1991:348). At present, in Kenya, no such coordinators exist and no funding is set aside for parental involvement activities (The Kenya National Commission for UNESCO, 2005:118). In addition, Van Wyk (2001:116) notes that little is done to prepare teachers during training to work with parents or members of the community. Therefore, Epstein (1987:8) suggests the need for including such

courses during teacher preparation. However, in Kenya, this is not mandatory in teacher training and no such courses exist.

## 3.10 SUMMARY

The provision of education in Kenya can be defined as both centralised and inadequate. Primary education is the responsibility of both the government and parents. Despite inadequate funding, parents and the community have played a significant role in primary school infrastructural development. Parental involvement in education generally amounts to little more than cost sharing. In addition, situational factors such as poverty, illiteracy, HIV/AIDS can have an impact on the nature of parent involvement that is found in primary schools. Yet, schools are required to implement policies that mandate greater parental involvement. Therefore, translating the rhetoric of increased parental involvement into action can be regarded as major challenges for schools. In the light of the above, this study will investigate the nature and practice of parental involvement in primary schools in Kenya.

The next chapter will deal with the methodology that will be used to investigate parental involvement in education in Kenya. It will also outline the research design and research methods used in this research. In due course, the sampling design and data collection methods, as well as the data analysis will also be explained. In addition, specific procedures for implementing these methods will be described in this chapter.

# CHAPTER 4

## RESEARCH DESIGN

### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

This study seeks to examine the practices of parental involvement in public primary schools in Kenya. In this regard, it deals with the environmental systems theories pertaining to primary schools. As Barton, Drake, Perez, St. Louis and George (2004:3-12) explain, parental involvement theories are often applied in order to understand how to improve the level of involvement of parents in school. As schools are an inextricable part of society and the community in which they belong, they are seen as social sub-systems, which cannot function in seclusion in their social environments. According to Hoy and Miskel (2001:252), they are open systems and depend on interactions with environmental elements to continue to exist. Multiple environmental influences come from diverse levels of society and affect what happens in schools. Families, on the other hand, are also seen as social systems, which influence what happens in schools. Importantly, Senge, Cambron-McCabe, Lucas, Smith, Dutton and Kleiner (2000:11) suggest that schools together with those in the schools, are living systems and are strongly influenced by their interaction at three levels, namely,

- The classroom.

- The school.

- The community.

This chapter presents a discussion of the research design developed to investigate the aim and objectives of this study. Firstly, a justification for the research design chosen is provided and a description of the research setting is given. Next, the data collection methods including ethical measures, verification strategies and the instruments employed are discussed. Finally, the procedures used for data analysis are explained.

**4.2 RESEARCH QUESTION**

Increasing parental involvement in children's learning is an important issue in many school reform initiatives (Chin-Lung, 2007:117). Importantly, there is overwhelming evidence that parental involvement in schools has a considerable effect on pupils' achievement at the elementary school level in many countries (Baily, 2006:155). As a result, this study looks at this implication in a Kenyan context.

It is important to take note of a qualitative study on parental involvement in schools conducted by Monadjem (2003:135-136), which sought to establish possible strategies for effective parental involvement in urban schools. Likewise, the present study sought to identify possible strategies to enhance the efficacy of parental involvement in public primary schools. Therefore, it, attempted to answer the question: How can an effective parental involvement programme be designed to benefit Kenyan public primary school pupils, their parents and teachers maximally? In order to develop recommendations for the design of an effective parental involvement programme for the Kenyan community, the following questions facilitated the demarcation of the problem more clearly:

- In what ways do public primary schools attempt to involve parents in their children's education?

- What are the teachers' perceptions of parental involvement in Kenyan public primary schools?

- What are the parents' perceptions of their involvement in Kenyan public primary schools?

- What factors hinder the involvement of parents in Kenyan public primary schools?

- How does family background influence the extent to which parents are involved in their children's education in public primary schools?

- How can these findings contribute to the planning of an effective parental involvement program for public primary schools in Kenya?

## 4.3 AIM OF THE RESEARCH

The aim of this research was to develop recommendations for the design of an effective parental involvement programme suited to Kenyan public primary school education so that pupils in particular, their teachers and parents would derive the greatest possible benefits from the implementation of this programme. In the preceding chapters, the frameworks of successful American parental involvement programmes were presented. Of these, Epstein's typology that forms the basis for a possible framework for a Kenyan programme of parental involvement in children's education has become known as a standard in the field. In order to investigate parental involvement as it is practised in schools, a research design was drawn up.

## 4.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

### 4.4.1 Qualitative methodology used in the study

McMillan and Schumacher (2006:22, 117) describe a research design as the procedure for conducting a study, "including when, from whom and under what conditions the data will be obtained." In a research design, a *modus operandi* must be followed that gives the researcher the confidence that the results obtained are due to the factors that were studied and not to extraneous or irrelevant factors.

The aim of the study was to explore the existing principles and practices pertaining to parental involvement programmes in public primary schools in the light of the framework provided by Epstein's model. For the purpose of this study, the qualitative methodology was the most suitable to be used in an exploratory field. This allowed the researcher to become intimately acquainted with the life world of the participants and thus to understand parental involvement in schools by illuminating it from different perspectives (Bridgemohan, 2002:102). Accordingly, face-to-face interviews, focus group discussions and observations were employed to gather the data (DSJ Research, 2005:14). This design made use of an interpretive perspective (Stake, 2000:435). Terre Blanche, Kelly and Durheim (2006:273-274) explain that an:

> ...interpretive paradigm involves taking people's subjective experiences seriously as the essence of what is real for them (ontology), making sense of people's experiences

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by interacting with them and listening carefully to what they tell us (epistemology), and making use of qualitative research techniques to collect and analyze information (methodology).

Interactive field research was conducted in this study, which involved face-to-face interactions between the researcher and the selected participants to explore their experiences concerning the practice of parental involvement in schools in terms of their individual and social beliefs, perceptions, thoughts and actions, after which these were described and analysed (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006:440). The data were collected in the form of words or narratives derived from the transcripts of focus groups and individual interviews.

As mentioned before, this study was qualitative and had an emergent and flexible design that continued to evolve throughout the research process (with each new research decision dependent on prior information). Moreover, it did not involve pre-planned, sequential, fixed steps, which could be followed (DSJ Research, 2005:12). Instead, a topic guide (discussion guide) was used to explore various issues in-depth and the discussion between the researcher and the participants was informed largely by the respondent's own thoughts and feelings.

### 4.4.2 The research instruments

In the study, the researcher used qualitative investigative techniques to study the participants' perceptions and opinions on parental involvement, namely focus group discussions and individual in-depth interviews in terms of semi-structured interviews (The Education Research Network for West and Central Africa (ERNWACA, 2005)). In addition, he used a discussion or interview guide that allowed for flexibility regarding the responses of the participants. In due course, questions, which did not generate useful information, were eliminated and other questions were added where it was helpful to do so (ERNWACA, 2005). The instruments were as follows:

Interview guide for principals.

- Interview guide for teachers.

- Interview guide for parents.

- Focus group discussion guide for teachers.

- Focus group discussion guide for parents.

The various instruments used, enabled the researcher to either confirm information or to seek further clarification. Direct field observations were also undertaken to aid further analysis of the data. The details of the instruments used are provided in the appendices.

The data gathering sessions involved focus group discussions with the selected principals, teachers and parents in the identified schools (see section 4.7.2 for a description of these groups) followed by face-to-face interviews with the participants. Informal analysis of the participants' answers in a session was undertaken to make changes in the interview schedule for the following sessions.

## 4.5 DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES

### 4.5.1 Data collection instruments and methods

Given the focus of the study, a qualitative, interpretive paradigm was employed that allowed the researcher to study people in their natural settings, and to make inferences regarding the meanings the people bring to them (Stake, 2000:435).

In a study aimed at establishing the strategies of how to prepare teachers for urban schools, Monadjem (2003:135-136) explored the perceptions of teachers and parents concerning parental involvement in urban schools using focus group discussions consisting of teachers and parents. Based on such a study, the researcher felt that focus groups consisting of information-rich teachers and parents in public primary schools would allow him to explore the complexities of teachers and parents in schools concerning parental involvement. Furthermore, Madriz (2000:11) suggests that a focus group discussion is a suitable method to use with marginalised participants, in this case, the parents who might be illiterate. Not only did the focus groups offer a non-threatening social context, the social support and companionship built in the sessions could also help the participants when conversing with the researcher, whom the participants might have viewed as an outsider in their socio-cultural

communities. This could have served as a communication barrier between him and them as he discussed their roles in public primary school education (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002:182).

The goal of the focus groups was to describe and explain the points of view of parents and teachers about public primary education. They were used to obtain preliminary information about the practice of parental involvement in the schools and they were helpful with identifying suitable questions for the subsequent individual interviews (ERNWACA).

In addition, individual interviews as well as direct observations were used to explore individual perspectives concerning parental involvement in schools. This process entailed the use of purposive sampling, data collection and partial analysis that was applied concurrently and interactively.

### 4.5.2 Sampling

#### 4.5.2.1 Selection of the schools

The selection of the schools was done in stages. During the first stage, the researcher selected a purposive sample from four out of the five educational zones in the Embu West District. Accordingly, the study selected a representative sample of public primary schools in the selected zones based on whether they were urban, semi-urban or rural. From these, the study selected three schools randomly from each group and ultimately, nine schools were included in the study.

#### 4.5.2.2 Selection of participants for the focus group interviews

A focus group discussion is a purposive debate developed to explore people's beliefs, attitudes and opinions. Focus groups that can range from six to twelve members, can vary in according to the number of participants involved (Baumgartner, Strong & Hensley, 2002:12; DJS Research Ltd, 2005:23; Johnson & Christensen, 2004:19; Onwuegbuzie, Dickinson, Leech & Zoran, 2007:17; Sandelowski, 2000:179). However, a focus group of only four participants may also be viable (Dawson, Manderson & Tallo, 1983).

In order to maximise the trustworthiness of the study, the focus groups consisted of homogeneous members of the target population. Kingry, Tiedje & Friedman, (in Schulze &

Lessing, 2002:3) indicate that the focus groups can consist of participants "who are similar in terms of social class, age, level of knowledge, cultural/ethnic characteristics and sex. This will create an environment where participants are comfortable with each other and feel free to express their opinions". By adhering to these criteria, the researcher was able to analyse the data by group and to compare the results of different types of groups.

The selected teachers and parents' focus groups were discussed next.

The teachers' focus groups included:

- All the class-teachers (eight participants).

- Subject panel heads (six participants, namely, English, mathematics, Swahili, science, social studies and creative arts subject panel heads).

The parental focus groups included parents with their children in lower primary school classes and the parents of children in upper primary school classes, regardless of their cultural or ethnic backgrounds. This ensured that the research captured the multiplicity of views among the parents of children in all primary school classes and that the researcher also explored the motivators and barriers affecting different parents' groupings regarding their parental involvement in schools. The groups included:

- Parents of children in lower primary classes (six participants).

- Parents of children in upper primary classes (six participants).

Table 4 below presents the proposed focus groups in terms of location:

**Table 4.1: Focus group participants by location**

|  | Teachers | Parents |
|---|---|---|
| Urban schools (three) | Two focus groups per school | Two focus groups per school |

| Semi-urban schools (three) | Two focus groups per school | Two focus groups per school |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Rural schools (three) | Two focus groups per school | Two focus groups per school |

According to Krueger (Onwuegbuzie *et al.,* 2007:17), when two homogeneous focus groups express different results, more focus groups will be necessary**.** In this study, therefore, focus group discussions will be discontinued when no more new information is forthcoming from the groups.

To select the participants, the principal in each school was approached to identify teachers who taught in those schools and parents who were deemed to be suitable, and who could offer insightful and relevant information regarding their experiences of parental involvement in their respective schools and who were willing to participate in the study. Networking was also used to obtain more participants among the parents and teachers from the ones already contacted. In line with focus group discussion protocols, over sampling was done to account for the possible non-attendance of some selected participants.

The researcher invited the selected class teachers and subject panel heads in the selected schools to participate in the focus groups. Class teachers are responsible for the general welfare of their classes and are frequently in touch with the parents. The subject panel heads are responsible for academic matters pertaining to the children in their respective subjects. Hence, they interact on a frequent basis with parents. Accordingly, a sample of eight class teachers and six subject panel heads of both genders, with varying backgrounds regarding teaching experience, marital status, age and number of years in the school formed the focus groups. Accordingly, the researcher requested permission from the principals in the selected schools to invite the teachers to participate in the focus group discussions.

The rights and privacy of the focus group participants were respected throughout the recruitment process. In addition keeping the identities of the participants confidential would be a priority. Therefore, their names were changed and any identifying information was altered. The participants' cultural background and age groups were however retained because

this information helped to understand participants' experiences and perspectives, but did not identify the individuals. Consideration was given to the participants' daily routine and possible transport constraints so that ample time was allowed for them to attend the sessions. The identified participants were notified about one week before the sessions and a reminder followed a day prior to the sessions.

### 4.5.2.3 Conducting the focus group discussions

After identifying suitable discussion participants (the researcher was flexible regarding the numbers and invited six to eight participants), they were invited to a meeting at an agreed place and time. A date for the interviews was scheduled at a convenient time and place that was accessible and was reasonably quiet. During each group discussion, the researcher attempted to create a positive atmosphere to enable the participants to contribute in this study willingly.

The researcher began each session by expressing gratitude for the participants' presence, reminded them of the purpose and aims of the research, assured them of the confidentiality of the research and their anonymity, requested them to maintain confidentiality regarding the sessions and obtained permission to record the discussions on audiotape. Each participant was asked to introduce himself/herself by stating their names, and by speaking briefly about his or her current parental involvement in the school and how he or she had been involved in the past. Each was asked why he or she had chosen their activities and anything they liked or disliked about parental involvement. The participants were then asked to reflect on the role of parental involvement for parents and teachers and their experiences regarding the school.

To explore barriers to parental involvement, the participants were asked how they would like parental involvement to play a different role in the school and the factors preventing them from participating more fully. Finally, the groups discussed the barriers to participation that they experienced in terms of their backgrounds as well as their strategies for overcoming these barriers.

Furthermore, the participants were invited to voice any further thoughts that they had on the topic. Each focus group interview lasted approximately 120 minutes. In addition to participating in the discussion, the participants will be asked to fill in a short fact sheet (see

appendices II, III and IV). These are designed to capture relevant demographic data that may not be discussed in the group, but which are likely to have an effect on the participants' experiences and perspectives such as age, cultural identity, religion, educational level, family type and source of income. They were then invited to present any additional information that they still wished to contribute.

Two interview guides (see appendices IX and X) were designed to gather data from the participants. The guides consist of a number of the main themes/issues for the discussion. During the focus groups, however, the natural flow of the conversation was followed and the themes were used as prompts (when necessary) to explore the meanings and experiences of the participants fully. After each focus group, additional themes or points for consideration were added to the interview guide for subsequent focus groups. However, once the focus groups ceased to reveal any new information, no further focus groups were necessary (Dawson *et al.,* 1983).

### 4.5.2.4 *Semi-structured face-to-face interviews*

After the focus groups discussions, individual interviews were conducted. These were useful in getting detailed descriptions of the participants regarding their individual experiences on the subject of parental involvement without being influenced by other individuals, to maintain participant confidentiality especially with the principals and in circumstances where organising group sessions were difficult (ERNWACA).

Semi-structured interviews that employed a set of themes and topics to guide the questioning were used to interrogate the participants (Langford, Schoenfeld & Izzo, 2002:60; O'Donoghue & Punch, 2003:19-21). A written list of questions or themes to be covered during the interview was used but the order and formulation of the questions varied from one participant to another. When the researcher wanted to investigate certain themes further, the guide contained clear instructions regarding the main questions and themes that could be probed further. Such interviews with a schedule useful because they provide for a relatively systematic collection of data and ensure important data is not forgotten (Bridgemohan, 2002:86).

Key persons who were good sources of data in each of the selected schools, namely, the principal, the counsellor and the senior teacher were interviewed. The principal is the leading authority on the school policy. Therefore, he/she has a definite influence on the nature, extent and type of parental involvement in the school. Additionally, the counsellor and the senior teacher's views could also be useful, as they work with the parents and their children in identifying attributes and talents in the pupils and consequently their suitable future careers. Thus, these respondents provided clear information on the actual parental involvement as it occurred in schools rather than what the school policy recommended should be happening (Republic of Kenya, 2009:1).

Parents' perceptions of their involvement in school, how they actually got involved in their children's education and their perceived hindrances to their involvement in school were also necessary. Not only were parents' views ascertained, they also provided a valid account of the meanings parents attached to their involvement in school. The respondents from the parent component included the chairperson and the treasurer of the school management committee (SMC) that is the official link between the school and parent body, together with four randomly selected parents who belonged to the school parents' body but were non-members of the SMC. The proposed participants for the individual interviews are depicted in table 4.2.

**Table 4.2: Participants for the individual interviews**

|  | Principals | Teachers | Parents |
|---|---|---|---|
| Urban schools (three) | One per school | Two per school | Two per school |
| Semi-urban schools (three) | One per school | Two per school | Two per school |
| Rural schools (three) | One per school | Two per school | Two per school |

The principals, teachers and parents were asked to complete a biographical data sheet before the interview (see appendix II, III and IV). These sheets were designed to gather personal data about the participants. This information will be discussed in chapter five. The participants were requested to give their permission for the interviews to be recorded and they were assured of the anonymity of both their schools and themselves as individuals.

### 4.5.2.5 Face-to-face interviews with the teachers, principals and parents

Eighteen individual teacher interviews (two per school) were carried out to determine teachers' views, feelings, perspectives and attitudes towards parental involvement. Additionally, the interviews sought to ascertain how the schools attempted to involve the parents. Teachers' perceptions in terms of parental involvement might facilitate or restrict involvement of the parents in the school (Newport, in Monadjem, 2003:61). A reflection of these perceptions is necessary in the designing of an effective parental involvement programme, which must include ways to help teachers have positive beliefs and perceptions regarding parental involvement. Knowledge of the level and types of parental involvement occurring in these schools is necessary to address the weaknesses in the design of the parental involvement programme.

The individual teachers' interviews were conducted on the school premises at the convenience of the teachers and parents, while the principals' interviews were carried out in the principal's office. Accounts of parents' perceptions regarding their participation in school, how they actually got involved in their children's education and their perceived hindrances to their involvement in school were indispensable. These interviews were aimed at not only ascertaining parents' views but also at providing a more legitimate account of the parents' own meaning attached to their involvement in school. Accordingly, the researcher interviewed the six selected parents. A general conversation on education and the routine issues preceded the interview session. The researcher set out to put the participant at ease before he began with the interview. In addition, he made every effort to maintain the confidentiality of all participants throughout the interviews and also during the dissemination of the findings. Furthermore, not only did he obtain verbal consent from the participants, he also assigned a number to each participant, he removed or altered identifying information from the analysis and destroyed the interview tapes after the analysis. Moreover, he reviewed

the purpose, procedure and confidentiality plans of the study with each participant and scheduled appointments to conduct the interviews personally. The interviews were guided by open-ended questions (see appendices IX, X and XI that helped to focus a discussion on the participants' lived experiences and constraints with school-parental involvement. Additionally, clarifying questions were asked to gain a clear understanding of participants' perceptions. The interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes each, with 10 to 15 minutes allotted for each interview if further clarification was needed. In addition to taping the interviews, field notes were jotted down during the interviews. After each interview, the tapes were transcribed for data analysis.

### 4.5.3   Observations

Observations were also used as a means of gathering primary data. This involved collecting information about the nature of both the physical and the social world respectively as it unfolds directly using the senses rather than indirectly via the accounts of others (Brown & Medway, 2007:529).

In this study, non-participant observations were made to generate in-depth descriptions of information that was otherwise inaccessible. This reduced the distance between the observer and what was being observed and that could not be produced by an instrument such as the interview (Research Methods Participant Observation, 2003:15). In addition, the context or background of the behaviour was noted in the observations of both the subjects and their environment. None of the observations were taped: the intention was to witness and record human behaviour including muted cues, facial expressions, gestures, tone of voice and other non-verbalised social interactions, which suggested the subtle meanings of language.

A field diary in which the researcher wrote down detailed descriptive field notes of the observations made was used (Research Methods Participant Observation, 2003:15). The notes were written in real-time in a form of personal shorthand attempting to capture the essence of the situation observed. Later these were be re-worked for clarity and entered into the researcher's field journal. The notes made during the observations were used in reporting on the key themes.

Observations were also made on the nature of teacher/parent, principal/parent, parent/parent interaction during a normal school day. In addition, having obtained permission from the principal, the researcher compiled a profile of each school in terms of the state of the physical facilities, such as the classrooms, toilets and the school grounds. In addition, the staff and pupils were also observed. A checklist for the school observations is presented in appendix VI.

Using these methods, the researcher was able to explore the school community's perceptions and opinions regarding parental involvement practice in schools, which enabled him to gain baseline data for developing an effective parental involvement programme for Kenya's public primary schools.

### 4.5.4 The researcher as instrument

The researcher (the self) is the instrument that engages the situation and makes sense of it. His or her role as an instrument is to see and interpret significant aspects and to provide unique, personal insights on the participants as they are performing their tasks (Bridgemohan, 2002:84). In this study, the researcher served as an instrument, in that he analysed the responses given by the participants. In order to prevent interpretations being influenced by the researcher's own prior understandings, two measures employed by Meloy (2002:61) to counter such biases, were used. Firstly, close attention was paid to the participants' own words. Secondly, he made the participants aware of where he was positioned *vis-à-vis* their life-worlds. Patton (2002:109) observes that people may respond differently to "ivory tower" academics and thus, in this study, approaching the interviewee as a parent or teacher and not as an academic, certainly minimised this effect.

Accordingly, some similarities between the researcher and the interviewees were discussed to encourage the latter to be more open and responsive. Firstly, being married he could empathise with the experiences of the parents. Secondly, being a teacher in the local primary teacher training institution, he was able to relate easily to the teachers' experiences. Moreover, the researcher explained his research procedures and interest in the topic to the participants. Identifying the particulars that prove the researcher's credentials reassures the participants that they are dealing with a *bona fide* researcher (Patton, 2002:109). The aim and

object of the investigation, how it would be undertaken and the envisaged purpose of the results were set out clearly for the respondents.

The ethical measures that were used as the guiding principles during the investigation follow.

## 4.6 ETHICAL MEASURES

The research methods describe the procedures used to collect and analyse the data. McMillan and Schumacher (2006:333) state that qualitative researchers need to be sensitive to ethical principles regarding informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, privacy and being considerate of the participants. Accordingly, in this study, the researcher developed a scenario that elicited the cooperation, trust, openness and acceptance of the subjects as well as providing ethical protection of the subjects as discussed in the next section.

### 4.6.1   Informed consent

The researcher obtained informed consent from all the participants by means of a dialogue, during which each participant was informed of the purpose of the study and also assured of the confidentiality of the data obtained and the anonymity of the respondents (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006: 334). In accordance with the suggestions of Research Methods Participant Observations (2003:5), the participants were provided with adequate information regarding:

- The procedures to be followed during the research.

- The possible advantages and disadvantages of participating in the investigation.

- The credibility of the researcher.

Additionally, the researcher was sensitive to the participants' readiness to share their information. After obtaining their consent, he made it clear to the participants that they were free to withdraw from the investigation at any time they wished to do so. This enabled them to make voluntary, informed and carefully considered decisions concerning their participation.

### 4.6.2 Anonymity and confidentiality

The participants were assured of their anonymity and the confidentiality of their responses. Thus, settings such as the schools and personal details of the participants would not be identifiable in print. McMillan & Schumacher (2006:334) recommend the use of code names for people and places as a common practice employed by researchers and, accordingly, this practice was employed in this study to ensure anonymity. Participants were also requested to sign a written statement declaring that they would maintain the confidentiality of discussions held during the sessions (see appendix VII).

### 4.6.3 Deception and privacy

It was the aim of the researcher to avoid deception by obtaining informed consent and by protecting the privacy of participants (Research Methods Participant Observation, 2003:5). Furthermore, the taping of focus group discussions would not take place without the knowledge and consent of the participants. In addition, the participants were assured that they had a right to refuse to respond to certain questions and to decide what information they were/ were not prepared to disclose.

### 4.6.4 Competence of the researcher

The researcher is required to identify and empathise with the participants in order to understand them in terms of their own frames of reference (Barrett, 2007:413). The researcher acknowledges the importance of ensuring that this research was conducted in a competent manner. In order to do this, he followed Strydom's (2005:63-64) advice, namely, that the researcher should:

- Remain sensitive to the needs of the participants in this study.

- Maintain objectivity and refrain from making value judgments about the values and points of view of participants, even if they contrast sharply with his/her own values.

### 4.7 MEASURES TO ENSURE TRUSTWORTHINESS

According to Poggenpoel (1998 in Bridgemohan, 2002: 98), while the verifiability of

quantitative research is assessed in terms of its reliability and validity, qualitative research is more accurately assessed in terms of its trustworthiness. In this study, Lincoln and Guba's model for ensuring the trustworthiness of qualitative data was employed. In accordance with this model, four criteria were used to ensure trustworthiness. The criteria that were applied in this study, are described below:

## 4.7.1  Truth value

The truth-value demonstrates how the research is conducted and how accurately the phenomenon under study is described (UNISA, 2003:79). In addition, it determines how confident the researcher is and to what extent, the findings are true for the particular subjects as well as the context within which the study has been undertaken. According to Lincoln and Guba (Bridgemohan, 2002:92), the truth-value, can also be termed "credibility," Which is the alternative to internal validity. They argue that internal validity that is based on the idea that there is a single reality to be measured, should be replaced with the idea that there are multiple realities, which the researcher needs to represent as accurately as possible.

Recognising the importance of ensuring that the research was conducted in a proficient manner, the researcher undertook to:

- Accept the ethical responsibility to ensure that he was competent and adequately skilled to undertake this empirical investigation.

- Remain sensitive to the needs of all the participants in this study.

- Maintain objectivity and avoid making value judgments about the ideals and points of view of the participants, even if they contrasted sharply with his own viewpoints (Strydom, 2005:63-64).

## 4.7.2  Applicability

Applicability refers to the extent to which the findings apply to other contexts, settings and groups. In qualitative research, the purpose is not to generalise findings to a larger population, but rather to describe a phenomenon or experience. According to Lincoln and Guba (In Bridgemohan, 2000:92), applicability (which is referred to as transferability) in

qualitative research is the alternative to external validity or generalisability and is defined as the extent to which findings can "fit" into similar contexts outside the present study. The responsibility for the strategy of transferability (that is, the task of demonstrating the applicability of findings to other contexts), lies with those wanting to transfer findings to other situations, rather than with the original researcher. In this study, the researcher addressed the problem of applicability by presenting sufficient descriptive data to allow for comparison in future research using similar contexts, settings or groups.

### 4.7.3   Consistency

Consistency, which is the alternative to reliability, refers to "the extent to which the findings would be consistent if the study" were to be repeated in similar contexts or with the same subjects (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006: 207). Moreover, to ensure consistency, the study will use Lincoln and Guba's strategy of dependability. This included accounting for the variables, which might result in changes in the experience or phenomenon of parental involvement and for changes, which occur because of an increasing understanding of the study setting.

### 4.7.4   Neutrality

According to McGrath (2007:1401), neutrality refers to the freedom from bias in research procedures and results and "whether the findings would be consistent if the inquiry" was to be replicated with the same participants or in a similar context, explain neutrality further as the degree to which the findings are a function only "of the participants and conditions of the research and not of other biases, motivations" and perspectives.

In this study, the researcher attempted to remain as objective as possible, guarding against subjective values, perspectives and biases which could influence the interpretation and description of data. The strategy of confirmability was employed to ensure neutrality (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006: 207), which aims at evaluation of the actual data and focusses on whether the results of the research (that is, raw data and the researcher's analyses and interpretations) could be confirmed by others.

Moreover, as De Gaetano (2007:145) has recommended, to meet the four criteria discussed above to ensure trustworthiness and avoiding biases regarding the data, the researcher will follow procedures such as:

- A triangulation of methods (such as, the interview sessions and focus group discussions) was used and the comparison of the findings obtained with other research findings studied in the literature phase of the study.

- During data collection, he verified whether the participants could identify with, or recognise the experiences described by the other participants in the interviews and focus groups discussions. Trustworthiness is established if the participants are able to identify with the given descriptions and interpretations (Lessing, 2002:5).

- During the interviews the data were recorded mechanically with an audio-tape recorder to provide an accurate and relatively complete record (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006:205). Each interview was taped to include any discrepant information given by the participants during subsequent interviews held with the same participants. Such data were later used to add to the credibility of the study (Creswell, 2003:196).

- The interviews and focus-group discussions were conducted in settings within the school to reflect the reality of the participants' experience accurately. Importantly, the questions posed were phrased so that the participants could understand them easily (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006:351). Moreover, the questions were confined to parental involvement in order to add to the construct validity of the interviews (Mertens & McLaughlin, 2004:175).

- Clarification of questions for the participants was done when they were unsure of their meanings.

- Sampling decisions were done carefully.

In this study, the researcher enlisted the assistance of the supervisor to check the analysis of the data to ensure that she agreed with the interpretations made and the meanings given to the raw data. In addition, the researcher explained his research procedures to the participants,

which was necessary to prove the researcher's credentials and reassure the participants that they were dealing with a *bona fide* researcher. Furthermore, the practical aspects of the research, such as the data collection methods and recording of data were analysed in detail (Research Methods Participant Observation, 2003:7).

### 4.7.5 Approval for conducting the research

Approval from the Department of Education was sought before commencement of the study (see appendix I). In this regard, the researcher followed the protocol of the Embu West District Education Office concerning conducting research in public primary schools. A letter providing information on the topic and the methodology was provided when the researcher sought approval to conduct the research. Importantly, this letter was used to obtain entry into the schools. The researcher then visited all nine schools to negotiate access to the participants. The principal was informed verbally of the nature and aim of the study and presented with the research proposal. In addition, the procedure of the study was outlined and the researcher, in his capacity as an educator, then sought permission from the principal to involve teachers and parents in this study. Accordingly, gaining access to the schools did not present any problems as the researcher emphasised his role as an independent investigator, completing a personal study and not as an official representing the district education officer (DEO).

### 4.7.6 Triangulation

According to Creswell and Miller (2000:124), qualitative researchers routinely employ member-checking, triangulation, thick descriptions, peer reviews and external audits. Because triangulation was the procedure used to validate data in this study, this procedure will be discussed in more detail next.

According to Leedy and Ormrod (2001:105), triangulation entails the use of multiple methods in data collection. They add that it is "a validity procedure where researchers search for convergence among multiple and different sources of information" to formulate themes or categories in a study. As a validity procedure, triangulation is a step taken by researchers employing a researcher's lens and it is the systematic process of sorting through the data to find common themes or categories by eliminating overlapping areas. McGrath (2007:1402)

explains that it seeks the areas of convergence, complementarity, paradoxes and contradictions in the findings. Furthermore, the results from one method may be used to inform the use of the other methods, thus adding breadth and scope to the study. According to Creswell & Miller (2000:17), a popular practice for qualitative inquirers is "to provide corroborating evidence collected through multiple methods such as observations," interviews and documents to locate major and minor themes. The narrative account is valid because researchers go through this process and rely on multiple forms of evidence rather than on a single incident or data point in the study (Creswell & Miller, 2000:17).

A description of the conditions and procedures for collecting and analysing the data is set out in the next section.

## 4.8 DATA ANALYSIS

Content analysis was used as the main method of data analysis. It involved identifying, coding and categorising the primary patterns of data (Patton, in Molohkoane, 2004:94). The data in this study consisted mainly of individual interview transcripts, focus group discussion transcripts and observations.

The analysis of data began while the research was in progress. This constituted the first level of analysis (that is, the interim analysis) (Miles & Huberman, in Johnson & Christensen 2000:425). At this stage, data analysis was carried out to determine the main themes that emerge from it. This enabled the researcher to verify with the participants if the analysis did indeed portray their views. Lincoln and Guba (2000) point out that member checking is both formal and informal and it occurs continuously. Therefore, member checking was done: whenever necessary. A summary of an interview may, for instance, be played back to the person who provided it, for his/her reaction, or the output of one interview may be played to another respondent who may be asked for his/her comments. Accordingly, the insights gleaned from one group may be tested on another.

Like Wolcott (in Molohkoane, 2004:80), the researcher processed the data manually instead of using a software programme to manipulate and code data. This study, involving the focus group discussions and interviews with the principals, teachers and parents, was still

manageable enough to be processed manually. Manual data processing was also suited to the researcher's desire to be able to view the research topic in a holistic manner .

At the second level of analysis, the researcher transcribed all the tape records of the interviews and focus group discussions. These were transformed verbatim into typed text before the data were analysed. The next step was to read and reflect on each transcript after which the significant concepts and themes were identified and jotted down. Memoing, involving the use of reflective notes, which the researcher would have made personally regarding the data, in terms of his own perceptions of the situation that he observed during the data analysis, was also done (Johnson & Christensen, 2000:425-426).

In addition, the researcher used different-coloured pens to highlight the major categories. Phrases and words were selected and written down alongside the transcripts and these became the sub-categories of the major themes identified. This formed the starting point from which to understand participants' experiences as conveyed in their own language and in their own voices.

Furthermore, the data segments in the form of specific quotations and researcher reflections were labelled, sorted and resorted. These were then grouped together into themes and sub-themes in folders. Constant comparisons were used to determine if the data segments were in the most appropriate categories. Data segments were rearranged, categorised and amended when necessary. Categories that were most appropriate to the study were identified and the relationships between them found. Throughout this data analysis process, data, links between the data and parental involvement theory were sought. In order to stay, as close to the data as possible, each theme heading was descriptive (McGrath, 2007:1401). Another important aspect was the interpretation and explanation of the themes (McGrath, 2007:1401). Most of these processes occurred simultaneously.

The original transcripts and recorded interviews were reviewed continually throughout the analysis in an effort to ensure that an adequate and accurate picture of parental involvement and the experiences of the participants were revealed.

**4.9 PRESENTATION OF DATA**

Since the Epstein Model was used as the framework for this investigation, the categories and subcategories were presented within the six types of parental involvement espoused by Epstein. The themes were discussed within this framework as it facilitated cross-referencing to literature. The analysed data were presented as readable narrative descriptions and their accompanying interpretations. In line with Curtis, Gesler, Smith, and Washburn (2000:1010) and Kemper (2003:43) suggestions, a thick description, with the provision of a sufficient amount of data in the informants' own words was used during the reporting of the results, so that readers would be able to make their own assessments of parental involvement in Kenya. This added validity and conviction to the results (McGrath,2007:1401). Where possible, a balance of quotes was provided so that no participants were either over quoted or omitted. In addition, contradictory quotes were included whenever possible. Furthermore, the editing of interviewees' responses will be kept to a minimum. As the aim is to show interviewees' perceptions, beliefs, values and meanings regarding parental involvement, their comments were reported in the original unedited form even if they were grammatically incorrect or words had been used incorrectly.

**4.10   SUMMARY**

In this chapter, an account has been given of the empirical phase of this study. This includes a description of the basic research design, an account of the ethical measures and measures to ensure trustworthiness taken as well as a description of the data collection process and the data processing methods. In addition, it also provides the rationale for the choice of qualitative approach for the study of parental involvement in primary schools in Kenya. In the next chapter, the findings of this empirical investigation will be reported.

**CHAPTER 5**

**PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS**

**5.1 INTRODUCTION**

This research examines parental involvement in public primary schools in Kenya. In this chapter, the researcher describes the collected data, transformed it into understandable concepts and themes to assist the reader in making sense of the information gathered in the field on parental involvement in education. The researcher has considered all aspects of the data gathering process, for instance, the way in which participants offered the data, the type of data that they offered, and the emotions that they revealed during the interview as they shared intimate information. In assembling the information, the researcher used quotations from the data to express the ideas expressed by participants and to demonstrate that the findings were derived from the evidential data (Mahlangu, 2008:78). The impact of the above-mentioned phenomenon on school management unfolded in the different sections and through the research design discussed in chapter four (see section 4.3).

This chapter presents and describes the data gathered from the investigation undertaken with the school principals, teachers and parents at nine public primary schools. The characteristics of the schools and participants are summarised and the ensuing sections provide the significant themes that emerged from the interviews. Although Epstein's typology was the frame of reference throughout this study, data was not categorised within this framework. The participants were allowed to discuss parental involvement within their own frame of reference, and the categories and sub-categories were allowed to emerge from the data. In keeping with Epstein's typology, the six categories, namely, parenting, communication, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making and collaboration with the community were used to facilitate cross-referencing to the literature, with the focus on the experiences of teachers and parents in public primary schools. The principals and teachers provided a broader picture of parents' involvement as it is practised in primary schooling.

## 5.2 PROFILES OF PARTICIPANTS

As indicated in section 4.7.2.2, semi-structured interviews, observation and focus group interviews were conducted in nine schools with principals, teachers and parents. For the interviews, this study used a selection of teachers and parents whose children were in three urban, three peri-urban and three rural public primary schools. Based on previous research by Monadjem (2003:135-136), the researcher felt that focus group discussions followed by face-to-face interviews with key teachers and parents would allow him to explore parental and teacher perceptions on parental involvement in public primary schools. In the present chapter, the researcher focusses on those interviews that offered the most valuable information. In order to provide confidentiality and privacy, participants' names and their schools were coded as shown in tables 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3, but with clear reference to the schools from which they were drawn.

During the interviews and focus groups discussions an audio-tape recorder was used to record what the participants said. Afterwards these were transcribed for analysis. The transcriptions were analysed by testing for emerging categories, patterns and themes that were detected (Poggenpoel, 1998 in Bridgemohan, 2002: 98). The biographical data of all the informants were presented in tables while the information having an impact on the responses was captured. Principals' and teachers' profiles were tabulated in table 5.1 and those of the parents in table 5.2.

### 5.2.1 The principals

In schools G and I, the principals were away from school during the period of data collection and were thus not available for interviews, but the researcher was able to carry out face-to-face interviews with the rest of the principals at the other schools. The interviews revealed that those principals had each served for more than fifteen years, while some had thirty years of experience. Some had between five and ten years experience as school heads. Therefore, principals had developed a sound acquaintance with the parents and the community around their schools. None of the school heads had a house in the school compound and some were living in the immediate neighbourhood of the school, while others commuted from far away. Most of the heads were males (females headed only schools A, F and G) and had a diploma in

education. Only the principal of school C had a master's degree in education. In addition, all of them had been allocated the upper classes in their schools to teach.

### 5.2.2 The teachers

The researcher experienced some difficulty with scheduling the focus groups. It was not possible to get all the teacher participants for the focus groups and therefore the smallest group comprised two teachers, while the largest had five teachers. The researcher had attempted to have all the class teachers and subject panel heads in each school included in the focus group sessions and the senior teachers and guidance/counselling teachers for individual interviews. Accordingly, eighteen teachers' focus groups comprising eight class teachers and six subject panel heads from each school were selected to participate in the focus group discussions. Subsequently, twenty-seven individual interviews were carried out with the principal, senior teacher and the guidance/counselling teacher in each school (see Table 5.1). The sessions lasted between 100 to 120 minutes each.

The majority of the teachers were female, which is typical of gender affirmation in primary schools (Inyega & Mbugua, 2005:4; Kenya Vision 2030, 2007:3). Some had taught for only three years, while others had up to thirty years' experience. All were trained and had P1 qualifications, some had a diploma and a few were on promotion to approved teacher status (ATS1). Every school had a guidance/counselling teacher who dealt with discipline issues regarding the pupils. A senior teacher in each school deputised in the absence of the principal and the deputy principal. Most males taught the upper classes. Lastly, all the teachers lived outside the school compound.

The principals' and teachers' characteristics are presented in Table 5.1.

**Table 5.1: Profile of the participants used for the final findings (principals and teachers)**

| School | Participants | Gender | Qualification | Responsibility in school |
|--------|--------------|--------|---------------|--------------------------|
| School A | Teacher A1 | Female | Diploma | Principal |

| | Teacher A2 | Female | P1 | Class teacher |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Teacher A3 | Female | ATS1 | Panel head |
| | Teacher A4 | Female | P1 | Panel head |
| | Teacher A5 | Female | P1 | Panel head |
| | Teacher A6 | Female | P1 | Class teacher |
| | Teacher A7 | Male | P1 | Class teacher |
| | Teacher A8 | Male | P1 | Class teacher |
| | Teacher A9 | Male | P1 | Senior teacher |
| | Teacher A10 | Female | P1 | G&C teacher |
| School B | Teacher B1 | Male | Diploma | Principal |
| | Teacher B2 | Female | P1 | Senior teacher |
| | Teacher B3 | Female | P1 | Panel head |
| | Teacher B4 | Female | P1/ | Class teacher |
| | Teacher B5 | Female | ATS1 | Panel head |
| | Teacher B6 | Female | P1 | Class teacher |
| | Teacher B7 | Male | P1 | Panel head |
| | Teacher B8 | Male | P1 | Panel head |
| | Teacher B9 | Male | P1 | G&C teacher |
| School C | Teacher C1 | Male | MEd | Principal |

| | Teacher C2 | Female | P1 | Panel head |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Teacher C3 | Female | P1 | Class teacher |
| | Teacher C4 | Male | P1 | Class teacher |
| | Teacher C5 | Male | P1 | Panel head |
| | Teacher C6 | Male | P1 | Panel head |
| | Teacher C7 | Male | P1 | Class teacher |
| | Teacher C8 | Female | P1 | Senior teacher |
| | Teacher C9 | Female | P1 | G&C teacher |
| School D | Teacher D1 | Male | Diploma | Principal |
| | Teacher D2 | Female | P1 | Senior teacher |
| | Teacher D3 | Male | P1 | G&C teacher |
| | Teacher D4 | Male | P1 | Panel head |
| | Teacher D5 | Male | P1 | Panel head |
| | Teacher D6 | Male | P1 | Senior teacher |
| | Teacher D7 | Female | P1 | G&C teacher |
| School E | Teacher E1 | Male | Diploma | Principal |
| | Teacher E2 | Female | P1 | Class teacher |
| | Teacher E3 | Female | ATS1 | Class teacher |
| | Teacher E4 | Male | P1 | Panel head |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Teacher E5 | Male | P1 | Panel head |
| | Teacher E6 | Male | P1 | Senior teacher |
| | Teacher E7 | Female | P1 | G&C teacher |
| School F | Teacher F1 | Female | Diploma | Principal |
| | Teacher F2 | Female | ATS1 | Class teacher |
| | Teacher F3 | Male | P1 | Panel head |
| | Teacher F4 | Male | P1 | Senior teacher |
| | Teacher F5 | Male | P1 | G&C teacher |
| | Teacher F6 | Male | P1 | Class teacher |
| School G | Teacher G1 | Female | P1 | Senior teacher |
| | Teacher G2 | Female | P1 | Class teacher |
| | Teacher G3 | Female | ATS1 | Panel head |
| | Teacher G4 | Female | P1 | Class teacher |
| | Teacher G5 | Female | P1 | Panel head |
| | Teacher G6 | Female | P1 | Class teacher |
| | Teacher G7 | Female | P1 | Panel head |
| | Teacher G8 | Female | P1 | Senior teacher |
| | Teacher G9 | Female | P1 | G&C teacher |

| School H | Teacher H1 | Female | ATS1 | Principal |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Teacher H2 | Female | ATS1 | Class teacher |
| | Teacher H3 | Female | P1 | Panel head |
| | Teacher H4 | Female | P1 | Panel head |
| | Teacher H5 | Male | P1 | Panel head |
| | Teacher H6 | Male | P1 | Senior teacher |
| | Teacher H7 | Male | P1 | G&C teacher |
| | Teacher H8 | Male | P1 | Class teacher |
| | Teacher H9 | Female | P1 | Class teacher |
| School I | Teacher I1 | Male | P1 | Deputy principal |
| | Teacher I2 | Female | P1 | Panel head |
| | Teacher I3 | Female | P1 | Class teacher |
| | Teacher I4 | Female | P1 | Class teacher |
| | Teacher I5 | Female | ATS1 | Class teacher |
| | Teacher I6 | Female | P1 | Class teacher |
| | Teacher I7 | Male | P1 | Panel head |
| | Teacher I8 | Male | P1 | Panel head Panel head |
| | Teacher I9 | Male | P1 | Senior teacher |
| | Teacher I10 | Male | P1 | G&C teacher |

| | Teacher I11 | Male | P1 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|

KEY**:** P1 refers to Primary Teacher 1; ATS1 is the Approved Teacher Status 1 level; a diploma teacher is one who possesses diploma qualifications from a recognised institution. A teacher who has a master's degree in education from a recognised institution is represented as an MEd (for other details on teacher certification, see appendix XIV). The senior teacher runs the school when the principal and deputy principal are not present at school. The G & C teacher is the guidance and counseling teacher. The class teacher not only has lessons in his or her class but is also in charge of learning in that class.

Table 5.1 depicts the profiles of the teachers in terms of gender, qualification and responsibility in their schools. Staffing was generally inadequate in schools and teachers complained of large teaching loads. All the schools visited reported inadequacy regarding staff numbers. The researcher repeatedly heard concerns about the large classes. Several schools had about 1000 pupils in approximately 20 classrooms with an average of one teacher per class. Out of necessity, schools had to combine classes so that some would not be left without a teacher. In addition, teachers were obliged to be at school beyond the normal school hours to be able to cover the work. Furthermore, they taught many lessons and subjects and had difficulty in monitoring and supervising the work of pupils.

### 5.2.3 The parents

The researcher planned to interview 18 parental focus groups comprising six parents with children in lower classes and six parents with children in upper classes and to hold face-to-face individual interviews with the school management committee (SMC) chair and treasurer of each school subsequently. It was difficult scheduling the focus groups, as not all the parents could be at the schools at the same time. Thus, for instance, at school A, the first focus group of four female parents (A2, A3, A4 and A5) with children in lower classes arrived and only two male parents (A6 and A7) with children in the upper classes participated in the second focus group. At school B, four parents (B2, B3, B4 and B5) with children in the lower classes appeared and in the following focus group, four parents were present (B6, B7, B8 and B9).

The focus group sessions lasted between one and one-and-a-half hours. The researcher

contacted the parents through the principals of the schools where his/her teacher trainees were undergoing teaching training. Teachers from the schools also helped to contact the parents, but the researcher also asked the parents to contact other to help schedule the meetings. The parents were first sent a handbill asking them to meet and express their thoughts about their children's performance at school. This was done because the researcher wanted to conduct the focus group discussions in a positive manner and not use the meetings as complaint session only.

At school H, the parents who were interviewed, were working as temporary cooks for the school and were interviewed in the kitchen in which setting they were comfortable. The interviews with the SMC members were also conducted on the school premises. Interviews with parents were terminated at school F when it became apparent that further responses would yield no new data.

The researcher used different kinds of questions with the parent focus groups. They were required to describe their views concerning childcare, homework, education and parenting, communication between the school and home, school meetings and social functions, parents at the school, barriers to involvement, perceptions of parental involvement by the parents and the future of parental involvement (see appendix IX). The parents' characteristics are summarised in table 5.2.

**Table 5.2: Profile of the participants used for the final findings (parents)**

| School | Participant | Gender | Marital status | Educational level | Position in school |
|--------|-------------|--------|----------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| School A | Parent A1 | Female | Married | Primary | Chair/Parent |
|  | Parent A2 | Female | Married | Primary | Parent |
|  | Parent A3 | Female | Married | Primary | Parent |
|  | Parent A4 | Female | Marred | Primary | Parent |
|  | Parent A5 | Female | Married | Secondary | Parent |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Parent A6 | Male | Married | University | Parent |
| | Parent A7 | Male | Married | Primary | Parent |
| School B | Parent B1 | Female | Married | Primary | SMC/Parent |
| | Parent B2 | Female | Married | Secondary | Parent |
| | Parent B3 | Female | Married | Primary | Parent |
| | Parent B4 | Female | Marred | Primary | Parent |
| | Parent B5 | Male | Single | Secondary | Parent |
| | Parent B6 | Male | Married | Primary | Parent |
| | Parent B7 | Male | Married | Primary | Parent |
| | Parent B8 | Male | Married | Primary | Parent |
| | Parent B9 | Male | Married | | Parent |
| School C | Parent C1 | Female | Married | Primary | Treasurer/Parent |
| | Parent C2 | Female | Married | Primary | Parent |
| | Parent C3 | Female | Married | Primary | Parent |
| | Parent C4 | Female | Marred | Primary | Parent |
| | Parent C5 | Male | Married | Primary | Parent |
| | Parent C6 | Male | Married | Primary | Parent |
| | Parent C7 | Male | Married | Primary | SMC/Parent |
| | Parent C8 | Male | Married | Primary | Parent |

| School D | Parent D1 | Female | Married | Primary | Chair/Parent |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Parent D2 | Female | Married | Primary | Parent |
| | Parent D3 | Female | Married | Primary | Parent |
| | Parent D4 | Female | Marred | Primary | Parent |
| | Parent D5 | Female | Married | Primary | Parent |
| | Parent D6 | Female | Married | Primary | Parent |
| | Parent D7 | Male | Married | Primary | Parent |
| School E | Parent E1 | Female | Married | Primary | SMC/Parent |
| | Parent E2 | Female | Married | Primary | Parent |
| | Parent E3 | Female | Married | Primary | Parent |
| | Parent E4 | Male | Married | Primary | Parent |
| | Parent E5 | Male | Married | Primary | Parent |
| | Parent E6 | Male | Married | Secondary | Parent |
| | Parent E7 | Male | Married | Primary | Parent |
| | Parent E8 | Male | Married | Primary | Parent |
| School F | Parent F1 | Male | Married | Primary | SMC/Parent |
| | Parent F2 | Female | Married | Primary | Parent |
| | Parent F3 | Female | Married | Primary | Parent |
| | Parent F4 | Female | Married | Primary | Parent |

KEY: SMC/parent implied parent was a member of the school management committee (SMC), Chair/parent refers to parents in the school who were chairpersons of their SMC, Treasurer/parent meant the parent held the position of treasurer of the SMC.

The majority of the interviewed parents were female. They had at least primary education. Most were in their late twenties. A few were in their mid-thirties and there was one older parent of about 55 years of age. Some were married, while others were single parents. The mothers were mostly homemakers, while some were working, but fell into a very low-income bracket. In some cases, working fathers were reluctant to participate. In addition, a few parents were members of the school management committee (SMC). All the parents interviewed were literate and were able to respond without difficulty during the interviews.

### 5.2.4 The schools

The researcher used a checklist when observing the facilities and neighbourhood of the nine schools. All the schools were within reach of the town of Embu. The schools were housed in permanent buildings with varying populations of pupils and classrooms. The average number of teachers was one per classroom. Although the classrooms were mainly stonewalled, they had open windows and the rooms were often cold in the mornings. Each school had a water tank supplied by PLAN International (a non-governmental organisation). Most of the schools had bare play areas and perimeter fences in disrepair. A brief description of the schools is provided in Table 5.3 and in the following sections.

**Table 5.3: The schools that participated in the study**

| School | Location | Number of pupils | Feeder area |
|--------|----------|------------------|-------------|
| A | Urban | 1015 | Urban slums |
| B | Rural | 810 | Rural and urban |
| C | Semi- urban | 1008 | Rural and urban |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| D | Urban | 950 | Rural and urban |
| E | Rural | 672 | Rural |
| F | Rural | 430 | Rural and urban |
| G | Rural | 412 | Rural |
| H | Semi-urban | 320 | Rural and urban |
| I | Rural | 1072 | Rural |

Table 5.3 depicts the schools' details in terms of location, number of pupils and the feeder areas. Schools in the rural areas had poorer facilities than those in urban areas. Concerning physical facilities, some schools were inadequately resourced, especially in terms of classrooms (schools B and C), school grounds (school G) and security fencing (schools F and G), but some had administration offices (schools A, B, D and F). A brief description of the schools regarding the availability of physical facilities and state of the schoolyards is presented below.

**School A**

This school was established by Asians for their children, but serves African children today. It was located inside Embu town. Most of the pupils came from the town's slums, such as Shauri, Dallas and Kathita. The community library was within reach of the school at about half a kilometer away. There were also several churches nearby. The Red Cross Society was sponsoring seventy physically challenged pupils by paying their boarding fees. These pupils were staying within the school compound that was fenced and had a single entry gate. The play area had uneven ground and in some places, the land was bare and dusty. Facilities such as toilets were designed for both the disabled pupils and the other pupils, as they were all taught together. The slums where most parents lived had poor sanitation and the streets were strewn with rubbish. According to one of the teachers interviewed, some parents made a living from brewing liquor and selling vegetables and other foodstuffs at the town market.

**School B**

A dirt road ran from Embu town to this rural school whose pupils mostly came from the town slum. This school was some seven kilometers from the town. Most parents worked on small farms but resided in the nearby town slums. Although the playground was adequate, it was uneven and completely bare. There was a very high learner population and the classrooms were inadequate for the pupils. Electricity had not been installed in the classrooms and the toilet facilities were inadequate. One of the classrooms had been converted into a staffroom, while the school principal, the deputy principal, the secretary and the senior teacher had small rooms as their offices.

**School C**

This school was situated on the outskirts of Embu town in the Majengo slum. The area around had a large Muslim community, consequently, the school had a large population of Muslim pupils. While most parents were small-scale business people, others were small-scale farmers. Pupils walked to school from the farms. A large mosque nearby served the Muslim population. There was a high learner population and classrooms accommodated an average of 52 pupils. No electricity had been installed in the classrooms. In addition, the fence was broken in places and was not effective in separating the school from the rest of the neighbourhood. Although the playground was adequate in terms of space, it was uneven and completely bare. The principal, deputy principal, the secretary, the guidance teacher/counselor and senior teacher had their offices in one block of rooms.

**School D**

This peri-urban school was about four kilometers out of Embu town. Neighbouring institutions were the provincial hospital and a medical training school. A special school for orphaned children was also close by. The principal indicated that parents were cooperative and interested in their children's progress. Some pupils walked from town, while others came from small farms outside the town. In addition, the school was well-fenced and was part of a large farm which was mainly let out to the teachers who tilled portions of it. A large water tank provided water for daily use by the pupils. The playing field was bare and not appropriately demarcated for extra-curricular activities. The school had electricity, an office telephone and a

school radio. Other available facilities were a library and a school hall. There was an atmosphere of discipline on the school premises. The local community started a new secondary school for children who had completed their education in the primary school.

**School E**

This rural school was about ten kilometers out of town and was within easy reach as it was along the tarred highway from Embu. Parents were mainly small-scale coffee and tea farmers. Furthermore, the local community had started a girls' secondary school within the school grounds. The negative attitude of parents towards education and schooling was explained by the principal during the interviews:

> I would like them to be available for their children, motivate their children, show them [the] need for education and show them it is important to do well, not only to go to school. Also try to chip in on the issue of textbooks even those that they can use at home - they buy others not only those the government has provided. That way things will be ok in this school.

The classrooms were adequate, allowing 35 to 40 pupils to be accommodated. Some classrooms were empty, as pupils had moved to new private schools started in the area. No electricity was available in the classrooms. Water storage provided adequate water for the pupils. Although the playground was adequate in terms of space, it was uneven and without any grass cover. In addition, the toilet facilities were sufficient and a fence was provided.

**School F**

This school was far from the main highway. It was a relatively new school and children from other nearby schools had been transferred to it because of its exemplary performance in the national examinations. It was flanked by two very old secondary schools. Some parents lived in town and owned small businesses, while others lived and worked on the nearby grain farms. Pupils had to walk through farms on dirt roads that were often overgrown with crops and were possible hideouts for criminals. Therefore, the teachers instructed pupils from the lower classes to stay until the end of classes in the afternoon to wait for their older siblings so that they could walk home together. There were sufficient classrooms that housed 35-40 children

each. Furthermore, the space available for playing was inadequate and poorly demarcated for various activities out of class.

**School G**

This was also a relatively new rural school whose pupils came from the farms in its neighbourhood. It was far from the main tarmac highway leading out of Embu town with a four-kilometre long dust road running to the school. Parents mainly worked on small coffee farms. There were adequate classrooms and water facilities were built with money from the community and aid from NGOs. However, the school premises were quite small and inadequate and pupils had to make do with the dusty area enclosed by the classroom block for their extracurricular activities. This often led to a great deal of noise and dust, creating a disturbance for other pupils when their classes were in progress., In addition, electricity was not installed in the classrooms. Furthermore, a small wooden structure served as the store.

**School H**

The school was one of the oldest public primary institutions in the country. It was situated in a poor socio-economic rural community and was situated next to a boys' and a girls' secondary school respectively as well as next to the local research station. The buildings were very old and dilapidated. Some classrooms had collapsed and had been abandoned. According to the principal, government funds could not take care of classroom repairs and the parents would not donate money for the necessary maintenance. However, the school had a good perimeter hedge. The outdoor play area for the pupils was bare in many places. The principal and the subject heads had tiny offices. This was a poverty-stricken area with many social challenges and the parents eked out a living on their small coffee farms. An interesting observation was that no parents were in sight visiting the school during the period of the interview. .

**School I**

This rural school was easily reached from the main tarmac road some five kilometers from Embu town. Parents were tea and coffee farmers around the school. The local community had started a new secondary school on the school grounds. The large school premises and the classrooms were in a good condition. The poor performance of pupils in national examinations

and the availability of other schools in the vicinity had led some parents transferring their children to other schools, and therefore its pupil population was low in relation to the number of classrooms. Some classrooms had even been abandoned. A large playground was available for extracurricular activities. This research was done in this setting.

A discussion of the key themes follows based on the study questions (see section 1.6).

## 5.3 CATEGORISING AND PATTERNING OF INTERVIEW DATA

The raw data from the field notes, written records and interviews were processed using a qualitative data analysis method as indicated in chapter 1 (section 1.8.5) and chapter 4 (section 4.8). The derivation of themes, categories and sub-categories from the raw data was based on the conceptual framework as outlined in chapter 1 (section 1.5). The main theoretical and sub-questions (section 1.6) formed the framework of the themes and categories used to manage and order the raw data accordingly. For the purpose of this study, the researcher looked for recurrent regularities in the units of data and grouped them into categories (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006:462). Patterns that comprised similar categories were grouped together with respect to principals' and teachers' perceptions on parental involvement, parental involvement in schools, barriers to parental involvement, family background and its influence on parental involvement and strategies that could be employed to improve parental involvement in schools. Table 5.4 presents the themes, categories and sub-categories.

**Table 5.4 Themes, categories and sub-categories**

| THEME 1 | 5.4.1 PRINCIPALS' AND TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOLS |
|---------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| Category 1 | 5.4.1.1 Principals' and teachers' understanding of parental involvement and its benefits |
| Category 2 | 5.4.1.2 Teachers' preparation for parental involvement |

| | |
|---|---|
| Category 3 | 5.4.1.3 Parental involvement policy in schools |
| **THEME 2** | **5.4.2 PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOLS** |
| Category 4 | 5.4.2.1 Parental understanding of their involvement in school and its benefits |
| **THEME 3** | **5.4.3 SCHOOLS' ATTEMPTS TO INVOLVE PARENTS IN THEIR CHILDREN'S EDUCATION** |
| Category 5 | 5.4.3.1 Parents' and teachers' view of parenting |
| Category 6<br><br>Sub-category 1<br><br>Sub-category 2<br><br>Sub-category 3<br><br>Sub-category 4<br><br>Sub-category 5 | 5.4.3.2 Volunteering at school<br><br>a. Teachers' attitude to volunteers in class<br><br>b. Parental assistance to schools<br><br>c. Parent involvement in pupils' discipline<br><br>d. Parental attendance at social events<br><br>e. Teachers' attitude to involving parents at social events |

| | |
|---|---|
| Category 7 | 5.4.3.3 Communication between home and school |
| Sub-category 1 | a. The need for communication as perceived by teachers and parents |
| Sub-category 2 | b. Types of communication |
| Sub-category 3 | c. Frequency of parental visit to schools |
| Sub-category 4 | d. Parent-teacher meetings |
| Category 8 | 5.4.3.4 Learning activities at home |
| Sub-category 1 | a. Parents and home discussions |
| Sub-category 2 | b. Mothers' involvement with learning at home |
| Sub-category 3 | c. School support for home learning |
| Category 9 | 5.4.3.5 Parental involvement in decision-making |
| Sub-category 1 | a. The School Management Committees (SMCs) |
| Sub-category 2 | b. Role of the SMC |
| Sub-category 3 | c. The School Instructional Materials' Selection Committee (SIMSC) |
| Sub-category 4 | d. Role of the SIMSC |
| Category 10 | 5.4.3.6 Schools' collaboration with the communities |
| Sub-category 1 | a. Schools had occasions for community involvement |
| Sub-category 2 | b. Occasions for community/school service |

| THEME 4 | 5.4.4 HINDRANCES TO PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT |
|---------|------------------------------------------|
| Category 11 | 5.4.4.1 Parental attitude to education |
| Category 12 | 5.4.4.2  Parental illiteracy |
| Category 13 | 5.4.4.3  Parental economic deficiency |
| Category 14 | 5.4.4.4  Parental commitment at workplace |
| Category 15 | 5.4.4.5  Foster parents |
| Category 16 | 5.4.4.6  Training in parental involvement |
| Category 17 | 5.4.4.7  Age of the parent |
| Category 18 | 5.4.4.8 Schools' and parents' attitude to each other |
| Category 19 | 5.4.4.9 Teacher-parent relationships |
| Category 20 | 5.4.4.10 Parental confidence in assisting in school work |

| | |
|---|---|
| | |
| Category 21 | 5.4.4.11 The parents involved in school |
| **THEME 5** | **5.4.5   THE FAMILY BACKGROUND'S INFLUENCE ON PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT** |
| Category 22<br><br>Sub-category 1<br><br>Sub-category 2 | 5.4.5.1 Circumstances of families<br><br>a. Unemployment and poverty<br><br>b. Educational level of parents |
| Category 23<br><br>Sub-category 1<br><br>Sub-category 2<br><br>Sub-category 3 | 5.4.5.2  Family structure<br><br>a. Single parents<br><br>b. Grandparents as guardians<br><br>c. Gender |
| **THEME 6** | **5.4.6  IMPLICATIONS OF THE FOREGOING FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AN EFFECTIVE PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT PROGRAMMEME FOR KENYAN PUBLIC SCHOOLS** |
| Category 24 | 5.4.6.1 Teachers' perceptions of parental involvement |
| Category 25 | 5.4.6.2 Limited role for parents in schools |
| Category 26 | 5.4.6.3 Teachers/parent relationships |

| Category 27 | 5.4.6.4 Homework |
|---|---|
| Category 28 | 5.4.6.5 Policy on parental involvement |
| Category 29 | 5.4.6.6 Government grants and school budgeting |
| Category 30 | 5.4.6.7 Discipline in schools |
| Category 31 | 5.4.6.8 Curricular issues |
| Category 32 | 5.4.6.9 The role of the SMC |
| Category 33 | 5.4.6.10 The local community and education |
| Category 34 | 5.4.6.11 Information about community services |

Table 5.4 shows how the raw data from the three data collection techniques (as described in chapter 1 section 1.8.5 and chapter 4 in section 4.8) were analysed and developed into six main themes, thirty-five categories and thirteen sub-categories. According to this table, parental involvement is influenced by five main themes: principals' and teachers' perceptions of parental involvement in schools, parents' perceptions of their involvement in schools, schools' attempts to involve parents in their children's education, hindrances to parental involvement and the family background. The sixth theme presented the implications of the foregoing for the implementation of an effective parental involvement programme for Kenyan public schools.

From each theme, some significant factors (categories and sub-categories) emerged; for instance, principals' and teachers' understanding of parental involvement and its benefits, teachers' preparation for parental involvement and parental involvement policy in schools as well as principals' and teachers' perceptions of parental involvement in schools were categorised under one theme,. These themes, their categories and sub-categories represent the

major findings of this research, and they were discussed in detail in the following section. The categorisations of raw data (Table 5.4) made it possible for the researcher to discuss the findings of the study as shown in section 5.4 below.

## 5.4 DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

As illustrated in table 5.4 above and figure 5.1 later in this section, the results obtained from raw data were organised into themes, categories and sub-categories which served as main headings and sub-headings, as is evident in the subsequent discussions below. During the discussions, applicable verbatim quotes extracted from the raw data were used to illustrate important findings.

### 5.4.1 Principals' and teachers' perceptions of parental involvement in schools

Of the principals in the study, seven were available for the individual interviews and seventy teachers attended the scheduled discussion groups. They were very positive about parental involvement and believed that it was a helpful and useful concept but they were not clear what it entailed.

### *5.4.1.1 Principals' and teachers' understanding of parental involvement and its benefits*

The principals viewed parental involvement as parents' knowledge and awareness that education was important for their children and that providing education to them would offer them a better future. They emphasised parents' support of the school but felt that parents were not bothered about their children's education as they were before the introduction of the Free Primary Education (FPE). The principal of school D felt that there should be total involvement but because of (FPE), parents had taken it to be the work of teachers: "I would want to work with the parents so that we can develop the education of that child."

In explaining parental involvement, the principal of school E would only describe the state of parental involvement in his school thus:

> Quite minimal and unlike before the FPE, which has put parents further away, not like before when parents were quite involved and they think that education is for the government and not theirs and the schools'. It is us, the administration of the school

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who must call the parents. We can stay the whole term without them coming because of FPE.

He added:

> Teachers need moral and financial support. The government support is not enough. We feel more books are needed and these can only be provided by parents. With parents' involvement, we make them own the school and this is what we need to in order to help improve the school's performance.

Teachers, in turn, cite limited parental involvement to supporting the children in their work, payment of school fees, monitoring children's progress and assisting the school. They believed that parents had to be involved. In reply to the question, 'How do you define ideal parental involvement?' most teachers did not have a definite idea of the concept and gave varying answers. A class teacher from school F replied: "It is where parents are concerned about and are contributing to what is going on in school."

The guidance teacher/counselor at school C thought (after clarification of the question): "It is the duty of the parent to tell the child about the importance of schooling and the benefits the child would derive from education." While the guidance teacher/counsellor at school B replied that it was involving parents in remedial teaching. Some saw it as giving work and assisting at home. The senior teacher in school B thought as follows:

> I think parental involvement comes in where the parent will help the child even in academic work such as homework. The homework they are given, the parent should make sure that the child is doing it; the parent should also give the child some work at home to provide for the supplementary material apart from what is given in school.

Teachers also saw parental involvement in terms of their coming to school to witness prize-giving occasions, as a teacher at school B explained:

> Parents are invited to functions such as closing ceremonies to witness and give awards to the best children in discipline, cleanliness, obedience, most improved and those very responsible in each class. Some teachers felt that the issue of involving parents in school had been complicated by FPE since parents did not want to give any

contributions to the school when "it is free". They fail to understand that they must play their part and that education cannot be given wholly free.

This showed that the teachers and principals lacked an awareness of how parental involvement should be initiated and promoted, implying that schools did not understand the benefits of comprehensive parental involvement. In fact, teachers did not view involving parents as part of their role. Since they were not aware of the totality of parental involvement, they did not view initiating or promoting parental involvement or even establishing positive relationships with parents as their part of their roles. Although the relationship between the parents and teachers was good, the roles of parents and of the teachers were clearly demarcated.

As in other parts of the world, schools in this study seemed to ascribe to Swap's (1993:28-29) Protective Model which aims at reducing conflict between the school and parents through protecting the school from parental interference, mainly by separating the parents and teachers' functions. Accordingly, teachers in the schools saw educating the child as their task while parents should provide for the physical needs of the child and support the child with schoolwork that was to be completed at home. Swap (1993:29) indicates that many teachers hold this attitude, feeling that they are responsible for teaching and that parents' responsibility is confined to the home. The schools visited seemed to decide when and how parents would be involved with teachers, relegating some tasks to parents and not allowing them to be involved in classroom decisions.

### 5.4.1.2 Teachers' preparation for parental involvement

The interviews indicated that teachers' training did not prepare them to involve parents. None of the teachers interviewed had done a course on parental involvement specifically. In fact, they did not remember being taught anything about parents and had only dealt with parent-teacher relationships "on the job." All the teachers interviewed had formal training that involved receiving the minimum P1 certification in education at least (see table 5.1). Their responses, however, showed that they were not fully aware of how to involve parents. Training colleges need to do more to prepare teachers in terms of life situations as a class teacher at school F stated:

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In 1989 when I graduated from college, I think colleges need to do more on life situations. Like now I would say that the Ministry of Education has woken up because we were being pumped up with knowledge but no skills on how to practise in real life and this is one thing that is very necessary. To answer your question, the involvement of parents was not taught and I learnt it from experience.

Teachers learnt about the involvement of parents from experience. A class teacher of school A gave this explanation:

When I left college, I was naïve but I have improved with age and interaction with parents in solving problems. I can say I am competent after attending in-service courses. I sometimes go for counseling courses which makes me enjoy my job.

In-service courses and seminars were important and were of assistance to teachers, especially in the guidance/counselling department. These, as the guidance teacher/counsellor at school B expressed herself, "make you enjoy the job."

In sum, the findings showed that, although all teachers were qualified, none had done a course in their training to prepare them for parental involvement, nor was it mandatory to have completed such a course for teacher certification (see 3.9). As Van Wyk (2001:116) observes, teachers were ill- prepared during training to work with parents or members of the community. This was also the case in the schools interviewed. As a result, working with parents was one of the challenges faced by new teachers. This suggested the usefulness of providing teacher training concerning parental participation. As Lemmer (2007:227) finds in her study, parental involvement is a cost-effective and feasible way of improving the culture of teaching and learning, which is considered necessary in schools. It would thus be essential to avail short courses to teachers that would provide particular skills requisite for parental involvement (Dearing, Kreider, Simpkins, & Weiss, 2006:659). This might also form part of proficiency development for the teachers.

### 5.4.1.3 Parental involvement policy in schools

No principal interviewed had an official parental involvement policy for his or her school.

However, the principal at school H when explaining the policy of her school on parental involvement, stated:

> Our key point is the parent to give their support towards the school, the necessities for their children so that they can learn and achieve their goals. Such materials are teaching and learning materials and a good learning environment at home.

Pressed to say if it was a written policy, the principal continued:

> For now I will say that it is unwritten, but it is what we normally emphasise now and then. We emphasise when we come to meetings and we put parents towards positiveness towards their role.

Schools only emphasised to parents what they expected them to do as part of their involvement. Parents were required to give their support to the school by providing the necessities for their children in order to learn and achieve their goals. This included the learning materials, bags for carrying books, clothing, food and a good learning environment at home. One teacher from school E blamed schools for the lack of a policy on parental involvement: "A school is supposed to have a vision, where it outlays its objectives. These include parental involvement. So it is the school that should initiate parental involvement."

In addition, teachers in the lower and upper classes were free to call the parent if they felt it was important to discuss the academic standard of their child with them. It appeared that schools did not have a defined parental involvement policy, which could determine the strategies regarding how parents would be involved. The teachers were unaware of strategies such as parenting workshops, home visits, parent volunteers and packages of home activities. Thus, limited formal opportunities in schools were available for parents to be involved in the education of their children. According to Epstein (1993:61), a formal policy on parental involvement together with the school and teacher practice were the strongest predictors of parental involvement in the school and at home. While the schools visited generally wanted more parental involvement, they had not laid down structures for involving them. Often, parents were only involved in the attendance of events at their school, payment of school levies and school-to-home communications. This would require the school to develop a written parental involvement policy related to the school and parent programmes, meetings

and other activities jointly with the parents. This policy would then be sent to the parents in a format and language that they could understand (No Child Left Behind Act, section 1118 (b) (1-4)).

Cotton and Wikelund (2001:18) stress the importance of the family and home environment in the academic development of children. They added that parental involvement from an early age at home and at school, ensured better reading and thus the general higher academic achievement of children. This involvement included "reading to children, explanatory talk during reading sessions and in general, conversations and participation in school activities" (Pretorius & Machet, 2003:23). Their involvement, however, was influenced by their understanding and beliefs concerning their involvement in school. Having highlighted the principals' and teachers' perceptions of parental involvement in schools, it is equally important to explore the parents' perceptions of their own involvement in schools and how this influences the involvement of the parents in schools. The following section presents the parental awareness of and perceptions of their involvement in school.

## 5.4.2 Parents' perceptions of their involvement in schools

Parents, regardless of economic and literacy level factors, are still their children's first teachers and the family remains the primary source for learning even after children enter school. Parents need to be involved in the education of their children for it to be effective. According to Cotton & Wikelund (2001:18), "Parents are concerned about their children's academic performance but do not always know how to express concern or how to participate." As with the teachers, the parents' focus groups believed their role in the schooling of their children was important and would foster their children's performance. Their responses in the focus group discussions were presented in the following section.

### 5.4.2.1 Parental understanding of their involvement in school and its benefits

The parents interviewed knew that they had an important role to play in their children's education. They however emphasised their role in terms of their duties to their children and less importance was attached to their roles in assisting and supporting the school as an institution. A parent from school A expressed her views by saying that she thought that as a parent:

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I show the child that school is important. Then a parent may wish the child to learn but if he does not provide the necessaries…..You also need to provide food, pay fees and help the child with school work.

Asked how parents could be more involved in school, a parent in school B explained: "If there is a problem, they [the teachers] could call us to a meeting and if there are issues they tell us, like if it is [text] books we can contribute." On the other hand, teachers felt that some parents did not know that they should be involved because of lack of education. A teacher in school F thought that some parents did not care about education and involvement in it because they "don't see the value of education even when they are not poor." A teacher from school H complained:

When you ask parents for contributions, they query why they are being asked to contribute when it is free education. They fail to understand that they have to supplement and nothing is entirely free. Furthermore, some parents were even against the Saturday tuition and "they want the Kibaki five days in a week system" and were not even ready to pay for that extra time.

Many teachers felt that some parents had left the responsibility of educating their children to the school. The interviews revealed that the reason why some parents left their children's education entirely to the school was that, in their opinion, free primary education absolved them from payment of any contributions. In school G one teacher reported that:

They think that once they have brought the child to school that is the end of it all, after all, it is free; there are books and everything so they feel we are wasting their time when we call them here. Therefore, the administration should do the rest.

The interviews revealed that FPE was the cause of parents leaving their children's education entirely to the school having absolved themselves of responsibility as parents should do the rest.

Another teacher concurred:

When parents were told that primary education was 'free' they refused to support the repair of buildings where some classrooms were falling down and toilets were

collapsing, and they are unwilling to contribute because they are waiting for the government to provide money for that.

The senior teacher at school B observed, that while the family was supposed to mould the child into a good citizen in the future, it was the school that "did this most of the time." According to him, teachers knew more about the children than their parents did because the parents were "busy away in the day and come back in the evening from business in the market." The guidance teacher/counsellor at school B observed that because children were left alone by parents, their problems spilled over to the school from home. The children were not cared for well enough in terms of the way they were growing up since "I remember at one point we had to buy sanitary towels because parents are not providing the towels." She added that the reason for this situation was negligence and poverty while some children were in the care of guardians who "don't care for them. Others do not care whether the child has eaten, what he does or where he has slept."

There was a notion that schools were not unfriendly places. Parents felt that teachers welcomed them to the school, warmly as one father from school H observed: "Teachers are very open and are happy to see parents come to visit the school." Nevertheless, the parents had the perception that the school was doing well without them and therefore they had little need to contribute more towards improving it for their children. Most parents did not come to school unless there was a problem. Moreover, the parents who were interviewed at the schools when they came to see their children's teachers had children in lower classes. A teacher in school B explained how the situation could be improved: ''Maybe we can try to enlighten those who do not seem to know the importance of getting into school activities, we call them and show them the need and how this could help the children."

The teachers' comments showed that many parents cared little about the education of their children. Following the complete abolition of schooling fee payments there was a perception among some parents that with education being "free" they no longer needed to be involved. Although none of the parents interviewed expressed such a view, teachers complained that some parents absolved themselves from any further role in their children's education with FPE. However, according to Mirons (2004:55-60), parents have a specific type of expertise, which they can contribute to their children's education and schools might "mistreat" parents

by regarding them as incompetent because they are poor. Many parents were not involved because they did not recognise the value of their involvement and did not know how to get involved. Epstein and Sheldon (2005:4) point out that irrespective of parents' socio-economic status or cultural background, all parents see education as important and actually want their children to succeed. They added that parents are poorly informed about the school system and how it operates. Thus, this led parents to have low levels of expectation of the teachers and thus keep their distance. Therefore, deducing that parents are disinterested because they are poor (a common stereotype that exists in schools) would be an incorrect assumption (Epstein & Sheldon, 2005:4).

Parents' responses, moreover, indicated that they were not aware of the benefits of taking part in more types of involvement such as volunteering at the school and decision-making and were thus generally satisfied with their levels of involvement. They believed they could make a greater contribution to their children's education by helping them with and supervising their homework, but could contribute very little by attending parent-teacher meetings. Thus, they placed great trust in the teachers as professionals in most matters regarding their children's education, feeling that they did not need to play any role themselves (Kenya National Commission for UNESCO, 2005:212).

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995:316) point out that for parents to be involved, they must have a strong sense of personal efficacy. In practice, Swap's Protective Model operated in schools due to the limited opportunities parents were given to be involved. Parents were not only rarely invited to schools but also played a minimal role in decision-making so it would be possible some of them believed that the basic assumptions held by these models were true for them. They felt that they were expected to delegate responsibility for their children's education to the school and that the teachers accepted this delegation of responsibility (Swap, 1993:28). This may have led parents to believe they had a negligible role to play in their children's education.

Parental involvement is important for pupils' academic success, but this declines as the child enters the middle classes (Jackson & Andrews, 2004; Jackson & Davis, 2000; NMSA, 2003a) Involvement is really a matter of the parent being aware of and getting involved in schoolwork, understanding the importance of the interaction between parenting skills and

pupil success in school and a commitment to consistent communication with the teachers about the child's progress.

The research on "parental involvement in the education of young adolescents addresses parents' activities in support of learning at home, in school and in the community." Joyce Epstein identified and studied several measures of parental involvement in the middle grades (Epstein, 1995; Epstein, Sanders, Simon, Salinas, Jansorn & Van Voorhis, 2002). The schools that participated in the interviews did involve parents in various activities. Having discussed the principals,' teachers' and parents' perceptions of parental involvement, it was important to examine how schools attempted to involve parents. This was on the basis of Epstein's (1995:705) typology of parental involvement as discussed below.

**5.4.3 Schools' attempts to involve parents in their children's education**

As discussed in chapter 2, the two determinants of parental involvement were the efforts made by the schools to involve parents and the opportunities that parents were given to become involved in their children's education (see 2.2.2.5). Analysis of the interview data involved observing the opportunities that schools provided for involvement by the parents, how parents took advantage of the opportunities available to them to become involved and whether they were involved in their children's education on their own initiative and not in ways advocated by the teachers and schools. Parental and teachers' beliefs concerning the involvement of parents were also analysed and the data were then sorted following Epstein's six types of parental involvement (Epstein, 1995:704), namely, parenting, volunteering, communication, learning at home, decision-making and collaboration with the community and is presented in the next sections.

*5.4.3.1 Parents' and teachers' view of parenting*

Van Wyk (2008:16) observes that parenting involves schools assisting families with parenting and child rearing skills, family support, understanding child and adolescent development and creating home conditions to support learning at every stage and grade level. The goal would be to help all families establish home environments to support children as pupils. This would help pupils become aware of family supervision and have respect for

parents, give parents understanding and confidence in their parenting, make teachers understand families' backgrounds, cultures, concerns, goals, needs, and views of their children (Project Appleseed, 2009:14).

**a. Parental awareness of their parenting obligations**

The parents interviewed showed an awareness of their basic obligations in terms of ensuring that their children attended school, providing their children's necessities and establishing home conditions that made education possible. Parents also noted their other traditional parental responsibilities such as supplying school stationery and books and doing school and home follow-ups for their children. A young parent whose son attended school A explained: "I think a parent has to provide for the child, pay school fees, buy everything at the school and help the child at home with his schoolwork and also provide balanced meals."

Parents also acknowledged their role in establishing positive values and in the disciplining of their children. A parent whose child attended school C explained:

> I arrive earlier than my child. I cook for him and then I put him to do his homework if he has any. I counsel him on the need for obedience and respect, and role model for him as his parent.

Some parents tried to supervise their children's progress as one father from school G said:

> I follow very much my child's progress. If they [the class] do an exam, I take the papers and check. If he [his son] does poorly, I come and follow up with the teacher.

However, the fact that many parents were at work all day and were not able to supervise their children personally made the follow-up regarding homework and children's progress difficult. One parent from school H explained: "Parents are too busy from early morning to evening worrying what food the child will carry to school the following day. However, most parents do not have land, therefore, they are tenants or labourers who work for wages to feed their children."

Another parent from school G added: "So you don't always have the time to follow the child's school work**."**

## b. Teachers' views on parenting

All the teachers interviewed emphasised the parents' role in fulfilling their basic obligations. They noted that parents must pay school levies, buy supplementary books, feed and clothe their children, be their primary educators, and also provide them with the emotional support, values and discipline which they need to learn. The guidance teacher/counselor at school B explained:

> A good parent is one who is able to guide the children because they need a lot of parental guidance. Some parent assumes that the teacher will do it and schools actually provide little guidance. Teachers expect parents to guide their children but most are not doing it that so the child loses direction.

The senior teacher at school C added that when a parent followed their children's progress, the latter were motivated to learn as "Daddy might find out that I am not doing as I should in class." However, very few teachers were happy about the general level of supervision in the children's homes. They felt that some parents did not meet these obligations as a class two teacher from school F complained that some parents were not really involved in their children's learning in school. According to him, some parents saw teachers as baby-sitters for their children: They were:

> Comfortable when the child is at school and will not come to school, and when asked to appear in school to discuss the progress of the child, they will not come, excusing themselves, "Teacher, I am not available for now. I will come when I get time." So we become the teacher and the parent to the child.

Teachers perceived that it was not that parents saw little value in the education of their children but that poverty was to blame. As the senior teacher at school B explained, they felt that, "If a child passes to go to secondary school, more money will be needed for fees. So they would rather the child remains at home or goes to look for petty wage jobs." Aware that some parents were not fulfilling these important obligations, some of the schools held parent talks in which parents' responsibilities and positive parenting behaviour were discussed. The principal

of school E explained that they encouraged parents to study with their children and to supervise them while reading.

> Like in standard eight, we have come up with a policy that they should never have the TV on when the pupil is studying and especially when they are candidates for examination, they should keep off even the radio to make sure the child has enough time to do their homework and their studies.

Teachers also encouraged parents to ensure that their children were fed and cleaned.

According to the findings, the parents interviewed were aware of their basic obligations and tried to meet them. This is in concurrence with Epstein (1987, in Monadjem, 2003:33) who states that it is the parents' basic obligation to provide for their children's needs such as food, shelter and safety. Teachers felt that most parents met their children's material needs. However, the teachers interviewed were concerned that some did not provide their children with the standards and discipline required for successful learning. They also felt that most did not parents supervise their children adequately. It is obvious that the parents interviewed were some of those were the most involved in their children's lives and so, it is likely that they were also the ones that were most aware of the need for a positive parenting style. However, the general attitude of teachers was that the majority of parents were not coping with parenting. They felt that their low social economic status was the cause of the apparent indifference towards education on the part of some parents and therefore, parents left it to the to the school to mind their children for them. Furthermore, teachers felt that poor parenting led to the problems they had with the pupils. Consequently, some of the schools provided parent education on parenting styles and supervision in an effort to educate parents in these respects.

Swap (1993:5) claims that family support programmes aimed at strengthening all aspects of child development and parents' education at home are important for parents. Since schools could not change parents' socio-economic status and other related family background factors such as marital status and ethnicity, it would be more practical to help them improve their parenting, which has been found to have a greater effect on achievement than family background variables (Zelman & Waterman, 1998:379). Therefore, all schools would need to pay greater attention to providing support programmes to the parents.

According to Fan and Chen (2001:19), a parenting style that includes frequent and systematic discussions with children about schoolwork and supervision, monitoring children when they return home from school and their after school activities, overseeing time spent on homework and the extent to which children watch television, was critical to the learner's achievement. Parental expectations and the extent to which parents communicate their academic aspirations to their children, were found to be the most critical for pupils' enhanced achievement (Hill, Castellino, Lansford, Nowlin, Dodge, Bates & Pettit, 2004:1493).

### 5.4.3.2 Volunteering at school

Volunteering involves assisting in the library, cafeteria, supervising pupils' sport and cultural activities, assisting with fundraising, community events and political awareness (Barrera & Warner, 2006:72). It refers to parents' support of the school in these activities to enhance pupils' performance as well as parents attending workshops or other programmes for their own education and training (Epstein, 1988:5). At school level, parental involvement includes parent volunteers who help teachers and the pupils in the classroom or in other areas of the school.

**a. Teachers' attitude to parent volunteers in the class**

The schools selected in this study did not involve parents as guest speakers in the classroom. Most teachers interviewed had never heard of parents volunteering to help in the classroom. They felt that work commitments would prevent parents from getting involved. Although some teachers were enthusiastic about involving educated parents to assist in this way, they did not actually allow them in class. A teacher in school G was explicit about this: "It is the teachers who do it." The same teacher recalled a time in the past when one parent had volunteered to teach a dance in his school. However, he felt that such parents were "rare" because they were not paid for their service to the school, "So they are not ready to come and waste the whole day here."

Some of the teachers were concerned that parent volunteers would be disruptive and that not all parents were skilled enough to help in the classroom. Parents, however, were allowed to talk to their children's class during meetings, but not to teach. A teacher at school C, upon the researcher's suggestion that the school could invite parent volunteers to teach a sport or

riddles in class, was emphatic: ''No! No. Maybe in other areas but in teaching, no. But, there are times when they bring gifts to the children, but this is one out of many.''

The findings above revealed that there were no structures or plans to allow parents to volunteer in the classroom or to supervise other activities during the school day. Accordingly, parents were not consulted or allowed to give advice on any decisions that involved learning. They were only allowed to talk to their children in class meetings, which were held rarely. This was in accord with Epstein's study (1987:125), which found that only about 4% of the parents she studied were highly active at the school.

Using volunteers was an untried idea in the Kenyan education system and teachers were unaware of the other roles that parents could play at school due to the novelty of the idea. Schools ascribed to Swap's Protective Model (1993:28-29) (see 2.2.2.3). Therefore, it was difficult for parents to accept ownership of the school, perceiving education as belonging to the teachers. This perpetuated the divide between schools' and parents' roles (Lazar & Slostad, 1999:207). Parent volunteers could be a possible option to improve learning in large classes where teachers were overworked.

They may participate by accompanying pupils during field trips; participating in parent safety patrols or in teaching a skill. School programmes could encourage parental involvement by recruiting and organising volunteers, matching volunteers with the appropriate opportunities, offering training for the volunteers, and recognising efforts of the volunteers. Greater individual attention to pupils, with help from volunteers would be realised as well as understanding the teacher's job with a concomitant increased ease in school interactions and a carry-over of school activities to the home by parents (Epstein & Sheldon, 2005:7).

**b. Parental assistance to schools**

While most schools essentially applied the Protective Model, some attempts to involve parents were found at these schools. Schools required the parents to buy uniforms, shoes, pens and notebooks for their children. They also involved parents in fundraising through levies to cater for trips, repairs, prizes for motivating pupils at the end of final examinations, paying water bills and paying subordinate staff because funds from the government under the FPE system were inadequate and irregular. In deciding the levies that parents had to pay, the School

Management Committee discussed the amounts agreed upon for the parents' body to pay with the parents. The school then notified the District Education Office (DEO) who then authorised the school to ask the parents to pay the levies.

Asked in what ways parents assisted schools, a teacher in school F explained:

One, financial contributions (not for fees), parents do something to pay for exams, watchman, secretary, grounds man. Parents pay for that. The FPE does not pay for that. Besides FPE funds depend on the number of pupils, if small you get little and the funds are never enough. We agree with the parents that now that FPE money is this much we should contribute this much. We also motivate their children by buying some utensils (as prizes) from parents' contribution.

Many schools, however, complain that parents were reluctant or did not want to assist. A class teacher of school F expressed the feeling of many teachers:

There are times we don't have enough exercise books or pencils. A child does not come to school because of a pencil costing 10 shillings or exercise books, which we used to buy before extremely comfortably. You feel they have left the burden to the school, even uniform, some don't buy so I see it is like everything to them the government should do for them. The old commitment has eroded away, but there are those who are concerned. But I think there has been that change of attitude.

In schools C and F, the teachers felt parents were willing to help. Although most parents were poor, the school provided for alternative contributions by parents to supplement government funding. A long serving class teacher from school F explained,

When they can't give money to do some jobs in the school they come to help do it. Like we had fencing to do at one time and parents really participated in that project putting up the fence… physically digging and putting up the fence.

In school, C the senior teacher explained that parents were asked to "donate maize and beans to cook for the children. We mix and then cook for them."

The findings indicated that fundraising was the traditional way in which parents were

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involved in most schools (Republic of Kenya, 2004a:96-99). With free primary education, parental involvement in fundraising was limited to certain specific activities, which had to be funded by parents when the government disbursements were inadequate. Although parents did not pay fees, they were encouraged to contribute funds in support of activities such as pupils' trips and to pay for other expenses that the FPE funds could not meet. Some schools allowed parents to do physical work such as fixing a fence as part of voluntary work. Formal levies differed according to the requirements in each school. Most parents, however, were reluctant to assist, thinking that the government should pay for everything and they only should take their children to school (see 3.3.3). Nevertheless, that should not be the case as the government provided teaching and learning materials (Kenya National Commission for UNESCO, 2005:278). Parents, on the other hand, were ready to support schools, but there was no framework for doing this. Therefore, the government requires laying down structures for promoting partnerships between schools with the parents to ensure the sustainable implementation of FPE.

## c. Parental involvement in pupils' discipline

Discipline in schools was carried out in accordance with school policy, which was based on the policy of the Ministry of Education. All the schools called the children's parents to the school to notify them and to seek their assistance whenever serious disciplinary problems arose. Teachers felt that parents were reluctant to discipline their children at home. In turn, the parents felt that school discipline should also be left to the school, as it was the teachers who had to face these issues when they arose at school. The guidance teacher /counsellor at school B observed that some parents "do not want to beat their children".

The senior teacher at school A, expressed his frustration with parents feeling that they left the disciplining of the children ''to us with which we don't agree.'' Therefore, teachers try to summon the parent to school when there is a disciplinary problem with the child. ''We don't cane them [the children], but we talk with them [ the parents] about the mistake the child has committed with the parents.'' Some teachers felt that parents had neglected their role in disciplining or even following up on their children. The guidance teacher/counsellor at school B told of an incident where a child had not attended school for two weeks and the parent was not aware of this fact: "When we called him to school to inform him how the child was not

coming to school and was on the farms eating mangoes each day. He was so shocked to learn this about his child. See, that parent never bothered to find out about his child**."**

Some teachers attributed this to the Children's Act and not FPE, which prohibits a teacher from use of the cane. Some attributed it to the large numbers of pupils and over-age pupils. In particular, the over-age pupils were unruly and disobedient as one teacher explained, ''The older boys when it comes to punishment, they don't take that from a female teacher."

In other cases, the lack of discipline in schools was due to the lack of support from parents, some of whom shouted at teachers when the latter attempted to punish their children for their wrongdoing. This encouraged pupils to disrespect teachers. One teacher explained why discipline was difficult in schools:

> Nowadays, there is the Children's Act and the children know their rights. They are enlightened. My daughter who is in class 7 already knows her right to self-expression and not to be caned at school.

However, some parents did discipline their children, though sparingly. According to one teacher from school E, ''they discipline in terms of advice and sometimes by the cane."

Schools had a guidance/counselling office headed by a teacher to address discipline problems. The principal, school E, described the role of such an office:

> The guidance/counselling teacher sees the children with difficulties. He or she must be understanding and able to talk about life skills to know how to go about aspects that are not taught in class.

The guidance teacher/counsellor, school A, shared her experience at her school:

> As I said there are children who come from families where there are no parents, also many homes are many single parents. Such children are taken care of by guardians. In such families there are very many problems and this affects their performance negatively.

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Pressed further, the same teacher explained that orphaned children's guardians and the single parents work until late, they work in bars, while others go to other "funny" areas leaving the children alone. When the children are left alone they also start misbehaving, "They become exposed to drugs, beer and cigarettes." On the other hand, in families with both parents, the mothers were more concerned with their children's discipline than the fathers were. One parent from school H said: "The child is with the mother most of the time, while the father is away working for wages and he only 'guides" The same parent explained further that disciplining is usually done by talking with the child but not by beating. Also, at school they are warned, "The cane cannot be put down when talking with the child, but it's not for beating."

The findings above indicated that teachers and principals in all the schools blamed parents for the problems that they encountered with the pupils at school. According to the teachers, fathers were not involved enough in their children's lives and while some parents were coping, many were apathetic due to their low social economic status and social problems such as broken homes, single parenthood, unemployment and alcohol abuse. Their attitude was that poor parenting was the cause of the problem as was shown by the poor behaviour of pupils seen in their disrespect for teachers and other pupils, poor learning habits, bad language and bullying. These problems affected children negatively.

Furthermore, difficult pupils were not subjected to corporal punishment at school, since the Ministry of Education had banned this. Rather, such problem cases were referred to the guidance and counselling teachers. However, the guidance/counselling structures were mainly meant to offer advice on career and employment opportunities to pupils (Republic of Kenya, 2009:iii). Teachers, therefore, felt that this was still not effective in curbing ill discipline. The Ministry of Education may require re-introducing corporal punishment in order to address pupils' disruptive behaviour.

On the other hand, Hill and Chao (2009:27) observe that because adolescents' development itself influences how parents can continue being involved, they advise that as parental influence becomes more indirect, strategies for involvement in education should change as well. At elementary level, involvement at school by the parents is associated with children's achievement because such involvement might entail visits to the classroom and interaction

with the child's teachers which helps to increase the parent's knowledge about the curriculum, enhancing the social capital and increasing the effectiveness of parental involvement at home (Seginer, 2006:45; Hill & Tyson, 2009:741). In primary school, however, school-based parental involvement shifts from assisting in the classroom to only attending school activities. Such school-based involvement may not provide primary school parents with information about pedagogy and classroom content or the opportunity to create mutual respect between parents and teachers (Hill & Tyson, 2009:741). Therefore, its relation with academic outcomes may be weaker. Accordingly, academic socialisation, which involves:

> … communicating parental expectations for education and its importance to the child, linking schoolwork to existing events, fostering educational and occupational aspirations, discussing learning strategies with children, and making preparations and plans for the future" would be more effective as a strategy for older pupils' achievement (Hill & Tyson, 2009:743).

## d. Parental attendance at social events

Schools arranged educational trips to take a grade of pupils to visit museums and other educational venues for several days. In all schools, parents were asked to pay for their children to go on these excursions. Parents did not attend these trips; neither did they participate in organising these trips. In addition, social events occurred no more than once a year. Sport was limited to an annual athletics day. However, few parents attended these events when they did take place. Furthermore, parents would rather go to their daily working places or remain at home. A parent from school G explained: "We cannot go as it involves first paying for the child to attend the sports meeting and I cannot get the time myself. Like now, one is already going on at Kangaru Primary School [one of the neighbouring public schools]. But I cannot attend."

Such parents would need support from the school but these resources were not available.

## e. Teachers' attitude to involving parents at social events

Teachers did not consider parents to be adequately skilled to be given the opportunity to teach

pupils sports and other activities As a teacher explained, "When I need help, I usually get it from my colleagues but not from parents." Teachers accepted that some parents could teach sports, drama and dance successfully and that their presence in social occasions would really encourage children's performance in these activities. However, they had reservations about parents assuming this role. A teacher in school C insisted:

> It is ok… though it has also some side effects because maybe you ought to know the background of the parents… what is his level of knowledge. How the parent relates with the school and pupils because a parent might be asked to come and the pupils know that parent in a different light. Remember most parents around are drunkards. Pupils will ridicule him and this becomes a non-lesson.

Because of the negative attitude by teachers, parents were unwilling to help the school in social activities. Asked if parents were requested to help the school in any way such as in class work or sports, a young parent from school A said: "No! No, those who teach are the teachers."

As seen in the findings above, the teachers reported that they did not involve parents in sport and cultural events. The parents interviewed did not attend these events because they felt that teachers did not encourage their attendance. The interviews also indicated that these events are held rarely. This suggested that the low levels of attendance at these events might have been because the schools were holding these events so infrequently and parents were not invited. Furthermore, it would require that they should take leave from their paid employment in order to attend.

Although teachers recognised that the parents' presence could encourage their children at social and sporting events, they did not point this out as part of the parents' role. They also did not encourage or invite the parents to be involved in these ways. They also did not feel parents were competent to contribute to social activities in the school. Therefore, the parents felt unwelcome and were negative about the activities.

According to Reaney, Denton & West (2002), the involvement of parents in extracurricular activities such as concerts, sports, scouts, relates positively to their reading, general knowledge, and mathematics knowledge and skills. The infrequency of these events at most

of the schools suggested that the teachers and schools did not realise the importance of holding social, cultural and sports events for the development of the pupils. They also did not seem to recognise that such events would give teachers and parents an opportunity to become familiar with each other under such social circumstances. In addition, it appeared that teachers did not appreciate the importance fully of involving parents in these areas. Schools also needed to set resources aside to support parents if the latter would be involved.

### 5.4.3.3 Communication between home and school

This type of parental involvement involves designing effectual forms of school-to-home and home-to-school exchanges about school programmes and pupils' progress (Epstein, 1995:704).

**a. The need for communication as perceived by teachers and parents**

The most common form of communication between parents and teachers in schools was through direct contact and informal discussions. Most teachers indicated that the school had an open door policy and welcomed visits from parents. One teacher from school E explained that a parent could visit the school any time he or she wished to do so and when summoned to school by the teacher, and sometimes, "you can also send the child to go for the parent when you want to talk with him."

Parental communication with teachers often concerned the child and problems with the child, while communication with the principal focussed on the difficulties of parents as individuals that were not essentially school-related. A mother at school F expressed her view: "As a parent, if your child is doing badly, you follow up with teachers to see to his progress."

Teachers also expected parents to approach them when they had problems to discuss with them. According to the principal of school D: "In our school, parents are supposed to come to school to find out the progress of their pupils." Although teachers stressed the importance of parents making the effort to communicate with them, most of them felt that parents rarely took advantage of it. Moreover, formal meetings with parents to meet the teachers of their children's classes were rare. A teacher from school C expressed her frustration at this: "During the annual general meetings, only a few attend class meetings. Out of 50, only 10

attend."

Even if teachers were frustrated over the parents' apathy, the parents themselves felt that they were welcome at the school and that they could approach teachers whenever they needed to talk to them. In contrast with that view, a father from school F felt that parents were well regarded because when there is a problem "you are able to solve it slowly with the teacher until you are able to see your child improve."

### b. Types of communication

Some of the communication between the school and home was in the form of notices that were usually sent to parents requesting money or materials from the parents or to inform them of problems or events at the school. However, when the learner was very young at five to six years old, schools used more innovative ways of ensuring that written communication reached the homes of the pupils. A teacher from school B explained:

> We may try to use an older sibling or a neighbour to call the parent. The child may be sent sometimes and will not call the parent for a whole week because he knows there is a problem. We might give a short note to the sister, brother, or neighbour to call the parent of the child.

The principal of school D explained: "We send the pupils when we need the whole body of parents, but if we need a few parents we write letters to pass the information." A teacher at school G added that they call the parents by telephone if they have their phone numbers.

Hanhan (1998:45) agrees that "written messages are an accepted way of bridging the gap between the school and the home," although, while it conveys a sense of authority and permanence when issued by the school, the effectiveness of its distribution depends on the learner as a reliable "messenger" (Stein & Thorkildsen, 1999:41).

School communication also occurred through examination reports where parents were expected to sign report books after an examination was done to show that they had seen their children's progress. A teacher in school I explained that parents are supposed to sign report books after examinations "to show that they have agreed with the reports."

**c. Frequency of parental visit to schools**

Teachers welcomed visits from parents when parents were informed of any problems concerning their children's progress as well as the parents' duties and roles that the school expected of them. A class teacher at school G explained: ''We try to guide them because most are ignorant and we show them the importance of education so as to impart it to their children."

Although parents visited the school as often as the need arose, teachers specifically wanted to meet parents whose children had problems. These parents, however were the most difficult to meet. A teacher in school B observed: "We actually like them to come but some factors such as their jobs keep them off."

The findings showed that the parents interviewed felt welcome at the school and that they could approach the teachers to talk whenever there was a need. The teachers also welcomed parents coming to the school to talk with them. According to the teachers, this was done to enable home- to- school communication. Yet the teachers interviewed indicated that the majority of parents seldom visited schools and did not frequently talk to the teachers. Lemmer and Van Wyk (2004:183) observe that home-to-school communication is one of the most important forms of parental involvement that is also poorly implemented. Moreover, Epstein (1986:281) observes that a large number of parents in her study were not involved in the most common traditional communications with the school, had no conference with the teachers during the year and the communication was "not deep, frequent or detailed".

Teachers communicated to parents about the problems and progress of their children and emphasised it was their role to help solve children's problems. They also noted that the parents did not always respond well to verbal and written notes, which were the main form of communication from schools. The teachers recognised the need for communication in both directions, from school to home and home to school. Epstein (1995:706) indicates that home-to-school communication, where parents contact teachers about their children's school life, correlates with positive child outcomes. While the teachers wanted parents to communicate with them, they felt that parents should take the initiative to approach them. They recognised that parents had useful information about their children's home circumstances, but they did

not realise that they should emphasise regular frequent communication with the parents as a way of finding out about the pupils. As Lemmer and Van Wyk (2004:270) observe, the emphasis in schools is on school-to-home communication and teachers mostly invited parents when there was a problem with pupils or in the school and seldom with parents whose children were without problems.

Frequent and open two-way lines of communication are essential to the establishment of partnerships between parents and schools for thoughtful and reflective conversation (Epstein, Sanders, Simon, Salinas, Jansorn & Van Voorhis, 2002:34; Jackson & Andrews, 2004:11). Schools accorded parents only a few formal opportunities for home-to-school communication despite their need for such communication. Moreover, teachers did not use communication materials to engage in dialogue with parents regularly and only invited them to come and talk to them at the annual parent-teacher meetings. Clearly, involvement of the parents in many schools was only about obtaining their support and getting them to adopt the schools' values and goals.

### d. Parent-teacher meetings

Teachers from all schools mentioned the importance of parent-teacher meetings. There were both formal and informal contacts that were usually based on the needs of the school, teachers or the parents. In all the schools observed, annual general meetings with the parents of each class were conducted once each term. These annual events were mainly held to inform parents of their children's progress and to address problems that the children may have been having at school. Parents were also informed about school levies that required to be paid. These meetings aimed at improving parent-teacher relationships. The principal of school H explained: "Parents are supposed to come discuss issues encountered in their children's classes." The principal of school F clarified:

> We normally have parents of a class, for example, standard two, come on their meeting day and talk with the class teacher and when need arises we call the individual parents to come to school and talk to them about issues pertaining their children and what is expected of them.

A teacher from school G explained that they mostly contacted parents at the opening of the

school year or "when we need to see them about a problem or something and when you have done an examination to discuss the results with them and in case of indiscipline and you want to speak with the parent." There were more informal contacts between teachers and parents than formal meetings. When teachers were asked how often they contact parents, the general response was when there was a problem. Only in schools A, F and G did parents come to see the teachers of their children on their own when there was a problem. One father from school G was keen to follow his child's progress in school and explained: "I follow very much my son's progress. I follow if my child was given homework I check and if they did an exam, I take the papers and check. Or if he does well I come and follow up with the teacher in school."

However, teachers and parents viewed these contacts differently. Parents appreciated the opportunity these meetings gave them to know their children's progress and behaviour at school. A parent from school G explained:

> Yes. All parents go to their class meetings (of their children) and follow what the child does and when going home you are already aware of the school's problems. We discuss academics, the previous term's examination's performance by pupils, and the welfare of the school such as water, maintenance of desks, classrooms and other structures within the school. We pay 40 shillings per pupil per year for water.

Teachers at Schools B, C, D and E observed that parent-teacher meetings were poorly attended:

> Not very much unless we have annual general meetings they are called but us here we don't involve them much because it sometimes creates more problems instead of solving problems. And when you call 50 parents in a class, 10 only will appear for such meetings. Moreover, only one of the spouses attended the parent-teacher meetings, not both.

For this, schools were willing to arrange a convenient time to meet parents for better attendance. The principal of school H expressed his frustration with parents:"Here if you call parents to come at 11.00 a.m. some will come drunk. So, we normally call them at 7.00 a.m. and finish at 8.00 to 9.00 a.m. We have made them used to come early so that they are sober."

The principal of school A explained:

> Because our children come from poor homes whose parents are wage earners, we don't call meetings at market days, we give long notices and take the shortest time during meetings to give parents who are wage earners time to attend to their jobs. A parent who asked permission from his employer to come to school will certainly not concentrate in the meeting at all, and will go away even before it ends. Sometimes we call meetings in the afternoons when parents are through with their jobs.

A teacher from school B added: "We make sure we take the shortest time possible to release those who want to go. So, we ensure not more than two hours if it is an academic clinic and then we release them to go to their work." Even when teachers requested parents to come to school whenever they found it necessary to talk with them, teachers felt that:

> It is as if they do not see the need to come to school. I feel it is because of the standard of the parents: they are so busy. They think that education is second to whatever they are doing, other things come first and feel that education is for the teachers so they will come here to discuss education only when teachers call them.

Furthermore, teachers observed that those parents whose children had the most problems were frequently called to school to be informed about their children's conduct, yet such parents were the very ones who do not come to school and who seldom attended meetings. The teacher in school B added: "Yet if there is a problem with the teacher they are all too ready to come and complain."

It was found that there were both formal and informal parent-teacher meetings. Parents' and teachers' remarks indicated that these meetings were valued and that they helped to improve teacher-parent relationships and child performance. They also brought teachers and parents closer together and promoted mutual understanding. However, teachers often called parents only when they had problems to sort out. Parents, on the other hand, visited the school only when there were issues with which they had to deal. While both appreciated parent-teacher meetings, the teachers and parents responses indicated that when parents were invited to these events or meetings not all attended. Even when such occasions provided opportunities to the parents for communication and problem solving, apparently, many parents did not perceive

them as such. Although schools attempted to encourage attendance by providing flexibility to the parents, the low turn-up by parents showed that most of them saw little value in these meetings.

Epstein (1996:226) observes that teachers' good intentions may not work out well if communication with parents is only in connection with problems. Nermeen, El Nokali, Bachman and Votruba-Drzal (2010:23) advise that teachers need to set up a structure of positive communication in order to lay the foundation for good interactions if they need parents to help them solve academic or behavioural problems.

### 5.4.3.4 Learning activities at home

According to Epstein (1997:8), homework does not just mean "work done alone, but also interactive activities shared with others at home" and the community and linking schoolwork to real life. The school provides information and ideas to families about how to help pupils at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions and planning.

### a. Parents and home discussions

Large numbers of pupils overwhelmed the teachers and they expected parents to help and supervise their children's homework. Schools required parents to provide enough kerosene for lighting and a conducive environment for their children to do homework in the evenings. This, they felt, would facilitate complete teaching of subject content. Some teachers suggested that parents should also provide extra work and supplementary reading materials to that given by the school.

Teachers were, however, not very positive about the cooperation they received from parents on homework assignments. One teacher from school G was dismissive of some parents regarding their involvement at home: "When you give homework to the children you will find that they don't even complete it and when you call the parent to find out if he makes follow-ups he won't turn up." Literate parents seemed to work more with their children at home, but illiterate parents "do not bother." The principal of school D observed that some of the parents were concerned with their children's schoolwork:

Because you see them come to follow up in school what their children are doing. But

the ones who are not concerned are the majority.

It was clear that teachers should not assume that parents were uninterested in helping their children at home. Parents showed awareness of their role in both supervising and helping with homework. All the parents mentioned this in their description of their roles. One mother provided this insight concerning her role as a supervisor at home:

> The child may come and tell me he has homework to do. I might show him what he is not able to do. Sometimes, to make him improve, I buy examination materials for the child or books needed at school.

### b. Mothers' involvement with learning at home

It was clear from the responses of most parents that usually only one parent helped with homework. Parents did not try to excuse or explain the non-involvement of the other parent. One teacher noted that often only one of the parents was involved in not only homework and school meetings, but also in preparing the child for school. Mothers were more involved because fathers were away at work during the day. Only a few fathers appeared at school. One father from school C, after a lot of clarification of the question by the researcher, explained:

> You know you have to look for wages daily. So you might be called to meetings, so you will not come only after getting the money.

Another father from school D who had come to visit the school explained,

> The mother… the father is very busy. The father may follow up but sometimes like myself, I go to work at night as a watchman (security guard). But mothers mostly get involved.

### c. School support for home learning

Teachers differed widely in their opinions of whether parents were, in fact, helping with and

supervising homework. Some teachers felt that very few parents were actually supervising or helping their children with their homework, others felt that parents did not feel obliged to help supervise homework. They mentioned interference by drugs, especially alcohol, and work commitments as reasons why parents neglected this role. In addition, even where alcohol use did not play a role, some parents did not help their children at all, as they did not see the value of education. "In this school there are parents who take their children to school because it is being done by everybody", reported the principal of school E. He added:

> Others do not have the skills required to help their children and feel that it is the teacher's role to supervise the homework and especially in the morning. Most of the pupils in public schools, their parents are not educated so they don't have the know-how, they do not know the importance.

Asked if parents helped with homework, a female teacher from school E complained: "No, they don't! But this is done by parents of children in private schools. Private school parents are more concerned about their children. The parents we have here, if you give them homework, when the child gets home, he is not helped at all by the parent. "

Some of the schools, recognising that parents required help, actually taught them general skills for assisting with homework or provided guidelines for specific homework assignments. The principal at school E noted that:

> We are trying to make them understand that they are supposed to study with their children. Like in standard eight, we have come up with a policy that they should never have the TV on when the pupil is studying and especially when they are candidates for examination, they should keep off even the radio to make sure the child has enough time to do their homework and their studies. We also have made parents sign the homework done to show that you have gone through the child's work. In exams we give report books and parents are supposed to show that they have agreed with the reports.

These findings concur with Epstein's (2001:185) findings that teachers and parents felt that

parental involvement in homework was essential. Some parents saw the need to help supervise homework and while some set times for homework, while others did not. Teachers intended that homework should give pupils a chance to practise skills taught in class, help them prepare for the next lesson and encourage their personal development. Yet, they did not seem to be aware that homework could be used as a tool for parental involvement and most did not attempt to teach parents the skills they needed to help even though they knew parents lacked them. Moreover, although the teachers were aware of the benefits of parents signing homework as was happening in private schools, many of them did not practise this. This reflected a general lack of school policy on the parents' role in getting homework done and suggested that teachers were unaware of the benefits of parental involvement in homework if done properly.

Research suggests that parental involvement in well-designed interactive home learning activities improves pupils' performance, attitudes and behaviour (Epstein, 1995:706-707; Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001:187-189). Yet, Cooper (2007:32) suggests that homework help could also impede achievement because of parental interference with the learner's autonomy or excessive parental pressure or because of a different understanding between parents and schools concerning how the latter should present the material. Dauber and Epstein (1991:290) found that some parents did not supervise homework because of the frustration that they felt at not knowing how to help their children. Moreover, Strauss and Burger (2000:41) point out that parents who have had limited schooling themselves would generally have difficulty in helping their children with their homework. It was not surprising that most parents did not supervise or help with the homework of their children.

Therefore, schools needed to help parents with this aspect because, as Georgiou (2008:125) suggests, parents' frustration regarding helping children with homework may be detrimental to their children's learning. Furthermore, teachers may need to be trained in strategies to involve parents in children's homework, which can be done through in-service training or can be included during basic training courses. Well-designed homework could guide and promote positive communication between the parent and the teacher and the parent and the child (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001:186). Schools should also encourage parental involvement in terms of other types of home-based involvement that have been shown to have a more

consistent positive relation with achievement, such as providing educationally enriching activities at home, making books and other educational materials available, and taking children to museums, libraries, zoos and other educational venues (Hill, 2009:742).

### *5.4.3.5 Parental involvement in decision-making*

This type of involvement includes parents being involved in making decisions at school and developing parent leaders and representatives. Decision-making as defined by Epstein *et al.* (1997:9) entails a process of partnership, of shared views and actions towards reaching shared goals, not just a power struggle between conflicting ideas. This implies that schools should have active parent-teacher organisations or school governing bodies or other parent organisations, advisory councils or committees for parent leadership and participation. Moreover, the participation of parents on class committees is also advocated.

The interviews aimed at determining the roles of the school management committee and the parental function in decision-making, especially on issues such as school uniforms, discipline, staff appointments and dismissals, school management, teaching methods and the curriculum. All schools had a school management committee (SMC) as the decision-making body. Parents were also represented on the school instructional materials selection committee (SIMSC) at each school.

### a. The school management committees (SMCs)

The composition and role of the SMC was the same at all schools. It was comprised of the principal and a small group of parents that had been elected by the parent body to represent them. This enabled the decentralisation of parental involvement to the class level. Every class appointed a parent as its representative who then liaised with the SMC. In addition, two members were provided by the District Education Board (DEB), while three came from the sponsor (which was the Church or the DEB). The principal of school D explained: ''Each year we have a new SMC as a new parent is elected from each class as class representative of the parents with children in each class.''

The class representative's task was to represent parents in school management: to discuss

school development and to help with the management of the school. For academic purposes, every class elected some parents who discussed the academic matters of each class that fell under the class representative. Schools B and D had established such an "academic board" for every class with six parents under the leadership of the class representative who met to discuss the welfare of each class. The parent representatives on the SMC ensured the involvement of the parents' body and the effective dissemination of information to all the parents. They arbitrated between parents, teachers and pupils ensuring cooperation among the stakeholders.

**b. Role of the SMC**

The SMC decided how government funds should be used, monitored the curriculum and played a role in long-term development. Additionally, the committee decided matters such as school uniforms, educational standards, discipline and learning materials. They monitored school projects, participated in budgeting and procurement activities and ensured transparency in school fund use. They also liaised with parents if the government funds received by the school were inadequate. In this way, parents were made to feel part of the development process and were motivated to contribute funds when government funds were inadequate. Moreover, through the SMC representative, the parents could ask questions and offer their suggestions. The principal of school E clarified this matter:

> They manage the school and give the go-ahead on the use of FPE funds. They also deal with issues of school development. For example, if a class is being built they are the ones who are in charge; if there are any repairs, they are in charge. They are supposed to meet once per term but we can meet twice, thrice when there is need. So these are people who are available and you call them any time.

Some of the teachers and parents recognised the importance of SMCs in giving parents a role in decision-making. The senior teacher from school B, explained that the class representatives attended SMC meetings and reported the deliberations of the SMC during annual general meetings (AGMs) to the parents of their classes when the parents were called for their class meetings. In this way, "we find it working because the parents are owning the results of the school and the way the school is run." The guidance teacher/counsellor of school C added, "When we have class meetings they say what they want and in case there are any complaints

it is the class representatives who air these complaints to the class teachers."

Other teachers were, however, wary of parents serving on the SMC as decision-makers as possible troublemakers to the school. One teacher from school E complained as follows about the SMC: "Some members are very negative, when informed about finances they keep talking about how money is being squandered. This leads to poor relationships with the teachers." Furthermore, while teachers reported that parents on the SMC were dedicated, they required training for them to function effectively. According to the principal of school B: "They are not professionals and in meetings you have to give them direction."

The teachers of school G felt that the SMC chair and his officials were not representative of the parents, had overstayed his position and was always being re-elected as chair. It was clear that other parents were not availing themselves for election to membership in the SMC. One of the teachers suggested:

> …when getting SMC members, we must get another lot, and elect good role models especially with educated members. In addition, the SMC members should have their children here in this school. For example, now the chairperson right now is a retired man with no children here and who has no contact with this school.

Another teacher from the same school added: "Also the office of the SMC should not stay [in positions] too long such as beyond 5 years, not like today where some members have stayed over 10 years." Although parents were involved in the decision-making process at school, through the SMC, these decisions were limited to the school budget, especially school levies and teaching materials. Additionally, while schools maintained that parents were involved in making decisions, the reality was that they merely approved decisions made by the principal. Moreover, the SMC members had little say on how the purchases were done and merely supervised what the principal had done without contributing very much. One parent member of the SMC of school F expressed his concern that:

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Prior to FPE, the SMC members used to collect money from parents, keep, plan, use and account for it. That is no longer the case now that funds come from the government and go straight into school accounts where the headmaster is the accounting officer.

The chair and treasurer of the SMC were active especially in collecting funds from the parents but in FPE, as one parent member of the SMC of school B complained:

We do not even see them in our school. Initially the committee members used to come to the school to see how things are going on but having realised that they do not have much work to do as all the procurements are done by the headmaster, they no longer come frequently.

The parents from school B in expressing their role with regard to the class meetings, reported that they discussed academic matters, the previous term's examination results, and other school requisites. They explained: "We discuss the performance and then the welfare of the school such as water, maintenance of desks, and parents' levies for these things during the AGM where parents of a class meet with the class teacher and the parent representative."

Parents expressed the feeling, however, that the matters discussed at meetings rarely concerned them: "we are called only when there are problems or when money is needed." Moreover, with regard to the class meetings, only a few parents attended. Because of the parent representatives on the SMC, parents had enough excuses for not attending school meetings or even visiting the school individually. One parent explained:

If there is any problem, the class representative comes to see the class teacher. We report our problems to him and when there is a meeting for parents, he speaks to them.

Parents therefore rarely attended SMC meetings to meet their representatives. They gave excuses that they "were at their jobs", or "were not informed." Most parents, it appeared, were only concerned with their children's performance and not the SMC and its decisions. Asked what she knew about the SMC, one mother from school A who had visited the school to bring medicine for her sick son, stated: "About the SMC, I don't know them [the members]. I follow my child's class and his performance".

**c. The school instructional materials selection committee (SIMSC)**

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Like the SMC, the composition and role of the SIMSC was the same in all schools. The principal chaired the committee which included the deputy principal, eight teachers, the class teachers (eight) from each class and the senior teacher. In addition, two parents were elected by the parent body to represent them.

**d. Role of the SIMSC**

Parents on the committee played a minimal role. Asked whether parents were active in the SIMSC the principal of school B explained:

> They do not actually choose books or other materials for teaching. They have no know-how unless they are teachers themselves. Yet even when they are professional teachers, it is the teachers who select the materials. But we inform them on behalf of the rest of the parents' body about the funds sent by the government to buy the reading materials and where we shall get these materials purchased from.

The principal of school A added:

> We would not really have them dictate the books we should buy for their children. This is for the teachers. But we also ask them to inform other parents of the need to care for the instructional materials at home when the school lent their children the books.

It was evident that the school management committee and the school instruction materials selection committee in schools comprised of, among other persons, parents elected from the parents' body. These committees made decisions about the long-term goals and objectives of the school. Accordingly, while the parents on the committees had little say in curriculum implementation, they did, at least, play a part in determining the future direction and needs of the school. Parents serving on the SIMSC were not consulted on the procurement of instructional materials because they were deemed ineffective by the schools.

On the other hand, before the FPE policy, the SMC members frequently met to discuss school funds and their use in the procurement of teaching materials and school maintenance. They also assisted with talking to parents and convincing them to participate in school activities. However, today with the FPE, the government through the MOEST deposits funds into the school bank accounts to which only the principal, chairman and treasurer of the SMC are

signatories. The MOEST has provided procurement and accounting procedures to schools. The principal made most of the decisions on the funds making the SMC members rather irrelevant to financial management. This has led to the SMC members' reluctance to attend school management meetings. This is consistent with Ashton and Cairney (2001:151) who observe that participation of parents in governing bodies might not mean that parents are actually getting to make decisions. They also add that parental involvement in decision-making in Australia had little impact on the curriculum and may be only tokenistic.

While parental involvement in decision-making was essential for any true partnership between parents and the school and was beneficial to parents, teachers and children, as research indicated, this type of parental involvement was difficult to implement (Lemmer & Van Wyk, 2004:262). Accordingly, in most schools, parents played a very limited role in decision-making. Epstein (1995:708) reports that parents on governing bodies rarely communicate with the parents that they represent to solicit ideas from them, nor do they pass committee plans or actions to them. McGrath and Kurlikoff (1999:77) also doubt whether any benefits arise from participative decision-making or even whether better quality decisions can be made possible because parents may become involved only to pursue their own agenda without bearing other parents' interests in mind.

This may have been because parents recognised that the SMC was primarily a fundraising body and not essential for their children's academic success. This was especially clear in the case of school G where one of the members of the SMC was on the committee "for so long that he did not have a child in that school [anymore]" and other parents had not replaced him since they did not present themselves for election to the position. Most parents, in addition, did not attend the general meetings of the parent body because as research showed, parents preferred to be involved directly in their children's learning (Epstein, 1995:708) and did not find these meetings useful.. According to Mestry and Grobler (2007:177), many countries are still grappling with how to involve parents as active stakeholders in education and that non-recognition and non-involvement of parents serve as barriers to quality in education. Hanafin and Lynch (2002:45) observe that while some parents would want to make decisions, it may be necessary to inspire others to want a decision-making role. Crozier (1999:113) also observes that few parents, irrespective of class, require much active involvement in decision-

making.

*5.4.3.6 Schools' collaboration with the communities*

This type of involvement involves identifying and integrating resources and services from the community to strengthen school programmes, family practices and children's learning and development (Epstein *et al*, 1997:9).

**a. Schools and community involvement**

Most schools had opportunities for involving the community such as the pupils' award ceremonies, concerts, cultural and sports days. In this regard, most schools had a sports day held on the school field. However there were few such activities, the principal explained: "Ball games, athletics and gymnastics are held in the first term."

Schools had an activity committee comprised of teachers from different schools that determined the amount to be levied from the parents to cater for sports, drama, cultural activities, gymnastics and concerts during the year. Asked if parents were included in the activity committee, the principal answered:

> No parent was included in the committee. It is for the teachers only, but the parents contribute by paying for their children. This year, each child must pay 70 shillings for the year's activities.

However, schools did not generally invite the whole community but they allowed members of the immediate neighbourhood of the school to attend sports and cultural events. Schools rarely held these events and focussed mainly on academic matters.

**b. Occasions for community/school service**

It was clear that, apart from teaching the children from the community, schools performed a few other services for their communities. The principal of school D explained: "When the community held events like weddings, sports and other occasions, schools allowed them to use their fields."

At school D, they invited preachers from the Catholic Church to provide guidance and

counselling to the pupils every Friday as "Our school is Catholic [Church] sponsored and the invited preacher gives [sic] a word and extends the role modelling in behaviour." The principal of school H added:

> During the awards day, we invite the parents of their children and the larger community, and especially the stakeholders like the old boys and old girls (the alumni), the church and business people during prize-giving days to talk to the pupils and present the awards to the best pupils.

Some schools involved non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to assist. The principal, school B explained:

> Some [NGOs] gave water tanks and doctors from the International Centre for Insect Pest and Ecology (ICIPE) treat the children and gave treated mosquito bed nets. The Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA) dewormed the children. They have been doing this now for the last few years.

Some schools used the community resources to enhance learning. For instance, school A received some help from the local community library that supported them. The principal reported: "We pay 20 bob [shillings] for each child to register as members at the local library. Children can then spend time during the weekend reading." However, the administration of school E did not attempt to involve the local community, not even to raise funds for the school. Said the principal, "Most of the time the school does everything." Even to raise funds, "We depend on government money."

It was found that very little community involvement occurred at these schools. Most of the schools did not attempt to involve the wider community apart from church-sponsored schools, which involved members of the church to talk to the pupils every Friday. Only rarely were members of the community called to provide guidance and counselling to the pupils during the occasional meetings. Interestingly, some schools invited NGOs to offer assistance. Thus, in Kenya (see 3.5), involvement of the wider community in schools was limited because schools relied mainly on government and parental support.

According to Epstein (1995:702), communities can have powerful effects on children's development by raising funds, serving as advocates for children's rights, providing learning opportunities outside the school, providing general social support and social and health and recreational services. In addition, schools can provide services to the community such as canvassing on behalf of community organisations and organising neighbourhood clean-ups. Epstein (1995:702) also proposes the idea of a community school where programmes and services for parents and pupils and others are offered before, during and after the school day. According to Kostelnik, Stein, Whiren, and Soderman (1993:2), social interaction, especially in "early childhood, is of great importance for future social relationships and personal self-actualisation" has a large impact on the cognitive outcomes of young pupils. Moreover, Epstein (1997, in Bridgemohan, 2002:176) advises integration of the community in terms of health, cultural recreation, counselling and civic agencies with the school.

However, it appeared that teachers and schools did not think that they could offer services to their communities. Avvisati, Besbas and Guyon (2010:14) suggest that communities can contribute to a home-school partnership by promoting an awareness of parental involvement in schools and by supporting school efforts to reach families. Furthermore, linkages between community resources and schools can also be strengthened to create continuity across the informal and formal learning environments of children through extracurricular activities. Schools need to understand that the community is broader than the neighbourhood. For instance, most schools were situated near shopping centres, hospitals, libraries, churches, mosques and markets. These facilities can be used to enhance learning. Nevertheless, schools did not see these institutions in that light and operated in isolation. In contrast with what happens in practice, these resources should be available to support pupils, families and the school.

Cotton and Wikelund (2001:18) observe that parental involvement in the academic development of their children from an early age both at home and at school ensured the general higher academic achievement of children. However, parental involvement in their children's formal education can be hindered by factors such as attitudes towards education, parental level of education, commitment at the workplace and other factors. These barriers to the effective involvement of parents are the subject of the next section.

### 5.4.4 Hindrances to parental involvement

Identifying the hindrances to parental involvement was a major step towards developing effective home-school partnerships (Gettinger & Geutschow, 1998:40). These factors included limitations caused by external barriers which were beyond the parent's control and personal obstacles. External barriers were mainly those that existed at the school while individual obstacles were the result of the parent's socio economic situation, work patterns and personal assumptions about what parental involvement should entail. This section discusses the range of factors that the participants identified that limited parents' ability to become more involved in different aspects of their children's education.

### *5.4.4 .1 Parental attitude to education*

There was a negative attitude towards education in some parts of the countryside where cash crops such as coffee and tea were grown. Parents in areas such as Embu made a living through farming and usually discontinued their children's schooling temporarily during peak seasons so that they could work on the farm. Since such parents could not afford hired labour and they perceived that there were few chances of employment after school, they did not see the value of further education after completing primary school. The principal of school E explained:

> It is poverty in the majority of the parents in public schools…. Here, now in this school, there are parents who take children to school because it's being done by everybody else and some of them don't care. They are too blocked by the issue that secondary education is too expensive such that they feel it is not important to take their children to school.

The principal of school B concurred, adding that the low socio-economic status generally caused the parents to be disinterested in education: "According to their children, these parents do not care and their children too lead a care-free life. If you hear about their problems most are frustrated because of the way they were brought up themselves in their homes."

### 5.4.4.2 Parental illiteracy

Teachers did not see themselves as barriers to parental involvement, instead they blamed the parents. The guidance teacher/counsellor of school C observed:

> We teachers are usually very positive and are not a hindrance to the parents coming to the school because we do understand this community we are living in. So, when they come they know they are supposed to come during break time, lunch time or in the evening so as not to interrupt classes and lose time for the pupils. So, they know when they can come for consultation.

The senior teacher, school B added:

> No, we actually want them to come, but external factors keep them away. But there are those parents who are not educated, who to them, education is not important and they don't value it. In most cases, some will bring the child to school because the chief is going around to homes to send the children out of homes to school. Some will actually tell you that 'I came because the chief said that he would come to my home as my children are still at home.' So, to these parents, education is of no value and they can do without it, yet still eat and live.

Teachers did not attempt to "educate" such parents directly regarding the need for involvement and they rather sought to have their children educate their parents on this. Asked what the teachers did to support parental involvement the same teachers added:

> We try to enlighten their children about the importance of being in school and the importance of their parents following them. Some of them go home and educate their parents and you find that a number of parents are positive and they come. We keep on telling them these things in assembly and in the class.

### 5.4.4.3 Parental economic deficiency

Parents who could not afford to buy school materials for their children, kept them out of school. Consequently, some teachers and principals thought that such parents were not interested in the education of their children. One teacher from school H remarked: "Some

parents see the school as a day nursery for their young children and they leave their children with the knowledge that teachers will look after them while the parents are away working in the day until evening when they return home."

As mentioned above Some teachers explained that although some parents are quite concerned about the education of their children, they do not have enough money to buy school materials and may keep them at home. A teacher from school G explained: "…lack of finances to buy materials required by the school… if the child has no books and the parent has no money to give the child, he or she will not come to school as he or she does not want to come and explain."

The findings revealed that some parents did not get involved in the school because of poverty and were unable to afford school materials for their children and therefore felt embarrassed when required to come to school and explain why they were not buying materials for their children. In addition, they did not want to enrol their children at secondary institutions because they felt they could not afford it. The teachers interviewed also indicated that most parents apparently did not value education because of their own illiteracy and they sent their children to school only because they were compelled by the law to do so. Epstein (1995:703), however, observes that irrespective of socio-economic status, all parents wanted their children to succeed, while Buchman (2000:1349) states that low-income parents view schooling as an avenue to economic and social success. Thus, while poverty and the lack of education might have discouraged parents' desire for involvement, it was obvious that schools required addressing this negative perception of parents.

Teachers did not consider themselves as barriers to parental involvement and they allowed parents to come to school during the breaks, that is, at morning break, lunch break and in the evening after classes in order to avoid interrupting classes for their children. Time was an important resource in schools and it was always allocated to direct teaching (Swap, 1993 in Letsholo, 2006:17). Furthermore, Swap advises that, for continued improvement of the school, it is important to create schedules that support regular, frequent and remunerated meetings with parents.

### 5.4.4.4 Parental commitment at workplace

At all nine schools, the teachers indicated that because both parents were working, they came home late and were tired and could, therefore, not help their children with homework. In addition, they did not have time to help their children with tasks that had to be completed at home. The parents interviewed also noted that work commitments sometimes made home supervision and attendance at school events difficult. Nevertheless, the parents tried to be involved in their children's school activities. Jackson and Cooper (1989:31) agree that even interested and concerned parents may be prevented from participating in school activities by time and circumstances. The teachers understood well that both parents had to work long hours to support their families. The guidance teacher/counselor of school B explained: "Parents are busy working, come home late, and have little time for the child. Where both parents are working, they leave their young children under the care of house helps. In some cases, the children arrive home to find the parents not having arrived."

Work was definitely a barrier, as the majority of parents were working or involved in business and felt that many meetings disrupted their schedules and even when summoned to discipline their children, they felt that the teachers could do it: "So why call me so many times?" A teacher from school B concurred that some working parents could not get permission from their seniors to attend meetings "so these will not come." In addition, parents who worked during the day might have been unable to arrange time off from work to attend events at the school during the day. Furthermore, if they took time off from work, they might not be paid and/or could lose their jobs. Teachers could therefore encourage parental involvement by calling meetings very early or during the evening after classes.

Studies show time constraints and inflexible work schedules to be the most significant barrier to parental involvement (Konzal, 2001:113). Many of the participants felt it was the most important barrier. The teachers understood that most parents were required to work for their living. In many homes, the parents worked and reached home extremely tired late in the evening. Therefore, teachers understood that such parents may have been exhausted and unable to help their children with homework or they could not help with it because their children had already done it earlier. Where both parents were working and in single parent households, this was definitely a problem.

Most parents emphasised that they lacked sufficient free time to involve themselves in regular formal or informal commitments. Crozier (1999:116) observes that working parents tend to view schools as something separate from their daily cultural and social worlds and their separate roles comprise a division of labour. She adds "that teachers tend to adopt the same strategies for promoting parental involvement irrespective of' parental need, class or individual circumstances and this may not always suit working parents. Moreover, most parents' desire was to spend quality time with their own children at home during the evenings and weekends rather than attend meetings at the school. Parents pointed out that their daily commitments and responsibilities made it extremely difficult for them to cope with activities such as homework supervision or attend school meetings. Nevertheless, they still managed to be involved suggesting that if the parent was sufficiently committed, this barrier could be overcome. It was important for schools to understand the challenges the parents of their pupils had to face and to address them. Epstein (1995) advises that opportunities for mutual communication with families may be optimised by communicating to parents in a language at a reading level all can understand and by ensuring information provided at workshops is distributed to the families who could not attend. This might make involvement easier and more convenient for all parents and this can lead to their increased support.

### 5.4.4.5 Foster parents

At schools A and B, some parents left their children with their grandparents, many of whom were illiterate. Although the grandparents are willing to care for these children, their own backgrounds and ages often prevented them from playing a more active role at school or from informing the school of problems the children may be facing. A teacher in school B described the situation: "Very many pupils here are orphans and stay with relatives who misuse them, some are made to do other work when they should be doing homework and so arrive late at school."

The principal of school D observed that these orphans were affected psychologically because of loss of their parents and thus they tended to disobey their guardians leading to conflict and tension within the family and this affected the children negatively in their learning. The guidance teacher/counselor from school B indicated that many parents depend on their own

parents for help and support because they work far away from home and are single parents without the support of the spouse. The grandparent takes the child as her own and feeds and protects the child but this is only as much as she can. The teacher explained:

> The parents themselves work far away from home as house helps or as farm hands. Some have no husband and so they leave the child to be with the grandmother. The grandmother even at her best will do little to follow up the child's progress in the school compared to what the parent would do.

### 5.4.4.6 Training in parental involvement

When asked if their training had helped them to cope with parental involvement, all the teachers interviewed indicated that parental involvement was not part of their preparation. In fact, they were underinformed about the reality of involving parents. At school E, the principal was emphatic: "No, that one I have learnt by experience when I came to the school." The principal, school C added: "I know more how to deal with them and how to handle those who are tough, also those who are rude. You know how to handle them." A teacher from school I found his on-the-job training beneficial and explained: "When I left college, I was 'naïve' but with age and interaction with parents in solving problems, I feel I am competent after attending in-service seminars, which also makes me come to enjoy the job."

The findings indicated that teachers had a limited understanding of parental involvement, implying that the theory that was taught in their preparation programmes was not applicable in practice. Moreover, the researcher was aware of the fact that teacher trainees did not receive any exposure to parental involvement in their training. Teachers admitted that they had learnt through maturity and experience. According to Lee (2005:40), professional growth in teachers occurs when their training programme acknowledges teachers' personal and professional needs. Bernauer (2002:89), Bolam (2003:103) and Lee (2005:47) also note that teachers would be most effective when their training is a continuous process that includes a formal, systematic and suitably planned programme based on their needs. In view of the fact that primary school education is free and the large classes involved there is a need to equip teachers with the skills and knowledge to work with parents as important stakeholders. It was

thus necessary to provide short courses that would deal specifically with the skills required for parental involvement. This might also form part of their professional development for the re-skilling of teachers.

### 5.4.4.7 Age of the parent

While one parent saw age as a barrier to parental involvement, no teachers felt that age was a barrier. A parent from school D observed: "It depends on the age group of the parent because I think older parents, those above forty, take it more seriously. Some younger ones may just not have the time." Younger parents who had children in lower classes were eager to see their children succeed and took time to ensure that their children reached school in time in the morning and came to collect them in the afternoon after school. A teacher from school B mentioned:

> You see them bring the children meals at lunchtime and then walk home with them Older parents will rarely do this. They are already used to the system and they ask the younger children to wait for their older siblings to go home with them.

### 5.4.4.8 Schools' and parents' attitude to each other

Attitudes of the teachers to the participation of parents in schools were perceived differently by different parents. Teachers observed that parents were not cooperative because of reasons such as illiteracy, poverty and ignorance. A teacher from school H mentioned that most parents would not attend meetings in the school and the ones who came "would not be sober." Parents soon internalised such negative sentiments by teachers and refrained from coming to the school. Parents also felt that some teachers were too busy and would rather that parents did not interfere. One of the parents asserted: "Teachers do not encourage it much and I think it is always a disturbance for the teachers."

### 5.4.4.9 Teacher-parent relationships

Although parents and teachers felt that they had very friendly, caring relationships with each other, they mentioned that misunderstandings might have kept parents away from the school. A teacher at school G explained: "In some cases, there can be a misunderstanding between the

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teachers and the parents and the office. Such may cause the parent to stay away because the teacher and parent happen to come from the same locality." Another teacher from the same school supported this: "Yes, we are all human beings even when we are teachers. If we have quarrelled over a boundary at home, the parent will not come to school because of the personal difference. But it is not a policy to keep parents away."

According to the findings, teachers and parents tend to blame each other for poor parental involvement. Some parents viewed teachers as unwelcoming and discouraging, leading to the perception that parents were regarded as a bother. According to Buchman (2000:1349), parents in her study felt both helpless and powerless and also felt ignored by the teachers. If teachers and parents have personal misunderstandings, parents may stay away from school feeling that teachers may retaliate against their children if they raised any issues at the school. It is essential that teachers maintain working relationships with parents for parents to want and continue to be involved.

### 5.4.4.10 Parental confidence in assisting in school work

Although most teachers felt parents should assist their children at home, parents did not always feel confident about how to help their children in learning activities in the home. As Strauss and Burger (2000:41) point out it is illiteracy that hinders them from carrying out this role at home. A teacher from school F observed, "We are dealing with a community that is not educated. Those illiterate ones would not like to participate in helping their children with homework." Another teacher from school E felt that ignorance caused parents to feel that they did not want to be involved even when they were educated.

> We, as teachers, try to involve them as much as possible but most of them are not concerned. Quite a good number do not care what the child is doing at school. If you send the child home there are those who will tell you they don't even know the position of the child in the last examination. Then there are those who do not know when their child misses coming to school.

Furthermore, some parents did not feel they were able to cope with the level of difficulty of some of the primary school work, particularly in mathematics. Teachers felt that such parents did not help their children with homework because they did not want to expose their

ignorance in some subjects to their children. Therefore, they gave little help at home. McGrath (2007:1401) concurs with these findings observing that in interactions between teachers and the parents, the parents depended on the school to provide them with information about their children, which would bolster their trust in the school, making them feel connected to their children's experience. However, the teachers apparently did not trust the parents and were unaware of the much power they stood to gain in their interactions with the parents.

### 5.4.4.11 The parents involved in schools

It was clear from the responses of most parents, that usually only one parent attended meetings or helped with the homework. Parents did not try to excuse or explain the non-involvement of the other parent. One teacher noted that often only one of the parents was involved in school meetings, homework and in preparing the child for school. The mother was usually the more involved parent as the father was away at work during the day. Only a few fathers came to the school. One father, upon being asked about this matter by the researcher, explained, "You know you have to look for wages daily. So you might be called to meetings, so you will not come only after getting the money."

Furthermore, it became clear from the interviews that parental involvement could be constrained by a lack of confidence. However, it became apparent that schools wanted parents to be involved. Nevertheless, they favoured Swap's Protective Model as evidenced by the limited opportunities the schools gave parents to be involved. Therefore, some parents may have believed that schools and teachers wanted them to play a limited role in their children's education and accordingly, they delegated their responsibilities to the school. Most schools offered similar opportunities for parents to be involved, but it was the specific theoretical stance of a school that determined the extra opportunities that it gave to the parents to be involved.

Although some parents were educated and could thus help with homework, the interviews indicated that others were not always confident about how to help their children and were therefore not involved in the homework at home at all. Certain parents lacked confidence in their ability to cope with primary school work, particularly in some subjects and may have avoided involvement in schoolwork, fearing exposing their ignorance would result in their

children not believing that their parents were able to help them with schoolwork. Pupils in such homes did not perceive that their parents had a role to play in learning activities in the home.

Although most parents interviewed were married and lived with their spouses, often one parent was more involved in the children's education or the parents took turns to be involved. On a few occasions, both parents attended an event. A personal observation by the researcher was that no couples were ever present together at any school visited. In view of these parents' work and social commitments, this was to be expected. Significantly, the parents interviewed also did not feel that more than one parent needed to be involved. This perception was obviously a barrier to the involvement of both parents. Teachers noted that having only one parent involved could lead to communication problems since they often only formed a relationship with one parent and the other parent may have little understanding of what was going on in the school.

According to Karlsson (1996:28), parental support of their children is insufficient and parents do not generally discuss or participate in pupils' schoolwork. One of the reasons for this is that pupils come from families where one or even more of the parents or caregivers is functionally illiterate and will thus feel unable to offer any meaningful support to his/her child/ children. Having analysed the obstacles to parental involvement in schools, the impact of individual parental backgrounds in terms of their circumstances and the family structure was examined. As shown below, these two areas were discussed under the influence of the family background on parental involvement.

### 5.4.5 The family background's influence on parental involvement

The Embu area has a high agricultural potential but the people were poor due to the decline in agricultural productivity. Most of them depended on coffee, which was sold for unfavourable prices on the international market and was affected by poor management in the coffee cooperatives. Unemployment was rife especially in the rural areas. In addition, many people had no land of their own to grow crops, while the population was steadily increasing (Kenya National Commission for UNESCO, 2005:243).

Urban areas were better developed since they had more public utilities, but most rural areas did not have electricity to enable people to start income-generating activities. Neither did they have adequate water for irrigation during the dry spells. The farmers' produce did not fetch good prices at the markets, thereby compounding the poverty problem in the area. Against this background, the introduction of free primary education (FPE) provided a great relief to the people, many of whom lacked money and food. Even with FPE, however, many children did not attend school because of poverty. Furthermore, HIV/AIDS aggravated poverty and many children were rendered orphans and left without the means of survival, thus dropping out of school (Kenya National Commission for UNESCO, 2005:243).

### 5.4.5.1 Circumstances of families

Guetzloe (2000:21) points out that conditions that aggravate hostility and aggression in society include overcrowding, family and cultural influences, poorly socialised pupils and few unskilled teachers who are easily intimidated. In the interviews, the following factors that influenced families emerged.

**a. Unemployment and poverty**

There is rampant poverty in the large slum areas such as Dallas, Majengo and Majimbo, which are the feeder areas for the schools. The participants reported high levels of crime, especially child rape by relatives and older men in the slums. Teachers said that the child who is the victim might not report such abuse especially if he or she is staying with relatives because of separation of the parents. A teacher from school F explained: "Schoolchildren have to walk through farms that are overgrown with crops and are possible hideouts for criminals. Pupils from lower classes are thus advised to stay until the end of classes in the evening to await their older siblings."

A teacher from school A blamed unemployment and poverty for the illicit brews commonly sold as well as the crime prevalent in the towns. Accordingly, most participants mentioned the high rate of unemployment and the state of poverty in which families lived. Pupils especially young children in lower classes who did not have shoes and showed signs of malnutrition when they came to school, were an indication of this fact. Most parents resorted to selling vegetables and other assorted food items on the market places. Some dealt in illicit

liquor in the villages and town areas or sold drugs. Others worked as casual labourers on the farms in the vicinity. Some women in the rural areas earned small wages selling food items in the marketplaces or by washing other peoples' clothes.

Some parents unable to meet their children's needs at home had no time to follow up on their children's progress in school and their children dropped out of school or played truant. One teacher from school F remarked:

> The parents are supposed to ensure that the child has been at home and at school. There was a child who was not attending school for two weeks and when the parent was called to school, he was shocked to learn that the child was not attending school. Parental neglect leads to children dropping out of school altogether and with time, such children become delinquents.

One teacher reported that such children arrived late at school and eventually stopped coming because nobody checked up on them. Home circumstances also influenced the extent to which assignments were carried out. One reason for poor homework performance was that children did not have anywhere to do their work. The G/C teacher from school C cited a case in Grogon (a local slum area) where an orphaned boy had been living with his grandmother in a temporary house covered with bits of paper and "when we give them work you wonder how they can manage to do homework in such areas." Teachers observed that poverty led to the lack of involvement and cooperation of parents with the school. Parents would not attend meetings and became uncooperative or aggressive if asked to pay any levies to the school because they felt "you are calling to ask them to give money and they do not have it."

On the other hand, teachers indicated that middle class parents had their children educated in private primary schools, which charged relatively high tuition fees compared to public schools. As Van Zanten (2005:155-160) indicates, such parents have more power that they exert over the school in their desire to increase their level of control over the schooling of their children. They actively monitored and intervened in their schools to ensure that the quality of education for their children did not fall. One teacher from school E, asked about the extent to which parents in her school helped with homework complained:

No, they do not! But this is done by parents of children in private schools. Private school parents are more concerned about their children. The parents we have here, if you give them homework, when the child gets home, he is not helped at all by the parent. But in private schools, homework when given ends up being done by the parent because he must sit with his child in order for him to read. In addition, the parents are required to sign somewhere that the child did the homework.

The researcher found that in Kenya where the larger part of the population lives below the poverty line (Kenya National Commission for UNESCO, 2005:122), slow economic growth and the lack of economic opportunities exacerbate the effects of poverty and the feelings of helplessness in the rural and urban areas as well. These circumstances had a bearing on this study as the financial situation influenced any substantial improvement in pupils' lives, living conditions and their education. Thus, for instance, the cause for dropping out of school was largely economic.

Depending on the size of the family, the education level and therefore the confidence in their ability to help their children and family resources, single and working parents experienced different levels of difficulty in their commitment to their children's education. Involvement at school for these parents is obviously the most difficult type of involvement and schools should target activities that require other time and not daytime availability. Epstein (1995:703) observes that although such parents may be less involved in the school this can be overcome if the school makes the effort to organise opportunities for the parents to volunteer at various times and places in order to support their children.

## b. Educational level of parents

The parents interviewed had primary education (see table 5.2), implying they had low educational levels. Generally, these parents were little involved in their children's schooling. Teachers explained:

We are dealing with a community that is illiterate while some are educated. But at the same time those who are illiterate would not like to participate because they would not even want their children to go to secondary school because they think it's an added burden.

Although parents did not mention it, there was a negative attitude towards education: some parents did not value education and had a negative attitude to teachers and schools. Some discussed teachers pejoratively with their children at home, and others saw teachers as non-performers. However, some parents appreciated that teachers cared for their children well while they were themselves away working during the day. As Symeou (2003) has pointed out, poorer communities with low levels of education tend to be generally less involved in their children's education.

It was found that most parents had experienced such inadequate schooling that they sensed that they could not be effective mediators in their children's learning. Eldridge (2001:68) observes that they feel unsure how they can possibly help and therefore keep away from the school. Importantly, parents usually chose the types of parental involvement in which they believed they could be successful. Their perception of their specific skills, knowledge and the demands on their time, energy and the invitation for parental involvement from the school and children influenced the type of parental involvement they chose (Eldridge, 2001:65-69). Schools, therefore, needed to inform them that their voluntary and genuine involvement had a decisive bearing on their children's potential and they needed to guide parents to fulfil their roles.

### 5.4.5.2 Family structure

The term "parents" refer to the biological parents, adoptive- and stepparents, and primary caregivers such as the grandmother, aunt or brother. The pupils attending the nine schools that participated in the research belonged to different family unit types: nuclear families, extended families, female-headed families, male parent families, educated families, working families and varying socio-economic levels.

### a. Single parents

The principal of school A estimated that the majority of children lived with their parents, while a significant number lived with a single parent or are orphaned. No school had the data to support these estimates but it was clear that foster parents cared for many children. A large number of the parents interviewed at the school were mothers. Fathers were either not there, having separated from the mother or were busy at work. A teacher at school F gave an

estimate of the family structures in her school: "I think 50% of our 400 pupils are living with their parents (nuclear families), one quarter live with single parents and a quarter are orphaned and living with the grandmothers."

As Sishana (2004:11), Booysen & Arntz (2002:23) and Booysen (2004:43) assert that such households exposed their families to vulnerability and poverty. Many single parents experience a great deal of difficulty with raising their families alone. A teacher observed that some mothers left their children in the care of relatives, neighbours or they left them at home to look after themselves when they went to work. Others sent their children to day-care centres until they returned home in the evening. The teacher added, "some children come telling me, teacher I have to go to the market to buy food and cook before Mother comes"

Single mothers were more numerous than single fathers. Most were living in the slums in the towns. The same teacher added :"Most have no fathers, maybe the mother never got married or the father left them and some died. Also, single fathers don't stay [unmarried] long before they remarry and the child lives with a stepmother."

Single fathers did not bother much about the child once he or she was fed. One teacher observed that children living with the father were unkempt when they came to school because the father was only concerned with eating and not with washing clothes and other matters unlike the situation of single mothers. Children of single mothers were more likely to perform better than those of single fathers. Another teacher remarked: "Children of single mothers perform better than those of single fathers because mothers encourage their children and are together most of the time at home unlike the fathers."

The teachers interviewed regarded some parents as poor role models for their children and this resulted in the poor learning habits of children at school. A teacher from school C informed the researcher of parents who sent their children to the farms to work or to look after cattle, thereby preventing the child from going to school or from doing homework. He explained that due to poverty, most parents did not care for their children as they were supposed to and this created a bad relationship between a child and its parents in this community. At times, a child was left to look after the younger children, while the parents were at work.

It was clear from the findings that, while most families were nuclear households, single parents headed many homes. Some of these single parent families were extended (that is, consisting of more than two generations) which helped to counteract the negative effects of disrupted nuclear family units. Teachers in the focus groups confirmed earlier observations concerning parental involvement in school events: parents were so busy that it was difficult for them to visit schools. The reason was that many of the parents were employed. However, their jobs were low wage and low skilled employment types that offered few benefits and little security. Thus, visiting the school required much planning to take time off from work to arrange for the visit. Moreover, parents felt anxious about visiting the school perceiving schools as institutions where they went only when there were problems to do with their children. Given such issues, it was not surmising that parents were always too busy to attend school events.

## b. Grandparents as guardians

Monasch and Boerma (2004:55-65) note that women are more likely to assume responsibility for their children, while grandparents were most likely to care for their grandchildren. According to the teachers, a number of children were under their grandparents' supervision. The reason given for this was the death of both parents from diseases such as HIV/AIDS or other causes. Single parents who were working and divorced or separated also left their children with the grandparents. Teenage pregnancies that occurred while the girl was at school resulted in the child being left with the grandparents, as the mother was still too young to care for the baby. A teacher from school B commented: "The nuclear families are the majority, but there were single parents, especially single mothers. We have few single fathers who are widowers, but cases of a father who chased the wife away are even fewer."

A case of a single father who was a widower was referred to by teachers from school E. Teachers observed that the challenge was how to care for such children, as the grandparents were not able to provide as much care as the parents for their children. They expressed the fear that such children were neglected and this was reflected in their poor performance and school attendance.

It was found that, in contrast with the traditional family, the family as the basic organising unit was under pressure. Poverty, overcrowding and instability were common, placing enormous strain on normal family relations. The employment of both parents to earn a living caused the further disruption of families. Although no school produced statistics to show the number of children living with their parents and grandparents, these findings indicated that a significant number of children did not live with their parents, but with their grandparents (Chisolm & Valley, 1996:37). According to Rajcoomar and Roper (2006), grandparents are emotionally, physically and financially unprepared for this task because of the lack of support from the extended family. Children in the care of grandparents were moreover likely to suffer neglect and double orphanhood when the grandparents themselves died (Booysen & Arntz, 2002:170-192).

## c. Gender of the parents involved

The majority of the interviewed parents were housewives. The mothers and other female caregivers were involved in education more than the fathers regardless of family or marital status were. A teacher from school G explained:

> Some parents work and leave in the morning and come [back] in the evening. For lunch, they ensure their children have carried packed food because they will be away the whole day. Such parents are away from home and when the teacher happens to send the child home to fetch them they are not there, or mostly the mother will come because fathers will not come to school.

For the most part, fathers were not very involved in the schools. A principal in school F noting that fathers left the care of children to the mothers had a strategy for involving all parents:

> We have a penalty for parents who do not attend. We agreed together with all parents that anyone who would not come to class meetings must pay a fine of fifty shillings. Since we all were together in agreement, all parents always do come. This has also made them willing to visit the school any time there are individual issues to do with their children. Even fathers must come if the mother can't attend!

A father from the same school explained: "Should you not come, we fear you must give a fine and nobody wants to lose that kind of money to the school."

Having discussed the effect of these factors on the involvement of parents in education, the proposals for an effective model for parental involvement in schools are presented in the section below.

**5.4.6 Implications of the foregoing for the implementation of an effective parental involvement programme for Kenyan public schools**

Pate and Andrews (2006:37) suggest that "parental involvement may be implemented as a stand-alone programme or as a component in comprehensive school-based programmes." In order to develop a long-range parental involvement plan, schools are required to establish and maintain respectful and productive relationships with families "to support the interaction of ideas and experiences centered on the learning of young people" (McEwin & Smith, 2005:94; Nesin & Brazee, 2005:42). In the following section, the researcher presents the data collected during the interviews and observations made briefly under several themes and offers recommendations.

*5.4.6.1 Teachers' perceptions of parental involvement*

It was apparent that teachers only had a limited understanding of parental involvement. Teachers did not know what parental involvement was, were not familiar with the techniques pertaining to parental involvement and they were also unaware of its benefits. Thus, they did not see it as their responsibility to teach parents how to be involved and they made ineffective attempts to teach them how to participate in their children's learning. Accordingly, they practised the Protective Model, consequently separating parents from the school. They felt, as noted by Doyle (2006:30), that engaging and involving parents was a challenge.

Teacher training did not include parental involvement as a training component and so the teachers and principals were unaware of it. Therefore, there was a need for teacher training programmes to offer new teachers strategies for parental involvement to enable them to work effectively with parents. Teachers have the potential to increase parental involvement effectively because of their exposure to the pupils in most communities and ultimately their

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parents and guardians. However, they expressed the need for additional subject-specific training. According to Jacobson (2005:5), teachers feel more comfortable and effective when they have had more training in a particular area. As noted by Birch and Hallock (1999), they feel the same about parental involvement in primary school education. Providing ongoing professional support and training for teachers in their work with parents as adult pupils is important. Teachers must learn that parents need to be treated with more deference than their children if they will be involved in school (Cooper, 2007:33). Because adult pupils prefer effective performance in their roles, effective parental involvement programmes should enable parents to do their jobs well as teachers of their children at home. Accordingly, effective parental involvement must mean that parents achieve success or feel good about their roles when working with their children so that school-related activities at home will not be frustrating but will rather be experienced as empowering to the parent. In-service training on working with families can help make parental involvement more effective by clarifying how and why parents can become involved.

### 5.4.6.2 Limited role for parents in schools

Parents' knowledge of parental involvement was limited because they did not have a complete understanding of the concept of 'parental involvement'. Moreover, teachers did not show them that they should be fully involved nor did they teach parents how to be involved either. Consequently, some parents felt that they had no role to play or had only a limited amount of responsibility regarding their children's education. Limited parental involvement was also a result of the following factors:

- Free primary education (FPE) absolved parents from playing a role (Kenya National Commission for UNESCO, 2005:62).

- Lack of confidence in some parents that they could contribute positively to their children's education.

  The protective theoretical stance of most schools.

Teachers encouraged parents to be involved in specific areas, such as the payment of levies, buying uniforms and coming to school to help solve discipline issues (Oketch *et al.,* 2007:6).

They also assigned homework for pupils to do at home, but most parents were not able to help their children with it. While schools recognised several roles for the parents, their crucial role in their children's education was not fully realised in Kenya. Swap (1993:29) indicates that many teachers hold that they are responsible for teaching, while the parents' duty is restricted at home where they should be involved with their children as pupils. However, the potential for a teacher-parent partnership in order to improve pupils' achievement and the family and the community resources that could be available to support schools was ignored.

Eldridge (2001:65-69) observes that parents will be involved to the degree that they see that supporting and enhancing their child's school achievement is part of their 'task as a parent, that they feel respected, that their time and efforts are acknowledged and if they are given training and guidance and practical support such as childcare and transportation assistance'. In essence, they would get involved to the extent that they felt they have the capacity to make a difference. Parents could learn new roles and skills but the desire and capacity to be involved was enhanced or limited by the barriers set up or opportunities afforded by schools and individual teachers (Jesse, 2002:23).

In terms of the School Impact Model, Gordon (1977:76) refers to the parents' impact on the school where the teachers and the parents learn from one another. Thus, the school becomes more attuned to the family culture leading to a better working relationship between parents and children enabling learning that is more effective. Following this model, parents were involved as volunteers or as advisors on parent advisory committees at the school in order to make the school become more responsive to the needs of the home.

Gordon (1977:59) further observes that parents can participate in a number of different roles as policy-makers, volunteers or paid workers in the school, as an audience, which requires informing them about school activities or summoning them to school as bystanders or observers, teachers of their own children and providing or contributing resources. Consequently, this type of parental involvement will influence not only parents' behaviour and children's work, but also the quality of the schools and communities with which families interact.

### 5.4.6.3 Teachers/parent relationships

According to Jackson and Andrews (2004) and McEwin and Smith (2005:94), in order to establish and maintain respectful and productive relationships with families so that the interaction of ideas and experiences centred on the learning of children can occur, the interaction between parents and teachers is crucial. Social relationships drive parents' perceptions of their children's school (Nesin & Brazee, 2005:42). Moreover, if there are barriers between parents and the teachers because of language, cultural and socio-economic differences parents become highly sensitive to how teachers treat them and their children. Teachers' ability to express sympathy and respect for children and their families was necessary for their effectiveness in the classroom and any family support they might need.

While schools were responsible for establishing open communication with parents, very few chances for home-to-school communication were availed to parents at these schools. Yet, the researcher learned that most teachers expected parents to communicate with the schools in "middle class ways," such as telephoning and visiting them. Although parents stated that their teachers were generally welcoming when they visited the schools, those interviewed in the focus groups indicated that they felt uneasy with school authority and they could not communicate comfortably with teachers. In addition, some did not have their own means of transport and could therefore not visit the school easily. Thus, schools needed alternative ways of connecting and communicating with parents. For example, the conventional annual general meetings (AGM) might be held at a community venue in the neighbourhood where families live rather than within the school grounds.

Furthermore, to enable the effective transfer of information and shared values, clear information about the school policies, programmes, expectations and assessment processes should be communicated to the parents (Project Apppleseed, 2008:4). A regular schedule of useful notices, memos, phone calls, newsletters, e-mails, conferences, parent forums and open houses can all be used (Society for the Advancement of Education, 2008).

According to Gordon (1977:72), the family and home are important for the child's lifelong development and parents require assistance with creating effective home environments for their children's development. For that reason, as Gordon (1977:74-78) proposes in the Parent or Family Impact Model, by means of home visits and other means of contact, schools can reach out and educate parents on effective parenting and supporting of their children's

education. Such visits to pupils' homes would improve communication between parents and the teachers because it would show that teachers cared about their children (Project Apppleseed, 2008:2).

Teachers could also visit a variety of meeting spaces (NMSA, 2003a:23) that allow for equitable access and are non-threatening environments such as community centres, churches and after-school programmes and they can attend cultural events that are held in school neighbourhoods. Such gestures may help break social barriers and foster understanding and respect between family and schools (Project Apppleseed, 2008:2).

Teachers should be sensitive to parents and should enlist their support as soon as it is needed. If parents felt that schools waited too long before notifying them of problems, they perceived that schools did not care about their child's success. Schools should have informed parents of behavioural and academic problems regularly. Moreover, teachers should have provided parents with positive feedback about their children to let them know when their children were doing well, because to most parents, calls from their children's schools often indicated a problem (Society for the Advancement of Education, 2008).

### 5.4.6.4 Homework

Coleman (1987:35) and Van Wyk (2008:14) state that schools and homes socialise the child through inputs such as the opportunities, demands and rewards that are provided by schools as one category of inputs and the intimate and more persistent environment offered by the family as the other category of inputs. The household's social environment is the foundation of the child's attitudes, efforts and conception of the self, that is, the child's attitudes towards and expectations regarding education, are rooted in the home, as well as its future effort towards achieving scholastic attainment.

All teachers should have learnt the importance of parental involvement in learner's education and ways to bring it about. Parents needed to understand that home assistance was productive only if the assistance remained positive and pleasant and they needed to be taught how to create situations in which children felt good about themselves as pupils (Anderson & Minke, 2007:311). Therefore, it was important to provide parents with homework tips such as encouraging them to talk with their children about the school assignment and to make sure

their children understood their assignments and being role models for their children by switching the television off in the evening and replacing that activity with reading and conversation and helping their children plan realistic schedules for short and long-term assignments and soliciting a homework coach to help their children with homework.

### 5.4.6.5 Policy on parental involvement

The Ministry of Education as the architect of policy in education is currently not aware of all the benefits of comprehensive parental involvement for schools, teachers, parents and the pupils. The MOE and the principals as the Ministry's agents in schools make many decisions. This excluded parents from being partners in their children's education, allowing them only a narrow role in decision-making. Swap (1993:27) asserts that teachers' reaching out to the parents is usually based on laid down policy, and not by their own individual inclination. This would also require that teachers, while receiving training on parental involvement. develop a definite policy setting out school strategies for active parental involvement. Additionally, schools required a policy that encouraged parental involvement and prevented all hindrances to parental involvement. Teachers and parent teams needed to address and discuss existing barriers that kept parents from the school, allowing parents to volunteer and work with teachers in the classrooms. They should also have addressed cultural and language barriers.

Parents needed to cooperate with teachers and help their children to improve the quality of education. They also needed to be educated regarding their roles and responsibilities as parents. The government should therefore have provided clear guidelines on the roles of the teachers and parents. This called for the MOEST to send out circulars regularly to inform schools, teachers, parents and the community what they should do. Use should be made of the mass media and local leaders to inform parents and the community what was expected of them. This would help to eliminate any misconceptions and all parties would act in an informed way (Kenya National Commission for UNESCO, 2005:211).

### 5.4.6.6 Government grants and school budgeting

Teachers and SMC members admitted that they had not accomplished much since the FPE system started because government grants came late and this made planning of the budget difficult. When FPE commenced, school improvement projects came to a standstill. Payment

of workers was impossible, and other aspects such as the installation of toilets and electricity came to a standstill. Planning was, as is the case today, difficult due to delays in the government fund disbursement, while parents did not want to contribute anything because they regarded education as free. One principal lamented, "We still have buildings that require repairs but we cannot do anything on them because the government outlawed 'harambees' community drives to collect funds."

Furthermore, many schools found themselves with more pupils than they could handle and the principals had to turn many children away because of limited space and facilities (Republic of Kenya, 2004b:9). Many parents were disappointed and they kept moving from one school to another in search of places for their children. Since the government had not set an age limit, even "over-aged" pupils were enrolled and this worsened the congestion in schools (Kenya National Commission for UNESCO, 2005:8). While there is consensus that FPE was an appropriate policy addressing the problem of declining primary school enrolment in Kenya, school principals were required to implement the FPE policy without prior preparation. Furthermore, the government was not ready to implement the policy at such short notice (Kenya National Commission for UNESCO, 2005:8).

Therefore, parents should have been encouraged to take the education of their children seriously and should have been given opportunities to provide facilities such as classrooms, toilets and desks. In addition, they should have replaced lost or damaged textbooks. In the previous era (that is, before FPE), schools drew up the budget and parents knew for what the money would be used. Thus, the government, in addition to prompt disbursement of funds to schools would be required to consider each school's particular situation as well as its needs. Accordingly, different allocations should have been given to each school in terms of its needs and priorities. This would have allowed for the planning to be carried out early. The government policy should have provided for the way in which the parents could contribute to and own the school. One way would be to cover the expenses for the construction and maintenance of buildings and other school structures.

### 5.4.6.7 Discipline in schools

Increased enrolment in schools because of FPE compounded the discipline problem. Together

with the issue regarding over-age pupils, some of whom were recalcitrant and difficult to handle and the problem of large numbers of pupils in classrooms, it was not possible to maintain discipline in schools. Moreover, the MOEST banned corporal punishment and directed schools to establish guidance and counselling offices to deal with discipline among other issues pertaining to the pupils (Republic of Kenya, 2009:iii). Teachers were not adequately prepared to provide counselling and in the absence of caning, they were handicapped.

Teachers required in-service training concerning new ways of instilling discipline without using corporal punishment. They needed guidance/counselling training, especially with regard to dealing with over-age pupils (Kenya National Commission for UNESCO, 2005:275). Parents and the communities needed to cooperate with teachers on matters of discipline by teaching them good manners and morals. In most cases, parents spent little time with their children at home and they expected teachers to instil discipline at school. In fact, partnerships between schools and the community agencies should have been developed to tackle this problem effectively (Guelzloe, 2000:22).

### 5.4.6.8 Curricular issues

As Bhering (2002:227) observes, while teachers acknowledged the need for parental involvement and claimed to have partnership with parents, they did not see parents as competent enough to be involved in all aspects of the school activities. Although the teachers'and parents' roles were clearly defined, the teachers determined the roles of the parents. For instance, parents did not teach in classes nor did they get involved in curricular matters. Since parents were not sure how much the government was doing and what their responsibilities were in FPE, it was clear that guidelines concerning the roles of all stakeholders should have been clarified. Kreider (2000:13) asserts that parents need to be involved in partnerships so that teachers can benefit from their resources and advice in order for both parties to pursue their common mission. For instance, they are required to supplement school items such as building new classrooms and toilets for pupils. They should also have paid for extra tuition to help improve the quality of learning and instil discipline in their children (Kenya National Commission for UNESCO, 2005:79). However, the government should have been clear regarding the role and responsibilities of the parents.

Moreover, schools should have empowered parents in curricular matters rather than sidelining them.

### 5.4.6.9 The role of the SMC

Since the institution of FPE, provided teaching materials and other facilities, the SMC's role had declined. Previously, this body had organised funds collection for running and maintenance of the school facilities (Kenya National Commission for UNESCO, 2005**:**74). Thus, it used to meet often and regularly. With FPE, the MOEST's effort to involve parents in school management had not succeeded because the government sent funds to schools detailing how they would be spent and the SMC members received no agenda for them to discuss, thus no need for meetings (Education News, 2011:6). One SMC member complained: "Since there is no longer any stipend paid after meetings, members are no longer seen in the school since the beginning of FPE."

There was a need for the SMC to meet regularly with the parents to enlighten them regarding the importance of education and what was needed to sustain FPE. This was because according to the Daily News (2010), even with FPE, six million children of school going age dropped out of school before the expected time. Chikama (2011:7) suggests that to improve this situation, schools need to reach out to parents through the SMC, to engage low income families especially who might not feel comfortable with the school.

The relationship of the school and the SMC was strained: although parent members in the SMC had bigger representation in terms of numbers (see 3.4.2), they had little say in decision-making. There was therefore a need for both parties to understand that they were in partnership and not in competition. It should have served as the link between parents and teachers uniting them over issues in the school as well as educating all parents regarding their responsibilities since they communicated better than teachers with the other parents. The members of the SMC should have volunteered to work without expecting payment or an allowance when they attended meetings. Since the government was providing textbooks and other facilities, parents and the community members should have catered for the rest of the needs that the government funds were unable to cover.

The SMC should also have helped to identify children who were out of school and encouraged

them to attend. It could also help deal with difficult pupils and assist with discipline. The committee could also deal with problematic parents, such as those who neglected their children by not feeding them or not buying them school uniforms. It could also look for money and sponsors for assisting with school improvements. In addition, it should have worked with the principal to compile the school budget.

### 5.4.6.10 The local community and education

Community participation involved identifying and integrating resources or services from the community to strengthen school programmes, family practices and children's learning and development (Project Appleseed, 2008:7). In essence, schools enjoyed little community involvement. The interviews indicated that teachers focussed on the parents of pupils in their own school only and not on the community at large. The church was the only means of involving the community in schools. However, this only applied in the case of church-sponsored schools such as school D. Only certain schools, such as school A, made use of the local community library. The community concept as interpreted and practised by schools was confined to the neighbourhood where the learners' homes were located and which influenced learning and development. It meant that those who were interested in and were affected by the quality of education were not just those with children in the school.

Comer, Haynes and Joyner's (1996:24) School Development Programme views the child as part of the family unit, the neighbourhood as well as the community and not only as an individual. The model provides a framework within which teachers, parents and community members can work together. The schools that were visited did not make concerted efforts to involve families, and they viewed the child in isolation and not as part of the family and community. Epstein *et al*. (1997:8) advises integration with the community by partnerships involving the school, civic, cultural, health organisations and business.

According to Mnyaka (2006:26), excellent schools have long traditions of working cooperatively with their community and schools and families take joint ownership of the school property. The community is an integral part of Swap's partnership model and schools, parents and the community must have a shared sense of mission about creating success for all the children.

*5.4.6.11 Information about community services*

Community involvement was hindered by factors such as a narrow definition of the community, which resulted in little attention being paid to involving the community resources that were available. A further problem was the negative attitudes towards community involvement. In the schools visited, even when there were instances of social problems in families, there was no record that such problems had been reported to services in the community for assistance.

According to Epstein *et al*. (1997:8), the community is one of the overlapping spheres of influence on pupils' learning and development in the theoretical model of partnerships. In practice, schools are required to provide information to pupils and families on community health, cultural, recreational social support and community activities that are linked to learning skills and talents.

On the other hand, community leaders should have educated parents on the importance of education (Republic of Kenya, 2001:114). They should have taught parents what FPE was all about and they should have enlightened the community on what the government could do through holding forums to educate the community about FPE (Kenya National Commission for UNESCO, 2005:67). Local community members could raise concerns when children were not in school and ensured that all children were in school, even those with special needs. Community leaders should also have provided care and support to orphans who needed assurance that someone was helping them. Chiefs could assist in maintaining discipline, especially for pupils who got drunk and took drugs (Kenya National Commission for UNESCO, 2005:67).

Church leaders could provide guidance and counselling to pupils along with spiritual support. This could help to ensure that under-age pupils did not drop out of school because of marriage and child employment. The benefits accruing from this could be wide-ranging. Pupils could be linked to programmes, services, resources and opportunities within their community and they could become aware of careers and options for future education and work.

This would lead to pride in community leadership and the latter's own contribution to the community. For parents, there could be increased knowledge about the use of local resources

by the family and the child to improve their skills and talents; or how to obtain required services; family pride in and contributions to community; interactions with other families in community activities and an awareness of the school's role in the community and community support and contributions to the school. For teachers, there is an awareness of the community resources to enrich curriculum and instruction, openness to using mentors, business partners, community volunteers and others to assist learning and teaching practice. Additionally, knowledgeable and helpful referrals of children and families to needed services could be achieved.

After presenting the summarised research findings, the researcher described a model for parental involvement in the next section.

## 5.5 A PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT MODEL FOR KENYA

According to Raja and Burnett (2004:5):

> The fundamental value that parents put on education is based on the following factors: cost of that education, the expected long term benefits in terms of gainful employment, quality of the available education (which affects the returns that can be expected), the family's income, and the parent/guardian's assessment of the pupil's innate ability and the value of the pupil's time now in productive activities inside and outside the home (that is the child's opportunity cost of schooling.

These are the major influences that drive the parent's desire to be involved in the education of the pupil. The innate efficacy in dealing with parents, the school's policy and resources for parental involvement are the factors that impact on the extent of parental involvement by the schools. However, schools' and teachers' approach to the involvement of parents is crucial because parents will become involved in the school to the extent that they feel they are invited, are given an opportunity by the school to be involved and they have been made to feel effective in helping the pupil (Anderson & Minke, 2007:311; Epstein, 1995:703; Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2007:535). Figure 5.1 shows the interrelationships between these factors.
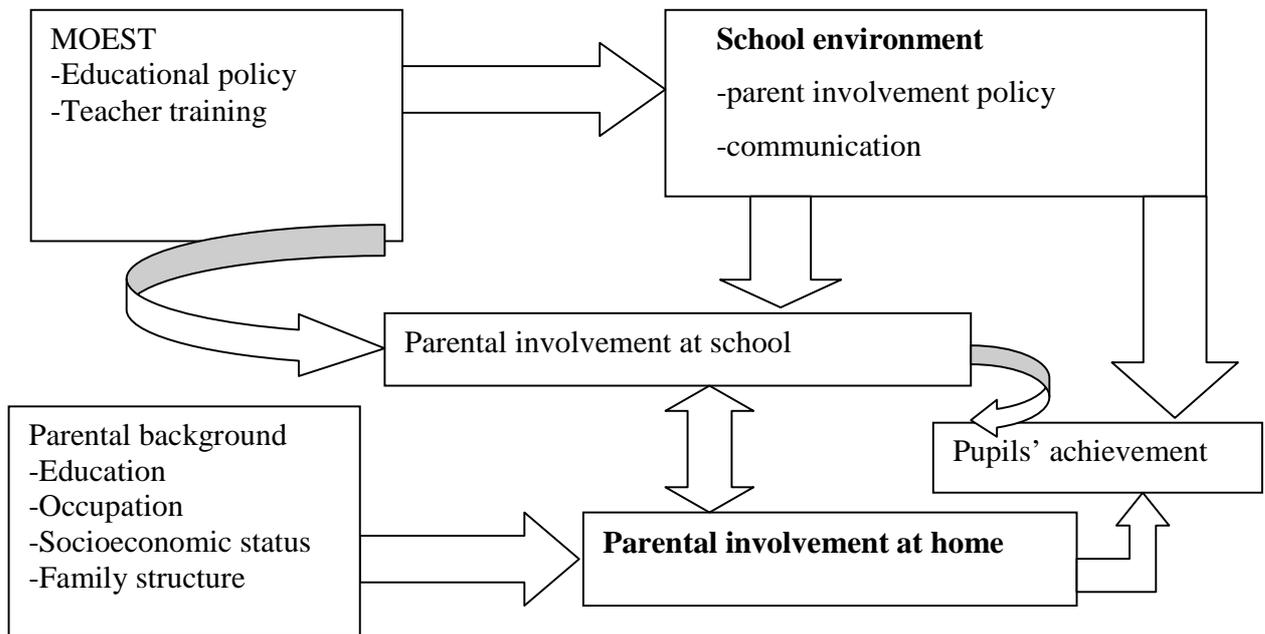
**Figure 5. 1 The model of the relationships among family/parental**

Figure 5.1 depicts parental involvement as a progression requiring intervention in terms of three fundamental elements, representing the key stakeholders that play vital roles in order to increase the educational outcomes of pupils. These are represented as they relate to each other by means of the arrows. Certain specific conditions need to be addressed to improve the parental involvement pertaining to each element. The detailed descriptions of how the stakeholders should relate to effect and sustain parental involvement are described in the next sub-sections.

- **Ministry of Education**

An education policy has a large impact on the practice of parental involvement at schools (Epstein, 1987:5). Epstein (1987:7) observes that the first step towards instituting a practical parental involvement programme is designing specific policy for parental involvement which should specify the government's perspectives, services, requirements and expectations concerning parental involvement. In Kenya, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology spells out education policy (Republic of Kenya, 2008:16). The policy provides guidelines to schools on the syllabus, timetable, fees paid in schools by parents, appointment of teachers, teacher training, and quality of education. For effective parental involvement

policy makers would require to adopt Swap's Partnership Model of parental involvement (see 2.2.2.3). In Kenya, most schools adopted Swap's Protective Model (see 5.4.1.1). However, regarding communication, teachers applied the Swap's School-to-Home Transmission Model (see 5.4.3.3). Swap (1993:37) notes that: "If the experiences of school personnel are positive over time and good relationships are developed through sustained contact, school personnel's control over programmes may give way to a more comfortable and mutual exchange of ideas and joint planning." In addition, it is recommended that the policy should be comprehensive enough to include all six Epstein's types of involvement, which would provide a variety of opportunities for Kenyan parents to be involved in their children's education.

Moreover, the Ministry of Education should decentralise many of its decision-making powers to the individual schools. The policy should require principals, teachers and parents to make decisions together pertaining to the curriculum, teaching methods, staffing requirements and discipline. For successful implementation, policy must be communicated effectively to schools and backed by adequate resources (5.4.3.2). Epstein (1991:348) recommends that that school districts employ parental involvement facilitators, who would promote parental involvement by guiding teachers, providing in-service training for teachers and offering services to parents. This could be applied in Kenya by having one such facilitator in each education zone who would offer in-service training to teachers in his/her respective zones. While many alternatives exist, financial bonuses or awards from the Ministry of Education based on the recommendations of head teachers and the parental involvement facilitators may serve to help motivate teachers. All the teachers interviewed were very committed but their lack of knowledge of parental involvement was the cause for little effort made by them to encourage parental involvement (5.4.1.1). Thus, it is recommended that teacher certification requires the completion of a course in parental involvement and that teachers receive in-service training in parental involvement. These courses should have both an applied and a theoretical component (Comer, 1987:14).

- **Teacher training**

Kenya's teachers should be informed about different parental involvement activities and their benefits (5.4.1.1). They should be taught that it is their responsibility to involve parents so that they view the diversity of families as an asset and not a challenge. Therefore, training is

needed on how to implement activities that would encourage parental involvement and create learning opportunities for pupils, while parents must be supported in order to develop their power of learning, teaching and decision making to be able to work effectively with the schools to improve their children (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001:188). A comprehensive pre-service or in-service parental involvement course that provides all teachers with the knowledge, understanding, skills and confidence they require to involve all parents successfully, is required for all teachers (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2007). Moreover, they should be taught to implement various strategies to encourage parental involvement (Tichenor, 1998:256). As Lemmer (2007:227) found in her study, parental involvement is a cost-effective and feasible way to improve the culture of teaching and learning in schools (chapter 5 section 5.4.1.2).

- **The school environment**

In terms of the model of various relationships, the school environment refers to an invitation by teachers for parents to become involved as well as how valued and welcome parents feel in the school environment and the direct requests from the teacher and the pupils to pay a visit to the school. Such a situation requires the creation of a welcoming and responsive school atmosphere, communication practices that ensure that parents are well informed about their children's progress, school requirements and school events as well as conveying respect for and responsiveness to parental questions and suggestions (Christenson, 2004:89; Green *et al.* 2007:538). For a positive and trustworthy school climate for supporting parental involvement, the school policy and communication need to be addressed.

- **Parental involvement policy**

Although parental involvement is important for the quality of education, the role of parents in education in Kenya was mostly limited to the long-established agenda such as attending parent-teacher meetings and receiving information from schools. Schools did not have a defined parental involvement policy, which could set down strategies on how parents would be involved. In addition, the teachers were unaware of strategies such as parenting workshops, home visits, parent volunteers and homework packages pertaining to home activities. This limited the formal opportunities in schools available to parents to become involved in the

education of their children. The first step in improving parental involvement would be making a school-wide commitment to build strong home and school ties. This increases the likelihood of finding strategies that will increase parental participation. Each school should formulate its own policy on involving and assisting parents, which must be communicated to them (Cullingford & Morrison, 1999:253). The policy should be the guide on how to implement the parental involvement programme based on the unique needs of the school's community. The programme aims to engage parents through a number of activities that enable them to participate more fully in their children's education both at home and at school (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

Deslandes and Bertrand (2004:412) have stated that parents decide to participate in the schooling of their children if they feel that they have the right skills, if invited to participate by the teachers and if the teachers understand their parental roles. At home, schools should help the parents by teaching them better child rearing skills for effective parenting. For instance, teachers could pay home visits to help families of pupils understand the schools as well as to enable the schools to understand the families (Epstein & Sheldon, 2005:7). Overall, providing clear information on parenting through documents, workshops, discussion groups, videotapes or classes to all the parents would be important (2.3.1.1).

Schools should also assist parents by stressing learning at home. Because it is easier for all parents to be involved in home learning activities and since these activities are particularly effective in improving children's grades (2.3.4.1), it is recommended that these activities be emphasised. Therefore, they should teach parents how to enhance schoolwork by instructing their children at home on academic tasks and time management (De Planty, Coulter-Kern & Duchane, 2007:361).

Other areas of parental involvement that occur in the school setting are also important. Using volunteers was a novel idea in schools as it was difficult for parents to accept ownership of the school, perceiving education as belonging to the teachers (2.2.2.3). In her study, Bassani (2008:58) finds that parents who are allowed to volunteer in class develop a sense of belonging in the classroom and their behaviour tends to change so that they are more actively involved in the academic development of their own children at home. Moreover, they help all pupils actively in the class (and not only their own children), develop stronger parent-teacher

relationships than they previously had and help out more within the school (through field trip participation and with general school events). Accordingly, parents should be allowed opportunities for volunteer*ing* as classroom aides, in social activities and as members of the school management committee in order to develop a higher degree of ownership in programmes.

Involvement in decision-making enables parents to feel a sense of ownership of the school and ensures a better fit between the needs of the children and the school policy (2.3.5.1). When parents participate actively in school decision-making, they can foster improvements in school performance and school/community relationships and can contribute more effectively to community development (Shatkin & Gershberg, 2007:582). Naidoo (2005:37) observes that such parents can be used to good effect to help with the determination of the budget, school discipline, staffing, curriculum, school policy, teaching strategies, school programmes and student allocation to different types of schools and programmes.Because parents wanted little to do with decision-making, an advisory role in terms of decisions should be allotted to the parents. This would allow them to see themselves as decision-makers and make the transition to partnership possible. Consequently, it is recommended that the education policy should be amended to ensure that school management committees are no longer allowed to disregard parents by making unilateral decisions. Parents should be given an opportunity to air their views publicly at these meetings and express their opinions through votes or surveys. Decisions based on the opinions of the majority of parents should then be adopted unless these are contrary to the professional judgment of the majority of teachers and the rationale for them should always be explained to the parent body.

Lastly, schools should collaborate with the community components to utilise community resources to strengthen school programmes. In Kenya, involvement of the wider community in schools was limited because they relied mainly on government and parental support (see 3.5). The schools studied operated in virtual isolation from their wider communities and interaction only occurred between schools and their parent communities or religious communities (5.4.3.6). Only rarely were members of the community called to give guidance and counselling to the pupils during the occasional meetings.

It is recommended that partnerships should be established between the community and the

school for the benefit of both parties. In effect, school principals, families and members of the community should work together specifically to meet the needs of pupils and their families. For instance, schools should organise services for the community and families through the pupils, in terms of art, music, drama, and other activities. Pupils could also contribute to their communities by visiting hospitalised children and the aged, collecting litter on village and town streets and engaging in tree planting for the community while the alumni may also be invited to participate in school activities in order to link school programmes with the community (Epstein & Sheldon, 2005:8). Moreover, school facilities should also be made available to the community for social, fundraising and educational events.

There are many religious groups, businesses, and non-government organisations and all schools should invite members of these organisations frequently to do presentations to the learners on various subjects such as life skills and career opportunities. Further, local businesses could also be approached to donate materials and equipment that may have educational value to schools, such as books, computers, amongst others items. Volunteer tutors in various subjects could also be sought from the local community and the school could ask experts in the community to help train pupils in various life skills.

The parental involvement policy should be created by the combined efforts of the principal, the teachers and all parents working together (Edwards & Warin, 1999:337). Epstein (1995:708) recommends that each school should have an action team, comprising some teachers and some parents with children from different classes in the school tasked with drawing up of guidelines as well as the implementing of that policy. It is essential that this team should be truly representative of teachers and parents for them to have a sense of ownership of the policy to become involved in its implementation (Lawson, 2003:113). Furthermore, according to Rasinski (in Monadjem, 2003:352), giving parents a meaningful role during the development of this partnership is vital for the success of parental involvement. This would require the entire parent body to availed itself of the opportunity to modify the policy before it is finalised. Importantly, the school policy should outline the responsibilities, rights and duties of parents and teachers clearly and it should be communicated to all those involved effectively and regularly. A sense of equality, trust and respect accorded to the parents enables them to feel more empowered, knowledgeable and

motivated, leading to more active participation (Mannan, Poston & Wang, 2004:146).

As is the case with the education policy, the school policy must clarify the guidelines explicitly for the practice of each of Epstein's six types of involvement for its successful implementation. Such guidelines would include an outline of the goals targeted for each of the six types of involvement and an outline of the precise activities to be implemented in terms of definite time periods and the persons to implement them (Epstein, 1995:709). The policy should be revised continuously to improve parental involvement and include the beliefs and circumstances of new pupils, parents and teachers. Moreover, the parental involvement team should schedule meetings for the entire parent body at least twice a year to communicate its goals and progress and receive reactions from the parent body (Epstein, 1995:709).

- **Communication**

Two-way communication is essential for successful parental involvement programme (2.3.2.1). Epstein (1995:704) suggests that most schools should send written information to parents. In fact, this did take place in the schools that participated in the study (5.4.3.3). However, the written information was mainly to inform parents of problems requiring their attention. Yet, this did little to enhance parents' understanding of what actually happened in the classroom. Parents needed to be made to understand that it was not enough for them to respond to written communication from the school as personal communication with the teacher was equally vital (Bridgemohan, 2002:31). Both parents and teachers should realise that all parents have a vast amount of knowledge about their children's skills, interests and backgrounds that should be communicated to the teachers. In addition to having an open-door policy, the school, must create opportunities for parents to communicate this information and should provide many formal and informal occasions for teachers to meet with and talk to parents. Such opportunities should enable teachers and parents to communicate personally at teacher-parent meetings, SMC meetings, sports, cultural and social events and workshops. Schools should ensure that the flow of reports and frequent effective written notes to parents be maintained . In addition, it is recommended that each child should carry a communication book, which would be used by parents and teachers to communicate with each other.

Most parents have hand phones and can access teachers. Therefore, the latter should make their telephone numbers available to parents and encourage them to phone them at times agreed upon in order to cause few interruptions to teaching. In addition, Stouffer (in Monadjem, 2003:356) recommends that schools send out regular newsletters to parents and that both parents and teachers monitor daily or weekly check-sheets for learner progress. These are inexpensive but effective methods of communication. Furthermore, this should include the topics being studied and information about all events occurring at the school. This information gives the parents the knowledge and confidence they require to help their children, and make suggestions and contributions to the school (Epstein, 1986:288).

Home visits are recommended for parents who live far from school and are difficult to reach in other ways. Furthermore, when dealing with parents of pupils who are at-risk, there is often a tendency to focus on the family "dysfunction" as the cause of the child's problems. Therefore, schools should realise that all families have strengths, and mutual relationships are best nurtured by emphasising those strengths, rather than contacting parents only when their children do poorly in classwork or when they have behavioural problems. Schools should ensure parents are informed meticulously about every aspect of their child's education (Lopez, Scribner & Mahitivanichcha, 2001:263). For instance, a simple strategy to increase trust would be to begin to correspond with parents when their child does something positive in the school or classroom.

All communications should be polite, respectful, warm and friendly so that the parents feel valued and welcome at the school. For example, parents should never get the impression that parent-teacher meetings are functions where they must account for the failures of their children. Finally, it is recommended that because sometimes only one of the two parents is highly involved (5.4.4.11), teachers must ensure that they maintain contact with both the mother and the father or the guardian. All these persons must receive all the communications from the school and be invited to communicate with the teachers.

- **Parental background factors**

In terms of the model, parental background refers to factors such as the educational levels, occupations and socio-economic status of the parents (as shown in chapter three, sections

3.9.3 and 3.9.5). The key variables that influence parental involvement growth and hence, the capacity of developing pupils' achievement, were teachers' skills and parents' life contexts (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005; Hong & Ho, 2005; Yamtim, Wongwanich & Suwanmonkh, 2006:5). This implies that teachers are capable of promoting parental involvement in their children's education.

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997:8) observe that schools cannot hope to counteract the factors pertaining to the parents' background entirely, but they may influence selected parental variables in order to increase parental involvement, which is instrumental in pupils' achievement at school. Therefore, it is important for principals and teachers to respect both the parents and families irrespective of their socio-economic status and to obtain parents' perspectives and not disregard them. In addition, schools need to have programmes that recognise the time and energy constraints experienced by parents by according flexible times to meetings.

Steps must be taken to ensure that all parents, particularly fathers, realise that their involvement will benefit their children and that their role in their children's education is important and irreplaceable. Parents should not simply be told that they must be involved; the school should rather help build their confidence regarding their ability to help their children. Workshops that explain the nature and benefits of parental involvement and that provide parents with the specific skills needed to feel confident and for their effective involvement are recommended (2.2.2.1). Jantjes (in Monadjem, 2003:67) advises that parents should be reminded of their responsibilities once or twice a year. The workshops could be organised and led by the parental involvement facilitator, the parent-involvement team and the teachers.

Being responsive to family and community needs is important. The chances of getting parents to visit schools can be increased significantly by making the activities and meetings responsive to the needs of families. For instance, meetings should be scheduled for times that parents can attend and care should be taken that meetings are free of professional jargon that may be unfamiliar to parents. Furthermore, Epstein (1988:58) emphasises the importance of schools showing parents that their involvement is permitted and encouraged. Although most schools had an open-door policy and parents felt welcome (Barrera & Warner, 2006:72), it is recommended that each school literally make room for parents by establishing a 'parent room'

at school where parents can discuss ideas and obtain information and resources (Epstein, 1991:349). All parents should feel that the school is a good place both for them as well as for their children.

## 5.6 CONCLUSIONS ON PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOLS

The data revealed that the teachers and parents who participated in the interviews were extremely concerned about their children's education. Although the teachers indicated that they welcomed the visits of parents to the school and while parents felt that the schools did not stop their visiting, the study indicated that there was limited parental involvement in public primary schools. Schools and parents did not understand what parental involvement entailed and were unaware of the full benefits of involvement beyond activities such as fundraising for the schools, solving pupils' discipline problems and attending the occasional annual general meetings (AGMs).

Various factors seem to cause problems regarding the involvement of parents, namely, the lack of a functional policy in schools on parental involvement, the illiteracy of many parents in the community, parental work commitments, time constraints, means of transport to school, the gendered nature of parental involvement and the lack of parenting skills among the parents. On the other hand, teachers had not been trained to promote parental involvement or even to work with adults, such as their pupils' parents; consequently, they were not in the position to suggest a variety of ways in which parents could be involved in the school. Moreover, they offered little assistance to parents to improve their parenting skills. As a result, they did not view involving parents as either their responsibility or part of their role, made little attempt to teach parents how to be involved, and were willing to allow their schools to apply the Protective Model by keeping the school and parents separated.

The lack of teacher training on parental involvement is attributable to the Ministry of Education itself, which is unaware of the benefits of comprehensive parental involvement. This implies that the education policy only allows for a limited role to be played by parents in Kenyan schools. Moreover, the inclusion of many educational decisions in the mandate of the Ministry of Education effectively prevents most parents from being partners in their children's education by excluding them from most decision-making.

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Parents are their children's most influential teachers. Home efforts by the parents in terms of their children's education can greatly improve pupils' achievement. However, when parents find themselves in a vulnerable position or experience handicapping conditions often characterised by poverty, illiteracy, single parenthood or foster parenthood, they may be less able to meet the challenge of providing the support their children need to succeed in school and in life.

Although little parental involvement currently occurs at public primary schools, a number of factors favour the implementation of a programme of parental involvement. The positive factors that promote parental involvement include good relationships between teachers and parents, having similar values and exhibiting positive attitudes towards each other. The study also showed that teacher education programmes must strive to help prospective teachers learn about the families and backgrounds of their pupils. Moreover, parental involvement programmes should consider the various parental backgrounds in adapting strategies for parental involvement to the needs of all parents. In the Kenyan context, by showing the particularly important association between the Kenyan school and family environments/background with parental involvement, the present study supports the educational reform movement encouraging schools to engage parents more intimately in shared responsibilities (European Commission, 2000:10; Mestry & Grobler, 2007:179; Naidoo, 2005:28).

Chapter 6 presents recommendations for a parental involvement programme for Kenyan public primary schools based on the qualitative findings and conclusions revealed in the current chapter, and the literature review (see Chapters 2 & 3).

**CHAPTER 6**

**SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

**6.1 INTRODUCTION**

Chapter six presents a summary of the study, including the conclusions derived from both the literature review and from the findings of the study. It also includes recommendations, suggestions for further research and the limitations of the study. The aim of this study was to investigate parental involvement in public primary schools in Kenya. Individual interviews and focus group discussions were used to obtain accounts of the experiences of nine principals, seventy teachers and forty-three parents at selected schools. Furthermore, observations of the individual schools enabled the researcher to develop further descriptions of the schools. In chapter one, a brief introduction and a short account of education in Kenya were given. Chapter two provided a synopsis of parental involvement in education, which was obtained from both global and local literature. Furthermore, chapter three presented an outline of parental involvement in education in the Kenyan situation. In chapter four, the qualitative design and methodology were described. In addition, chapter five presented the findings of the study in relation to the research question. The purpose of this chapter was to present a summary of the study, to formulate conclusions and to suggest recommendations based on the research results.

**6.2 SUMMARY**

This study set out to explore the lived experiences of principals, teachers and parents at Kenyan public primary schools (section 1.4). In addition, this study was initiated by a brief introduction of the concept of 'parental involvement' in education, as well as the benefits accruing from this involvement and the relevance of parental involvement in terms of Kenya's education (section 1.1). A brief overview of parental involvement in education in Kenya was presented in section 1.2 followed by a brief history of the Kenyan education sector (section 1.3). The theoretical framework, on which this study was based, was expounded on in section 1.5. Accordingly, the main research problem was formulated as follows*: How can an effective parental involvement programme be designed to benefit Kenyan public primary*

*school pupils optimally, their parents and teachers?* (see section 1.6). Consequently, the aim of this study was to develop recommendations for the design of an effective parental involvement programme suited to Kenyan public primary schools so that pupils, teachers and parents would derive the greatest possible benefits from the implementation of this programme (section 1.7). An overview of the qualitative research design including sampling, data collection, data analysis and presentation was provided in section 1.8 and the terminology was defined in the next section, 1.9. In addition, the organisation of the chapters was provided in section 1.10 and chapter one ended with a brief conclusion (section 1.11).

Chapter two focussed on the international literature on parental involvement. In this regard, a theoretical framework on parental involvement was presented (section 2.2) and theories of parental involvement were investigated (section 2.2.2). Epstein's typology of parental involvement was outlined (section 2.3) and a research agenda for parental involvement was proposed in section 2.4. Chapter two closed with a summary in section 2.5 where chapter three was also introduced.

Chapter three was an extension of the literature review, which placed the study in the Kenyan context. The chapter opened with a brief introduction (section 3.1) after which an overview of the education system in Kenya was provided (section 3.2). Section 3.2.1 paid specific attention to the socio-economic background regarding the Kenyan context and the structure of the education system as it is at present. The history of parental involvement in education was discussed followed by a brief discussion of parental involvement in the free primary education (FPE) era (section 3.3). Accordingly, the evolution of the education policy (3.4), including the parental involvement policy (section 3.5) and its limitations (section 3.6), were presented. The challenges facing FPE (3.7) and specifically education in the study area of the Embu West district (section 3.8) were discussed followed by an outline of the factors influencing primary education and parental involvement (section 3.9).

Chapter four provided a framework for the research design and methodology selected for this study. The chapter detailed how the study was undertaken, the selection of the schools and the participants for the interviews, the instruments used, the data collection procedures and the method of data analysis. After the introduction (section 4.1), the research question (section 4.2) and the aim (section 4.3) were also outlined. A qualitative design was considered appropriate as it enabled the investigation of the research problem (section 4.4). In section

4.5, the ethical measures were discussed in detail, including informed consent (section 4.5.1), confidentiality and anonymity (section 4.5.2), deception and privacy of the participants (section 4.5.3) and competence of the researcher (section 4.5.4). The measures to ensure trustworthiness were presented in section 4.6 followed by the data collection techniques (section 4.7). An outline of the qualitative research instruments appeared in section 4.7.1, for example, the sampling techniques (section 4.7.2) used to select the schools (section 4.7.2.1). A second qualitative research instrument entailed focus group discussions and face-to-face interviews with teachers and parents (section 4.7.2.2). Semi-structured interviews (section 4.7.2.4, Appendices IX, X and XI), and observations (section 4.7.3, Appendix VI) enabled the collection of the data required for this study. Furthermore, the data analysis (section 4.8) and the presentation of the data (section 4.9) were explained and a brief summary of the chapter was provided (section 4.10).

In the sections that follow, the conclusions drawn from the literature study (chapter two and chapter three) were initially discussed. Subsequently, a summary of the findings obtained from the lived experiences of the principals, teachers and parents (chapter five) was provided.

## 6.3 SUMMARY OF EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

The transcribed individual interviews and field notes were analysed and the emerging themes were listed. Each theme generated several categories, which, in turn, contained sub-categories. The following were the main themes and their emerging sub-categories:

### 6.3.1 Principals' and teachers' perceptions of parental involvement in schools (section 5.4.1)

The principals and teachers had shared perceptions regarding parental involvement in their schools. Three categories emerged from this theme and they enabled the exploration of the following sub-categories:

- Principals' and teachers' understanding of parental involvement and its benefits (section 5.4.1.1).

- Teachers' preparation for parental involvement (section 5.4.1.2).

- Parental involvement policy in schools (section 5.4.1.3)

## 6.3.2 Parents' perceptions of their involvement in schools

This theme generated one category. The parents shared their perceptions on their own involvement in schools. From the category it was possible to determine:

- Parental understanding of their involvement in school and its benefits (section 5.4.2.1).

## 6.3.3 Schools' attempts to involve parents in their children's education

This theme explored the opportunities that schools provided for involvement by the parents, how parents took advantage of the availed opportunities to become involved and whether they were involved in their children's education on their own initiative and not in ways dictated by the teachers and schools (section 5.4.3). Parents' and teachers' beliefs regarding the involvement of parents were also analysed and the data were then sorted according to Epstein's six types of parental involvement (Epstein, 1995: 704), namely, parenting, volunteering, communication, learning at home, decision-making and collaboration with the community. The following categories emerged:

### 6.3.3.1 Parents' and teachers' view of parenting (section 5.4.3.1)

Two subcategories emerged:

a. Parental awareness of their parenting obligations

b. Teachers' views on parenting

### 6.3.3.2 Volunteering at school (section 5.4.3.2)

Five sub-categories were studied:

a.  Teachers' attitude to parent volunteers in class

b.  Parental assistance to schools

c.  Parental involvement in pupils' discipline

d.  Parental attendance at social events

e.  Teachers' attitude to involving parents at social events

### 6.3.3.3 Communication between home and school (section 5.4.3.3)

This category generated four sub-categories, namely:

a. The need for communication as perceived by teachers and parents.

b. Types of communication.

c. Frequency of parental visits to schools.

d. Parent-teacher meetings

### 6.3.3.4 Learning activities at home (section 5.4.3.4)

Three sub-categories emerged from this category as follows:

a. Parents and home discussions

b. Mothers' involvement with learning at home

c. School support for home learning

### 6.3.3.5 Parental involvement in decision-making (section 5.4.3.5)

Four sub-categories were derived from this category:

a. The school management committees (SMCs)

b. Role of the SMC

c. The school instructional materials selection committee (SIMSC).

d. Role of the SIMSC

### 6.3.3.6 Schools' collaboration with communities (section 5.4.3.6)

Two sub-categories were generated within this category:

a. Schools and community involvement

b. Occasions for community/school service

### 6.3.4 Hindrances to parental involvement (section 5.4.4)

As the participants shared their experiences, challenges to parental involvement appeared to fall into eleven categories:

- Parental attitude to education (section 5.4.4.1)

- Parental illiteracy (section 5.4.4.2)

- Parental illiteracy (section 5.4.4.2)

- Parental economic deficiency (section 5.4.4.3)

- Parental commitment at workplace (section 5.4.4.4)

- Foster parents (section 5.4.4.5)

- Training in parental involvement (section 5.4.4.6)

- Age of the parent (section 5.4.4.7)

- Schools' and parents' attitudes towards each other (section 5.4.4.8)

- Teacher-parent relationships (section 5.4.4.9)

- Parental confidence in assisting with schoolwork (section 5.4.4.10)

- Parental involvement in the school (section 5.4.4.11)

## 6.3.5 The family background's influence on parental involvement (section 5.4.5)

Two categories and their respective sub-categories were explored:

### 6.3.5.1 Circumstances of families (section 5.4.5.1)

a. Unemployment and poverty

b. Educational level of parents

### 6.3.5.2 Family structure (section 5.4.5.2)

a. Single parents

b. Grandparents as guardians

c. Gender of parents involved

## 6.3.6 Implications of the foregoing for the implementation of an effective parental involvement programme for Kenyan public schools (section 5.4.6)

The categories explored here were as follows:

- Teachers' perceptions of parental involvement (section 5.4.6.1)

- Limited roles for parents in schools (section 5.4.6.2)

- Teacher/parent relationships (section 5.4.6.3)

- Homework (section 5.4.6.4)

- Policy on parental involvement(section 5.4.6.5

- Government grants and school budgeting (section 5.4.6.6)

- Discipline in schools (section 5.4.6.7)

- Curricular issues (section 5.4.6.8)

- The role of the SMC (section 5.4.6.9)

- The local community and education (section 5.4.6.10)

- Information about community services (section 5.4.6.11)

## 6.4 CONCLUSIONS OF THE STUDY

Based on the findings obtained from the review of the literature on parental involvement as well as  the findings derived from the empirical research, the study reached the following conclusions.

From the empirical research, the study reached the following conclusions:

### 6.4.1 Conclusions based on the literature study

The review of literature generated the following conclusions:

- The Kenyan educational policy advocated parental involvement for improving teaching quality and for obtaining greater administrative efficiency. In public schools, parental involvement in the management of schools took the form of participation in school management committees (SMCs). Such bodies involved parents mainly fulfilling the functions of fundraising and having an input in the management and operation of schools (section 3.5).

- The school management committee (SMC) members and other parents expressed the opinion that in general, parents needed to be educated regarding their role in the implementation of FPE. At certain schools, some parents were uninformed and negligent

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regarding their roles and when invited to meetings, they refused to attend, apparently feeling that school business was the work of the teachers.

- The lack of adequate improvement in  the quality of education was a persistent problem that adversely affected education across the board. At primary school education level alone, a considerable number of pupils repeated each year while nearly half the pupils did not complete their primary school education (section 3.2.2).

- The lack of adequate funding for teaching resources and teacher education (which would improve the quality of education) was a persistent problem that adversely affected education across the board. At primary education level alone, a considerable number of pupils repeated each year while nearly half of pupils did not complete their primary education (3.2.2).

- A challenge to the implementation of FPE was to obtain capital for education expenditure and the problem concerning the tardy imbursement of funds to schools. This was compounded by the necessity of overseeing that budgeted funds were spent appropriately at school level, given the high enrolment numbers, particularly at schools where facilities were already insufficient. Furthermore, PFE implementation included providing sufficient teachers and motivating them, maintaining education quality as enrolment increases in schools and ensuring that their retention rates were maintained in areas where factors such as famine, nomadism and female genital mutilation had a negative effect on the retention of pupils (section 1.4).

- The Kenyan government employed more teachers than before, encouraged communities to send their children to school to enhance retention and completion in schools and encouraged parents to raise funds for improved infrastructure at schools but the need for the effective involvement of parents in education was largely unrecognised (section 1.4).

- Most parents in the study were not involved in the education of their children because of illiteracy, their long working hours, getting home late and therefore leaving their children in the care of grandparents or older siblings. Other problems were the extreme poverty of the communities, which forced parents to marry their children off before they had completed school or the fact that they sent them to work on the farms as a family or employed casual labour (section 3.3.3).

- Most teachers and principals blamed the parents for the lack of involvement in their children's education. Parents were neither aware of their responsibilities as parents nor did they appear to be concerned about the quality of education provided to their children. Teachers at one school wanted the government to clarify the role of parents as parents according to them, were disinclined to believe the teachers (section 3.3.3).

- Schools ascribed to Swap's (1993: 28-29) Protective Model with regard to delegating the responsibility for educating their children to the school. Swap (1993: 29) indicates that many teachers have the attitude that they are responsible for teaching and that the parents' responsibility is confined to the home sphere (section 2.2.2.3).

- Schools, in addition, practised Swap's (1993: 28-38) School-To-Home Transmission Model, spelling out what parents were to do to help their children at home. They also required the parents to provide support to the school by highlighting the school's expectations of their children, and by supporting them through a home environment that nurtured learning (2.2.2.3).

- Communication transpired to be the schools (Kenya National Commission for UNESCO, 2005: 75). Few parents attended school meetings and because of their unwillingness to contribute to the schools' funds, together with inadequate government funding and the ambiguous policies governing parental involvement, school projects had come to standstill (3.3.3).

- The factors that caused the low levels of involvement included the inherent school climate that discouraged parental involvement, the perceived disinterest or helplessness on the part of parents in assisting schools with their children's education, parents' discomfort in their relationship with the school and parents' perception of teachers not informing them of their children's education (2.4).

### 6.4.2 Conclusions derived from the findings of the study

From the findings of the study, the following emerged as the main experiences of principals, teachers and parents:

- Principals and teachers did not understand the potential benefits that could result from comprehensive parental involvement and therefore teachers did not view involving parents as part of their roles (see section 5.4.1.1).

- Schools seemed to ascribe to Swap's (1993: 28-29) Protective Model regarding reducing possible conflict between the school and parents mainly by separating the parents and teachers' functions (section 5.4.1.1).

- Although all the teachers were qualified, their training did not prepare them for parental involvement, nor was it a compulsory part of teacher training (sections 3.9 and 5.4.1.2).

- Schools had no defined parental involvement policy and thus, there were limited formal opportunities in schools for parents to become involved in the education of their children (section 5.4.1.3).

- The abolition of the payment of fees in all the schools led to the perception among some parents that, as education was "free! they no longer needed to be involved in the school. Consequently, some refrained from playing any further role in their children's education (section 5.4.2.1).

- Although most parents met their children's material needs, some did not provide their children with the support and discipline required for successful learning, nor did they supervise their children adequately (section 5.4.3.1b).

- Parents' volunteering in class was never implemented, so there were no structures or plans to allow parents to volunteer in the classroom or supervise other activities during the school day. They were neither consulted nor were they allowed to give advice on decisions that involved learning at the school because they were considered to be too incompetent (section 5.4.3.2a).

- Government disbursements for FPE were inadequate to meet all school expenses. Schools resorted to involving parents in fundraising to support activities such as pupils' educational trips and to pay for other expenses that the FPE funds could not cover. However, most parents were reluctant to assist, thinking that the government had to pay for everything (section 5.4.3.2b).

- Schools blamed parents for the problems that they encountered with the pupils at school. they ascribed the problems to poor parenting practices as a result of social problems such as broken homes and alcohol abuse, while in some families, the fathers showed little involvement in their children's lives (section5.4.3.2c). Furthermore, difficult pupils were not punishable by corporal punishment at school, since the Ministry of Education had banned this. Instead, such cases were referred to the guidance and counselling teachers (5.4.3.2c).

- In addition, the schools did not involve parents in sports and cultural events because they felt that parents were not competent enough to participate in the schools' social activities. Although teachers acknowledged that the parents' presence could encourage their children at social and sporting events, they did not point this out as part of the parents' roles (section 5.4.3.2e).

- Although parents felt welcome to talk to teachers at school whenever there was the need, the majority of the parents seldom visited schools and did not talk to the teachers frequently (section 5.4.3.3).

- The main form of communication between teachers and parents occurred through verbal messages and written notes that usually dealt with the progress and problems pertaining to their children. However, parents did not always respond positively to such types of communication (section 5.4.3.3).

- Importantly, formal and informal parent-teacher meetings were valued. In spite of being invited to do so, most parents visited the school only when there were specific issues that needed to be addressed (section 5.4.3.3d).

- Although teachers gave pupils homework to practise the skills taught in class, they did not use homework as a tool for parental involvement. This was because teachers were unaware of the benefits if done properly, of parental involvement with regard to homework and moreover, the schools lacked a policy on the parents' role concerning homework (section 5.4.3.4c).

- FPE entailed the government depositing funds into the school bank accounts and only the principal, chairman and treasurer of the SMC were signatories with regard to the accounts. Since the MOEST provided the procurement and accounting guidelines to

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schools, principals made most of the decisions regarding the funds, thereby rendering the SMC members rather redundant in terms of financial management. Consequently, the SMC members' were reluctant to attend school management meetings (section5.4.3.5).

- Little community involvement occurred at these schools because they relied mainly on government and parental support to raise funds. On the other hand, apart from carrying out their teaching functions, schools offered few services to their communities (section 5.4.3.6).

- Poverty caused some parents to avoid getting involved in school and they felt embarrassed when requested to visit the school to explain why they were not buying materials for their children; what is more, in some cases, they did not want secondary education for their children because they felt they could not afford it (section 5.4.4.3).

- Low education levels on the part of most parents left them feeling that they were ineffective mediators with regard to their children's learning and therefore they stayed away from the school (section 5.4.5.1). Furthermore, a lack of time because of employment pressures also played a role in their failure to visit the school (section 5.4.5.2a). In addition, some parents felt they were not equipped to help their children and therefore they were not involved with their children's homework at home at all (section 5.4.4.11).

## 6.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations could be useful for further study.

### 6.5.1 Recommendations emerging from the study

From the research study and the experiences shared by the principals, teachers and parents, it became apparent that several recommendations could be made that could benefit public primary educational management. In the following sections recommendations and implications for the major role players in terms of parental involvement are presented. Because the practice regarding the limited amount of parental involvement in schools was a consequence of Kenya's national policy on education, which provided the basis for school

practice as well as the basis for curriculum and teacher training (section 5.4.6.6), this will serve as the starting point for certain recommendations.

### 6.5.1.1 Educational policy

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MOEST) directed the development of all education in the country (section 3.4) spelling out the policy, which influenced teacher training and staffing, discipline in schools and the curriculum taught at schools (Republic of Kenya, 2008: 16). This education policy has a large impact on the practice of parental involvement in schools (Epstein, 1987: 5). A practical parent involvement programme would require designing a specific policy for parental involvement that specifies the government's perspectives, services, requirements and expectations concerning parental involvement in the schools (Epstein, 1987: 7).

### 6.5.1.2 Teacher training

All the teachers interviewed were extremely committed but their lack of knowledge with regard to parental involvement resulted in little effort being made by them to involve the parents (section 5.4.1.1). Accordingly, schools adopted Swap's Protective Model (section 5.4.1.1) and for communication, they practised Swap's School-to-Home Transmission Model (section 5.4.3.3). Although all the teachers were qualified, their training did not prepare them for parental involvement, nor was it obligatory to have knowledge of it before being allowed to attain teacher qualifications (sections 3.9 and 5.4.1.2).Thus, it is recommended that teacher trainees complete a course in parental involvement and that teachers receive in-service training with regard to parental involvement. It is important that both courses should have both an applied and a theoretical component (Comer, 1987:14).

### 6.5.1.3 Government free primary education funds

Under the FPE system, the government provided funds that were used for running the schools. However, the imbursements for FPE were inadequate to meet all school expenses. However, most parents were reluctant to assist thinking that the government should pay for everything (section 5.4.3.2b). For successful implementation, the relevant school policies must be communicated to schools effectively and backed by adequate resources (section 5.4.3.2). The

Ministry should also decentralise many of its decision-making powers to the individual schools so that the principals, teachers and parents can make joint decisions on the curriculum, teaching methods, staffing requirements, funds and discipline themselves according to the individual schools' requirements.

### 6.5.1.4 School policy on parental involvement

None of the schools had developed a written policy on parental involvement, which would have specified the roles they wished parents to play as well as how the school would support the involvement of parents (section 5.4.1.3). Therefore, it is then recommended that each school should have its own policy fashioned by the principal, teachers and all the parents working together regarding parental involvement. Epstein (1991:348) recommends that school districts employ parental involvement facilitators, who would guide teachers and provide them with in-service training. In Kenya, each facilitator in each education zone would be employed to offer in-service training to teachers in his/her respective zones. It is further recommended that the policy includes all six Epstein's types of involvement, which would provide a variety of opportunities for Kenyan parents to be involved in their children's education.

### a. Parenting in families

The low educational levels of most parents made them feel that they were ineffective mediators in their children's learning and therefore they stayed away from the school (section 5.4.5.1). The lack of time (section 5.4.5.2) and confidence concerning how to help their children (section 5.4.4.11) prevented most parents from being involved with homework at home. Schools require programmes that would help to improve parents' homework supervision and their ability to act as role models for their children, which in turn, will increase parents' confidence so that they will be willing to consult teachers and deepen their understanding of their children.

Epstein (1988:58) emphasises the importance of encouraging parents to become involved in the education of their children. Therefore, workshops for parents that clarify the practice and benefits of parental involvement were recommended. These can be directed by the parental

involvement facilitator and the teachers (5.5.1.1) and will enable parents to acquire the specific skills needed to make them feel confident to become involved in their children's schools. Setting up a "parent room" at the school where parents can exchange ideas and obtain information and needed resources, is also recommended (sections 2.3.1.1 and 5.4.2.1).

## b. Parents volunteering at school

The practice of parents' volunteering to assist in classrooms was untried and so there were no structures or plans to allow parents to volunteer their services for classroom duty or to supervise other activities during the school day. They were neither consulted nor allowed to give advice on almost all the decisions that pertained to learning because they were considered too incompetent (section 5.4.3.2a). Although teachers recognised that the parents' presence could provide encouragement for their children during social and sporting events, they did not point this out as part of the parents' role (section 5.4.3.2e).

## c. Communication between teachers and parents

Inadequate communication was the major reason for the lack of parental involvement, especially the lack of clear, straightforward and helpful information by the teachers to parents (section 2.3.2.1). Mutual and relaxed communication between parents and teachers is important so that the latter can participate actively in school-based activities. This will help parents gain an understanding of school programmes and policies as well as the capability of monitoring their children's progress. In the past, interaction between the home and the school was often hostile and unpleasant because schools summoned parents when the learner did not meet the school's expectations, while parents contacted the school only when they experienced problems with the learner's education. Accordingly, schools should show respect for the diversity of cultures, beliefs, values, needs of parents. Furthermore, home visits that will serve to help families of pupils understand the school environment and to enable schools to understand the families, are essential (section 2.3.1.1).

## d. Parental involvement in homework

Although teachers assigned homework to pupils to practise the skills taught in class, they did not use homework as a tool for parental involvement. This was because teachers were unaware

of the benefits of parental involvement in homework if done properly and schools lacked a policy on the parents' role in homework (section 5.4.3.4c).Teachers should schedule regular interactive homework that requires pupils to discuss what they are learning at school with their parents. This can help them to view their parents as real teachers and their homes as learning areas just like the school. Consequently, an awareness of their obligation in sharing schoolwork at home with their parents as well as linking learning to real life situations can be fostered (section 2.3.4.1).

### e. Decision-making at school

SMC) members and other parents expressed concern that in general, parents needed to be educated regarding their role in the implementation of FPE. At certain schools, some parents were ignorant and negligent regarding their roles and when invited to meetings, they refused to attend feeling that school business was the work of the teachers (section 3.5).

Involvement in decision-making aims to include parents in school decisions and develop parent leadership skills so that they can become representatives of the parent body. Furthermore, parents may participate in parent advisory committees, serve as school board members, be included in the local school improvement council or act as active members of the PTA.

### f. Community involvement

A low level of community involvement was apparent at these schools because they relied mainly on government and parental support to raise funds. On the other hand, apart from teaching, schools offered few services to their communities (section 5.4.3.6). The success of the school depends on the support from the community as its influence overlaps with the extended family, the church, local businesses, volunteer organisations and neighbourhood communities. Accordingly, communities have a powerful influence over children's development through the raising of funds, providing learning opportunities outside the school, general social support and providing recreational, social and health services (section 2.3.6.1).

### 6.5.1.5 *The teachers*

It was apparent that teachers had different perceptions of parents from those the latter had of themselves (5.4.3.1). Thus, teachers' attitudes might facilitate or hinder parental involvement

and so they require to be made aware of different parental involvement activities and their benefits (section 5.5.2.1). In addition, they must be taught that it is their responsibility to involve parents in education and this should be communicated to all teachers so that all categories of parents can be involved effectively (sections 5.5.1.1 and 5.5.1.2). Therefore, a broad pre-service or in-service parental involvement course that provides teachers with the required knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes with the aim of involving all parents successfully is recommended for all teachers.

### 6.5.1.6 The parents

In this study, teachers expressed the view that parents were disinterested in the school, were illiterate and had little time for school involvement because of work obligations; consequently, they were unable to help their children adequately. However, the findings derived from the interviews with the parents revealed that they were indeed aware of their basic obligations and tried to meet them (section 5.4.3.1). Nevertheless, not all parents had the requisite confidence or knew how to help their children (section 5.4.3.1). Accordingly, workshops that focus on affirmative home supervision are recommended for the schools. These can teach the parents how to monitor what their children watch as well as the number of hours spent watching TV and also how to schedule time-tables for both homework and house chores (section 5.4.3.4c). Parents also need to create a calm environment for their children conducive to studying (section 5.4.3.1b). This can help to close the gap between the school and the home and can encourage parental involvement in children's schooling.

### 6.5.2 Recommendations for further research

The limited literature on the topic of parental involvement in public primary schools calls for further research on the topic. Some areas that were left uncovered in this study that needs further auxiliary research are:

- Parental involvement in the more "neglected" regions in the northwestern and northeastern counties of Kenya.
- Aspects relating to parental involvement in schools such as appropriate discipline of pupils at school and home.

- Strategies to equip teachers and parents regarding handling traumatised pupils.

- Strategies to involve illiterate parents in their children's education.

- Parental involvement of parents from different family backgrounds in terms of each of Epstein's six types of activities.

- Parental involvement of parents with different levels of education in arid areas.

- The efficacy of the suggested parental involvement programmes and further recommendations for subsequent improvements.

## 6.6 LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY

The findings based on the qualitative results had a high degree of reliability and validity (sections 4.6.2, 4.6.3 and 4.6.4), and therefore they provided an appropriate starting point for designing a parental involvement programme. However, the current study was limited in the following respects:

- This study included the experiences of principals, teachers and parents with regard to rural and urban primary schools in the Embu West district in the Embu County. Public primary schools' principals, teachers and parents in other counties may not have similar experiences.

- Generalisation of the findings should therefore be done with caution. The findings depicted the parental involvement practices in rural and urban public primary schools. Different experiences may be found in private primary schools and at different levels of education.

- The study only included public primary school participants who were interviewed on their experiences for the first time. It is possible that their views may not have been well defined and concrete as verbalising their experiences was new to them.

- The views in this investigation were sought from the principals, class teachers and subject panel heads. Thus, caution must be exercised when presuming that these results are valid for other teachers.

## 6.7   CONCLUSION

Parental involvement in schools was characterised by diverse levels of interaction among the teachers and parents. The process of involving parents was faced by challenges as highlighted in the findings. Parents continued to be involved in their children's education to a limited extent only. However, both teachers and parents acknowledged that more parental involvement was required for improving the quality of their children's education. The present investigation made recommendations for a parental involvement programme suited to public primary schools in Kenya. However, the improvement of partnerships is a process that requires the investment of time, resources and efforts. The implementation of such a programme can enable teachers and parents to embrace parental involvement as school practice and can help them to become more confident and able to play a meaningful role in the school, which can benefit all the parties involved,  with regard to overcoming the limited opportunities and weaknesses in the schooling of some learners.  According to Smith (in Engle, 2008: 10), the involvement of parents can:

> …increase the teachers' understanding of the child's environment, add to parents' knowledge of the child's educational   setting,   improve communication between parents and the school, increase the school's understanding of the child, and increase the likelihood that, with improved understanding between home and school, mutually agreed upon educational goals would be attained.

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**APPENDIX I**

Kimu Mwai

St Marks Teachers College

Private Bag, Embu

TO: The District Education Officer

Embu West District

Dear Sir,

**REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN NINE PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN THE CENTRAL ZONE**

1      I am currently registered for a Doctoral degree with the University of South Africa. My topic is:

'*Parent involvement in public primary schools in Kenya*'.

2      I have chosen the qualitative methodology and will therefore conduct research in nine primary schools.

3      The research involves interviewing the principal, two teachers and six parents face-to-face from each school and subsequent focus group discussions with eight class teachers, six subject panel heads, six parents with their children in lower classes and six parents with their children in upper classes.

4      I request permission to conduct the research in nine primary schools within the Central Zone in the period between June and August 2010.

Thanking you in anticipation.

Yours in education.

**Kimu Mwai**

**APPENDIX II**

**GENERAL INFORMATION: TEACHERS**

To be completed by the participant prior to the interview.

**PERSONAL INFORMATION**

Names………………………………………… (to be coded later for anonymity)

Age………………………………………………………….

Marital status……………………………………………………

Number of children………………………………………………

Where do your own children attend school......................................

Where do you live?

**PROFESSIONAL INFORMATION**

Highest qualification:

Years of teaching experience:

Have you attended any workshops/courses on parental involvement?

**APPENDIX lll**

**GENERAL INFORMATION: PRINCIPAL**

To be completed by the participant prior to the interview.

**PERSONAL INFORMATION**

Names………………………………… (to be coded later for anonymity)

Age……………………………………………………………….

Marital status………………………………………………………

Number of children…………………………………………………

Where do your own children attend school?.....................................

Where do you live?……....................................................................

**PROFESSIONAL INFORMATION**

Years of experience as principal:

Years of experience in this school:

**INFORMATION ON THE SCHOOL**

Name of school:

Explain the pressing needs your school currently has

**APPENDIX IV**

**GENERAL INFORMATION: PARENTS**

**PERSONAL INFORMATION**

Names……………………………………(to be coded later for anonymity)

Age……………………………………………………………………

Marital status…………………………………………………………

Number of children………………………………………………..

**DETAILS OF THE PARENT**

Where do you live?……………………………………………………

What is the highest level of your education?………………………….

Explain your employment…………………………………………

Who is the breadwinner in the family?……………………………..

**APPENDIX V**

**REQUEST TO THE PRINCIPAL TO CONDUCT INTERVIEWS IN THE PRIMARY SCHOOLS**

**THE PRINCIPAL**

**_____ PRIMARY SCHOOL**

**REQUEST FOR AN INTERVIEW**

I am a lecturer at St. Marks Teachers' College and have enrolled (I am in the final year) for a doctorate (DED) at the University of South Africa. I am at present completing my thesis entitled: **Parent involvement in public primary schools in Kenya.** I hereby request for permission to interview the members of the school community, namely, some teachers and some parents. I would also, with your permission, like to carry out observations of the school facilities. Subsequently, I would be glad to interview the principal.

Your kind assistance in granting me permission to carry out the interviews and allowing me to obtain the required information will be highly appreciated. Once again, thank you for your assistance.

With best regards

KIMU MWAI

(Telephone-cell 0721 228 113)

**APPENDIX VI**

**SCHOOL OBSERVATION CHECKLIST**

**Description of general school facilities:**

| | |
|---|---|
| Permanent classrooms | |
| Temporary classrooms | |
| Open-air teaching areas that serve as classrooms | |
| Walls-good condition/unstable/moving/crumbling | |
| Windows-glass in place/broken/no glass | |
| Roofing-good covering/caving in/open in places/leaking | |
| Floor-flat and smooth/uneven/potted/dusty/muddy | |
| Space-ample space for pupils to work/classroom crowded | |

**Description of toilet facilities**

| | TEACHERS | | | | PUPILS | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Male | | Female | | Male | | Female | |
| Type of toilets | | NOT working | | NOT working | | NOT working | | NOT working |
| Pit latrines | | | | | | | | |
| Flush toilets | | | | | | | | |
| None | | | | | | | | |

**School safety/security**

| | |
|---|---|
| Boundary wall/fence | |

**School water supply**

| | |
|---|---|
| School water- adequate/all time/sometimes | |
| Do pupils bring water to school? | |

| Is water safe for drinking? | |
|---|---|
| | |

**Facilities for co-curricular activities**

| Co-curricular facilities | |
|---|---|
| | |

**Electricity/electronics**

| Electricity supply | Telephone | School radio | Television | Others |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | |

**Reading facilities**

| Library | Workshops | Laboratory | School hall | Others |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | |

**APPENDIX VII**

**Participants' anonymity/confidentiality sheet**

Being aware that the information that I will provide is for research purposes only, and that my identity will remain anonymous in the final work, I undertake to maintain confidentiality concerning any information in the discussion

Name…………………………….                    Signed………………………………

**APPENDIX VlII**

**FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION SCHEME**

(I). Self-introductions and warm up (10 minutes)

1.  How the focus group discussions (FGD) will work: the researcher will explain to the participants their roles in the FGD and the use of the FGD

2.  What is a focus group all about and what will be discussed.

    o It is interested in your viewpoints, you represent many people who may have views just like you

    o this is a research project, and just want your perceptions

    o talk to each other, not just to me

    o no right or wrong answers, alright to differ, if your opinion is different it is welcome and needed

    o honest answers

    o everyone talks, no hand-raising

3.  Recording to be done, assurance of privacy

4.  Role of the researcher:

    o put out issues/subject areas

    o facilitate the discussion, get everyone to talk to each other

5.  Ground rules

    o no wandering

    o no vague words

      o no talking more than one person at a time

6. Self-introductions: give the name and the work you do

(II)     Discussions

(III)   Conclusions, thanks.

**APPENDIX IX**

 **INTERVIEW SCHEDULE: PARENTS**

**A   INTRODUCTORY QUESTION**

- Describe what it is like being a parent in your school (Describe an incident to illustrate what it is like being a parent in your school).

- Who taught you to be a father/mother?

- Discuss the informal ways in which you were taught how to be a mother/father.

- Discuss the formal influences/training you had which helped you to bring up your children (that is, the influence of women/men's groups, the church, the school, et cetera).

**B   CHILDREN AND CHILD CARE**

- How do you see the value of children in the family-explain/give examples to illustrate

- What is your opinion of today's children?

- How do children spend their afternoons and weekends?

- Who disciplines the children at home?

- In what ways are children disciplined?

- If the mother/father works, and someone else cares for the children, who teaches the children what is right or wrong? How is it done?

**C   HOMEWORK, EDUCATION AND PARENTS**

- Do children get homework to do in the afternoons? Do they have tests/examinations to study for in the afternoons?

- How is this homework controlled?

- In what ways do you think parents should be involved in the education of their children?

- Would you like to be involved? Explain

- What prevents you from being more involved?

## D   COMMUNICATION BETWEEN THE SCHOOL AND HOME

- How do you find out what is happening at school?

- How do you find out how your child dong at school?

- When you speak with your child's teacher, what does he/she tell you?

- Have you attended a class meeting at the school?

- How are you treated when you go to school, or phone the school or write to the school?

## E   SCHOOL MEETINGS AND SOCIAL FUNCTIONS

- Does the school present concerts or sports days or any other social events/functions?

- How often do these take place?

- Do you attend? How often?

- When are parents' meetings held?

- What happens at parents' meetings?

- Do parents play a role at these meetings or functions/Do parents help to plan parents' meetings/Do they address parents at these meetings?

## F   PARENTS AT THE SCHOOL

- Are parents asked to help at school? Give examples of such requested activities.

- Do parents help in the classroom? Explain.

- Do you think the school arranges enough opportunities to become involved in the schooling of their children?

- What else should the school be doing about this? Give suggestions.

## G   BARRIERS TO INVOLVEMENT

- What do you find to be the most important obstacles for parents being involved in school life? Explain

- Which resources does school need for more involvement of parents and how would the school use them?

## G   PERCEPTIONS ON PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT BY THE PARENT

- Would it be important for you if you could be involved more in the school-life? Explain

- What are/would be your personal benefits of becoming more active?

## H   FUTURE OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

- What would be required so that you would involve yourself more in school life?

- What should change within the school/educational system in order to make you really want to be more active as a parent?

## I   CONCLUDING REMARKS

- In what way would you like to be involved in the education of your children?

- How would you see the future of your children in Kenya?

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR CONTRIBUTION

**APPENDIX X**

**INTERVIEW GUIDE: TEACHERS**

**A   INTRODUCTORY QUESTIONS**

- Describe what it is like being a teacher in a public primary school (Describe a typical day/Describe an incident to illustrate)

- Has being a teacher in a public primary school changed in any way during the years? Explain

**B   PARENTING**

- How would you describe a 'good parent'?

- To what extent are parents in this community involved in the lives of their children?

- How do you describe the relationship between parents and their children?

- How do parents generally discipline their children?

**C   FAMILY STRUCTURE AND SCHOOLING**

- What is the composition of the average household in this community (that is, single parent homes, extended families, nuclear families, et cetera)?

- What is family life like in your community (describe a typical day in the life of a family in this community)

- What influences does the family structure and the circumstances under which they live have on the child?

- What is the status of the child in the family?

- Who generally looks after the child after the school hours?

**D   GENERAL UPBRINGING/EDUCATION OF CHILDREN**

- What is the role of the family in the upbringing of the child?

**E   COMMUNICATION WITH PARENTS**

- How often do you contact parents?

- Why do you contact them?

- How do you contact them?

- When ar**e** parents able to speak with you about their child?

- How often does this occur?

**F   PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION AND PERCEPTIONS ON PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT**

- In your opinion, what is the role of the parent in education?

- How would you define parental involvement?

- What experience have you had of parental involvement?

- What do you as a teacher do to support parental involvement?

- In what ways are parents involved in your class

- In what ways are parents involved in this school?

**G   ADVANTAGES OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT**

- Do you think parental involvement could be of benefit to pupils, the school and teachers?

- In what way?

**H   BARRIERS TO PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT**

- What are the barriers to parents' involvement in this school and community?

**I TEACHER TRAINING AND PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT**

- In what way did your basic training equip you to work with parents?

- What has the years of experience taught you in this respect?

**J THE SCHOOL AND PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT**

- Who should initiate parental involvement-the school or the parent?

- What role does the principal play in home-school relations?

- In what ways can parent involvement be improved?

- What role would you like parents to play in this school?

- Do you think parents need to be trained to fulfil this role?

**K FUTURE OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT**

- What would be required so that you would involve yourself more in school life?

- What should change within the school/educational system in order to make you really want to be more active as a parent?

**L CONCLUDING REMARKS**

- Is there any change in attitude to parent involvement following the Free Primary Education (FPE)?

- How do you see your future as a teacher?

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR CONTRIBUTION!

**APPENDIX Xl**

**INTERVIEW GUIDE: PRINCIPAL**

**A  INTRODUCTORY QUESTION**

- How would you describe the parents of this community?

**B  GENERAL INFORMATION ON PARENT INVOLVEMENT**

**SCHOOL POLICY ON PARENT INVOLVEMENT**

- What is the policy of this school on parental involvement?

- Is it a written policy/unwritten policy?

**D  PARENTAL GOVERNING STRUCTURES**

- Is there a governing structure in place in this school?

- What is the nature of the governing structure?

- When was it established?

- What are the tasks of the school governing body?

- How often do they meet?

- Are there any other structures on which the parents serve?

- How does new legislation on FPE affect the school governing body in this school?

- To what extent is the school governing body affiliated to with political parties or unions?

**C  COMMUNICATION  BETWEEN  THE  SCHOOL  AND  FAMILY,  AND  VICE VERSA**

- How do you pass information to parents or to guardians?

- Are there any opportunities for parents to come to school and talk with the teachers?

- How often are such opportunities created?

**D  PARENTS AND VOLUNTEERS**

- In what ways do parents assist the school?

- If asked to help, who shows them or informs them what to do?

**E  PARENTS AND HOMEWORK**

- To what extent are parents involved in their children's homework?

- How is this explained to them?

- What is the policy of the school with respect to involving parents in academic affairs?

**H  PARENTING**

- Do you think parents in this community are bringing up their children in a correct manner?

- To what extent does the school assist the parents in their parenting task by for instance, having talks on topics, for example, drugs, health, choosing subjects in secondary schools, et cetera?

**I  COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT**

- In what way is the community such as the church or business involved in the school?

**J  EXTERNAL FACTORS, THE SCHOOL AND THE FUTURE**

- Do politics still have an influence on what is happening in the school?

- Do teachers' unions still play an important role? Please explain.

- How do you see the future of schools?

**K PARENTING ROLES**

- What is the role of the school in the upbringing and education of the child?

- If a child is not living with the parents, how do you see the role of the guardian?

**L COMMUNICATION WITH PARENTS**

- How often do you contact parents?

- Why do you contact them?

- How do you contact them?

- When are parents able to speak with you about their child?

- How often does this occur?

**M PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT**

- In your opinion

- How would you define parental involvement?

- What experience have you had of parent involvement?

- What do you do as a teacher to support parental involvement?

- In what ways are parents involved in your class?

- In what ways are parents involved in this school?

**N ADVANTAGES OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT**

- Do you think parental involvement would be of benefit to the pupils, the school and teachers?

- In which ways?

**O BARRIERS TO PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT**

- What are the barriers to parent involvement in this school and in his community?

**P TEACHER TRAINING AND PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT**

- In what ways did your basic training equip you to work with parents?

- What have the years of experience as a teacher taught you in this regard?

**Q THE SCHOOL AND PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT**

- Who should initiate parental involvement-the school or the parent?

- What role does the principal play in home-school relations?

- In what ways can parental involvement be improved?

- What role would you like parents to play in this school?

- Do you think parents need to be trained to fulfil this role?

**R FUTURE OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT**

- What would be required so that you would involve parents more in school life?

- What should change within the school/educational system in order to make you really want to be more active as a parent?

**S CONCLUDING REMARKS**

- Is there any change in attitude to parent involvement following the Free Primary Education (FPE)?

- How do you see your future as a teacher?

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR CONTRIBUTION!

**APPENDIX XII**

**CONSENT TO CARRY OUT DATA COLLECTION**

District Education Officer,

Embu West District

**TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN**

Name:  KIMU A.MWAI

Student no. 35815892 is at present enrolled at Unisa for the Doctoral degree in Education Management that requires an empirical research project to meet the requirements for the degree. The student's topic is

**'PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN KENYA'.**

We rely on the willingness of principals, staff members and parents to grant Mr. Kimu permission to undertake the research.

We thank you in anticipation for your willingness to assist us in our training endeavours.

Prof GM Steyn (Promotor)

UNISA

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**APPENDIX XIII**

**FACE-TO-FACE WITH THE SENIOR TEACHER IN SCHOOL B**

KM: How do you see your life here as a teacher?

A: Now here it is challenging although we have been able to overcome the challenges. You know most of the pupils are from different backgrounds, some of them are extremely poor and their family set-up is of single parents; most from slums like Kathita, Dallas, Stadium and Grogon. With very low income, these are not able to cater for their needs. These are the challenges, but even though, we keep on challenging those challenges

Although the school is in town and we get help from the government, we are able to incorporate them here. We have OVC (Orphaned Vulnerable Children) and MVC (Most Vulnerable Children) here and we have to balance our funds to be able to cater for all theses children. The government at times gives us grants to assist theses parents to but uniform and we do buy them uniforms.

KM: I thought the challenge is in terms of affordability of various materials, the uniforms or the class work you know, the way they are able to….

A: (interruption) no, you see, children can't learn without these necessities, otherwise….and these pupils are not able to come to school. In terms of books, we have enough. In terms of book ratio, we have 1:2.

KM: Being a long-serving teacher because being the senior teacher you must have quite some experience, what would you say about how the school has changed over the years since (is it 2003)? What is your experience?

A: Let me say from FPE in 2003, enrolment has gone up and the bigger the enrolment the bigger the challenge. So before the FPE the enrolment was not good and the standards too low. This is true, true, true according to y view and experience. We had little then in the way of reading materials even if parents were being asked to buy these materials for their children. You should have seen the tatters that was the textbooks that children had then!

KM: In the old system, was it any better?

A: But this time the standards are better. It is a bit low, yes, but today the children are a bit brighter and they do better. When we were in the old system few homes were in touch with the usual things which are common in most homes today. Even the poor families can watch the TV or listen to the radio in the public places in the towns and villages. So pupils have access to information all round.

KM: Then it means we had a bigger challenge in the old system? Yet how is it that we have a bigger environment, long ago we had a lower enrolment I was expecting that when you have a lower enrolment…

A: (interruption) it is because of technology. Like now students are able to access many things unlike there before; they can watch the TV, are informed more and even know their rights. This time, a home owns a TV so are informed. In the new system, these youngsters are very close to information and they know their rights. You are teaching a topic and a learner might even challenge you with a question that you as a teacher was not prepared for. These are our pupils today.

KM: What would you say about technology, about TV in this school itself, is it better?

A: Yes, it is better, in terms of communication. You can teach a topic and you can relate it to what they experienced at home. For teaching, we can request them to follow these things in their homes in the radio and TV.

KM: Concerning parents, comment on how you would describe a 'good parent'.

A: A good parent is one who minds about his child. The child needs care and cannot grow well without the mother and fathers' guidance. A parent then who follows up on his child at school and a parent who is available for the child would be what you are asking me about. The parent must be ready to listen to the child and attend to all its needs and provide them.

KM: To what extent are parents in this community here involved in the lives of their children?

A: A parent is a stakeholder. He is needed and has to be informed so he has to play a big role, otherwise the school is formed of three people, the teacher, parent and the child, so we cannot leave out the parent. The parent teaches or rather guides and counsels the child at home. Yes, they are and must be involved. The reason we have so many street children not in school today who should be there in school because there is free education is already testimony to the fact that homes are not good anymore and are not caring for the child. It was never like it is today!

KM: How would you describe the general relationship between parents of this school and their children, now that you have already spoken about orphans and broken homes?

A: In this community, parents do not seem to follow children's work at school. You see most are poor and are at work or at whatever they do in the day for their income. We want them to follow the pupils and even though quite a number are doing this, many I am afraid, do not. It is rather disappointing but they are our parents! Apart from two or three cases, parents are not concerned about their children; they just dump them here to us.

KM: How do parents generally discipline their children?

A: Sometimes it is a bit difficult because the parent believes the teacher is the one who should…you know they have left the role to us of which we don't agree with that. Look, if you have a case we call the parent. We don't cane them but we talk with them, you know, the mistake of the child with the parent.

KM: Do you have indiscipline cases often?

A: Yes, they are there. We have many cases, yes, like in all schools. You have yourself had such cases in your own school, isn't it? The families' poor parenting and poverty are the causes of some indiscipline here. Unstable families around with divorce and where the parents are at loggerheads at home. Some mothers are alone and have to bring up the children alone. Some are orphans and the child is with the uncles or the grandparents. What do you expect from these? This makes the child extend the problems to school. A child at standard

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one picked his father's money and hid it and we had to harass it before he revealed that he was hiding it. We talked with the father who came to report his child to us and the boy gave back the money. The child later told of his father having left drinking and he is happier now!

KM: Ok, ok, what is the composition of the average household in the community in terms of single families, extended families, etc?

A: Em, let me say, two-thirds have both parents, and one-third are orphaned.

KM: Do you have cases of single parents?

A: Yes, there are there. I am afraid many children are under single parents. Those with the mother, the father died or divorced the mother. If the father is dead, the mother takes long to settle down. The family that started well and the mother died will end up with a step-mother and the children of the dead mother are under a new mother. The single mothers are the most from divorce, and the mother lives with the children. Such mothers will of course be very harsh to the child just to keep it in line. The stress is actually passed to the child and the parent beats the child when he asks for books or pens and will not care how the baby reaches school and the school is a long distance away. Stepmothers where the mother died and the father remarried are brutal sometimes because they feel threatened and have no security and feel the father will give his children money, and so they harass the stepchildren. Children are given lots of work at home . We know this because when we give homework they will not have done it the next day. Or the child is given work to draw water and feel the containers at home, yet he or she is fetching it from the river far away. Others never bother how the child grows and are always complaining to us about the bad child's behaviours. But we still have very good children with us here, it is not all bad. We are happy with all children as a school.

KM: What is the effect on the children in search circumstances?

A: The child is stressed all the time, feels hopeless, has no vision for the future, and will not work well in class. These eventually drop out of school and even influence others if not handled well fast enough. They are bad.

KM: Are such cases many?

A: Yes! And common. Remember many parents visit complaining how their children are difficult to handle.

KM: And now can you comment on a typical day of a family in this community.

A: I don't get it right.

KM: That is not clear to you? Ok in terms of how a typical day goes, the day's routine.

A: They do report here (at school) at seven o'clock, that is when I expect them here. We start classes at eight-twenty in the morning. From the nursery (elementary) to class three, they arrive at eight-thirty in the morning because of their age. They start classes at eight-thirty. They have lunch at twelve-fourty…

KM: This a typical school day, what about a typical family day?

A: That is a bit technical on my side. I can't exactly give you what the family does

KM: Ok, what influence does the family structure have on the way the child behaves in class? For example you have said that one-third of the families are orphaned?

A: Here we treat all alike even though we try to counsel extreme cases. For single parents, it is two-way; some take care of their children quite well especially with the single father. The mother is always there for her child. Yet if the mother is away, working the mother may not care for the child, they neglect the child.

KM: What about single fathers?

A: Yes, some are very caring. But we rarely have cases of this nature, single mothers mainly. You understand, the divorced father goes for another wife and will not stay with the children. It is the mother! The father may not even want to care about the kids and leaves them to the mother. Some families struggle like that.

KM: What about the orphaned ones?

A: For the orphans here we have a special programme. The school counsels them and we work with their guardians.

KM: I believe the guardians will be the extended family members?

A: They are the well-wishers to the child.

KM: When you compare those children who have both parents and the orphaned children, who are easier to handle?

A: It will vary…Many parents don't follow their children. Where both parents are there and are stable do not discipline the children and the child learns to do anything they like. Where there is a single parent or a stepmother the child is stressed and can only feel accepted outside the home by his peers. But theses friends have bad behaviour and mislead the child. Where the single mother is head of the family, she entertains other men and the child does not to stay away from the home to find friends outside again.

KM: What would you say is the typical role of the family in a typical Embu urban child?

A: What I say about the family? It is a very big role. One thing the child behaves according to the family set-up. So the family needs to be educated on the rights of the child.

KM: I was asking this in connection with the material needs and things, the way the family comes in the life of the child?

A: When the child is very small, the mother provides for the child mostly, providing its needs later at school, the family arranges for the provision of books and uniforms. Parents also provide food, shelter and clothing. They should also discipline the child.These are the needs of the child and parents are the ones who meet these. We come in as the school when we need parents' assistance.

KM: That is ideally, what about the reality?

A: Parents are busy looking for money. They leave the house at 7.00 in the morning and return at 8.00 in the evening. When will they look after the child? By the time the parent comes back, the child is already asleep. He stayed with the teacher at school and is asleep when the parent arrives home. She will not talk to the child and will not know what goes on even when the child is sick. One of our children started to swell in the back and to have a hump and the mother knew it when it was too late. Parents are too busy after money.

KM: How often do you contact parents?

A: Let me say definitely once to three times each term. If you call them every term, they will say no time. So in most cases we call them in the third term because it is a closing of the year and we want to explain how the year has been and to update them about the requirements for the next year. When we have indiscipline cases you know, when the child is not doing well in the class also. The parents must be called to be made aware of the fact.

KM: Do you contact all the parents at once or?

A: We call them once every term that is in three months' school term. We call them by their classes. All parents in a class are called at their time. Some give excuses but others will come definitely.

KM: How do you contact them?

A: Through their children. We use the word of mouth, but we pass a note (written) through the younger children who are unable to pass the message to their parents. Some we call after the letter to confirm they received the letter. This is for those with phones whose numbers we know. The information is mainly to tell the progress of the child to the parent.

KM: When are parents able to speak to you about their children?

A: When there is an issue, for example if the child is beaten by another one in school and the child reports to the parent, and she is concerned the child is hurt so she will come to follow up.

KM: Is it only the mother who comes? Fathers?

A: Mostly, the mother will come.

KM: What do you do about such cases when the parent brings herself to school?

A: You will ask the teacher of the class concerned about the problem. What really occurred. We may discipline the offending learner. We also refer them to the guidance/counselor to counsel the bad student.

KM: In your opinion, what do you consider is the role of the parent in education?

A: It is to foster, facilitate…..and to take care of the child.

KM: How would you define parental involvement in school?

A: (laughing) ok let me clarify it like this. Let me say that because we have a nursery (elementary) unit here, they do pay for their children to be taught here, they do feed the children. The parents also ensure the child's environment is favourable for their learning. We want the paret to follow the child if he did homework and also to respond by buying books and materials when the child requires them. To know the teacher of his child. Some never know the teachers at all! They need to respond by coming to meetings and ask questions there and don't sit as if all was ok.

KM: Comment about parent volunteers, or parents belonging to the school management committee

A: We have spoken too much about parents dumping their children in school and not concerned but there are some parents who communicate: they come and ask teachers how the school is and about their children. They encourage and contribute to what should be done. They promise especially the old boys and girls who are parents in this school. These do encourage us.

KM: Will you have parents teach in the class especially the ones who can teach?

A: Parents can't volunteer because it will disrupt the class. Each teacher has his own approach and we don't want parents even if they are professional teachers to confuse the children using different methods from the class teacher's. Let them at home ensure the child has done the given homework, and whether right or wrong it is for the teacher to correct at school.

KM: That is the nursery level, what about the primary classes?

A: They also ensure the child's environment allows them to learn.

KM: What experience do you have of parental involvement?

A: Some positive, some negative ones. Parents are divided: some will not come even when called. Some will not pick their children (in the lower classes) until late. Some are good, contributing to the school by advertising the school and saying how good it is. Some will come harassing teachers for not teaching their children well.

KM: Comment about those bad ones.

A: At times some parents talk negative things about the teachers.

KM: What about the community?

A: The church comes to pray once in a term-not frequently. Business people are not involved. Sometimes the community gets to praise us out of good work. They also get involved in activities.

KM: Are you comfortable with parental involvement as it is today?

A: Very much. But for parents, they do very little.

KM: In what ways are parents involved in the class?

A: I do communicate with the parents…...

KM: What would you say about parental involvement in school?

A: (hesitatingly) let me say that in activities like music festivals they assist.

KM: Do you call them or do they volunteer to come?

A: They come to coach football.

KM: Do you think parental involvement would be of benefit to the teachers, pupils and the school?

A: Parental involvement would lead to the child learning with confidence. If involved discipline will improve. This is what we want most. So that the child is disciplined. No caning is done in school, when the child is caned and then reports to the parent, he comes to harass the teachers. Since the teacher will not neglect the child he will be doing what he wants.

KM: What about the teachers?

A: Yeah….because as the parent is making follow-ups, the teacher works extra hard, as parent is following. The teacher will share information about the child. Like the case of the boy who stole 1000 shillings if the parent had been sharing with the teachers such theft would not have occurred.

KM: What about the school in general?

A: …..there is that good performance.

KM: What are the barriers to parental involvement in this community?

A: One is what we have said-parents are busy looking for money, very busy. Illitearcy, parents don't understand and so depend on teachers to learn what is going on. Some parents are drunks-they drink and such do not even want to know what is happening. Communication can be a barrier, especially when there is misunderstandings between teachers and parents as individuals. Some schools are also far from the villages and parents have to plan to visit. This means they have no time to waste coming to school at the expense of other work and commitments.

KM: Can bureaucracy of the school perhaps keep off parents?

A: Some teachers can be barriers when they communicate only by letters to notify parents what is going on in the school. They don't want any meetings with parents. Even when the parent comes the teacher is too busy and has no time for meeting the parent. Yes because some parents are so busy and so will find it time wasting to come to school. He will keep away when there is such bureaucracy.

KM: Can the child himself be a barrier?

A: Exactly. You see a child is a child and a young mind. Being so if the teacher infers that the parent is kind of to blame for the wrongs that a child has committed or the poor performance the parent will definitely want out of such a situation. He will not come to school if he/she has a perception that the school has summoned him to come, listen, and answer to such a situation about his child. Also the child may sometimes refuse to give the parent the letter to come to the school when he knows that he will be in trouble with the parents as well when the parent comes.

KM: Did your basic (college) training equip you to work with the parents?

A: Oh, I did all the child development courses.

KM: On the other hand, what have your years of experience taught you about parental involvement?

A: (telephone call interrupts) let me take the call and then proceed. Now they taught me to be patient and tolerant. This was not a part of my college training as a teacher.

KM: What role does the principal play in terms of parental involvement?

A: In fact, she is the first. As I said, the children and parents in this school come from diverse backgrounds. The principal has to find some way of reaching to all of the parents and link with them so that they feel a part of the school system.

KM: In what ways can parental involvement be improved?

A: By keeping talking to all the parents. Yes, although this has not been possible on account of the fact that you can't bring all parents to the school when you want. They will not all come. This has been an issue and although we really have few issues that call for all parents coming to school we have usually specific cases for which we require the parents to come, and this is indiscipline and poor performance. These are the parents who we want involved, but they are also not always easy to bring to the school. This then is a challenge to us. However we need to communicate withal parents using the phone if possible. And to go to their homes with the child and share our vision with parents about the need to be involved. Parents will be able to know about the school as many do not know and will be ready to help.

KM: Does it need you using more funds to contact them?
A: Let me say that government funds do not allow for contacts with parents. It caters for books, and other reading materials not for irregular things like getting parents to come to meetings.
KM: What role would you like parents to play in this school apart from the one they are already playing?

A: (hesitating) Eh….I am not sure.

KM: For example, would you want them to teach in the classroom, especially those who have a teaching background, those who have some training?

A: No! (emphatic) as resource persons that is ok. Occasionally we have called one parent to talk to the children during the class meetings but never to teach in class! Our classes would not permit a stranger in class, besides we have never had persons who are not the school teachers teach in class. The children would not even listen and follow the stranger as they would their own teachers.

KM: Do you think parents require training to be involved?
A: Yes.

KM: What would be needed for parents to become more involved?
A: Em…money is needed as resources for feeding transport for parents and allowances.

Many parents are poor, cannot afford losing their day's wages to come to spend time in school unless you pay for their time. But the school does not have accommodation for such things and may not even think of such in the near future with the government funds in FPE. We have also no need to ask parents to pay funds to cater for such activities.

KM: What should change within the school for more parental involvement?

A: Most parents fear anything to do with money. May be the school should find a way of getting funds for getting parents come to the school.

KM: We are at the close of the interview but are there any more remarks you would want to give?

A: We want our school to perform better in the examinations. The parents must play their role as the teachers. They must work with their children to get them to take education of the child seriously. We have a feeling that this is an area that needs emphasis to our parents.

KM: Thank you so very much for your time.

**APPENDIX XIV**

**KENYA'S TEACHER CERTIFICATION**

For direct appointment to the grade of P1 Teacher, the candidate is required to:

(i) have minimum mean grade D+ at the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Examination (KCSE) done after four years' secondary school education (or equivalent recognised qualifications) offered by the Kenya National Examinations Council or any other recognised institution;

(ii) have passed the P1 Teacher's Certificate in a two year teacher training course (or its approved equivalent) offered by the Kenya National Examinations Council.

A candidate may also be promoted to the grade of P1 teacher:

(i) on having served as P2 Teacher for at least 5 years;

(ii) have passed Teacher's Proficiency Course (TPC) Examination No. III conducted by the Director of Education.

(iii) have shown merit and aptitude at work as teacher.

The duties and responsibilities of a P1 Teacher include:

(i) teaching in the classroom;
(ii) supervising a class as class teacher;

(iii) preparing and maintaining lesson notes, schemes of work, pupil assessment reports, records of work and other records;

(iv) maintaining discipline in the class and school in general;

(v) developing and organising relevant teaching and learning materials;

(vi) participate in school co-curricula activities.

**Approved teacher status I (ATS1)**

To be appointed as Approved teacher I, the teacher should:

(i) have done at least three years satisfactory service as Approved teacher II;

(ii) Have exhibited capability in school management, examination results and awareness of education policies and their interpretation; and

(iii) be aware of the legal provisions in Education, the Teachers Service Commission Code of Regulations and other relevant regulations.

The duties and responsibilities of an Approved Teacher I include the following:

(i) Classroom teaching;

(ii) preparing schemes of work;

(iii) inducting new teachers and teacher trainees;

(iv) conducting research activities and publishing learning and teaching materials/manuals;

(v) guidance and counseling of pupils;

(vi) organising remedial work for pupils.

Note: (i) A teacher at this level may be deployed as a Senior Teacher/Deputy principal or a coordinator of the District Teachers Advisory Centers.

(ii) For those with Special Education, their duties and responsibilities will be similar to those of Approved Teacher II in Special Education.

Diploma in Education from an approved Teachers' Training College.

Diploma in Special Education from an approved institution.

(f) Other qualifications that may be adjudged as equivalent to the above as may be approved by the Director of Education or the Director of Technical Training.