

**How teachers and parents perceive parent-teacher
communication in resource-constrained primary school
settings**

by

Bronwyn Wendy Ellis

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SUPERVISOR:

Prof Ronél Ferreira

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the parents and teachers who are committed to nurturing parent-teacher partnerships and engage in frequent meaningful conversations for the benefit of the children in our country.



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- Thank you God, for providing me with this opportunity to develop my strength, courage, knowledge and wisdom.



DECLARATION

I, Bronwyn Wendy Ellis declare that the dissertation titled **How teachers and parents perceive parent-teacher communication in resource-constrained primary school settings** that I hereby submit for the degree MEd in Learning Support, Guidance and Counselling at the University of Pretoria, is my own work and has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other tertiary institution.

Ms. B.W Ellis

Date



DECLARATION BY LANGUAGE EDITOR

I
HATE
MISTEAKS

TK Language Service
Editing and Proofreading

Cell: 082 303 5415

Tel: 012 343 8412

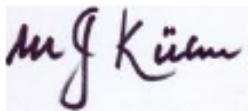
Email: tinus.kuhn@gmail.com

Address: 180 Smith Street, Muckleneuk, Pretoria, 0002

25 March 2017

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the master's dissertation titled **How Teachers and Parents Perceive Parent-teacher Communication in Resource-constrained Primary School Settings** by Bronwyn Wendy Ellis has been edited for grammar errors. It remains the responsibility of the candidate to effect the recommended changes.



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Ms BW Ellis

Educational Psychology

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The author, whose name appears on the title page of this thesis, has obtained, for the research described in this work, the applicable research ethics approval. The author declares that he/she has observed the ethical standards required in terms of the University of Pretoria's *Code of ethics for researchers and the Policy guidelines for responsible research*.



ABSTRACT

How teachers and parents perceive parent-teacher communication in resource-constrained primary school settings

by

Ms. Bronwyn Wendy Ellis

- Supervisor: Prof. Ronél Ferreira
- Institution: University of Pretoria, Department of Educational Psychology
- Degree: MEd (Learning Support, Guidance and Counselling)

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of parents' and teachers' perceptions of parent-teacher communication, its purpose and how it is implemented in resource-constrained school settings. I employed a collective case study design involving four cases, namely parents of Grade 3 learners, parents of Grade 6 learners, Grade 3 teachers and Grade 6 teachers. I followed a qualitative research approach in order to gain rich, contextual information that portrays the perceptions of the participants. I identified three primary schools to participate by combining purposeful and convenience sampling strategies, and purposefully selected 11 teachers and eight parents as participants.

Eight semi-structured interviews and two focus group discussions were conducted to collect data. In addition, I relied on observation, field notes and a research diary. Following inductive thematic data analysis, I identified the following themes: general modes of parent-teacher communication, purposes of parent-teacher communication, role-players and their expectations, factors negatively impacting parent-teacher communication, and strategies to move towards effective parent-teacher communication.

Findings of the study indicate that the participating schools utilised written communication, telephone contact and meetings in person to exchange information with parents, in support of learners' performance. Children, School Management Teams and the Department of

Basic Education were identified as additional important role-players in communication. However, the attitudes, behaviours and preferences of teachers and parents as well as resource-constrained contexts can negatively influence parent-teacher communication. On the other hand, more effective use of technology, the creation of more opportunities for open dialogue and the commitment of all role-players can potentially enhance regular two-way communication between parents and teachers.

Key words

- Home-school support for learners
- Information sharing
- Modes of communication
- Parent involvement
- Parent-teacher communication
- Qualitative research
- Resource-constrained primary school settings
- Telephone communication between teachers and parents



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CHAPTER 1: OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Children learn and grow within a family, school and community (Epstein, 2001). In spite of this fact, families and schools often take up separate isolated roles. Families generally focus on moral, cultural and religious education, whereas schools typically take responsibility for academic orientated topics and development (Hill & Taylor, 2004). However, in recent decades, a move towards greater democracy in education, both internationally and nationally, has been propagated (Mncube, 2009). According to international scholars (Reezigt & Creemers, 2005), an effective school requires local support of community members and the parents of learners, and in particular of district officials and school administrators. Nationally, Mncube (2009) similarly argues that parent involvement in schools is an important aspect for creating democracy in the schooling system. However, parents generally do not participate as mandated by legislation.

Policies and legal structures provide families and schools with guidelines on their rights and responsibilities in the education of children. Over the last couple of decades, laws relating to parent involvement have grown in complexity and quantity (Stern, 2003). Every school governing body or education committee is accordingly required to have parent representation and schools have been mandated to operate home-school agreements. Parents have been given the right to complain about schools or teachers that are not acting in the best interest of their children. To this end, ensuring that children are being educated in school, is a legal obligation that parents hold (Stern, 2003). As schools do not function in isolation the need exists to draw from the outside world, more specifically from learners' families.

Research increasingly indicates that parent involvement in children's education can support the development of academic and social competence (Epstein, 2001; Chen & Gregory, 2009; Bindiya, 2012). In addition to parents' influence, schools play a significant role in the lives of children as they build on the foundation laid by parents (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009). Despite such positive effects being highlighted by existing research, parent involvement seemingly tends to decrease as children move from one

grade to the next (Bindiya, 2012; Epstein & Dauber, 1991). It has, as a result, become important to devise strategies that can promote parent involvement even when learners move to higher grades. Positive and frequent home-school communication has been indicated as one such way of promoting parents' participation in children's educational activities (Bindiya, 2012).

Optimal open communication between parents and teachers however, does not always occur (Lau, 2014). In addition, the nature of parent-teacher communication typically changes as learners progress to higher grades and intermediate grade teachers tend to utilise fewer communication practices and communicate less with parents than foundation phase school teachers (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Murray, McFarland-Piazza & Harrison, 2015). Despite the importance of parent-teacher communication, research studies seldom focus on this topic. Similarly, despite several studies on the various aspects of parent involvement, few studies have been dedicated to variations in contexts, participants and theoretical points of view (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Additional analysis and clarifications are therefore required with regard to the actions and perceptions that may determine parent-teacher communication. This is particularly important within resource-constrained school settings, where limited parent involvement seems to be an even greater challenge yet more important than in other school settings, due to the potential positive outcome of such involvement on the performance of learners.

1.2 RATIONALE AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

According to Rakabe (2014) South African schools are challenged by limited available resources and pressure from both government and the public sector to improve the academic performance of learners. The National Development Plan (NDP) aims to improve the performance of learners in English and Mathematics, as well as learners' completion and retention rates to 80% by 2030 (Rakabe, 2014). In order to achieve these aims, the improvement and allocation of resources – human, financial and infrastructure – needs to be redirected to areas that require assistance. For example, the NDP aims to attract a new group of young, motivated and well-trained teachers to the teaching profession as well as improve the professionalism, subject knowledge, teaching skills and computer literacy of teachers currently in the profession

(Department of Basic Education, 2015). In addition, an increase in parent involvement and community participation in the schooling system as well as curriculum improvements can potentially promote these aims (Department of Basic Education, 2015; Rakabe, 2014).

People that live and work within a resource-constrained setting are forced to deal with many challenges. Schools in these contexts typically accommodate poor students, may produce sub-standard academic outcomes and generally have limited facilities at their disposal. They often receive government funding and may experience restrictions with regards to charging school fees (Rakabe, 2014).

From my experience as a teacher of learners from resource-constrained communities, a lack of opportunities for personal growth and sufficient resources can make it hard for learners to reach their potential. Furthermore, large numbers of learners in one classroom limit the possibility to assist all learners individually with the problems they experience. Many such learners coming from resource-constrained contexts travel far distances to attend school with little or no food available. High incidences of theft, bullying and violence may occur in these settings, once again emphasising the need for parent involvement in such schooling contexts. As the environment in which children learn and grow can be positively influenced if a collaboration or partnership between parents and teachers exist, such collaboration should be supported.

Being a teacher in a resource-constrained school has allowed me to observe the relationships between teachers and parents over the past two years. I initially became interested in this specific topic when I started noticing some difficulties in the communication between teachers and parents. For many of the teachers and parents in the school where I teach, information to parents is conveyed only once a term when learners receive their academic results. Some parents may then, for example, for the first time be notified that their children are at risk of failing.

In addition to my own observation and experience, some of my colleagues have expressed their frustration about parents with whom communication has reportedly been ineffective. In my view, teachers and parents often do not communicate

sufficiently in an open and honest way with one another and may thus experience challenges in terms of parent-school communication. The question arises as to how parent-teacher communication can be improved upon. It follows that possible solutions to creating or improving an honest and open line of communication may lie with both parents and teachers, who experience this phenomenon and the related challenges on a daily basis.

Regardless of their background, most parents rely on invitations and information being sent from the school in fulfilling a productive role in their children's education (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009). According to Epstein and Dauber (1991) most parents do not know how to become involved in their children's education if not guided along the way. It is therefore important for schools to gain an understanding of the different characteristics and needs of parents to ensure maximum involvement in their children's learning (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009). In this regard Anderson and Minke (2007) propose ongoing investigations of parents' perceptions of specific forms of communication with the school, as well as their views on more effective ways that could encourage parent involvement.

This study may provide insight into and add to the knowledge base on teachers' and parents' perceptions of the functioning and effectiveness of parent-teacher communication in resource-constrained school settings. As the perceptions of parents and teachers may be shaped towards the completion of the various phases of schooling, I focus on two specific grades in this study, namely Grades 3 and 6. Furthermore, I regard the beliefs and expectations of parents and teachers as significant in shaping relationships between home and school. In my view beliefs about individuals motivate choices and behaviours that are crucial in developing partnerships. As such, the findings of this study could provide some understanding of effective parent-teacher communication, which may in turn assist learners to fulfil their potential when receiving collaborative support from both their parents and the teachers at school.

Against this background, the purpose of this study is to contribute to existing theory on parent-teacher communication by illuminating teachers' and parents' perceptions of this phenomenon, its purpose and how it is implemented in practice. In this manner

my study may shed light on the type of communication that parents and teachers prefer in a resource-constrained school context. To this end I set out to explore and identify general challenges experienced by parents and teachers in parent-teacher communication, and in using different types of communication. Following this aim, I also set out to explore and describe preferred ways of communication and potential ways of improving parent-teacher communication that are not perceived as optimal.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The primary research question that guided this study is: *How do Grade 3 and 6 teachers and parents in resource-constrained school settings perceive parent-teacher communication?*

In addressing the primary research question, the following secondary questions applied:

- What are the current parent-teacher communication practices between Grade 3 and Grade 6 teachers and parents in resource-constrained school settings?
- Which mode of communication do parents and teachers prefer in resource-constrained primary school settings?
- How do the perceptions of parent-teacher communication differ between Grade 3 and Grade 6 teachers and parents?
- Which challenges do parents and teachers experience in relation to parent-teacher communication?
- How can parent-teacher communication be improved?

1.4 WORKING ASSUMPTIONS

In undertaking this study, I assumed the following based on my initial literature review:

- No clear definition of parent involvement exists, with the result that participants may not necessarily share the same view of what this phenomenon entails.
- Parents and teachers may define and interpret their roles differently, which can lead to conflict and confusion.

- The nature of parent-teacher communication differs between different grades, and in schools accommodating learners from different socio-economic backgrounds.
- Parent involvement will decline as learners continue to higher grades.
- Parents are generally not given the opportunity to participate in decision making processes at school.

1.5 CONCEPT CLARIFICATION

In this section I present the key concepts of the study, and clarify the concepts that guided my study.

1.5.1 Parent involvement

Parent involvement can be defined as the willing and active participation of parents in a wide range of both home-based and school-based activities (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009). Epstein (1995) suggests that overlapping spheres (home and school) influence learners' achievement and development as well as family and school effectiveness. In addition the ecological systems theory of Bronfenbrenner (1994) refers to multiple levels of influence on growth, where the home and school combine forces in supporting the development of individuals.

For the purpose of this study parent involvement is defined according to the description included in the *No Child Left Behind* legislation (Bush, 2001). This legislation states that parent involvement implies participation in frequent, two-way and meaningful conversations, involving a child's education and other school activities that may play a role in assisting learning. In these conversations, parents are encouraged to participate and become full partners in their children's education (Bush, 2001).

1.5.2 Parent-teacher communication

A comprehensive definition of a parent is provided by the South African Schools Act (No. 84 of 1996). According to this Act (No. 84 of 1996), a parent refers to any primary care-giver, a biological parent or legal guardian, who takes care of a learner and fulfils certain obligations such as taking responsibility for the learner's schooling. A parent is

therefore an adult who assumes responsibility for a child regardless of their biological relationship (Pekel, Roehlkepartain, Syvertsen & Scales, 2015). Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009) propose that parents are people who permanently care for children and are compelled to show interest in the children's education. For the purpose of this study parents are viewed as primary care-givers or legal guardians who acknowledge and respect the rights of children and act as full partners in their children's development, in all aspects of life.

According to the South African Department of Basic Education (2005), a professional teacher is an individual with educated competences and abiding commitments that are required to participate successfully in the professional practice of teaching. Collins (1990) views an effective teacher as someone who is committed to students and learning, fully understands subject knowledge, can think systematically about teaching practices, takes responsibility for managing students and belongs to a learning community. In addition, Graham-Clay (2005) proposes that teachers are individuals that should strive to ascertain partnerships with parents in order to support children's learning. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, I view a teacher as someone who is in partnership with parents and will support the development of a child's academic potential and general functioning.

Jooste (2011) defines communication as the process of exchanging information, which can influence and is influenced by interaction with others. Parent-teacher communication often involves one-way communication, whereby teachers share information and ideas, and parents passively receive them (Olsen & Fuller, 2003). In this regard, Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009) describe the process of communication as one where a person starts a conversation while another receives the messages. Once these individuals exchange roles and the process is repeated in both ways, two-way communication occurs. Barriers or disturbances may, however, negatively influence such a communication process (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009).

In this study the goal was to strengthen parent-teacher relationships by means of communication for the sake of optimal learner development. Parent-teacher communication is thus viewed as frequent and meaningful, two-way interaction

between parents and teachers. In such interactions the exchange of information can benefit the development of the learner.

1.5.3 Resource-constrained school setting

A resource-constrained setting refers to an environment characterised by limited resources, which typically results in budget restrictions and challenges in accessing much needed equipment (Sargent & Hannum, 2009). A resource-constrained school setting similarly refers to an unsupportive school environment where high incidence of poverty, violence and crime occurs (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009). Such schools usually receive funding from the Department of Basic Education, charge limited or no schools fees and are under pressure to improve the academic performance of learners with the limited resources that are available (Rakabe, 2014). For the purpose of this study, a resource-constrained school setting refers to a school situated in a community where resources are limited, where learners generally obtain poor academic results, where poor learners are accommodated, and where facilities are limited or lacking (Rakabe, 2014).

1.6 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

I selected Epstein's theory (1995) as theoretical framework as this theory illuminates the overlapping spheres of possible influences on learner performance, namely the family, school and community. This theory's underlying principles can thus provide possible explanations for family-school relations, by focusing on separate responsibilities, shared responsibilities and sequential responsibilities of both families and schools (Epstein, 1995). Epstein (1995) suggests that the overlapping spheres of the school, family and community will influence a learner's achievement and development, together with family and school effectiveness. As such, Epstein's theory (1995) provides a foundation for this study and explains possible dynamics between the home and school environment.

Some schools and parents may indicate the need for separate responsibilities of families and schools, resulting in possible conflict in terms of family-school relationships. However, following a shared responsibilities approach emphasises cooperation and coordination. In this regard Epstein (1995) argues that teachers and

parents need to work together in support of child development. Furthermore, sequential perspectives may stress the critical stages of teachers' and parents' contributions to children's development. Parents are said to be responsible for the skills taught up to the age of five or six, while the teacher is believed to take primary responsibility for the child's education thereafter (Epstein, 1995).

Epstein's (1995) model provides a framework for six different types of parent involvement at school, namely parent participation at school, communication, volunteering, learning at home, active decision making, and collaboration with the community. For the purpose of this study the second type of parent involvement (communication) was viewed as significant. The model indicates the importance of effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communication, and emphasises two-way communication as important for school-community partnerships. A more in-depth discussion of Epstein's model follows in Chapter 2.

1.7 INTRODUCTION TO PARADIGMATIC PERSPECTIVES

Research provides an understanding of the world; however, individuals' understanding is based on how they perceive the world and on their views of the purpose of this understanding (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). The assumptions that underpin research can be ontological and epistemological in nature (Grix, 2002), and will in turn give rise to methodological considerations (Maree, 2013). In this section I introduce the paradigmatic perspectives I opted for. More detailed discussions follow in Chapter 3.

1.7.1 Epistemological paradigm: Interpretivism

Interpretivism is rooted in hermeneutics, which implies the practice and theory of interpretation (Maree, 2013). Researchers holding this perspective assume that access to reality or a phenomenon is gained through the social construction of shared meaning, and by means of consciousness and language rather than being rooted in objective facts (Maree, 2013).

Interpretivist research aims to understand lived human experience through the meaning that people assign to experiences in their lives by means of thoughts and

ideas (Maree, 2013). The aim of interpretivist research is aligned with the goals of my study, as such a lens can provide me with an understanding of parent-teacher communication, resulting in insight into a particular group of people's views, based on what they have personally encountered. As an interpretivist researcher, I thus aimed to understand perceptions of parent-teacher communication, rather than to explain these (Mack, 2010).

I view Interpretivism as a suitable epistemological paradigm for this study, as a particular strength of interpretivist research relates to the depth and richness of the descriptions and explorations that can potentially be gained when adapting this paradigmatic lens (Maree, 2013). Furthermore, an interpretivist approach can allow the researcher to generate new knowledge and contribute to future work and practice by providing valuable information (Wu & Chen, 2005). Interpretivist research can also facilitate improvement or change through the creation of theories in practice, instead of generalisation of findings (Mack, 2010). This interpretivist study intends to contribute to current thinking on parent-teacher communication, and potentially provides a constructive understanding of the phenomenon by means of communication. This may subsequently result in greater collaborative support from both parents and teachers in assisting learners to fulfil their potential.

1.7.2 Methodological approach: Qualitative research

I followed a qualitative approach, grounded in subjectivity, and aimed to gain insight into the phenomenon under study (Maree, 2013). Qualitative research is typically exploratory in nature and can improve an understanding of why and how populations define and experience situations or events. This approach provides for in-depth and rich, varied contextual information to be obtained that may portray attitudes, intentions and perceptions underlying and influencing behaviour (Basit, 2010).

I based my choice of a qualitative approach on the advantages implied by this choice. Firstly, as little is currently known about parent-teacher communication, I regarded a qualitative approach as potentially useful in gaining insight into this phenomenon, enabling me to explain and describe parents' and teachers' perceptions of their communication, the challenges they experience and how communication can be

improved upon in practice. Secondly, the goal of qualitative research relates to understanding a situation from participants' points of views and not that of the researcher. Furthermore, the findings required to answer my research questions did not depend on quantifiable data, but rather on the words, feelings, ideas and experiences of the participants. Finally, by following this methodological approach, I was able to research dynamic processes, and identify patterns and changes in parent-teacher communication across two grades (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006).

1.8 OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH PROCESS

The research design, selection of participants, data collection and documentation techniques, and data analysis strategy formed part of the research process. In this section I introduce the research process. More comprehensive discussions of the research process follow in Chapter 3.

1.8.1 Research design

I utilised a collective case study design (Yin, 2014), which is aligned with the underlying paradigmatic assumptions and perspectives of my study. A case study design enabled me to provide a unique holistic depiction of experiences in the form of participants' perceptions and feelings about the phenomenon under investigation (communication between parents and teachers) in a real-life social setting (resource-constrained school setting) (Basit, 2010).

Even though a case study design can include multiple cases, the design allows for a single set of cross-case conclusions (Yin, 2014). By utilising a collective case study design, I was thus able to provide a detailed and rich description of the participating parents' and teachers' personal experiences. In this manner I could gain an understanding of the perceptions held by the participants of their communication in the specific resource-constrained school setting (Basit, 2010).

When utilising a case study design, a case is not required to be a single person; instead it may form a small group of individuals (Yin, 2014). As I required the views of both parents and teachers to gain insight into the dynamics of parent-teacher communication, I involved both these cases for the purpose of the study. Furthermore,

I selected two specific grades due to the fact that they represent the final years of particular phases in a primary school (being the Foundation Phase and the Intermediate Phase). I based this decision on the assumption that parents and teachers may have developed a perception or opinion of the phenomenon under investigation towards the completion of the various phases of schooling. My study therefore comprises of four cases, namely parents of Grade 3 learners, parents of Grade 6 learners, Grade 3 teachers and Grade 6 teachers.

1.8.2 Selection of cases, research sites and participants

I selected the cases, research sites and participants utilising purposive and convenience sampling strategies, thereby aligning my strategy with the interpretive paradigm and qualitative methodological approach I selected (Basit, 2010). I relied on purposive sampling as my research involved a small-scale study with the goal of finding answers to specific research questions (Basit, 2010). More specifically, I used specific criteria in choosing the cases and participants. My focus was on small groups of individuals that formed the cases as I was interested in the detailed descriptions of a specific phenomenon (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014).

The three schools I selected are characterised by limited resources (financial and infrastructure) and pressure from the government and public to improve the poor academic performance of learners (Rakabe, 2014). These primary schools are situated in the greater Tshwane region and function within resource-constrained communities. Once the selected schools had granted permission, I selected 11 teachers and eight parents of learners in Grade 3 or Grade 6 to participate in this study. Participants shared similar characteristics and could provide views on parent-teacher communication based on personal experience. The selection criteria and more detail of the cases, research sites and participants are included in Chapter 3.

1.8.3 Data collection and documentation

Numerous data collection and documentation techniques, sources and instruments can be used when conducting case study research. I planned a combination of data collection and documentation techniques, as captured in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1: Data collection and documentation (adapted from Maree, 2013)

Phases of field work	Data collection and documentation techniques
1st	Individual (five) and dyadic (three) semi-structured interviews with parents and teachers integrating semi-structured observations, documented by means of recording, transcripts, field notes and a research diary.
2nd	Two focus group discussions with parents and teachers (one each), integrating semi-structured observations, documented by means of recordings, transcripts, field notes and a research diary.
3rd	Volunteers completing logbooks over a period three months ¹ .

I utilised semi-structured interviews to collect data, and documented these by means of transcripts, field notes and a research diary. Research interviews generally provide researchers and participants with the opportunity to take part in a dialogue aimed at extracting information about a specific phenomenon (Menter, Elliot, Hulme, Lewin & Lowden, 2011). For this purpose one or two participants from each case were asked predetermined questions related to their perceptions, opinions, experiences and feelings about parent-teacher communication. In this manner semi-structured interviews allowed me to gather and elicit information in my attempt to understand how teachers and parents think and/or act with regard to parent-teacher communication. As one of the research sites is the school where I am currently employed (See Chapter 3 for more detail), I relied on a field worker for data collection at this site in order to avoid bias and subjective interpretation during the analysis process, and address the potential effect of power and hierarchical challenges. In addition, an external individual transcribed the data collected, resulting in my not knowing which contributions were made by which of my colleagues or parents of the school.

A small group of individuals (teachers and parents) sharing similar characteristics partook in initial focus group discussions during which I explored their views, opinions and feelings about the phenomenon under study (Menter et al., 2011). I facilitated two focus group discussions (with four participants per focus group) and relied on the benefits of this technique to gain an in-depth understanding of their perceptions on parent-teacher communication. All focus group discussions were audio-recorded and

¹ Even though I planned data collection by means of logbooks, this strategy was eventually not utilised due to the reasons provided in my discussion in this section.

later transcribed verbatim. Moreover, I captured my ideas and observations in a research diary and by means of field notes.

Throughout I relied on semi-structured observations as complementary data collection method, as this could provide me with a more comprehensive depiction of parent-teacher communication in the specific school settings. Observations can provide qualitative information on a particular context and the information shared by participants. By utilising semi-structured observations I was not required to follow a strict agenda, but could instead be flexible and record any significant and interesting information I observed (Basit, 2010).

Following the focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews, I requested volunteer participants to generate logbooks as part of the data collection process. Logbooks can be viewed as diaries in which personal narratives are written for a specific purpose over a period of time (Basit, 2010). One volunteer was requested from each focus group and semi-structured interview; participants were asked to record information on their experiences of parent-teacher communication at their schools for a period of three months. Information associated with the frequency of communication, types of communication and personal reflections was required for this purpose. However, despite ongoing efforts and constant reminders and requests, participants did not complete these logbooks due to reported personal reasons of being overwhelmed and having a busy work schedule.

1.8.4 Data analysis and interpretation

Once data have been collected, it is necessary to make sense of it all (Basit, 2010). The main goal of qualitative data analysis is to determine categories and relationships that portray the participants' views or perspectives. By analysing the participants' perceptions, understanding, feelings and experiences I was able to establish how these individuals made meaning of the specific phenomenon, being parent-teacher communication in a resource-constrained school setting (Maree, 2013).

Inductive thematic data analysis assisted me in identifying the multiple realities of the participants and determining common themes and sub-themes. As a researcher

implementing the interpretivist paradigm, this type of analysis enabled me to be guided by the participants' views in my presentation of the findings, regularly reflecting on alternative potential interpretations of the data (Basit, 2010). I was thus able to seek answers through descriptions of the participants' perceptions (Basit, 2010).

I regarded thematic analysis as a suitable choice for this study, as it allowed me to analyse qualitative, textual data (transcripts of interviews and focus groups discussions, field notes, observations and a research diary). Thematic inductive analysis furthermore provided me with the opportunity to identify similarities and differences in the participants' responses, which in turn enabled me to answer the research questions (Maree, 2013). The way in which I implemented the guidelines for thematic inductive analysis are presented in more detail in Chapter 3.

1.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

As a researcher involving human participants in a study, I was required to follow the guidelines for conducting ethical research with human subjects. Participation was voluntary and participants could withdraw from the study at any time during the process if they wished to do so. I commenced with the research only once all parties had provided written informed consent, and participants had the right to ask questions and gain clarity at any time (Maree, 2013). Before any data were collected, I informed the participants that interviews would be recorded and listened to by someone other than myself when being transcribed, requesting their permission to record discussions. In addition I respected confidentiality and anonymity from the start (Menter et al., 2011).

I sought to gain the participants' trust, be transparent and avoid deception throughout the research process (Menter et al., 2011). I ensured that no participants were exposed to undue psychological and physical harm, and focused on preserving the dignity of the participants throughout the research process. Furthermore I ensured that no questions were threatening, insensitive or offensive in any way (Basit, 2010). The ethical guidelines I followed are discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

1.10 QUALITY CRITERIA

Enhancing rigour and implementing quality assurance are necessary to evaluate the worth of qualitative research (Shenton, 2004). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) trustworthiness or authenticity can be established by ensuring credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability and authenticity.

Credibility of findings implies that a researcher has truthfully recorded the phenomenon under investigation. Triangulation may enhance credibility and entails the use of multiple methods of data collection and analysis in order to validate findings (Lincoln & Guba 1985; Shenton, 2004). In the current study I collected data by means of several qualitative methods, namely focus groups discussions, interviews and observations.

In qualitative research, comparability and transferability refer to the possibility of findings being generalisable or applicable to other contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I aimed to include descriptions that are sufficiently detailed for future researchers to be able to determine the extent to which the findings may be transferred and compared to different situations and contexts (Basit, 2010), yet I did not aim to obtain generalisable findings.

Dependability indicates the extent to which a study is consistent and can be replicated by other researchers (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004). In the present study I thus reported the research process in great detail. This may also allow the reader to determine whether or not trustworthy research procedures had been followed (Shenton, 2004).

Confirmability indicates whether or not a study reflects the voices of the participants and is free from researcher bias or interests (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study I took several steps to ensure that the findings do not reflect my preferences or characteristics, but capture the experiences and perceptions of the parents and teachers who participated (Shenton, 2004).

Finally authenticity creates integrity in research, and involves the appreciation and true understanding of individuals (Schwandt, 2007). Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose fairness, ontological authenticity, educative authenticity, catalytic authenticity and tactile authenticity as specific guidelines. Chapter 3 provides a more comprehensive discussion of the strategies I implemented in support of the trustworthiness of this study.

1.11 OUTLINE OF THE DISSERTATION

This dissertation consists of the chapters set out below.

Chapter 1: Overview of the study

Chapter 1 provides an introduction and includes background to the study, the rationale for undertaking this research and the research questions that guided the investigation. The purpose of the study, definition of key concepts, an overview of the selected theoretical framework and introduction to the research process are presented.

Chapter 2: Literature review

In this chapter I focus on the review of existing literature relating to the phenomenon under investigation. As such Chapter 2 locates the current study in the wider subject area and provides a review of existing trends, current debates and other relevant aspects related to parent involvement and parent-teacher communication. In addition I explain the theoretical framework I utilised.

Chapter 3: Research methodology

In Chapter 3 I discuss the research methodology I relied on. I explain and justify my choice of a research design, the selection of cases and participants, data collection and documentation techniques, and data analysis and interpretation procedures. I also elaborate on the ethical considerations and quality criteria I adhered to.

Chapter 4: Results of the study

Chapter 4 presents the results I obtained based on the inductive thematic analysis I completed. I include extracts from the raw data in support of my discussion.

Chapter 5: Conclusions, implications and recommendations

The discussion in Chapter 5 focuses on the findings of the study. For this discussion I situate the results I obtained in existing literature as presented in Chapter 2. Thereafter, I draw conclusions based on the key findings of the study and contemplate the implications of the findings. I conclude with recommendations for training, practice and further research.

1.12 SUMMARY

In current times limited communication between parents and teachers seems common and widespread (Lau, 2014). This study aimed to shed light on this occurrence, and subsequently identified suitable strategies that may overcome the challenges often associated with limited communication. In this chapter I introduced and provided an overview of my study, I stipulated the purpose of my research, formulated research questions, clarified key concepts, and introduced the selected paradigmatic perspectives and research process.

In the following chapter I discuss my exploration of existing literature on parent-teacher communication. To this end I discuss relevant research studies indicating similar or contradicting arguments. I aim to identify current limitations in existing research, and potential areas where the current study can contribute to what is already known. Lastly, I explain the theoretical framework I selected for this study in more detail.



CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 1 I provided an outline of the study. I discussed the purpose of the research, my rationale for embarking on the study and some background to the research. I presented the research questions that guided the investigation and clarified key concepts. I also provided an overview of my paradigmatic choices and the research process.

In this chapter I focus on literature concerning parent involvement and parent-teacher communication. Researchers have spent decades debating parent-teacher communication in order to promote parent involvement in schools, with this focus still emerging. Following my presentation of existing literature, I discuss the theoretical framework of the study.

2.2 Parent involvement

Understanding parent involvement from different perspectives is necessary to comprehend this topic fully. However, the rapidly growing body of knowledge on parent involvement indicates differences between past and present studies in defining this phenomenon. Despite its instinctive meaning, parent involvement has as a result not been clearly or consistently defined (Fan, 2001). Studies in the past have, for example, defined parent involvement as parents' communication with teachers (Epstein, 1991), or as parents' participation in home and school activities (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009). Lawson's findings (2003) indicate that parents generally define their involvement in terms of a community-centric view that may include activities such as safeguarding and making sure that their children attend school. On the contrary teachers typically view parent involvement as parental presence at school throughout the year (Lawson, 2003).

Fan (2001) elaborates on this view, indicating that parent involvement implies 14 items, among others, supervision. In addition, the ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1994) refers to multiple levels of influence on growth, where the

home and school combine forces in impacting the development of individuals. Closely aligned, other researchers (Anderson & Minke, 2007) state that parent involvement is multi-dimensional in nature and should not be treated as a single construct. These authors indicate that schools may underestimate parent involvement if they consider only activities taking place at school. Therefore parent involvement should be defined in a broad manner in order to include activities from both school and home (Anderson & Minke, 2007).

Epstein (1995) identifies six types of parent involvement that can guide programmes and policies at schools. These are parenting, communication, volunteering, learning at home, decision making and collaboration with the community. As parents will have different preferences for one or more types of such parent involvement, the effectiveness of parent involvement programmes will depend on the type of involvement selected and the quality of implementation. Each type of parent involvement includes practices in partnerships, challenges that need to be addressed and possible outcomes for the individuals involved (Epstein, 1995). According to Epstein (1995) the initial responsibility of encouraging parents' participation lies with the school. Halsey (2005) confirms that many parents require specific guidance from schools as they may not understand their responsibility in their children's schooling. As a result of their own uncertainty, parents may merely focus on support with extracurricular activities (Halsey, 2005).

Existing literature indicates that parents and teachers, however, define parent involvement differently. When these differences are not acknowledged, misunderstandings and conflicts between parents and teachers may occur (Lawson, 2003). Epstein and Dauber (1991) support Lawson's (2003) claim, indicating that parent-family interactions may often be seen as negative due to conflicting differences held. In addition, teachers are most likely to engage in contact with parents who have similar beliefs of involvement as they have. In terms of different and changing views, a recent study by Lau (2014) indicates that parents interpret their roles in parent involvement, before and after school transition in different ways. Less involved parents tend to follow a more traditional culture where their roles are clearly defined, such as being responsible for children at home (Hill & Taylor, 2004).

Despite the apparent benefits for learners, parents and teachers, some parent involvement dimensions may also have a negative effect on learners' academic growth, such as supervision (Fan, 2001). Madigan (1994), for example, highlights the possibility of negative effects on the academic performance of learners when parents assist with their homework, insist that their children do their homework, or reward their children for good grades. Explanations for these seemingly conflicting findings remain unclear, thereby necessitating ongoing research in this field. My study could add insight in terms of the ways in which parents and teachers define their roles, and may perhaps influence the participants' practices in communication with one another in future.

2.2.1 Legislation on parent involvement

The effects of parent involvement in schools have been studied globally (Harber, 2004; Epstein 1991; Epstein, 1995; Lau, 2014). International research indicates a link between high functioning schools and active parent participation with associated power and responsibility in schools (Harber, 2004). Parents will generally feel more confident to assist their children when they are certain about what to do and what is expected of them (Epstein, 1991).

Recent international research, however, suggests that parents generally experience fewer opportunities to participate in formal schooling (Lau, 2014), resulting in them focusing on the educational environment at home (Epstein, 1995). Studies conducted in South Africa confirm that parents are often not given the opportunity to participate in decision making processes at school, particularly in rural schools (Mncube, 2009; Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009). Parents may furthermore limit participation due to them not possessing the skills required to perform the expected duties (Mncube, 2009).

Over the past few years international laws and policies relating to parent involvement at school have grown in complexity and quantity (Olsen & Fuller, 2003; Stern, 2003). These laws allow parents to take some control over the schooling system (Stern, 2003) resulting in some teachers experiencing this as a personal attack (Shah, 2001). Parent representatives are, for example, mandated to form part of school governing bodies. In addition, all parents are to receive an annual report including information such as

admission procedures. Furthermore, home-school agreements are required according to current legislation (Department of Basic Education, 1996).

All parents have a legal obligation to make sure that their children are being educated in schools. Despite the nature of the schooling received, parents hold the right and responsibility to guide and influence their children's education (Olsen & Fuller, 2003). Parents furthermore have the right to complain about a school or a teacher (Stern, 2003). In this regard, teachers sometimes argue that parents' rights are viewed as more valuable than the rights of learners or teachers (Shah, 2001).

Even though South African teachers and policy makers seemingly favour active parent involvement, parents are not always considered as full partners in their children's education (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009). As relatively little has been published on parent involvement in the South African context, this study can potentially add to existing theory in this field.

2.2.2 Factors influencing parent involvement

Research indicates that the education level of parents can influence their level of involvement at school and in their children's education. For example, a study by Jooste (2011) indicates that less educated parents are less likely to be involved in their children's education. Ricciuti (2004) similarly suggests that a child's academic achievement will be positively influenced by factors such as parents' education, competencies, and schooling expectations and attitudes. Closely related, studies conducted by Chen and Gregory (2009) as well as Fan (2001) indicate that increased classroom engagement can be due to parents' expectations that their children will obtain higher educational degrees. Learners receiving positive reinforcement at home are also more likely to have a better relationship with their teachers. In this regard, parent involvement and support can assist children to achieve educational success.

Other supportive findings stem from South African studies, indicating factors such as parents' education level and children being victimised as important in determining parents' involvement in school activities (Mncube, 2009). Even though research suggests that teachers who frequently encourage parent involvement do not judge

less educated parents, teachers who do not involve parents tend to make more stereotypical judgments (Epstein, 1986). Parents from all backgrounds can, however, be productive and actively involved when teachers assist them.

Another factor that may influence parent involvement is socio-economic status. Living in an economically disadvantaged and resource-constrained context implies various potential consequences and related challenges (Cooper & Crosnoe, 2007). According to Cooper and Crosnoe (2007), economically disadvantaged youth typically experience less parent involvement than their affluent peers. Learners whose parents are actively involved are generally more academically orientated, tend to enjoy school and receive higher scores than their peers where parent involvement is lacking or limited (Cooper & Crosnoe, 2007).

Ricciuiti (2004) explains that less support from lower income families can be associated with time constraints and parent occupation. Ricciuiti (2004) furthermore emphasises the fact that lower income parents (often single mothers) may have limited social and economic resources available to them and their families, implying the likelihood of negative outcomes for children. A finding by Anderson and Minke (2007) indicates that parents who face adverse circumstances will be more likely to participate in school activities if they know that this is desired by the teacher. This finding emphasises the importance of parents, teachers and community members communicating with one another in order to assist learners in succeeding in school, especially learners at risk of failing (Epstein, 2001).

Children's developmental level seemingly also has an influence on the level of parent involvement at school. Existing studies indicate that parent involvement generally declines as learners develop, due to reasons such as parents experiencing fewer opportunities for involvement in formal schooling activities (Lau, 2014; Epstein & Dauber, 1991). Epstein and Dauber (1991) state that, at school level, parent involvement is typically stronger in primary schools, and more positive and comprehensive when compared to middle school. As a learner progresses through the different grades, fewer teachers tend to assist parents in becoming involved (Epstein, 1986). According to Chen and Gregory (2009), when parent involvement decreases, it does, however, not necessarily mean that the effects of development will decrease

accordingly. Findings like these influenced my decision to involve parents and teachers from two grades in this study, in an attempt to either confirm or contradict this belief. I specifically included two grades at primary school level, where active parent involvement is a possibility.

2.2.3 Benefits of parent involvement for primary school learners

As stated, various factors within individuals, schools and families are associated with the academic success of learners. Different views currently exist in terms of the effect of parent involvement as some researchers argue that learners with greater parent involvement will perform better in schools (Fan, 2001; Hill & Taylor, 2004), while others claim that parent involvement may result in academic failure (Horn & West, 1992). Perspectives specifically seem to differ between different cultures and groups in society. For example, parent involvement is encouraged in the Chinese culture through the publication of documents, yet in Hong Kong, parents typically take a passive role in the schooling environment (Chen & Gregory, 2009). In South Africa, policy documents propagate parent involvement (Department of Basic Education, 1996), as indicated in the previous section.

In terms of the benefits of parent involvement, Epstein (2001) indicates that a connection between home, school and the community can improve a learner's success and potentially promote parent involvement across grades. When this connection is lost, learners may feel unsupported and not try their best at school (Epstein, 2001). Related studies generally indicate that the benefits of parent involvement are specifically significant in the case of young children (Crosnoe, 2001).

In line with findings such as these, Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009) foreground an association between parent involvement and improved academic achievement, a decrease in school drop-out rates, improved learner behaviour and an increase in emotional stability among learners. Certain partnership practices with families, schools and communities can, for example, improve learners' school attendance (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). In addition, parent involvement may act as a buffer to prevent negative behaviour, and stimulate a child's development, thereby fostering a smoother transition between the different grades in school (Cooper & Crosnoe, 2007).

Furthermore, the physical, social and emotional development of children can be enhanced by shared commitments of parents and teachers (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009; Lau, 2014). It has been found that parent involvement can improve children's social skills and reduce behavioural problems (Nokali, Bachman & Votruba-Drzal, 2010). Children may also develop a positive attitude to themselves and to learning when they witness their parents' interest in their education. Where parents are actively involved, children are more likely to experience emotional stability and security allowing them to overcome barriers and adjust to school (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009).

2.3 Parent-teacher partnerships as basis for parent involvement

According to Cox-Peterson (2011) a partnership is established when two or more people agree to work together in order to fulfil mutual goals. An educational partnership generally works towards improving the academic performance of learners and adds overall benefits to the school. The establishment of partnerships between parents and teachers is not an easy task, and requires commitment from both parents and teachers in striving to assist learners to reach their full potential (Couchenour & Chrisman, 2011).

2.3.1 Purpose and nature of parent-teacher partnerships

Educational partnerships can involve any individual in the family, school or community that aims to enrich the educational practices that learners experience (Cox-Peterson, 2011). Many people share the view that education should be the responsibility of both teachers and parents (Albright & Weissberg, 2010), and that this partnership should not have a dominating individual or group where decisions are enforced. All decisions are made in a collaborative manner within a parent-teacher partnership (Cox-Peterson, 2011), and involve shared responsibility and two-way conversations (Weiss, 2015). Shared responsibility in turn emphasises continued cooperation and coordination between the school and the home.

Parent-teacher partnerships need to be mutually created and the foundation is generally based on trust, understanding, accountability and appreciation of cultures and languages (Cox-Peterson, 2011). In the same way, collaborative relationships are typically based on approachability, honesty, shared information, support and an

approach of working together. Such practices typically give rise to positive outcomes for learners and satisfactory experiences by both parents and teachers, according to Ellis, Lock and Lummis (2015).

In adapting the work of an earlier author (Eisner, 1985), Cox-Peterson (2011) identified three possible types of educational partnership, namely explicit partnerships, implicit partnerships and null partnerships. In explicit partnerships, schools, families and communities formulate written goals and outcomes for improving the education of learners. Implicit partnerships imply that partners discuss goals, yet do not identify any specific strategy or outcome. Finally, a null partnership occurs when all parties occupy the same area but do not communicate about any goals or outcomes. In applying these categories to the current study, and against the background that limited parent involvement seems prevalent in South African schools, it can be assumed that many school and family partnerships may not communicate or establish shared goals relating to the education of children, thereby falling in the last category.

Parent-teacher partnerships can potentially support the provision of good quality education for learners by utilising the best possible expertise and available resources (Cox-Peterson, 2011). In this regard Epstein (1995) states that partnerships between parents and teachers can assist learners in succeeding during and after their years of schooling. Furthermore, school programmes may improve, a positive school climate can be promoted, teachers can be assisted with their work, and parents' skills developed while families connect with communities and schools as part of such partnerships (Epstein, 1995). It follows that parent-teacher partnerships can create opportunities to foster learners' emotional, social and academic competencies by establishing supportive and engaging environments (Albright & Weissberg, 2010).

Even though principals and educational leaders often intend to prioritise family engagement in support of learners' performance (Pekel, Roehlkepartain, Syvertsen & Scales, 2015), schools and districts do not always follow through on such partnerships (Cox-Peterson, 2011). Furthermore, teachers may not feel sufficiently equipped with the necessary strategies, experience or knowledge to establish and maintain these relationships (Couchenour & Chrisman, 2011; Cox-Peterson, 2011).

Despite ongoing research, policymakers, researchers, teachers and parents seemingly do not regularly participate in successful parent-teacher partnerships (Albright & Weissberg, 2010). The current study may add to existing literature on parent-teacher partnerships as well as the goals of teachers and parents and the strategies that may be put in place to achieve such goals.

2.3.2 Parents' expectations of teachers

As early as 1995, Bastiani identified common expectations of parents of school-going children. According to this author, parents want their children to receive high quality education, be provided with regular and reliable information, and be informed about their children's academic performance. Furthermore, parents wish to be taken seriously and to contribute to the schools their children attend. Despite this need to make a contribution, current research suggests that parent involvement in schools remains limited (Mncube, 2009).

As the informal information conveyed between children and parents is often considered as insufficient, many parents stress the importance of being informed by teachers about their children's academic performance and well-being at school (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009). This need is supported by Ellis et al. (2015) who argue, based on the findings of their research, that parents often experience teachers to withhold information and not provide sufficient feedback about their children,. Parents participating in their study were as a result seemingly unable to provide the support that their children required at home. In this particular study, partnerships between parents and teachers were hampered due to limited or a lack of regular communication (Ellis et al., 2015).

Parents often wish to become more involved in their children's schooling but then do not know how to do so (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009). They may also feel that schools are teachers' territory and therefore be hesitant to initiate communication. Teachers are considered as experts in teaching and as a result seen as authority figures in this area (Olsen & Fuller, 2003) and that they should take the lead in communication between the two parties (Epstein, 1986). It can be argued that teachers who are

accessible and welcoming in nature will thus be more likely to set parents at ease (Ellis et al., 2015).

Even though parents will typically become emotionally upset when they feel that teachers do not understand or hear their concerns, teachers often find it hard to remain calm and not become defensive when concerns are brought to light (Couchenour & Chrisman, 2011). In this regard Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009) assert that parents may experience teachers as looking down upon them, making them feel unwelcome. On the contrary teachers may also experience parents as aggressive and insulting, resulting in teachers feeling intimidated and even fearful (Ellis et al., 2015). Such unhealthy practices may in turn result in limited communication between parents and teachers, with subsequent negative effects on learners (Ellis et al., 2015).

Pekel et al. (2015) view parents as potentially not having the desire, time or skills to participate in parent-teacher partnerships, and propose that parents may rather focus on the quality of family relationships. Existing studies (Kraft & Rogers, 2015; McNeal, 1999) emphasise the importance of parent-child relationships; however, suggestions on how schools can assist in strengthening family bonds are relatively novel. According to McNeal (1999) parent-child discussions are likely to raise educational expectations and influence learners' performance. Furthermore, teachers who provide parents with information and guidance can enhance sound parent-child interactions (Kraft & Rogers, 2015).

2.3.3 Teachers' expectations of parents

Bastiani (1995) provides a list of expectations that teachers and schools typically have of parents. Parents are namely expected to send their children to school at the appropriate age, ensure that their children are adequately fed and clothed, see to it that their children attend school regularly with the basic materials they require, and educate their children to be well behaved and respectful to others. Moreover, in order for a collaborative parent-teacher relationship to develop, teachers require of parents to be honest and provide real accounts of their children's capabilities as experienced at home. This can enable both teachers and parents to understand the level of support

required for children fully (Ellis et al., 2015). However, teachers may experience difficulty in gaining access to such information (Stern, 2003).

Complaints about parents are often reported by teachers. More specifically, teachers may experience parents as uninterested, not suitably educated, not spending enough time with their children, or as leaving many things for the teacher to handle. Teachers often argue that parents in resource-constrained community settings are especially difficult to reach (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009). In addition, when collaborative partnerships indeed develop, some parents may want to develop a personal relationship with teachers whereas teachers typically aim to maintain professional relationships with parents (Ellis et al., 2015).

According to Pekel et al. (2015), teachers may experience challenges in determining the focus of parent involvement. Teachers may, for example, suggest ways to reinforce effective parenting practices instead of focusing on the reinforcement of school work; they may furthermore feel overwhelmed and overextended (Cox-Petersen, 2011; Wright & Stegelin, 2003), not pursuing the necessary strategies to encourage parent involvement due to them feeling exhausted (Xu & Gulosino, 2006).

Teachers may also believe that their encouragement of parent involvement will possibly not be useful and could potentially interfere with their teaching or activities (Xu & Gulosino, 2006). However, recent findings suggest that the inactive nature of parents often hampers collaborative relationships as parents do not always follow through on the recommendations provided by teachers (Ellis et al., 2015). As research on parents' and teachers' current expectations and perspectives on parent-teacher partnerships is still emerging, my study may add to this body of knowledge.

2.4 PARENT-TEACHER COMMUNICATION

The significance of communication between parents and teachers is emphasised in various theories and frameworks (Albright & Weissberg, 2010). However, the process of communication may pose some challenges (Decker & Decker, 2003).

Communication from schools to parents is often provided at large meetings during parent evenings. These meetings are typically dealt with in a monologue way (Olsen & Fuller, 2003). In general, parent-teacher communication more often than not involves one-way communication, with teachers sharing information and ideas, and parents passively receiving these (Olsen & Fuller, 2003). For instance, teachers commonly utilise newsletters, orientation meetings and report cards to 'inform' parents about their children's academic progress and school activities (Olsen & Fuller, 2003).

Current research emphasises the fact that parent involvement should be viewed as a partnership that involves both parents and teachers. Communication between parents and teachers is central and will significantly influence parents' involvement (or lack thereof) at school (Lau, 2014). Parents generally tend to communicate more frequently with teachers when educational activities occur in the home environment (Murray, McFarland-Piazza & Harrison, 2015). However, communication is often limited to school meetings, once again emphasising the importance of schools finding novel ways of encouraging ongoing family engagement. An example of such an initiative can be found in schools in Boston, where meaningful conversations between parents and teachers occur before learners even enter school (Weiss, 2015).

2.4.1 Purpose of parent-teacher communication

Based on the findings of Halsey (2005), it can be argued that persistent, personal communication is necessary to initiate parent involvement. As communication increases, more parents may become involved and effective home-school relationships as a result established. Therefore, parent-teacher communication can be viewed as the cause and effect of parent involvement (Halsey, 2005).

Over time, the understanding of parent-teacher communication has changed in perspective. Epstein (1995) described communication as one of the six types of parent involvement practices that are critical in establishing a partnership between parents and teachers. In support of this earlier work in the field, Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009) indicate that parent-teacher communication will occur when families and schools share respective information about children on a regular basis, in a two-way mode. As such, parent-teacher communication can be viewed as the process of exchanging

information to create consensus, fulfil stockholders' needs and achieve learning goals (Ho, Hung & Chen, 2013). In order to develop a collaborative relationship between parents and teachers, information needs to be shared. It follows that positive parent-teacher communication is described as open, regular and two-way communication (Ellis et al., 2015).

Encouraging and consistent parent-teacher communication has been found to promote the participation of parents in children's educational activities (Bindiya, 2012). Based on the findings of Kraft and Rogers (2015), teachers who communicate with parents by sending one-sentence messages on a weekly basis may support learners' passing rate, school attendance and parent-child conversations. However, teachers and parents need to reach a level of mutual acknowledgement and understanding of one another in order to determine common grounds and interests, and commit to the children involved (Lawson, 2003).

In this regard Lau (2014) emphasises the importance of school involvement and collaboration between the teacher and the parent for promoting the development of the child. Complementary to this, Epstein (1996) indicates that learners, parents and teachers may gain from effective home-school communication. Learners and parents could, for example, benefit when they understand the curriculum and requirements of the different subjects, as well as the school policies and programmes. As for teachers, they may gain insight into the family contexts of learners and potentially develop an appreciation of the parents' contribution to the development of their children (Epstein, 1996). When parents and teachers work together, they will generally be able to share ideas, exchange facts and knowledge, and provide support to learners (Ellis et al., 2015).

At school level newsletters and other modes of communication will typically provide descriptions of school activities or school events. They may also indicate announcements and school changes, explain routines, provide information about the school staff and capture reminders. Some schools include information on articles relating to parenting, guidance, health and safety (Couchenour & Chrisman, 2011). In this regard Olsen and Fuller (2003) propose that newsletters also provide parents with samples of learners' work, special community announcements and suggestions for

age-appropriate books. In addition, information about school policies, reforms and programmes can be provided to keep parents informed. Parents and learners should, for example, obtain the necessary information on the selection of school subjects and career guidance in order to plan correctly and make informed decisions (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009).

Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009) maintain that parents and teachers generally wish to convey and receive information that they are concerned about. Even though parents may prefer information about their children's ongoing development, teachers typically tend to focus on information about the mastery of specific skills (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009). A study by Kraft and Rogers (2015) demonstrates that teachers are more likely to mention children's behaviour in a positive context, and provide information on missing assignments, learners' studying habits and broad topics of overall performance (Kraft & Rogers, 2015). Optimal conditions for children to grow and learn can, however, only be created when information is effectively combined (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009).

Confidential information about behaviour difficulties, as experienced by both parents and teachers, should also be conveyed. In this regard the necessity of consistency at home and in school is emphasised, thereby foregrounding the importance of parent-teacher communication. In some cases, the behaviour of a child may suddenly change, once again necessitating communication between parents and teachers (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009). In the same manner, communication and positive feedback to parents about a child's behaviour and work is just as important (Couchenour & Chrisman, 2011; Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009). Such feedback can, for example, focus on areas where improvement had been observed or positive traits demonstrated by children at school (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009).

Parenting and teaching are said to be complementary in nature as both share a commitment to children. As the information that parents and teachers hold about a child tends to differ, with some overlapping, it is important to share experiences and views with one another (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009). As existing literature tends to focus on schools' or teachers' views of parent-teacher communication, ongoing research on specifically parents' experiences is required. In my study, both parents

and teachers were asked about the nature and purpose of their communication, thereby exploring the perspectives of both partners.

2.4.2 Avenues and modes of parent-teacher communication

A variety of practices can be utilised between schools and families to assist in developing successful partnerships. One-way communication strategies typically originate from teachers and are directed towards parents. Despite the informative nature of one-way communication strategies, they do not necessarily promote interaction (Wright & Stegelin, 2003). Although schools hold the responsibility to design effective modes of communication about school programmes and children's academic performance, they also require information from parents about children's emotional, physical and social well-being (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009). Several researchers agree that communication between parents and teachers should flow in two directions (Olsen & Fuller, 2003; Couchenour & Chrisman, 2011). In order to develop an effective partnership between parents and teachers, both parties need to have the opportunity to speak and be heard (Olsen & Fuller, 2003).

The most common mode of contact between parents and teachers is by means of written communication in the form of e.g. newsletters (Olsen & Fuller, 2003). A welcome letter from the school to parents often marks initial contact from the school's side (Couchenour & Chrisman, 2011), with regular newsletters providing information on school events. While some parents view this mode of communication as meaningful, others find them boring (Olsen & Fuller, 2003). Such a one-way communication approach therefore does not appear to be the optimal avenue for parent-teacher communication due to the limitations associated with information flowing in only one direction.

According to Epstein (2011), communication between parents and teachers is important to both parties for them to share information about learners' academic progress and school-related matters. Even though schools thus often communicate information to parents by means of notebooks, newsletters and report cards, some parents find it hard to comprehend fully what is being communicated. Therefore, sharing information personally through e.g. conferences and phone calls may be

considered as better options, as this can provide an opportunity for all individuals involved to take part in a two-way communication process. In this way both parents and teachers will have the opportunity to ask questions, provide comments and take part in other interactions (Epstein, 2011). Two-way communication strategies furthermore imply the possibility of any misconceptions being clarified and limited communication being noticed (Couchenour & Chrisman, 2011).

Some teachers prefer to utilise daily information sheets when communicating with parents. These sheets are generally perceived as useful by parents as they contain information on their children's daily activities and academic progress (Couchenour & Chrisman, 2011). Home-school journals are another example that is typically used when parents of children with special needs are unable to visit the school on a daily basis. For this purpose a notebook is provided to the parents containing comments about the child's activities during the day (Olsen & Fuller, 2003).

Maintaining a journal has become an increasingly popular mode of communication between parents and teachers; however, for this strategy to be successful, parents and teachers need to agree to this form of communication and actively participate. Furthermore, families need to be literate and comfortable when writing comments if this mode of communication is pursued (Couchenour & Chrisman, 2011). According to Olsen and Fuller (2003), effective home-school journals therefore depend on the diligence of both parents and teachers. Some parents tend to prefer the traditional form of report writing; however, narrative reports are increasingly incorporated by teachers. Narrative reports allow teachers to describe a child's schooling activities and include descriptive details, yet this form of writing can be time consuming (Olsen & Fuller, 2003).

Communication in person is another strategy that may be employed by schools to promote interaction between parents and teachers (Couchenour & Chrisman, 2011). To this end schools and other educational settings frequently use parent-teacher conferences or meetings with success when communicating with parents (Olsen & Fuller, 2003). Planned or unplanned meetings may provide both parents and teachers with the opportunity to share information calmly and confidentially (Couchenour & Chrisman, 2011). During such meetings, suitable body language and effective

listening skills are necessary to interpret the messages correctly (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009).

An open door policy for face-to-face interactions will encourage family involvement, more specifically during early grades. Cox-Petersen (2011) emphasises the fact that an open door policy indicates respect to all and will make parents feel comfortable at school and in the classroom space. According to Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009), allowing parents and teachers to feel comfortable in an environment will influence their attitudes about the partnership. Even though parents can be heard and attended to (Couchenour & Chrisman, 2011), teachers may find such meetings emotionally draining. In addition, parents who need to be spoken to may not necessarily attend (Olsen & Fuller, 2003). Despite these challenges, on-going communication throughout the year will promote parent involvement and make parent-teacher conferences more meaningful and less stressful (Weiss, 2015).

Communication by means of telephone calls is another convenient channel for communication between parents and teachers (Couchenour & Chrisman, 2011). According to Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009), this form of communication is appropriate when factual information, such as verifying a postal address, needs to be relayed. Furthermore, telephone calls or text messages are fast ways of communication, and of sharing or obtaining information (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009).

Other forms of communication that may be used to share information and communicate with parents include parent bulletin boards, home visits and communication with groups. Parent bulletin boards are effective to communicate with parents as they can provide interesting and attractive information that is noteworthy. However, this form of communication generally flows in one way as the information is typically provided from the schools to the parents (Olsen & Fuller, 2003). In addition, addressing groups of individuals has become useful to many schools as parents are provided with the opportunity to feel heard and take ownership, while being part of a group (Olsen & Fuller, 2003).

Finally, the use of technology when communicating with parents and teachers has become increasingly popular. As Internet access continues to become more viable,

more parents and teachers are inclined to communicate through emails, text messaging or social media (Couchenour & Chrisman, 2011; Thompson, Mazer & Flood Grady, 2015). Even though researchers have thus demonstrated that parents and teachers should take part in frequent, two-way communication there is still much to be learned about optimal delivery methods, suitable content and the frequency of information that will encourage parent participation in their children's schooling (Kraft & Rogers, 2015). The findings of this study could provide insight into some of these areas of research by identifying the avenues and modes that parents and teachers prefer for parent-teacher communication that may, in turn, enhance parent-teacher communication and parent involvement.

2.4.3 Role of technology in parent-teacher communication

The use of technology-enhanced media as a means of communicating to parents and community members is prevalent in many schools (Hohlfeld, Ritzhaupt & Barron, 2009). According to Thompson, Mazer and Grady (2015) parent-teacher communication has evolved due to new technologies. The rapid development of technology is said to have caused a preference for e-communication as opposed to traditional forms of communication (Ho et al., 2012). Parents seemingly prefer to communicate regularly with teachers by means of emails, text messaging or through social media (Thompson et al., 2015).

In this regard Ho et al. (2012) found that telephone messages are seen as a convenient form of communicating concerns and reducing conflict, which may occur between parents and teachers due to frustrations created by a lack of effective communication, incomplete information or differing beliefs. Effective communication is said to reduce such frustrations and prevent misunderstandings while building consensus (Ho et al., 2012). When teachers plan to communicate with parents by means of telephone, it is important for them to keep in mind that some families may not have access to this form of contact. Therefore, reasonable alternatives need to be identified in all such cases (Couchenour & Chrisman, 2011).

Electronic newsletters or so-called e-newsletters have also become popular tools for communicating with parents as this mode implies low costs and is delivered instantly

(Couchenour & Chrisman, 2011). Furthermore, computers have simplified the production of newsletters as the same format can be used for different letters (Olsen & Fuller, 2003). According to Wright and Stegelin (2003), it is important for teachers to remain informed about technology developments in order to utilise recent communication options and meet the expectations of parents. However, schools once again always need to keep in mind that not all families have access to the technology required for accessing e-newsletters, and may thus depend on traditional forms of newsletter (Hamunyela, 2008).

Closely related, Hohlfeld, Ritzhaupt and Barron (2010) indicate that, regardless of socioeconomic status and school level, the use of school websites in communicating with parents has increased. Furthermore, information and communication technology (ICT) has been utilised as a means of communicating with diverse family and community members. In addition, the number of modes of communication has increased, more specifically in primary school settings (Hohlfeld et al., 2009). However, little research has focused on the content and quality of such communication (Hohlfeld et al., 2009). In this regard my study may shed light on some of these aspects, more specifically in terms of technology-driven parent-teacher communication in a resource-constrained primary school setting.

2.4.4 Parent-teacher communication within resource-constrained school settings

As previously mentioned, several researchers state that effective partnerships between parents and teachers is only possible when communication flows in two directions (Olsen & Fuller, 2003; Couchenour & Chrisman, 2011). This is particularly important when dealing with families who reside in resource-constrained settings where learners often require additional support. Even though frequent positive communication from schools to families may be helpful in establishing positive parent involvement (Olsen & Fuller, 2003), parents living in such conditions may not have the emotional or physical energy to become full partners of teachers. These parents may rather spend their energy on dealing with challenges such as a lack of resources and financial constraints they may face. According to Wright and Stegelin (2003), parents who lead busy lives due to work conditions are also less likely to become involved in

their children's schooling. It is thus important that teachers remain mindful and respect the situation of parents often facing high demands (Olsen & Fuller, 2003).

Parents sometimes complain that the safety at schools may furthermore contribute to difficulties in regular effective communication between parents and schools (teachers) (Wright & Stegelin, 2003). A fear of crime and high transport costs may, for example, prevent parents from attending meetings or other school events (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009). Nevertheless, Dauber and Epstein (1993) argue that school programmes and policies stipulating parent involvement may have an influence on how parents get involved in their children's education despite physical contact at school or in the home setting.

Parents in resource-constrained communities may also not necessarily have access to telephones or computers. As a result, printed newsletters and personal visits may be the best form of communication that teachers may use in such cases (Olsen & Fuller, 2003). According to Wright and Stegelin (2003) the lack of access to technology can be regarded as a barrier to effective communication as all families can as a result not be supported or involved via web pages, emails and information sites. If technology were to be widely accessible, parent-teacher communication could be supported as information could then be conveyed immediately and accessed by parents and teachers anywhere (Cox-Petersen, 2011).

Living, learning or working within a resource-constrained environment thus seemingly poses some challenges in terms of effective parent-teacher communication. However, all parents regardless of socioeconomic status, educational level or race can contribute to their children's development and learning (Albright & Weissberg, 2010). In this regard the findings of this study may contribute to existing theory on parent involvement in resource-constrained school settings, in terms of the relevant preferences of parents, possible solutions to challenges and practical guidelines on improving parent involvement.

2.4.5 Challenges in maintaining effective parent-teacher communication

Several barriers can interfere with how messages are conveyed and understood (Decker & Decker, 2003). In this regard both parents and teachers need to be mindful of potential obstacles when developing or sustaining parent-teacher partnerships (Cox-Petersen, 2011). As such, schools need to ensure that communication to parents is clear, regular and readable, considering parents who may potentially experience challenges to comprehend what is communicated. Furthermore, parents should be given the opportunity to speak and be heard in order to share and express their opinions (Epstein, 1995), and to clarify any messages they receive.

School programmes should therefore incorporate various effective forms of communication between the home and school. Table 2.1 captures some examples of practices, associated challenges and potential results that may be gained through effective communication.

Table 2.1: Addressing challenges through effective communication (adapted from Epstein, 1995)

Examples of practices	Associated challenges	Possible outcomes of effective communication
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual parent-teacher conferences with follow-up sessions when required. • Using language translators when needed. • Sending learners' work home to parents for comments and review. • Parents and learners fetching report cards and discussing how to improve scores. • Teachers providing clear information on school policies and programmes. • Regular communication through newsletters, telephone calls or other available methods. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents not able to speak or write fluently in English. • Establishing two-way communication channels. • Clarity, readability and frequency of notices and other print or non-print communication. • Content and structure of communication efforts. 	<p>For learners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness of their own scores and actions required to increase or maintain results. • Understanding school policies, behaviour and conduct. • Making informed decisions about programmes and courses. <p>For parents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness of children's progress. • Suitable responses to children's problems. • Interaction and communication with teachers. <p>For teachers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased communication with parents. • Appreciation for parent networks for communication purposes. • Increased understanding of parents' views of children's progress.

The communication-related challenges identified by Epstein (1995) require of schools to review the quality and form of communication with parents regularly. As some parents may misunderstand the information communicated, it is important that teachers and schools utilise language that is understandable and clear, in both verbal and written conversations. In order to improve the content and design of communication methods, schools may request ideas from parents (Epstein, 2011), as I attempted to do in this study, in order to obtain a comprehensive view of parent-teacher communication and the challenges the participants experience.

However, when communication is effective, a number of measurable outcomes can be identified. Learners will, for example, become aware of their own academic progress in terms of skills and subject knowledge, and may in turn understand how to improve their performance. In addition, parents can gain ideas on potential strategies of how they can support their children, and may experience ease when interacting with teachers. Teachers can build on their skill of clearly communicating with parents and expand their networks in order to communicate with all families (Epstein, 2011).

Another challenge that teachers may experience when communicating with parents relates to time constraints as some teachers may find it difficult to meet with parents or take part in interpersonal communication. As a result, teachers may be tempted to offer solutions or merely tell parents about their concerns rather than engaging in a two-way conversation (Couchenour & Chrisman, 2011). In such cases, ongoing positive communication and effective problem solving may not transpire (Couchenour & Chrisman, 2011). Complementary to this, as change takes time, the different people involved in a partnership should dedicate sufficient time and commitment to execute the partnership fully (Cox-Petersen, 2011).

The training, attitudes and changing demographics of teachers can also be considered as potential challenges for developing collaborative partnerships. Within many education programmes, teachers are not trained in the development of effective communication or partnerships, and may as a result not value parents as assets or partners (Couchenour & Chrisman, 2011; Wright & Stegelin, 2003). Recent research indicates that many parents are of the view that early career teachers are also less confident and may display an abrupt attitude (Ellis et al., 2015). As a result, parents

may prefer to discuss their concerns with higher management, such as the principal rather than with the classroom teacher. Despite the importance of parent-teacher communication, teachers are furthermore taught to speak rather than listen, implying the possible challenges of one-way communication (Olsen & Fuller, 2003).

At school level, management may lack the necessary leadership skills to recruit parents when forming relationships and to involve all parties in decision making (Cox-Petersen, 2011). The management and administrators in schools are expected to promote teachers' commitment to parent-teacher partnerships by providing information on the benefits and creating opportunities for ongoing communication (Xu & Gulosino, 2006). Likewise, schools that do not ask for ideas and feedback from parents and community members, can potentially hamper effective two-way communication (Wright & Stegelin, 2003).

Based on the ideas of Wright and Stegelin (2003), prior negative experiences by parents in schools will effect follow-up communication that occur. Even parents' unpleasant memories of their own schooling and their childhood relationships with teachers may affect parents' perceptions of parent-teacher communication (Olsen & Fuller, 2003). Perceived inequality can, for example, result in parents believing that teachers hold the power and should not be approached (Olsen & Fuller, 2003). Parents may subsequently opt not to discuss concerns with teachers due to them feeling powerless (Ellis et al., 2015). As such, domination of power can be detrimental to collaborative partnerships (Cox-Petersen, 2011).

In addition to perceived inequality, language and culture imply a number of challenges for both parents and teachers who would like to engage in open communication (Olsen & Fuller, 2003; Wright & Stegelin, 2003). Mutual understanding can only be established if both the speaker and the listener are able to articulate and interpret the messages that are conveyed. Teachers may, for example, speak in gentle terms when referring to problematic behaviour, which may be interpreted as the behaviour being satisfactory or acceptable (Olsen & Fuller, 2003). Closely related, Cox-Petersen (2011) argues that collaborative relationships between parents and teachers are difficult to achieve when cultural beliefs differ. Along similar lines, Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009) state that cultural expectations may differ during communication

according to the cultural norms that people follow. For some teachers and parents, certain behaviours may be considered as disrespectful or embarrassing (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009); however, through respect and education, such obstacles can be positively transformed.

2.4.6 Promoting regular parent-teacher communication

When people communicate with one another, some misunderstandings, heightened emotions and the use of different vocabulary can occur (Couchenour & Chrisman, 2011). As a result, effective strategies to improve communication between parents and teachers have been identified. In this regard teachers can be expected to take responsibility for directing relationships with parents in a positive direction (Couchenour & Chrisman, 2011). When teachers implement strategies that can potentially improve communication, they also aim to establish strong partnerships and model methods of communication that others may incorporate to further strengthen bonds (Couchenour & Chrisman, 2011). Olsen and Fuller (2003) emphasise that it is the responsibility of both parents and teachers to maintain true partnerships based on mutual commitment, action, trust and understanding. Complementary to this, educating all partners about respect, trust, understanding and effective communication can assist them in overcoming barriers (Cox-Petersen, 2011).

Effective communication strategies, such as providing parents with positive news about their children, can create a positive experience for parents within the school environment. In addition, research suggests (Bindiya, 2012) that direct invitations are a good predictor of parent attendance of meetings as opposed to a general invitation given to children at school. To this end, invitations written by teachers have proven to be more influential than general invitations as they encourage parents to visit the school (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Bindiya, 2012).

Active listening, which implies listening with a particular purpose (Decker & Decker, 2003), is another important strategy. Couchenour and Chrisman (2011) emphasise that active listening will convey the message to a speaker that what is being said, is valued. It is important that parents experience teachers to hear what they are saying and to be open to their points of view. In this regard research suggests (Couchenour

& Chrisman, 2011) that active listening is easily accomplished when teachers perceive partnerships with parents as necessary. Olsen and Fuller (2003) also support the claim that active listening will promote a reciprocal conversation, where positions of those in the relationship can be equalised and effective two-way communication can occur.

Ongoing reflection of concerns, issues, feelings and suggestions can furthermore assist parents and teachers to identify and modify their understanding of a conversation. This can provide an opportunity to comprehend the meanings captured in messages fully (Couchenour & Chrisman, 2011). Equally important, teachers need to reflect on the cultures and values that parents hold, as this may influence partnerships. Parents may, for example, hold the view that teachers are always correct and that their concerns should not be brought to light (Olsen & Fuller, 2003), directly affecting the way they communicate with teachers or the school. However, Olsen and Fuller (2003) indicate that teachers can gain when providing parents with the opportunity to speak and to be heard.

Couchenour and Chrisman (2011) suggest guidelines that schools can implement when telephonically communicating with parents. Suggestions include that parents should receive positive comments and that confidentiality should be maintained. Furthermore, teachers need to remain calm and polite. In addition, when communication needs to occur within a parent-teacher conference, such meetings have to be scheduled at times suitable to parents and in a safe environment that will not be experienced as threatening (Olsen & Fuller, 2003).

2.5 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

Epstein's theory (1995) explains the dynamics of family and school relationships and the forces that have an influence. The theory of overlapping spheres (Epstein, 1995) is considered as core to the field of family-school partnerships. In addition to focusing on three overlapping spheres of influence, Epstein (1995) explains external and internal factors that may influence these spheres as well as six parent involvement types that can assist when planning, implementing and reviewing parents' participation (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009). Moreover, Epstein's theory (1995) provides a framework that schools may utilise in support of parent involvement, and provides a foundation

of knowledge for future and current research. Studies such as my own may benefit from and also build on the contributions made by Epstein (1995) in the field of parent involvement and parent-teacher communication.

In this study Epstein's (1995) model, as theoretical framework, provides a basis for the effective actualisation of parent involvement, focusing on communication as means to promote partnerships between parents and teachers. I view Epstein's (1995) model as a suitable theoretical framework as it specifically acknowledges potential changes that may occur in schools and families, the possibility of improving the knowledge and skills of all parties involved, and the influences of interactions and patterns on learners' development. As the manner in which parents and teachers interact may affect learners' academic performance, this study may raise awareness of the current practices of parent-teacher communication and identify similarities or differences in knowledge and skill acquisitions, with the aim of addressing blind spots and challenges.

2.5.1 Overlapping spheres of influence of the family, school and community

Epstein's (1995) model indicates three primary contexts in which children develop and learn, namely the family, school and community. These contexts can be drawn together or pushed apart. The greater the overlap between these spheres, the more beneficial they become to the individuals involved. Potential benefits include a better response to teacher practices, less conflict and incompatibility between families and schools, teachers recognising parents for their efforts (Epstein, 2011), teachers building connections, and a focus on common goals concerning the learners by all parties involved (Epstein, 2011). Figure 2.1 provides an overview of the underlying perspectives of family and school relations, according to Epstein's (1995) theory.

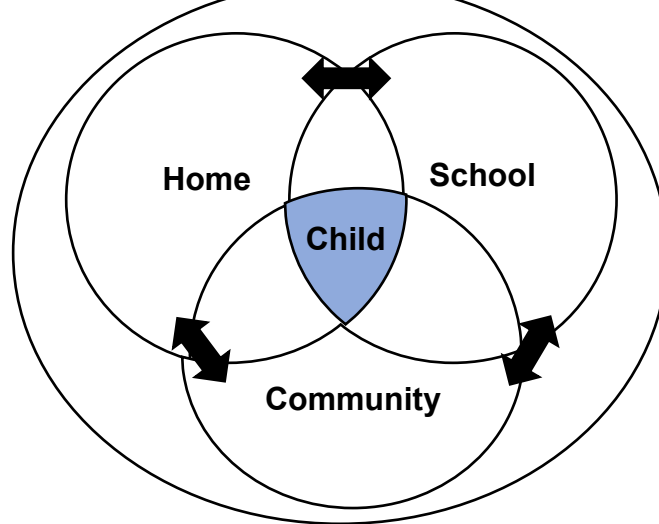


Figure 2.1: Epstein's (1995) Overlapping Spheres of Influence (adapted from Epstein, 2011)

Epstein's (1995) theory identifies different forms of responsibilities associated with families and schools, being separate, shared and sequential responsibilities. In this regard, the current study aimed to identify the perspectives and practices of parent-teacher communication as experienced by teachers and parents. The intention was to identify which type of responsibility these individuals typically experience and which they may prefer.

According to Epstein (1995), teachers are more likely to view families as separate from the school if they (teachers) regard children as mere learners. Some schools prefer to separate responsibilities between the family and the school (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009), resulting in teachers and parents preferring their roles to remain independent. In such cases, parents will focus on family responsibilities, leaving the education of their children to the teachers (Epstein, 1995).

Teachers are, however, more likely to believe that parents and community members are partners in education if they view learners as children (Epstein, 1995). Shared responsibilities typically occur when schools and homes emphasise cooperation and are complementary in nature in encouraging participation from both sides. Common goals can be shared and achieved when parents and teachers work alongside, with such partnerships in turn creating more opportunities and better programmes for learners (Epstein, 1995). Finally, child development stages form the basis for the sequential perspectives according to which parents are expected to teach children the

required skills until the age of five or six (Epstein, 1995). Thereafter teachers are viewed as primarily responsible for the knowledge and skills that children acquire (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009).

Epstein's (1995) theory therefore acknowledges that some practices of schools and families can be conducted in isolation; other practices imply shared responsibilities for the education of learners. According to Epstein (1995), learners are located in the centre of the model as they are the main actors in their education, yet family, school and community partnership activities will guide and motivate them to produce their own success. Learners who are encouraged and cared for are viewed as more likely to remain in school and achieve academically (Epstein, 1995). Epstein (1986) furthermore suggests that less overlap will occur as children progress to higher grades. Parents often feel that they are less able to assist older children in higher grades. In applying this idea to my study, the findings relating to parents and teachers of Grades 3 and 6 children may thus differ.

2.5.2 External and internal forces in the overlapping spheres of influence of the family and school

Epstein's (1995) theory indicates that the efforts of effective schools and families will overlap when the partners share missions and goals. The degree to which the various spheres overlap depends on three forces, namely time, the experience of schools, and the experience of families (Epstein, 2011). Figure 2.2 provides an overview of the overlapping forces between the family and the school.

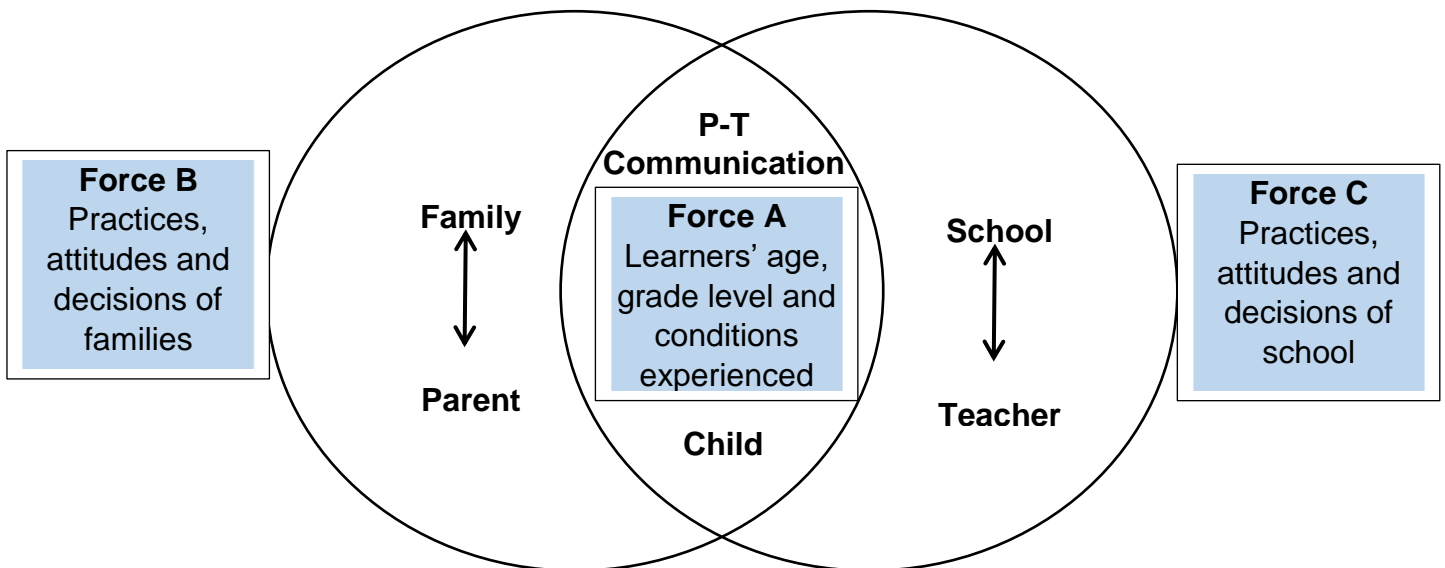


Figure 2.2: Overlapping spheres of influence of the family and the school (adapted from Epstein, 2011)

In Figure 2.2 external and internal forces are closely connected as individual relationships and internal organisations are influenced by learners' ages, grades, conditions and practices experienced over a period of time (Force A), as well as the practices, attitudes and decisions of teachers and parents (Force B and Force C). Time represents the historical line and developmental time of learners, families and schools (Force A); for example, the age or grade level of a child or the social conditions experienced over a period of time by a child during school years. The greatest overlap between the spheres tends to occur during preschool and the early grades of primary school; however, a great overlap can also occur for children (irrespective of their grade level) due to policies, practices and pressure from parents and teachers (Epstein, 2011).

Furthermore, the experience of and pressure on families and school organisations (Force B and Force C) may be pushed together or pulled apart, influencing the overlap of the spheres. Greater overlap will occur when parents' involvement in their children's schooling increases, or when teachers provide parents with the opportunity to take part in regular teaching practices. Maximum overlap is likely to occur when families and schools consider themselves as true partners in education and take part in regular and clear communication (Epstein, 1986). It is, however, not possible to have a complete overlap of spheres as some functions and practices are completed by

families and schools independently. Furthermore, Force B will remain constant as children remain connected to the same families. However, Force C can include new teachers as children move through the grades (Epstein, 2011).

Epstein's internal model thus recognises the complexity and essential interpersonal relations and patterns of influence between people at home, at school and within the community (Epstein, 1995). According to Epstein (2011) two types of interaction can occur, namely interaction within and interaction between organisations. In addition, two levels of interaction exist, being communication between the school (S) and home (H), and communication between teachers (T) and parents (P). Interaction between families and parents, and between schools and teachers accordingly occur separately. Communication between schools (S) and families (F) is seen as generalised and focused on school policies, practices, workshops and programmes.

2.6 SUMMARY

Effective communication between parents and teachers is often not sustained and may occur irregularly. In this chapter I discussed existing literature relating to parent involvement and parent-teacher communication, and provided a framework that schools may potentially utilise when planning parent-teacher communication with the aim of encouraging parent involvement. In addition to discussing the benefits and influencing factors on parent involvement and parent-teacher communication, I focused on the expectations generally held by parents and teachers, and the potential influence of technology on communication. In this way I attempted to provide the necessary background and elicit current trends relating to the phenomenon under investigation.

In the following chapter I describe the empirical investigation I undertook. I explain the research methodology I followed, and provide explanations for the selected research design, data collection and documentation techniques, as well as data analysis and interpretation procedures. I also present the quality criteria and ethical considerations I adhered to during this study.



CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The process of conducting good research is dependent on the researcher's ability to make sound strategic decisions by selecting a suitable research pathway from a variety of options or alternatives. Each option is based on a set of assumptions and will imply certain benefits and challenges (Denscombe, 2003).

In this chapter I present the pathway, or methodology, I selected to investigate the phenomenon under study. I discuss my research design, the selection of participants, as well as the data collection, documentation and analysis strategies. Moreover, I present the quality criteria and ethical principles I followed in my attempt to promote rigor.

3.2 PARADIGMATIC PERSPECTIVES

Researchers are required to consider their epistemological stance when making decisions about methodology (Koshy, 2010). The selected perspectives will influence the manner in which questions are posed, methods are selected for data collection and analysis, and results are interpreted (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014).

3.2.1 Epistemology

Epistemology focuses on the theory of knowledge, more specifically the possible means of gaining knowledge of the social world. Therefore, epistemology relates to how researchers come to know what they know (Grix, 2002). My epistemological assumptions for this study are based on the interpretivist paradigm, which represents my worldview and stance in undertaking this study (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). Being an interpretive researcher, I assumed that the participants' subjective experiences exist (ontology), that I could potentially understand these experiences by interacting with them (epistemology), and that qualitative research methods would best suit this study in answering the research questions (Durrheim & Terre Blanche, 1999).

By declaring this stance, I foreground my assumption that access to a phenomenon can only be gained by means of consciousness and language, and through the social construction of shared meaning. Furthermore, the data I collected were likely to have depth and richness in terms of descriptions and explanations provided by the participants, possibly indicating the social processes they experienced (Maree, 2013; Raddon, 2010; Durrheim & Terre Blanche, 1999). Therefore, in order to collect data on perceptions about parent-teacher communication, I needed to provide the different groups of participants with the opportunity to speak about their feelings and experiences, thereby determining the social dynamics among individuals and how they interpreted and shared meaning.

3.2.1.1 Advantages of utilising the interpretivist paradigm

The interpretivist paradigm is based on several principles that complement my research. Firstly, interpretivist research implies that human life cannot be observed by an external reality and can only be understood through the personal experiences of people (Mack, 2010). Hence, the interpretivist paradigm is centred on subjective experiences, construction of meaning and integration or relation with others (Maree, 2013). This idea aligns with the purpose of this study, which was to contribute to current thinking on parent-teacher communication by gaining an understanding of the subjective perceptions and experiences of this phenomenon by teachers and parents. Participants' meanings and perceptions were identified through multiple data collection techniques, namely semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and semi-structured observations (Wu & Chen, 2005). I selected these data collection techniques with the aim of gaining insight into the participants' personal attitudes, opinions, views and perceptions of the phenomenon at hand (Maree, 2013; Wu & Chen, 2005).

Secondly, as social life is a human product, it is important to understand the context of a phenomenon as well as the interpretation of any meanings constructed (Maree, 2013). As such, the aim of the interpretivist paradigm is to understand meanings that may inform behaviour while keeping in mind that different interpretations of situations and events can exist (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). In this study I maintained the working assumption that teachers and parents would hold different perspectives on

parent-teacher communication and that these perspectives would be uniquely different. By gaining insight into subjective experiences and shared meanings, in terms of the interactions between parents and teachers, I was able to obtain insight into parent-teacher communication in the relevant school settings.

Thirdly, the human mind is the origin of meaning and a purposive source of meaning. Researching the depth of a phenomenon can provide an understanding of the meanings imparted by people and how these meanings may have been constructed, and could contribute to comprehension of the whole. In addition, knowledge of the social world can affect human behaviour (Maree, 2013), with multiple realities and perspectives of one phenomenon being possible (Mack, 2010). When selecting the participants for this study I considered these principles. Keeping in mind that different realities and perspectives may exist, I aimed to create a comprehensive picture of parent-teacher communication, focusing on the experiences and views of both partners.

As interpretations are culturally and historically bound, the interpretivist paradigm furthermore allows contextual factors to be considered (Raddon, 2010). In this regard, Bertram and Christiansen (2014) argue that the responses of people in a situation will depend on the specific circumstances and situation, as well as their experiences. The fact that the context in which people exist is significant was particularly important during this study, as the resource-constrained context in which the participants function may have influenced the manner in which they described and interpreted their experiences and perceptions of parent-teacher communication as a social phenomenon.

Finally, in the social world researchers are informed by their knowledge, values, beliefs and prior experiences. These direct and influence data analysis and interpretations of the results (Maree, 2013). To this end, interpretivist researchers will take a subjective stance when conducting research (Mack, 2010). As such, I could not remove myself from this study, and regarded it as important to identify and continually reflect on my own biases, values and background, such as how my gender and culture could perhaps have shaped my interpretations of the data and the results I obtained.

3.2.1.2 Addressing potential challenges associated with interpretivist research

In selecting interpretivism, I realised that I would conduct research that is subjective in nature and that I could not detach myself from the study (Mack, 2010). As such, the data I collected were interpreted through my perspective as researcher (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). However, as an interpretivist researcher, I strove to remain objective when analysing and interpreting the data (Mack, 2010).

Besides the possible effect of subjectivity, the inability to generalise findings beyond the phenomenon that is explored is viewed as a challenge implied by interpretivist research (Maree, 2013; Mack, 2010). As a result, positivists (Mack, 2010) often question the overall benefit of interpretivist research. In addition, the interpretivist paradigm is viewed as unscientific by some schools of thought, and subject to possible fabrication (Wu & Chen, 2005). As it is impossible to remain completely objective, I relied on several strategies to enhance the trustworthiness of this study (Wu & Chen, 2005).

I, for example, remained truthful in describing the results I obtained. Throughout, I relied on peer review and discussions with my supervisor to clarify meanings (Creswell, 2012). I aimed to avoid the pitfalls of a subjective stance by bracketing my assumptions during data analysis and continuously reflected on my own subjective stance in order to limit the influence this may have had. This allowed me as researcher to view the data thoroughly and focus on the phenomenon rather than on my own perspectives (Mack, 2010).

Another potential limitation relates to interpretivist research ignoring political and ideological influences on knowledge and social reality. This implies that interpretivist researchers generally seek to understand social phenomena instead of changing or challenging these (Mack, 2010). However, this interpretivist study could provide valuable information resulting in the generation of new knowledge and contributing to future research and changed practice of parent-teacher communication (Wu & Chen, 2005).

3.2.2 Methodological approach

A researcher's methodology is supported and reflected by the specific ontological and epistemological assumptions held (Grix, 2002). I followed a qualitative methodological approach in my attempt to gain insight into a social phenomenon by exploring why and how the participants defined and experienced parent-teacher communication (Basit, 2010; Maree, 2013). The qualitative data collection strategies I selected enabled me to collect textual, verbal and visual data that cannot be counted.

The purpose of qualitative research is thus to gain depth rather than breadth (Basit, 2010). I regarded the qualitative approach as suitable for this study as the formulated research questions did not depend on quantifiable data, but rather required insight in terms of the words, feelings, ideas and experiences of the parents and teachers involved in parent-teacher communication (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). Participants were as such required to elucidate a particular aspect of social reality for the purpose of this study. To this end, it was important to select participants and research sites purposefully that would best provide an understanding of the phenomenon I set out to explore for me to answer the formulated research questions (Creswell, 2014). I thus needed to select a research approach and methods that would allow the participants to express their perceptions, the challenges they experienced and their ideas on promoting parent-teacher communication.

My decision to follow a qualitative approach was furthermore based on the premise that the natural world and the social world are different, and that the truth cannot necessarily be seen (Basit, 2010). Qualitative research, being based on multiple realities, is holistic and contains many dimensions (Mayoux, 2001). Furthermore, reality is viewed as subjective and the social world as dependent on an individual's perceptions, ideas and behaviour (Basit, 2010). Learning about participants' meanings forms the focus of any qualitative research process (Creswell, 2014), as was the case in this study.

As a qualitative researcher, I fulfilled the role of key instrument throughout the research process; however, the focus remained on the participants' perceptions, and not on the meanings and experiences I brought to the field (Creswell, 2014). Therefore, in order

to gain an understanding of the phenomenon of parent-teacher communication, it was vital that my interpretations reflected the points of view of the teachers and parents and not my own (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006).

As qualitative research centres on the subjective views of the research participants, their social reality and how this is perceived and created remained at the core (Basit, 2010). It follows that I needed to collect data in the natural settings where the participants experienced parent-teacher communication (Creswell, 2012; Durrheim & Terre Blanche, 1999). Contextual and setting factors relating to this social phenomenon could in this way be identified (Basit, 2010).

3.2.2.1 Advantages of a qualitative approach

Qualitative research often requires in-depth face to face field work (Mayoux, 2001), collecting data by means of observations, the review of documentation, individual interviews, focus group discussions or a combination of such data collection methods (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). The researcher plays a central role in designing and conducting the research, and completing the data analysis (Mayoux, 2001). In this study I utilised qualitative interviews, focus group discussions and observation in collecting data.

In following a qualitative approach, researchers can analyse a limited number of cases in depth (Basit, 2010). As rapport with participants develops and continued contact occurs, information that is more accurate may be gained (Mayoux, 2001). In this study, this benefit implied the possibility of my obtaining a constructive understanding of parent-teacher communication by thoroughly analysing a small number of cases. To this end, I focused on continued contact and sound rapport with the participants in my attempt to obtain accurate data. The fact that my background, culture, educational level and home language differed from the language and culture of many of the participants made this priority even more important.

Finally, qualitative research is not competitive in nature. It seeks to answer 'how' and 'what' questions with the aim of passing on findings to other qualitative studies in order to understand the phenomenon under investigation better (Silverman, 2001). I found

this associated advantage to be significant as the objective of this study was to contribute to existing literature on parent-teacher communication, and to provide information that can potentially inform other future studies.

3.2.2.2 Addressing challenges associated with qualitative research

A qualitative researcher faces the challenge of findings not being generalisable to the greater population or other settings. Findings may thus only be relevant to the participants in a particular study or research context (Basit, 2010). In utilising an interpretivist paradigm I did not aim to obtain findings that can be generalised to the greater population (Basit, 2010), but rather focused on obtaining an in-depth understanding of the particular phenomenon I explored in the specific context and setting. The findings of this study may, however, be transferrable to similar research contexts as decided by the reader, based on the descriptions of the research process and context I include in this dissertation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Qualitative research furthermore implies the challenge of results being influenced by personal bias and prejudices (Mayoux, 2001). Even though a researcher's bias can never be eliminated, I guarded against subjective interpretations based on my assumptions, views and theoretical orientation throughout this study. I continuously reflected on my own biases and prejudices in discussion with my supervisor and by means of a research diary (Mayoux, 2001). Making detailed field notes and documenting my recordings furthermore supported me in guarding against subjective influences (Mayoux, 2001).

Even though the qualitative approach provided me with a wealth of research information, considerable time and resources were required to explore and represent the phenomenon I studied adequately (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006; Basit, 2010). Spending a prolonged time in the field assisted me in developing an in-depth understanding of parent-teacher communication as experienced by the participants. Gaining experience with the participants in their natural settings contributed to the accuracy of the findings I obtained (Creswell, 2014). Throughout, preparation and planning were important to avoid any careless use of time and resources.

As a final challenge, qualitative research requires skilled interviewers to collect primary data successfully (Mayoux, 2001). Training and guidance by my supervisor contributed to the way in which I overcame this challenge (Mayoux, 2001). In addition, I regularly reflected on my performance as interviewer following each discussion, and discussed strategies on how I could improve with my supervisor. Compiling detailed field notes furthermore assisted me in overcoming this challenge (consult Appendix H).

3.3 OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH PROCESS

The process of a qualitative study can be described as a progression of decisions (Flick, 2009). In Figure 3.1 I summarise the phases of the research process I followed. Within each phase, all decisions and actions were founded on moral and ethical reasoning (Basit, 2010).

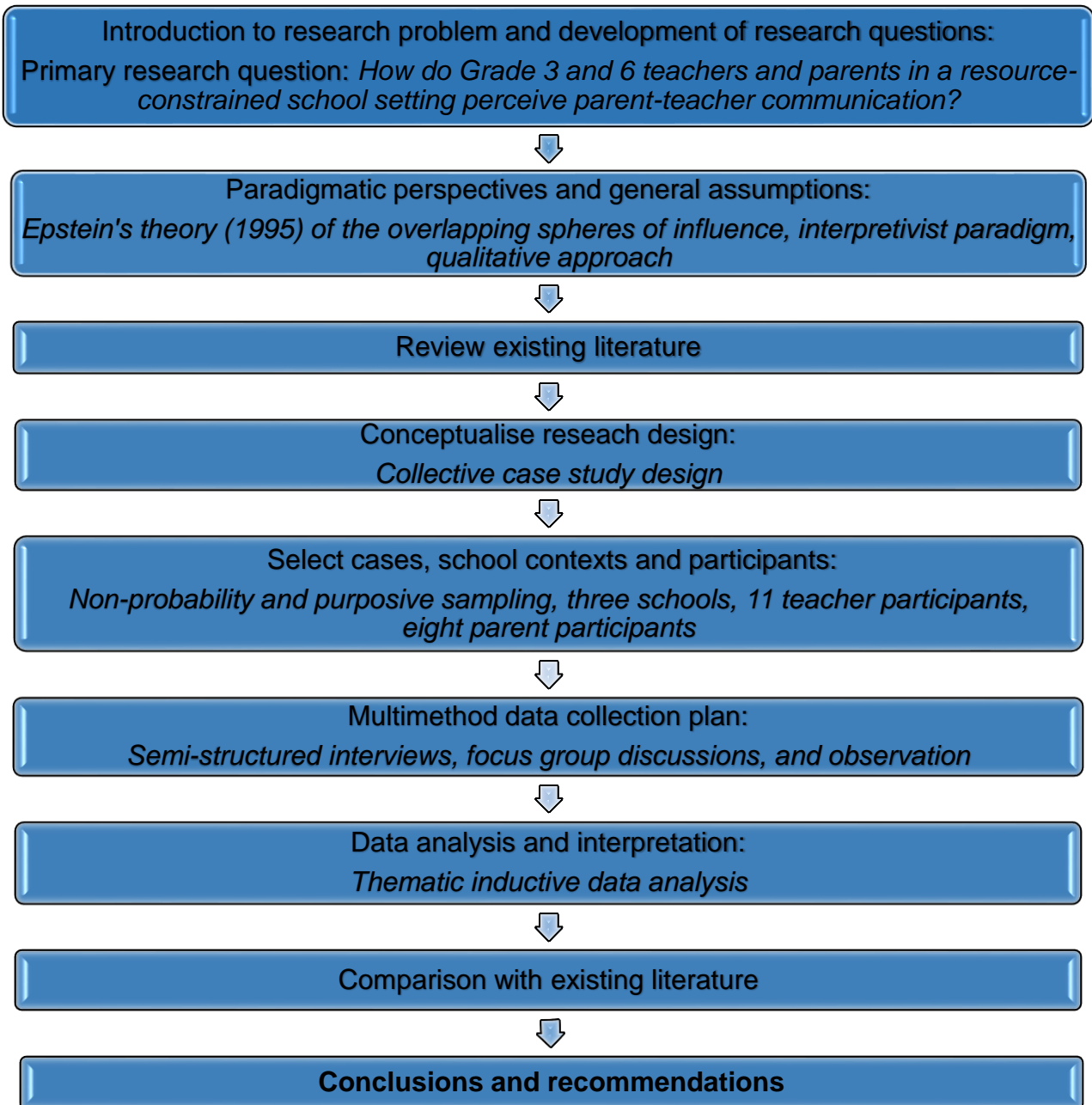


Figure 3.1: Overview of the research process

3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

A case study design involves the in-depth and systematic study of a particular case, such as an individual or a group of people (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). According to Yin (2009), case study research does not necessarily involve the study of a single case, but may instead involve multiple cases. These cases share common characteristics and are bound together categorically (Stake, 2006). For these reasons, an instrumental case study design will lead to a general understanding of a phenomenon using a particular case. Closely related, I selected a collective case study

as research design as this choice could provide me with a general understanding of parent-teacher communication based on a number of instrumental cases as they occur at multiple research sites, or schools in this context (Stakes, 2006; Harling, 2012).

Moreover, my choice was directed by the formulated research questions that focus on an in-depth understanding and description of the circumstances of a social reality (parent-teacher communication) experienced by those (parents and teachers) involved (Yin, 2009). These research questions bind ideas and concepts that hold cases (Grade 3 parents, Grade 6 parents, Grade 3 teachers and Grade 6 teachers) together (Stake, 2006). The case study design I selected is supported by the interpretivist paradigm and generation of qualitative data (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014), as applied in this study.

Case study research is generally descriptive and can be utilised as a means to generate claims that can be verified through future research (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). By implementing this design, I aimed to capture the perceptions and lived experiences of parents and teachers across multiple cases in order to compare data and draw conclusions (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000).

I relied on the aim of case study research, and strove to provide a unique holistic depiction of experiences in terms of individuals' perceptions and experiences in their real-life social setting (Basit, 2010; Stake, 2006). This design therefore allowed me to address a phenomenon in its real-world context, which is bound by time and space (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006; Yin, 2014). By utilising a collective case study design, I was thus able to provide a detailed and rich description of the personal experiences of the participating parents and teachers. In this manner I could gain an understanding of the perceptions held by them in their communication in the specific resource-constrained setting (Basit, 2010).

3.4.1 Advantages of a collective case study design

Researchers generally utilise a collective case study design when seeking answers to 'why' and 'how' questions (Yin, 2014). In this manner, this design enabled me to address the primary research question focusing on how teachers and parents perceive

parent-teacher communication in a resource-constrained primary school setting. As this design lends itself to the use of multiple sources of information and data collection methods (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006; Maree, 2013), the descriptions I gained could be grounded in deep and varied data sources based on the specific phenomenon of parent-teacher communication (Maree, 2013). In this manner, rich data from the semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and semi-structured observations supported me in answering the research questions.

As such, this research design offered a multi-perspective angle in conveying different views and perspectives on parent-teacher communication in resource-constrained school settings. By interacting and discussing the questions at hand with the different participants, I was able to identify relationships and patterns in the data (Maree, 2013), recognise complexities and identify discrepancies in the different perceptions of the participants (Basit, 2010). I was furthermore able to gain an understanding of how participants related and interacted with one another (Maree, 2013). By utilising a case study design, I also had the opportunity to explore additional questions and investigate a category in more detail when needed (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006).

Finally, the findings of a collective case design are usually easily accessible and can be reported in a straightforward manner, allowing individuals to come to independent conclusions on the effects of research. Moreover, as case study data are directly interpreted, findings from such studies may inform practice (Basit, 2010). As such, my findings may inform the practice of parent-teacher communication in schools and result in follow-up research in this field.

3.4.2 Addressing potential challenges and limitations associated with case study research

A challenge often associated with a case study research design concerns the question of rigour, more specifically when researchers do not follow systematic procedures or allow misleading evidence to influence their findings (Yin, 2014). In this study I guarded against this challenge by asking the participants to verify the notes I made following the interviews and discussions I facilitated, in order to ensure that my notes reflected their views. My supervisor also guided me throughout the research process,

especially during the data analysis process, and in my generation of findings and formulation of conclusions (Mertens, 1998).

Another limitation of a collective case study design relates to the inability to generalise findings to the wider population. Based on the focus of this study and my selected paradigm, I did not aim to reach generalisable conclusions. I rather focused on gaining a deep insight and understanding of the specific phenomenon of parent-teacher communication (Maree, 2013) in a resource-constrained primary school setting. As such, my focus has been on local cases and not on how these cases are represented in general (Stake, 2006). However, a collective case study design can be used to develop claims that can be verified through follow-up research (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). In addition, based on the detailed descriptions and trail of evidence I provide in this dissertation, the findings of this study may be transferred to similar contexts and research settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Next, a collective case study design required of me, as researcher, to spend long periods inside and outside the field focusing on this study (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006; Stake, 2006). I concur with Stake's (2006) claim that for every hour spent in the research field, another six hours is required from the researcher for planning, negotiating, reflecting and other practical activities. However, I view this fact, which is regarded as a potential challenge by some, as a strength of a collective case study design, as additional time inside and outside the research field assisted me in gaining an in-depth understanding of parent-teacher communication, thereby adding to the rigour of the study and the trustworthiness of the findings (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006).

3.5 SELECTION OF CASES, SCHOOLS AND PARTICIPANTS

The paradigms utilised by a researcher and the purpose of a study have an influence on the selection of participants and the cases included in a study. As I utilised an interpretivist paradigm, I was not concerned with statistical accuracy, or whether or not the participants represented the wider population. I rather selected cases and participants that were knowledgeable on the topic and could provide in-depth answers to the research questions I set out to explore.

3.5.1 Selection of cases

With regard to the selection of cases, Flick (2009) argues that a researcher should identify cases that complement the research questions and the methodology of a study. As I required in-depth and detailed descriptions of a specific phenomenon, my focus fell on small groups of individuals that formed my cases (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). More specifically, my study contained four cases, namely parents of Grade 3 learners, parents of Grade 6 learners, Grade 3 teachers and Grade 6 teachers.

As previously mentioned, a case may constitute of a small group of individuals who share specific characteristics (Yin, 2009). I required insight into the perceptions of both parents and teachers as these individuals have experience in terms of parent-teacher communication. The specific grades under investigation (Grade 3 and 6) were selected due to these grades being the final years of two phases of primary schools in South Africa, namely the Foundation Phase and Intermediate Phase. At the onset of the study I assumed that towards the completion of these two phases, parents and teachers would have developed a perception or opinion of the dynamics experienced in communication between parents and teachers. Furthermore, the use of collective cases could strengthen the transferability of findings to similar situations or contexts.

3.5.2 Selection of schools as research sites

I employed both purposive and convenience sampling strategies in line with the interpretivist paradigm and qualitative approach I selected. These sampling strategies implied that not every school from the population was offered the opportunity to participate in this study. The selected schools had to share defining characteristics for me to find answers to my research questions (Basit, 2010).

Purposeful sampling occurs when a researcher draws on a sample with a specific purpose in mind (Maree, 2013). I strove to identify information-rich cases from the required settings (Mertens, 1998). Therefore, I identified individuals who were teachers or parents of Grade 3 and 6 learners from resource-constrained primary school settings as other participants or settings would not provide the information required about the phenomenon under study. Furthermore, I did not aspire to

generalise the findings I obtained from this sample. With this in mind, I created criteria for selection and then identified cases that met the criteria (Mertens, 1998).

Purposeful sampling was thus primarily applied in selecting the research context, meeting the following selection criteria:

- The selected schools had to be primary schools in Gauteng situated in resource-constrained communities.
- The Department of Basic Education, School Governing Bodies and principals had to provide permission for the study to be conducted at the specific schools.
- The language of learning at the participating schools had to be English.

The first research site I selected was situated in the school and community context where I was employed, implying elements of convenience sampling. Convenience sampling entails the selection of a sample or setting because it is readily and conveniently available. This sampling strategy does not produce a representative sample; however, I did not attempt to generalise the findings due to my epistemological stance (Maree, 2013; Mertens, 1998). Based on my experience in school A, I realised that the school met all the selection criteria. As I knew the principal, gaining access to the school was easy (Maree, 2013). In my view, one of the advantages of working in a familiar research field was that I had established and developed trust with the principal and participants even before data collection commenced (Oppong, 2013).

A disadvantage, however, was that I was subject to being biased and may have developed my own subjective meanings and perceptions before collecting data (Mayoux, 2001). In addition, the possibility existed that the participants would perhaps not provide authentic views, because I was one of their colleagues or the teacher of their children. For these reasons, it was important to involve a field worker who could conduct the data collection activities, and another individual to transcribe all interviews. In this way, I had access to the transcripts only, and was not able to identify who made which contributions. I did, however, conduct three interviews with parents at this school as I did not educate any of their children and we were unknown to each other. In addition, the University of Pretoria and the participants involved granted permission to

allow the additional individuals to assist me during the data collection process and development of transcriptions (consult Appendix A and Appendix F). Both the field worker and individual who transcribed the data respected all the necessary ethical principles. Furthermore, I stated my assumptions held in Chapter 1, kept a reflective research diary and aspired to bracket my subjective interpretations during the data analysis process (consult Appendix I).

As I was familiar with the schools in the community, the second school I identified met the selection criteria, based on my experience and being familiar with the context. The principal confirmed my perceptions during our first interaction. As I selected a school in the area where I was teaching, in a familiar setting, this selection once again implied elements of convenience sampling. A benefit of involving this particular school was that I saved time and resources, as the location was close to the first school I selected (Maree, 2013). A disadvantage of selecting these two schools was that findings might not be generalisable to the greater population and that the perceptions gathered might simply represent those of individuals in this specific community (Stake, 2006). This possibility however aligns with the purpose of this study, namely to obtain an in-depth understanding of a particular phenomenon in a particular context and setting (Maree, 2013).

When selecting the final school, I searched for a school in a different community, yet which experiences similar resource constraints as in the other two schools. I gained access to the third school through a colleague who knew the principal. Once the principal had read my research proposal and following a discussion with him, I obtained permission to conduct my study at the school. In selecting the school, I believed that the study might benefit, as my objective was to provide evidence from multiple yet similar sources in order to increase the credibility of the data (Mertens, 1998).

3.5.3 Selection of participants

As I used non-probability and purposive sampling strategies, not all individuals from the population were provided the opportunity to participate in the study (Basit, 2010). In purposefully selecting the participants, the following criteria applied:

- The participating parents and teachers had to be associated with a primary school in Gauteng situated in a resource-constrained community.
- The participants had to be either teachers or parents of learners in Grade 3 or Grade 6.
- The participants had to provide informed consent.
- The participants had to be able to communicate in English.
- The participants had to have experience in parent-teacher communication.

Once the selected schools granted permission, I discussed the details pertaining to this study with teachers and parents of learners in Grade 3 and Grade 6 in these three schools (Basit, 2010). I called for participation by means of meetings with teachers and sent 100 letters to parents of Grade 3 and 6 learners in each school, where I provided information about the study and the role that the participants would play (consult Appendix D and Appendix E). The teachers and parents were provided the opportunity to participate voluntarily in this study without coercion (Maree, 2013). Table 3.1 provides a summary of the participating parents and teachers.

Table 3.1: Summary of participants

	Participants	Age	Gender	Level of education	Occupation
School A	AT3.1 ²	26	Female	PGCE	Grade 3 teacher
	AT3.2	67	Female	NH4	Grade 3 teacher
	AT6.1	57	Female	Li 267RS	Grade 6 teacher
	AT6.2	41	Male	Diploma	Grade 6 teacher
	AP3.1	45	Male	Grade 4	Shop assistant
	AP6.1	54	Female	Grade 10	Unemployed
	AP6.2	42	Female	Grade 10	Unemployed
School B	BT3.1	35	Female	Diploma	Grade 3 teacher
	BP3.1	35	Female	Grade 11	Shop assistant
School C	CT3.1	24	Female	B.Ed. degree	Grade 3 teacher
	CT3.2	27	Female	B.Ed. degree	Grade 3 teacher
	CT3.3	44	Female	UVPE and ACE	Grade 3 teacher
	CT3.4	41	Female	Diploma and ACE	Grade 3 teacher
	CT6.1	41	Male	M.Ed. degree	Grade 6 teacher
	CT6.2	49	Male	BA/HED	Grade 6 teacher
	CP3.1	25	Female	Higher secondary school certificate	Sales representative
	CP3.2	52	Female	No qualification indicated	Unemployed
	CP3.3	55	Male	Matriculation certificate	Admin officer
	CP3.4	45	Female	Degree in HR	HR manager

² AT3.1 = School A, Teacher of Grade 3 learners, first participant in this case.
AP3.2 = School A, Parent of a Grade 3 learner, second participant in this case.

3.6 DATA COLLECTION AND DOCUMENTATION

To gain a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon, researchers can benefit from different accounts and multiple data collection methods for the purpose of crystallisation and triangulation of data. This strategy can contribute to validating the findings and enhancing the trustworthiness of a study (Maree, 2013; Menter et al., 2011). I relied on multiple data collection and documentation methods, as described in this section.

In addition to the strategies discussed below, I initially planned to analyse logbooks as part of my data collection. However, despite my attempts to motivate and remind parents and teachers to complete these logbooks, they were seemingly unable to maintain and record any data due to personal reasons mentioned previously.

3.6.1 Semi-structured individual and dyadic interviews

Research interviews allow researchers and participants the opportunity to take part in a dialogue focused on information about a specific phenomenon (Menter et al., 2011). In order to answer my research questions, I aimed to see the world through the eyes of the participants without restriction, and as a result conducted semi-structured interviews with the participants for this purpose (Maree, 2013). Individuals from the selected schools who met the criteria were requested to participate voluntarily in these interviews. The semi-structured interviews occurred during the period May to September 2016.

Prior to the interviews, I provided participants with a brief outline of the study, indicating the purpose, matters related to potential benefits, and confidentiality issues. I obtained biographical data before the onset of the discussions (Menter et al., 2011). I focused on establishing sound rapport with the participants before commencing with the data collection, and arranged the interviews at locations convenient for the participants, such as the school premises. Such familiar non-judgemental environments set the participants at ease (Maree, 2013; Menter et al., 2011). All interviews were recorded with a video and audio recorder as writing all responses may have lacked detail and such a process is known to be time consuming and distracting (Hancock & Algozzine,

2006; Maree, 2013). I obtained permission for the recordings from the participants prior to using the recording device.

Individuals from each case were asked predetermined questions (consult Appendix G) focusing on their perceptions, opinions and experiences of parent-teacher communication (Menter et al., 2011). In addition to conducting five individual interviews, I facilitated one dyadic interview involving two participants who responded to questions with the possibility of follow-up interaction with each other (Bell & Campbell, 2014). I also briefed the field worker who took responsibility for conducting a further two dyadic interviews with my colleagues at School A. The recorded interviews, which lasted between 20 and 70 minutes each, were transcribed verbatim for analysis purposes.

Conducting these interviews allowed me to gather and elicit information in my attempt to understand how teachers and parents think or act with regard to parent-teacher communication (Durrheim & Terre Blanche, 1999). The information I obtained enhanced my understanding of the participants' perceptions, attitudes and experiences of this phenomenon (Maree, 2013). In addition, semi-structured interviews allowed the participants to share their views by using their own terminology, which assisted me in determining the meanings underlining their thoughts and actions that were not explicitly voiced during the focus group discussions (Menter et al., 2011). Furthermore, the participants in the dyadic interviews felt comfortable in each other's presence and provided two similar or different accounts in each case; these could create additional avenues in my research (Bell & Campbell, 2014). I experienced the participants to identify with each other in remembering events, which often stimulated more thoughts during dyadic interviews (Flick 2009).

A key strength of semi-structured interviews lies in the fact that they require participants to answer predetermined questions but with the flexibility of probing and clarifying answers where needed (Menter et al., 2011). When new lines of enquiry emerge, these can also be explored in more detail. All accounts by participants were triangulated in order to promote the strength of the research findings (Menter et al., 2011). A potential limitation of semi-structured interviews is that such interviews can be time-consuming and expensive (Maree, 2013; Menter et al., 2011). As my findings

were more likely to be trustworthy if I spent a prolonged period in the field, I valued the time and contributions I obtained despite this being time-consuming. In addition, more time spent with the participants assisted me in establishing sound rapport, which contributed to the rigour of the study, as participants seemed open to share their views with me (Creswell, 2014). Proper preparation and planning were, however, vital in order to prevent time and resources from being unnecessary wasted.

Furthermore, as this data collection technique entails social interaction (Bell & Campbell, 2014; Menter et al., 2011). I faced the potential challenge of one participant holding a dominant view during the dyadic interviews (Bell & Campbell, 2014). Interviews can also be influenced by factors such as personality differences, power dynamics and gender differences. A challenge I thus experienced was to prevent individual participants from dominating interactions. I had to encourage all participants to be equally involved in order to gain information from both participants at a time.

Finally, the skills and experience of an interviewer can influence an interview (Menter et al., 2011). According to Flick (2009), carrying out successful research interviews is dependent on the researcher's situational competence. I found Flick's (2009) claim to be true due to my competence increasing as I gained practical experience through rehearsal, interview situations and guidance by my supervisor. In addition, I was well prepared before the interviews and relied on an interview schedule to structure all sessions. As a researcher, I continued to reflect on my biases and guarded against my presence influencing the information I gained.

3.6.2 Focus group discussions

Selected from a wider population, a small group of individuals with similar characteristics took part in focus group discussions during which they shared their views, opinions and experiences of parent-teacher communication (Menter et al., 2011). The selected participants thus had insight into the phenomenon I explored (Basit, 2010).

I conducted two focus group discussions at School C once the semi-structured interviews had been completed, with four participants in each focus group, during the

period May to September 2016. Discussions lasted between 45 and 55 minutes. One focus group discussion involved four teachers educating Grade 3 learners, and the other involved four parents of learners in Grade 3. The number of participants was determined by their availability and willingness to participate. Similar to the semi-structured interviews, all recorded focus group discussions were guided by a focus group schedule as used for the semi-structured interviews (consult Appendix G), which I developed prior to the interactions in order to remain focused on the aims of the investigation (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006).

A benefit of utilising focus group discussions for this study is that these discussions allowed participants the opportunity to express themselves freely and in their own words (Menter et al., 2011). This provided me with an understanding of the perceptions held and the associated views related to the challenges and solutions experienced by parents and teachers in terms of the dynamics of parent-teacher communication. During focus group discussions, individuals were able to say things that could provoke or stimulate responses from others. In addition, this strategy implied the benefit of participants feeling less pressured and providing more detail when taking part in a group discussion (Menter et al., 2011).

In terms of the possible limitations or pitfalls, shy personalities may participate less when compared to dominant personalities during focus group discussions. In the same way, individuals holding a different opinion or view are more likely to remain silent if the majority of people agree on a position (Basit, 2010). As facilitator, I ensured that all participants had the opportunity to contribute (Basit, 2010). I had to find a balance between directing the discussions and facilitating the group (Flick, 2009). I also summarised the discussions a few times and checked that the participants agreed about the information and the data that had been generated during these discussions (Basit, 2010).

Skilled facilitators are required for focus group discussions to provide rich data, and may be expensive (Menter et al., 2011). As a small-scale researcher, I fulfilled the role of facilitator, as I had an interest in the enquiry and dedicated time to gaining insight into the phenomenon I set out to investigate. In preparation I familiarised myself with the potential challenges of focus group discussions in order to avoid or address these.

A final potential challenge of focus group discussions relates to the findings not being generalisable to the greater population (Menter et al., 2011). As previously indicated, the purpose of this study was to gain a deep understanding of parent-teacher communication in resource-constrained school settings, and not to generalise the findings to the wider population. Moreover, I aimed to contribute to a specific field of study by focusing on the views, opinions and feelings experienced by a few individuals.

3.6.3 Observation

The use of direct observation as data collection method relies on evidence gained through the researcher's senses in witnessing an event first-hand. In support of the other data collection methods I used, I was not only interested in what the participants said or thought, but also drew on what I observed (Denscombe, 2003). I implemented non-participant observation, as I did not actively participate in the interviews and focus group discussions being observed. However, I slightly adapted this type of observation, as I needed occasionally to get involved in order to understand or seek clarification by asking questions of those being observed (Menter et al., 2011).

Before the interviews and focus group discussions occurred, I created an observation sheet where I could record my thoughts in a structured manner. This observation sheet allowed me to be flexible by also recording interesting and significant information instead of merely keeping to a strict structure (Basit, 2010). I reflected on my feelings before and after the interviews and focus group discussions, and recorded how I could have influenced these discussions. Furthermore, I documented the dynamics between individuals and the environment or context in which the research activities occurred.

Observations were deemed valuable as they provided an understanding of the context in which parent-teacher communication generally occurs. It also provided me with the opportunity to highlight information that others may not have given attention to (Patton, 2002). Furthermore, this complementary data collection method provided me with visual and auditory qualitative data (Menter et al., 2011). I was able to provide observer logs of events occurring at a given point in time and to observe the participants in a familiar environment (Denscombe, 2003). As I made use of a visual and auditory recording device, I could return to the discussions and interviews at any time and

review and include observations that I might have missed. In addition, I was able to view and reflect on behaviour or activities that could have been unnoticeable through other data collection methods. Textual data were in this manner used to triangulate and strengthen emerging findings and interpretations (Menter et al., 2011).

Similar to other data collection methods, observation implies certain potential challenges. The main objective of observation is to observe events or participants as they occur in their environment. However, the act of observation can influence the cases being observed (Flick, 2009). Another challenge lies in the focus on overt behaviour where these behaviours are described but not necessarily explained. Contextual factors influencing such behaviour may as a result be overlooked (Denscombe, 2003). In addition, observation relates only to external behaviour that is viewed (Patton, 2002). In an attempt to address these challenges, I made use of a variety of data collection methods with the purpose of gaining insight into the intentions and contextual information motivating the participants' observed behaviour.

Another challenge implied by observation relates to the complexity of human interactions. When conducting my observations, it was difficult to understand fully the meanings created between people as these interactions were probably founded on previous experiences and relationships. In addition, the observational data could also be limited due to the small sample of interactions I observed (Patton, 2002). Moreover, my observations and interpretations were based on my view of the world and what I expected to see (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). I was, however, able to address potential challenges through triangulation of the data, continuous guidance and advice from my supervisor as well as the use of a research diary where I recorded my personal reflections. I thus recorded my observations by means of field notes and a research diary, which assisted me in understanding the research sites and participants who functioned there (Patton, 2002).

3.6.4 Field notes and research diary

In qualitative research, field notes can provide an essential ongoing database when composing case studies and doing thematic cross-case analysis (Patton, 2002). Field notes allow the researcher to document observations or thoughts on the research

process (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). These descriptive notes can furthermore enable the reader to view the research activities as they occurred (Patton, 2002). Field notes are based on the researcher's individual work habits and style (Patton, 2002).

In this study, I initially experienced difficulty simply to record details without a structure. As I was of the view that I would be more effective in recording my observations if I was well organised, I prepared a structure that I could use to focus on the necessary descriptions for noting my observations. I took the advice of Patton (2002), who maintains that noteworthy information should be kept for future recall by relying on field notes (Denscombe, 2003). My field notes were dated, and captured information about the type of research activity, time, physical setting and group dynamics that existed during the data collection sessions (Patton, 2002).

I found field notes to be specifically useful during interaction with the participants as they allowed me to record my observations of what occurred or was discussed, and later refresh my memory (Denscombe, 2003). I also relied on my hand-written field notes where additional questions or clarifications were required. Field notes furthermore assisted me in filling in information that was missed in the audio-visual recordings. Direct quotations from the participants and information on non-verbal communication were also recorded as field notes (Denscombe, 2003; Patton, 2002).

Challenges associated with field notes include that this strategy cannot be used in isolation for data collection purposes, that information gained in this manner is based on the researcher's interpretations and cannot be considered as an objective record, and that researchers may interpret information incorrectly (Denscombe, 2003). Therefore, I relied on the guidance and direction provided by my supervisor to overcome these potential challenges. My research diary was also used to consider my ideas and insights as well as my decisions during the research process critically, which may assist others in following my reasoning and arrival at certain conclusions (Maree, 2013; Menter et al., 2011). I reflected on my personal feelings, personal meanings and reactions to my experiences (Patton, 2002). As Patton (2002) states, the purpose of field notes is lost if the researcher does not describe what it is like to interact with the participants and settings.

3.7 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

There is no distinct stage where data collection ends and data analysis begins, as the two processes simply fade into each other (Durrheim & Terre Blanche, 1999). The transcriptions of interviews and focus group discussions as well as written texts can provide linguistic character to qualitative data as such raw material reflects spoken words and is written in document form (Silverman, 2001). In this regard, Flick (2009) states that texts provide significant data that findings are based upon, the instrument for interpretations, and a medium for communicating and presenting conclusions and recommendations.

I conducted inductive thematic analysis of my field notes, research diary, transcripts of interviews and focus groups discussions, and visual data. This allowed me to determine relationships, patterns and categories portrayed in each case, and then compare these themes across the cases (Harling, 2012). I regarded this type of analysis as suitable for this study as it gave me the opportunity to be guided by my own style of thinking and reflect on alternative interpretations (Basit, 2010). My objective was to gain insight into the meanings shared by the participants and to explore the manner in which they understood the phenomenon under study (Maree, 2013). Furthermore, this type of analysis provided me with the opportunity to investigate multiple realities, and to search for answers through the descriptions provided by the participants (Basit, 2010).

Throughout the study, I aimed to gain an understanding of parent-teacher communication as a whole, after exploring all the cases closely (Stake, 2006). I took the advice of Durrheim and Terre Blanche (1999), who maintain that during the analysis process I had to remain close to the data in order to interpret from a place of understanding. As a degree of subjectivity may have occurred when noticing assertions and drawing conclusions during my analysis, I tried to remain systematic and transparent (Menter et al., 2011). Furthermore, I focused on applying a critical perspective instead of taking the information at face value (Menter et al., 2011).

I implemented the guidelines for inductive thematic analysis as proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994) as well as Durrheim and Terre Blanche (1999). Figure 3.2 provides a summary of the process I followed in analysing and interpreting the data.

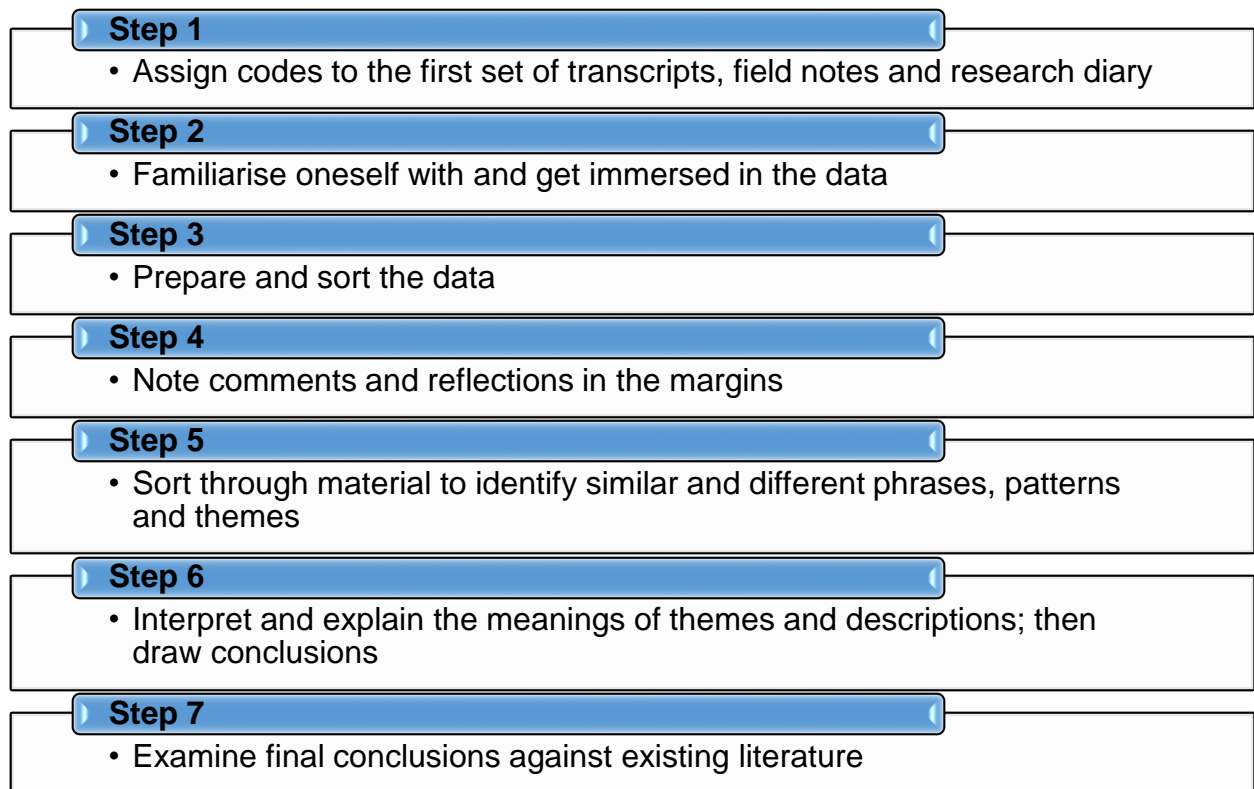


Figure 3.2: Process of data analysis and interpretation

Once the data had been collected, I prepared all raw data by creating a detailed description of the participants, including important information such as age, gender and relevant background information (Menter et al., 2011). With the assistance of a professional transcriber, the visual and audio recordings from the semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were transcribed. Transcripts were given to the participants to allow them to add comments and correct any errors or misunderstandings (Creswell, 2012). I then familiarised and immersed myself in the data by reading through the texts many times and creating summaries (consult Appendix K) (Durrheim & Terre Blanche, 1999).

As semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions typically produce a large amount of data, sorting and coding was the next vital step in the data analysis process. By creating a good coding system, I was able to create simple categories or themes

from the complex phenomena (Stake, 2006). I made use of inductive coding to divide information into meaningful analytical units as they appeared in the data (Maree, 2013; Creswell, 2012; Durrheim & Terre Blanche, 1999). By doing so, I was able to provide interpretations across cases (Stake, 2006). I sought to identify what was unique to each case and what was similar or different across the cases (Stake, 2006). I also summarised textual data by examining the frequency of occurrences (Basit, 2010) and searching for relationships and patterns (consult Appendix L). Initially, I relied on the research questions in identifying themes; yet, as the analysis progressed, these themes and sub-themes were refined (Stake, 2006). Once I had thoroughly worked through the data several times, I established a final list of key categories, themes and codes (consult Chapter 4). I aimed to identify between five and seven categories per sub-theme as suggested by Creswell (2012).

In doing the analysis, I had to review the details of each case carefully in an attempt to understand parent-teacher communication as it occurred in the various cases (Stake, 2006). Through interpretative reading, I focused on how the participants made sense of their worlds and how these perspectives could be interpreted (Basit, 2010). The aim was to get a general first impression of the information and to reflect on the tone, use and credibility of the data (Creswell, 2012). I throughout remained aware of the research questions and the purpose of the study. This process highlighted the most significant sections where annotations and assertions were created (Stake, 2006, Menter et al., 2011), allowing me to interpret and explain the meanings of themes and descriptions and subsequently draw conclusions from the verifiable data (Creswell, 2009; Maree, 2013).

I made these assertions based on evidence demonstrated across the multiple data collection methods where at least three confirmations were required per category (Silverman, 2001; Stake, 2006). I then summarised the data by means of specific techniques such as numbering each line in the transcripts and using coloured pens or pencils to identify key quotations (consult Appendix J). I include examples of these in this dissertation (Chapter 4) in support of the assertions made (Menter et al., 2011; Creswell, 2012).

Recording the data was the final step of the analysis process (Basil, 2010). My conclusions were then compared to previous theories and literature on parent-teacher communication in order to determine similarities and differences in the information I obtained and those captured in existing literature (Creswell, 2012). I subsequently aimed to gain accurate accounts of parent-teacher communication where people undergoing similar experiences can recognise this and perhaps obtain a new perspective of this phenomenon (Durrheim & Terre Blanche, 1999).

3.8 QUALITY CRITERIA

The trustworthiness of this study was achieved by ensuring credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability and authenticity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this section I explain each criterion and present the strategies I relied on to enhance the quality of this research.

3.8.1 Credibility

Credibility of findings and descriptions indicates that a researcher has correctly and truthfully recorded the phenomenon under investigation. In other words, the manner in which the participants' realities are perceived needs to correspond with the researcher's depiction of these viewpoints (Mertens, 1998; Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). To this end, I utilised a variety of data collection and documentation strategies in order to provide evidence from multiple sources for the findings I obtained (Mertens, 1998).

As such, triangulation was utilised to validate my findings (Lincoln & Guba 1985; Shenton, 2004). Various methods and sources were compared to one another (Maree, 2013) in order to find at least three confirmations of themes or assertions (Stake, 2006). In this way, I was able to limit the risk of chance associations and systematic bias. Findings were also compared to research involving a diverse range of individuals, research sites, and a variation of methodologies (Maree, 2013) in order to identify comparisons and patterns, thereby further increasing the credibility of my findings (Menter et al., 2011).

In addition to triangulation, persistent observations and a prolonged period with the participants at the research sites enhanced this study's credibility (Mertens, 1998; Schwandt, 2007). I decided to leave the research sites only once my supervisor and I felt confident that the themes were repeating and that data saturation had thus been reached (Mertens, 1998). I engaged in extended discussions with my supervisor on all findings and conclusions. Furthermore, I stated my initial beliefs at the onset of the study and monitored them as they developed by means of a research diary. Finally, I verified the data I obtained by checking with participants that the constructs or statements I provided accurately reflected their viewpoints (Mertens, 1998). I communicate these viewpoints in Chapter 4 by providing rich and thick descriptions (Creswell, 2014).

3.8.2 Transferability

Generalising in interpretivist research is often not possible; however, transferability may be possible when findings are applicable to similar contexts and research sites (Lincoln & Guba 1985). In order for the readers to be able to determine whether the findings of this study can be transferred to similar context, I include rich and comprehensive descriptions of the research process and context in this dissertation (Mertens, 1998).

By providing extensive and careful descriptions of the times, places and contexts, I aimed to provide the opportunity for existing and future researchers to compare this study to similar cases across research sites and draw upon differences and commonalities in findings (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014; Schwandt, 2007). For example, my descriptions of what a resource-constrained school setting entails could affect the reader's understanding of potential challenges or solutions to parent-teacher communication that were identified.

Finally, the use of multiple cases in this study strengthened the transferability of findings as the data I obtained could be compared and provided detail (Yin, 1994). As I indicated my theoretical lens before doing any interpretations, the conclusions I came to can be regarded as substantiated (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014).

3.8.3 Dependability

Throughout my study, I strove to increase dependability, as suggested by Bertram and Christiansen (2014). Dependability refers to the extent to which a study is consistent and can be replicated by future researchers (Shenton, 2004). It furthermore includes researchers providing explanations for variations in findings or interpretations of differences when comparing previous and current studies (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). Moreover, Yin (1994) states that dependability should be viewed as the maintenance of a case study protocol by, for example, documenting an entire research process in detail.

I aimed to enhance the dependability of this study by providing the reader with the opportunity to evaluate the research practices by reporting and recording the research process in detail (Shenton, 2004). In addition, I attempted to justify the differences I identified in the findings between the cases or previous literature in Chapter 5 (Mertens, 1998; Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). I sought to describe the participants and their viewpoints of parent-teacher communication and ensure that my descriptions matched what I had learnt in the research sites (Maree, 2013) in order to increase the rigour of this study.

3.8.4 Confirmability

Confirmability indicates the extent to which a study reflects the voices of those being studied and is free from the researcher's interest and bias. In other words, findings should not be influenced by a researcher's judgement (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As I was the researcher in this small-scale study, I interpreted any data with care, and was guided by my supervisor (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014).

I furthermore aimed to ensure that the findings of this study reflect the perceptions and experiences of the parents and teachers. I explicitly state the reasons for my assertions and interpretations, and the original sources of contributions can be tracked. As such, a trail of evidence is included in the examples and appendixes I provide, as suggested by Yin (1994). Throughout, I ensured that the analysis process was systematic and transparent in order to allow for scrutiny by other professionals.

Furthermore, I relied on a research diary to indicate my characteristics and preferences in order not to influence any insights gained (Shenton, 2004).

3.8.5 Authenticity

The authenticity of research refers to the understanding of individuals' views and being confident in such understandings. Authenticity will create integrity in research as various descriptions and views can be balanced (Schwandt, 2007). Lincoln and Guba (1985) state ways of supporting authenticity, namely fairness, ontological authenticity, educative authenticity, catalytic authenticity and tactile authenticity. Fairness relies on the evaluator to expose value structures and conflicting constructs that are held (Schwandt, 2007). Ontological authenticity refers to the personal growth and insight that individuals experience as they interact with others. Next, the appreciation and understanding of constructs rooted in individuals' value systems is known as educative authenticity (Schwandt, 2007). Catalytic authenticity is established when action is stimulated and facilitated (Schwandt, 2007). Finally, tactile authenticity refers to the ability to empower participants to take action.

I attempted to enhance the integrity or authenticity of my research by keeping a reflective diary where I noted conflicting assumptions and stated my value system. Throughout the study I documented my personal growth and interactions with the participants (Maree, 2013). Furthermore, I ensured that all my decisions and behaviours were founded on moral principles.

As I was interested in the perceptions of others, I needed to show respect and appreciation for the meanings they shared (Basit, 2010). I relied on member-checking and detailed descriptions as strategies that could add balance to the views created (Menter et al., 2011). Transcriptions of the semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were thus provided to the participating teachers and parents to confirm the data obtained and interpretations I made (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These member-checking sessions occurred at the selected schools at times that were convenient for the participants and only after the data had been transcribed and analysed. In some cases participants requested that the transcriptions be sent via email as a password protected file due to them not being able to meet me in person. However, I ensured

that all participants had the opportunity to ask questions and contribute to the interpretations I made (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

3.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Throughout this study, my decisions and actions were guided by ethical reasoning (Basit, 2010). Flick (2009) proposes that researchers regularly reflect on participants' roles and expectations, and treat any dilemmas that may arise with sensitivity. I discuss the way in which the field worker involved and I respected ethical guidelines in the sub-sections that follow.

3.9.1 Permission to conduct research, informed consent and voluntary participation

Before conducting any form of research, researchers need to obtain permission from all relevant parties. To do research with human participants at a school requires certain procedures such as clearance from an ethics committee (Maree, 2013). I obtained permission from the University of Pretoria as well as the Gauteng Department of Basic Education (consult Appendix B) to conduct the study in local schools. Furthermore, the relevant schools, and governing bodies and school principals provided permission for the study (consult Appendix C).

The University of Pretoria and the participants from School A granted me permission to make use of a field worker for data collection and an external individual to transcribe the data collected. As School A employed me at the time of data collection, I required the assistance of these two individuals in order to obtain data from my colleagues but to ensure that I could not identify the contributions made. This was necessary to avoid bias and subjective interpretations during the analysis process, and address the potential effect of power and hierarchical challenges. In addition, both the field worker and external individual respected all the necessary ethical principles.

Gaining written informed consent from the participating teachers and parents was necessary before collecting any data. Once I had informed the participants about the research purpose and process, I requested them to decide whether they wanted to participate in the research (Flick, 2009). Participants were made fully aware of the

process and background of the study before giving written consent to participate (Basit, 2010). For this purpose individuals received letters of invitation and consent (consult Appendix D and Appendix E) containing the necessary detail on the study. I also explained the consent form verbally and allowed participants to read and sign the document. Participants had the opportunity to ask questions and gain clarity at any time during the research process (De Vos, 2002; Maree, 2013).

As participants voluntarily participated in the study, I explained to them that they could withdraw at any time during the research process if they wished to do so. It was important that I respect the reasons for participation or the lack of involvement at all times and allow participants to decide for themselves (De Vos, 2002).

3.9.2 Confidentiality, anonymity and respect of privacy

Confidentiality and anonymity entail the handling of information in a manner that is private or secret. Participants' confidentiality can be guaranteed when personal information is utilised in a manner that makes it impossible for others to identify the participants (Flick, 2009). According to De Vos (2002), individuals differ in terms of how private they want their personal information to remain.

I attended to confidentiality and anonymity from the onset of the study. No data were linked to individuals but instead remained private (Basit, 2010). To protect the interests and identities of the participants results are portrayed in an anonymous manner in this dissertation. Before data were collected, the participants were made aware of and gave permission for the interviews to be recorded and listened to by someone else, unknown to them when doing the transcriptions (Menter et al., 2011).

3.9.3 Protection from harm

Although physical injury cannot be ruled out, many participants of qualitative studies can be subject to harm of an emotional nature. Emotional harm is often difficult to predict and could have lasting consequences (De Vos, 2002). Therefore, researchers need to ensure that all participants are protected from harm when a study is conducted.

As researcher, I guarded against participants being exposed to any undue physical, emotional, social or psychological harm. Care was taken to preserve the dignity of the participants throughout the research process. Participants were not pressured to participate and could withdraw from the study at any time without consequences (De Vos, 2002). They were made aware of the potential impact that this study might have (De Vos, 2002) and agreed to all information that would be made public (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). Furthermore, questions posed to the participants were not threatening, insensitive or offensive in any way (Basit, 2010).

3.9.4 Trust and deception

Establishing trust and avoiding deception is necessary when involving human participants in a study. Deception refers to the misleading of facts (Loewenberg & Dolgoff, 1988) or withholding information related to a study, which may break down trust between the researcher and participants (Corey, Corey, & Callanan, 1993). By doing so, participants may not be willing to take part in the study or honestly and openly provide their views on the phenomenon under investigation (Menter et al., 2011). I honoured these principles by remaining transparent and assuring confidentiality and anonymity throughout the research process.

3.10 MY ROLE AS RESEARCHER

My primary role as qualitative researcher was to engage in a collaborative partnership with the participating parents and teachers to gain a deep understanding of parent-teacher communication as they experienced it. Conducting interpretive research requires of researchers to convert everyday skills into research skills. This involves personal change as I needed to learn how to listen, look and correctly interpret during interactions with the participants in their natural environments (Durrheim & Terre Blanche, 1999). As I did not want to disturb the natural context in which parent-teacher communication occurs, I took the necessary care when entering the schools and engaged with the participants in an empathic and friendly manner (Durrheim & Terre Blanche, 1999). I prepared, structured and conducted most of the multiple data collection activities myself, apart from the two dyadic interviews that were facilitated by a field worker due to reasons discussed elsewhere.

Furthermore, I was responsible for analysing the field notes, research diary, transcripts of interviews and focus groups discussions, and observational notes. As analysis of qualitative data may be influenced by a researcher's subjective experiences, I had to remain cautious and conscious of the role I fulfilled (Basit, 2010). I kept a reflective diary to consider the ideas and insights I identified from the data critically (Maree, 2013). In addition, reflective reading assisted me in locating myself in the data that had been generated by exploring my viewpoint and understanding of the data (Basit, 2010).

Upholding the ethical guidelines suggested by various authors (Basit, 2010; Bertram & Christiansen, 2014; De Vos, 2002; Maree, 2013, Menter et al., 2011) remained a priority throughout the research process. Therefore, obtaining permission and informed consent, and honouring confidentiality, anonymity, and protection from harm, while avoiding deception and establishing trust was a priority. Finally, as I aimed to contribute to the literature base on parent-teacher communication in resource-constrained school settings, I had to recognise the expectations of potential academic audiences. These expectations affected my written and oral presentations of the findings (Silverman, 2001).

3.11 SUMMARY

In this chapter, I described the empirical part of my study. I presented my paradigmatic perspectives by discussing my choice of an interpretivist paradigm and qualitative approach. I explained the case study design I utilised, and discussed the data collection and documentation techniques I selected. I then presented the manner in which I analysed and interpreted the data, and foregrounded the procedures I relied on in enhancing the trustworthiness of the study. I concluded with a discussion of ethical principles and my role as qualitative researcher.

In the following chapter, I present the results of the study in terms of the themes and sub-themes that emerged. I include extracts from the data in support of my discussions, relying on examples from the semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and field notes on observations. I furthermore relate the results of this

study to the literature discussed in Chapter 2 in order to foreground the findings of this qualitative study.



CHAPTER 4: RESULTS OF THE STUDY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

I presented the empirical part of my study in the previous chapter, discussed the paradigmatic perspectives and justified the methodological choices I made. I elaborated on the case study design I implemented, as well as the data collection and documentation techniques I used. Moreover, I explained the methods I implemented to analyse and interpret the data collected. I concluded the chapter by discussing the trustworthiness of the study and the ethical guidelines I followed.

In this chapter I present the themes and sub-themes that emerged following inductive thematic data analysis. I include verbatim quotations from the transcripts as well as extracts from my research diary as supportive evidence.

4.2 RESULTS OF THE STUDY

The primary research question that guided this study is: *How do Grade 3 and 6 teachers and parents in resource-constrained school settings perceive parent-teacher communication?* Figure 4.1 provides an overview of the themes and sub-themes I identified, which subsequently assisted me in addressing the research question.

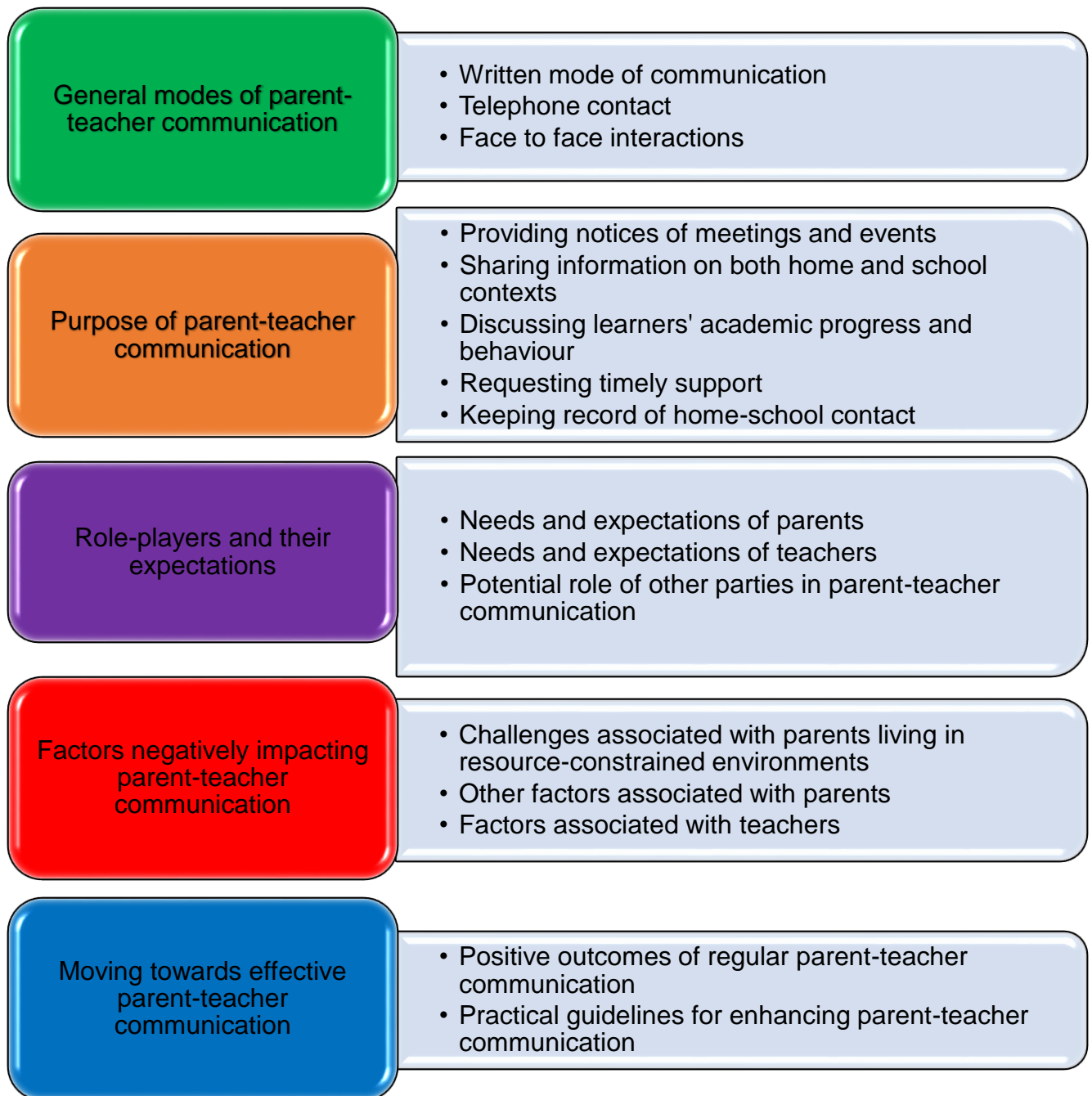


Figure 4.1: Results of the study

4.3 THEME 1: GENERAL MODES OF PARENT-TEACHER COMMUNICATION

This theme reports on the modes of communication generally used by parents and teachers, namely the written mode, telephone contact and face to face interaction. An overview of the inclusion and exclusion criteria I relied on in identifying the sub-themes are captured in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Inclusion and exclusion criteria for Theme 1

Theme 1: General modes of parent-teacher communication			
Sub-theme	Categories	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
1.1 Written mode of communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Communication books 	All data related to the utilisation of communication books and the processes involved when communicating through this channel.	Data related to the use of newsletters, letters to selected parents, telephones or face to face interactions when communicating with parents or teachers.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ General newsletters 	All data related to the utilisation and type of information shared when communicating through newsletters.	Data related to communication books, letters to selected parents, telephone contact or face to face interactions when communicating with parents or teachers.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Letters to selected parents 	All data related to the utilisation and type of information shared when communicating to selected parents via letters.	Data related to communication books, general newsletters, telephone contact or face to face interactions when communicating with parents or teachers.
1.2 Telephone contact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Telephone calls 	All data related to the utilisation of telephone calls as a means to communicate.	Data related to written contact, short text messages or face to face interactions when communicating with parents and teachers.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Short messages 	All data related to the utilisation of short text messages via mobile-phones when communicating with parents or teachers.	Data related to written contact, telephone calls or face to face interactions when communicating with parents and teachers.
1.3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mass meetings 	All data related to the occurrence and	Data related to written contact,

Face to face interactions		purpose of mass meetings with parents in order to convey certain messages.	individual meetings or telephone contact when communicating with parents and teachers.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Individual meetings 	All data related to the utilisation and purpose of individual meetings with parents for the purpose of communicating with them.	Data related to written contact, mass meetings or telephone contact when communicating with parents and teachers.

In terms of the preferred modes of communication, participants highlighted the fact that different modes of communication imply different advantages and disadvantages. The participants indicated that a specific mode is typically selected based on the criterion of being effective to reach the identified goals. One of the participants explained: *“Basically I don’t think there is the best form of communication, the only thing is which one can reach or help you both equally in order to reach your goal, because here at school, yes we have many forms of communications with parents”* (CT6.1, DI, p. 3³). Against the background of this perception, I was unable to identify one particular mode of communication that was preferred by all participating teachers and parents, yet realised that people preferred different modes of communication for different reasons, as discussed in the sub-sections that follow.

4.3.1 Sub-theme 1.1: Written mode of communication

Both parents and teachers identified written communication as a mode of two-way parent-teacher contact that commonly occurred in the form of communication books, general newsletters, and letters to selected parents.

4.3.1.1 Category a: Communication books

The participants identified message books or communication books as a means of exchanging information. Participating teachers of both Grade 3 and 6 learners

³ Henceforth the following abbreviations will apply: FGD = Focus group discussion; II = Individual interview; DI = Dyadic interview; FN = Field notes, and RD = Research diary.

explained that they relied on communication books to send messages to parents, who seemingly in turn responded. Teachers stated, *“We’ve got a message book, so we write them a letter and they write back”* (CT3.1, FGD, p. 2), and, *“I would think the communication book because you will tell if you’re not doing your work if you write the note in the communication book, he must take it home and the parent must come back to you, so in that works better”* (AT6.2, DI, p. 3). Parents of Grade 3 and 6 learners confirmed that they received messages from teachers via such books, stating, *“They will also write on the child’s communication book”* (BP3.1, II, p. 1).

It appeared as if communication books could encourage two-way communication between parents and teachers, yet on condition that both parties participated. A lack of two-way involvement reportedly limited the potential use of this medium of communication, as captured in the following contributions:

- *“There’s this communication book yes, when they give them the communication book what they told us is the teacher will write, then you will respond, or if you are experiencing something you will write to the teacher that’s when the other day I did write then there was no response”* (BP3.1, II, p. 4).
- *“... the child keeps on saying my parents signed the communicator but I forgot the book at home or ..., you also get that or ‘my parents I didn’t see them last night, when I was asleep they came and when I left they, you know’ and when it drags on too long”* (AT6.1, p. 3).

4.3.1.2 Category b: General newsletters

A second form of written communication reportedly used by teachers and parents to exchange messages was newsletters. Parents reported on the use of newsletters by stating, *“They write letters and give each child and we have to read and also reply if it needs a reply that’s what we do”* (AP3.1, II, p. 2). Teachers confirmed, *“We send out the newsletters”* (AT3.2, DI, p. 3), which were seemingly utilised to invite, inform or remind parents of school activities, and reflect communication from the school to the parents. One of the teachers explained: *“With us you will get those message like the newsletters they will send it maybe this week, the meeting is in the next two weeks”* (CP3.4, FGD, p. 9).

In support of these reports on the use of newsletters, I documented my observations in field notes, indicating the following:

“She showed me the newsletter that children had already received with specific information relating to the school. From what I observed, newsletters are not written by class teachers; instead they are produced by the management of schools in order to inform parents of school events. This process may not encourage two-way communication as parents are not given the opportunity to respond to or comment on these letters. The School Management Team simply asks parents to sign that they have received these letters, irrespective of whether or not they agree to its content” (FN, p. 7).

4.3.1.3 Category c: Letters to selected parents

The third form of written communication reportedly used by primarily the participating teachers was letters to selected parents in order to exchange specific information or to make requests. Both Grade 3 and 6 teachers explained how they used letters when requesting a meeting with parents, for example, to discuss a particular problem. They mentioned the following examples: *“In our school right now, you know we have a letter we send, it is like the first, second and third and the final warning”* (BT3.1, II, p. 1), and also, *“Then you resort to the disciplinary letter where there’s a tear off slip at the back because now it’s getting to a level where it’s getting a little bit more serious. And then there’s a little clause you underline in red the parents must please report to school like in tomorrow at 07:30”* (AT6.1, DI, p. 3). Judging by these contributions, the purpose of individual letters to selected parents seemingly differed from general newsletters as the information conveyed related to particular parents and their children in the former case. Parents may, for example, be requested to attend to urgent meetings in order to discuss learner behaviour and academic results in such cases.

A Grade 6 teacher reported success when utilising written communication with parents. He linked the successful outcomes to the fact that parents would receive letters at home, stating, *“The book is better, it will be checked at home”* (AT6.2, DI, p. 3). Likewise, another teacher favoured this mode of communication as he apparently as a result experienced ease in maintaining two-way communication with parents. He explained: *“I prefer the one we are using, the diary one because that one I can get a message and I can answer”* (CT6.1, DI, p. 3).

4.3.2 Sub-theme 1.2: Telephone contact

In addition to written contact, participating parents and teachers apparently also communicated telephonically, by phoning one another or sending short text messages.

4.3.2.1 Category a: Telephone calls

During a dyadic interview, a Grade 3 teacher explained that the school would contact parents telephonically when behavioural problems were displayed by their children. The teacher said: *“... and then at times we use, if it’s a very, very serious we got registers we’ve got like telephone numbers, we phone parents and stuff like that”* (AT3.1, DI, p. 4). In addition to this, a Grade 6 teacher reportedly used this mode of communication to convey appreciation for positive efforts of parents in the hope that these actions would continue. She reported as follows:

“That is why we are calling parents to come and discuss some of the problems, and is not only based on problems. If I want to give information, or taking information to one of the parents then I can call that person to say you know these nowadays this boy is doing well, whatever you are using or doing ..., add on ..., please continue with that” (CT6.2, DI, p. 3).

The participating teachers of both grades agreed that certain situations required telephone contact with parents. More specifically, they referred to instances and examples where other modes of communication were considered ineffective, such as when parents would not gain from written communication due to their being illiterate or not having the time to attend to face to face meetings at school. The teachers explained: *“Well there are various ways, we have a little communicator booklet which is the system for all teachers in our school where we write little notes in for the parents and they reply in that and the challenge is that some of our parents can’t read, they are illiterate and they can’t write and therefore we then resort to telephonic conversations”* (AT6.1, DI, p. 2). As such, it appears that this mode of communication may not necessarily have been teachers’ first choice when exchanging information with parents, yet was opted for in certain instances based on practical considerations.

During one of the focus group discussions, the parents of Grade 3 learners shared insight in terms of experiences they had had when using telephone calls in cases where they wanted to communicate with the school. They indicated how teachers

(when they were at school) would telephonically communicate with parents in cases where learners were unruly, saying, “... *then they will call your parent, they will literally put you here, they will call the parent and say this is what’s happening, she vandalised the toilets, she was writing on the table*” (CP3.1, FGD, p. 10). In spite of this recollection, some parent participants were not able to report whether or not this trend occurred in their children’s school; yet they indicated, “*We don’t know if they are doing that. Actually they must do it hey ...*” (CP3.4, FGD, p. 10), and also, “*I think it’s changed now because I used to come to the school*” (CP3.1, FGD, p. 10).

Other participants were apparently of the opinion that teachers were possibly utilising this mode of contact with selected parents at the time of this study; however, many parents may well not be contacted in this manner due to their children not creating serious problems. One of the parents stated: “*Maybe we have not seen that because our children are not directly involved, we’re not sure*” (CP3.4, FGD, p. 10). In support of this view, a parent of a Grade 6 learner confirmed that teachers often relied on this mode of communication in instances of problematic behaviour displayed by learners; he made the following contribution: “*Like they call me with my son’s behaviour, my daughter, she’s okay, she’s progressing, she go for tuitions, she’s okay is only my son that we got always communication with teachers, always having problems with him because he don’t want to behave in school*” (AT6.2, DI, p. 2).

4.3.2.2 Category b: Short messages

In addition to telephone calls, short messages were reportedly utilised by teachers when they wanted to communicate about learners with parents. For example, a Grade 3 teacher indicated that she sent messages to parents from her personal mobile telephone in cases of parents experiencing difficulty to attend meetings due to, for example, a busy work schedule. She stated, “*The parents can’t just take off from work, that’s why we use the phone ... That’s why we use the phone and WhatsApp and the SMS*” (BT3.1, II, p. 1-2). Similarly, a Grade 6 teacher indicated the use of short messages (and other avenues) when wanting to convey messages to parents. He referred to the importance of “*using all avenues of communication, sms messaging, email, newsletters, communication book all this we need to do*” (AT6.2, DI, P. 5).

Participating parents were of the view that schools could utilise bulk messages as a means to enhance communication among parents and reach a broader audience. One of the parents explained: *“They are still reminding us about that meeting, but sometimes you will forget to note it to say by the way on the 23rd there’s a parents meeting and even they will send that newsletter but they will still send sms messages ..., hence I’m not sure maybe it’s about funding issues or whatever but if maybe the school can improve on that”* (CP3.4, FGD, p. 9). For this participant, the value seemingly lay in the potential of getting a message across fairly quickly, for example, to remind parents of meetings and school events.

It appeared as if some of the participating parents preferred telephone communication as a means for teachers to inform them about matters relating to their children, for example saying, *“When they phone and let me know then I know what’s happening”* (AP6.2, II, p. 2). Another parent indicated her tendency to use written communication as a means of conveying messages, despite her reported preference for telephone contact. She explained: *“Both, I think both because sometimes when I get a letter from school, I have to reply the teacher, otherwise sometimes I also write when tomorrow, so I just ..., I say ..., but through phone is better”* (AP3.1, II, p. 4).

4.3.3 Sub-theme 1.3: Face to face interactions

Communication in person was identified as yet another way in which information could be shared between parents and teachers. Contact interaction apparently occurred either through mass meetings or by means of individual meetings with parents.

4.3.3.1 Category a: Mass meetings

According to the participating teachers, meetings involving groups of parents occurred throughout the year, yet the frequency and format depended on the specific school. Meetings were allegedly often pre-determined by the specific purpose or agenda. Teachers indicated, *“We even have like in the beginning of the year we have a grade meeting with them, to explain to them what is the rules of the grade”* (AT3.1, DI, p. 8), and also, *“Like today we have a budget meeting”* (CT6.2, DI, p. 8).

In support of using this mode of communication, parents of Grade 3 children highlighted the potential value of such meetings, referring to the value of social events at these meetings, as well as the possibility to gain knowledge on challenges they had to deal with. A parent explained by saying, *“Sometimes they even have a bring and braai where the children can also come”* (CP3.4, FGD, p. 1), and also, *“There was a workshop when they invited service providers to come and share with us information about bullying and how to deal with bullying at schools and all that”* (CP3.4, FGD, p. 3). This parent described how school management tended to conduct these kinds of meetings for a particular purpose, saying, *“When we’ve got meetings you know the principal will always talk about those issues to say children who are bullying this is what we must ..., the other time they even arranged a workshop for us”* (CP3.4, FGD, p. 3).

4.3.3.2 Category b: Individual meetings

The participating teachers of both Grade 3 and Grade 6 learners seemingly held similar views on teachers’ utilisation of individual meetings to communicate with parents. They stated that towards the completion of each term, parents would typically be invited to individual meetings with the school for a particular purpose. These individual meetings (often called parents’ evenings) allegedly provided both teachers and parents with an opportunity to discuss learners’ academic performance or (problem) behaviour, as captured in the following verbatim quotations:

- *“... that’s also a platform where we can you know see one another face to face and then a lot of information is transgressed in those particular period even which takes place 4 times a year, at the end of every term when the reports are being exchanged”* (AT6.1, DI, p. 2).
- *“Well we do have like every term we have parent’s evening, and that’s when we do our ..., when we hand out reports and then we send out letters to these children that need, that we need to see, that we mostly call them remedial children and those that are having a discipline problem”* (AT3.2, DI, p. 8).

In support of this view, parents of Grade 3 learners confirmed that individual meetings would be arranged for particular purposes, such as collecting reports or discussing learners’ academic performance. Parents viewed such events as opportunities to

receive and also to share information with the teachers, saying, *“I wanted to add that sometimes when it’s time for issuing of reports, we will also have time to communicate with the teachers, they will be able to explain to you the progress of the child”* (CP3.4, FGD, p. 2). The issuing of reports was seemingly the only time that many parents would specifically visit the school, as captured in contributions such as, *“With my daughter I don’t simply come to school, the only time I come to school is when it’s a report”* (AP6.2, II, p. 4-5), and also, *“And usually when we come to collect the report, it is only then”* (BP3.1, II, p. 1).

Some participating teachers preferred this mode of communication when sharing information with parents. These teachers were of the opinion that face to face interaction was more relaxed and provided good opportunities to explain and discuss the problematic behaviour of learners. They explained: *“One on one is usually the easiest”* (AT3.2, DI, p. 8), and also, *“OK like I think the WhatsApp is easier nowadays, to communicate with the phone, but sometimes when a child is very difficult, I think I want to see the parent eye contact. It is better when you meet the parent”* (BT3.1, II, p. 2). In support of this choice a parent indicated a preference for individual meetings rather than group meetings involving other parents when discussing the academic results of learners. She stated the following: *“I can say also one on one, because you know some parents you find that they are not comfortable if you share the whole class progress to other parents”* (CP3.4, FGD, p. 2).

4.4 THEME 2: PURPOSE OF PARENT-TEACHER COMMUNICATION

Theme 2 focuses on the purpose of parent-teacher communication as identified by the participants. Participants indicated the following as purposes of such communication: to inform parents of meetings or events occurring at school; to create opportunities for sharing information on both the home and school contexts; to discuss learners’ academic progress and behaviour; to request timely support, and for record keeping purposes of home-school contact. I summarise the inclusion and exclusion criteria I relied on for Theme 2 in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: Inclusion and exclusion criteria for Theme 2

Theme 2: Purpose of parent-teacher communication		
Sub-theme	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
2.1 Providing notices of meetings and events	All data referring to information, reminders of meetings or upcoming school events that are sent to parents.	Data related to the sharing of information, yet not to communicate about events or meetings, or to discuss a learner's academic progress, behaviour or support actions.
2.2 Sharing information on both home and school contexts	All data related to the sharing of information on school conditions and work taught, as well as background information on children provided by the parents.	Data related to notices of events, or to discussions and opportunities for concerns and support of learners, or to record keeping of home-school contact.
2.3 Discussing learners' academic progress and behaviour	All data related to the discussion of learners' progress and academic performance at school as well as any concerns related to problematic behaviour.	Data related to information sharing with parents and teachers, or for the purpose of requesting timely support or keeping record of home-school contact.
2.4 Requesting timely support	All data related to the concerns of parents and teachers, as well as to providing support to learners in order to address concerns in a timely manner.	Data related to information sharing between parents and teachers, for discussion of learners, or for record keeping of home-school contact.
2.5 Keeping record of home-school contact	All data related to documenting parent-teacher discussions at school and any parent involvement that occurs.	Data related to information sharing, discussion of learners' progress and support in a timely manner.

4.4.1 Sub-theme 2.1: Providing notices of meetings and events

According to the participants, parent-teacher communication provides opportunities for the school to inform parents of events or proceedings occurring at school. One of the teachers elaborated as follows: *“And also the newsletters that are coming out they inform parents about things that are happening at school”* (CT3.4, FGD, p. 2). In some of these cases where information was shared with parents, the latter were required to perform tasks, such as acknowledging the notice or paying for an excursion. A teacher who seemingly valued this outcome of communication stated, *“Like for example when we give out newsletters is going to be what ..., excursion, everyone is on board, every child will pay for the excursion, the money will pop out from somewhere”* (AT3.2, DI, p. 11).

Parents confirmed this purpose of parent-teacher communication. In addition they referred to the possibility of being invited to functions, and learning about factors potentially influencing their children's performance at school. A parent explained: *"Usually like there's a communication book that my child has, I think every child has here at school, then maybe the child doesn't do the homework or maybe the stationery is short, or maybe there's a trip or there's a function here at school, where they will invite you in that"* (BP3.1, II, p. 1). In some cases, parents were allegedly summoned for individual meetings for a variety of reasons, requiring of them to attend these without delay. In this regard a parent of a Grade 6 learner said: *"So that's why I come often to them, they phone me, they tell me that they want to see me, then I come to the school"* (AP6.2, II, p. 1).

4.4.2 Sub-theme 2.2: Sharing information on both home and school contexts

A second purpose of parent-teacher communication, as suggested by the participants, relates to the sharing of information from home as well as school, with the intention of providing support to children in both of these contexts. For teachers, it was seemingly important to understand children and any important home-related circumstances when they as teachers shared experiences about children with parents. One of the teachers explained this idea as follows: *"Definitely I believe it's about communication, okay is communicating about the child basically ... because basically at the centre is the child, so there are things that the teacher needs to communicate with the parent and basically the other way around also"* (AT3.1, DI, p. 1). Another teacher confirmed this view, saying, *"Is for you to be able to give them feedback about what's happening in the classroom about the child and you also need to know what is happening with the child at home"* (CT3.4, FGD, p. 1).

As such, sharing information on both these contexts was regarded as important for communication to flow in two directions and for sufficient information to be shared between parents and teachers. In support of this view, a Grade 3 teacher foregrounded the importance of parents also being aware of, for example, the concepts taught in the classroom so that parents can use such knowledge to provide additional support at home. She said: *"So I think the parents must know what we are doing in school, what the concept that we teach is and all that"* (BT3.1, II, p. 3).

During a dyadic interview with Grade 6 teachers, one of the participants elaborated on the type of information that can be exchanged between parents and teachers. According to this teacher, parents had to be aware of school conditions, both the actual school environment and the social dynamics potentially having effected learners' performance. In the same manner, contextual factors or home circumstances that could influence learners were regarded as important for teachers to be able to provide the necessary support in class. This idea is captured in the following contribution:

“One can actually say if I may just add that there’s a juristic value to the communication in the sense that the parent or the parents/guardian can be informed about conditions at school which they might not be aware of, whether it’s physical, social, academic and then the educator vice versa then can also be informed by the parent if there are any necessary specific situation that needs to be known by the teacher as a background for maybe extra support or just the theory of understanding” (AT6.1, DI, p. 1).

In support of these views, participating parents also emphasised the importance of sharing information, as problems experienced at home may negatively affect children at school. By obtaining such information, parents could potentially change their behaviours in children’s presence, as captured by a parent:

“Sometimes there’s a fight at home, I am fighting with the father, then I have to know this is affecting my child at school, then maybe as the teacher explains to me, then maybe I can just make it simple in the house, talking to the father, let’s not fight in front of the kid ..., if I have a problem because it is affecting the child too much in the class, please let’s make it like this then we know it will be for the kid in the class” (AP6.1, II, p. 4).

As such, participants were apparently of the opinion that teachers could gain a better understanding of the learners they teach while parents would be able to provide better academic support at home when relevant information is shared. Thus the importance of participation by both parties was highlighted. A parent summarised this idea as follows:

“... maybe the teacher doesn’t understand some of the things about the child, then the teacher will be communicating with the parent. Or if the parent is helping the child with the homework or the school work, then if maybe he picks up that the child doesn’t understand or maybe there is something that the parent doesn’t understand about the school, then the parent must talk to the teacher” (BP3.1, II, p. 1).

4.4.3 Sub-theme 2.3: Discussing learners' academic progress and behaviour

During the focus group discussions and interviews, teachers of learners in both Grade 3 and 6 agreed that parent-teacher communication should flow in two directions with the purpose of promoting the development of the child. This idea is captured in contributions such as the following: *“One cannot deal with a child isolated from a parent’s knowledge, input and absolutely open and honest communication”* (AT6.1, DI, p. 1), and also, *“Communicating effectively with the parents about the students, so having open line with the parents”* (CT3.2, FGD, p. 1). It therefore seems clear that teachers and parents should not deal with children separately but should rely on the benefits gained from open and honest communication, and two-way sharing of information and concerns.

In support of the teachers' views, parents confirmed the need for mutual support and collective action. They stated: *“I understand that teachers and the parents must communicate together”* (CP3.2, FGD, p. 1), and, *“Then we need to support the teachers as well ... But I think we also need to provide that support from our side as well. They can’t do it alone. We can’t expect the teachers you know to do everything without our support”* (CP3.4, FGD, p. 7). One of the participants suggested that teachers and parents should create solutions together in order to assist children academically. The parent said the following: *“For me, teacher and parent communication is about a teacher and the parent talking about what’s happening with the child here at school so that we can both know whether the child is doing good or bad at school so that we can come up with a solution together, to make the child grow on an educational base”* (CP3.1, FGD, p. 1). She elaborated on possible consequences of parent-teacher communication not occurring in two directions, stating that parents and teachers will in such cases have limited knowledge of what is occurring both at school and at home. The parent remarked: *“Because if the teacher does not talk to I will never know what is happening. If I don’t talk to the teacher she will never know what’s happening...”* (CP3.1, FGD, p. 7).

4.4.4 Sub-theme 2.4: Requesting timely support

In addition to exchanging information between the home and the school, participating parents of Grade 3 learners were of the opinion that parent-teacher communication

can provide a platform to discuss concerns with the aim of improving the discipline of children. One participant described the manner in which he approached situations when teachers shared their concerns about his child's behaviour. He apparently believed that parents and teachers need to have a mutual understanding and similar approach when dealing with children, and indicated the following:

"... we really know that the children mostly they don't listen and they are stubborn, sometimes they also challenge the teacher, they need more discipline. So my child is making problems at the school, when the teacher is reporting to me, I can't say no you are not treating my child well, leave my child like that. This is quite bad because otherwise I'm spoiling my child. So I have to follow exactly what is needed at the school so that my child can perform better in future" (AP3.1, II, p. 4).

It thus appears that, if a parent was to side with the child, the behavioural concerns experienced by teachers might be neglected. This contribution furthermore emphasises the importance of parents' support to the school, for the sake of the academic performance of the child.

In support of this view, another parent seemingly believed that teachers may experience greater challenges in the classroom if support is not provided by parents. As such, participants of both groups apparently realised that parents and teachers should not expect of one another to handle children or situations in isolation. This belief is captured in the following extract: *"... obviously there are challenges and we need to support as parents. Then if we not providing that support as well, it makes it difficult for them you know to also discipline our kids because if we don't also discipline our kids from home, then we can't expect the teachers to do the same"* (CP3.4, FGD, p. 7).

According to the parents, parent-teacher communication can also provide opportunities to discuss occurrences of behaviour, such as bullying, with a view to stopping it. A participant expressed her frustration with a teacher reportedly not dealing with an incident of bullying when it occurred in the classroom. She subsequently decided to become involved herself, as captured in the following report: *"... my child was complaining that there were other two girls just harassing her in the class and I told her to complain to the teacher, but otherwise she said the teacher didn't solve the problem ... And then I don't understand why this thing can happen even if the teacher is in class. Then I wrote a letter and gave it to the child to give to the teacher"* (AP6.1,

II, p. 1). In this way, communication from the parent apparently supported a teacher to look into unacceptable behaviour that could harm other learners.

Some participating parents furthermore indicated that parent-teacher communication can encourage discussions on challenges experienced by learners when completing homework. Some parents reportedly relied on parent-teacher communication in order to inform teachers about the work their children struggled with at home, especially in cases where children seemed afraid to ask for additional support in class. This idea, as well as the possible positive outcome of assisting learners, is captured in the following contributions:

- *“... there are sometimes when the child doesn’t know anything about the homework, then I will ask the teacher that I was helping the child and she seemed not to be understanding what the homework is all about”* (BP3.1, II, p. 1).
- *“Like my daughter will say you know we’ve been given this homework and if she doesn’t understand or I am also struggling to assist her, then I will write a message to the teacher and say you know what I think this you need to give more timing because it looks like the children didn’t understand because my daughter is very focused, to say you know everyone in the class didn’t understand and we were scared the teacher and whatever, so now I will have to a message. But definitely the next day I know she will answer, she will say noted and say I will make sure that they understand it more”* (CP3.4, FGD, p. 5).

4.4.5 Sub-theme 2.5: Keeping record of home-school contact

According to the participating teachers, schools are obliged to utilise the various modes of communication with parents, as required by the Department of Basic Education. Schools are namely required to keep record and evidence of all contact with individual parents, more specifically indicating when they had initiated and allocated time for interaction and communication with parents. In terms of informing parents of such meetings, teachers mentioned, *“By departmental law must be done by the school telephone, we can’t phone you from our private phones”* (AT6.1, DI, p. 2), and, *“Because when you see them personally it shows them almost everything and*

this also proves to say that they were at school, that they came to see you because every time they come, they sign the register” (BT3.1, II, p. 1).

Teachers indicated that they were also expected to document any parent involvement as children progress from Grade 1 to Grade 12. Teachers explained this process as follows: *“We also have a these profiles, which is like a document that runs from the day that they start in Grade 1 right up to Grade 12 and we always have to put in comments there of parental involvement” (AT6.1, DI, p. 2), and, “So then we have to send out other letters again, and then during the course of the week, we allow them to come during teaching because they have to fill in and sign the 450s” (AT3.2, p. DI, p. 3).* It appeared as if this information was recorded in documents known as Profiles and 450s. In addition, teachers seemingly attempted to encourage parent involvement by sending out more than one letter if needed and allowing parents to consult with them at times that suited the parents.

4.5 THEME 3: ROLE-PLAYERS AND THEIR EXPECTATIONS

Within this theme, I present the results of possible role-players in parent-teacher communication as well as parents’ and teachers’ needs and expectations of one another. I summarise the inclusion and exclusion criteria provided for Theme 3 in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3: Inclusion and exclusion criteria for Theme 3

Theme 3: Role-players and their expectations		
Sub-theme	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
3.1 Needs and expectations of parents	All data related to the manner in which teachers may provide guidance to parents in order to support children to perform well.	Data related to the needs and expectations of teachers as well as other potential role-players in parent-teacher communication.
3.2 Needs and expectations of teachers	All data related to expectations of parent involvement at schools and in learners' performance.	Data related to the needs and expectations of parents as well as other potential role-players in parent-teacher communication.
3.3 Potential roles of other parties in parent-teacher communication	All data related to the roles that children, school management or the Department of Basic Education may potentially fulfil in parent-teacher communication.	Data related to the needs and expectations of parents and teachers in parent-teacher communication.

4.5.1 Sub-theme 3.1: Needs and expectations of parents

The participating parents of both Grade 3 and 6 learners shared their expectations of teachers and the school, indicating that they preferred parent-teacher communication that is open, honest and transparent. To them, children could be supported in this way and any misconceptions avoided, as indicated in the following extract: *“They must help each other with these children; we must be transparent and communicate”* (CP3.2, FGD, p. 6). Parents apparently welcomed open communication, indicating their need for teachers to share information with parents who may in this way better understand their children. One of the parents explained this expectation as follows: *“... in fact with the teacher I am expecting him/her to keep on feeling free, not fearing the parents ..., a teacher must be open, talk to us, tell us what exactly is happening to our children and it opens our minds about our children”* (AP3.1, II, p. 6). Another parent of a Grade 6 learner echoed this need for teachers to communicate with parents openly and frankly yet in a pleasant way, saying, *“I would like the teacher to just tell me, maybe we can communicate nicely, explain everything what is happening about the child”* (AP6.1, II, p. 4). For others, parent-teacher communication could serve the purpose of informing parents of what is expected from them as they may not necessarily hold

such knowledge. In this regard a parent commented saying, “... *so we can do what we wish to be done but maybe we don’t know, but tell us what you expect from us*” (CP3.3, FGD, p. 6).

Closely related, several parents apparently experienced difficulty in assisting their children with school work due to their limited subject and curriculum knowledge, as captured in the following extract: “*I know nothing about what she’s doing at school, I know nothing, I’m lost. Especially like with Afrikaans, I like Afrikaans, but I am learning ... Sometimes there will be this homework, I don’t know where to start*” (BP3.1, II, p. 5). Due to this challenge, some parents tended to rely on the assistance of others such as neighbours or customers in order to assist their children to complete tasks for school. However, parents seemingly realised that such people cannot provide support in the long term, and that another form of intervention is therefore required. Parents explained this view as follows: “... *most parents have studied, some parents didn’t get a chance of going to school, as a result the child comes with a homework, it becomes ..., its blank, the child doesn’t understand, the parent doesn’t understand and as a result one has to go to the neighbour to assist, but for how long because the neighbour must assist their own children and your children as well*” (CP3.3, FGD, p. 12), and also, “*Then I won’t do the homework today, tomorrow I’m going to work and ask one of my friends or whether the customer is there at work*” (BP3.1, II, p. 5). As captured in these examples, the inability of parents to assist their children could often be linked to their own level of education. Despite parents’ willingness and desire to assist their children, they, as a result, required guidance to fulfil this task, and viewed parent-teacher communication as one possible way of receiving some guidelines.

Two parents from different schools seemingly wished to empower themselves and indicated a need for information on, for example, the types of books that could assist them in understanding the subjects taught at school to be able to support the teacher. These parents seemed willing to cover the related financial costs as education was reportedly valued in their households. Furthermore, they wished to be educated alongside teachers as they shared the view that this could be beneficial to their children. These ideas are captured in the following quotations:

- “*So what I don’t know is, could it be possible for the principal to let us have those syllabuses or he can also bring it on the papers or tell us where to buy I*

don't know because this thing is quite important to those people who are serious about their children for learning much" (AP3.1, II, p. 3).

- *"Then the teacher must know that I don't know about that and he must help me to know when this homework comes what do I do, how do I help my child because at the end of the day I must help the teacher so that the teacher can help my child to learn ... I must know which kind of books to read so that I can assist with the child"* (BP3.1, II, p. 5).

These experiences seemingly evoked negative feelings within parents. In this regard I noted the following when a participant spoke about her limited subject knowledge and her inability to assist her child: *"She came across as frustrated in her tone as she had been isolated and had no knowledge of things occurring at the school. She was deeply frustrated about the amount of homework and that certain teachers did not sign these books. It appeared that she blamed herself for not having the skills to assist her child"* (FN, p. 9).

In relation to personal negative feelings, it became apparent that, when expectations were not being met by teachers, parents tended to display negative reactions. Parents generally expected teachers to respond to their concerns or questions, for their voices to be heard. One parent explained: *"The only time I can say okay the teacher is not being responsive, if I ask this is what happened and she says I don't know that's only when I can say okay my views were not heard"* (CP3.1, FGD, p. 6). Closely linked, another parent indicated feelings of frustration when not being informed, receiving limited information, or in cases of discussions being unsuccessful. This parent stated, *"I don't feel nice because sometimes is like maybe I have to know how my kid is coping in the class, how am I going to know this subject is difficult for the kid or what ..., like that. Then I have to make an appointment but the appointment doesn't work"* (AP6.1, II, p. 3).

An even more intense negative reaction is captured by the following contribution, with a parent participant questioning whether or not teachers would complete their responsibilities and fulfil their duties, if non-responsive. The parent remarked: *"Sometimes I feel like they are not doing their job that's what I thought"* (BP3.1, II, p. 2). In support of these expressions of negative experiences, I noted a parent's

emotional response when speaking about limited communication, stating, *“She seemed really unhappy and frustrated when she spoke about her experiences. Her issues have been brought to higher management yet she feels that she remains unsuccessful in finding a resolution”* (FN, p. 3).

As such, parents seemingly expected open communication from teachers to convey messages about their children, yet also to share information on school and homework to equip parents to support their children. Parents furthermore reported the need for ongoing communication and voiced unhappiness in cases where their needs were not met or when they felt uninformed.

4.5.2 Sub-theme 3.2: Needs and expectations of teachers

When asked about their needs and expectations, both Grade 3 and 6 teachers indicated that parents had to be involved and show commitment and interest in their children and their progress at school. Some of the teachers shared their view that children would benefit from such involvement and interest. As an example, a participant indicated the following: *“If they come forth and make it their business to be involved in the education of the child, that child would flourish ...”* (AT3.2, DI, p. 9). Another teacher confirmed this perception and emphasised the importance of the home and parents ensuring that children are prepared for school each day. He stated, *“First is to have an interested in their children’s education, to show that a parent has an interest, everything starts at home, every day they have to see that their child is wearing a proper school uniform and that uniform is clean”* (CT6.1, DI, p. 9). Similarly, a Grade 6 teacher described how parent-teacher communication implied teachers’ expectations that parents would assist learners to prepare for assessment. The teacher said: *“They are going to write a test, that’s when we write in the diary, that’s the way of communication with parents, to say please help the learners we are going to write a test and what is expected from them is they must deal with this”* (CT6.2, DI, p. 2).

Participating teachers seemed eager that parents initiate and help maintain parent-teacher communication. To them continuous communication was important, as well as responses when requested, as captured in the following contribution: *“They need*

to contact us, be in touch with us at all times, especially when we send letters out, especially when we forward them, they must know it is important because we not going to phone the parents” (AT3.1, DI, p. 10). Another teacher confirmed this view and voiced the expectation for parents to attend meetings when requested to do so for discussions to occur. The teacher indicated, *“What I expect from parents, is I want them to attend meetings, they must come to school”* (CT3.3, FGD, p. 5).

Several teachers seemed frustrated with parents who reportedly did not demonstrate commitment. During a focus group discussion, I noted the following in this regard:

“When speaking about the challenges to parent-teacher communication, the participants provided their views and seemed upset by their experiences indicating that there was no commitment from parents. They laughed when I asked what parents can do to improve parent-teacher communication as the answer was simple, ‘Simply show up’ (FN, p. 11).

In addition to their need for parents to be committed and communicate with the school on a regular basis, teachers expect parents to share background information on their children and home contexts with the school. Teachers seemingly valued such information, as background knowledge could assist them in managing the learners. A teacher stated, *“... if at home there are some difficulties of life problems, so for me as a teacher I need to be informed so that I can handle the learner accordingly; that’s my understanding based on teacher/parent communication”* (CT6.2, DI, p. 1). Another teacher confirmed the value of having background information for teachers to understand children’s contexts, as captured in the following example: *“So I think it is important to share the family background, the family information. Some of the families are having certain sicknesses which are genetic, so you have share those”* (CT6.1, DI, p. 14). In elaborating on this view, a Grade 3 teacher indicated that such knowledge can provide a teacher with a better understanding of children, highlighting that poor academic performance may as a result be ascribed to problems at home. She explained: *“If there are problems at home, hey usually affect the child’s performance, so we have to know about them for us to be able to understand that they have problems”* (CT3.4, FGD, p. 3-4).

Teachers experienced frustration when their attempts to initiate contact with parents failed. Despite their efforts, these parents would allegedly complain when their children

failed or faced challenges. One teacher explained: *“Frustrated, for three months they tried to get hold of the parent, the child is going to fail and then they are going to ask, ‘But Ma’am why’ ...”* (CT3.1, FGD, p. 5). Another teacher even questioned the role and responsibility of the Department of Basic Education in such cases, thereby illustrating his feelings of despair. He stated: *“... you know it is depressing and in such a way that you come to ask yourself many questions about this department”* (CT6.1, DI, p. 12).

Teachers’ negative experiences in such cases were captured in their contributions as well as in my observations. Some of their responses were rather alarming with teachers considering options other than teaching, as indicated in the following extract: *“Honestly speaking that’s why you can see this is not working, people are resigning from a teaching career because they feel oppressed, people are resigning I’m telling you”* (CT6.2, DI, p. 12). Another teacher voiced her experience of not being recognised, saying, *“It’s a pity that it is not about us because we don’t always feel we get the necessary recognition”* (AT6.1, DI, p. 4) while yet another seemed to have lost hope, and feeling that her efforts were in vain. She explained her experience as follows: *“You know, sometimes as a teacher you want to give hope because in the class we are trying our best ..., we give them homework, they go home and nothing is happening”* (BT3.1, II, p. 5). In this respect I reflected as follows in my research diary: *“The expectations of parents and teachers are seemingly often not met, making it difficult for collaborative relationships to form. Unfortunately, some of the expectations seem difficult to meet due to external or internal conditions which may require more understanding from both parties involved”* (RD, p. 13).

Teachers emphasised their need for parents to take a keen interest in learners’ academic performance, as such involvement could be beneficial to the learners. Furthermore, participating teachers required parents to maintain parent-teacher communication by initiating and responding to messages. Teachers valued the sharing of information by the parents, specifically in terms of the background of children and the home context, as such knowledge can assist teachers in gaining a better understanding of the learners they teach. Lastly, teachers tended to lose hope and experience frustration when these needs were not met by parents.

4.5.3 Sub-theme 3.3: Potential roles of other parties in parent-teacher communication

Some participants identified children as significant role-players in parent-teacher communication. However, according to the participants, children may not be aware of this role that they should play, as explained by a teacher: *“I don’t think they grasp how important it is for us to have that sort of triangulation, the teacher, the child and the mommy and daddy at home, or the granny”* (AT6.1, DI, p. 5). In this regard another teacher emphasised the importance of all role-players to meet their responsibilities in order to ensure success. This idea is captured in the following quotation: *“... is like a triangle, I can do my best and the child can try ..., if you don’t help also them also the triangle is incomplete and then it goes down from there”* (CT3.1, FGD, p. 3).

In support of the views held by the teachers, parents also considered children as role-players in parent-teacher communication. During the focus group discussion the parent of a Grade 3 learner stated: *“I think now there’s a third ..., what she is saying just made me acknowledge that there’s a third party, it is not just us”* (CP3.1, FGD, p. 8). In confirmation, another parent suggested that two-way communication between parents and teachers should involve children, saying, *“Communication is actually a two-way communication and even involving the child as well. As a child you must know that there’s communication between the teacher and the parent, as well as the child”* (CP3.4, FGD, p. 8). Closely aligned, another parent emphasised that parents have to depend on children as they lie at the centre of parent-teacher communication. The parent remarked: *“... there’s always that threat that always know that your child also needs to be involved in the communication as well, just pull, talk to your child what’s this and this, or ..., because at the end of the day you also rely on that middle man”* (CP3.1, FGD, p. 8). This contribution highlights the perception of parents that children may shed light on issues when communication is not necessarily clear.

To this end, I noted the following in my research diary:

“I was pleased that parents and teachers understand that the children are at the centre of parent-teacher communication. Irrespective of their behaviour or academic achievement, these children remain important to the families and teachers that spend time trying to assist them in reaching their full potential. I believe the saying, ‘It takes a village to raise a child’ is accurate as these

parents and teachers understand that they cannot work and exist in isolation” (RD, p. 15).

Participants furthermore indicated that children can either hinder or facilitate the communication process. For example, parents may not necessarily receive newsletters or communication, as indicated in the following extract: *“Sometimes you will give a note to send to all your parents ..., some of these boys are naughty they won’t even issue that letter to the parent to say no I’ve done something wrong you must come to school. They will just keep it with them”* (CP3.4, FGD, p. 9). In support of the discourse other parents seemingly believed that children’s playful nature may result in their forgetting to give messages to parents. They stated: *“I mean if my child comes back from school and he puts his bag there and goes to play, does homework, and he doesn’t even tell me there’s a message”* (CP3.1, FGD p. 8), and also, *“... they write letters and give each and every child, mostly you will understand that the children when they are playing sometimes they are lost ..., can lose the papers”* (AP3.1, II, p. 2). A teacher confirmed these views by explaining that limited parent-teacher communication may perhaps be caused by the carelessness of children, resulting in parents being unaware of information sent to them. The teacher said: *“And they don’t get the newsletters sometimes or maybe they don’t give it to the parents you see”* (AT6.2, DI, p. 5).

In addition to the children, the participating teachers and parents regarded the School Management Team of the school as another role-player in parent-teacher communication. A participant highlighted the idea that effective parent-teacher communication should perhaps be the responsibility of higher management in schools, stating, *“It should be the head of the school, the parent and the learner, senior management”* (AT6.2, DI, p. 8). Another parent supported this perception by indicating that the School Management Team can support teachers by encouraging and maintaining parent-teacher communication. He said, *“... we need a help of management because we can talk as teachers what...and management they are also involved in this one, as support”* (CT6.1, DI, p. 7).

Teachers seemingly viewed the Department of Basic Education as yet another role-player in parent-teacher communication. They indicated that this role-player has the

responsibility to provide strategies that can encourage parent involvement, such as workshops with parents where the importance of education and parent involvement is discussed. A teacher emphasised this idea by stating, *“And then one other thing, as a school, if not the district, they must come up with parents workshops, so that they can actually help them to become aware as to how important it is for them to come to school”* (CT6.2, DI, p. 4). Another teacher supported this view by pointing to the importance of workshops where parents are educated regarding their roles and responsibilities in their children’s education. She said: *“I don’t know maybe it’s something higher than us, maybe the department to step in and with workshops and educating the parents on the importance of their involvement in their children’s education”* (AT3.2, DI, p. 10). In some cases, the Department of Basic Education, however, seemingly did not fulfil this role as expected, as implied by the following extract: *“Because in my life I never had anyone from the Department saying that we are having a seminar or we are having a workshop to influence them or to encourage them to be involved in their children’s education”* (CT6.1, DI, p. 8).

4.6 THEME 4: FACTORS NEGATIVELY IMPACTING PARENT-TEACHER COMMUNICATION

Throughout the process of data analysis I found statements by both parents and teachers that relate to factors negatively influencing parent-teacher communication. In this regard I identified the following sub-themes: challenges associated with parents living in resource-constrained environments; other factors associated with parents; and factors associated with teachers. The inclusion and exclusion criteria for Theme 4 are listed in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4: Inclusion and exclusion criteria for Theme 4

Theme 4: Factors negatively impacting parent-teacher communication		
Sub-theme	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
4.1 Challenges associated with parents living in resource-constrained environments	All data related to contextual challenges associated with low socio-economic households, such as transport costs, single parent-households and hours of employment.	Data related to the factors associated with parents and teachers that may negatively influence parent-teacher communication, other than those associated with resource-constrained settings.
4.2 Other factors associated with parents	All data related to characteristics and behaviour displayed by parents that may negatively influence parent-teacher communication.	Data related to contextual barriers typically experienced by parents in resource-constrained settings, or to teachers that may negatively influence parent-teacher communication.
4.3 Factors associated with teachers	All data related to how teachers and their preferences and behaviour can negatively influence parent-teacher communication.	Data related to the context of resource-constrained settings or to the behaviour or characteristics of parents that may negatively influence parent-teacher communication.

4.6.1 Sub-theme 4.1: Challenges associated with parents living in resource-constrained environments

Parents explained how living and working in resource-constrained communities implied certain difficulties that may hamper parents' ability to ensure and maintain regular parent-teacher communication. A parent, for example, indicated how high transport costs negatively influenced her involvement in parent-teacher communication. She also remarked that despite her attempts to attend some meetings at school, her efforts would not always be successful. She stated: *"You then have to make another appointment and it's difficult because you used money for transport to come here and you find the teacher is not here you see"* (AP6.1, II, p. 3). In addition to financial constraints, work commitments and time limitations seemingly made it hard for parents to attend individual meetings called by teachers. They explained, *"... we were faced with power failure ... Another day I knock off at 8"* (BP3.1, II, p. 7), and also, *"I'm in Johannesburg I must come and get the problem solved, then the teacher*

would say okay I will be available between 2 and 4 and then travelling from Jo'burg to here it will be ..., I will probably get here at about 5 o'clock due to the traffic" (CP3.3, FGD, p. 5). As such, it appeared as if possible times for interaction posed distinct challenges, as these were not always suitable for both teachers and parents.

Teachers of Grade 3 and 6 learners confirmed these claims. They displayed an understanding that financial constraints, money for transport, and long working hours and night shifts may limit the interaction between parents and teachers as scheduled times for meetings at school may overlap with parents' work commitments. This insight is captured in the following extract: *"We think that it might be because of working hours that many parents might be working nightshifts when we have our slots here, and it might be financially, you know that they don't have the finance to take a taxi and come here and the distance"* (AT6.1, DI, p. 3). Another teacher confirmed this and elaborated as follows:

"Maybe you've got something to discuss; they are unable to come because of their work commitments also, sometimes you find some are working double shifts and stuff like that and some are single parents, and so you can't really expect them to be there when you need them. So sometimes it is not that they don't want to be here, sometimes it's just that they cannot because they have to provide for the family, they've got three other baby sisters to take care of you know " (AT3.1, DI, p. 5).

Although some parents seemingly wanted to attend school meetings, they were thus unable to do so because of contextual challenges. In addition to challenges associated with work demands and financial means, some parents faced the challenge of raising many children by themselves, adding to the difficulties they faced. During a semi-structured interview, a Grade 3 teacher confirmed this view by stating that some learners are being raised in single parent households where fathers may not be fulfilling their roles: *"... the problem some parents have is when they come here, they say some parents, most of our parents are single parents, when a father is not involved"* (BT3.1, II, p. 3).

After listening to the parent's explanation of the difficulties she experienced in raising children without the support of her husband, I noted the following: *"After the interview she spoke about her problems related to an absent father. She feels hopeless as she tries to make money and raise two children alone"* (FN, p. 6). This informal

conversation with a parent once again confirmed how financial difficulties and time, yet also emotional fatigue, may negatively effect parents and their involvement at school and in parent-teacher communication.

4.6.2 Sub-theme 4.2: Other factors associated with parents

In addition to the factors captured in sub-theme 4.1, certain other factors associated with parents could reportedly hamper parent-teacher communication, namely parents' educational level, invalid parent contact information, the misuse of personal contact with teachers, and poor attendance of school meetings. According to the teachers of both Grade 3 and 6 learners, parents' educational level influenced parent-teacher communication as they were reportedly often illiterate and therefore found it hard to use the written mode of communication effectively. Furthermore, teachers highlighted the possibility of parents and teachers interpreting messages in different ways, which could potentially lead to misunderstanding and incorrect responses. These views are captured in the following contributions: *"... the challenge is that some of our parents can't read, they are illiterate and they can't write ... One finds that if parents can't write, in the structure of our families with the schools that we are dealing here"* (AT6.1, DI, p. 2), and also, *"... not the best because sometimes you can be saying something and then another person interpret it in a different way"* (AT3.2, DI, p. 8).

Participating parents confirmed these perceptions, saying, for example, the following: *"You know, I think maybe for the parents, because it doesn't mean that most parents are literate ..., most parents have studied, and some parents didn't get a chance of going to school"* (CP3.3, FGD, p. 12). One of the participants explained the process that would occur when she struggled to understand the messages received from teachers, reportedly resulting in sending messages back and forth until both parties could comprehend what was communicated. She said:

"... because to write a letter I can write a letter, maybe you answer the letter, then maybe I don't understand. Then I have to write again the letter asking you some question again, then maybe you will answer the question. The answer is not the way I want it or I don't understand, then I have to write again you see ..., it's going to be difficult" (AP6.1, II, p. 3).

My own observations during the data collection process support these views. To this end, the following extract from my field notes indicates the difficulties I experienced when interviewing one of the parents:

“Many of the questions asked had to be rephrased as he did not understand these. This could mean that the terms being used might not be easily understood by all participants. The participant may not have known the answers to my questions; however, he was eager to learn more about parent-teacher communication and stated that this was his reason for attending” (FN, p. 1).

My observations therefore also point to the idea that some parents seemed eager to gain knowledge on how they could fulfil their role in parent-teacher communication, despite the challenges they experienced in this regard. After this particular interview, I reflected on the challenges I experienced in selecting suitable terms that could be easily understood. I noted:

“I struggled with rephrasing terms and explaining questions. I might have to think about examples when I explain for future participants without leading them. I didn’t realise that my educational level would impact my study. I do not want to cause frustration but this remains a challenge for me as I struggle to select terms that are easily understood at the moment when required” (FN, p. 2).

In this reflection the possible effect of variations in literacy level between two people who are communicating is implied, just as in the case of parents and teachers who have different levels of education.

Another challenge indicated by the participants relates to the contact details of parents not being updated or being incorrect. Teachers stated that they often found it difficult to contact parents telephonically, as telephone numbers could be incorrect or invalid, causing frustration among teachers. They remarked, *“... they had to give me four phone numbers, they had four phone numbers in the profile and I phoned all four numbers, not one answer”* (AT6.2, DI, p. 1), and also, *“... then as you say the telephone numbers aren’t sort of valid anymore, you can’t express this in words”* (AT6.1, DI, p. 5). In addition to not having the correct contact numbers, teachers experienced that some parents may choose not to engage in parent-teacher communication when messages are exchanged telephonically. One of the participants explained her experience as follows: *“We communicate with the WhatsApp, some parents won’t answer back, and some parents just refuse to answer ... they got the message, you can see they read the message but they just don’t answer. So it is a big problem”* (BT3.1, II, p. 5).

On the contrary, however, many parents seemingly requested teachers' personal contact information as a means to share concerns or clear up misunderstandings. Many parents allegedly preferred this method of communication as it was convenient for them. In this regard, one parent said: *"Then I find it to be very much easy because you know it was like opening to us and gave us the numbers so every time when I get the problem or maybe didn't understand something then I will call her, you know she didn't mind but it depends on the individual"* (CP3.4, FGD, p. 4). This particular parent expressed appreciation for the teachers she dealt with as the option of contacting teachers on their personal mobile telephones enabled parents to get answers to questions when needed, or to clarify issues that they found challenging. Another parent explained how this communication option enabled her to schedule meetings at times that were suitable for her and the teacher. She stated, *"I have to call first and say will you be able today to be at school or not then I know when I come to the school I know the teacher will be there to meet me, I would have contacted the teacher before time and say she will be available to see me"* (AP6.1, II, p. 4).

Despite several positive remarks by parents about contacting teachers telephonically, participating teachers seemed reluctant to provide their personal contact information to parents due to the possibility of parents misusing this information. Even though a Grade 6 teacher acknowledged that this form of communication can be beneficial to all involved, he indicated that some parents would communicate about unnecessary things when provided with teachers' personal contact information. He remarked the following: *"... it's a good thing sometimes, but sometimes is bad because they phone you for every small thing"* (AT6.2, DI, p. 8). He continued by providing an example of such an occurrence, saying, *"I had a parent, it was in another school, always phoning what time is school coming out, why is school is not out, things like that"* (AT6.2, DI, p. 8). In support of this argument a Grade 6 teacher mentioned that some parents would make contact at inappropriate times, as captured in the following quotation: *"... telephonically I don't prefer that one because some of the parents they can phone you in late hours"* (CT6.1, DI, p. 3).

A Grade 3 teacher from a different school supported these statements, indicating that although this mode of communication can be easier for all involved, she was unhappy with constantly receiving messages on inappropriate days and times. She indicated,

“... it was easier to message all of them at one stage but that gets difficult because on a Sunday night 6 o'clock they try to phone you, so I decided against that one” (CT3.1, FGD, p. 2). Furthermore, such behaviour could continue for a long period of time, as seen in the following extract: *“Otherwise every little thing they going to phone and you not going to hear the end ... it just goes on and on and on”* (AT3.1, DI, p. 12).

In addition to these challenges, the participating Grade 3 teachers regarded the trend of certain parents not attending personal meetings as challenging, more often than not in cases where attendance is important. She explained: *“The children whose parents we need to see are hardly there and these are children that you know I've got issues with, they've got discipline problems, and sometimes it's not just difficult and discipline, discipline usually goes with academic performance, they usually collide”* (AT3.1, DI, p. 4). The teacher indicated possible reasons for this occurrence, suggesting that parents may feel ashamed of certain things and then avoid contact. She said: *“And then again the parent that you need don't come ja ... I don't know whether they feel embarrassed or what, I don't know but they don't come”* (AT3.1, DI, p. 8). Other Grade 3 teachers from all participating schools provided examples of their experiences in support of these claims. One of the participants highlighted the trend of parents attending these meetings, often not having children that pose concerns to teachers. This view is captured in the following contributions: *“... we must sit here for two hours waiting for them to come, then 10 will come and the 10 that do come are the ones that you don't have a problem with, they have nothing to do ..., the ones that you do want to see they don't come at all”* (BT3.1, II, p. 4), and, *“... the parent that you want to see they don't come for meetings, they don't come to collect the reports”* (CT3.4, FGD, p. 5).

In support of these points of view, I experienced this challenge when some of the parents of Grade 6 learners that I invited did not turn up for the data collection sessions. I indicated this challenge in my research diary, stating, *“The parents of Grade 6 learners did not attend this scheduled interview. I contacted my supervisor and she told me to send the letters again and allow more time for parents to respond and prepare themselves.”* (RD, p. 6). I later reflected as follows: *“Despite my efforts I was unable to obtain more parents of Grade 6 learners. Some parents who had indicated that they would attend, however did not do so. Perhaps as children progress, parents tend to be less involved”* (RD, p. 6).

4.6.3 Sub-theme 4.3: Factors associated with teachers

Participants also provided information associated with teachers on factors potentially influencing parent-teacher communication. They mentioned teachers' tendency not to adhere to arranged meetings, and their focus on learners who are academically weak or display behavioural problems. In this regard a parent provided examples of teachers not being available, saying, "*When you get to the school the teacher is already gone, or the teacher is not at school, he didn't come to school for the whole week or maybe for that day she is not at school*" (AP6.1, II, p. 3).

When engaging with parents, teachers would allegedly not have enough time to engage with all the learners' parents, leaving some parents disappointed and without the information they required. For some parents, parent meetings were the only time for interaction with teachers, yet they stated that if many parents wanted to engage with the teachers at such occasions it was not possible for others to engage in meaningful conversations. They said, "*... because at times you will find maybe it's four or five parents who have different problems wanting to talk to the teacher and the teacher is only available at a certain time*" (CP3.3, FGD, p. 5), and, "*I went and looked for the English teacher, she was busy giving the other parents reports, she said I must wait. I waited for her for 45 minutes and it was a long time that I left. So I never had any discussion with her since then*" (BP3.1, II, p. 2).

According to the participating parents, a factor associated with teachers not sufficiently engaging in parent-teacher communication relates to teachers' tendency to focus on learners who are academically weak or display behavioural problems. This view is captured in the following extract: "*Like I've got a son that's very naughty, and I like come frequently to the office just to communicate with teachers*" (AP6.2, II, p. 1). A teacher confirmed this perception by indicating that she usually initiated communication when experiencing problems with learners who displayed academic problems. She said: "*You know usually it takes place with the weaker children, so I think that every time you have a problem you need to inform the parent*" (BT3.1, II, p. 2).

Following my first semi-structured interview with a parent, I reflected on my interaction with the parents of learners I teach. I entered the following remark:

“For the first time, I put myself in the participant’s position. I felt that her concerns were real and well justified. I started thinking about how I communicate with parents and what they may be thinking about the manner in which I communicate with them. She complained about homework not being checked by teachers. I thought about how often I checked homework. I could never understand why I had difficulties getting parents to show an interest in their children’s education. As a teacher, I only see what happens at school. Perhaps they do show an interest at home. The same can be said about parents. They only see what happens at home with regard to homework not being marked and not my efforts made in teaching their children. Could I have been the cause of my own frustrations?” (RD, p. 6).

4.7 THEME 5: MOVING TOWARDS EFFECTIVE PARENT-TEACHER COMMUNICATION

Among other aims, I attempted to provide parents and teachers with the opportunity to identify practices that could improve parent-teacher communication. I identified the following sub-themes: positive outcomes of regular parent-teacher communication, and practical guidelines for enhancing parent-teacher communication. Table 4.5 presents the inclusion and exclusion criteria for Theme 5.

Table 4.5: Inclusion and exclusion criteria for Theme 5

Theme 5: Moving towards effective parent-teacher communication			
Sub-theme	Categories	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
5.1 Possible outcomes of regular parent-teacher communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing clear guidance in support of learner performance 	All data related to the manner in which parents can be informed how to support their children by means of regular parent-teacher communication.	Data related to addressing problems and challenges when they arise, the positive effect of parent-teacher communication on learners' well-being, or practical guidelines for parent-teacher communication.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Addressing problems and challenges when they arise 	All data related to the possibility of dealing with problems and challenges as they occur.	Data related to guidance in support of learners' performance or to the positive effect of parent-teacher communication on learners' well-being, or practical guidelines for parent-teacher communication.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Positive effect on children's general well-being 	All data related to the positive effect of regular parent-teacher communication on children's general well-being.	Data related to addressing problems and challenges when they arise as well as to guidance in support of learners' performance by means of regular parent-teacher communication, or practical guidelines for parent-teacher communication.
5.2 Practical guidelines for enhancing parent-teacher communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guidelines for telephone communication 	All data implying guidelines and ideas for the use of telephone communication to enhance parent-	Data related to the need for more open dialogue opportunities, the value of communication with children or the

		teacher communication.	outcomes of regular parent-teacher communication.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creating more opportunities for dialogue 	All data related to the value of opportunities for meaningful conversations between parents and teachers.	Data related to telephone communication, regular communication with children, or the outcome of regular parent-teacher communication.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encouraging communication with children 	All data related to the value of communication with children, both at home and at school.	Data related to telephone communication or the need for more opportunities for open dialogues as well as to regular parent-teacher communication.

4.7.1 Sub-theme 5.1: Possible outcomes of regular parent-teacher communication

Participating parents and teachers from all schools provided information on potential positive outcomes or benefits of maintaining effective parent-teacher communication. The following categories apply: providing clear guidance in support of learner performance; addressing problems and challenges when they arise; and the positive effect of parent-teacher communication on children’s general well-being.

4.7.1.1 Category a: Providing clear guidance in support of learner performance

Parents and teachers indicated similar experiences and views on the benefits of parent-teacher communication for sharing information in order to assist learners who, for example, struggle academically. A parent of a Grade 3 learner believed that parent-teacher communication can create opportunities for parents to clear up any misunderstandings, such as the concepts taught in class. He stated, *“It’s quite important to communicate with the teachers because mostly, let’s say the teacher, gives my child homework, there are some other issues which we can even understand, which need us to ask the teacher ... or the write message so that we can also understand exactly what he/she was trying to say for the child”* (AP3.1, II, p. 2).

In support of this benefit of being able to gain clarity, another parent highlighted the possibility of getting and sharing information on homework, enabling parents to support their children at home. This parent said: *“To help the child at school and even at home because if I don’t communicate with the teacher, how am I going to help the child with the homework”* (BP3.1, II, p. 1). She elaborated as follows: *“That’s when the teacher should tell me or should teach me ..., help me that okay your Afrikaans is a little bit ..., so for you to learn more about Afrikaans, so that you can help him, the teacher will be teaching child here at school, but so that even at home I am helping this child”* (BP.3.1, II, p. 5). This contribution thus points to the value of gaining clarity on how to assist children, and on the benefits of acquiring new information as parents may not necessarily possess the necessary knowledge and skills.

Next, parents indicated that awareness of the factors that may influence their children’s academic performance can assist them in managing such problems. According to one of the parents, *“... we gave the child homework, the child is not always doing the homework, she is doing the homework in the morning, but as a parent I don’t know what is happening. And you see those things will also improve the marks for the child, then as we are parents then we have to ..., the teacher has to take responsibility to talk to us”* (AP6.1, II, p. 5). This contribution points to the possibility of parents not being aware of behaviour or trends displayed by their children, and therefore not being in the position to attend to this if not informed. A teacher supported this view by stating that parents will indeed be able to provide additional support at home, on condition that they receive information. The possibility of additional support to children for the sake of academic performance was thus related to parent-teacher communication. The teacher stated the following:

“... you communicate with the parents to tell them where the child is wrong, where he is struggling and also how the parent can help the child. And sometimes the homework is not enough like you need to give them that extra work, like maybe in Maths ..., they struggle with something so you give them work, you tell the parent that she must give them extra work and help them with that” (BT3.1, II, p.1).

Such a directed focus of parent-teacher communication seemed beneficial to children and their performance.

In reflecting on my observations, I captured the benefits of clear guidance when parents required it. Following a semi-structured interview with a parent, I, for example, noted the following in my research dairy:

“In my opinion teachers assume that parents understand the concepts taught and know how to teach their children, when reality is very different. Many parents from these resource-constrained communities did not have the opportunity to become educated. They struggle to assist with homework and need to rely on neighbours or customers for support. These parents appear to be frustrated but have the desire to learn. Therefore teachers should consider demonstrating and educating parents in order to help them educate their children alongside us” (RD, p. 15).

4.7.1.2 Category b: Addressing problems and challenges when they arise

According to the participating parents of both Grade 3 and 6 children, parent-teacher communication could allow the opportunity to address problems and challenges the moment these occurred. Parents held the view that discussions with teachers on the academic performance of learners had to be conducted immediately, especially when learners’ results deteriorated. With the necessary knowledge, parents and teachers can reportedly work together to ensure that results improve over time. One of the parents explained: *“... we have to talk in order to help each other to improve our kids, to know this ..., Maths this time she got maybe six marks, then the next term she got four marks. I have to know what is happening, then we have to communicate together”* (AP6.1, II, p. 5). Contributions such as these once again emphasise the importance of parents and teachers working together and communicating regularly.

Participants furthermore held the view that problems can be solved if parents and teachers are aware of what is happening in the classroom or on the sportsgrounds. As such, parents allegedly required feedback on all aspects of their children’s functioning. A parent for example stated the following:

“Because that’s the best way to know how your child is doing, that way you can even know if the child needs extra curriculum after it and if the child would need an extra class, if you need to come to school in your ..., maybe if he is performing at school but the sport side is not doing well then you can know how to resolve it because a child that is active is also active in class” (CP3.4, FGD, p. 2).

4.7.1.3 Category c: Positive effect on children's general well-being

In addition to learners improving in terms of their academic performance, their participation, confidence and emotional well-being could reportedly be strengthened if effective parent-teacher communication occurred. One of the teachers explained this as follows: *"... it helps their confidence you know why because if they feel like my mom is involved, then at least she can help me with this but if they can't then it also drops their level of participation in school and it takes away their confidence"* (AT3.1, DI, p. 3). Similarly, another participant drew a direct link between poor participation and behaviour of children on the one hand, and limited parent involvement at school on the other. This teacher added: *"But learners who are not participating, who are giving us problems in class are the ones their parents are aggressive, not showing up, they are not involved at all"* (CT6.1, DI, p. 6).

A Grade 3 teacher emphasised the possible effect of poor parent involvement and limited parent-teacher communication, saying, *"... the child seeing that my mother is interested, the child will want to work to impress, but if the child goes home and you as a parent just don't care about the child, you don't even know what the child is doing, the child is going to say my mother don't worry so ..., I come to school who is the teacher to worry, so why must I listen to her"* (BT3.1, II, p. 4). As such, participants related poor parent involvement with learners not being motivated and not showing respect. In summarising these ideas, a teacher said: *"... children whose parents are not involved usually have discipline problems and they also have academic issues"* (AT3.1, DI, p. 4).

However, a Grade 3 teacher provided an example of active parent involvement positively influencing a learner in terms of behaviour and academic performance. She explained: *"She is the best student in the world, like she does her work, homework is perfect she's got beautiful manners, she is a leader, you can just see ..., she is perfect I will not lie like that, I'm not even ashamed to say she is perfect, because ..., mommy and daddy are always involved"* (AT3.1, DI, p. 7). In support, a parent described how his daughter was seemingly pleased with her parents' involvement at school, resulting in her being motivated to reach academic success. The father shared the following anecdote: *"... when the child gets a reward we are called to the school and that's a*

good thing for us because even the child also feels happy when the father has ..., and the parents are there at school to see what is happening” (AP3.1, II, p.2).

4.7.2 Sub-theme 5.2: Practical guidelines for enhancing parent-teacher communication

Certain practices of parent-teacher communication were considered successful by the participants. In explaining their ideas of effective parent-teacher communication practices, participants highlighted some guidelines related to telephone communication; opportunities for dialogue; and two-way communication, including that with children.

4.7.2.1 Category a: Guidelines for telephone communication

After a semi-structured interview, one teacher mentioned the following: *“Parents do not have food but they all have cellphones”* (FN, p. 8). Teachers seemingly had some success when relying on telephone communication such as WhatsApp messages, despite the challenge of parents’ numbers not always being valid and in use. Teachers indicated that some parents responded well to this mode of communication and were eager to exchange information, thereby displaying parent commitment and involvement. In this regard, a teacher said: *“Like eventually it can take place maybe everyday where we WhatsApp the parent, and some parents they are eager about the child they want to know, and sometimes you are at home, then you will get a WhatsApp from them, is the parent that cares about the child, and wants to know how can I help my child”* (BT3.1, II, p. 2). Contributions such as these point to the value of utilising telephone communication on a regular basis, getting messages across fairly quickly.

Likewise, participating parents related their desire to receive teachers’ personal contact information to telephone communication being viewed as convenient and quick when sharing or requiring information. Parents allegedly relied on this mode of communication when wanting to clear up concerns or misunderstandings, to schedule individual meetings with teachers, or to acquire information and guidance. The following excerpts provide supportive evidence:

- *“Then I find it to be very much easy because you know it was like opening to us and gave us the numbers so every time when I get the problem or maybe didn’t*

understand something then I will call her, you know she didn't mind but it depends on the individual" (CP3.3, FGD, p. 4).

- *"It can be easy for me to communicate or it can be easy for me to make an appointment because ... that day I have to call first and say will you be able today to be at school or not then I know when I come to the school I know the teacher will be there to meet me"* (AP6.1, II, p. 4).

However, as previously discussed, some teachers reported distinct challenges associated with parents having their personal contact information. To this end, I reflected on the use of teachers' personal contact information as a means to exchange information in the following way: *"It appears that parents may require guidance when utilising teachers' personal contact information. The challenges experienced by teachers may be influenced when parents and teachers engage in meaningful discussions where rules and expectations are clearly defined"* (RD, p. 16).

The parents of Grade 3 learners indicated the value of bulk messages via mobile telephones to obtain information on school events. If utilised effectively, telephone communication could thus keep parents informed of events, yet also of other important information, which could in turn promote better parent involvement. One of the parents described her view based on what she had observed at another school:

"So she will always get messages on her cell phone, you know they send it to all parents... I got an SMS from school, even if the child has got that letter he's been giving to you, then you know that you've got ... so I find it to be very effective in terms of communication with parents. The other thing when she told me she said oh I forgot there was a parents meeting, I see an SMS, they sent an SMS as a reminder" (CP3.4, FGD, p. 9).

Similarly, one of the teachers reported on other schools' use of bulk messages, indicating, *"Other schools have an SMS system and the moment they know that, they return the SMSs"* (AT6.2, DI, p. 2). In this regard, another teacher highlighted the advantage of all parents being able to receive such messages on their personal mobile telephones. She said: *"They've got this mass SMS and they send it out to all the parents and or communicate so that they can alert everybody's personal phone ... We don't have that at school"* (CT3.1, FGD, p. 6).

Parents were thus of the opinion that schools could use technology more efficiently and had to remain informed about technological advances in order to enhance parent-teacher communication. One of the parents said: *“We can move with technology like I suggested to say, send us an sms”* (CP3.3, FGD, p. 11). However, participants seemed aware that, utilising this sort of technology by schools would require funding from e.g. the School Governing Body, and that such funding may not necessarily be available. They stated: *“I don’t think the school has got the funding mam”* (AT6.1, DI, p. 8), and, *“So I’m not sure whether maybe support/funding issues if maybe they can improve on that”* (CP3.4, FGD, p. 9).

4.7.2.2. Category b: Creating more opportunities for dialogue

The participants (both parents and teachers) suggested that parent-teacher communication and partnerships may improve when parents and teachers are provided with increased opportunities to express their views and concerns. Parents emphasised the need for regular communication, saying, *“... we don’t get the time to share and talk issues you know relating to kids”* (CP3.4, FGD, p. 7), and, *“I remember parents saying we need to raise our views, you tell the teacher that you know what I am having a problem with one, two, three and I think the school can do better by one, two, three”* (CP3.1, FGD, p. 11). As such, parents highlighted the value of a platform where they could raise their concerns and assist in providing solutions. Parents seemingly believed that, if schools are made aware of the problems experienced by parents, they could provide suitable responses or suggest changes, as captured in the following quotation: *“We will ask the school to make more time to communicate with us ..., I think if the parents can come forward, with the problem that I am having, then I think the school will do something”* (BP3.1, II, p. 7).

According to the participants, opportunities for dialogue could allow both parents and teachers with an avenue to convey their expectations of each other in an honest and open manner. A teacher remarked, *“... we have open discussions about everything ..., what is expected of them, what do they want from us that I think that will help us”* (CT3.2, FGD, p. 5). Teachers furthermore indicated their preference for parents to be involved in finding solutions rather than relying on solutions found by the teachers. One of the teachers said, *“And also maybe if we can ideas from the parents unlike us*

always coming up with things like this things will be much better” (CT3.4, FGD, p. 6-7). Such solutions could be viewed as probably more effective, due to parents and teachers sharing opinions and strategies instead of one role-player deciding in isolation. In this regard I reflected as follows in my research diary:

“It appears that there are many strategies utilised by schools that positively influence parent-teacher communication; however, some practices may require simple adjustments in order to benefit all involved. For example, parents have requested more opportunities for dialogues to occur at times that are suitable for them. Schools should perhaps keep this in mind when planning scheduled meetings” (RD, p. 16).

4.7.2.3 Category c: Encouraging communication with children

The importance of parent-child communication and teacher-child communication was underscored by both the participating parents and teachers. According to the parent of a Grade 3 learner, parent-child communication could be considered as priority. The parent said: *“There also has to be a parent and child communication”* (CP3.1, FGD, p. 8). A teacher elaborated in terms of possible practices that parents could implement for effective parent-teacher communication. He stated: *“Firstly they need to speak to the child, to sit down with them and ask them to take a day at least once a week, go through their books or see what they are doing”* (AT6.2, DI, p. 6-7). These practices were encouraged to occur frequently, and could reportedly promote parent involvement and support to learners.

Closely related, a Grade 6 teacher was of the opinion that teacher-child communication could improve parent-teacher communication, as captured in the following contribution: *“By penetrating little hearts ... of the children ... you don’t work or deal too often with the parents, so if you really get the children on your side the communication will improve”* (AT6.1, DI, p. 9). The teacher added that all role-players had to understand the value and benefits that could be gained when encouraging communication. She explained: *“And I also feel that we really need to instil the value of the importance of communication within our children ... and you know our parent community needs to understand the value of communicating with our school”* (AT6.1, DI, p. 5). Another Grade 6 teacher emphasised the importance of nurturing relationships with children. She stated: *“There’s the trust too, you should trust them, you need to build it”* (AT6.2, DI, p. 6). In this regard, I reflected as follows:

“Listening to the different perspectives of the participants has led me to believe that effective parent-teacher communication may positively influence all role-players involved. If this is true, perhaps the same could be said for parent-child and teacher-child communication. Just like parent-teacher partnerships, parent-child and teacher-child relationships should be encouraged and developed. Parents may need to direct this relationship as children may not completely understand the value of such interactions” (RD, p. 16).

4.8 SUMMARY

In Chapter 4 I presented the results of the study in terms of the five themes and their related sub-themes and categories I identified. I included extracts from the raw data in support of my discussions throughout the chapter.

In the next and final chapter of the dissertation I present the findings of the study by situating the results I obtained in existing literature, as captured in Chapter 2. I highlight correlations and contradictions, and identify silences and new insight. Next, I draw conclusions in terms of the research questions I formulated in Chapter 1, and then reflect on the limitations and challenges I experienced. I conclude this study by making recommendations for training, practice and future research.



CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter I presented the themes, sub-themes and categories that I identified following the inductive thematic data analysis I completed. I provided verbatim quotations and extracts from the data in support of the discourse.

In this final chapter of the dissertation I discuss the findings of the study, compare the results I obtained with the background literature I discussed in Chapter 2, and highlight correlations, contradictions, silences and new insights stemming from the study. I draw conclusions when addressing the research questions, foreground potential contributions of the study and reflect on some challenges I experienced. Finally, I make recommendations for training, practice and further research based on the findings and conclusions of the study.

5.2 OVERVIEW OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

In **Chapter 1** I provided a general overview of the current study. I explained the rationale for and purpose of exploring this phenomenon, focusing on how teachers and parents perceive parent-teacher communication in resource-constrained primary school settings. After formulating the research questions, I declared my working assumptions. I then provided clarification of the key concepts, being parent involvement, parent-teacher communication and resource-constrained school settings. Furthermore, I briefly introduced the selected theoretical framework, epistemological paradigm and methodological approach I relied on. I then provided an overview of the research process I employed and stated the ethical considerations and quality criteria I adhered to.

In **Chapter 2** I explored existing literature in terms of current trends, debates and relevant aspects related to parent involvement, parent-teacher partnerships and parent-teacher communication. I discussed contemporary legislation on parent involvement at schools, factors influencing such involvement as well as the benefits

implied in the case of primary school learners being the context of my study. I contemplated the purpose and nature of parent-teacher partnerships, and explored the reciprocal expectations of parents and teachers. I then discussed parent-teacher communication in terms of its purpose, potential avenues and general modes that may be utilised. The role of technology and communication within resource-constrained settings was also addressed. Furthermore, I presented some challenges in maintaining parent-teacher communication as well as proven strategies that can promote parent-teacher communication. Lastly, I explained Epstein's theory (1995) as theoretical framework that guided the current study.

In **Chapter 3** I explained and justified my choices of the interpretivist paradigm as epistemology and a qualitative approach as research method. Next, I explained the collective case study design I implemented, my data collection and documentation techniques (semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, observations, field notes and a research diary) as well as the procedures I employed to complete inductive thematic data analysis, linking these decisions to the purpose of the study. Finally I elaborated on the quality criteria and ethical considerations I respected throughout the research process.

In **Chapter 4** I presented the results of the study in terms of five themes, namely the general modes of parent-teacher communication, the purposes of parent-teacher communication, role-players and their expectations, factors negatively impacting parent-teacher communication and strategies to move towards effective parent-teacher communication. Throughout this chapter I included extracts from the transcripts, field notes and my research diary to support my discussions.

5.3 FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

In this section I situate the results of the study in existing literature as background to the conclusions I draw when answering the research questions. Throughout I indicate correlations and contradictions, and where applicable the silences I identified. I also highlight new insights stemming from the study.

I structure my discussions of the findings according to the five themes I identified, and then utilise these discussions to address the secondary research questions that apply to each. Figure 5.1 provides an overview of the manner in which the themes I identified relate to the secondary research questions.

Primary research question: *How do Grades 3 and 6 teachers and parents in resource-constrained school settings perceive parent-teacher communication?*

Theme 1: General modes of parent-teacher communication

- Secondary research question 1: What are the current parent-teacher communication practices between Grade 3 and Grade 6 teachers and parents in resource-constrained school settings?
- Secondary research question 2: What mode of communication do parents and teachers prefer?

Theme 2: Purpose of parent-teacher communication

- Secondary research question 3: How do the perceptions of parent-teacher communication differ between Grade 3 and Grade 6 teachers and parents?

Theme 3: Role-players and their expectations

- Secondary research question 3: How do the perceptions of parent-teacher communication differ between Grade 3 and Grade 6 teachers and parents?

Theme 4: Factors negatively influencing parent teacher communication

- Secondary research question 4: Which challenges do parents and teachers experience in relation to parent-teacher communication?

Theme 5: Moving towards effective parent-teacher communication

- Secondary research question 5: How can parent-teacher communication be improved?

Figure 5.1: Research themes related to secondary research questions

5.3.1 Utilising various modes of communication

In this section I discuss the modes, frequency and content of parent-teacher communication as indicated in this study as well as in previous research. Furthermore, I discuss the avenues from which parent-teacher communication may flow between parents and teachers. The findings I present in this section are then utilised to answer secondary research questions 1 and 2.

5.3.1.1 Findings relating to the modes of communication generally used by parents and teachers

Existing literature indicates that newsletters and other modes of communication can typically provide parents with information about school activities and events (Couchenour & Chrisman, 2011). Schools may also utilise written modes to communicate about school policies, reforms or programmes (Olsen & Fuller, 2003). The findings of this study confirm existing literature on the use of written modes of communication, yet primarily highlight the sharing of information on upcoming school meetings and events such as excursions, either to invite or remind parents of these, as well as communication about specific children. Communication about policies, reforms, and programmes were not specifically foregrounded; yet policies and workshops were mentioned by a few participants.

It follows that parent-teacher communication creates opportunities for parents and teachers to share information with one another, primarily about children, their progress, or unexpected changes in children's behaviour, as foregrounded by Ellis et al. (2015) as well as Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009), and confirmed by the findings of this study. In the current study teachers and parents specifically emphasised the importance of exchanging home-school information from both the school and home context, as this can add insight into a child's behaviour and performance. Furthermore, communication about challenges such as bullying at school was highlighted as a priority by both parents and teachers.

According to Olsen and Fuller (2003) teachers often utilise newsletters and report cards when communicating with parents about school activities and the academic progress of their children. In addition home-school journals (also known as notebooks or communication books) have gained popularity as a mode of parent-teacher communication over recent years (Couchenour & Chrisman, 2011; Olsen & Fuller, 2003). The current study confirms the work of these scholars, as participating schools were found to provide information to parents on the progress of learners and activities at school in written format by means of newsletters, report cards and communication books. While newsletters were indicated as a communication channel directed from the school to the parents, I found the use of communication books to be focused on

the sharing of information between parents and teachers, directed from both ends. More specifically, two-way communication was emphasised when using communication books, thereby supporting the work of Olsen and Fuller (2003) who also indicate the importance of communication flowing in both directions.

In addition to written texts, participating teachers from both grades utilised telephone calls and text messages to communicate with parents about behavioural problems of their children, to secure appointments, or to share information on work or activities. Teachers specifically opted for this mode of communication when contextual barriers occurred, such as parents being illiterate and thus having difficulty to understand written text, or when parents could not be freed from work to attend personal meetings at school. These findings align with the study of Couchenour and Chrisman (2011) who also indicate the trend of teachers utilising telephones as medium to communicate with parents about serious matters, or simply to exchange factual information. These authors furthermore found that teachers preferred telephonic communication to other modes of communication due to telephone contact being perceived as convenient and necessary in certain situations (Couchenour & Chrisman, 2011).

In addition to written text and telephonic communication, teachers may rely on parent-teacher meetings to communicate with parents and get specific messages across, as indicated by Couchenour and Chrisman (2011). These meetings have been found generally to follow a monologue approach and can be considered as communication flowing in one direction (Olsen & Fuller, 2003). In support of existing studies, the parents and teachers participating in this study indicated that information is provided to parents through large or mass meetings where parents are, for example, addressed by the School Management Team or when parent workshops are presented.

Findings of this study furthermore indicate the use of individual meetings (once a term) where teachers primarily discuss the academic progress of children with their parents as well as any behavioural concerns they may have. This finding aligns with the study of Couchenour and Chrisman (2011), indicating that planned or unplanned individual meetings may provide parents and teachers with the opportunity of exchanging information in a calm and confidential manner. Despite this mode of communication being used, the findings of this study indicate that such meetings are not always

viewed as successful, for example, in cases of parents or teachers not adhering to arranged times or simply not attending. Further investigation is required to determine the potential reasons for such incidences.

Even though different completed studies indicate preferences for certain modes of communication (for example a study by Olsen and Fuller [2003] that indicates that some parents prefer written communication while others find this boring) I was not able to identify a specific mode to be preferred to others. The findings of the current study indicate that the modes utilised for parent-teacher communication are determined by factors such as the purpose of communication, contextual factors (for example the literacy levels of parents), as well as the attitudes and behaviours of all role-players involved. This finding adds to the existing body of knowledge as it highlights the idea that each mode of communication has advantages and disadvantages, and that the selection of a specific mode will thus be based on whether or not the selected mode will be the most effective in getting a message across and assisting role-players in attaining common goals and interests. As such this finding indicates that there is not a one-size-fits-all when it comes to the preferred mode of parent-teacher communication and that the choice may vary. Further research in this area may provide better insight into possible determining factors for people preferring specific modes of communication to others.

5.3.1.2 Addressing secondary research question 1: *What are the current parent-teacher communication practices between Grade 3 and Grade 6 teachers and parents in resource-constrained school settings?*

The resource-constrained primary school settings where I conducted this study typically utilise three modes of communication, namely the written form, telephonic communication and meetings in person. The frequency and content of communication between parents and teachers depends on the school and individuals involved. Written communication usually takes the form of newsletters and communication books, with newsletters being directed only from the school to the parents, while communication books are used by both parents and teachers to engage in two-way communication.

In terms of telephonic communication, this option is selected when specific purposes require it, for example when challenges are experienced to utilise other forms of communication or when children display behavioural problems that are difficult to manage at school and require prompt attention. Meetings in person can take the form of either general mass meetings or individual face to face encounters. Mass meetings occur when many parents are invited to learn about particular issues or concerns whereas individual meetings usually take place when teachers and individual parents discuss specific children's academic performance or behaviour. During these meetings teachers and parents may exchange home-school information to understand fully and assist the learners involved. In addition, information on general challenges such as bullying at school, excursions, and school policies may be shared.

Despite the various modes of communication utilised by parents and teachers who participated in this study, optimal open communication between the two parties does not necessarily always occur. Teachers may, for example, tend to communicate more regularly with parents of children who are academically weak or display behavioural problems, thereby not attending to other parents who may just as well have questions or require guidance. However, teachers may also require of parents to engage in parent-teacher communication more often. The study furthermore indicates that parent involvement may decline for a number of reasons as children progress to higher grades, such as the literacy levels of parents, implying that they may not be able to assist their children with more advanced school work. This hypothesis requires further investigation in order to confirm or reject it.

5.3.1.3 Addressing research question 2: *What mode of communication do parents and teachers prefer in resource-constrained primary school settings?*

In undertaking this study I assumed that, if parents and teachers were to communicate in a way of their choice, they might be encouraged to maintain two-way communication. However, I was unable to determine one exact mode of communication that is preferred to others by either parents or teachers. Instead I found that both parties will utilise the mode of communication they view as fit for a specific purpose and context.

I can conclude that parents and teachers in the participating schools will select a mode of communication that can assist them in establishing and meeting specific goals in order to support the academic or behavioural goals they set for learners. I found that both parents and teachers realised that each mode of communication implies unique benefits and limitations, and is as a result guided by these when determining the format of parent-teacher communication. As such, the mode selected by a teacher or a parent is determined by underlying factors, and may differ for communication taking place at other schools or involving other role-players.

5.3.2 Information sharing and learner support at the core of parent-teacher communication

In this section I present the findings I obtained with regard to the nature and purpose of parent-teacher communication. I compare my findings to existing literature in order to answer secondary research question 3.

5.3.2.1 Findings relating to the nature and purpose of parent-teacher communication

A study by Lau (2014) indicates that the absence of communication between parents and teachers has a significant influence on parent involvement in schools. Moreover, a South African study by Mncube (2009) suggests that policy makers and teachers favour and promote parent involvement at school. In this regard the findings I obtained indicate that both teachers and parents of learners in Grades 3 and 6 regard parent involvement as important; however, parent-teacher communication is generally still limited. In many cases opportunities for regular communication are not created, resulting in parent involvement being low, thereby confirming the findings of both Lau (2014) and Mncube (2009).

In terms of the purpose of parent-teacher communication, the findings of this study align with those of Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009), Ho, Hung and Chen (2013), Couchenour and Chrisman (2011), Ellis et al. (2015) as well as Mncube (2009). According to Couchenour and Chrisman (2011), parent-teacher communication can keep parents informed about school activities and upcoming meetings. Both the

parents and teachers of the current study emphasised the fact that the information shared primarily entailed descriptions of school events or parents' evenings.

In terms of information typically shared between parents and teachers, the current study furthermore indicates that parent-teacher communication can provide an opportunity to parents and teachers to exchange home-school information. This finding supports the work of Couchenour and Chrisman (2011) who similarly foreground information sharing as key purpose of parent-teacher communication. The findings correlate with a study by Ellis et al. (2015), indicating that parents can be informed of school activities, programmes and school functions through parent-teacher communication. It therefore seems clear that the purpose of parent-teacher communication generally relates to the receiving and sending of general and specific information between parents and teachers.

In the current study the participating parents and teachers understood the importance of parent-teacher partnerships when dealing with challenges. As a result, they proposed that parent-teacher communication can be utilised as a platform to determine solutions and support one another while assisting children who face behavioural or academic challenges. These findings align with those of studies by Lawson (2003) as well as Kraft and Rogers (2015), indicating that, in order to determine common grounds and interests, parents and teachers should reach a level of mutual understanding and respect as regular parent-teacher communication may support the pass rate of learners and improve school attendance.

The findings of this study also support the work of Ho et al. (2013) by highlighting that parent-teacher communication can be utilised by the various role-players in order to reach a consensus, fulfil needs and reach joint goals. It also aligns with the work of Ellis et al. (2015) by implying that the exchange of information may assist parents' and teachers' understanding of others, and the needs of the children involved. As such, the findings of this study indicate that parent-teacher communication can provide a platform for both parents and teachers to communicate about concerns in order to provide support to learners timeously. Concerns related to aspects such as discipline, bullying at school and homework were mentioned by the participating parents and teachers as examples of challenges.

In terms of the potential purpose of parent-teacher communication for policy implementation, I obtained findings that support the work of Mncube (2009) who indicates that policy makers and teachers favour parent involvement in schools. According to the teachers participating in this study, parent-teacher communication also provided them with the opportunity to record home and school interaction to provide evidence to the Department of Basic Education, of how the school had initiated and provided time for parent-teacher communication, as per policy requirements. By requesting such evidence, policy makers may understand the importance of parent involvement in South African schools.

5.3.2.2 Addressing research question 3: *How do the perceptions of parent-teacher communication differ between Grade 3 and Grade 6 teachers and parents?*

Contrary to my expectations, I did not find significant differences between Grade 3 and 6 teachers and parents with regard to their understanding of parent-teacher communication, its purpose or nature. Parents and teachers of both grades seemingly understand the importance of parent-teacher communication and identified communication as a significant means to discuss concerns about learners' academic performance and behaviour as well as to be informed about school meetings and events. Both parties of both grade groups agreed that home-school information can be exchanged in this way in order to establish solutions to problems and provide timely support where required. Furthermore, teachers are required to document parent-teacher interaction and parent involvement as per policy requirement stipulated by the Department of Basic Education. This request for ongoing evidence may indicate that policy makers encourage such interaction and communication.

5.3.3 Similarities and differences in the expectations of the various role-players

In this section I discuss and compare the expectations of parents and teachers for parent-teacher communication, as indicated by existing literature and the findings of this study. I also explain the role of additional potential role-players in parent-teacher communication as indicated by the participants. After presenting the findings I address secondary research question 3.

5.3.3.1 Findings relating to role-players and their expectations

Bastiani (1995) as well as Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009) indicate that parents value the role of teachers in providing information on the well-being and academic progress of their children. According to Ellis et al. (2015), teachers that withhold information from parents may influence the manner in which support is provided to children at home. The findings of this study support these claims as parents and teachers from both grades stressed the need for transparent, open and honest communication on the academic progress and behaviour of their children for them to provide suitable support at home.

In this regard Kraft and Rogers (2015) confirm that parent involvement can be enhanced if specific guidance and information is provided to parents. In addition, Epstein (2006) argues that parents may benefit from parent-teacher communication when they acquire knowledge on the curriculum and subject requirements. The findings I obtained correlate with the views of these authors as both the participating parents and teachers indicated that some parents may not necessarily possess the subject or curriculum content knowledge to assist their children at home, and may therefore require guidance and support from teachers to teach with them and enhance parent-child interaction. These findings once again support the work of Kraft and Rodgers (2015), who also state that interaction between parents and children can be improved when teachers provide parents with relevant information and guidance. Thus, the level of parent involvement can be influenced by parents' educational levels as parents may lack the necessary specialised knowledge and skills that will enable them to assist their children, especially in higher grades, such as Grade 6. This finding is furthermore consistent with the findings of Jooste (2011) who indicates that parent involvement in learners' education and schooling is directly influenced by the education level of parents.

Moreover, according to Bastiani (1995) as well as Ellis et al. (2015), teachers expect of parents to provide real and honest accounts of their children's capabilities as observed at home to the school. In this regard Pekel et al. (2015) suggest that teachers do not necessarily expect school work to be reinforced by parents but that they do require effective parenting to occur. I obtained similar findings in this study, as

teachers emphasised their need for parents to take a keen interest in their children's education and provide accurate information about the home context. Teachers furthermore expected the parents to assist them in maintaining parent-teacher communication. In some cases, teachers also mentioned parenting practices such as ensuring that children's uniforms are clean while others highlighted the role of parents to assist with homework and provide additional academic support. This last finding thus contradicts those presented by Pekel et al. (2015). The difference may be ascribed to the different contexts or research sites of the studies. Further research in this field could provide more insight.

According to Couchenour and Chrisman (2011), parents may become emotionally charged when they experience that teachers as not hearing their concerns; when listening to concerns teachers may become defensive. Authors such as Ellis et al. (2015) believe that, irrespective of the emotions experienced, such incidences will limit the exchange of information. These studies provide an indication of the emotions that can be experienced by teachers and parents when parent-teacher partnerships are not successfully implemented. In addition to my study confirming such claims, some related new insight emerged as participants elaborated on these emotional states when parent-teacher communication was not successful, thereby conceptualising what *emotionally charged* meant for them. They experienced feelings of frustration, unhappiness and hopelessness. In some cases, parents would also question teachers' way of fulfilling their responsibilities when limited communication occurred. On the other end of the partnership, teachers tended to feel that they were not suitably recognised in such cases, and even considered leaving the profession of teaching as a result. These findings require further inquiry in order to explore determining factors and the exact outcome of such examples.

According to Albright and Weissberg, (2010) and Pekel et al. (2015), policy makers, principals, teachers and parents may prioritise parent involvement in support of learners' academic performance, however may not necessarily participate in successful parent-teacher partnerships. These studies thus identify other potential role-players in parent-teacher partnerships but do not include these in parent-teacher communication. In this regard the findings of the current study indicate the Department of Basic Education, School Management Teams and children as additional important

role-players in parent-teacher communication that can potentially enhance partnerships. Support by the first two role-players can take the form of workshops emphasising parent-teacher communication and interaction, or funding for the utilisation of communication technology to send out bulk messages when wanting to communicate with parents.

Acknowledging children as role-players and considering their roles in parent-teacher communication has, however, not yet been suggested in existing literature, and thus represent new insight based on this study. This finding emphasises the central role of children and proposes children's involvement as equal role-players in parent-teacher communication efforts. According to the findings I obtained, children may positively or negatively influence parent-teacher communication, depending on their attitudes and behaviour. As such children can be considered as barriers to effective parent-teacher communication in cases when parents, for example, do not receive newsletters on time. However, if parents involve their children in communication this may be avoided. These findings require follow-up research in terms of the exact foreseen role of this proposed additional partner in communication between the school and the children's home environment.

5.3.3.2 Addressing research question 3: *How do the perceptions of parent-teacher communication differ between Grade 3 and Grade 6 teachers and parents?*

It is apparent that parents and teachers have certain expectations of each other. Both parties indicated the need for open, honest and transparent communication on the academic progress, abilities and behaviour of children. Parents furthermore wished to receive information on the curriculum and subject content knowledge in order to be able to assist their children and also the teachers. Moreover, teachers stressed the importance of parents taking a keen interest in their children's education, creating a situation where the school can request additional support for learners at home whenever required.

Findings stemming from this study suggest that when these expectations are not met, parents may become unhappy and question whether or not teachers are doing what

they are expected to do. Closely related, teachers may feel that they are not recognised and valued, and may as a result consider other career options.

In addition, children, the School Management Team of schools and the Department of Basic Education were considered as additional role-players in parent-teacher communication by the participants who reported that all these role-players should be involved. Furthermore, parents and teachers indicated the need for support from each of these role-players, for example, by arranging workshops on parent-teacher communication and partnerships. Figure 5.2 indicates what was described by parents and teachers in terms of the key role-players in parent-teacher communication.

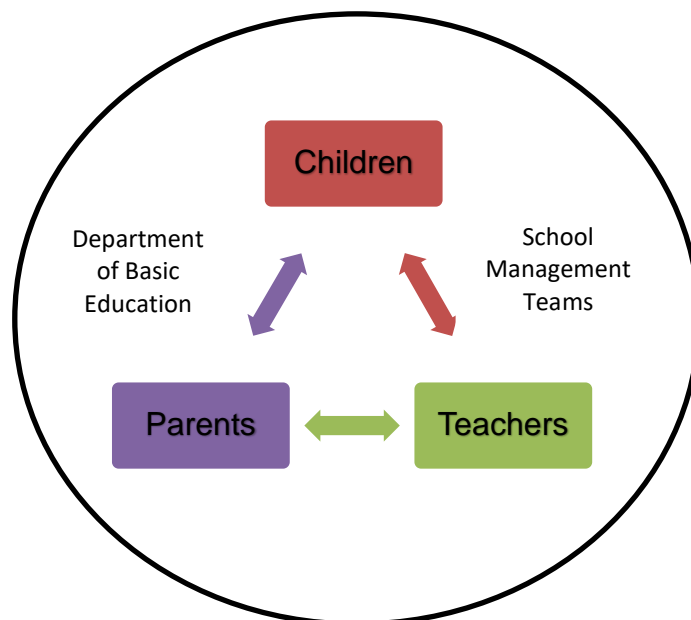


Figure 5.2: Role-players in parent-teacher communication

5.3.4 Context, parents and teachers as possible obstructions to effective parent-teacher communication

In this section I discuss some factors that may negatively influence parent-teacher communication as identified by the participants and in existing literature. I also address secondary research question 4, based on the findings I obtained.

5.3.4.1 Findings relating to factors negatively impacting parent-teacher communication

Couchenour and Chrisman (2011) argue that parent-teacher partnerships depend on the attitudes, reactions and behaviour of all involved. In this study parents indicated some challenges with regard to meeting teachers in person. For example, they reported that some teachers would not attend scheduled meetings or that a large number of parents would want to speak to an individual teacher at the same time at parents' evenings, making it difficult to engage in meaningful discourse. These findings correlate with the work of Couchenour and Chrisman (2011), which also indicates teachers to experience challenges when meeting or engaging in interpersonal communication with parents due to time constraints. In addition to these factors, parents indicated that teachers tended to communicate more often with parents of children who display behavioural problems or who are academically weak. This finding, however, does not correlate with the findings of Kraft and Rogers (2015), who claim that teachers are more likely to mention children's behaviour in a positive context. Owing to this contradiction in findings, more research is required in this field before reaching a conclusion.

New knowledge emerged in terms of telephonic contact between teachers and parents. I found that participating teachers from both grades were hesitant to provide parents with their personal contact information due to the possibility of parents not respecting protocol when using this channel of communication. Teachers indicated that they had been contacted for insignificant reasons and at inappropriate times by parents in the past and had as a result become reluctant to provide personal information to parents. Yet this mode of communication was indicated as preferred mode of communication by many parents, resulting in the finding that the preferred modes of communication as indicated by parents may not necessarily be an option for teachers.

In terms of other influencing factors, more specifically those associated with parents, Mncube (2009) indicates that parents' educational level can result in limited parent involvement in South African schools. My findings support this claim as the participants indicated that some parents are illiterate and may experience difficulty in

understanding what is communicated. In addition to parents' educational levels, the use of telephonic communication presented its own challenges (in addition to those stated above) as some parents' contact information was found to be incorrect or invalid, making it hard for teachers to communicate with parents. This finding provides new insight, yet should be interpreted with the necessary caution as the reasons for this trend were not explored. It thus remains a hypothesis that requires follow-up investigation.

According to Epstein's theory (1995), individual relationships and internal organisations are influenced by children's ages, grade levels and conditions experienced over time as well as by the practices, attitudes and decisions of teachers and parents. The Grade 3 teachers who participated in this study indicated that some parents do attend meetings but that their attendance would decrease as the year continues, resulting in these practices not being maintained. In addition, the Grade 6 teachers regarded their efforts to communicate with parents as worthless. I experienced this first-hand when struggling to get parents of Grade 6 learners to participate in this study across the selected schools. This finding thus confirms Epstein's theory as I too found that effective parent-teacher communication can be related to the attitudes and behaviours of all involved as well as to the age and grade levels of children. Even though Grade 6 parents were perceived as less involved than the parents of Grade 3 learners in this study, a follow-up study can confirm, strengthen or reject this finding.

Cox-Petersen (2011) highlights several context-related barriers or obstacles that people may experience when trying to accomplish a task, especially when sufficient resources are not available. The findings of the current study provide support to these claims as the participating parents indicated high transport costs, single parent-households and long hours of employment as factors that made it difficult for them to participate optimally and maintain parent-teacher communication. Teachers supported these claims based on their experiences when trying to involve parents.

Closely related, Olsen and Fuller (2003) indicate that some parents residing in resource-constrained contexts may not have access to computers or telephones, thereby highlighting that such parents would as a result rather rely on newsletters and

school visits to receive and exchange information. However, the findings of the current study somewhat contradict these claims, as some parents indicated that they preferred telephonic communication due to their regarding this mode of communication as more convenient and immediate than others. This contradiction may perhaps be ascribed to the participating parents' literacy levels (resulting in their experiencing written communication as challenging) or to their hours of employment (making it difficult to attend scheduled meetings). However, these are merely hypotheses that require further investigation.

5.3.4.2 Addressing research question 4: *Which challenges do parents and teachers experience in relation to parent-teacher communication?*

The characteristics, behaviour and preferences of parents and teachers may create barriers to effective communication. Some teachers and parents may hinder the process of effective communication when they schedule meetings and then do not attend. Especially teachers tend to become frustrated when parents do not attend scheduled meetings, as their children may need urgent support at home. Moreover, teachers may tend to communicate with parents of learners who are academically weak or display behavioural concerns more often than with parents of other learners, thereby causing further barriers to open communication with all.

Regarding telephonic communication, teachers may be reluctant to provide parents with their personal contact information as parents have been found to use this mode of communication in an irresponsible way in the past by discussing insignificant topics or by making contact at inappropriate times. Furthermore, some parents do not necessarily possess the required literacy levels for certain modes of communication. Parents may thus be unable to understand or read information that they receive, or to respond in writing. As a result some teachers will resort to telephonic communication in such cases; they may experience further difficulty when parents' contact information is invalid.

Several contextual challenges that may negatively influence parent-teacher communication are highlighted by this study. In this regard parents that live and work in resource-constrained settings typically experience certain difficulties that can

hamper effective parent-teacher communication. For example, high transport costs and long working hours may prevent parents from attending parents' evenings or meetings at school. In addition, many parents may not have the necessary support to attend to children when their presence is required at school, more specifically in cases where parents raise children in single parent households. I can conclude that although resource-constrained settings may negatively influence parent-teacher communication, the attitudes, intentions and perceptions of the individuals involved can motivate and influence positive behaviour on the side of both partners.

5.3.5 Moving towards effective parent-teacher communication

Understanding the possible outcomes of regular parent-teacher communication and providing practical guidelines may encourage parent involvement and effective parent-teacher communication. In this section I discuss the findings related to such improved communication, and also address secondary research question 5.

5.3.5.1 Findings relating to strategies for more effective parent-teacher communication

According to Couchenour and Chrisman (2011) it is the teacher's responsibility to initiate and direct relationships between the home and the school. In contrast, Olsen and Fuller (2003) argue that duty lies with both the parents and the teacher to ensure that an effective partnership is maintained. The findings of my study support Olsen and Fuller's (2003) claim, as both the participating parents and teachers of children in Grades 3 and 6 agreed that parent-teacher communication depends on a joint effort involving all role-players. They indicated that such a partnership requires transparent, open and honest communication as well as ongoing support from all parties.

Authors such as Epstein (1996), Kraft and Rogers (2015), Lau (2014) as well as Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009) argue that effective parent-teacher communication will positively influence the role-players involved. Lau (2014) specifically emphasises the importance of parent-teacher communication for promoting the development of children. The findings of my study strongly support this claim as both parents and teachers agreed that children will benefit academically, participate in class more often and display better confidence when regular parent-teacher communication occur. Emotionally, children can be happier when they witness that their parents have an

interest in their education and schooling activities, and attend events. These findings furthermore correlate with the work of Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009), stating that parent involvement can improve behaviour and increase the emotional stability of learners.

Kraft and Rogers (2015) indicate that parents and teachers require guidance and information in order to improve and encourage parent involvement. The findings of the current study confirm these views as participating parents indicated that, through parent-teacher communication, they could be equipped to provide suitable responses for the academic challenges their children faced. Thus, when parents understand the concepts taught by teachers, they can assist and educate their children, working with the teachers.

These findings furthermore correlate with the work of Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009) as well as Couchenour and Chrisman (2011). According to Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009), parents and teachers generally want to convey and receive information that they are concerned about. Similarly, Couchenour and Chrisman (2011) point out that effective problem solving strategies can be implemented when two-way, interpersonal conversations occur. To this end the parents and teachers in the current study indicated that when parent-teacher communication is maintained, problems and challenges relating to children can be addressed the moment they arise. In doing so, these problems may be contained and not manifest into greater hindrances.

In addition to these benefits, findings of the current study provide support to Cox-Petersen's (2011) claim that technology can assist teachers and parents to overcome barriers, such as possible time constraints. Moreover, Cox-Petersen (2011) states that information can be immediately conveyed through this channel and be quickly accessible to many parents and teachers. In this regard, both the participating parents and teachers indicated that schools should utilise bulk messaging in order to remind parents of school events or activities. However, the participants also realised that public primary schools may not necessarily have the funding to do so.

In addition to bulk messaging, some of the participating teachers shared their successes when utilising WhatsApp as a way of communicating with parents about the behaviour and academic performance of their children; however, this requires of

teachers to provide parents with their personal contact information, which in itself implies certain challenges, as already indicated. The advice of Halsey (2005) is perhaps relevant in this case, stating that many parents may require specific guidance from teachers to enhance parent involvement in schools. In the same way parents can receive guidelines from teachers when utilising this mode of communication in order to maximise the efficiency of parent-teacher communication. This hypothesis requires further investigation.

According to Couchenour and Chrisman (2011) it is essential that parents experience their voices to be heard and taken seriously. To this end, Ellis et al. (2015) state that teachers are taught to speak rather than listen. In support, Olsen and Fuller (2003) highlight the idea that parent-teacher communication can improve through active listening when positions in relationships are equalised and effective two-way communication occurs. The findings of the current study lend support to these claims as parents desired more opportunities for parent-teacher communication, where both parents and teachers can express their opinions or concerns about children, be heard in terms of their needs, and make related contributions in support of solutions.

According to Epstein (2011), when parent-teacher communication is effective, learners may benefit when becoming aware of their parents' involvement and their own academic progress. They may, as a result, also gain insight into the manner in which they can improve their performance. This statement implies that some form of communication needs to be facilitated with children. In this regard, participating parents and teachers both emphasised the importance of acknowledging and involving children as role-players in parent-teacher communication. They suggested that children be taught the importance of communication, irrespective of the form it takes. This finding was rather unexpected and suggests that parent-child communication and teacher-child communication are just as significant as the communication between parents and teachers. These ideas require further investigation.

5.3.5.2 Addressing research question 5: How can parent-teacher communication be improved?

The commitment and involvement of all role-players are required to improve parent-teacher communication in resource-constrained primary school settings. Partnerships should be based on mutual understanding of and respect for each other, as this may encourage open, honest and transparent communication. Children may, as a result, benefit academically, behaviourally and emotionally from such commitment and partnerships between their parents and teachers. In addition to improved scores, children tend to be happier, display more confidence and participate more spontaneously in class when parents are involved and become interested in their children's school work.

Parent-teacher communication could assist parents in developing their subject and curriculum knowledge. As a result parents may then be able to provide more appropriate academic responses at home when assisting children with their homework. They rely on teachers' willingness to support them in acquiring the necessary new knowledge. Such assistance can reduce frustration and enhance cooperative interaction. Challenges or concerns may be addressed when they occur while parents too develop in the process. To this end I propose that schools create regular opportunities for open dialogue to occur between parents and teachers. Active listening should be encouraged during all interaction and all questions need to be addressed.

The use of technology may also assist schools in enhancing and maintaining regular two-way parent-teacher communication. Some parents and teachers prefer bulk messages from schools as this manner of communication is considered quick and effective. The exchange of personal contact information between teachers and parents can open an effective communication channel yet should include clear guidelines for the ethical use thereof, and then be respected as such. Despite potential challenges implied by utilising this mode of communication, I thus propose that teachers and parents agree on the guidelines and rules in order to prevent frustration and concerns, before accessing this channel of communication more effectively.

Children may hinder or facilitate parent-teacher communication, and should as a result be involved in communication in a positive manner. They should be sensitised about the significance and benefits of two-way communication, irrespective of the shape or form it takes. In this regard parent-child communication and teacher-child communication need to be encouraged in support of parent-teacher communication.

5.4 FINAL CONCLUSIONS

In this section I address the primary research question and draw final conclusions in terms of the findings of the study. During this study I was guided by the following primary research question: *How do Grades 3 and 6 teachers and parents in resource-constrained school settings perceive parent-teacher communication?*

Based on the findings I can conclude that, in terms of the preferred modes of communication, the participating schools situated in resource-constrained contexts utilised written communication, telephonic contact and meetings in person to exchange information between parents and teachers. Newsletters tended to be directed from the school to the homes of learners, while communication books encouraged two-way interaction between parents and teachers. Telephonic contact usually occurred for specific purposes or in particular cases, such as when communicating about behavioural concerns of learners. General mass meetings likewise occurred for particular reasons, such as discussing financial budgets for schools, while individual meetings provided teachers and parents with the opportunity to discuss the academic performance and behaviour of specific identified learners. The frequency of use of the various modes of communication was dependent on the schools as well as the individuals involved.

New insight stemming from this study relates to the way in which teachers and parents would select a mode of communication based on other contextual factors, such as the literacy levels of parents or their availability to attend meetings at school. As such, the challenge implied by resource-constrained settings may result in parents in such settings preferring telephonic contact for the purpose of parent-teacher communication. However, difficulty in always having the parents' correct contact numbers at hand and teachers' hesitance to provide parents with their personal contact

information seemingly place distinct challenges on effectively utilising telephonic contact for parent-teacher communication. This may provide a possible explanation for limited parent-teacher communication in these settings and relates to the context and circumstances the parents and teachers find themselves in.

Despite the said challenges, both teachers and parents of Grade 3 and Grade 6 learners indicated an understanding of the importance of parent-teacher partnerships and parent-teacher communication. Furthermore, both partners agreed that parent-teacher communication provided a platform to exchange home-school information, provided notices on school events or activities as well as discussed learners' academic progress and behaviour in order to provide them with timely support. A surprising finding is the manner in which parent involvement and parent-teacher communication seemingly declined as learners progressed to higher grades. This finding can again be related to parents' background and circumstances, not always knowing how to provide the needed support. In addition to the purposes mentioned, teachers were also mandated to collect evidence on parent-teacher communication and parent involvement, implying the possibility of policy makers being supportive of parent-teacher communication and partnerships.

Based on the findings of this study, I argue that parents and teachers will hold certain similar yet also different expectations of each other in relation to parent-teacher communication. Both parties indicated their need for communication to be open and transparent when sharing information on learners' academic progress and behaviour. Furthermore, parents specifically requested information and guidance on curriculum and subject content knowledge in order to assist their children at home. New insight stemming from this study highlights the potential effect of such needs and expectations not being met, as both parents and teachers indicated unhappiness and frustration when communication was too limited.

Another surprising finding relates to the additional role-players that the participants identified for parent-teacher communication. Parents and teachers indicated that children, School Management Teams and the Department of Basic Education should take an active role in parent-teacher communication, and that their involvement or lack thereof may hinder or support parent-teacher interaction.

In conclusion I posit that the attitudes, behaviours and preferences of both teachers and parents, as well as resource-constrained contexts can negatively influence parent-teacher communication. In this study the participants provided several examples of parents or teachers not adhering to scheduled meetings, the tendency of teachers to communicate more often with parents of children who were considered as academically weak or who displayed behavioural problems, parents' literacy levels that caused challenges when wanting to engage them through written communication modes, and challenges posed by telephonic contact, as already alluded to. In addition to these factors, high transport costs, long working hours and single parent households were mentioned as contextual factors that may contribute to low levels of parent-teacher communication.

In terms of potential strategies that can be used to improve parent-teacher communication, I argue that effective parent-teacher communication is dependent on the efforts of all role-players previously mentioned. All role-players can, in turn, benefit from efficient interaction; for example, children can improve their academic performance, and parents can develop subject knowledge or receive guidance on how to provide appropriate support to their children.

More effective use of technology can enhance regular two-way communication between parents and teachers. For example, bulk telephonic messages imply the advantage of reaching many parents at once and sending out regular reminders, which can encourage parent involvement. In the same way, class teachers can reach all parents of learners at once by means of functions such as WhatsApp; yet in such cases, teachers' personal numbers may become public, which is something teachers may resist. However, I propose that teachers and parents need to agree on guidelines and rules before sharing personal contact information in order to prevent future frustrations. Another strategy to enhance communication relates to the creation of more opportunities for open dialogue between parents and teachers, yet keeping in mind the challenges that parents may face when finding themselves in resource-constrained settings. Lastly, the value of communication should be instilled in children, irrespective of the form it takes. As a result I propose healthy parent-child communication and teacher-child communication as the underlying component of effective parent-teacher communication.

5.5 CONTRIBUTION OF THIS STUDY

This study contributes to existing literature in the field of parent-teacher communication, particularly in resource-constrained primary school settings. As many existing studies are international in origin, the findings of this study allow for application of this phenomenon in the South African context.

The theoretical contribution more specifically relates to the new insight that stems from the study in terms of the view that children, School Management Teams in schools and Department of Basic Education should be part of parent-teacher communication. Possible emotions relating to ineffective parent-teacher communication by both parents and teachers were also added to the existing knowledge base. In addition, the challenges that parents and teachers faced when utilising specific modes of communication, and the possible link of this to the context in which communication takes place, also add value. Furthermore, the way in which the selection of a particular mode of communication is related to factors such as the purpose of parent-teacher communication, contextual factors (for example long working hours) and the behaviour and attitudes of all role-players involved, brings new insight to the fore.

In terms of the contribution of this study to the field of Learning Support, Guidance and Counselling, findings demonstrate how parent-teacher communication can provide a platform where parents and teachers exchange important home-school information, which may in turn enable them to provide adequate support to learners when required. This study thus contributes to the existing theory on school-home partnerships when supporting learners who struggle academically and display behaviour problems, as part of parent-teacher communication initiatives. Furthermore, emphasis on the involvement of children in the communication process highlights the importance of involving role-players from all systems when encouraging parent-school involvement or planning learner support.

Regarding the practical application value of the study, both parents and practising teachers who share similar experiences as the participants in the study may gain some new perspectives on parent-teacher communication and its possibilities, as well as utilise guidelines that may encourage healthy two-way communication. Based on the

findings, parents, teachers and future researchers may be empowered and subsequently implement selected strategies to enhance the dynamics of existing parent-teacher communication practices and partnerships. The schools that participated may furthermore have benefited from the discussions that took place and as a result may have implemented some new or revised strategies in support of their current practices.

5.6 REFLECTING ON THE LIMITATIONS AND CHALLENGES I EXPERIENCED

Firstly, based on the nature, scope and methodology of the study, the findings cannot be generalised to a wider population. As a result of the paradigm I selected (Interpretivism) and the focus of the study, I did not intend to reach generalisable conclusions but rather focused on obtaining an in-depth understanding of the particular phenomenon. This study can thus merely inform other parents, teachers and researchers of the participants' views relating to parent-teacher communication. Even though the findings may be applied and transferred to similar contexts or circumstances, the reader will have to decide on this possibility, based on the detailed descriptions and trail of evidence I include.

A second potential challenge I experienced relates to my role as an interpretivist researcher. Before embarking on this journey, I had a special interest in parent involvement and parent-teacher communication and as a result initially experienced difficulty to detach myself from the study and the data I obtained. It was thus necessary for me continually to reflect on my own experiences of this phenomenon, as well as on my background, values and biases, as these could have influenced my interpretations and conclusions if I was not cautious. In response I attempted to remain objective when analysing the data and allow the voices of the participants rather than my own to be heard. Discussions with my supervisor assisted me in clarifying meanings, and I included member checking as part of the research process in order to confirm that I had interpreted the participants' contributions in a fair and just manner. I took great care in acting ethically and professionally throughout the research process.

Thirdly, I experienced distinct challenges in terms of the data collection process. Despite my efforts and many letters of invitation to parents, I was initially unable to get

enough participants to take part in this study at the two schools I envisioned. As a result I had to select another school. I had to adapt my intended methodological strategies by relying on interviews, focus group discussions and observation only, and not using logbooks as originally planned, due to participants not being supportive of logbooks as data collection strategy. As a result I had to ensure that I followed all possible guidelines for enhancing the trustworthiness and rigour of this study. I also left the research sites only when my supervisor and I agreed that data saturation had been reached and the themes were repeating.

Next, I faced the challenge of developing specific skills as a qualitative researcher. In order to collect data successfully, I had to acquire the skill of conducting research interviews. In this regard I had to learn how to listen, look and correctly interpret things during interaction with teachers and parents. Being a teacher myself, personal contact with parents has often involved my responses to requests or providing them with advice, not asking of me to take a neutral stance and merely listening to the messages and hidden messages of parents. In addition I had to overcome my own feelings of anxiety when entering the relatively new field of research, conducting interviews with parents and teachers. In compiling this dissertation, I had to attend to my writing skills in order to meet the criteria of scientific formulation and rigour. Guidance by and regular discussions with my supervisor contributed to the way in which I overcame these challenges and was shaped into the scholar I have become.

A final challenge I experienced relates to my dual role as that of researcher and that of teacher at school A. Upon realisation of the possible effect of power differences, I involved a field worker to conduct the data collection and another individual to transcribe the data that was obtained at this school. Throughout I ensured that the data was protected for confidentiality and anonymity purposes.

5.7 RECOMMENDATIONS

In this section I formulate recommendations for training, practice and future research.

5.7.1 Recommendations for training

Based on the findings of this study, I recommend that the processes and principles of parent involvement and parent-teacher communication be more strongly incorporated into the training programmes of teachers. More specifically, student-teachers need to be trained in terms of the challenges they may face and how to overcome these in resource-constrained school settings, when attempting to involve and regularly communicate with parents.

In addition, in-service training and workshops for teachers and parents can be developed and implemented, especially in resource-constrained primary school settings, where limited parent involvement seemingly remains a prominent challenge. Providing clear guidelines to parents and teachers may motivate them to develop partnerships or collaborations that may positively influence and shape the environment in which children live and learn.

5.7.2 Recommendations for practice

The findings of this study suggest a few practical ideas that may enhance parent-teacher communication in resource-constrained primary school settings. These include the creation of more opportunities for open dialogue between parents and teachers, the use of bulk messaging and other telephonic communication, as well as the encouragement of any form of communication between the role-players involved. In addition, the findings suggest that children should be involved and fulfil a stronger, more dominant role in parent-teacher communication. These guidelines can be put into practice by providing verbal and written feedback to the schools that participated, and also to other schools in similar settings.

I furthermore recommend that the Department of Basic Education and the School Management Team in resource-constrained school settings develop policies or alternatively formulate procedures and guidelines for parent-teacher communication that can guide such efforts in all schools. Policies should be developed in consultation with all role-players involved, including all partners that may benefit.

5.7.3 Recommendations for future research

Based on the findings of the study, I recommend the following for possible future research:

- A descriptive case study focused on the perceptions of teachers and parents of parent-teacher communication in resource-constrained high school settings, with the possible outcome of drawing comparisons.
- A descriptive study on learners' perspectives of parent-teacher communication in resource-constrained primary school settings.
- An exploratory study on parent-child communication and teacher-child communication, the value and nature thereof, and the perceived purpose of such interaction.
- A case study on the influence of parents' literacy levels on parent involvement as children progress to higher grades in schools.
- A case study on the utilisation of technology in support of parent-teacher communication in resource-constrained primary school settings and on overcoming the challenges this mode of communication implies.
- A follow-up study on providing parents access to the personal contact information of teachers in support of parent-teacher communication without invading the privacy of teachers.
- A follow-up study on the outcome of the strategies suggested to enhance parent-teacher communication, following the implementation of these.
- An exploratory study on the use of suitable data collection strategies when involving parents and teachers in a study, in terms of their preferences.
- A follow-up study on the factors and exact outcomes of limited parent-teacher communication on the emotional states of teachers and parents.

5.8 CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

When I embarked on this journey I set out to learn, grow, reflect and develop, both as a researcher yet also professionally as a teacher. I conclude this dissertation with some of my reflective thoughts taken from my research diary.

- **Why did I initially become interested in this topic?**

I initially became interested in parent-teacher communication as I started to observe the relationship between parents and teachers at the school where I am currently employed. My observations led me to believe that difficulties were experienced in parent-teacher communication. From my experience, information relating to the academic performance of learners would only be conveyed at the end of each term. In some cases this opportunity would be the only form of interaction between teachers and parents. In my view, challenges in parent-teacher partnerships are a result of communication not occurring in an honest and open manner. I started to ask questions and believed that the solutions may lie with the parents and teachers that experience this phenomenon on a daily basis.

- **What did I enjoy most of this study?**

During the data collection process I specifically appreciated and enjoyed the experience I gained during a focus group discussion with Grade 3 parents. At this point I had already conducted other research activities; therefore I felt confident in collecting data in this way. These parents wanted to be heard and were eager to answer all my questions. As the discussions continued I was able to observe the process of a focus group and could truly understand what so many authors had written about. These participants were having a conversation with one another. They were able to relate and assist one another in remembering previous experiences. As the discussions continued they realised that their children's school needed to improve the communication between parents and teachers. They had not previously thought about parent-teacher communication and came to the conclusion that their voices needed to be heard and change needed to occur.

- **How did this study impact my life?**

This study has changed the way I perceive parent-teacher communication. I have become more considerate and think about how my actions may influence others. Instead of thinking from a teacher's perspective, I am able to obtain and understand the experiences and views of parent-teacher communication from the parents' perspective. This has forced me to think about the frequency and manner in which I communicate with parents of the learners I teach. These children are spending most

of their time at school and in many cases the parents just want to know that they are with someone that cares for them. In addition, teachers should not feel discouraged when parents do not respond to their efforts to communicate yet should instead acknowledge the possible barriers that parents may experience. As I continue my career, I will strive to encourage and maintain parent-teacher communication and ensure that I do not become a barrier to these partnerships.

- **What have I become interested in as a result of this study?**

The findings of this study have directed my thinking towards parent-child and teacher-child communication. I would like to gain more insight into these forms of communication in future, in particular how these are perceived, their purpose, and how they are implemented in practice. I would also like to understand the benefits gained when these forms of communication are effective and the factors that may negatively influence them.

As an unknown author stated, *“Together may we give our children the roots to grow and the wings to fly”*. Children are at the centre of parent-teacher communication. They require the dedication and commitment of the various role-players in order to benefit academically and emotionally, and as a result be able to function as responsible and productive citizens of this country.



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Appendix A: Approval of research ethics application



Ethics Committee
15 September 2016

Dear Ms Ellis

REFERENCE: EP 15/10/01

We received proof that you have met the conditions outlined. Your application is thus approved, and you may continue with your fieldwork. Should any changes to the study occur after approval was given, it is your responsibility to notify the Ethics Committee immediately.

Please note that this is not a clearance certificate. Upon completion of your research, you need to submit the following documentation to the Ethics Committee:

- Integrated Declaration Form (Form D08),
- Initial Ethics Approval letter and,
- Approval of Title.

Please note:

- *Any amendments to this approved protocol need to be submitted to the Ethics Committee for review prior to data collection. Non-compliance implies that the Committee's approval is null and void.*
- *Final data collection protocols and supporting evidence (e.g.: questionnaires, interview schedules, observation schedules) have to be submitted to the Ethics Committee before they are used for data collection.*
- *Should your research be conducted in schools, please note that you have to submit proof of how you adhered to the Department of Basic Education (DBE) policy for research.*
- *Please note that you need to keep to the protocol you were granted approval on should your research project be amended, you need to submit the amendments for review.*
- *The Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education does not accept any liability for research misconduct, of whatsoever nature, committed by the researcher(s) in the implementation of the approved protocol.*
- *On receipt of the above-mentioned documents you will be issued a clearance certificate. Please quote the reference number: EP 15/10/01 in any communication with the Ethics Committee.*

Best wishes

Prof Liesel Ebersöhn
Chair: Ethics Committee
Faculty of Education





Appendix B: GDE approval of research



GAUTENG PROVINCE

Department: Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

8/4/4/1/2

GDE AMENDED RESEARCH APPROVAL LETTER

Date:	09 March 2017
Validity of Research Approval:	06 February 2017 – 29 September 2017 M2017/360AAA
Name of Researcher:	Ellis B.W
Address of Researcher:	19 Charis Complex ; Basden Avenue Lyttleton Centurion; 0157
Telephone Number:	084 589 2843
Email address:	bron.wendy@gmail.com
Research Topic:	How teachers and parents perceive parent-teacher communication in resource-constrained primary school settings
Number and type of schools:	Three Primary Schools
District/s/HO	Tshwane South and Tshwane West

Re: Approval in Respect of Request to Conduct Research

This letter serves to indicate that approval is hereby granted to the above-mentioned researcher to proceed with research in respect of the study indicated above. The onus rests with the researcher to negotiate appropriate and relevant time schedules with the school/s and/or offices involved to conduct the research. A separate copy of this letter must be presented to both the School (both Principal and SGB) and the District/Head Office Senior Manager confirming that permission has been granted for the research to be conducted.

Y. M. M. M. 27/03/2017

The following conditions apply to GDE research. The researcher may proceed with the above study subject to the conditions listed below being met. Approval may be withdrawn should any of the conditions listed below be flouted: 1

Making education a societal priority

Office of the Director: Education Research and Knowledge Management

7th Floor, 17 Simmonds Street, Johannesburg, 2001

Tel: (011) 355 0488

Email: Faith.Tshabalala@gauteng.gov.za

Website: www.education.gpg.gov.za



1. The District/Head Office Senior Manager/s concerned must be presented with a copy of this letter that would indicate that the said researcher/s has/have been granted permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct the research study.
2. The District/Head Office Senior Manager/s must be approached separately, and in writing, for permission to involve District/Head Office Officials in the project.
3. A copy of this letter must be forwarded to the school principal and the chairperson of the School Governing Body (SGB) that would indicate that the researcher/s have been granted permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct the research study.
4. A letter / document that outlines the purpose of the research and the anticipated outcomes of such research must be made available to the principals, SGBs and District/Head Office Senior Managers of the schools and districts/offices concerned, respectively.
5. The Researcher will make every effort obtain the goodwill and co-operation of all the GDE officials, principals, and chairpersons of the SGBs, teachers and learners involved. Persons who offer their co-operation will not receive additional remuneration from the Department while those that opt not to participate will not be penalised in any way.
6. Research may only be conducted after school hours so that the normal school programme is not interrupted. The Principal (if at a school) and/or Director (if at a district/head office) must be consulted about an appropriate time when the researcher/s may carry out their research at the sites that they manage.
7. Research may only commence from the second week of February and must be concluded before the beginning of the last quarter of the academic year. If incomplete, an amended Research Approval letter may be requested to conduct research in the following year.
8. Items 6 and 7 will not apply to any research effort being undertaken on behalf of the GDE. Such research will have been commissioned and be paid for by the Gauteng Department of Education.
9. It is the researcher's responsibility to obtain written parental consent of all learners that are expected to participate in the study.
10. The researcher is responsible for supplying and utilising his/her own research resources, such as stationery, photocopies, transport, faxes and telephones and should not depend on the goodwill of the institutions and/or the offices visited for supplying such resources.
11. The names of the GDE officials, schools, principals, parents, teachers and learners that participate in the study may not appear in the research report without the written consent of each of these individuals and/or organisations.
12. On completion of the study the researcher/s must supply the Director: Knowledge Management & Research with one Hard Cover bound and an electronic copy of the research.
13. The researcher may be expected to provide short presentations on the purpose, findings and recommendations of his/her research to both GDE officials and the schools concerned.
14. Should the researcher have been involved with research at a school and/or a district/head office level, the Director concerned must also be supplied with a brief summary of the purpose, findings and recommendations of the research study.

The Gauteng Department of Education wishes you well in this important undertaking and looks forward to examining the findings of your research study.

Kind regards

Ms Faith Tshabalala
CES: Education Research and Knowledge Management

DATE: 27/03/2017

Making education a societal priority

2

Office of the Director: Education Research and Knowledge Management

7th Floor, 17 Simmonds Street, Johannesburg, 2001

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Appendix C: School principals' informed consent form



Faculty of Education

Fakulteit Opvoedkunde
Lefapha la Thuto

The school principal
Primary School
Pretoria
0001
April 2016

REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT YOUR SCHOOL

Dear Sir/Madam

My name is Bronwyn Ellis. I am a student at the University of Pretoria (Department of Educational Psychology) for the Master's degree in Learning Support, Guidance and Counselling. I am conducting research on how teachers and parents perceive parent-teacher communication in a resource-constrained primary school setting.

I am hereby seeking your consent to conduct the following study at your school and acquire voluntary parents and teachers to serve as participants.

I have provided you with a copy of my research proposal and ethics approval letters received from both the Department of Basic Education and the University of Pretoria indicating the permission granted to conduct the following study.

Benefits

There are no direct benefits for taking part in the study however your school's participation will provide insight into parent-teacher communication in terms of your parents' and teachers' understanding of this phenomenon, its purpose and how it is implemented in practice. The findings of this study could potentially provide support to improve parent-teacher communication in the future.

Procedure

Should you provide consent to conduct this study at your school, I would require the participation of four groups of participants comprising of the Grade 3 teachers and Grade 6 teachers as well as the parents of Grade 3 and Grade 6 learners. Parents and teachers of each grade will participate in the research activities separately. The research will take place in the hours after school for teachers. Furthermore, research activities involving parents will occur in the hours during school or after school depending on their availability. It would be preferable if these research activities occurred at your school. Each possible participant will receive information relating to the purpose of this study and procedures that would follow. However, only individuals that consent to participate in this study will do so.

I will namely facilitate four focus group discussions with your parents and teachers. Each focus group discussion will occur for a period of 60 minutes. Eight to twelve participants will be present during a group discussion, focusing on current parent-teacher communication practices, and their perception of this. Furthermore, parents and teachers from each group will be asked to volunteer to complete a personal log book for 3 months, recording information relating to their experiences of parent-teacher communication. Furthermore, these volunteers will be asked predetermined questions in individual interviews in order to further explore the information gained from the focus group discussions as well as the log books. Lastly, I will make use of observations as a complementary data collection method.

If any responses need to be clarified or explored further, a follow-up discussion may take place. With your consent as well as the consent of parents and teachers, all discussions will be recorded by means of an audio-visual recording and field notes. Participants will not be exposed to harm in any manner during participation. All participation is also completely voluntary therefore all parties involved may remove themselves at any time during the study without any consequences.

Confidentially and anonymity

All data collected with public funding may be available in open repository for public and scientific use. However, the name of your school and all names of individuals participating will not be recorded when reporting the findings as I will make use of codes. Names of participants will only appear on consent form and the recording

sheet. These documents will be in my possession and will not be mentioned in any report of the findings. All responses will be dealt with confidentially. As I am a student, I am overseen by a supervisor at the University of Pretoria. My supervisor will have access to all audio-visual recordings transcripts and field notes in order to assist me in the research process. All discussions between my supervisor and I (regarding your personal information) will be held in strict confidence. Furthermore, all recordings and transcripts will be stored in a secured place at the University of Pretoria for a period of 15 years.

If you agree to allow your school to participate in the research activities of this study, please sign the consent form indicating that you are aware of the rights you and your teachers and parents hold.

Thank you for considering participation in this study. If you have any further questions, now or as the study progresses, please feel free to contact either my supervisor or me.

Yours sincerely,



Ms B. Ellis
Student
0845892843/bron.wendy@gmail.com



Prof Ronél Ferreira
Supervisor
0832587747/ronel.ferreira@up.ac.za

Informed consent

The study has been explained to me and I have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I am content with the answers provided. I understand that I can remove the participation of the school from the study at any point of time if I wish to do so. I hereby provide consent for the participation of parents and teachers associated with the school to take part in the study and agree to the use of audio-visual recordings during the focus group discussion and interview.

I am also aware that the study is being conducted by a student therefore a supervisor from the University of Pretoria will have access to all data. I am mindful that all personal information will be kept private during the research process. By signing this document, I indicate my willingness for participation in this study.

Date: _____

Name of Principle: _____

Signature of Principal: _____



Appendix D: Teachers' informed consent form



Faculty of Education

Fakulteit Opvoedkunde
Lefapha la Thuto

April 2016

Dear Teacher

My name is Bronwyn Ellis. I am a student at the University of Pretoria (Department of Educational Psychology) for the Master's degree in Learning Support, Guidance and Counselling. I am conducting research on how teachers and parents perceive parent-teacher communication in a resource-constrained primary school setting.

Benefits

There are no direct benefits for taking part in the study however your participation will provide insight into parent-teacher communication in terms of your understanding of this phenomenon, its purpose and how it is implemented in practice. Your experience and insights as a teacher may potentially provide support to improve parent-teacher communication in the future.

Procedure

If you agree to participate in the study, I would require your involvement in a one hour focus group discussion. Eight to twelve teachers will be present during this group discussion, focusing on current parent-teacher communication practices, and your perception of this. Furthermore, all teachers will be asked to volunteer to complete a personal log book for 3 months, recording information relating to experiences of parent-teacher communication. After the 3 month period, I would require these volunteers to participate in individual interviews in order to further explore the information gained from the focus group discussions as well as the log books.

The research will take place after school hours on the school premises. If any responses need to be clarified or explored further, a follow-up discussion may take place. With your consent, all discussions will be recorded by means of an audio-visual recording and field notes. You will not be exposed to harm in any manner during

participation. Your participation is also completely voluntary therefore you may remove yourself at any time during the study without any consequences.

Confidentially and anonymity

All data collected with public funding may be available in open repository for public and scientific use. However, your name will not be recorded when reporting the findings as I will make use of codes. Your name will only appear on this consent form and the recording sheet. These documents will be in my possession and will not be mentioned in any report of the findings. All responses will be dealt with confidentially. As I am a student, I am overseen by a supervisor at the University of Pretoria. My supervisor will have access to all audio-visual recordings transcripts and field notes in order to assist me in the research process. All discussions between my supervisor and I (regarding your personal information) will be held in strict confidence. Furthermore, all recordings and transcripts will be stored in a secured place at the University of Pretoria for a period of 15 years.

Please feel free to ask me any questions relating to this study. If you agree to participate in the study, please sign this consent form indicating that you are aware of your rights and wish to take part in the research activities of the study. If you do not wish to participate in the study, please leave this consent form empty.

Thank you for considering participation in this study. If you have any further questions, now or as the study progresses, please feel free to contact either my supervisor or me.

Yours sincerely,



Ms B. Ellis
Student
0845892843/bron.wendy@gmail.com



Prof Ronél Ferreira
Supervisor
0832587747/ronel.ferreira@up.ac.za

Informed consent by teachers

The study has been explained to me and I have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I am content with the answers provided. I understand that I can remove myself from the study at any point of time if I wish to do so. I hereby provide consent for the use of audio-visual recordings during the focus group discussion and interview.

I am also aware that the study is being conducted by a student therefore a supervisor from the University of Pretoria will have access to all data. I am mindful that all personal information will be kept private during the research process. By signing this document, I indicate my willingness to participate in this study.

Date: _____

Name of participant: _____

Signature of participant: _____



Appendix E: Parents' informed consent form with an example of attached letter



April 2016

Dear Parent/Guardian

My name is Bronwyn Ellis. I am a student at the University of Pretoria (Department of Educational Psychology) for the Master's degree in Learning Support, Guidance and Counselling. I am conducting research on how teachers and parents perceive parent-teacher communication in a resource-constrained primary school setting.

Benefits

There are no direct benefits for taking part in the study however your participation as a parent will provide insight into parent-teacher communication in terms of your understanding of this phenomenon, its purpose and how it is implemented in practice. The findings of this study could potentially provide support to improve parent-teacher communication in the future.

Procedure

These research activities will occur on the school premises in the hours during school or after school depending on your availability. With your consent, all discussions will be recorded by means of an audio-visual recording and field notes. You will not be exposed to harm in any manner during participation. Your participation is also completely voluntary therefore you may remove yourself at any time during the study without any consequences.

If you agree to participate in the study, I would require your involvement in a one hour focus group discussion. Eight to twelve parents of learners in the same grade will be present during this group discussion, focusing on current parent-teacher communication practices, and your perception of this. Furthermore, if you volunteer to complete a personal log book for 3 months reflecting on your experiences of parent-teacher communication, I would require your participation in an individual interview of

30 to 60 minutes to further explore the information gained in the log books and focus group discussions. If any responses need to be clarified or explored further, a follow-up discussion may take place.

Confidentially and anonymity

All data collected with public funding may be available in open repository for public and scientific use. However, your name will not be recorded when reporting the findings as I will make use of codes. Your name will only appear on this consent form and the recording sheet. These documents will be in my possession and will not be mentioned in any report of the findings. All responses will be dealt with confidentially. As I am a student, I am overseen by a supervisor at the University of Pretoria. My supervisor will have access to all audio-visual recordings transcripts and field notes in order to assist me in the research process. All discussions between my supervisor and I (regarding your personal information) will be held in strict confidence. Furthermore, all recordings and transcripts will be stored in a secured place at the University of Pretoria for a period of 15 years.

Please feel free to ask me any questions relating to this study. If you agree to participate in the study, please sign this consent form indicating that you are aware of your rights and wish to take part in the research activities of the study. If you do not wish to participate in the study, please leave this consent form empty.

Thank you for considering participation in this study. If you have any further questions, now or as the study progresses, please feel free to contact either my supervisor or me.

Yours sincerely,



Ms B. Ellis
Student
0845892843/bron.wendy@gmail.com
0832587747/ronel.ferreira@up.ac.za



Prof Ronel Ferreira
Supervisor

Informed consent by parents

The study has been explained to me and I have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I am content with the answers provided. I understand that I can remove myself from the study at any point of time if I wish to do so. I hereby provide consent for the use of audio-visual recordings during the focus group discussion and interview.

I am also aware that the study is being conducted by a student therefore a supervisor from the University of Pretoria will have access to all data. I am mindful that all personal information will be kept private during the research process. By signing this document, I indicate my willingness to participate in this study.

Date: _____

Name of participant: _____

Signature of participant: _____





Dear Parent/Guardian
2016

August

The following research will be conducted at the school:

How teachers and parents perceive parent-teacher communication in resource-constrained primary school settings.

The findings of this study could potentially provide support to improve parent-teacher communication in the future. Parents of Grades 3 and 6 learners are specifically selected to take part in this study. All research activities will occur on the school premises in the staffroom. All information and responses provided will be dealt with in a confidential manner.

Please indicate if you will be attending by completing the information below:

Name: _____ Telephone number: _____

Parents of Grade 3 learners

3 September 2016 (Saturday) 08:30

Parents of Grade 6 learners

3 September 2016 (Saturday) 10:00

Thank you for considering taking part in this research project.

Yours sincerely,
Ms B. Ellis



Appendix F: Teachers' informed consent form with specific conditions



April 2016

Dear Teacher

My name is Bronwyn Ellis. I am a student at the University of Pretoria (Department of Educational Psychology) for the Master's degree in Learning Support, Guidance and Counselling. I am conducting research on how teachers and parents perceive parent-teacher communication in a resource-constrained primary school setting.

Benefits

There are no direct benefits for taking part in the study however your participation will provide insight into parent-teacher communication in terms of your understanding of this phenomenon, its purpose and how it is implemented in practice. Your experience and insights as a teacher may potentially provide support to improve parent-teacher communication in the future.

Procedure

If you agree to participate in the study, I would require your involvement in a one hour focus group discussion. Eight to twelve teachers will be present during this group discussion, focusing on current parent-teacher communication practices, and your perception of this. Furthermore, all teachers will be asked to volunteer to complete a personal log book for 3 months, recording information relating to experiences of parent-teacher communication. After the 3 month period, I would require these volunteers to participate in individual interviews in order to further explore the information gained from the focus group discussions as well as the log books.

The research will take place after school hours on the school premises. If any responses need to be clarified or explored further, a follow-up discussion may take place. With your consent, all discussions will be recorded by means of an audio-visual recording and field notes. Throughout this process, a fieldworker will be conducting

these research activities and a professional will be used to transcribe the data gathered. You will not be exposed to harm in any manner during participation. Your participation is also completely voluntary therefore you may remove yourself at any time during the study without any consequences.

Confidentially and anonymity

All data collected with public funding may be available in open repository for public and scientific use. However, your name will not be recorded when reporting the findings as I will make use of codes. Your name will only appear on this consent form and the recording sheet. These documents will be in my possession and will not be mentioned in any report of the findings. All responses will be dealt with confidentially. As I am a student, I am overseen by a supervisor at the University of Pretoria. My supervisor will have access to all audio-visual recordings transcripts and field notes in order to assist me in the research process. All discussions between my supervisor and I (regarding your personal information) will be held in strict confidence. Furthermore, all recordings and transcripts will be stored in a secured place at the University of Pretoria for a period of 15 years.

Please feel free to ask me any questions relating to this study. If you agree to participate in the study, please sign this consent form indicating that you are aware of your rights and wish to take part in the research activities of the study. If you do not wish to participate in the study, please leave this consent form empty.

Thank you for considering participation in this study. If you have any further questions, now or as the study progresses, please feel free to contact either my supervisor or me.

Yours sincerely,



Ms B. Ellis
Student
0845892843/bron.wendy@gmail.com



Prof Ronél Ferreira
Supervisor
0832587747/ronel.ferreira@up.ac.za

Informed consent by teachers

The study has been explained to me and I have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I am content with the answers provided. I understand that I can remove myself from the study at any point of time if I wish to do so. I hereby provide consent for the use of audio-visual recordings during the focus group discussion and interview. In addition, I provide consent for a fieldworker to conduct the research activities and for the data to be transcribed by a professional.

I am also aware that the study is being conducted by a student therefore a supervisor from the University of Pretoria will have access to all data. I am mindful that all personal information will be kept private during the research process. By signing this document, I indicate my willingness to participate in this study.

Date: _____

Name of participant: _____

Signature of participant: _____



Appendix G: Schedule for semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION ITEMS

I, Bronwyn Ellis am a student at the University of Pretoria conducting research on how teachers and parents perceive parent-teacher communication in a resource-constrained primary school setting. Any information or responses provided will be kept confidential and will be used for research purposes. The participants are requested to answer honestly during the focus group discussions.

Place of semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions: _____

Date: _____ **Time:** _____

Participants:

Parents	Teachers
---------	----------

Grade of learners:

3	6
---	---

SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Participants	Age	Gender	Educational level	Occupation

SECTION B: CURRENT PRACTICES IN TERMS OF PARENT-TEACHER COMMUNICATION

- a) How do you understand parent-teacher communication, and what is the purpose of this?
- b) How does parent-teacher communication currently take place?

Prompts: How often? Which format? Types of communication? Content/topic?

SECTION C: PREFERRED TYPES OF COMMUNICATION

- a) What type of communication do you prefer with the school/parent?
- b) What information do you think should form part of parent-teacher communication?
- c) Do you make use of technology for parent-teacher communication, if so, how?

SECTION D: CHALLENGES AND POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS IN PARENT-TEACHER COMMUNICATION

- a) Which challenges do you experience in current parent-teacher communication practices in the school?

Prompts: How does this make you feel? What is the background to this?

- b) Can parent-teacher communication be improved in the school your child currently attends?

Prompts: From parents' side? From teachers' side?



Appendix H: Field notes

Event: Semi-structured interview

Place of interview: School A staffroom

Participants: Parent

Date: September 2016

Grade of learners: 3 (AP3.1)

First interaction with participant/s: He was neatly dressed. He was also very polite and on time for the interview.

Physical environment:

- The interview occurred within a small staffroom.
- There were many chairs and four large tables.
- The lighting and air ventilation was good.
- There was no noise as the school was closed on weekends.

At the start of the interview: I was worried that he would have difficulty understanding the questions I was going to ask.

During the interview:

- Many of the questions asked had to be rephrased as he did not understand these. This could mean that the terms being used may not be easily understood by all participants⁴.
- The participant may not have known the answers to my questions however he was eager to learn more about parent-teacher communication and stated that this was his reason for attending.
- He seemed very relaxed during this process.
- When I brought up the question about technology, he seemed very surprised and reacted as though it was a silly question to ask.

Insight:

- Previous participants also established that the purpose of parent-teacher communication was to assist their children. He further added that parent-teacher communication is necessary to assist parents in their understanding of the curriculum.
- Children may be role-players in parent-teacher communication as they are also responsible to receive and provide letters. Their involvement can aid or hamper the process.
- His focus was heavily on the future and how education is the gate-way for a better life ("Perform better for the future").
- He didn't want to oppose any teachers however he felt sad when his child did not perform well in school.
- The importance of education was emphasised throughout the interview.

At the end of the interview: He seemed open and very relaxed. He moved his arms often when he spoke. He didn't seem bothered by the camera.

⁴ In this appendix the following colour codes apply: Theme 1= green font, Theme 2= orange font, Theme 3= purple font, Theme 4= red font and Theme 5= blue font.



Reflection after this interview

Possible themes:

- The role learners play in parent-teacher communication
- Books and curriculum needs
- The roles parents play in parent-teacher communication
- Discipline as a problem in schools

Reflective questions: What are schools doing to assist parents and their understanding? Do parents know that the curriculum can be found on the internet? How involved is his partner in parent-teacher communication?

Any impact that I may have had on this interview:

It appeared that he didn't recognise me as a teacher of this particular school. I struggled with rephrasing terms and explaining questions. I might have to think about examples when I explain for future participants without leading them. I didn't realise that my educational level would impact my study. I do not want to cause frustration but this remains a challenge for me as I struggle to select terms that are easily understood at the moment when required.



Appendix I: Research diary

Conducting my first focus group discussion

My first focus group discussion occurred today and it appeared to have been a disaster. As I started to prepare for the discussion, I realised that only three out of four participants attended. I also experienced technical difficulties as my camera would not switch on. I prepared the camera the night before but for some strange reason it would not switch on. I therefore, used my telephone which did not produce the best quality.

Unfortunately, it appeared as if the participants were in a hurry for their next meeting. They seemed like they wanted to tell me about their school and procedures followed but just did not have the time at that moment. This made me think that perhaps teachers are very busy and experience time constraints. They may want to have meaningful communications with parents but may not necessarily have the time available⁵. Initially, I should have told them that it was going to be at most an hour to conduct the focus group discussion. As a result, the data I received was very limited due to the focus group discussion being only 10 minutes long. I also noticed that the participants were uncomfortable by the recording device. As soon as it was switched off, they told me about some of their experiences with parents and learners. During this informal discussion, I asked them to hand out documents relating to my study to the parents of Grade 3 learners. I planned to conduct research activities with the parents the following Saturday. I also told them about the logbooks. All the participants agreed to document their communication with parents.

After the discussion, I realised that I forgot to record an introduction to the focus group discussion. I also experienced difficulty taking field notes therefore I decided that I require a structure to assist me. Unfortunately, I need to reschedule another focus group discussion with these participants as this first attempt was not successful.

I noticed that one participant was very quiet throughout the process. I did not know how to handle this particular situation. So after the focus group discussion, I contacted

⁵ In this appendix the following colour codes apply: Theme 1= green font, Theme 2= orange font, Theme 3= purple font, Theme 4= red font and Theme 5= blue font.

my supervisor and told her about all the challenges I experienced. I was very nervous and did not want to disappoint her. She agreed that the time spent was very short. She encouraged me to communicate with the quiet participant and conduct an individual interview with her. She also gave me advice saying that when someone has not given enough data, I should use silence as a strategy as people will generally speak when this occurs. She also indicated that I should say “tell me more” in order to gain more insight.

Conducting interviews personally is very different compared to how it is described in textbooks. I went into the discussion thinking that I would not experience any challenges. Furthermore, the textbooks I read indicated that I could have difficulties with dominate personalities but I was not prepared to deal with very quiet participant.

Questions that came to mind:

- Did I have something to do with this participant being so quiet?
- Was it simply part of her personality?
- Was it the group dynamic?

It was clear that I had not develop a relationship with these participants. I did not realise that the first meeting was just to get to know the participants and arrange a time which would be suitable for everyone. I assumed that everything would go well and I could just jump into the data collection process. In the future, I need to plan and organise myself better. I also need to ensure that I would not experience technological difficulties again. Finally, I need to utilise the strategies provided by my supervisor.



Appendix J: Transcript of a focus group discussion

School C Grade 3: Parents

Focus group discussion

<p>Facilitator: Thank you for agreeing to be part of this research, my name is Bronwyn Ellis, I am currently studying at the University of Pretoria. And the reason I am doing this focus group is because I want to find out more about parent/teacher communication. So I need your inputs and I want you to share your honest and open thoughts. But before we start we must go through some ground rules. I want everyone to do the talking, so please I would like to hear your opinions. There is no right or wrong answer and if you have a different opinion, that's perfectly okay. The more information you give me the better. All responses will be dealt with in a confidential manner. I want to capture everything you say that is why I am recording. And I do not identify anyone by name in my thesis, so you will remain anonymous. Your first question: How do you understand parent/teacher communication?</p> <p>CP3.3: I should say is for the parent's responsibility to what the teacher is saying or is requesting that the child should communicate or participate in the school.</p> <p>CP3.4: I also want to add on to what he is saying, <i>it's about the teacher informing the parent about the progress of the child at school. Also if there are things that they need to know about about the child, whether it's in a written form or whether the teacher can call you as a parent then I think that's where the communication should play an important role⁶.</i></p> <p>CP3.1: <i>For me, teacher and parent communication is about a teacher and the parent talking about what's happening with the child here at school so that we can both know whether the child is doing good or bad at school so that we can come up with a solution together, to make the child grow on an educational base. That's how I understand it.</i></p> <p>CP3.2: <i>I understand that the teacher and the parent must communicate together, when a parent is, or sometimes is a good person or a bad person, parents must know about the behaviour of the child in school.</i></p> <p>Facilitator: How does communication currently take place in this school?</p> <p>CP3.4: <i>Via letters, parent meetings and sometimes they even have a bring and braai where the children can also come and if you have issues you can also come after school to see the teachers individually.</i></p> <p>Facilitator: Do you experience the same thing?</p> <p>CP3.4: Yes ..</p> <p>Facilitator: How often?</p>	<p>Purpose: discuss progress</p> <p>Modes of communic ation</p> <p>Purpose: work together and share information</p> <p>Two way communic ation</p> <p>Modes of communic ation</p>
--	--

⁶ In this appendix the following colour codes apply: Theme 1= green font, Theme 2= orange font, Theme 3= purple font, Theme 4= red font and Theme 5= blue font.



<p>CP3.2: I wanted to add that sometimes when it's time for issuing of reports, we will also have time to communicate with the teachers, they will be able to explain to you the progress of the child.</p>	<p>Mode of communication and content</p>
<p>Facilitator: How often does this communication take place?</p>	
<p>CP3.3: Is like once or twice a year ...</p>	<p>Frequency</p>
<p>CP3.1: But letter of our ...</p>	
<p>CP3.3: Letters every week ...</p>	<p>Frequency</p>
<p>CP3.1: Letters everyday it depends on the programmes that are taking place at school, and then with parents meetings .., but for the reports obviously it's gonna be every term ...</p>	<p>Frequency</p>
<p>CP3.4: Quarterly ...</p>	
<p>CP3.4: And then I think the bring and braai is like twice a year.</p>	
<p>CP3.4: Ja it's twice a year.</p>	<p>Frequency</p>
<p>Facilitator: So what type of communication do you prefer to have with your teachers?</p>	
<p>CP3.1: One on one ...</p>	
<p>Facilitator: Tell me about it ...</p>	<p>Preferred mode of communication</p>
<p>CP3.1: Because that's the best way to know how your child is doing, that way you can even know if the child needs extra curriculum after it and if the child would need an extra class, if you need to come to school in your .., maybe if he is performing at school but the sport side is not doing well then you can know how to resolve it because a child that is active is also active in class.</p>	<p>Resolving problems</p>
<p>Facilitator: What do you prefer?</p>	
<p>CP3.4: I can say also one on one, because you know some parents you find that they are not comfortable if you share the whole class progress to other parents, you find that other kids will be intimidated or .., so ja I think the one on one is a good thing because you also have an opportunity to ask a teacher more details and you get the truth about the whole thing.</p>	<p>Preferred mode of communication Get all the details</p>
<p>CP3.2: And sometimes I don't know I stay with my children. I spend very little time with my child. A teacher can communicate with them the whole day, I must know how my child behaves in school, I must come on one on one with mam .., how my child operates with other .., the child could be quiet at home but noisy .., I must communicate with the teacher one on one regarding the child's behaviour. The child is at school 8 hours, and the child spends less hours at school.</p>	<p>Topics discussed</p>



<p>CP3.3: Ja one on one is the best .., and then I think like if we continue with scrutinizing the books, like there is a message book that if you have a problem you write it in the book and then the book must be returned signed by the teacher to show that the teacher has read what the complaints are or what your opinion is like to be dealt with at school regarding the child.</p> <p>Facilitator: Besides behaviour and academics.., what else do you want the teachers to share with you?</p> <p>CP3.1: I think those are the main key issues like, for now behaviour seems to be one of the key issues, because there's some kids suffering from being bullied, that way a teacher can tell you. There's some kids that you know they are too quiet to even communicate with others and they suffer that way. You find that kid doesn't want to come to school because of certain issues that you as a parent don't know, that way when you come to the teacher they let you know those kind of things. Like with us girls when we get into grade 6, we start having our period, and sometimes it's not as easy to tell your parent .., so you have to talk to your teacher but .., and you find that's like the key one, to know if your child is open. So if .., not just school wise but also emotionally .., that's that.</p> <p>CP3.4: Look I think the most common ones is like you said is the behaviour and the academics but what I can also add from my side is about the activities. You know children who are active at school like participate in sports activities and all that they tend to socialise a lot and you find that even if they've got problems they are open to the teachers they are even open at home, they can't hold things to themselves and you find that they accept the other children who outgoing, and if your child is a reserved person then you will find that you don't even know about those things that you think now that area is ..(unclear) now there's a lot of interaction when we've got meetings you know the principal will always talk about those issues to say children who are bullying this is what we must .., the other time they even arranged a workshop for us, I'm not sure if the other ladies attended. There was a workshop when they invited service providers to come and share with us information about bullying and how to deal with bullying at schools and all that. But also issues around you know the ...(unclear) where the school is also a dangerous place because the other time I learnt there are people who used to sell drugs on the other side of the streets and all that. So is like we are always kept informed of these things and we need to talk to our kids as well to show that there are things that can be dangerous out there and that they must always make sure that they take care of themselves. So I think that communication is there, always when we've got meetings they will you know sensitise us and that.</p> <p>Facilitator: Do you make use of any technology when you communicate with your teachers?</p> <p>CP3.3: Not really is only in a written form</p> <p>CP3.4:The telephone ...</p> <p>Facilitator: Okay.</p>	<p>Communication book</p> <p>Speak to teacher on behalf of children</p> <p>Topics discussed</p> <p>Mass meetings</p> <p>Contextual challenges</p>
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<p>CP3.1: I think the cellphone is a very personal thing so it's best I sit with the teacher here, unless if you read like you said you can write on the message book, because now I tried to call and it may be after class, let's say you won't answer that call you know, or I text you when you see it ..., when you are at home you see those certain things they tend to interrupt with school.</p> <p>Facilitator: Have any of you tried getting the teacher's numbers and communicating to them?</p> <p>CP3.3: It's very rare ...</p>	<p>Teacher' personal contact information</p> <p>Modes of communication</p>
<p>CP3.4: Ja but there are some teachers who are currently doing that, I remember when my daughter was in grade 2, the teacher actually gave all of us her number on the first day that we met her. She said this is my number, in case you've got problems, you are welcome to communicate with me unless if it's something that needs the principal or the vice principal or the office then they don't have to communicate with you, unless if it's something directly involving the child. Then I find it to be very much easy because you know it was like opening to us and gave us the numbers so every time when I get the problem or maybe didn't understand something then I will call her, you know she didn't mind but it depends on the individual. Some are comfortable to do that some are not so ... ja, but because it's a private cellphone number then you can't insist to say to say they must give it to you.</p> <p>Facilitator: Do you experience in challenges when it comes to communicating with your teachers?</p>	<p>Teacher's personal contact information</p>
<p>CP3.3: Not really I would say, like I said you just write on the message book what your problem is and then the teacher would respond and then so you can arrange a meeting and then you resolve the problem and ..., so unless maybe if at a later stage there can be like make us communicate telephonically or otherwise maybe it will be much better, but up to so far I am comfortable with the writing.</p> <p>Facilitator: Do you experience any challenges?</p>	<p>Preferred mode of communication</p>
<p>CP3.4: I think the message book works much better for us because in most cases where ..., like my daughter will say you know we've been given this homework and if she doesn't understand or I am also struggling to assist her, then I will write a message to the teacher and say you know what I think this you need to give more timing because it looks like the children didn't understand because my daughter is very focused, to say you know everyone in the class didn't understand and we were scared the teacher and whatever, so now I will have to a message. But definitely the next day I know she will answer, she will say noted and say I will make sure that they understand it more.</p> <p>CP3.1: Even if you don't use the message book, you can also just write a little note under the homework, after that ..., I don't understand where you get these marking from, I went through it, I've explained but now I don't understand where the final mark comes from. She responded and said I used this method. I was</p>	<p>Purpose-Communicating concerns of children</p>



<p>happy because if you get a response back it shows that the teacher saw this. The teacher is committed to work with you. There are parents, which is very sad, that they just have a bit of negligence sometimes, your child doesn't understand but because you also don't understand, you just leave it at that. That's why they will also ask you please sign or even write a note. Please sign so you can see that your child has shown you the homework, it's incomplete or you know. So that kind of thing asks you. So I don't think, I think the only challenge is the time constraints with the communication because we can't all want to go one on one and the teacher have time for that. There's limited time.</p>	<p>Parent's educational level</p> <p>Challenge of mass meetings</p>
<p>Facilitator: What do you expect from your teacher with regards to parent/teacher communication?</p>	
<p>CP3.3: I would say to ask the teacher to check all the complaints or maybe if it's only one parent who is .., who's got a complain and wanting to meet with the teacher, must directly ask that particular teacher when is it the right time to come and see you and that is when an arrangement can be made because at times you will find maybe it's four or five parents who have different problems wanting to talk to the teacher and the teacher is only available at a certain time, and they've got different times that they can come and talk with the teacher. So it's for the teacher to say okay I will only be available on this day .., then if you can be able to come do come please. But even the times would be different, like myself I'm working in Jo'burg and I've got a problem with the my child and I must come to school and then the mother is sometimes out of the country and I'm in Johannesburg I must come and get the problem solved, then the teacher would say okay I will be available between 2 and 4 and then travelling from Jo'burg to here it will be .., I will probably get here at about 5 o'clock due to the traffic. So I think the teacher must just try to allocate time, like on weekends if someone is available on weekends, and you come in the teacher is here, give them our problems and then, maybe it can be much better that way.</p>	<p>Challenge of mass meetings</p> <p>Work constraints</p> <p>More opportunities for dialogue</p>
<p>CP3.1: I think transparency that's one aspect ...transparency. When my child is naughty, I would like to know that besides because you wouldn't know the source of that naughty, that full transparency that ...</p>	<p>Parents expectation</p>
<p>CP3.4: If the transparency is there then that teacher is communicating because as a parent you are sitting at home you don't know what is happening with your child at school, sometimes you know these kids they've got double personalities, they are .., at home you find that they are so good you can't even think that they will do something wrong, then the y come to school then it's another person .., so now if you don't know about those things then you will always be protecting your child and which is not a good thing, because you need to also, as a parent to be transparent, you can't expect teachers to be transparent and us parent not being transparent. We need to do the same.</p>	<p>Parents expectation</p>
<p>CP3.2: They must help each other with these children, we must be transparent and communicate.</p>	<p>Parent's expectation</p>
<p>Facilitator: Are these expectations met in this school?</p>	



<p>CP3.3: What we don't is that share our views, we only wish that this can be done or directly in the school but we never ready to do it at school, so we can do what we wish to be done but maybe we don't know, but tell us what you expect from us. So we as parents must just stand up and share our views so the school is not to be blamed.</p>	<p>More opportunities for dialogue</p>
<p>CP3.1: I believe if you want transparency, as much as we want transparency we must also be transparent. If you want a certain relationship with somebody you must start and build it yourself. Like if my child comes back hurt, I mustn't be the first to say my child is hurt, somebody did this ..., I must actually ask, okay my child came back ..., looking like this, do you any information, what happened at school, was he involved in a fight ..., okay this is what happened, he is ..(unclear) what happened, does he not read anymore ..., you know if you want that kind of relationship you must build on it. I can't just want it to be one sided and say okay teacher you must tell me everything. I must also have that interest to ask, getting this is what's happening with my child, I'd like to know. The only time I can say okay the teacher is not being responsive, if I ask this is what happened and she says I don't know that's only when I can say okay my views were not heard ...</p>	<p>Parent's expectation</p>
<p>Facilitator: So are the grade 3 teachers ..., are they meeting these expectations, the one that you've just put out, are they meeting it or do you think it can be improved on?</p>	<p>Emotions associated with parent-teacher communication</p>
<p>CP3.3: It can be improved provided ...</p>	
<p>CP3.1: I think they are meeting the expectations but it can be improved ...</p>	
<p>Facilitator: How do you think that can happen?</p>	
<p>CP3.3: I think if you can come to school, tell them about all your views so that they can try to attend to them ...</p>	
<p>CP3.4: Or maybe the school arrange sort of a workshop, I know they do these braai thing you know we don't come together but actually we don't get the time to share and talk issues you know relating to kids because we can't always be talking about you know academics and whatever you know, we need to talk about the..., I know sometimes when we are called in a meeting the principal will just share with us their challenges, obviously there are challenges and we need to support as parents. Then if we not providing that support as well, it makes it difficult for them you know to also discipline our kids because if we don't also discipline our kids from home, then we can't expect the teachers to do the same. You know maybe if they can in the future have those kind of workshops when will we have talk like this, not only one on one like we suggesting ..., but also talk as parents and teachers ..., let them share their frustrations and then we will also you know share maybe our ideas that can assist them you know in taking the thing forward, but I know in most cases you will find that sometimes as parents we're also wrong ..., you know that your child maybe is a problematic child then there's people who will come to you and say or maybe they will write a letter, I know of a one child when the school wrote a letter, they wanted to see the parent, then the parent was just screaming and saying my child didn't ..., no I don't think my child did this.</p>	<p>More opportunities for dialogue</p> <p>Purpose-Communicating concerns</p>



<p>But you know like I'm saying at home he can be somebody else, and then here at school he is something different. Then we need to support the teachers as well ... But I think we also need to provide that support from our side as well. They can't do it alone, we can't expect the teachers you know to do everything without our support.</p>	<p>Two way communication and purpose</p>
<p>Facilitator: So who do you think is responsible to ensure that effective communication occurs?</p>	
<p>CP3.3: The parents ...</p>	
<p>CP3.1: Both sides ...</p>	
<p>CP3.4: I think both sides.</p>	
<p>Facilitator: Why?</p>	
<p>CP3.1: Because if the teacher does not talk to I will never know what is happening. If I don't talk to the teacher she will never know what's happening. If I don't talk to the teacher ..., she will never know what's happening ...</p>	<p>Limited communication results in limited knowledge</p>
<p>CP3.4: So it must be both sides. When my child is sick, she won't make it to school I will make sure that the day she comes I will make a note so that the teacher knows that the child was not just sitting at home, the child was sick, then the teacher must also note to show that I have seen the message, I've recorded it. That communication is actually a two way communication and even involving the child as well. A child you must know that there's communication between the teacher and the parent, as well as the child. Because if I write a message I'm giving it to my child to say make sure that you give it to your teacher, then you know that the child will give it to the teacher, the teacher will give it back to the child, and then is back to me again. So you've .., is actually the role of parents, teachers as well as the learner.</p>	<p>Two way communication (role-players) Value of communication</p>
<p>CP3.1: I think now there's a third..., what she is saying just made me acknowledge that there's a third party, is not just us. I mean if my child comes back from school and he puts his bag there and goes to play, does homework, and he doesn't even tell me there's a message ...Message or the newsletter ...</p>	<p>Role-players</p>
<p>CP3.4: I am also missing, let's say I'm one of those curious parents that's actually gonna go and ask did you do your homework .., message, I will always do that with my nephew because he tends .., sometimes he comes home absent minded .., he will forget certain things and I will ask him .., show me your homework, what did you learn, let me see did the teacher write anything, can I write here, something for your teacher, okay it's fine, but there's always that threat that always know that your child also needs to be involved in the communication as well, just pull, talk to your child what's this and this, or .., because at the end of the day you also rely on that middle man, if he doesn't come and say mommy here's the newsletter ...</p>	<p>Role-players and their value</p>



<p>CP3.1: Ja but even us parents especially when it comes to the messages, we mustn't wait for the child to tell to us, because they just ..., you know they are so occupied, once they come back from school they just go play and stuff like that. As a result of that in the morning a child can say "eish I forgot to write my homework" and then transport is waiting outside ...</p>	<p>Role-players influence communication</p>
<p>CP3.3: He didn't read but you just sign. He is only thinking about it that morning and you don't know about it, so that's why after school I will ask him show me this, show me ..., like there was this one time I asked him okay I hear there's prize giving ..., when is it, show me that, show me that and he was like ..., okay here's the date and I asked him what are you getting the prize for, he doesn't even know. I said okay maybe it's a surprise ..., you know those certain things that he doesn't know, you can read it there, he doesn't know you just have to go and say okay there's a time, the venue and all that ..., you must be decent on that ..., so there's also ..., there also has to be a parent and child communication.</p>	<p>Value of communication</p>
<p>CP3.1: Ja it's very important</p>	
<p>CP3.1: Ja</p>	
<p>CP3.3: There's always a room for improvement. I don't know how ..., the cell phone, you know I have an issue with the cellphone, is a very personal thing. When one gets hold of it, they don't want to keep dwelling on things at a... you don't want to get home you know and still experience work, that's your time to rest, find ..(unclear) there needs to be a time where you say okay after 4 o'clock I don't want to take calls anymore and that's starts becoming a problem with like parents, with this teacher and this and this and this. So I think the improvement part I think we just need to settle down on the day we are also asked to come, we come just together, I'm experiencing, okay let me say Ms [REDACTED] with the parents then there this and this and this with my child, then in that way we all know maybe 5...I have the same problem, then we say can we use a starting different time to sort out this problem. There's five of us in this... that's the one improvement I think we...we still doing okay, we still above average.</p>	<p>Providing teachers' personal contact details</p>
<p>CP3.1: I don't know whether maybe it's the issue of funding, I'm not sure, I'm just thinking now that I have a friend of mine that I work with, her child also goes to a private school like mine, she is in Centurion. So she will always get messages on her cellphone, you know they send it to all parents, where they will say thanks for meeting this evening you know, with us you will get those message like the newsletters they will send it maybe this week, the meeting is in the next two weeks. Then you will find that you know you totally forgot about that meeting, even now they have a meeting on the 23rd, the last time that I saw the newsletter I think it was last week, that other week, now there's another one that I saw now on the 14th, they are still reminding us about that meeting, but sometimes you will forget to note it to say by the way on the 23rd there's a parents meeting and even they will send that newsletter but they will still send SMS's ..., hence I'm not sure maybe it's about funding issues or whatever but if maybe the school can improve on that to say they take all that ..., maybe they take all our cellphone numbers are there for record purposes they can do that and you know send messages to all parents, if well there are changes where they will ask the parent to come if the</p>	<p>Using a messaging system Newsletters Bulk messaging</p>



<p>child maybe there's something that the child has done. Sometimes you will give a note to send to all your parents ..., some of these boys are naughty they won't even issue that letter to the parent to say no I've done something wrong you must come to school. They will just keep it with them. But if you know that you need to send a message on the cellphone number, then that will also play an important role because the parent will also know and say by the way you have done something wrong, I got an SMS from school, even if the child has got that letter he's been giving to you, then you know that you've got ..., so I find it to be very effective in terms of communication with parents. The other thing when she told me she said oh I forgot there was a parents meeting, I see an SMS, they sent an SMS as a reminder. So I'm not sure whether maybe support/funding issues if maybe they can improve on that.</p> <p>CP3.4:Ja I remember we use to get that, I remember at Voortrekker if your son or your child was troublesome at school, you will get an sms ..., absent you will get a message, you are paying your school fees you get a message.</p> <p>CP3.3: I think it's changed now because I used to come to the school ..., then they will call your parent, they will literally put you here, they will call the parent and say this is what's happening, she vandalised the toilets, she was writing on the table, she was ..., you know small things. So I don't know now what the system is, is not just ...</p> <p>CP3.3: In this school?</p> <p>CP3.1: Yes they used to call ..., even coming late, they will call the parent why was she late, or if your parent is the one dropping you off, they will expect the parent to come to the office and, it was traffic or something and I don't know now ...</p> <p>CP3.3: Maybe it's still happening maybe John experienced it.</p> <p>CP3.1: I don't think so, I mean even with the... they will send an sms ...</p> <p>CP3.4: No I'm referring to the one that where they will contact you directly as a parent. Remember the one that I was referring to is for everyone, let's say there's a meeting, then they will say to everyone to say this is a reminder there's a meeting. So that one is a communication to everyone but where it's basically ..., maybe we have not seen that because our children are not directly involved we're not sure.</p> <p>CP3.3: I don't know if they forgot it I'm not sure ...(they laughed)</p> <p>CP3.4: We don't know if they are doing that. Actually they must do it hey ...</p> <p>CP3.1: Because I think if your child did something wrong, there's still a library ...</p> <p>CP3.4: Ja there is some of it ...</p>	<p>Role-players influencing communication</p> <p>Using a messaging system</p> <p>Previous experience with phone calls</p> <p>Phone calls</p> <p>Unsure of school practices</p>
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CP3.1: So they would say your child's book is red ..(unclear) two weeks, and if you don't bring it back there's going to be a fee .., so they can call the parent. If you messed up the computer that the computer be the centre of the ..(unclear), so I don't know now ...

CP3.4: But they still tell you ...(unclear) ...

CP3.1: They don't do it at all.

Facilitator: So how does that make you feel, that these strategies are not put into place?

CP3.1: I think if they are not doing anymore, it is dropping the standard, that's where I remember parents saying we need to raise our views, you tell the teacher that you know what I am having a problem with one, two, three and I think the school can do better by one, two, three. If it's not going to be with the teacher, you can even raise it with the principal, to ask the principal to work on this and this, because improvement can't just be done by done by just the school, we as well as the people paying school fees, and bringing our children here we need to have a role, we need to play some part in it. That's why I was saying I don't know what they record anymore, because they used to do that .., they would just call, you know your child didn't pitch .., your child was here in the morning, your child is no longer here, we wonder if maybe they picked her up by the gate or what's the situation so .., I don't know now what's the situation.

Facilitator: And how do you feel?

CP3.3: This .., like now it's only now that this is happening, so all ..(unclear) don't know that it through cellphones, but through communication I'm more than satisfied to just getting ..(unclear) the message ..(unclear) they respond, the teacher responds and then is fine.

Facilitator: How do you feel?

CP3.2: To me it's fine, I communicate with the book, I don't know about this, what they are talking about ..(unclear), they can improve the standard.

CP3.3: Ja as long as we can request .., to carry on with what was happening before. We can move with technology like I suggested to say send us sms's, then if your child is not at school, then they also send you a message to say please come and see us. If we do now, we don't see you know the non-effect of communication because we still write message on the message books or whatever. But there's still more that can be done to improve that communication.

Facilitator: And what do you see as your role, as parents with regards to parent/teacher communication?

CP3.1: I think the role of the parents is to always want to know, like be very curious about your child's education because at the end of the day you find the child is

More opportunities for dialogue

Mass messaging



failing. Last time we collected the year before, just to know if he passed the grade, or the last time we really spoke was January when the school opened because you are so busy also with trying to provide for the child and be curious, always know that your child spends most of the time here. He is home weekends, I can only monitor him weekends. He spends most of the time with the teacher. So the teacher will have an insight “I noticed this and that” – sometimes you don’t even see your child is sick, the teacher can say “I think your child is sick” that’s when you can take a step. But also as well we just need to acknowledge that you don’t just drop your child here and go, we need to acknowledge that as well. So ...

Facilitator: What do you feel your role should be?

CP3.4: My role should be to support my child, to support the teacher and make sure that you know both the teacher and the child have got that respect, mutual understanding and also to make sure that I communicate with the school, it’s not about even the teacher/parent communication so the admin people you know. Sometimes you will find that you have paid your school fees, maybe somewhere they will send you a message to say or maybe they will send you a statement and then you realise I paid my school fees but they are saying I’m owing. Now you can’t just leave it like that, obviously you will have to maybe call or come to school and you know to check. So that respect must be there to say you can’t just go there and just start screaming at people, you need to talk nicely with respect. But I think the respect must come from how we teach our children “you go to school you show respect to your teachers and classmates then you will do better”.

CP3.2: Me and my child I must communicate with the teacher at the school, the television show .., I think it was Skeem Saam, (unclear) you must do your homework, you must do this, you must do this .., and when he comes from school I ask him what did the teacher say today .., (unclear) this other teacher is bothering you or what what, you must communicate. Me and the children in the school must be on one level. I must take a side with my child .., I must understand what happened, I must really say ..., the teacher asked me to come to school what is happening. So we must communicate, there must be communication.

CP3.3: I think the parents much check the progress of the child, check the books every time when the child comes back from school. Help the child with the homework because at times the child will say I don’t understand this, the minute I explain it to the child “so it looks like it’s so above” because the standard these days is too high. You know I think maybe for the parents, because it doesn’t mean that most parents are illiterate .., most parents have studied, some parents didn’t get a chance of going to school, as a result the child comes with a homework, it becomes .., its blank, the child doesn’t understand, the parent doesn’t understand and as a result one has to go to the neighbour to assist ., but for how long because the neighbour must assist their own children and your children as well. So at least for us who can must just tell the child make sure and understand and then if maybe the results or the standard is too high, make a note, ask the teacher what is going on here, because the child is getting these results and but now the standard is now going down, what is wrong with the child. Does the child understand, or does the child pay attention to you when you teaching or something, because you need to know why is the standard dropping .., the child

Purpose of communication

Parent’s educational level

Expectation



used to get 10 out of 10, but now it is 4 out of 20 then you want to know ..., that's the role we should play, fighting with the child and want the child to further explain to you why is it like that. Then the child must tell you .., "it was because I did not have a pen and all that", you shout at the child make sure she gets better results, next time she mustn't forget the school stationery. So to make sure that the parent that before she watches TV all the work is done, and from there it's bed time, that's the role we should be playing.

Facilitator: Is there any other information about the parent/teacher communication that you think you should tell me with regard to parent/teacher communication?

CP3.3: I think we have said a lot, I hope we have answered all your questions correctly or ..., you said there is no right or wrong answer but we hope it will assist you.

Facilitator: Thank you so much for your time.

END

Discuss progress



Appendix K: Summary of a transcript

School A Grade 3 Teachers

- Children are at the centre of parent-teacher communication.
- Two-way communication is necessary.
- Parents need to communicate things to ensure communication goes smoothly.
- There are no remedial teachers or psychologists therefore they identify the children who are academically weak and notify parents immediately.
- They are looking for support and assistance from these parents in particular.
- There may be limited parent involvement especially with academically weak children.
- Teachers' work is easier if parents are involved.
- Parents come home too late from work.
- Parent-teacher communication builds children's confidence and increases participation level in classrooms.
- Parent evenings take place so that teachers can hand out reports.
- Teachers may focus on remedial children and children with behavioural concerns.
- Parents that are called in, never attend these meetings.
- Parents argue with teachers when their children fail but these same parents do not attend scheduled meetings. .
- Children are very disruptive and naughty.
- Communication books are utilised where parents and teachers write and respond back to each other.
- Teachers cannot take children to hospitals or give them any medication.
- Discipline problems and academic problems go hand in hand.
- Some children come from unstable homes where drugs and alcoholism is a problem.
- Some children are not receiving academic support at home.
- Work commitments from parents make it difficult to maintain parent-teacher communication.
- Single-parent households are prevalent.
- More support is given to children when parents and teachers work together.

- Parents want to communicate in the beginning of the year but don't maintain this communication.
- Some children are aware of the limited parent involvement.
- They spoke about previous experiences of schooling where parents would side with teachers.
- Some children now feel entitled.
- They spoke about a boy who had no support at home but was intelligent.
- When parents are involved, children may be almost perfect, displaying good manners and leadership skills.
- Children respond well to praise. One participant wished parents knew this knowledge.
- Mass meetings at the beginning of the year occur at this school.
- Both participants prefer one on one interaction with parents.
- Writing letters may cause problems in interpretations made.
- Parents may not attend meetings as they may feel embarrassed about something.
- Teachers need the background information of the child.
- Children could flourish if parents make it their business to be involved.
- Parents of naughty children tend to receive phone calls from teachers.
- These participants focused on parenting practices not being fulfilled.
- Parents need to assist in maintaining parent-teacher communication.
- Workshops should be provided to parents focusing on parent involvement
- Learners' transports arrive at certain times making it difficult for these teachers to provide additional support to them.
- Technology can influence parent-teacher communication such as the access to emails.
- Only special cases receive teachers' personal telephone numbers as parents call for every little thing.
- They believe teachers should start parent-teacher communication.
- They also believe teachers should try display the positive side to parent-teacher communication.



Appendix L: Summary of an analysed transcript

School C Grade 3 Parents

Summary of transcript

- Parent-teacher communication is about informing parents of learner's progress at school⁷.
- Two-way communication is necessary.
- It is about developing solutions together in order to develop children.
- This occurs through newsletters every two weeks and parents' meetings.
- Sometimes they will have even have a 'bring and braai'.
- The issuing of reports also occurs when teachers explain the children's progress.
- Reports are given once a term.
- Two participants prefer one on one interaction with the teachers.
- One on one interactions provide a good opportunity to ask questions and get more details over concerns.
- They can share concerns over children being bullied.
- Children may feel more comfortable discussing private concerns with teachers than parents.
- Workshops have been provided to these parents relating to concerns of bullying and school contextual problems.
- Some parents would like teacher's personal contact information as it made life easier when discussing concerns.
- One participant is comfortable with writing.
- Parents communicate over concerns especially when children are too afraid to ask the teacher.
- Sometimes parents don't understand the work and their children don't understand the work so they just leave it.
- Parents cannot all go to the teacher and express concerns at once.
- Traveling from work makes it difficult to attend meetings.

⁷ In this appendix the following colour codes apply: Theme 1= green font, Theme 2= orange font, Theme 3= purple font, Theme 4= red font and Theme 5= blue font.

- Perhaps more time should be allocated for parents' evenings at times that suit them.
- They require transparency during parent-teacher communication.
- They need to be told what teachers expect from them.
- Parents should only say they are not being heard if the teacher isn't being responsive.
- Parent-teacher communication can be improved at this school.
- There needs to be time allocated to share views and talk about the issues.
- Workshops should be provided.
- Parents and teachers need to work hand in hand in order to discipline children.
- Parent and teachers should share frustrations and ideas.
- Both parties should ensure that parent-teacher communication remains effective.
- Two-way communication is necessary.
- Children should also be considered as role-players.
- There is a third party, being children.
- Sometimes children do not give parents letters from teachers.
- Parents must be curious to know what is happening with child.
- The value of parent-child communication is emphasised.
- One parent believes that teachers don't want to experience work at home and should relax therefore should not provide parents with their personal contact information.
- Issue of funding may be a problem for bulk messaging.
- Bulk messaging can be used to remind or inform parents of school events.
- Phone calls were used in the past to communicate over learners' misbehaviour but may not be occurring currently. This may however be due to their children not causing any problems for teachers.
- They require more opportunities for dialogues to occur.
- Some parents may not have the skills needed to read and write therefore they require the assistance from others.
- The principal should also become involved and listen to the views of parents.

