MANAGING FAMILY- SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS IN GAUTENG SECONDARY TOWNSHIP SCHOOLS

by

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MASTER OF EDUCATION

in

EDUCATION MANAGEMENT AND POLICY STUDIES

at the

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Supervisor: Dr Maitumeleng Nthontho

Declaration of Originality

I, Rachael Adebola Olusegun (Student Number: 16150822), hereby declare that this study entitled: **Managing family-school partnership in Gauteng secondary township schools,** which is submitted for the degree of Master's in Education in the Department of Education Management, Law and Policy Studies at the University of Pretoria has not previously been submitted by me for any other degree or examination at this university or at any other university. It is my own work, and information from other sources used are duly acknowledged by appropriate references.

Signed at University of Pretoria on this _____ day of _____2021

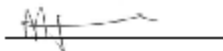Signature: _____

Ethics Clearance Certificate

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RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	**CLEARANCE NUMBER:** EM 19/03/07
DEGREE AND PROJECT	MEd Managing family-school partnerships in Gauteng secondary township schools
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CHAIRPERSON OF ETHICS COMMITTEE: Prof Funke Omidire

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Ms Bronwynne Swarts
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This Ethics Clearance Certificate should be read in conjunction with the Integrated Declaration Form (D08) which specifies details regarding:
- Compliance with approved research protocol,
- No significant changes,
- Informed consent/assent,
- Adverse experience or undue risk,
- Registered title, and
- Data storage requirements.

Ethics Statement

The ethical standards listed above were adhered to in this dissertation. The ethical considerations upheld in the study are discussed in detail in Section 3.8.

Language Editor's Certificate

DECLARATION

I herewith declare that I,

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my dear husband (Ori ade mi), Olusegun Okikiola Adeyemi, who encouraged me to add more feathers to my academic cap. He detests mediocrity and loves excellence with a passion.

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My sincere gratitude to my dear heavenly Abba, for successful completion of this work. I am incredibly grateful for the favour He has showered on me over the years, before I got to acknowledge Him as my Father, and since I got to know Him as one. It has been an amazing journey. Thank you, Papa.

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate how township secondary schools manage the family-school partnership for purposes of enhancing the quality of teaching and learning in township schools. A literature search on related subjects was followed by an empirical study to address the study aim. A qualitative research approach, adopting a case study design, was used to investigate the perspectives and experiences of stakeholders in this key partnership (principals, teachers, and parents) and to examine the strategies the schools employed to manage it, the challenges they encountered in the process and the solutions they employed. Two principals, two deputy principals, seven parents and ten teachers from two township secondary schools in the Tshwane West District (Gauteng Department of Education (GDE)) took part in the research process.

The study findings indicate that, despite the disadvantaged circumstances of township schools, it was possible to effectively manage successful family-school partnerships in these schools, provided that all major stakeholders (principals, teachers, and parents) were committed to the process. The study furthermore shows that an effective family-school partnership in township secondary schools depended largely on the ability of the school management team to create and facilitate initiatives that promote effective family-school partnerships.

It was, however, also evident from the study findings that even the commitment of all stakeholders to the family-school partnership could not always overcome the challenges posed to an effective partnership. Pro-active engagement by the stakeholders was encouraged to overcome the problems that challenged the family-school partnership. Since lack of cooperation from parents appeared to be main cause of these challenges, it was imperative for the schools to find more creative ways of attracting parents to the school environment. Schools need to collaborate with those parents who are already actively involved and brainstorm with them on strategies for reaching non-involved parents and drawing them into the partnership too. Schools should also consider organising platforms to educate parents on rules of engagement with the school over their children.

The findings of my study further revealed a lack of formal policy on the partnership between school and family. Education policymakers therefore need to consider the formulation of a clear policy on the family-school partnership that will serve as a toolkit

for schools in their engagement with families about the education of their children. Moreover, since I found that most parents were unable to assist their children with schoolwork at home, due to the ambiguity of the curriculum. Policymakers should consider introducing a curriculum handbook for parents on each subject and design it in such a simplified format that any average parent can relate with the content.

KEYTERMS: partnership; stakeholders; management; township secondary schools; principals; teachers; parents; Epstein's Framework for Comprehensive Programs of Partnership.

Abbreviations

AA   - Administrative Assistant

SASA   - South African Schools Act

SGB   - School Governing Body

SMT   - School Management Team

NNS   - National Numeracy Strategy

NLS   - National Literacy Strategy

SWIFT   - School-Wide Integrated Framework for Transformation

LSM   - Learner-Teacher Support Material

GDE   - Gauteng Department of Education

Q-1   - Quintile 1

SAPS   - South Africa Police Service

SSIP   - Saturday School Improvement Plan

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CHAPTER 1: RESEARCH PROBLEM AND METHODOLOGY

1.1   Introduction and background

The family-school partnership as a concept has been studied extensively, both locally and internationally (Haines, Gross, Blue-Banning, Francis & Turnbull, 2015; Okeke, 2014; Makgopa & Mokhele, 2013; Lemmer, 2012; Dusi, 2012; Epstein, 2011; Mncube, 2010; Gestwicki, 2008). However, it is a concept that cannot be over-researched because of its importance to education in general. Embedded in a family-school partnership is the holistic wellness of learners, which resonates with high expectations among stakeholders (Epstein, 2011:13). Therefore, studies on the contributions of stakeholders towards the wellness of learners (Francis, Hill, Blue-Banning, Turnbull & Haines, 2016; Haines *et al.*, 2015; Makgopa & Mokhele, 2013; Dusi, 2012; Christenson & Reschly, 2010; Mncube, 2009) have shown that a partnership between stakeholders is the best approach to achieve maximum benefits. This is because all the stakeholders can collaborate to disseminate information, give guidance to learners, proffer solution to challenges and celebrate achievements (Epstein, 2011:4).

Research (LaRocque, Kleiman & Darling, 2011; Banerjee, Harrell & Johnson, 2011; Epstein, 2011; Christenson & Reschly, 2010; Nojaja, 2009; Epstein, 2008) also shows that a healthy partnership between family and school can yield great benefits and lead to personal and academic achievements, as well as positive behavioural changes at home and school (Epstein, 2008). Also, it facilitates attributes that support achievements and enhanced benefits for learners, parents, and teachers (Christenson & Reschly, 2010; Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009; Gestwicki, 2008).

In light of the above, schools across the globe are adopting strategies to facilitate and manage family-school partnerships because of their benefits to the education system as a whole (Okeke, 2014; Lemmer, 2012). Different models, programmes and techniques have also been developed to enhance the success of the family-school partnership, for instance the compensation model, training model, consensus model, and participation model (Phokane, 2013; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Epstein, 2011; Stinchfield & Zyromski, 2010; Christenson & Reschly, 2010; Houston, Blankstein & Cole, 2010).

To underscore the importance of family-school partnership, countries like the United States of America (USA) and the United Kingdom (UK) are adopting laws and policies to promote family-school partnerships. In the USA there is the "No Child Left behind" Act (NCLB, 2003), which is dedicated to the collaboration between parents and schools to enhance the education system. Similarly, in the UK, the government is promoting many learning and social schemes such as the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) and the National Numeracy Strategy (NNS) to boost learners' achievement by getting families to work together with schools (Wolfendale & Bastiani, 2000). In South Africa, section 29 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996a) (herein after the Constitution), states that, "everyone has the right to basic education" (RSA, 1966). The state, in implementing this section of the Constitution, enacted education policies that make provision for a functional partnership between parents and school. One of these policies is embodied in the, "South African Schools Act 84" of 1996 (herein after SASA), which makes provision for the involvement of parents in the governance structure of public schools (RSA, 1966b).

However, despite the benefits and importance of a family-school partnership, or of the laws and policies that support this partnership (as discussed above), there is an abundance of local and international studies dealing with poor family-school partnerships due to inter alia socio-economic factors (Maluleke, 2014; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Lemmer, Van Wyk & Berkhout, 2010), racial and ethnic factors (Deslandes, 2009; Wong & Hughes, 2006), political factors (Rhodes & White Burkett Miller Center, 2012; Lemmer *et al.*, 2010), and cultural and social factors (Lemmer *et al.*, 2010; Deslandes, 2009).

Empirical evidence reveals the existence of poor family-school partnerships in township schools in South Africa (mostly previously disadvantaged schools with 100% black learners) (Maluleke, 2014; Okeke, 2014; Nojaja, 2009; Singh, Mbokodi & Msila, 2004; Smit & Liebenberg, 2003; Heystek, 1999). However, most studies focused on the diverse aspects of poor family-school partnerships in township schools, and not much attention has been paid to township schools where the family-school partnership proved to be functional in terms of active engagement of parents with the school, parents' participation in school activities and academic work of their children, teachers' robust rapport with parents, and school management's purposeful activities to manage the partnership. Also, a fair body of work exists on schools' partnerships with different

stakeholders locally (Myende, 2018; Bhengu & Myende, 2015; Naicker, 2011), but not much has been done on the factors that contribute to the successful management of these partnerships. This is the gap this study intended to fill by highlighting the management of a functional family-school partnership in township secondary schools and revealing how it enhances a positive learning experience.

A pertinent question was how 'functional' was defined. I used Epstein's (2011) Framework for Comprehensive Programs of Partnership (FCPP) to determine the functionality of the family-school partnership, based on how schools were adopting the framework for management of the family-school partnership and the way in which families were responding to it.

1.2   Statement of the research problem

Socio-economic status is a major factor that has a negative influence on the family-school partnership in South African township schools. This is largely because the education system in pre-1994 South Africa subscribed to unjust laws and policies of the apartheid system, with segregated provision of education along racial lines (Lemmer *et al.*, 2010). This, together with factors such as the migrant labour system, led to the fragmentation of family life among the black population, which hampered the participation of black parents in their children's learning activities (Lemmer *et al.*, 2010:118). Unfortunately, after more than two decades of post-independence and with an all-inclusive education policy in place, research evidence indicates that black parents in South Africa still do not participate adequately in the education of their children (Maluleke, 2014; Okeke, 2014; Singh *et al.*, 2004; Smit & Liebenberg, 2003; Heystek, 1999).

However, amidst the present narrative of poor family-school partnerships in South African township schools, there is a pocket of schools that show signs of a functional and effective family-school partnership, regardless of their socio-economic status. This is even though very little (if any) attention has been paid to such schools regarding their management of their family-school partnership to benefit learners, and regardless of the challenging circumstances in these schools. My study focused on how these schools manage to establish a successful family-school partnership. I also sought to understand how different stakeholders interpret and understand this type of partnership, as well as the strategies they use to manage it.

1.3 The purpose of this research

The purpose of my research is summarised in the study aim and objectives as outlined below.

1.3.1 The study aim

In this study, I aimed to investigate how township schools manage the family-school partnership to their own benefit, and to achieve this aim, I formulated four study objectives.

1.3.2 The study objectives

- Understand the role the tripartite stakeholder partnership (principals, teachers, parents) play in the management of the family-school partnership.
- Determine the management strategies, the schools employed to facilitate the family-school partnership.
- Describe the challenges the schools may experience in the management of the family-school partnership.
- Identify strategies that the schools employ to overcome such challenges.

1.4 Research questions

The main research question that guided the focus of my research was formulated as follows:

How do township secondary schools manage the family-school partnership for purposes of enhancing the quality of teaching and learning in township schools?

The sub-questions that were addressed in this study were the following:

(i) What roles do the main stakeholders (principals, teachers, parents) play in the management of a functional family-school partnership?

(ii) What management strategies do the schools employ in managing the family-school partnership?

(iii) What challenges have the schools experienced in the management of the family-school partnership?

(iv) How do the schools overcome the challenges above?

1.5   The rationale for this study

The literature studied attributed a poor family-school partnership to different reasons. Okeke (2014) suggests that a poor or complete lack of partnership between families and schools in South Africa is generally not because parents are not interested in partnering with the schools, but rather due to several mitigating factors. These are for instance problems of illiteracy, which make it difficult for parents to communicate with the school or help their children with homework, and poverty, which makes poor parents hesitant to engage with the school, for fear of being asked for financial contributions. According to Nojaja (2009:78-79), a lack of proficiency in English is part of these mitigating factors, and parents who cannot express themselves properly in the English language might shy away from engaging with the school for fear of embarrassment and humiliation. Despite all the factors that impede the effectiveness of a family-school partnership in South Africa township schools, some of these schools have – against all odds – utilised and benefited from such a partnership. The current study therefore aims to find out how these schools manage the family-school partnership to the benefit of their learners.

Besides, there is a budding body of knowledge in South Africa on family-school partnerships. A number of researchers investigated the roles of different stakeholders involved in the partnership: Makgopa and Mokhele (2013), as well as Lemmer (2009), examined teachers' perceptions, while Mncube (2013), Mncube and Mafora (2013) and Naong (2011) studied the role of the School Governing Body (SGB) in the partnership. Others investigated the role of parents in the partnership: Singh *et al.* (2004) investigated the influence that the engagement of black parents have on the performance of their children; Nojaja (2009) developed a model for active participation of parents in disadvantaged schools in South Africa, while Maluleke (2014) examined the way parents are enhancing their children's learning in schools in the Vhembe district in Limpopo. Brown and Duku (2008) studied the parents of learners in rural Eastern Cape schools to determine their contributions to the family-school partnership by means of school governance. The research mentioned above sought to contribute to the current body of knowledge by highlighting and investigating the management of the family-school partnership in certain township schools.

The expectation was that the outcome of the study may help township schools in South Africa adopt some of the factors behind the effective management of the family-school partnership in those schools, which could provide a different narrative of the management of the family-school partnership in South Africa township schools.

1.6 Literature review

The existing literature on family-school partnerships explores different perspectives on such a partnership, inter alia the effect of the family-school partnership on academic achievement (Ma, Shen, Krenn, Hu & Yuan, 2016; Goodwin, 2015; Wilder, 2014; Stewart, 2008; Jeynes, 2007), the link between the family-school partnership and school governance (Mncube & Mafora, 2013; Naong, 2011; Mncube, 2009), and the benefits of the family-school partnership for all stakeholders (i.e. learners, parents, and teachers) (Gestwicki, 2008; Brown & Duku, 2008). From a South African perspective, there is a budding body of knowledge on the family-school partnership (Bhengu & Myende, 2015; Maluleke, 2014; Makgopa & Mokhele, 2013; Mncube, 2010; Nojaja, 2009; Lemmer, 2009; Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009; Brown & Duku, 2008). The focus of this literature review is on analysing the available studies on family-school partnerships, both locally and internationally, as they relate to this study.

1.6.1 The family-school partnership

Although there is a considerable overlap between the family-school partnership and parental involvement in schools (Lazaridou & Gravani Kassida, 2015:98), it should be admitted that there is a slight difference between the two. In a partnership, there is an expectation of what each party (family and school) is bringing to the table (Haines *et al.*, 2015; Epstein, 2009). With parental involvement, the focus is mostly on the parents in terms of how they should be involved in their children's learning activities (LaRocque *et al.*, 2011; Mncube, 2010; Mncube, 2009).

It is therefore important to mention that the family-school partnership was the focus of this study for a few reasons.

(i) Firstly, it is the understanding in this study that formal education is the responsibility of all stakeholders, and each has a role to play for such education to take place.

(ii) Secondly, extensive literature exists in which parents are informed of what they are supposed to and not supposed to do, and in most cases, they are blamed when the school system fails.

(iii) Thirdly, the voice of the parent is rarely heard when issues of family-school partnership are discussed.

(iv) Finally, the school management team (represented by the school principal), which is supposed to oversee the management of the family-school partnership, was also the targeted population in this study.

A family-school partnership can be described as a situation where each party (home and school) brings their unique contributions to the table to work together towards achievement of the educational objectives. Unlike parental involvement, where the focus is on what the school expects from the parents, a family-school partnership is more of a two-way affair. Myende (2018:1001), in his study of what makes a school-community partnership functional, is of opinion that for any partnership to be functional and sustainable, there must be, "collaborative planning and decision making, effective two-way communication, eagerness to address power issues and the creation of a culture that promotes participative leadership". All these features of a partnership as articulated by Myende (2018) are found in the family-school partnership.

A partnership is crucial for the role that the family and the school play in the holistic development of learners. The family-school partnership involves a situation whereby educators and the school management create 'family-like' schools, where every child is treated as at home, and is made to feel special. In the same way, families create a 'school-like' family, where the child is acknowledged as a student at home and given all the support that is needed to succeed academically (Epstein, 2010:3).

As mentioned earlier, a substantial body of work on schools' partnerships with different stakeholders has been established in South Africa (Myende, 2018; Bhengu & Myende, 2015). However, not much has been done on the management of these partnerships. My research, therefore, focused on the family-school partnership in those township schools where the partnership has been managed effectively.

1.6.2 The importance of a family-school partnership

According to LaRocque *et al.* (2011:118), schools that have a wide range of programmes that involve parents tend to be more efficient than those that do not. Different authors have also conducted extensive research and highlighted the importance of a family-school partnership (Houston *et al.*, 2010; Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009; Gestwicki, 2008; Epstein, 2008). According to Christenson and Reschly (2010:31), an increasingly advanced body of work indicates that the collaboration of parents with the school in respect of learners' education, from pre-school to high school, makes a very important contribution to learners' achievement. In a study by Epstein (2011:238-244) and her team on how homework and family-school interaction were connected to learners' academic performance and conduct, it was found that learners who discuss school and homework with their parents are less stressed about their school work, inclined to perform better academically and they display good conduct.

Moreover, empirical evidence has shown that learners experience enhanced academic achievement when they receive good support from their parents (Ma *et al.*, 2016; Wilder, 2014; Epstein, 2011; Stewart, 2008; Jeynes, 2007). It is for these reasons that I was curious to investigate how township schools manage the family-school partnership to benefit the learners.

1.6.3 The role of teachers in the family-school partnership

Teachers are major stakeholders in family-school partnership and their role in it is crucial. Whatever strategy the SMT might come up with to establish a functional family-school partnership, the implementation of such strategy rests heavily on the teachers.

There have been attempts by governments, departments of education and higher institutions of learning to include the concept of partnership between families and schools in the Teacher Education Curriculum. In a study on parent-school relations in Australia, four key domains were identified in which the education programme in Australia prepares teachers for parent-school engagement. However, it was discovered that the downside of the initiative was a lack of continuity when teachers got to the field to practice (Saltmarsh, Barr & Chapman, 2015).

In South Africa, a Certificate Programme on Parent Involvement was introduced by the University of South Africa to prepare teachers for the implementation of effective family, school, and community partnerships. The programme's curriculum was designed using Epstein's model of family, school, and community partnership. A qualitative study (Lemmer, 2007) was conducted to explore how student teachers implemented this model in a few sample schools and four major themes emerged from the study:

(i) Creating a conducive environment that will cater for home and school activities.

(ii) Effective communication between home and school.

(iii) Broadening the concept of the parent and community.

(iv) Creating a result-orientated volunteering programme.

The above study by Lemmer (2007) is of great significance to my study, since it was also guided by Epstein's theory of overlapping spheres of influence. Teachers are part of the eco-system that implements Epstein's theory for the management of a family-school partnership.

1.6.4 The role of parents in the family-school partnership

Several authors have defined and described the role of parents within the family-school partnership framework. For instance, Okeke (2014:1) describes it as the supportive roles parents play in the academic attainment of their children, while Gestwicki (2008:127) defines it as encompassing the ways in which parents relate with the school – parents' participation in the school's policymaking, fundraising activities and volunteering work, and their exchange of information with the school. Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009:14), however, suggest that while parents' roles in the family-school partnership may have a different meaning to different people (teachers, parents, learners, policymakers and the public), there is a common goal. All the activities carried out by these different stakeholders bring together distinct spheres of home and school for the good of the child. The current study therefore concurred with that of Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009) and sought to understand how township schools manage the role of parents in this partnership for their own benefit.

1.6.5 School management team managing family-school partnership

The SMT plays a vital role in the implementation and management of any programme within the school system, including the family-school partnership initiative, and the principal is the main actor in this. According to Auerbach (2011:731), the principal should create a family-friendly school climate, address any barriers to the family-school partnership, take part in action teams for developing the partnership, make resources available to the partnership, and facilitate programmes on family-school activities.

Auerbach (2011) conducted a study on two Los Angeles school administrators in predominantly Latino immigrant schools that highlighted different school management approaches to the family-school partnership and identifies four types of management of family-school partnership in the process. **The Preventing Partnership**, which prevents parents from involving in school activities and shields the school from outside influence (parents inclusive). The **Nominal Partnership**, which involves parents, but limits and controls their involvement. **Traditional Partnership Management**, which encourages mutual communication between family and school and more family participation, but the agenda is still planned around the school's interests. **The Authentic Partnership**, which broadens the scope of management of the family-school partnership to include social justice, democratic participation, and cultural responsiveness. Auerbach (2011), however, realised that much more sophisticated research was necessary on the connection between school management and the family-school partnership. This study accepted this challenge by investigating how the SMTs in two township schools manage the family-school partnership to their benefit.

1.6.6 Strategies for boosting the family-school partnership

Okeke (2014:7) suggests that certain strategies must be established to have an effective family-school partnership for learners' wellbeing. To support this suggestion, authors and researchers such as Hornby and Lafaele (2011), Lemmer *et al.* (2010), Stinchfield and Zyromski (2010), Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009) and Gestwicki (2008) came up with different strategies and models for promoting a functional partnership between parents and schools: the compensation model, consensus model, and participation model. Hornby and Lafaele (2011:39) designed an explanatory model that identifies four factors that act as barriers to the family-school partnership. These

include **parent factors** that focus on parents' beliefs, status, cultural background, and gender; **child factors** that include age, capabilities, inabilities, and behavioural challenges; **parent-teacher factors** that include a diversity of goals, agendas, language, and attitudes; **societal factors** that include past history, demographics, partisan and pecuniary factors. The study by Hornby and Lafaele (2011) helped me to identify different strategies that township schools in my study used to manage a family-school partnership.

1.6.7 Barriers to the family-school partnership

Despite empirical evidence that highlights the importance of a family-school partnership, there are some barriers that hamper its effectiveness. I was interested in finding out if the schools in my study encountered barriers in their management of the family-school partnership. LaRocque *et al.* (2011:118) listed several difficulties that schools need to address to experience an effective family-school partnership. The first of these is the language barrier in the case of parents who lack proficiency in the English language; secondly, a physical barrier when school activities that involve parents do not fit into the parents' schedule; thirdly, the cultural barrier when parents are from a different cultural background; and fourthly, emotional barriers in the case of parents coming from an oppressive background and having a low level of education. In addressing barriers to the family-school partnership, Lemmer *et al.* (2010:217) also highlighted school, family, and community barriers that could hinder parents from giving the necessary support to their children to enhance their learning. When this happens, learners lose a critical support base for their education.

My extensive literature review confirmed that much has been reported about the family-school partnership. Reports deal with the overall aim of such partnership, structures that are involved, strategies put in place, management of the family-school partnership, as well as the importance of and barriers to an effective family-school partnership. However, very little (if any) attention has been paid to how township schools manage the family-school partnership for a positive learning experience, which is the gap that this study intended to fill.

1.7 The theoretical framework

I used the theoretical viewpoint that Epstein developed in the 1980s – the "overlapping spheres of influence" – to explore the phenomenon of family-school partnerships in

South African secondary schools. The theory postulates that, in addition to the independent responsibilities that the home and school have towards the learners, there are also shared responsibilities (Epstein, 2011:26). When home and school each sticks to their independent responsibilities, the spheres of influence are pulled apart, but when parents and teachers engage in their shared responsibility towards the learners, the spheres are pulled together, which enhances a functional partnership between school and home (Lemmer *et al.*, 2010:206).
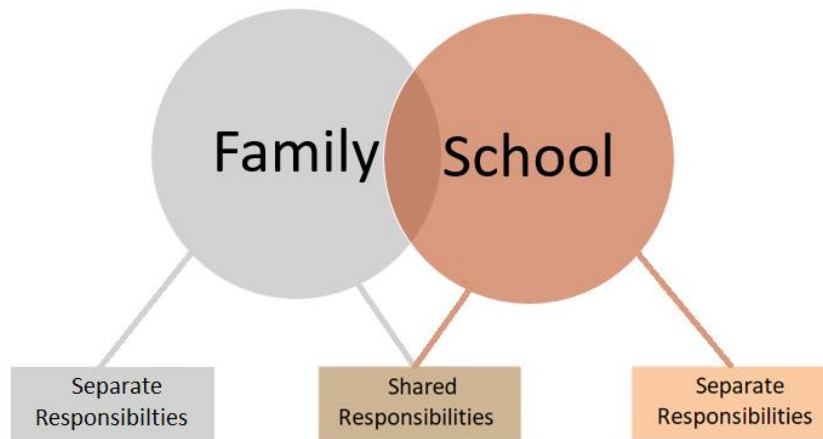
Figure 1.1: Epstein's theory of overlapping spheres of influence

The theory emphasises **separate responsibilities** of parents and the school in the family-school partnership, whereby the family creates **'a school-like'** environment and an atmosphere that supports children as students (Bhengu & Myende, 2015:229). The family provides all the assistance that learners need at home to enhance their learning, such as supplying learning materials and engaging with learners on how they are going about their academic work. I used this perspective to investigate how the parent participants viewed and performed their independent roles in their partnership with the school to ensure the academic and life success of their children. Also, the teachers create a **'family-like'** school, where there is a strong teacher-learner relationship, and teachers give individual attention to learners. I investigated how much of this existed among the participant teachers. I also explored the role that school principals as the leader of the SMT played in creating a **'family-like'** school.

However, as good as the idea of separate responsibilities may sound, if there is no synergy between the responsibilities of the two (the family and the school) or no overlapping of the two spheres, there cannot be a functional partnership between the

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two – hence the need for **shared responsibilities.** I used Epstein's proposed framework for Comprehensive Programs of Partnership (Figure 1.1) to investigate how teachers, principals, and parents in participating schools engaged in the family-school partnership. The framework proposes six different ways schools can engage in an effective partnership with the different stakeholders. I investigated how the schools were utilising this framework to manage the family-school partnership and how parents were responding to it.

Epstein's (2011) theory of "overlapping spheres of influence and framework of parental involvement" can be described as a tool of engagement that schools can use when partnering with different stakeholders in education (families included) – hence my choice of this theory to guide my study.

Table 1.1: Epstein's Framework for Comprehensive Programs of Partnership

Parenting	Schools providing necessary assistance to families for skills relating to parenting.
Communication	Schools creating a two-way communication channel between school and home.
Volunteering	Schools recruiting families as volunteers.
Learning at home	Schools collaborating with families over home learning activities, like homework.
Decision making	Schools involving family in governance and decision making.
Collaborating with community	Schools harnessing community resources for the benefit of learners' education

Source: Epstein (2011:395)

1.8   Research methodology

When conducting research, three elements are crucial to the process: The research paradigm, research approach, and research method (Creswell, 2014:5). In essence, to engage in a study, researchers must consider the philosophical worldviews and supposition upon which their study is based (**research paradigm**), the **research approach** that is correlated to this worldview, and the **research design**, which is the specific method (procedures) that will be used to convert the approach into practice (Creswell, 2014:5).

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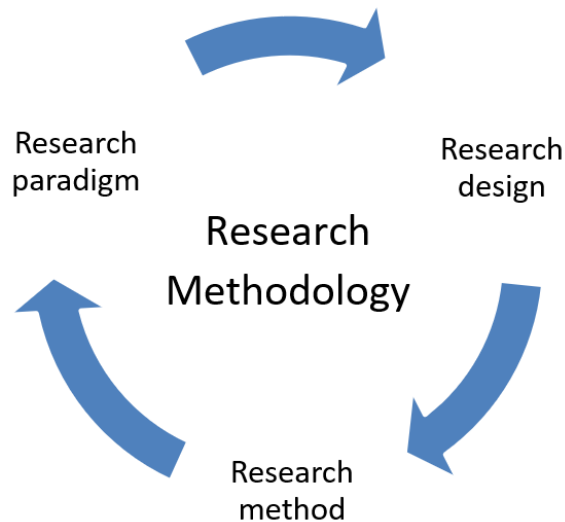
Figure 1.2: Research Methodology

1.8.1 Research paradigm: Interpretivism

My research was located within an interpretivist paradigm – a paradigm based on the supposition that, since different people explain events in different ways, social reality is characterised by a diversity of viewpoints, which leads to diverse perspectives on the event (Maree, 2016:52). I used this paradigm because the study aimed to analyse how parents, teachers and principals perceive and perform their roles within the management of the family-school partnership.

1.8.2 Research approach

The research approach is a strategy that moves from the fundamental theoretical postulations to specifying the choice of participants, data-gathering techniques to be used, and how data collected will be analysed (Maree, 2016:72). A research approach can use qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods. I adopted the qualitative research approach, which enabled me to investigate and comprehend the meaning that my study participants ascribed to the social and human phenomenon of the family-school partnership (Creswell, 2014:4). Using the qualitative research approach also allowed me to understand the life-world of individual participants (parents, teachers, and principals), and this enabled me to explore and explain the phenomenon from their different perspectives (Lemmer *et al.*, 2010:35).

1.8.3 Research design

The design of a research study involves the method/procedure used to conduct the specific research (Creswell, 2014:5). For this study, I employed a **case study** design – a design that is part of a qualitative research approach. It is normally used to develop a rich depiction of the object of study by using diverse kinds of data collection to gather the views and opinions of different individuals connected to the case (Hamilton, 2011:1). What mainly informed the choice of the case study as design, is the fact that my study was based on a single entity (township schools with effective family-school partnerships), and I intended to do an in-depth investigation of the object (the topic) of my study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014:370). Moreover, the participants in the study were connected by common characteristics (i.e., practitioners of family-school partnership), and therefore the parents as a group would share their opinions of the family-school partnership from the perspective of being parents. (The same principle would apply to the teachers and principals.) I also conducted an in-depth study by using focus group discussions and individual interview techniques to extract relevant information from my participants on site (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014:5).

1.8.3.1 Study sites

My study sites were two township secondary schools within the Tshwane education districts of Gauteng where an effective family-school partnership existed. In my quest to find township schools with a functional family-school partnership, I made numerous enquiries from relevant people to locate these schools. These were people who have connections with the township and semi-urban secondary schools, such as current and retired teachers and principals, as well as education inspectors (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014:377). And through my informal enquiry from them found out that the specific schools fitted into my definition of township secondary schools with effective family-school partnerships (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014:377),

1.8.3.2 Sampling

A sample is a portion that represents a whole. The sample is supposed to represent the whole so that we can say things about the whole based on information about the sample (Byrne, 2017:2). For this study, a purposive sampling technique was used to select township secondary schools with effective family-school partnerships.

Purposive sampling is a sampling process whereby the researcher chooses to study participants according to the purpose they serve in the study (Guest, Namey & Mitchell, 2013:48). The rationale behind my choice of such schools is that parents, teachers and principals in a township school with functional family-school partnerships fit into McMillan and Schumacher's (2014:349-351) description of 'information-rich' cases for in-depth study in my research. These participants would have key information on my subject of study, namely the management of effective family-school partnerships in township schools.

I also used the purposive sampling technique to select parent and teacher participants, based on the recommendations made by each school's principal of most available parents and most experienced teachers. This culminated in a sample of ten teachers, seven parents, two principals and two deputy principals from the two schools, which gave me 21 participants in total.

1.9   Data collection

Individual and focus group interview techniques, all of which are qualitative data collection techniques, were the sources of data collection for this research. These two techniques afforded me an in-depth view of the subject of management of the family-school partnership as discussed below. Since the information I sought to gather was the management of the family-school partnership of the schools under study, I designed the interview questions around Epstein's framework of the family-school partnership to determine how the schools were adopting this framework and how families responded to it.

1.9.1 Semi-structured individual interviews

Creswell (2014:191) defines the individual interview as a face-to-face, one-on-one, in-person interview. I engaged the principal of each school, being the leader of the school management team (SMT), as well as two deputy principals of one of the schools, in individual interviews. The purpose was to gather their opinions on the strategies each school's management uses to manage the family-school partnership. I considered them the most appropriate persons through whom I could get information on the SMT's strategies on the management of the family-school partnership. The same individual interview technique was also used to interview the parent participants. This interview was semi-structured (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014:381-382), and although the

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interview guide was predetermined and in sequence, the questions were open-ended, and no restrictions were placed on principals', deputies' or parents' responses during the interview.

1.9.2 The focus group interview

A focus group interview is a small group interview of selected persons to evaluate a problem (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014:3). I used this interview technique to investigate the perceptions of teacher participants in both schools on the management of the family-school partnership in their respective schools. This choice agrees with Maree's (2016:96) recommendation that five to 12 people could form a focus group, and Krueger and Casey's (2000) suggestion of between five and ten people per group. During the interviews, I used the interview guide technique, an approach where interview topics are pre-selected, but the researcher decides the order and phrasing of questions during the interview (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014:381). This enabled me to design the interview questions as they related to the theoretical framework of the study. Secondly, it helped me make the interview session conversational, which made participants more relaxed and allowed the interview to flow naturally. Thirdly, it afforded me the flexibility to manage the way the questions were asked as I interacted with participants about the topic. I audiotaped the interviews and then transcribed them to allow a proper transaction analysis. I also took notes during each interview.

My reason for using a focus group interview was owing to the common characteristics of the groups in terms of my study: the parents and teachers all shared their perception of the management of the family-school partnership (Krueger & Casey, 2000). With the focus group interview, I created a social environment through which participants in the group were encouraged by one another's opinions and felt free to share their thoughts freely (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014:389). I agree with Maree (2016:95) that group dynamics enriched the data collected during each session, because participants were allowed to have a guided robust discussion over issues among themselves. However, I was conscious of the fact that some participants might not be as perceptive as others or might feel threatened by others. Taking these possibilities into consideration, I watched out for those participants who might fall into this category and made a deliberate effort to acknowledge them and draw them into the discussion as much as possible.

1.10   Data analysis

In the analysis of qualitative data, the goal is to summarise all the information collected during the data collection process into "common words, phrases, themes or patterns" that would assist with comprehending and analysis of what is coming to the fore from the data (Maree, 2016:110).

For this study, data collected during the individual and focus group interviews was analysed by means of inductive analysis, a process through which qualitative data is organised into groups and prototypes and links are identified among the groups.

The following process was used to analyse the data as recommended by Maree (2016), Creswell (2014) and McMillan and Schumacher (2014):

Collect data – My data collection was conducted using qualitative data collection techniques discussed under Data collection in 1.9.

Describe data – I gave a detailed description of my site, participants (but adhered to the confidentiality and ethical principles), the circumstances under which data was collected, and the participants' selection process.

Organise data – I first organised the interview data according to the focus group (audio records and back-up notes taken during the interview), and clearly labelled it as to where, when, and how each detail was collected. Each batch of focus group interviews was stored in separate folders and clearly labelled for easy retrieval when needed. I also organised the individual interviews by clearly labelling each participant's interview.

Transcribing data into segments – Data collected via audio recording was transcribed according to each focus group and individual interview, and properly labelled in respect of when and where the group and individuals were interviewed.

Code data – The transcribed data of each focus group and individual principal was separated into sub-themes of similar ideas and marked with easy-to-identify descriptions or symbols.

Data interpretation – This was the final stage of data analysis during which I interpreted my findings. At this stage, I made deductions about how each stakeholder perceived their role in the partnership, strategies they employed to manage the family-

school partnership, the challenges that each faced with the partnership, and strategies they employed to overcome such challenges.

1.11   Trustworthiness of the research

Trustworthiness in qualitative research is attained by ensuring the validity of the results (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014; Creswell, 2014). Validity in qualitative research can be described as the degree of similarity between the explanation of the phenomenon and its reality on ground (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014:354). The validity and reliability of this study's findings depended on the extent to which my interpretations of the data synchronised with the participants' accounts.

To enhance the validity and reliability of this study, I applied some of the strategies for enhancing validity as proposed by McMillan and Schumacher (2014) and Creswell (2014): I engaged in a relatively protracted and lengthy fieldwork (July to November), during which I captured verbatim accounts in the participants' language as much as I could and sought clarification where the point made was not clear. Also, I used a recording device for data collection, which enabled me to go over and over the points raised by participants until I got clarity about issues. I explained to the participants the usage of the recording device and asked for their permission to use the device before the interview commenced, which they granted. I used the strategy of member checking to check the accuracy of my findings – in other words I conducted follow-up interviews to confirm with participants the accuracy of my findings based on the information they provided. To add validity to the study, I involved a fellow Master's degree student in a peer debriefing by asking her to review my study and ask questions for clarification.

1.12   Ethical considerations in the study

Because humans are a central focus in educational research, it is the responsibility of the researcher to protect the rights and safety of the participants (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014:23). To comply with this ethical principle, I

- obtained ethical clearance from the University of Pretoria's Ethics Committee.
- sought permission from the Department of Basic Education and from the schools where the research was conducted before the study commenced.

- observed all the principles of the Research Ethics Committee of the University of Pretoria in terms of voluntary participation of participants, informed consent, safety in participation, privacy, and trust.
- did not expose participants to undue physical or psychological harm.
- enlightened the participants on the nature of the study to be conducted, as well as gave them the choice to participate and the freedom to withdraw from participating whenever they wished; and
- reported my research findings completely and honestly.

1.13 Conclusion

Chapter 1 presented the background to the study, the research problem, the rationale for the study, as well as the main research question and sub questions. The next chapter explores relevant available literature on the subject, as well as the theoretical framework on which the study rests.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1   Introduction

In this chapter, the concept of the family-school partnership is explored as discoursed by various authors, both locally and internationally. It is looked at from their perspective on the purpose of this study: management of the partnership by its principal stakeholders (i.e. teachers, parents and principals), the factors that enhanced or acted as barriers to the partnership, as well as relevant existing studies on family-school partnerships in South African township schools. The literature related to this study was reviewed to establish what research exists on the topic and explore its findings. The management of the family-school partnership, which is the core focus of study, was explored with reference to Epstein's Framework for Comprehensive Programs of Partnership (Epstein, 2011).

2.2   Global perspectives on the family-school partnership

According to the School-Wide Integrated Framework for Transformation or SWIFT (2014), the family-school partnership that contributes positively to learners' holistic achievement happens when

- there is a relationship focusing on education of the learners that works for the good of both families and the school.
- families can be significantly involved in their children's learning activities and in school life generally; and
- the school is receptive to families' expressions of interest in their children's learning activities and school life.

In the USA, school systems and government agencies believe so strongly in the significance of involving families in their children's learning activities, that they developed policies and strategies to facilitate such involvement (Gestwicki, 2010:141). One example is the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 2002, popularly referred to as 'No Child Left Behind' (NCLB)'. One of the core pillars of this Act is the home and school officially taking collective responsibility for learners' success, and parents are officially informed of the details of school life (LaRocque *et al.*, 2011; Gestwicki, 2010).

In the Czech Republic, there is the concept of 'open school', which refers to the openness of schools towards their learners' parents and the public. Empirical evidence by Deslandes (2009:33) reveals that headmasters in Czech schools consider good relations with parents among the main priorities of their managerial duties and see it as a very important task. However, when supplemented by a qualitative research survey, it was revealed that the perspectives of headmasters and teachers regarding the 'open school' system was marred with numerous obstacles that prevented its full implementation. In fact, parents merely acted as relatively satisfied customers, without being actively engaged in a partnership with the school, and they became active only when their interests were at risk.

In a comparative study of the family-school partnership in two Chinese communities, Macao and Hong Kong, the following was found: In Macao, government policy on the home-school collaboration policy introduced between 2001 and 2002 mandated the Education and Youth Affairs Bureau to support a formal teacher-training programme on parental participation regarding children's education in three government departments. These were the Division of Continuing Education responsible for parent education, the Division of Pre-school, and Primary Education, and the Secondary and Vocational Technical Education which had to promote the training of teachers and parents for home-school collaboration. In Hong Kong, the home-school collaboration policy mandated the inclusion of parents in school management committees, the establishment of Parent-Teacher Associations in schools, and the reinforcement of parents' role in evaluating school quality (Deslandes, 2009).

A study in Kenya found that the engagement of parents in the financial management of schools had a positive effect on the finances of the schools. It was therefore suggested that major role players in education must encourage parental engagement in schools because of the importance of finance in school management outcomes (Koross, Ngware & Sang, 2009). In Ethiopia, they found that parents' active participation in schools had positive effects on school quality (Koross *et al.*, 2009). For instance, it was easy for parents to closely monitor the behaviour and school attendance of their children. Furthermore, an improved partnership between teachers and parents brought about greater security and a higher enrolment of girls in schools. Parents also suggested strategies that improved the schools (Koross *et al.*, 2009). In Mali, parents were part of the School Management Committee (SMC), a body that has

authority over the employment of teachers, school fees, and basic operations of community schools (Koross *et al.*, 2009).

Despite different policies adopted by different nations that promote the family-school partnership as discussed above, there seem to be lapses when it comes to the implementation of those policies. According to Okeke (2014:4), most participants in her study believed that policy documents on parents partnering with the school were not explicit enough, which in turn hindered them from knowing how to engage in the process.

2.3   South Africa's perspective on the family-school partnership

Historically, the education system in South Africa pre-1994 subscribed to unjust laws and policies introduced by the apartheid system, with segregated provision of education along racial lines (Booyse, 2011; Lemmer *et al.*, 2010). This, together with other factors like the migrant labour system, led to the fragmented family life of the black population, which challenged the involvement of black parents in the learning activities of their children (Lemmer *et al.*, 2010:118). Empirical evidence reveals that black parents currently are not active role players in the education of their children due to factors associated with the disadvantaged position of these parents (Okeke, 2014; Maluleke, 2014; Parmaswar, 2014; Naidoo & Perumal, 2014; Ramadikela, 2012).

Politically, it has been observed that when countries gain independence and establish democratic governments, they usually adopt national transformation strategies that include reconstruction of the education system (Lemmer *et al.*, 2010:202). A similar scenario came to play in South Africa after the democratic elections of 1994. Policies were designed to correct the injustices of the past in the country's system of education. According to Section 29 of the Constitution, "everyone has the right to basic education, which the state through reasonable measures must make progressively available and accessible". In implementing this section of the Constitution, the state enacted education policies that make provision for parents' input in the learning activities of their children.

One of such policies is contained in Section 23 of SASA, which provides for the participation of parents in the governance structure of public schools as from January 1997, and the potential election of the parents of learners at every public school to the SGB. To achieve this, the Act makes provision not only for the inclusion of parents in

the governance structure of public schools, but also for a greater representation of parents in SGBs. Section 23(9) of SASA states that the number of parent governors in the SGB must be one member more than the number of other governors with voting rights.

Also, the Department of Education encourages the involvement of parents in school life. The White Paper on Education and Training, clearly states that "the principle of democratic governance should increasingly be reflected in every level of the system, by the involvement in consultation and appropriate forms of decision-making of elected representatives of the main stakeholders, interest groups, and role players" (DoE, 1995:17). It is therefore necessary to explore how parents make use of the powers vested in them by legislation and policies to engage with the school in the learning activities of their children.

Socially, the family structure in South Africa has been affected by HIV/AIDS and teenage pregnancy. Therefore grandparents, older siblings and single mothers are nowadays part of children's caregivers in different households. Schools also need to accept that family structures have changed from the traditional form, and there is a need to understand, accept and welcome different types of families (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009:8). It is also necessary for schools to design family-school partnership programmes that will cater for different family structures and reach all those caring for children (Lemmer *et al.*, 2010:203).

2.4   Management of the family-school partnership

"When administrators and teachers in schools decided that reaching out to include families is an important part of their mission, they have taken a first step toward creating partnerships. Having made that decision, they can then design the policies and practices to work with families" (Gestwicki, 2008:221).

"Meaningful partnerships with parents must be purposely cultivated and planned for, especially when the school's focus is on instructional excellence" (Houston et al., 2010:4).

The above statements underscore the importance of proper management of the family-school partnership**.** However, this is only possible when there is synergy between major stakeholders in the partnership. In the remainder of this section, I

explore the roles of major stakeholders (teachers, principals, and parents) in the family-school partnership, as documented by various scholars and studies. These stakeholders were crucial to my study as they were the main participants through whom I explored the concept of the management of the family-school partnership.

2.4.1 Parent factors in the management of the family-school partnership

Many authors have defined and described the parental role in the family-school partnership in different ways. Makgopa and Mokhele (2013:220) define it as the supportive roles parents play in the academic achievement of their children, as well as their participation in their children's school life. LaRocque *et al.* (2011:116) define the parental role as the contribution of parents towards their children's learning endeavours. Okeke (2014:1) describes it as the way parents actively partner with the school over their children's schooling, while Maluleke (2014:3) describes it as an opportunity for the parents to improve their child's academic performance by getting involved in their learning activities in and out of school. From the perspective of other researchers, the role of the parent in the family-school partnership entails supporting children with homework, acting as volunteers, attending parent-teacher association meetings, visiting the child's classroom, being involved in school activities, and becoming part of the school governance system (Okeke, 2014; LaRocque *et al.*, 2011; Naong, 2011).

Moreover, empirical evidence shows that when parents become active players in the education of their children by partnering with the school, such partnership yields positive academic results – for example, higher math and reading scores, better student attendance, less grade retention, and improved scholastic performance (Okeke & Van Wyk, 2016; Ramadikela, 2012; Walker & Dotger, 2012; LaRocque *et al.*, 2011; Lemmer, 2009; Anderson & Minke, 2007). It also yields positive non-academic outcomes like improved learner behaviour, improved attitudes towards the school, a lower dropout rate, reduced disciplinary problems, learners' effectiveness, cost savings to the school through parents' volunteer works and financial contributions, as well as parents' sense of ownership of the school (Lazaridou & Gravani Kassida, 2015; Okeke, 2014; Evans & Radina, 2014; Ramadikela, 2012; Walker & Dotger, 2012; Christenson & Reschly, 2010; Lemmer, 2009).

Furthermore, empirical evidence shows that socio-economic factors often cause parents' poor engagement with the family-school partnership. It is suggested that the active involvement of parents with low economic status in the learning activities of their children is likely to be poorer than that of parents of high socio-economic status (Maluleke, 2014; Turney & Kao, 2009; Singh *et al.*, 2004). As accurate as this may be, there are exceptions where parents from low economic status are actively engaged in the education of their children. Altschul (2012:25) found that, despite the high poverty rate among Mexican Americans, average Mexican American parents care deeply for the academic wellbeing of their children; therefore, they are actively involved in the learning activities of their children through their individual social and human capital.

Despite the myriad of advantages attributed to parents' partnering with the school about the education of their children and the growing body of knowledge on parents' active engagement with the school over the learning activities of their children, research has shown that the level of South African parents' engagement with their children's school appears to be quite low (Makgopa & Mokhele, 2013; Mncube, 2009). In a situation where parents do not engage with the school, there cannot be any form of partnership – let alone a functional one. This study therefore explored the situation in South African township secondary schools where there was a high level of engagement between families and schools, and the strategies the stakeholders employed to achieve a functional family-school partnership.

2.4.2   Teacher factors in the management of the family-school partnership

"Without the establishment of a positive working relationship with families, much of what the teacher would like to do does not get done or does not get done as well as it could" (Gestwicki, 2010:169)*.*

"Teacher leadership is central in the functionality and continuity of partnership"
(Myende, 2018:15)*.*

The above statements give credence to the importance of teachers' role in the effective family-school partnership. Different authors describe this in different ways, and various studies highlight this fact. Gestwicki (2010:176) found that, when teachers have a quality relationship with parents, students benefit greatly from this relationship and improve their academic performance. It also serves as motivation for students' behavioural, social, and emotional adjustment (Walker & Dotger, 2012). Furthermore,

a productive partnership between teacher and parent is not only beneficial to the child, but also benefits the parents and the teachers (LaRocque *et al.*, 2011; Gestwicki, 2010).

Regardless of the crucial and beneficial role of teachers in an effective and functional family-school partnership, many teachers, according to LaRocque *et al.* (2011:115), acknowledge that they are not well equipped when it comes to relating with parents. This finding is supported by a study on how the issue of the relationship between parents and school is addressed in the training programme of Australian teachers. Saltmarsh *et al.* (2015:1) found the level of training for teacher trainees on how to effectively engage with their learners' parents to be insufficient. My study therefore investigated how teacher participants, despite little or no training, engage with parents. I also tried to determine what factors are responsible for their effective engagement, which contributes to the functional family-school partnership in their respective schools.

2.4.3 Principal's role in the management of family-school partnership

In his study of what makes school-community partnerships sustainable, Myende (2018) found that, for a partnership of which the family is an integral part, the principal as leader plays a critical role at the inception of the partnership. Ramadikela (2012:4) agrees that the success of any school programme involving parents depends on how hands-on the principal is in terms of such a programme. The principal's role is critical because part of his responsibility is the coordination and guidance of the SMT and SGB in line with the school's vision. According to Masha (2017:40), the principal is in the best position to inspire parents and teachers to work together towards assisting learners to perform optimally.

In contrast, Epstein (2010:89) argues that because of the broad outlook of the partnership, it will be a daunting undertaking for the principal alone to steer the management of the partnership. She proposes the establishment of a school-based action team to manage the partnership within every school structure, and to take responsibility for coordinating the partnership process. Teachers from different grades, student delegates, a minimum of one community member, and the school principal, should constitute the membership of this action team.

2.5   Barriers to the management of the family-school partnership

Notwithstanding the importance of the family-school partnership, certain factors are barriers to its effectiveness. Ramadikela (2012:38) defines these barriers as obstacles or problems that inhibit the enhancement of dynamic relationships between parents and schools.

LaRocque *et al.* (2011:118) name certain factors such as emotional, language, physical and cultural barriers that militate against parents' active engagement in partnership with the school and propose strategies that schools can employ to overcome them.

Furthermore, all the participants (parents, teachers and principals) in Ramadikela's (2012:98-104) study of the management of parent involvement in historically disadvantaged secondary schools in the Tshwane West District listed factors such as time, illiteracy, parents' lack of education, the poor communication channel between teachers and parents, diverse family structures, unemployment and socio-economic factors as barriers to parents' role in partnering with the schools. Other authors and scholars allude to these factors as well (Masha, 2017; Maluleke, 2014; Ramadikela, 2012; Naong, 2011; Singh & Mbokodi, 2011; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; LaRocque *et al.*, 2011; Mncube, 2009; Gestwicki, 2008; Singh *et al.*, 2004).

Research also reveals the following as underlying factors that hamper an effective family-school partnership. Firstly, although many parents want to be involved in an effective partnership with their children's school, they do not know how. Secondly, in many cases teachers also do not know how to engage in a dynamic partnership with the parents (Robinson, 2017; Okeke & Van Wyk, 2016; Makgopa & Mokhele, 2013; LaRocque *et al.*, 2011).

It should be noted that some (if not most) of these barriers that prevent a functional family-school partnership as highlighted by various authors and studies, exist in South African township schools. Nevertheless, some of these township schools have succeeded – against all odds – in maintaining a functional family-school partnership. I was curious to find out which specific barriers these schools encountered in their management of an effective family-school partnership.

2.6 Family-school partnership in South African township schools

South African townships, a product of the apartheid regime, are racially separated urban areas, earmarked for non-whites (Indians, Africans and coloureds) and dating from the late 19th century till the first democratic elections in 1994. These informal settlements are recipients of poor or non-existing basic service delivery (i.e. sewerage, electricity, roads, clean water) which adversely affects residents' quality of life (Wikipedia, 2010).

South African township communities can be categorised as disadvantaged communities, which Naidoo and Perumal (2014:4) describe as communities dealing with poor living conditions, an unhealthy environment and poverty, and whose residents are often subjected to unfair treatment characterised by a lack of respect and dignity.

The conditions in township communities reflect on the township schools, which leaves them at a disadvantage compared to advantaged schools in other parts of the country. Most of the township schools are poorly equipped and characterised by inadequate Learner-Teacher-Support Materials (LSMTs), overcrowded classrooms, unqualified and under-qualified teachers, and unconducive environments (Sedibe, 2011:2; Felix, Dornbrack & Scheckle, 2008).

Empirical evidence (Maluleke, 2014; Okeke, 2014; Nojaja, 2009; Singh *et al.*, 2004) abounds of poor family-school partnerships in township schools due to many factors related to the disadvantaged state of both the township communities and township schools. In their investigation into how the performance of learners from traditional African communities in South Africa is influenced by the level of their parents' involvement in their education, Parmaswar (2014), Naidoo and Perumal (2014) and Singh *et al.* (2004), found the following:

- Home conditions for most of the learner participants were not conducive to learning. Over 70% of the homes were not learning friendly.
- Most of the parents did not understand their role as parents. Over 90% of the parents believed that the school was fully responsible for the education of their children. Thus, they did not see any reason for partnering with the school over their children's schooling.

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- Most of the parents/caregivers lacked the capacity to assist their wards with schoolwork due to their own low level of education.

All of these findings had a negative impact on the children's academic performance. Most of the factors deviate from Epstein's framework of what constitutes a functional family-school partnership (Epstein, 2011).

Parmaswar (2014:56-59) identified the following barriers to parents' effective collaboration with the school in disadvantaged communities of KwaZulu-Natal: intellectual constraints, physical constraints, communication, and ignorance. Nojaja (2009) concluded that despite the negative narratives of a poor family-school partnership in most disadvantaged communities in South Africa, there is willingness and openness from both schools and parents to engage in a dynamic family-school partnership.

2.7   Strategies for boosting the family-school partnership

Clear-cut strategies need to be employed by schools to achieve the desired result of a functional and effective family-school partnership. Research (Okeke, 2014; Makgopa & Mokhele, 2013; Lemmer *et al.*, 2010; Gestwicki, 2010) reveals the need for different strategies to strengthen the partnership between families and the school, some of which are highlighted below.

2.7.1 Policies on parents' role in family-school partnership

Okeke (2014:5) found that although there is government policy in England (where his study was conducted) on the engagement of parents in their children's learning, the policy fails to spell out how parents and schools should initiate and grow this engagement. Parents are therefore calling for a more structured guideline for parents' engagement with the school. According to Makgopa and Mokhele (2013:219), government policy in England has for many years encouraged parents to participate in their children's learning activities, and most schools have responded by developing a range of strategies to assist parents in helping their children with their schoolwork at home.

2.7.2 Involving parents in curriculum matters

Involving parents in curriculum planning, development, implementation, and evaluation is a good way of strengthening the home-school partnership. When parents are involved in the curriculum process, it makes it easier for them to own the content of the curriculum and assist the children with it.

2.7.3 Parents' evening

Parents' evening is an event when both parents and teachers learn about the school and about the home. It is the best opportunity for teachers to communicate with parents about their children and solicit their support in educating those children. Although parents' evenings were held in the school of his study, Okeke (2014:5) found that parents felt it was done more at the instance of the school, without much input from parents. Parents' participation in planning the evening would ensure that their interests, like the time and structure of the evening, are taken care of.

2.7.4 Home visits

This a very efficient strategy for the development of an effective family-school partnership. Home visits provide opportunities for teachers to have a better understanding of the child's background and to develop a healthy relationship with the parents and other members of that family.

2.7.5 Parent-teacher associations (PTAs)

PTAs are part of an age-long strategy for strengthening the family-school partnership. A PTA is a social platform for teachers and parents to meet and rub minds over issues that concern the school and the children. It is also used to organise fundraisings for the school. According to Okeke (2014:7), the best way to secure parents' participation in PTA meetings is by sending the meeting agenda to parents ahead of time, and to include a questionnaire that enables them to indicate their availability or non-availability for the meeting. In South Africa, SGB play the role of boosting family-school partnership, as stipulated in Section 23 of SASA.

Parent-teacher conferences

A parent-teacher conference is a formal and structured platform for parents and teachers to meet to have a robust conversation around the common denominator

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between the two – the child. According to Lemmer (2012:83), focused parent-teacher conferences create the platform for teachers and parents to jointly tackle specific issues relating to the child, such as academic and behaviour issues. According to Hornby and Lafaele (2011:44), teachers must use this platform to update parents on their child's progress and any challenges the child may be facing. They must also enquire from the parents how the child is handling their schooling and inform parents how they can assist the learner at home.

The parents, on the other hand, should not only use the platform to discuss their child's progress with the teachers, but also use the opportunity to get to know how the school system works. Furthermore, they should discuss any concerns they have with the teachers. Gestwicki (2010:330) believes the parent-teacher conference allows both family and teacher to learn new information, assess their progress towards mutual and separate goals for children, and grow their relationships.

Interestingly, local studies such as those by Makgopa and Mokhele (2013) and Nojaja (2009) have indicated the existence of some of the above strategies for an effective family-school partnership in some disadvantaged schools in South Africa. My study therefore delved deeper into the existence of these strategies in the township schools in my study. I also investigated other strategies they may have been using (beside the existing ones) and how the implementation of the strategies has worked to their benefit.

2.8 Theoretical framework: Epstein's model of overlapping spheres of influence

Joyce Epstein and her colleagues have done extensive work on family, school, and community partnerships. Several authors have proceeded to use her work to study different phenomena relating to partnerships (Myende, 2018; Masha, 2017; Ramadikela, 2012; Naong, 2011; Nojaja, 2009; Mncube, 2009).

I used Epstein's model to assess the degree of effectiveness of the family-school partnership in this study and focused on her 'Framework of Six Types of Involvement for Comprehensive Programs of Partnership'. The essence of this framework is for schools to plan and implement activities that will enhance the family-school partnership. The framework as analysed by Myende (2018), Ramadikela (2012),

Epstein (2008; 2010; 2011), Naong (2011), Lemmer *et al.* (2010), Gestwicki (2010), and Christenson and Reschly (2010), is presented below to provide a broad view of the model.

2.8.1 Parenting

Schools provide numerous activities to assist families with effective parenting, which include the following:

- Strengthening parenting and child-rearing skills
- Providing child development knowledge
- Understanding the development of the child and adolescent
- Empowering parents with the knowledge to create an enabling and academic-friendly environment at home

These activities can be offered through workshops to educate parents on different topics, inter alia, drug abuse, health issues, the creation of an enabling and academic-friendly environment at home, etc.

2.8.2 Communication

Research has shown that a lack of communication is the cause of failure of the partnership in many cases (Myende & Chikoko, 2014; Myende, 2013). It also seems that communication helps to create lasting relationships (Bhengu & Myende, 2015).

Effective communication occurs when the school involves parents in its operations by regularly disseminating information to them on learners' progress, school activities, and events. Communication can take place via phone calls, notices, conferences, memos, and electronic devices.

2.8.3 Volunteering

Volunteering involves schools' recruiting of parents as voluntary helpers to support learners and assist with school events. This may include parents enlisting as volunteers to assist teachers, learners and school administrators with school and classroom activities. Schools may even arrange a time for parents to educate learners about their potential and career choices, or recruit and train parents to serve as volunteer coaches and mentors.

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2.8.4 Learning at home

This type of involvement refers to the support system schools put in place to assist parents to help their children with schoolwork at home. It includes, among others, schools equipping families with the required skills for school subjects for every grade and schools supplying parents with homework policies. Parents are guided to assist learners with their schoolwork at home, and to hone their skills to successfully deal with school assessments.

2.8.5 Decision making

The school should include families as part of its governance structure by involving parents in the various leadership organs of the school. Parents should be involved in different stages (developing, reviewing, etc.) of school policies that concern learners and families. Also, the school should involve parents in the different committees and teams that are parent and learner related.

2.8.6 Collaborating with the community

Collaborating with the community refers to schools working with families to harness community resources for the school's benefit. This includes identifying and liaising with businesses as well as groups and entities in the community who can through their human and social capital add great value to the school.

2.8.7 Implementation of Epstein's framework

Epstein (2011:55-56) offers more insight into her framework by asking the following questions to assist stakeholders in the implementation of the framework:

Parenting

- How are the workshop topics selected, conducted, and disseminated so that all families (not just those who can come to school) can obtain and apply information on topics that are important to parents?
- What short- and long-term effects do parental participation in or information from workshops on parenting and child-rearing across the grades have on parents, students and schools?
- How does information from families about their children assist educators or other parents?

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Communication

- How are report cards explained so that all can understand them?
- How can families be helped to work with their children and teachers if they (and the students) believe that better grades are attainable?
- What are the results of these efforts on student report card grades?
- How can the parent-teacher conference be designed, scheduled, and conducted to increase the attendance of parents who work outside the home?
- How are students included in and affected by parent-teacher or parent-student-teacher conferences that deal with student attendance, behaviour, attitudes, achievement, goal setting, or other topics?
- How is information provided on school programmes or course choices so that all families can understand and discuss the options and consequences of choices with their children?
- How do such discussions affect the patterns of choices that are made?

Volunteering

- How are volunteers recruited, welcomed, trained, and evaluated?
- How are the skills and talents of volunteers identified and matched with the needs of teachers, students, and administrators?
- How do various volunteer programmes and activities affect student learning, attitudes, and behaviour; teacher attitudes towards parents; parent attitudes and skills; and other families?

Learning at home

- In which forms can information about students' classwork and homework be offered to help families assist their children with their school responsibilities?
- How can activities be designed to enable families to use their unique 'funds of knowledge' to motivate their youngsters to learn new things at home? Which activities can serve as means through which learners can bond with their families over things they are learning?
- How do activities at home that promote student and family interaction affect students' attitudes, skills, and homework?

Decision making

- How can all families give information to and receive information from parent leaders who represent them on councils and committees?
- How do family or community representatives on school site councils, school improvement teams, or committees alter (1) school improvement plans and activities or (2) the knowledge and attitudes of all parents about the school?

Collaborating with the community

- How can schools help families to obtain useful information about and access to community programmes, services, and resources that may benefit them and their children?
- Which forms or approaches are most effective for sharing this information with all families?
- What effects will these approaches have on students' work in school?
- How can schools, families, and students contribute to their communities, and with what effect?

The interview focus for this study during my fieldwork was based on three of the six fields of Epstein's framework, namely:

(i) Communication
(ii) Volunteering
(iii) Learning at home

These three fields were identified as most suitable for the study because they speak to the research questions. They were therefore used as the yardstick to measure the role of each participant teacher, parent, and principal in the family-school partnership and to determine how those roles contribute to the school's successful family-school partnership.

2.9   Conclusion

A range of relevant literature in the form of journals, textbooks, dissertations, and online sources was studied in this chapter and the following concepts were reviewed as they relate to the research problem:

- The global, continental, and South African outlook on the family-school partnership.

- The roles of principal stakeholders in the management of the family-school partnership.

- Strategies for boosting the family-school partnership.

- Barriers against the family-school partnership.

- The theoretical framework on which the study was based.

All these served as a compass for navigating the research problem.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1   Introduction

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2014:6), research is an organised way of data collection and analysis to achieve a specific objective. This systematic process involves the identification of a research paradigm, which includes the philosophical worldviews and supposition upon which the study is based (Creswell, 2014:5). The research approach refers to strategies and techniques used in the research, covering the steps followed from general postulation, to meticulous data collection, and analysis procedures (Creswell, 2014:3). The research methods refer to the tools used for collecting data (Maree, 2016:51). In summary, this chapter therefore presents the details of the research paradigm upon which my study was based, the research approach I employed to carry out this study, and the research tools used to collect the data.

3.2   Research paradigm

According to Maree (2016:52), a research paradigm is a set of suppositions about an important facet of realism which has led to the emergence of a specific worldview. The research paradigm could be interpretivism, post-positivism, a critical theory approach, or symbolic interactionism. My study was located within the interpretivist paradigm and based on the assumption that social reality is characterised by a diversity of viewpoints. This is because different people explain events in different ways, which leads to diverse perspectives on the event (Maree, 2016:52). Using the interpretive approach, I obtained diverse the viewpoints of the main stakeholders – principals, teachers, and parents – in the family-school partnership. I relied heavily on their views on the management of the family-school partnership in their respective schools (Creswell, 2014:8). However, as an interpretivist/constructivist researcher, rather than being objective, I took into account my professional judgements and perspective in the interpretation of data (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014:14).

3.3   Research approach

This study employed a qualitative research approach, which falls under the interpretivism paradigm (the paradigm under which this study is located). Qualitative research as defined and described by various authors has the following features

(Maree, 2016; Creswell, 2014; McMillan & Schumacher, 2014; Guest *et al.*, 2013; Joseph & Russell, 2012; Willig, 2008):

- It involves a naturalistic approach, whereby things are studied in their natural setting.

- It relies on words, rather than on numerical data.

- It captures reality from the perspective of participants' experience, not as the researcher's preconceived opinion.

- It occurs within a social context.

- It involves exploratory research questions.

- It focuses on the meaning that participants attach to events in their lives.

- It involves inductive and deductive data analysis.

- It attempts to make sense of or to interpret the phenomenon concerned from the participants' perspective.

In this study, the qualitative research approach allowed me to understand the lifeworld of individual participants (parents, teachers, and principals) within the school, which is the natural domain of operations of the family-school partnership. It further enabled me to investigate and comprehend the meaning the stakeholders in the partnership ascribed to the social and human phenomenon of a family-school partnership. Thus, I was able to explore and explain the phenomenon from their perspective (Maree, 2016; Creswell, 2014; McMillan & Schumacher, 2014; Guest *et al.*, 2013).

Furthermore, the qualitative approach enabled me to use inductive and deductive data analysis. By inductive analysis, I established a wide range of themes after I had worked back and forth on the data. Deductive analysis forced me to re-look at the data and seek if I could find more evidence to support the established themes, or if I needed to gather more information (Creswell, 2014:186).

However, despite all the great features of the qualitative research approach discussed above, I would be remiss if I did not take into consideration the weaknesses and limitations of this approach. One of such weaknesses is the time-consuming nature of its analysis (Guest *et al.*, 2013:23). From the rigour of transcribing, to the thoroughness

of coding and the strenuous exercise of data interpretation, qualitative research data analysis can be very daunting. However, the solution to this challenge is that qualitative samples most of the time do not require large samples (Guest *et al.*, 2013). In the case of my research two schools were involved, with 21 participants in total. The compactness of the data size allowed me to make a comprehensive and thorough analysis of the data.

Also, in cases where another language is involved, the extra work of translation is a further limitation of the qualitative research design (Guest *et al.*, 2013). This affected me personally because I do not speak any of the indigenous languages of the community where the schools are located. I did however manage to design a mechanism around that to ease the burden of translation during transcribing. I have discussed this mechanism in detail under 'Personal Declaration' later in this chapter.

Moreover, by design, qualitative research is interpretative, which implies that it leans heavily on the researcher's interpretation of the event being studied. This adds some limitations to the design and may compromise the trustworthiness of the research if not handled carefully. One such limitation is the researcher's own biases, values, and personal background and experience, which may shape the interpretation of the study. (Creswell, 2014:187-188). Fortunately, none of these limitations affected me personally since I did not have any prior connection with the schools under study nor with the communities where the schools are located. I went to the field on a very neutral ground.

As discussed below, I incorporated the case study as the research design for this study, as it falls within the qualitative research approach (Hamilton, 2011:1).

3.3.1 Case study design

The case study design allows a thorough analysis of a specific phenomenon, studied within its authentic setting. Data is collected on or concerning a single entity (a person, a group of people, or an incident). In certain instances, more than one case may be studied (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014:370). The main objective of a case study is to spot something distinct about the case, and then to study and understand that uniqueness. The results of the study can then be applied to other cases in similar contexts. Study methods used in a qualitative case study usually involve different types of extensive interviews spanning a period (Guest *et al.*, 2013; Hamilton, 2011).

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The case study was employed for this study because I wished to study the management of the family-school partnership within a real-life context (Guest *et al.*, 2013:15). Also, the case study is a research design that is normally used to develop a rich depiction of the object of study by using diverse kinds of data collection to gather the views and opinions of different individuals connected to the case (Maree, 2016; Hamilton, 2011:107). In this case, I saw this design as a useful tool, because I needed to use different data collection strategies to collect the views and opinions of the stakeholders in the family-school partnership (i.e. teachers, principals, and parents). I used the individual interview strategy to gather the opinions of school principals, deputy principals and parents on the concept of a family-school partnership. I also used the focus group interview strategy to garner the perspectives of teacher participants from both schools on the phenomenon involved.

However, I was not oblivious to the weaknesses and constraints of the case study as a research design. One such limitation is that the results may not be applicable to similar cases. Also, case studies are by design not receptive to validation, therefore they are susceptible to being prejudiced and subjective (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011:293).

Maree (2016:108), however, proposes solutions to the above constraints highlighted by Cohen *et al.* (2011). Firstly, the report of the case study must be presented in easy-to-understand language, so that whoever reads it can query the report and draw an objective conclusion. Secondly, case studies should be presented in an easily accessible way that may lead readers to apply the experience to their real-life situations. In line with Maree's (2016) proposal, I simplified the report on the study to the extent that an average reader could relate to the report and possibly adapt its findings to a similar situation.

3.4   Research methodology

The research methodology involves the procedures researchers follow to carry out their study in terms of the collection, analysis, and interpretation of research data. In this section, I comprehensively and extensively discuss the research methods used in this study.

3.4.1 Sampling and sampling techniques

A sample is a portion that represents a whole. The sample is supposed to represent the whole so that we can say things about the whole, based on information about the sample (Byrne, 2017:2). From a research perspective, sampling is the process of selecting a subset from a delineated population chosen for a study (Guest *et al.*, 2013:42). A sample must be suitable and apt for the study, even if it does not completely represent the whole population (Joseph & Russell, 2012:198). To underscore the importance of sampling in research, Guest *et al.* (2013:42) argue that the degree of generalisability and validity of the research findings depends on the researcher's sampling strategy.

A purposive sampling technique was employed in the selection of sites and participants for this study. According to Creswell (2014:189), in qualitative research, the selection of research participants, sites, or documents is done purposefully, in a way that will assist the researcher to understand the research problem. Guest *et al.* (2013:48) describe purposive sampling as a sampling process whereby the researcher chooses to study participants according to the purpose they serve in the study. In other words, the researcher decides the purpose they want their participants to serve, and they go out and find them.

Purposeful sampling is a useful sampling technique because it enables the researcher to select study sites and participants according to their relevance to the study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014:189). This technique affords the researcher the flexibility of choice of sites and participants, which will best help with understanding the research problem and questions (Creswell, 2014:189).

One major limitation of purposive sampling, as highlighted by Joseph and Russell (2012:19), is its constraint in generating a sample that represents a bigger population. This may be a limitation to the generalisability of the study, in other words the generalisation of findings to subjects beyond those under study (Creswell, 2014:203). However, my study fits more into the transferability construct which, instead of making generalisation claims, would allow readers to link their experience with certain elements of the study (Maree, 2016:124).

The rationale behind my choice of purposive sampling for this study is that I needed to select participants and sites that were relevant to my study and would assist me in

having a proper handle on my research problem and questions (Creswell, 2014:189). Therefore, to be able to get a wider perspective on the subject under investigation, I used a purposive sampling method to select suitable study sites and participants. The details of these are discussed below.

3.4.1.1   Study sites

My study sites were two township secondary schools in the GDE's Tshwane West District. These two secondary schools are located within informal settlements/semi-urban areas of the district. Although they may not be as advantaged as schools located in urban areas, they did against all odds maintain good management of family-school partnership. This was evident, both from the active engagement of parents with the school and their children's learning activities, and from the school's effective management of parents' collaboration with the school. To locate these schools, I made enquiries from people with connections to the township and semi-urban secondary schools, such as current and retired teachers and principals, and education inspectors (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014:377).

Moreover, this study was limited to only two secondary schools, as its focus fell on what Joseph and Russell (2012:105) described as a 'hard-to-reach or hard-to-identify population'. An effective family-school partnership is a rare phenomenon in township schools, and although empirical evidence (Maluleke, 2014; Okeke, 2014; Nojaja, 2009) on dysfunctional family-school partnerships abounds, a functional family-school partnership is not a common occurrence.

Table 3.1: Study sites

DETAILS	SCHOOL A	SCHOOL B
Location	Winterveldt Pretoria West Education District, Gauteng Province	Mabopane Pretoria West Education District, Gauteng Province
Type of school	Quintile 1 No-fee paying school	Quintile 1 No-fee paying school
Number of learners	799	850
Number of teachers	25	29
Predominant language within the community	Tswana	Tswana
Medium of instruction	English	English

3.4.1.2   Study participants

My study participants were purposefully selected according to their relevance to the study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014:189). All of them were principals, deputy principals, teachers, and parents from the above purposefully sampled schools. The rationale behind my choice of these participants was because they were 'information-rich' sources (Guest *et al.*, 2013; Suri, 2011). McMillan and Schumacher (2014:349-350) describe 'information-rich' cases as those samples that are well-informed and in possession of good information about the study.

(i)   Principals and deputy principals

The choice of these principals and deputies came with the choice of the schools. However, their participation in the study was key because I needed to obtain from them the information on the school's management of the family-school partnership. I also needed their assistance on the purposive selection of teacher and parent participants.

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(ii)   The teacher participants

I engaged Grade 8 to 12 teachers to get a broad perspective on family-school partnerships from the teachers' point of view. This culminated in five teachers per school. Their involvement gave me a wide range of teacher perceptions on the management of the family-school partnership (Joseph & Russell, 2012:203). I secured the assistance of the principal in the choice of these teacher participants. The involvement of the principal was essential in this selection exercise because I needed teachers who were well informed and knowledgeable on my research subject (Joseph & Russell, 2012).

(iii)   Parent participants

A parent as it relates to this study, is the biological parent or caregiver of a learner(s). I involved parents of learners from different grades to gauge the perception of parents on the management of the family-school partnership. The selected participants were the most experienced parents available for the interview. The rationale behind this choice was because I needed parents who were most informed about my subject of study (Joseph & Russell, 2012). I found four parents from School A, and three parents from School B, which culminated in a total of seven parents participating in the study. I engaged the assistance of the principal of each school in the selection of these parent participants as well. The principal's involvement in the selection exercise was again vital because I needed the opinions of parents who were well informed about my research subject (Joseph & Russell, 2012).

3.4.2   Data collection

The qualitative research approach adopts diverse methods for data collection: focus group and individual interviews, participant observation, and document analysis (Joseph & Russell, 2012). Data collection steps in qualitative research include delineating the scope for the study, using interviews, observations and documents to gather relevant information, as well as ascertaining the procedure for logging information (Creswell, 2014:189).

The focus of the data collection for this research was to acquire useful information to answer my research questions regarding the roles of parents, teachers and principals in the management of the family-school partnership (Masha, 2017; Hamilton, 2011). I

used individual and focus group interview techniques to secure a comprehensive understanding of the subject of the management of the family-school partnership from the major stakeholders in the partnership: principals, teachers, and parents (Creswell, 2014:189; Joseph & Russell, 2012). All these techniques are discussed in detail in the sub-sections below.

3.4.2.1   Semi-structured individual interviews

Creswell (2014:191) defines the individual interview as a "face-to-face, one-on-one", in-depth interview. Joseph and Russell (2012:189) describe it as an unrestricted, unstructured, and intensive interview. It is a process whereby the interviewer tries to garner exhaustive information on the interviewee's views, opinions, and perceptions. I engaged the principal of each school, being the head of the SMT, and the deputy principals of School B in an individual interview. The purpose was to gather their opinion on the strategies the SMT uses to manage a successful family-school partnership. I considered them the most appropriate persons through whom I could get information on the SMT's strategies on the management of the family-school partnership. The interviews were scheduled according to each principal's preference of time and location within the school.

I also interviewed the parents during one-on-one individual interviews. Although I had initially planned to conduct focus group interviews with parents, the small number of parent participants in each of the schools did not qualify for a focus group interview, and individual interviews were used. At School A, only four parents could participate, while only three parents from School B could participate. The interviews were scheduled to take place at the school, according to each parent's preference of time.

The interview questions were designed around my research questions and sub-questions (see Annexures E and G)). Although my interview guide was predetermined and in sequence, the questions were open ended and there was no restriction on the principals, deputy principals and parents' responses during the interview (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014:381-382). The latter is a major advantage of a semi-structured interview. It gave me the flexibility of probing further into responses that were of importance to the study. It also enabled me to ask for clarification to extract new information that emerged outside the scope of my prepared interview questions (Maree, 2016:93).

It must be admitted that one major constraint of semi-structured individual interviews is that it is easy to be side-tracked by trivial aspects that are not related to the study (Maree, 2016:93). I keenly watched out for this, and when it happened, I carefully led the principals, deputies, and parents back to the focus of the interview.

3.4.2.2 Focus group interviews

A focus group interview is a small cluster interview of selected persons to evaluate a problem (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014:173). It is usually a well-planned conversation on a purposeful topic with a small cluster of people (Guest *et al.*, 2013). I used the focus group interview technique to investigate the perception of teachers on success stories regarding the management of the family-school partnerships in their respective schools. My choice of the focus group interview as a technique was based on its strength, which is the dynamics in a group. Ideas generated within the group are more comprehensive than the types obtainable from individual interviews, because in the focus group interview, participants build on one another's views and opinions (Maree, 2016:96). I used the advantage of the common characteristics shared in each group to gather the individuals' opinions on the family-school partnership as it related to them as teachers (Guest *et al.*, 2013; Joseph & Russell, 2012).

I did however take into consideration the limitations of the focus group interview, which could compromise the study if not handled properly. These included the domination of the discussion by outspoken individuals, which could affect the correct assessment of the opinions of reticent participants. Also, a lot depends on the moderator, as excessive moderation means hearing less of the participants' perspective, and less moderation means hearing less of the topic under discussion (Maree, 2016:97). However, a good rapport between me and the participants assisted us in overcoming these constraints.

(i) Focus group size

Five teachers from each school formed the two focus groups. My choice of five people per focus group was based on Maree's (2016:96) recommendation that five to 12 people should form a focus group. I employed the assistance of the school principals in the selection process of each of these groups. I relied on their knowledge of

individuals in both groups to choose participants according to specifications I was looking for, namely, to involve the longest-serving educators in each grade.

(ii)   Interview venue

I requested suitable venues for both groups from the schools via the principals, bearing in mind the following requirements as advised by Guest *et al.* (2013:184):

- Enough space for participants, the moderator, and recording equipment for group proceedings.
- Comfortable seating.
- Privacy or isolation to minimise interruptions.

The venues used in both schools for the focus group interview met most of the above criteria. The focus group interview in School A was conducted in a covered pavilion that serves as the school hall, with enough space and comfortable seating. However, because the pavilion is open, there was no privacy. Nonetheless, did not compromise the study, because there was no need for privacy about what was being discussed. At School B, the teachers' focus group interview venue met all the criteria because it was held inside the school library.

(iii)   The research Team

My research team for the interview sessions consisted of myself, **the researcher** (also the moderator), and **the interpreter**. I made provision for the services of an interpreter because I do not speak any of the indigenous languages of the communities where the schools are located. The interpreter elaborated on the questions to parent participants who were not proficient in English, and she explained their responses to me. Prior to the focus group interviews, I briefed the interpreter about the details of the proceeding, the ethical principles involved, and what her specific roles were.

(iv)   Session recording

My interview sessions were recorded with an electronic device, together with notes taken by me. To comply with ethical considerations, the participants were properly briefed about the recording procedure so they could relax during the interview sessions (Guest *et al.*, 2013:139). Also, I explained to the participants the usage of the

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recording device and asked for their permission to use the device before the interview commenced, which was granted by all who participated in the interview.

(v)   Interview procedure

During the interviews, I made use of the interview guide technique, whereby my interview topics were pre-selected. However, I decided the order and phrasing of the questions during the interview (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014:381). As indicated earlier, my interview questions were designed in alignment with the research questions (see Annexure G).

(vi)   Challenges and solutions

Since each focus group was made up of different personalities, each personality presented different challenges and the challenges were all handled as they surfaced.

Table 3.2: Focus group interview – challenges and solutions according to personality type of participants

PERSONALITY TYPE   SOLUTION

PERSONALITY TYPE	SOLUTION
Shy or reticent	I asked the affected participant's specific response to a question or to the responses of other participants.
Overbearing/Interruptive	I directed the questions to the group, and sometimes directly asked them to hold back so others could speak.
Long-winded	I directly asked the participant to come to the point and repeated the need for responses to be to the point.
Wandering off the topic	I reminded them what question has been asked, pointed out that the group had limited time and much ground to cover, and repeated the need for responses to be to the point.

Source: Guest *et al.* (2013:198)

3.5 Personal declaration

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the interpretative nature of qualitative research makes it tend to lean on the researcher's interpretation of the event being studied. This is one of the limitations of qualitative research, which may compromise the trustworthiness of the research (Creswell, 2014:187-188). However, I took care to put mechanisms in place to address those limitations, should they occur.

One potential limitation is the researcher's biases. Since I did not have any prior connection with the schools under study, nor the communities where the schools are located, I can state that I went into the field as a neutral person. This, I believe, eliminated the possibility of personal bias affecting the trustworthiness of the study.

Moreover, I am a non-speaker of any of the South African indigenous languages, which could have been another factor that may have had a negative impact on the credibility of the research. I had anticipated that, during the focus group interview with parent participants, some parents would naturally switch to a local language for ease of expression. To address this challenge, I engaged the services of an interpreter and requested the interpreter to interpret all responses given in Tswana to me right there.

However, the involvement of an interpreter during the interviews with parent participants might have cast a shadow on the reliability of the research. To prevent this, I briefed the interpreter prior to the interviews on her role as it related to ethical research principles. She also signed an undertaking to adhere to these principles, which has been submitted to the University's Ethics Committee (see Annexure H).

3.6 Data analysis

Data analysis in qualitative research involves getting to understand the content of collected data (Creswell, 2014:195). Maree (2016:110) asserts that the goal in analysing qualitative data is to summarise all the information collected during the data collection process and group it under most frequently occurred words and phrases, subjects, or patterns. This would assist with better comprehension and interpretation of themes emerging from the data.

The thematic data analysis technique was used for this study. It is a technique whereby both the implied and obvious ideas within the data (referred to as themes) are identified and described. The technique incorporates inductive analysis, a process through

which qualitative data is organised into classifications and patterns, and relationships are identified among the classifications (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014:395). Once the themes have been identified, codes are developed to denote each theme (of which a detailed analysis follows later) (Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2012:9). My rationale for using this technique was because of its major advantage of an exhaustive coverage of data, and because the researcher's interpretation of the analysis is supported by data (Guest *et al.*, 2012). This gave me room to navigate through the data to extract information (Guest *et al.*, 2012:17). Although the major weakness of this technique is that it is laborious, its advantages outweigh this disadvantage. I therefore used thematic data analysis by following the procedure outlined below.

3.6.1 Describe data

I gave a detailed description of the research site, participants (though adhering to confidentiality and ethical principles), the circumstances under which data was collected, and the participant selection process. This is in line with Maree's (2016:114) proposal that the first step in data processing is to describe the participants in as much detail as possible, but to safeguard the anonymity and confidentiality of all participants.

3.6.2 Organise data

I organised the interviews with principals, deputy principals, and parents, as well as the focus group interviews with teachers, along with their interview data (audio recordings and back-up notes taken during the interview), and clearly labelled them as to where, when and how each was collected. Each batch of focus group interviews was then stored in a separate folder clearly labelled for easy retrieval when needed. I also organised the individual interviews by clearly labelling those of each principal, deputy principal, and parent (Maree, 2016).

3.6.3 Transcribe data into segments

Data collected via audio recording was transcribed according to each focus group and each individual interview, and subsequently marked with a proper label of when and where the group or the individuals were interviewed. This is in line with Maree's (2016:115) proposal that audio recordings must be transcribed verbatim, that is, written down word for word.

3.6.4 Code data

The transcribed data of each focus group, individual parent, and principal was separated into sub-themes, in which similar ideas were marked with easy-to-identify descriptions or symbols (Maree, 2016:116).

3.6.5 Interpret data

At the interpretation stage, I made use of emerging patterns in the data to determine the extent to which my main research question and sub-questions were addressed. I also ascertained how the school management and teachers were adapting Epstein's Framework for Comprehensive Programs of Partnership (Epstein, 2011:395) in the management of the family-school partnership, and how parents were responding to it (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014:106).

3.7   Trustworthiness

To prove the trustworthiness of the study, I gave detailed descriptions of the focus of the study, my role as the researcher, participants' details, the data collection site, and the conditions and context under which the data was collected. I also gave a detailed report of strategies used for data collection and analysis, to provide a clear picture of the research method used for the study (Creswell, 2014).

For triangulation purposes, I performed my data collection and data analysis concurrently. I analysed the first set of interviews before I proceeded to the next interview session. This way, I was able to build on information that emerged from the previous interview to secure more information or clarification in the next interview. Moreover, I involved a fellow Master's student in a peer debriefing, requesting her to review my study and ask questions for clarification.

Furthermore, according to Maree (2016:122), it is important to leave a clear audit trail of analysis and conclusions made all through the research procedure. In other words, the instruments and processes that have been used for data collection must be included in the final document and be readily available and open for inspection. To achieve this, I kept both electronic and hard copies of the instruments used for the study, namely interview questions, audio recordings, letters of authority to conduct research (both from the Tshwane West District office and the principals of the schools involved), and participants' signed consent forms.

3.8 Limitations and delimitation of the study

Sample size may be the main limitation of the study. Only two schools from one district in South Africa's Gauteng province were involved in the study. Therefore, due to the limited sample size, the study does not represent a population and therefore may not be generalised. In addition, most of my parent participants in both schools were volunteers who were actively involved in the school volunteering programme and in their children's learning activities, due to the nature of their volunteering work for the school. I was not able to get the objective opinion of any average parent who is not a volunteer, save one. This parent was also a volunteer – involved in school security – but was off duty and came purposely for the interview.

3.9 Ethical considerations in the study

Since human beings are a central focus in educational research, the onus is on the researcher to safeguard the rights and safety of the participants (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014:23). To comply with this, I adhered to the following principles of research ethics:

3.9.1 Permission

I obtained permission from the University of Pretoria's Ethics Committee to undertake the research and fulfilled all the committee's requirements before permission was granted (see Annexure B). I also applied for authorisation from the GDE and its Tshwane West District to conduct research in the schools involved. Permissions were granted by both (see Annexure A).

I furthermore a letter requesting permission from the chairperson of the SGB of each school to conduct research there (see Annexure C). The letter included the following content:

- The nature of the research
- The duration of and proposed venue for the study
- Provision made for confidentiality, anonymity, and safety of the participants.

3.9.2 Voluntary participation and informed consent

The principles of informed consent and voluntary participation are key to the ethical conducting of research. Joseph and Russell (2012:53) reiterate that participants who are eligible to do so, must give consent since they fully understand and are giving the

consent voluntarily, having been properly briefed about what the research is all about. In adherence to the principles of voluntary participation and informed consent, a detailed letter of invitation to participate, together with a consent form, was given to each of the participants before commencement of the interviews. The letter contained details of what the study is about, the nature of the study and their expected role. Moreover, detailed information regarding both ethics principles was stated clearly in the consent form, namely that each participant's involvement is wholly voluntary, and the participant is free to disengage from participation at any point during the study (see Annexure D).

3.9.3 Confidentiality and anonymity

According Booyse (2011:35), confidentiality endorses an individual's right to privacy, while anonymity implies that no-one who has access to the report will be able to identify research participants through their responses. To ensure adherence to the confidentiality and anonymity clause of the research ethics principles in this study, the following undertakings were clearly stated in the informed consent form:

- The participant's name and any contributions to the study will be kept private, except if it is the participant's wish to be named.

- The identity of participants and schools, as well as all that was said in the research activities and tape-recorded interviews, will remain anonymous and confidential.

- Pseudo names will be used in the research report – both for the participant and the school (see Annexure D).

3.9.4 Participants' well-being

Safeguarding participants' well-being should be every researcher's careful consideration before embarking on a research project (Joseph & Russell, 2012:209). According to Booyse (2011:35), any physical or psychological distress or harm to the individual being interviewed or surveyed should be avoided. In compliance with the ethics principle of participant well-being, I clearly stated the following assurances in my letter of invitation to participants:

(i) I do not foresee any harm (physical or psychological) to happen to any participant.

(ii) Should there be any problem in this regard, they should speak to me and I will consult with my supervisor.

(iii) If anything threatens their physical or psychological wellbeing, I undertake to report it to the appropriate authorities (see Annexure D).

3.10   Conclusion

This chapter presented details of the research paradigm upon which my study was based, and of the research approach adopted to carry out the study. The rationale behind the choice of research method to be used was also discussed.

The next chapter presents the research findings that emerged from the collected data.

CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS AND RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

The research methodology and design used for this study were discussed extensively in Chapter 3. The purpose of the study as revealed in previous chapters was to investigate how township schools with a functional family-school partnership manage this partnership to their benefit. In Chapter 4, I present the perspectives of the principals, teachers and parents, and the strategies the schools employed in the management of the partnership. In analysing the data, my goal was to recapitulate what I had seen and heard in the field in terms of frequent expressions, ideas, words, or themes. This would assist me to make sense of the data as it emerged (Maree, 2016:110). Data analysis design uses a thematic data analysis technique as detailed in chapter 3.

4.2 The study participants and sites

In line with Maree's (2016:114) suggestion, I start the data processing off by describing the research participants. My research was conducted at two public (township) secondary schools in the GDE's Tshwane West District. Two focus group interviews and 11 individual interviews were conducted. A total of two principals, two deputy principals, seven parents, and ten teachers were involved in the research process. Consistent with the research anonymity and confidentiality principles, each of the participants in this study is described in coded terms. The list of codes and their meanings, as well as the race and gender of participants, are captured in Table 4.1. This is in agreement with Maree's (2016:114) warning that, in defining research participants, caution should be taken to protect the identity of the participants and to adhere strictly to all ethical principles.

Table 4.1: Codes used for study sites, and participants' gender and race

Description	School A (SA)	Gender	Race	School B (SB)	Gender	Race
Principal	PR1	male	black	PR2	male	black
Deputy Principal 1	not involved	N/A	N/A	DP1	male	black
Deputy Principal 2	not involved	N/A	N/A	DP2	female	black
Teacher 1	T1	female	black	T1	male	black
Teacher 2	T2	male	black	T2	female	black
Teacher 3	T3	female	black	T3	female	black
Teacher 4	T4	female	black	T4	female	black
Teacher 5	T5	female	black	T5	female	black
Parent 1	P1	female	black	P1	female	black
Parent 2	P2	female	black	P2	female	black
Parent 3	P3	female	black	P3	female	black
Parent 4	P4	female	black	not involved	not involved	not involved

A description of the sites at which the study took place, as well as the participants involved at each site, follows next.

4.2.1 School A (SA)

This school is in Winterveldt, Pretoria West, and falls under the Tshwane West District of the GDE. The school has approximately 799 learners and 25 teachers. It is a township, Quintile 1 school. Quintile 1 (Q-1) schools in South Africa are categorised as underprivileged and poorest in each province, and they are usually located in informal settlements, characterised by poor infrastructure, and serve families with low

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socio-economic status (Daniel-Oghenetega, 2010:22). Learners do not pay school fees and benefit from the government's free feeding scheme. The learners, management personnel and teachers in School A are black and the school is in a predominantly Tswana-speaking township.

4.2.1.1 Employees at School A

- The principal (PR1) is a black male. He has been the principal of this school for 10 years.

- Teacher 1 (T1) is a black female who has worked at the same school for 20 years. She teaches Grades 11 and 12.

- T2 is a black male who has been employed at the same school for 15 years. He teaches Grades 9 and 10.

- T3 is a black female who has been at the same school for 18 years. She teaches Grades 8 and 10.

- T4 is a black female who has taught at the same school for 16 years. She teaches Grades 9 and 11.

- T5 is a black female who has worked at the same school for 15 years. She teaches Grades 9 and 10.

It is worthy of note that most of the teacher participants were female. This is because my target teacher participants were teachers who had worked longest in the school and could share their perspectives on and experiences of the management of the family-school partnership in the school. Mostly female teachers in the school fitted this description.

4.2.1.2 Parents at School A

- Parent 1 (P1), a black female, has been a parent at the school for three years and has a child in Grade 10. She is a food vendor at the school.

- P2, a black female, has been a parent at the school for four years and has a child in Grade 11. She is a food vendor at the school.

- P3, a black female, has been a parent at the school for five years and has a child in Grade 12. She is a food vendor at the school.

- P4, a black female, has been a parent at the school for three years and has a child in Grade 10. She is a security guard at the school.

All the parent participants (save one) were food vendors. Their job was to prepare and dish out breakfast and lunch for learners in the school in accordance with the school feeding scheme, which is a feature of Q-1 schools. Since they were actively involved with the school's volunteering programmes as food vendors, they could be actively involved in their children's learning. Their position made them as eligible participants in the study, because the study focused on obtaining the perspectives of parents who are actively engaged with the school on the education of their children.

4.2.2 School B (SB)

This school is in Mabopane, Pretoria West, and falls under the GDE's Pretoria West District. The school has approximately 850 black learners and 29 teachers. It is a township, Quintile 1 school, just like School A. The learners, management personnel, and teachers in the school are black, and the school is located within a predominantly Tswana-speaking township.

4.2.2.1   Employees at School B

- The principal (PR2) is a black male. He has been the principal of this school for ten years.

- The first deputy principal (DP1) is a black male. He has been the deputy principal of this school for five years.

- The second deputy principal (DP2) is a black female. She has worked in and been the deputy principal of this school for only one year.

I ended up having two deputy principals involved in the study, although this was not part of the original plan. This is because I was initially unable to interview the principal due to his being ill, and they were not sure when he would resume duty. The two deputies graciously offered that one of them would grant the interview on behalf of the principal. The interview however took a different turn when the second deputy decided to join the interview halfway through. I allowed this deviation in terms of the so-called emergent sampling approach, a sampling approach that "takes advantage of whatever unfolds, as it unfolds by utilising the option of adding to a sample to take advantage of

unforeseen opportunities after fieldwork has begun" (Suri, 2011:8). When during the fieldwork the principal returned, I was able to interview him as well.

- Teacher 1 (T1), a black male, has been in the same school for 20 years. He teaches Grades 9 and 11.

- T2, a black female, has worked in the same school for 22 years. She teaches Grades 10 and 12.

- T3, a black female, has taught at the same school for 21 years. She teaches Grades 8 and 10.

- T4, a black female, has been employed in the same school for six months. She teaches Grades 10 and 11.

- T5, a black female, has been in the same school for 15 years. She teaches Grades 9 and 10.

As in School A, most of the teacher participants were female – again because I targeted teacher participants who had worked longest in the school and could relate their perspectives on and experiences of the management of the family-school partnership in the school. It was mostly female teachers in the school who fitted this description.

4.2.2.2   Parents at School B

- Parent 1 (P1), a black female, has been a parent at the school for a year and has a child in Grade 8. She is a food vendor at the school.

- P2, a black female, has been a parent at the school for two years and has a child in Grade 9. She is a food vendor at the school.

- P3, a black female, has been a parent at the school for three years and has two children – in Grade 9 and Grade 10 respectively. She is a food vendor at the school.

All three parent participants from School B were females and food vendors (very similar to School A). Their job was to prepare and dish out breakfast and lunch for learners in the school, in accordance with the school feeding scheme, which is a feature of Q-1 schools. As volunteers who were actively involved with the school's

volunteering programmes as food vendors, they were able to be actively involved in their children's learning. This made them eligible as participants in the study, seeing that the study focused on gaining the perspectives of parents who are actively engaged with the school on the education of their children.

The above participants were asked to answer the questions below in the one-on-one and focus group interviews that were used as my data collection instruments:

(i) What role do you play in the management of the successful family-school partnership?

(ii) What management strategies does the school employ in managing the successful family-school partnership?

(iii) What challenges has the school experienced in the management of the family-school partnership?

(iv) How do schools overcome such challenges?

4.3 Data collection instruments used

The findings from the data generated during the field study by means of interviews are presented next. I discuss the perspectives of relevant stakeholders on their roles in the management of the family-school partnership, the strategies the schools employed to manage the partnership, the challenges faced in the management of the partnership, and strategies employed to overcome such challenges. I then interpret and draw conclusions on how the family-school partnership management strategies employed by the schools, and the schools' adaptation of Epstein's framework might have been responsible for the effective family-school partnerships that exist in the schools.

To get answers to the four questions above, I used the instruments discussed below.

4.3.1 Individual interviews

In both schools, principals and deputy principals were interviewed in one-on-one individual interviews. The interviews were conducted in English and took place in their respective offices. The interviews were scheduled according to the time preferences of each principal and deputy principal.

Parent interviews also were conducted individually and on a one-on-one basis. Although I initially planned to interview parents in their focus group, the number of parent participants in neither of the schools qualified for a focus group interview, and I decided to use individual interviews. At School A, only four parents could participate – three food vendors, and one a security guard – and in School B, only three parents (all food vendors) could participate.

Not all parents in my study were fluent in the English language, hence the need to interview them in the language spoken predominantly in the community, namely Tswana. Furthermore, because I do not speak any of the indigenous languages, I had to use the services of an interpreter who interpreted both my questions and their responses. The reason for the interpreter's presence was explained to each of the parents at the beginning, as well as her obligation to adhere to ethical research principles. The Tswana interview responses were transcribed verbatim into English in the interpreter's words.

The interviews were scheduled according to each parent's preference of time and venue within the school premises. All the one-on-one interviews met the interview venue criteria proposed by Guest *et al.* (2013:184):

- Enough space for participants, moderator, and recording equipment
- Comfortable seating
- Privacy or isolation to minimise interruptions

4.3.2 Focus groups interviews

The focus group interviews that were used to garner information from teacher participants in both schools were conducted in English and at a time agreed by all teacher participants, as pre-arranged with each school's principal. I opted for a focus group interview with teachers (as opposed to the one-on-one interview I used for principals, deputy principals, and parents), because I was able to get an adequate number of teachers in each school. I also preferred this type of interview because of its strength, which is the dynamics in a group. Ideas generated within the group are more comprehensive than those gained from individual interviews, because in a focus group interview, participants build on one another's views and opinions (Maree, 2016:96).

Five teachers were involved in the focus group interview conducted at School A. The interview took place in a structure that serves as the school hall. At School B, the interview session was held with five teachers in attendance, inside the school library, after hours.

Both individual and focus group interviews were recorded with an electronic device and supplemented with field notes. For ethical reasons, and so they could relax during the interview sessions, the participants were properly briefed about the recording procedure (Guest et al., 2013:139). I explained to the participants the usage of the recording device and asked for their permission to use the device before the interview commenced, which was granted by all who participated in the interview.

During the interviews, I used the interview guide technique, which means that interview topics were pre-selected. However, I decided on the order and phrasing of the questions during the interview (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014:381). These questions had been designed in accordance with the research questions.

I divided each interview session into three segments. Firstly, I welcomed each participant and thanked them for their participation. I introduced myself and the purpose of the interview session. I explained the interview procedure as spelled out in the invitation letter they had received earlier (see Annexure D) and reconfirmed my intent to safeguard the ethical principle of informed consent. I then paused to ask and check if my explanation was understood. Once I had established that the participant(s) and I were on the same page, I proceeded to ease the participant into the situation and started with broad and less structured questions such as *"what is your most memorable experience as a teacher/parent/principal?"*. As the interaction picked up, I advanced to more structured questions that covered topics pertinent to the study. In the last segment, I summarised salient points that had emerged from the interaction and verified my understanding of those points (Maree, 2016:96).

4.4   Stakeholders' roles in managing the family-school partnership

The stakeholders' understanding of their role in the partnership was crucial to the success of the partnership. Without an understanding of their roles, they may not have been able to fulfil their roles in the partnership.

Principal 1 from School A (PR1–SA) described[1] his role in the family-school partnership in this way: *"I mediate in between all the parties. I ask the teachers to direct all learners' behavioural issues to me so that they can focus on teaching, while I deal with learners' misbehaviour and the parents."* Principal 2 from School B (PR2–SB) in turn described his role in the family-school partnership as follows: "*The partnership as we normally call it is a triangular relationship. My role is to make sure there is a balance between the school, the family, and the child. I often facilitate a one-on-one meeting with parents because of learners' transgressions."* Deputy Principal 1 from School B (DP1–SB) said*: "My duty is to work with the parents in the area of discipline of the learners because we have a problem in the area of discipline with our learners".*

From the narratives of the principals and deputy principal quoted above, it was evident that they saw themselves as the mediator between teachers, learners, and parents. Not only that – they also viewed themselves as support structures for teachers and parents. These roles that the principals assumed in the partnership gave hope to all stakeholder groups in the schools. Perhaps hope generation was a major element contributing to the success of the family-school partnership in their schools.

On the roles of teachers in the family-school partnership, Teacher 1 from School A (TA1–SA) had this to say: *"I work together with parents on school matters that involve their children. I inform them about the challenges the children have, and we work together to address such challenges. In the same way, parents inform me about the challenges they face with their children while at home and together we address them. In this way, everything works together for the good of the children."* This assertion is echoed by T3–SA: *"I work with parents as a team because learning is not going to take place not just at the school, it will take place at home too."* T4–SA added: *"I create a home atmosphere at school. I try to know the background of those learners. I visit their homes sometimes, to be able to be familiar with the challenges they face at home that may affect their schoolwork."*

Further, on the role of teachers in family-school partnership, T5–SB said: "*My duty is to play the role of the parent of the learners during the school. So, that the child can be free to talk to me the same way he would talk to his/her parents at home."* T4–SA

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[1] All narratives have been quoted verbatim.

said: *"I regularly interact with the parents because I believe they must have access to the school environment where learning takes place."* T2–SB added: *"I report to the parents, areas to be addressed in terms of progress of the learner."* T2–SB described her role in this way: *"I support parents by reporting to them if there is any problem I encounter with the learner. I also encourage them to cooperate with me in the business of educating their children."*

The narratives above indicated that teachers saw themselves as stand-in parents to the learners while at school, and therefore they created a home environment at the school. In this way, they were fulfilling the principle of *in loco parentis,* as prescribed in South African legislation and educational policies. The teachers also viewed themselves as team players in their partnership with the parents for the educational development of the learners and experienced a need for their active engagement with parents about issues that affected the learners. Hence, learners' well-being was being taken care of from both ends. Teachers demonstrated a true partnership with parents over the educational development of their learners. They also served as support structures for the parents in the way they supplied information on the learners to the parents to help them assist their children. This approach motivated parents to engage with their children's teachers, rather than to wait to be invited for a report on what the children had done wrong.

On the role of parents in the family-school partnership, Parent 2 from School A (P2–SA) remarked: *"I am always available whenever the school needs me. And I provide whatever the school requests from my child.'* P3–SA said: *'"When I notice any problem with my child, I come to the school to find out what is going on. If my child gives the teacher problem, I am available to intervene."* P1–SA agreed: *"If my child is giving teachers a problem, I work with the teacher to overcome that problem."* P3–SB had the following to say on her role in the family-school partnership: *"The teachers usually report behavioural problems to me, and I work with the child over it."* P1–SB concurred and stated: *"Whenever my child is having a problem with a subject, I speak with the teacher and we both decide to work together to help the child improve. The teacher explains to me that I must do to assist the child at home, which I do. And this often leads to an improvement in the subject."* P2–SB said: *"Whenever I notice my child is lagging in his schoolwork, I organize an extra lesson for him to be able to catch up*

with the rest of the class. I do this to assist the teacher so that I do not leave everything to the teacher, and the teacher does not have to do extra work on the child."

The narratives of the parents presented above describe them as teachers – thus, parents as teachers. Their remarks indicate that they consider their availability and active engagement with the school as role players in the education of their children to be of paramount importance. The other important element that transpired from parents' narratives revealed that the children were giving teachers problems, rather than teachers giving children problems. This indicates parents' understanding that challenges that arise in most schools are not caused exclusively by teachers, but that children are also at fault most of the time. In this way, parents take responsibility for acting as **mediator between teachers and learners** in respect of poor learning and misconduct. This could surely be one of the elements that strengthened the family-school partnership in these schools. Parents also indicated that they were supporting teachers to help their children improve, which means they were working as a team with their children's teachers. They furthermore supported the teachers by making sure their children were getting extra lessons if they lagged in their studies, which means they did not leave everything to the teacher.

In my discussion on the findings regarding the roles of principals, teachers and parents in the family-school partnership, the following themes emerged: **Family-school partnership as a collaborative effort** was made possible by (a) home visits by teachers, (b) parents' regular consultation with teachers, (c) teachers viewing themselves as parents (*in loco parentis*), and (d) parents viewing themselves as teachers ('learning at home', thereby creating a 'school-like-home' and a 'home-like school'). The stakeholders in my study saw themselves as **support structures** for one another – principals for teachers and parents, teachers for parents, and parents for learners. They also viewed themselves as **mediators between conflicting parties** and that included teachers mediating between parents and learners, parents mediating between learners and teachers, and the school principal mediating between teachers and parents.

4.5   Strategies used in managing the family-school partnership

Having explored the level of understanding of each of the stakeholders in the family-school partnership and how they perceive their unique roles in the partnership, our

next focus is the nature of the partnership in schools A and B, and how it was managed.

Regarding the strategies the school used to manage the partnership with the families of its learners, PR1–SA had the following to say from the perspective of the head of the SMT: *"When it comes to partnership with parents, we do not have a specific policy that governs partnership between the school and the families, but we have different ways by which we engage with the parents. For example, we communicate with the parents via telephone, for personal information to be passed across, but more often we write letters to communicate with them over issues that affect their children."* Regarding communication as a partnership strategy with parents, he said: *"We set up WhatsApp communications system, through which learners communicate with teachers over anything from home, even during the holiday. Teachers too pass information to learners via the same WhatsApp system outside of school hours. For example, if something urgent happens during the holiday, I inform the teachers to pass the information across to their learners, and they send the message to learners via WhatsApp. And we use the same means also to pass messages across to the parents through the learners. It is a lovely communication strategy."*

I later found out that the WhatsApp communication strategy referred to by the principal had originally been set up by subject teachers for subject-related engagement with their learners. I was able to establish this because I carried out my data collection and data analysis concurrently, which allowed me to analyse the first set of interviews before I proceeded to the next interview session. This way, I was able to build on information that emerged from the previous interview to secure more information or clarification in the next interview.

PR1–SA also spoke about the Telkom Foundation initiative that they used in the management of the family-school partnership. In 2017, the Foundation launched a programme to assist eight previously disadvantaged schools in Gauteng to develop in the area of Information Technology. This they did by equipping the schools with state-of-the-art Information Technology tools, inter alia electronic boards, Wi-Fi devices, and tablets for learners. School A was one of those eight schools. Through the initiative, Telkom initiated a number of programmes, one of which is Mzali, an app that the school used to engage with parents over almost everything – questions from parents,

dissemination of information to parents, and many more. PR1–SA had this to say: *"We established partnership through the initiative called Telkom Foundation with Telkom. They assisted with an App called MZALI, meaning 'PARENTS'. Parents can communicate with us through that App. It is like a WhatsApp, where parents have their username. If parents want to see information on their children, they do that via Mzali. If the school has something to communicate to the parents, they use Mzali to send messages to the parents."* Concerning the administration of Mzali, the principal explained: *"The school's Assistant Administrators (AA) are the ones who send messages to parents through Mzali. If parents also have a concern that side, they use Mzali to send the message, the AA receives it and communicates to the management."*

Another initiative that School A used to manage the family-school partnership was the Matric Support System. PR1–SA explained: *"We also set up a Matric Support System, whereby we request parents to open doors for matric study group. This is how the study group system works, the learners grouped themselves and use one of their homes as a meeting place. Another week another family hosts them. The teachers do the coordination. They group matric learners according to the area where they live, to control the movement close to their homes. And select the best learner in academic performance to be the group leader. The learners also give their inputs as to who they want to be grouped with."*

On the issue of discipline and safety on the Mzali platform, PR1–SA said: *"We inform the parents about the study group and request support from the parents in that regard. We request the parents to monitor the involvement of their children in the study group, so they don't use the pretence of the study group to do other things. The list of learners in each study group is made known to each parent who has a child in that group. Also, I make it clear for every hosting family that they are responsible for the learners' safety because sometimes they knock off very late, in such situation, I insist that hosting family must accompany learners to their homes."*

Holding parents' meetings is another strategy that School A uses to manage its partnership with parents. PR1–SA explained: *"We have four parents' meetings in a year, the first meeting is where we set the mechanism in place on how to assist the learners and roles parents should play. The subsequent ones are where we review and evaluate if the target, we set in the first meeting is working or if there is a need for*

review". He continued to explain: "*We also use parents' volunteering system, whereby parents at the beginning of the year volunteer to come and clean the school premises before the opening. They also volunteer midterm to come and clean the offices to help assist the grounds' men and the cleaners at the school. They do this once a month. Like yesterday we had two who were cleaning the offices.*" In response to the question from the researcher about who were managing the volunteering system, the principal replied: "*The school head of cleaners manages the process. The parents' volunteers come through the cleaner. They communicate through the gentleman, who informs the office, and together with the school's Assistant Administrators (AA), they set up the schedule.*"

PR2–SB shared strategies used by his school to manage the family-school partnership in this way: "*Although there is no existing policy that governs how we relate with our learners' parents, we as the school management engage with parents via parents' meeting. In every parents' meeting, we present to the parents, various issues that pertain to the learners and how the parents can partner with us. We basically discuss with them (parents) how they can be part of their children's education. Why and how they must work with us. We solicit for their support.*" The principal also mentioned another strategy the school used in partnering with parents: "*We (school management) and grade 12 teachers, always hold a strictly grade 12 parents' meeting, where we discuss the successes, failures, and limitations of the programs that we set out for ourselves every year to assist grade 12 students. And the grade 12 parents always participate in good number.*"

School B also had a unique volunteering programme system, whereby parents in the SGB assisted with the issue of discipline because it was a growing concern in the school. The principal explained how the system works: "*It is largely the School Governing Board (SGB) that volunteers to assist. They come around before the school starts and they encourage learners to hurry to the school premises. Because some of the learners normally hang around outside the school and not getting into the school premises. They also assist with the discipline of learners, especially late coming, cigarette and weed smoking, gambling, and improper dressing by girl learners. They come to school, spend the whole day speaking, and counselling the affected learners.*"

On the serious challenge of ill-discipline among learners, and the potential to take to crime, the SMT, in partnership with SGB, organised periodic lectures dealing with crime by the South African Police. DP1–SB explained: "*We (the school management) in partnership with the School Governing Body (SGB), periodically arrange for the South African Police (SAPS), to come and talk to learners about crime, that if they commit can land them in prison and warn them against such crimes.*" DP2–SB explained how the school used different communication strategies to engage with the parents: *"We use letters and telephone calls to communicate to parents. We use letters for the general invitation, like an invitation to parents' meetings, or invitation of parents of specific grades. While we use the telephone for specific one-on-one calls."*

The narratives above indicate that the success stories of the two schools' partnerships with the families of their learners depended heavily on various **initiatives the SMTs had formulated to manage the family-school partnership**. These initiatives, which were unique to each of the schools and facilitated the management of the partnership, included the **Mzali app, Matric Support System, parents' meetings, SAPS lectures on crime, and Grade 12 parent meetings**. This showed that the SMTs were intentional and proactive in their engagement with the families of their learners. Both principals affirmed that their schools did not have official policies that guided their engagement with the parents of their learners but declared that they had unwritten policies in place around their partnership with parents. Although this asserted the schools' commitment to a partnership with the parents, I found it to be a risky practice, since stakeholder groupings cannot consistently commit to unwritten rules and regulations. I would therefore recommend that schools consider developing written policies in a collaborative approach.

The schools also employed different communication strategies to engage with parents, which included telephone calls, WhatsApp messages, Mzali, SMSs and letters (among others). This way, the schools created a functional two-way communication line as a platform of engagement with their learners' parents. They also facilitated various volunteering programmes through which parents could partner with the school, which demonstrated to the parents that, as major stakeholders in the school system, their involvement was acknowledged and valued. The schools' unique partnership initiatives (mentioned in bold print above) differed from the conventional ways in which most schools normally connect with their parents, and they were part of what

distinguished Schools A and B from any average township school as far as a partnership with the parents was concerned. These initiatives probably contributed to their functional partnership with the families.

The interviewed teachers also shared other strategies they employed to ensure an effective partnership between them and the parents of their learners. T2–SA said: *"I communicate with the parents via letters, phone calls, and SMS. I also involve other learners who are neighbours to the parent of the learner involved, to deliver the message, if I suspect a child is not getting the message to the parent."* T3–SB followed a similar strategy: "*I use school telephone to communicate with parents on issues regarding their children. I also send letters to them through their children.*"

T4–SA highlighted the intervention programme the school designed as a means of collaborating with parents over learners who are struggling academically. She explained: *"The school has an intervention programme for struggling students in grades 8 to 11. I use intervention form to interact with parents of learners who are struggling academically. I sit with parents to go through the performance of the learner and check how the learner has performed in each subject. How the parents can assist the learner and how I too can assist the learner to improve performance."* In answering the question on how the intervention programme works, her response was as follows: "*When a child is having either learning or behavioural challenges, I contact the parents through the admin office and schedule a one-on-one meeting with them and the child to see where the problem lies. And how I, the child, and the parent can work together to solve the problem.*"

In addition to the intervention programme, the teachers reported that they had a system in place to assist academically challenged learners by working with their parents. T4–SA explained the process in this way: "*Learners who are struggling academically are called 'progress learners. Whenever I noticed such a learner, I invite the parents over to the school to discuss the challenge and how to assist such a learner. It is usually an extensive discussion. I show the progress report of the learner to the parent and the discussion commences on how we can assist such a learner. Most of the time, what I usually discover is that such a child is slacking in both his school and homework.*" In response to my question on the form of intervention she would bring to the table during such a discussion, she responded: "*During the*

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discussion, I may find out that the child will do better in the Technical subject. I then advise the parent to consider that route. If both the learner and the parent agreed, such a learner is then referred to Technical school. But if I noticed the child has the potential to improve, I map out how to assist him."

Furthermore, in School A, the teachers organised the Saturday School Improvement Plan to assist Grade 12s in preparation for the matric exams on Saturdays. They collaborated with parents to make the programme work even better. T2–SA remarked: *"The school management usually discuss the programme with the parents at the beginning of the year, during the first parents' meeting, and solicit their support in making sure their children attend."* T2–SB added: *"If I notice a child whose academic performance is not satisfactory, I normally advise the parent to take the child to manpower, where he or she equipped with some skills. Some of those referred to Manpower (which deals with skills development) come out with qualifications on the different skills they have acquired."* When I probed further on what parents' responses to her advice of referral to manpower were, she said: "*It is 50-50. Some are positive, some not so positive."*

T4–SB explained her strategy as follows: *"If a child is misbehaving or having a challenge, I report to the parents, many involved parents usually respond positively."* T1–SB agreed: *"If a learner does not want to do his schoolwork, I call the parents and they intervene somehow."* T3–SB added: "*If a child is not doing well, I invite the parents and I show them files of learners who are serious and doing well and I compare that with their child's file. I also handle issues of truancy with the parents when I invite them."*

Based on the narratives above, it seems that teachers' active engagement with parents over issues that affect the learners, the support structures put in place for parents to be able to assist their children with their academic work, regular communication with parents, and partnership initiatives like the intervention programme and Saturday School Improvement Plan, were some of the strategies that boosted the teachers' engagement with parents in the partnership. Since they demonstrated their commitment to the partnership, parents saw the teachers as their ally in the educational development of their children, contrary to the situation in most

schools where the relationship between parents and teachers was not open, friendly, and mutually beneficial.

It also emerged from teachers' narratives that learners are not only beneficiaries of the family-school partnership, but they are also active participants towards its success. This was indicated by teachers mentioning that some learners delivered letters from teachers to parents and from parents to teachers, while others (i.e., Grade 12 learners) assisted learners in lower grades with schoolwork when parents could not, due to their poor education level. In this way, learners acted as a liaison between parents and teachers. It also transpired that teachers in these schools were playing the role of career guides by guiding learners towards appropriate subjects that would match their skills better. Teachers would also refer learners to skills development programmes to better fine-tune their skills in their areas of choice. This is indicative of the fact that teachers are accountable about the achievement and development of their learners.

It must, however, be noted that although the intervention programme of the teachers in School A appeared to be a laudable initiative, it was difficult to assess its effectiveness, because I was unable to interact with any practical case involved in the programme. However, judging from the school's matric pass rate (average of 85% over the past three consecutive years), the other family-school partnership initiatives (Matric Support System and Saturday School Improvement Plan) may have contributed to the academic achievement of the matric learners.

Parent participants also shared the strategies they employed to fulfil their role in the management of the successful family-school partnership. P1–SA told me: "*Although we share the living space at home, I make sure I give my child space to do his schoolwork and make sure TV is off until he's done. I also see to it that he gets enough rest, especially over the weekend. Whenever I receive letters or phone calls from school inviting me to discuss issues regarding my child I respond promptly. I am a volunteer food vendor at the school.*"

P2–SA remarked: "*At end of the term, when I receive the academic report and notice my child's grade is not satisfactory in any subject or subjects, I book an appointment to see the teacher and discuss what could have been responsible for the poor performance and how to help the child. I assist with the feeding scheme at the school as a food vendor. The school communicates with me through letters for meetings, and*

telephone calls for emergency on matters that concern my child. I always go to school to discuss the issues whenever I get the invitation".

P3–SA shared her strategy for partnering with the school: "*Although the environment at home is not good, five of us share the living space, but I make sure my daughter does her schoolwork. When she has challenges with any part of her schoolwork, although I am unable to assist her, I usually seek the assistance of neighbours, like Matric students in the neighbourhood. I am in school every week as a volunteer food vendor, so I seize the opportunity to engage with my child's teachers whenever she has any challenge with her schoolwork.*"

Furthermore, P4–SA described her strategy of engaging with the school as follows: "*I use Mzali to communicate with the school over my child's education and welfare. I find Mzali a very useful app because the school loads my child's result unto the app, and I access the result via the app through his ID details. I am a volunteer security guard. I see that as my way of partnering with the school. I make use of the school's open school policy, whereby parents can come to the school to interact with the children's teacher or the social worker. I speak regularly with my child's teachers over her schoolwork and any behavioural issue.*"

P1–SB had the following to say regarding strategies she employed in partnering with the school: "*Because my level of education is low, my daughter who is at Varsity usually helps my child who is in Grade 9. Each time I notice any problem with my child's academic work, I always approach the class teacher, who in turn refers me to the relevant subject teacher. I have the contact number of all my child's subject teachers, so I contact them, to book an appointment to discuss my child's studies.*"
P2–SB had this to say: "*I work with my child's teacher over any challenge he is facing with his schoolwork. For example, when he had problem with the Tswana language as a subject, I spoke with the subject teacher and we both decided to work together to help the child improve. The teacher explained to me what I must do to assist the child at home, which I did. And this led to an improvement in the subject. I always check with the school office to ask if there is any way I could be of help, like cleaning the school, which I do regularly. I always check my child's schoolwork, to make sure he is doing it and that he is doing it the right way.*" P3–SB stated: "*I am a volunteer food vendor, together with other volunteer food vendors, I assist with preparing food*

(breakfast and lunch). Dish for the children and clean up the kitchen. I also do spring cleaning for the school."

The parents' narratives above indicate that the social challenges involved in sharing their living space with their children did not deter them from active involvement in their children's education. Regardless of these challenges, they actively engaged with their children's teachers and used it as an important strategy in the management of their partnership with the school to enhance the educational development of their children. This way, they demonstrated their commitment to the partnership and played in the same team with the teachers when it came to their children's academic progress. They also supported the school through their involvement with their children's learning at home.

These narratives also revealed that parents worked as volunteers in their children's school by volunteering services such as that of security guard, cleaner, food vendor or monitor of the safety of learners in mornings before the school commences. Through this, they added great value to the school management system.

Based on the findings regarding management strategies employed by the stakeholders for a successful family-school partnership, several themes emerged. These include the non-existence of policies on a family-school partnership in both schools since they simply worked on the principle of trust. The school management introduced various unique initiatives to manage the family-school partnership, which included the Mzali app, a Matric Support System, parents' meetings, lectures by the police department on crime, and Grade 12 parent meetings. Although this seemed to be working for them, I recommended that they consider drafting official policies in this regard.

Being inclusive appeared to be another strong point of the family-school partnership in these schools. Regardless of their level of education, every member of the different stakeholder groups was regarded important and their inputs and contributions to the management of the family-school partnership were valued in the schools. The inputs and contributions included the following:

- Parents' involvement with their children's learning at home and active engagement with the school.

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- Teachers who besides their teaching responsibilities, became life coaches and career guides.

- External agencies such as Telkom that partnered with the school and initiated better communication procedures.

- Learners who acted as the liaison between parents and teachers.

- Members of the SGB who monitored learners' safety every morning before school and also acted as counsellors to learners guilty of unruly behaviour.

- Parents who volunteered to perform a variety of tasks at school.

The above did not only result in strong support structures for the two schools, but also strengthened the work relationship between the management and governance of the school. Regular communication between the different school communities on a variety of platforms such as letters, memos, telephone calls, verbal messages via a third party, and by using apps such as WhatsApp and Mzali, resulted in the successful management of the family-school partnership and made it a truly laudable venture.

4.6 Challenges faced by the family-school partnership

As reported by various authors, one major factor responsible for the poor partnership between families and schools was the myriad of challenges encountered along the way in the partnership endeavour. In this section, I present the challenges highlighted by participants in this study.

Principal 1 from School A (PR1–SA) highlighted parents who seemed to be not cooperative and child-headed families to be the overarching challenges in his school. In his opinion, these factors hindered the effective management of the family-school partnership: *"Some parents, even if you invite them, they do not come, especially when they check the agenda and see that the items on the agenda are what they don't have interest in."* He continued: *"We also have a problem of child-headed families. In such cases, there is nobody to partner with.* He further mentioned the challenge they face with the Mzali app: "*The majority of the parents do not have smartphones, because they are not working. They have what we call 'mapopotani', those small phones, and those are not capable for the App we are referring to."* PR2–SB described the challenges the school faced in partnership with the parents as follows: *"From the*

management point of view, the partnership sometimes suffers because of non-participation of the other part of the triangle, in this case, parents. Parents sometimes don't respond to our calls when we have got issues with their children."

Deputy Principal 1 from School B (DP1–SB) posited: *"Some of the parents experience violence from their children. For this reason, they do not cooperate with us with the fear that their children will turn against them. In such cases they rely on the school to help raise the children 100%."* According to DP2–SB, *"the challenge is that learners regard themselves to have freedom to do whatever they want at any time they want it. As a result, they are not cooperative towards initiatives meant to strengthen the family-school partnership".*

The narratives of the principals and deputy principals mentioned child-headed families as a challenge faced by their schools. They argued that it becomes a challenge to expect the child to wear two hats – that of a learner as well as that of a parent who has to enter into negotiations with the school. In this way, the learner is robbed of the right to be a child. Principals and deputies also revealed that apathy was another major challenge when a poor partnership existed between school and families. This challenge robbed the schools of the opportunity to implement their strategies for growing a functional partnership with the parents.

Indiscipline among learners was another challenge highlighted by the management of both schools. Parents felt no need to partner with the school over their unruly children. They considered this to be a challenge to learners' rights, as promoted in the Children's Rights clause in Section 28 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, and Prohibition of Corporal Punishment (Section 10 of SASA, 84 of 1996). They believed this promoted irresponsibility in learners. In other words, if the learners (who are the subject of the partnership between the school and their parents) do no not see the merits of this partnership, it is easy for them to rebel against it and thus put the partnership in jeopardy. Technology use – which is unique to School A's Mzali app – is another challenge that was highlighted, since some parents were unable to engage with the school via the app due to illiteracy or the lack of a proper device. Because of this challenge, a large percentage of the parents was not be able to benefit optimally from the value that Mzali could add to the partnership.

While relating the challenges of the family-school partnership, T1–SA made the following remark: *"I am a Mathematics teacher, the relationship between me and the parents of my learners is very sour. Because most of them are illiterate and they can't help their children at home. They depend on me to sort the child out all through and if the child's performance falls behind, I am at fault. They have high expectations for their children to do well, but they can't partner with us to achieve their expectations because they themselves lack the subject knowledge."* T2–SA shared her experience in the following words: "*The parents come out of courtesy when we invite them to meetings. But because they feel incapacitated, especially in the area of discipline, they just listen and leave. Hoping teachers can help them discipline the child."*

According to T4–SA, "*many parents want to participate, but they don't know how to. Government policy on learners' rights has impaired both parents and teachers in working together to train these children. Too much emphasis on learners' rights, with little emphasis on learners' responsibility. Even parents fear their children, they can't discipline them. I have taught the parents of some of the learners and I had liberty to work with them because learners' rights were not as enforceable as they today are. Things have now changed. One needs to be more cautious when dealing with children because they seem to be the most protected by the human rights and this makes the management of family-school partnership difficult".*

T5–SA had this to say: "*Parents who are responding very positively are the ones whose children don't give problems with schoolwork. They try their level best to assist their children. But the troublesome ones, their parents don't even come to school".* T1–SB confirmed this by saying: *"It must be noted that most of the parents that do not respond to our calls are those with low education level. This barrier disables them to help their children."*

T2–SB suggested: "*Some parents have lost control when it comes to disciplining their children, so they want us to do that without their involvement in it."* Apathy was another challenge raised by T3–SB, "*Many parents are not willing to come to school when invited. Others see it as a waste of time."* T4–SB added: "*Some parents give an excuse for work, so they claim they don't have time to come to school to engage with the school over the education of their children. Another problem is that of families that are*

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child-headed. I find myself faced with a learner who has become a parent for his/her siblings.”

Teachers' narratives on challenges that hampered the effective family-school partnership indicated that a lack of cooperation from parents to work with teachers contributed towards issues such as learner discipline. Parents would often leave everything in the teachers' hands. This scenario had two sides. On the one hand, parents seemed to grasp the principle of *in loco parentis* and trusted teachers so much that they gave them the absolute liberty to 'parent' the children while at school. On the other hand, parents may have avoided taking responsibility of their own children's education. This could result from several factors, including apathy, whereby parents would fail to show the expected interest in engaging with the school over the progress of their children.

Parents' level of education, which causes them to doubt their ability to handle issues such as schoolwork, could also contribute to their lack of cooperation with teachers. A related factor may be the stigma involved, where parents might have been shy to display their level of education for fear of being undermined or for their child being victimised by the same teacher. Although this was a circumstantial challenge, it added to teachers' workload, because if the parents could not assist their children at home, teachers had to put in extra effort to assist the affected learners. While lack of education made it difficult for some of the parents to work with teachers and assist the children with their schoolwork, it presented a good opportunity for the school to identify such parents and devise strategies to educate them.

The challenge of child-headed families was another issue raised by teachers as a problem that probably impaired the family-school partnership. Such a child was totally overloaded, as they were a learner who at the same time had to play the role of a parent for their sibling. Another observation by the teachers was that the parents of troublesome learners – exactly those with whom the school needed to be involved with to help them – were those who did not actively engage with the school. This revealed a correlation between academic performance and families' active engagement with their children's school.

From their point of view, parents also highlighted challenges that undermined their partnership with the school over the educational development of their children. Parent

1 from School A (P1–SA) said: "*I don't help because I'm not educated enough to assist my child.*" In contrast, P2–SA remarked: "*I don't have challenges in partnering with the school, because the school usually invites me to come and discuss issues that concern my child. We sit down and plan intervention together with the teacher to assist the child in areas where he is struggling with his work.*" P4–SA shared the same sentiment: "*I don't have any challenge because the school encourages the partnership.*"

P3–SA articulated a common problem bothering various parents: "*I try to help, but because of the new syllabus, I am not able to assist much.*" P1–SB shared her challenge: "*I would love to be more involved than the little way I am now, but I do not know how to. I wish the school could tell me what more to do.*" P2–SB agreed and stated: "*To be honest, I do not give much assistance to the school regarding educational development of my child, because I don't understand the Curriculum. So, I don't know how to partner with the school to assist my child with the schoolwork.*"

The above narratives of parents indicate that their lack of (or limited) formal education served as a hindrance to them in assisting their children with homework, which is a main feature of the family-school partnership. A second challenge reported by the parents (related to the challenge of illiteracy) was a lack of understanding of the curriculum by those who had above average formal education and could assist their children. This shows that there was a willingness on the part of the parents to engage with the school over the educational development of their children, but they were incapacitated by the curriculum. Both challenges discussed here were related to the abilities of the parents in their engagement with the school. However, parents did not mention any challenges encountered from the school side, which is an indication that they were satisfied with the schools' role in the partnership. This is an important perspective, which might be one of the main reasons for the functional partnership between the schools and the parents.

The findings on the challenges that schools A and B faced in their partnership endeavour with their learners' families mainly pointed to parents' lack of cooperation and included the following:

- Many parents' modest level of education that results in their depending solely on schools for the education of their children (Although this could appear as a

weakness on parents' side, it may be both a strength that displays the trust that parents have in their schools and a threat due to the stigmatisation of learners and/or the parents).

- Child-headed families where a learner becomes a parent for his/her siblings.

- Low socio-economic status of parents who are unable to meet the requirements of initiatives in the school because of financial constraints.

- Lack of cooperation from parents, which manifests in apathy.

- Technology challenges.

A final challenge that Schools A and B faced in their partnership endeavour with their learners' families (as revealed in my study) involved the learners and their lack of discipline. This was the result of learners' abuse of the Children's Rights clause in Section 28 of the Constitution, as well as the Prohibition of Corporal Punishment in Section 10 of SASA.

4.7   Overcoming the challenges posed by the family-school partnership

In addressing the lack of cooperation by parents, Principal 1 from School A (PR1–SA) noted: *"We decided to call the parents' meeting without setting the agenda. We only give the agenda at the meeting. As a result, we get better turnover. We've taken a resolution that only information that is not of general concern should be dealt with through the Mzali app. If it affects all the parents, we use letters, then we know the information is going to reach them. For instance, if learners are going on a trip, we write letters to the parents, and we request that learners must bring the reply slip to acknowledge receipt."*

PR2–SB mentioned an open day as a solution to parents' poor engagement with the school. He explained: *"We use an Open Day as our strategy to bring parents' attention to their children's education. On this day, parents are able to meet with teachers and their children to discuss the performance of the learner."* When asked about the difference between the parents' meeting and the open day, he responded: *"Parents' meeting is a formal meeting with structured agenda, where we address specific issues, whereas an open day is an informal event that is about consultation with parents on different issues that pertain to their children's development."* Deputy Principal 2 from

School B (DP2–SB) added: *"We use every avenue and opportunity we have to keep soliciting and advocating for parents' support until we get their buy in to school initiatives."*

The above narratives by the principals and deputy principals on the measures that schools put in place to address the challenges of a family-school partnership indicated that they often used open days because these gatherings did not require an agenda. According to them, this strategy had worked for them because parents easily attended open days in large numbers as compared to parents' meetings. This way, the school management exhibited a resolve to get parents involved by finding a creative way of overcoming the challenge of low attendance at parents' meetings. The principals also used different communication platforms to engage with the parents and to involve as many of them as possible. Their strategy to connect with parents showed the commitment of the school management to communicate with the parents.

Teacher 1 of School A (T1–SA) proposed training on involvement for parents: *"Many parents want to participate, but they don't know how to. I should think that as schools, we need to initiate workshops to empower them on how they can actively get involved in their children's education."* T5–SA agreed: "*Parents can be trained on responsibility to work with the school."* T3–SA mentioned that home visits have worked for her: *"I have opted to visit homes of those learners whose parents are unable to attend to my calls. I must admit that it hasn't been a smooth sail in the beginning because I would receive excuses from parents. I however insisted with the help of the child who would inform me when the parents are at home. I must also say learners like it to see the teacher at his/her home. To them, it is an honour regardless of the mission behind the visit. This has made our relationship with such parents and their children stronger."*

T2–SA held the same opinion: *"I involve parents of my learners by visiting their homes after realising that they are unable to attend to meetings initiated by the school and that has worked for me."* T1–SB suggested that the *"School should introduce Parent Awareness Programme",* while the solution offered by T5–SB was the utilisation of community platforms to engage with the parents: *"I have used community platforms like my church and community meetings to engage with parents. When I have an issue that requires parents' attention, I request a platform from the Pastor who has never turned me away. I found it to be an honour to them for a teacher to address them from*

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that platform and they turn to be cooperative. I have also discovered community meetings to be one other useful platform. Addressing parents from these platforms has benefited our family-school partnership a lot."

The above narratives from the teachers revealed the initiatives that they had been applying to meet the challenges relating to the family-school partnership. They created a parent's awareness programme, a sort of orientation programme to inform parents on how they could engage with the school about the educational development of their children. This awareness programme could address the challenge of parents who were willing to partner with the school but did not know how to. They also introduced home visits for teachers who visited their learners' homes to check on their welfare in terms of their educational development. By gaining knowledge of the learner's background, the teacher was able to understand the child better when engaging with such a child. Engaging with families via community platforms such as church and community meetings was another strategy adopted by the teachers. The schools made use of these platforms to raise awareness about the importance of families working in partnership with the schools to boost the educational development of their children. This way, the school connected with and related to the community in which was operating.

To address the problem of illiteracy, which was a major hindrance identified by the parents in their partnership with the school, P2–SA shared the way in which she was navigating this challenge: *"When my daughter has challenges with any part of her homework, although I am unable to assist her, I usually seek the assistance of neighbours, like matric learner in the neighbourhood. I find it easy to seek assistance from neighbours rather than from teachers because they sometimes take advantage of a child whose parent is illiterate."* P2–SA had a similar story: *"Since I don't know how to assist my child, my daughter who is at Varsity usually helps her sibling who is in Grade 9."* P2–SB agreed: *"When my child arrives at home, I ask about his homework and ask if he will need help with it. If yes, I seek help from neighbours."*

The above comments by the parents revealed how they were navigating the challenge of illiteracy that inhibited the partnership from their side, since they were unable to assist their children with their schoolwork. They sought help around them, like from educated neighbours or educated older siblings, to assist with the children's

homework. This proves that the parents were indeed engaged stakeholders who were interested in making the partnership work. In this way, they relieved the teachers of expending too much time and energy on assisting the learners to catch up with the schoolwork they could otherwise not finish at home.

To summarise – the following emerged as solutions to the challenges of the family-school partnership as expressed by the different stakeholders:

- The hosting of open days, which were less formal than parents' meetings and, because of their informal nature, attracted greater participation from parents.

- Teachers paying home visits to learners' homes.

- The schools using community platforms to raise awareness of the family-school partnership.

- Parents seeking assistance for their children in their academic work via third party outside of the school.

4.8   Conclusion

In this chapter, profiles of the school and other participants were provided. It presented the findings of my study based on data generated from focus group interviews and individual interviews with two principals, two deputy principals, 10 teachers, and seven parents from two schools (A and B). The findings were interpreted, and conclusions drawn to answer the research questions.

The next chapter focuses on a discussion of the findings as they relate to the reviewed literature and the theoretical framework on which the study leaned. Recommendations and suggestions for future research are also made.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented the research findings on the perceptions and experiences of principals, teachers, and parents regarding the management of a successful family-school partnership in two township secondary schools in the GDE's Tshwane West District. These emerged from the data collected during individual and focus group interviews. Chapter 5 now presents the findings of the empirical research that I conducted to find answers to the question of how the stakeholders in the family-school partnership (parents, teachers, and principals) in township secondary schools managed this partnership.

The interview questions reported in Chapter 4 were based on four research sub-questions that supported the main research question, was: "How do township secondary schools manage the family-school partnership for their own benefit?". The key findings from participants' responses are listed below:

- The participant stakeholders were aware of what their roles in the family-school partnership entailed, and they were able to define, describe and explain how they carried out these roles by means of collaborative efforts, providing support structures for one another, and acting as mediators between conflicting parties.
- The strategies that stakeholders employed for the management of the family-school partnership contributed to an effective partnership between the schools and the families. These included working on the principle of trust with the stakeholders, seeing that no policies on a family-school partnership existed, developing inclusive partnerships, and improving regular communication between the stakeholders.
- Despite relatively good strategies employed by the stakeholders for the management of the family-school partnership, certain challenges hampered the effectiveness of the partnership. First, a lack of cooperation from parents, which appeared to be the main challenge, and second, the learner factor, characterised by indiscipline among learners, which was attributed to learners' abuse of the Children's Rights clause in Section 28 of the Constitution and the Prohibition of Corporal Punishment in Section 10 of SASA.

- Stakeholders initiated pro-active engagement to overcome the challenges posed by the family-school partnership, by launching initiatives such as open days, home visits, community platforms, parents seeking outside assistance, and parent awareness programme.

5.2 Discussion of the findings

The main aim of my study was to investigate how two township secondary schools in Tshwane's West District were managing the family-school partnership for their benefit. The perceptions of the stakeholders (parents, teachers, and principals) on their roles in the partnership, the strategies that the schools employed in their management of the partnership, the challenges they encountered and the solutions to these challenges – compared to existing research findings in the reviewed literature on the topic – are presented in this chapter. Recommendations are also made based on the findings, followed by suggestions on possible areas for further research. Details of the findings are discussed below.

5.2.1 Stakeholders managing the family-school partnership

To establish how any partnership is managed, it was crucial to understand the roles played by partners on both sides of the partnership. The interviewed participants, in the way they defined and described their roles in the family-school partnership, expressed their perception of their roles in three ways:

(i)   They considered the family-school partnership as a collaborative effort among the different stakeholders.

(ii)   They viewed themselves as support structures for one another – principals for teachers and parents, teachers for parents, and parents for learners.

(iii)   They viewed themselves as mediators between conflicting parties.

The details of these three main perceptions of participants on their roles in the family-school partnership are discussed below.

5.2.1.1   The family-school partnership as a collaborative effort

The participants saw the family-school partnership as a collaborative effort among them as stakeholders. This view resonated with its description by the Schoolwide Integrated Framework for Transformation (SWIFT) (2014) as a family-school

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partnership that contributes positively to students' holistic achievement when there exists a courteous and mutually rewarding partnership between families and the school, and where both parties take collective responsibility for learners' education. T3–SA summed up the general view in this way: *"I work with parents as a team because learning is not going to take place not just at the school, it will take place at home too"*.

This collaborative perception by the participants was revealed in three ways:

(i) Firstly, the teacher participants highlighted home visits as a common strategy to establish and improve the family-school partnership. They asserted that, getting to know learners' background (i.e. the kind of environment in which they study at home and other factors that may have a direct bearing on their study) help the teachers to assist such learners with their studies at school. T4–SA affirmed:

"I create a home atmosphere at school. I try to know the background of those learners. I visit their homes sometimes, to be able to be familiar with the challenges they face at home that may affect their schoolwork."

According to Okeke (2014:6), home visits enable teachers to have better understanding and create a healthy relationship, not only with the learner, but with the learner's family as well. This buttresses another piece of empirical evidence by Makgopa and Mokhele (2013:223), namely that home visits could lead to a relationship based on trust between teachers and parents.

(ii) Secondly, parent participants listed regular consultation with their children's teachers as a major element in their partnership with the school over the education of their children. P3–SA said:

"When I notice any problem with my child, I come to the school to find out what is going on."

This is in line with Makgopa and Mokhele's (2013:221-222) assertion that parents should visit schools regularly to interface with the teacher over their children's work and life at school.

(iii) Thirdly, teachers viewed themselves as stand-in parents, who take interest in the holistic wellbeing of individual learners. T5–SB said:

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"My duty is to play the role of the parent of the learners during the school. So, that the child can be free to talk to me the same way he would talk to his/her parents at home."

This view corresponds with the principle of *in loco parentis*, a legal responsibility, whereby "an educator possesses both delegated power as well as original power by the virtue of her position and status to act as parent when learners are on school grounds, during the normal school sessions, after school hours and during official school activities" (Coetzee, 2012:177).

In addition, parents saw themselves as teachers who were actively involved in their children's learning activities at home. Lemmer *et al.* (2010:214) rightly observe that there has been a paradigm shift from the traditional "delegation model" of the role parents play in their children's learning activities, to a "collaborative model". P2–SB said:

"Whenever I notice my child is lagging in his schoolwork, I organize an extra lesson for him to be able to catch up with the rest of the class. I do this to assist the teacher so that I do not leave everything to the teacher, and the teacher does not have to do extra work on the child."

These last two perceptions from teachers and parents respectively, give credence to Epstein's (2010) concept of a school-like home and a home-like school. In her theory of overlapping spheres of influence, she postulates that although there are independent responsibilities of both home and school towards the learners, there are also shared responsibilities (Epstein, 2011:26). In shared responsibility, educators and the school management create 'home-like schools', where every child is treated as if they are at home, and they are made to feel special. In the same way, families create a 'school-like family', where the child is acknowledged as a student at home and given every support, they need to succeed academically (Bhengu & Myende, 2015; Epstein, 2010:206; Lemmer *et al.*, 2010).

5.2.1.2 Stakeholder groupings as the support structure

The stakeholders in my study saw themselves as support structures for one another. Principals saw themselves as support to the teachers, the parents, as well as the

learners. PR2–SB attested: "*The partnership as we normally call it is a triangular relationship. My role is to make sure there is a balance between the school, the family, and the child.*" This is in consonance with Masha's (2017:40) claim that principals – by virtue of their position – can influence parents and educators to work together to enhance learners' performance.

Teachers saw themselves as a support structure for parents since they were giving parents all the necessary assistance to support the educational development of their children. TA1–SA stated: *"I work together with parents on school matters that involve their children. I inform them about the challenges the children have, and we work together to address such challenges. In the same way, parents inform me about the challenges they face with their children while at home and together we address them. In this way, everything works together for the good of the children."* Gestwicki (2010:176) found that, as teachers managed to draw families from minority population groups into the educational process, their children benefited in terms of both self-esteem and academic success. According to Walker and Dotger (2012), the quality of teachers' relationship with parents has consequences for students' achievement, and serves as motivation for their emotional, social and behavioural adjustment.

Parents also act as a support structure for learners when they do not leave the education of their children only to the teachers and take responsibility themselves. When they give every needed support from their side, they make the teachers' work much easier. Okeke (2014:1), in describing parents' roles within the family-school partnership framework, confirmed that they should play a supportive role in the academic attainment of their children. P2–SB remarked as follows: "*Whenever I notice my child is lagging in his schoolwork, I organize an extra lesson for him to be able to catch up with the rest of the class. I do this to assist the teacher so that I do not leave everything to the teacher, and the teacher does not have to do extra work on the child.*"

In a study conducted by Epstein (2011:238-244) and her team on how homework and family-school interaction were connected to learners' academic performance and conduct, they found that learners who discuss school and homework with their parents are less stressed about their school work and are inclined to perform better academically and display good conduct.

5.2.1.3   Mediators between conflicting parties

The different participants in this study furthermore viewed themselves as mediators between conflicting parties. The principals indicated that they were mediating between teachers, learners, and parents. PR1–SA explained: *"I mediate in between all the parties. I ask the teachers to direct all learners' behavioural issues to me so that they can focus on teaching, while I deal with learners' misbehaviour and the parents."*

Teachers also considered themselves as mediators between parents and learners. T2–SB stated: *"I support parents by reporting to them if there is any problem I encounter with the learner. I also encourage them to cooperate with me in the business of educating their children."*

Parents in turn indicated that they mediated between teachers and learners, and P3–SA said: *"When I notice any problem with my child, I come to the school to find out what is going on. If my child gives the teacher problem, I am available to intervene."*

Empirical evidence suggests that one of the main factors responsible for a poor partnership between school and family is that individual stakeholders often do not know how to engage with other stakeholders in the partnership. They do not know what their role in the partnership entails, and therefore don't know how to play it (Saltmarsh *et al.*, 2015; Ramadikela, 2012; LaRocque *et al.*, 2011). The participants in this study were, however, able to explain what their roles as stakeholders were and how they were playing the roles.

5.2.2 Strategies for managing the family-school partnership

It was established by my study participants that the success of the family-school partnership in schools A and B was due to three strategies that the schools adopted to manage the partnership. First, since no formal policies to regulate the family-school partnership existed in either of the schools, the partnership was built on the principle of trust among the stakeholders. Secondly, the partnership was inclusive of all stakeholders, and thirdly, regular communication took place between the stakeholders. The three strategies are discussed in more detail below.

5.2.2.1   Non-existence of policies to regulate the family-school partnership

The two principals involved in this study affirmed that neither had any official policy in place to govern the family-school partnership. Consequently, the partnership was primarily based on trust. PR1–SA said: *"When it comes to partnership with parents, we do not have a specific policy that governs partnership between the school and the families, but we have different ways by which we engage with the parents."*

This finding is in line with what Okeke (2014:5) found in a school in England where he conducted his study. Even though there was government policy on parents' engagement with the school in their children's schooling, the policy failed to spell out the mode of this involvement. However, it is contrary to Gestwick's (2008:237) standpoint when she highlighted seven common features of successful family-school partnership programmes, one of which is official policies and a statement that recognise parents' active involvement in the school structure. The two schools in my study nevertheless found ways around this deficiency by using different unwritten policies and adapting existing related policies to manage the family-school partnership. According to Ramadikela (2012:111), the lack of formal/written policy to regulate the family-school partnership led to poor engagement of parents with schools in his study. He therefore recommended that the school management should develop – in conjunction with all the stakeholders – formal policy on rules of engagement between the school and the family (Ramadikela, 2012:115). Maluleke (2014:72) in turn, in his study on parents' involvement in their children's education in the Vhembe district in Limpopo, posited that the lack of a written policy on parents' engagement with the schools tended to breed confusion.

Although schools A and B did not have a written policy that guided the family-school partnership, the school management came up with various initiatives formulated by the schools to manage the family-school partnership. These were unique to each of the schools, and included use of the Mzali app, a Matric Support System, parents' meetings, lectures by the police department on crime, and Grade 12 parent meetings. DP1–SB cast more light on one of these initiatives: "*We (the school management) in partnership with the School Governing Body (SGB), periodically arrange for the South African Police Service (SAPS), to come and talk to learners about crime, that if they commit can land them in prison and warn them against such crimes.*"

This arrangement resonates with Auerbach's (2011:731) findings in his study on the management approaches in two Los Angeles schools, namely that principals should facilitate programmes on family-school activities.

5.2.2.2   Inclusive partnership

Every participant in this study experienced a sense of inclusivity in the way the family-school partnership was managed. They affirmed that their input and contributions to the family-school partnership were valued, irrespective of their level of education or socio-economic status. The inclusive partnership was based on the following:

(i)   Parents' involvement in their children's learning at home and active engagement with the school

Parent participants indicated that their home environment was not as conducive as it should be for their children to study at home. Their views resonated with research (Parmaswar, 2014; Naidoo & Perumal, 2014; Singh *et al.*, 2004) on the influence of parents' involvement in traditional black communities in South Africa, and how their children were faring in post-apartheid South Africa. It was found that the home conditions for most of the learner participants were not conducive to learning, and over 70% of the homes were not learning friendly. However, although the home environments of my interviewed parents fell in this category, most of the parents indicated that they used creative means of assisting their children at home with their schoolwork. For instance, P3–SA explained:

> "*Although the environment at home is not good, five of us share the living space, but I make sure my daughter does her schoolwork. When she has challenges with any part of her schoolwork, although I am unable to assist her, I usually seek the assistance of neighbours, like Matric students in the neighbourhood.*"

Empirical evidence from previous studies (Ndebele, 2015; Maluleke, 2014; Parmaswar, 2014; Turney & Kao, 2009; Singh *et al.*, 2004) suggests that, in contrast to parents of high economic status, parents of low economic status are likely not to be actively involved in their children's education. However, the parent participants in my study proved otherwise in the way they navigated around their disadvantaged state of low economic status. This resonates with what Altschul (2012:25) found, namely that

despite the high poverty rate among Mexican Americans, average Mexican American parents cared deeply for the academic wellbeing of their children. Therefore, they were actively involved in the learning activities of their children and used their individual social and human capital.

The parents participating in my study highlighted the impact of their low level of education on assisting their children with their homework and they freely shared the strategies they employed to navigate this challenge. P1–SB alluded: "*Because my level of education is low, my daughter who is at Varsity usually helps my child who is in Grade 9. Each time I notice any problem with my child's academic work, I always approach the class teacher, who in turn refers me to the relevant subject teacher.*"

Parmaswar (2014), Naidoo and Perumal (2014), as well as Singh *et al.* (2004) reported that parents in the communities where they had conducted their studies did not have the education required to be able to understand the homework given to the children, and thus they lacked the intellectual capacity to assist the children. The parents in my study found a way to navigate around that challenge and were still able to assist their children with their academic work at home. They also engaged actively with the school regarding the education of their children by responding promptly to the school's invitation and contributing towards the educational development of their children. P1–SA confirmed: "*Whenever I receive letters or phone calls from school inviting me to discuss issues regarding my child I respond promptly.*"

According to LaRocque *et al.* (2011) and Hornby and Lafaele (2011), the non-availability of parents was a major reason for a poor family-school partnership. The above findings also prove that the availability of parents contributed greatly to the success of the family-school partnerships in their schools.

(ii)   Teachers acting as life coaches and career guides

Interviewed teachers mentioned that, besides fulfilling their teaching responsibilities, they had become life coaches and career guides. They took it upon themselves to stage interventions to assist academically challenged learners by working with the child and parents to assist the learner in overcoming the challenges. T4–SA explained:

"*Learners who are struggling academically are called 'progress learners'. Whenever I noticed such a learner, I invite the parents over to the school to discuss the challenge*

and how to assist such a learner. It is usually an extensive discussion. I show the progress report of the learner to the parent and the discussion commences on how we can assist such a learner. Most of the time, what I usually discover is that such a child is slacking in both his school and homework. During the discussion, I may find out that the child will do better in the Technical subject. I then advise the parent to consider that route. If both the learner and the parent agreed, such a learner is then referred to Technical school. But if I noticed the child has the potential to improve, I map out how to assist him."

(iii)   Inclusive partnership achieved through external agencies

Participants indicated that an inclusive partnership was also achieved through external agencies that partnered with schools to launch inter alia better communication initiatives. For instance, the Telkom Foundation was launched in 2017 to assist eight previously disadvantaged schools in Gauteng to develop in Information Technology. The Foundation equipped the schools with state-of-the-art Information Technology tools, such as an electronic board, Wi-Fi devices and tablets for learners. School A (SA) was among these eight schools and PR1–SA provided more details:

> *"We established partnership through the initiative called Telkom Foundation with Telkom. They assisted with an App called MZALI, meaning 'PARENTS'. Parents can communicate with us through that App. It is like a WhatsApp, where parents have their username. If parents want to see information on their children, they do that via Mzali. If the school has something to communicate to the parents, they use Mzali to send messages to the parents".*

(iv)   Learners liaising between parents and teachers

Furthermore, an inclusive partnership was achieved through learners who acted as the liaison between parents and teachers. It emerged that learners were not only the beneficiaries of the family-school partnership, but also active participants towards its success. They liaised for instance via the WhatsApp groups that were dedicated for use between subject teachers and learners, and which the school used to communicate with parents via the learners. Also, the teachers mentioned that some learners delivered letters from teachers to parents and from parents to teachers, while others (e.g. Grade 12 learners) assisted learners in lower grades with schoolwork

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where parents could not, due to their low education level. Due to the challenge of some learners being unwilling to convey information from the school to their parents, the teachers came up with the strategy of getting the information across through other learners who were neighbours to the unwilling learner. T2–SA explained: *"I communicate with the parents via letters, phone calls, and SMS. I also involve other learners who are neighbours to the parent of the learner involved, to deliver the message, if I suspect a child is not getting the message to the parent."*

(v)   SGB members involved in the partnership

Parent members of the SGB were also involved in the inclusive partnership. They monitored learners' safety every morning before the school commenced and acted as counsellors to learners guilty of unruly behaviour. Principal 2 from School B (PR2–SB) made the following remark:

> *"It is largely the School Governing Board (SGB) that volunteers to assist. They come around before the school starts and they encourage learners to hurry to the school premises. Because some of the learners normally hang around outside the school and not getting into the school premises. They also assist with the discipline of learners, especially late coming, cigarette and weed smoking, gambling, and improper dressing by girl learners. They come to school, spend the whole day speaking, and counselling the affected learners."*

This remark resonates with what Mncube and Mafora (2013:90) found with regard to the functions of parents in the SGB, where maintenance of discipline in the school was one of the functions listed by their respondents..

(vi)   Systems to accommodate parents as volunteers

Parents in my study volunteered to carry out a variety of tasks in the schools, like serving as food vendors, acting as security guards, and assisting with the regular cleaning of the school. In addition, the schools had systems in place to accommodate parents who were willing to serve as volunteers. PR1–SA attested to the success of this arrangement:

> *"Usually, parents at the beginning of the year they volunteer to come and clean the school premises before the opening. Another thing it's cleaning of*

the facilities of the school, there are people that volunteer to come and clean the offices to help assist the grounds' men and the cleaners at the school. But it's not for the whole week once a month they come, or twice a month they come. Like yesterday we had two who were cleaning the offices." Parent 3 from School B (P3–SB) also indicated: *"I am a volunteer food vendor, together with other volunteer food vendors, I assist with preparing food (breakfast and lunch). Dish for the children and clean up the kitchen. I also do spring cleaning for the school."*

Volunteering in the family-school partnership is part of Joyce Epstein's framework of six ways through which schools can achieve an effective partnership with learners' families and the community at large (Epstein, 2011; Lemmer *et al.*, 2010; Gestwicki, 2010).

5.2.2.3   Regular communication between the stakeholders

I gathered from the interviews that the schools employed different communication methods such as letters, memos, telephone calls, SMSs, verbal communications via third parties, as well as WhatsApp and Mzali messages, to engage with their learners' families. T2–SA stated: *"I communicate with the parents via letters, phone calls, and SMS."* To this, P1–SB added: *"I have the contact number of all my child's subject teachers. So, I contact them, to book an appointment to discuss my child's studies."*

P4–SA highlighted School A's unique communication strategy and said: "*I use* Mz*ali to communicate with the school over my child's education and welfare. I find Mzali a very useful App because the school loads my child's result unto the App, and I access the result via the App through his ID details."*

My study participants therefore confirmed Gestwicki's (2010:128) assertion that effective communication within the family-school partnership means that schools actively engage with parents over their children's learning activities by communicating through effective two-way channels: the school communicating with the family about the school programme and the child's progress, and the family responding back to the school. Also, in their study on teachers' perception of parents' involvement in the education of their children, Makgopa and Mokhele (2013:223) found that teachers believed it was imperative for them to communicate regularly with parents on their

children's progress. They also believed that parents had to reciprocate by regularly checking with teachers on the performance of their children in the classroom.

Communication in the family-school partnership is also part of Epstein's framework through which the school can establish and maintain an effective partnership with learners' families and the community at large (Epstein, 2011; Lemmer *et al.*, 2010; Gestwicki, 2010).

5.2.3 Challenges of the family-school partnership

Despite the relatively successful partnerships that the schools had with families of their learners (as expressed by participants in the previous section), they encountered similar challenges as those experienced by other schools where poor partnerships prevail. A lack of cooperation from parents appeared to be the main challenge, while learner factors, characterised by indiscipline among learners, was another barrier that thwarted an effective family-school partnership. All of these robbed the schools from the opportunity to implement their strategies for a functional partnership with the parents. Details of the challenges are discussed below.

5.2.3.1   Lack of cooperation from parents

Although participants in this study reported a degree of cooperation between stakeholders in the schools, it remained difficult to cultivate a relationship with some parents and specific reasons were given for that. Firstly, parent participants admitted that their low level of education was a challenge when it came to their engagement with the school over the education of their children. As expressed by P2–SB: *"To be honest, I do not give much assistance to the school regarding educational development of my child, because I don't understand the Curriculum. So, I don't know how to partner with the school to assist my child with the schoolwork."* P1–SA agreed and added: "*I don't help because I'm not educated enough to assist my child."* Teacher 1 (T1) from school B confirmed this sentiment when he said: *"It must be noted that most of the parents that do not respond to our calls are those with low education level. This barrier disables them to help their children."*

This lack of cooperation could be explained in a number of ways:

(i)   Parents' low level of literacy or lack of interest

Many parents, possibly because of their low level of literacy or lack of interest, do not know what is expected of them when it comes to partnering with the school about the education of their children. They believe that educating their children is the sole responsibility of the teachers and the school. This is what certain scholars describe as parents' lack of education on how to partner with the school (Masha, 2017; Naong, 2011; Mncube, 2009). Although this may seem to be a weakness on the part of the parents, it may also be a display of trust by them as they have great faith in the school to give their children the formal education, they themselves never had. It may also come with some element of stigmatisation of learners and/or the parents. According to Turney and Kao (2009), immigrant American parents are challenged with stigmatisation in their engagement with the schools, because they speak a language other than English, and meetings are conducted in English.

(ii)   Growing existence of child-headed families

The lack of cooperation from parents could also be the result of the growing existence of child-headed families. According to teachers, it becomes a challenge to expect the child to simultaneously wear two hats – that of learner and that of parent who enters negotiations with the school. Often such a learner is robbed of the right to be a child. T4–SB explained: "*Another problem is that of families that are child-headed. I find myself faced with a learner who has become a parent for his/her siblings.*"

In his study on the "Management of parent involvement in historically disadvantaged secondary schools in the Tshwane West District", Ramadikela (2012) attributed the poor involvement of parents in the schools to changing family structures, for instance the challenge of child-headed families. Schools therefore need to accept that structure of the family has changed away from the traditional form, and there is the need to understand, accept and welcome different types of families (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009:8). It is also necessary for schools to design family-school partnership programmes that will cater for different types of families and reach everyone caring for children (Lemmer et al., 2010:203).

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(iii)   Socio-economic and financial factors

Another challenge posited by the participants as a barrier to an effective family-school partnership emerges when parents are unable to meet the requirements of the initiatives in the school because of financial constraints. Principal 1 from School A (P1–SA) explained this challenge by referring to the app that his school uses to communicate with the parents: "*The majority of the parents do not have smartphones, because they are not working. They have what we call 'mapopotani', those small phones, and those are not capable for the App we are referring to.*"

Maluleke (2014:74), in his study titled "Parental involvement in their children's education in the Vhembe District of Limpopo Province" identified low socio-economic status as one of the factors militating against parents' engagement with the schools.

(iv)   Apathy of parents

The apathy of parents who fail to show the expected interest in engaging with the school over their children is another challenge that hamper an effective family-school partnership. This was exhibited in many ways, from parents not responding to the school's invitation, to failure in assisting their children with their academic work. (PR2–SB stated: "*From the management point of view, the partnership sometimes suffers because of non-participation of the other part of the triangle, in this case, parents. Parents sometimes don't respond to our calls when we have got issues with their children.*" T4–SB added: "*Some parents give an excuse for work, so they claim they don't have time to come to school to engage with the school over the education of their children.*"

These responses resonate with Maluleke's (2014:75) finding that some parents are completely unwilling to work with the schools. Michael, Wolhuter and van Wyk (2012:65) made similar findings in their study titled "The management of parental involvement in multicultural schools in South Africa".

(v)   Parents' inability to use technology

The ability to use technology unique to the school (e.g. School A's Mzali app) was highlighted as a final challenge, seeing that some parents were unable to engage with the school via this app due to illiteracy or the lack of a proper device. Quite a large percentage of the parents were not be able to benefit maximally from the value that

this app was adding to the partnership. PR1–SA explained: "*The majority of the parents do not have smartphones, because they are not working. They have what we call 'mapopotani', those small phones, and those are not capable for the App we are referring to.*"

5.2.3.2 Learners as a factor that hampers the family-school partnership

The school management and teachers expressed concern over what they regarded as learners' contribution to the challenges that debilitate the family-school partnership in their schools. The main problem identified was indiscipline among learners. According to them, parents feel no need to partner with the school over unruly children. They attributed this challenge to the recognition of learners' rights as promoted in the Children's Rights clause (Section 28 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa), as well as the prohibition of corporal punishment (Section 10 of SASA, Act 84 of 1996). They generally believed that these promoted irresponsibility in learners. What this means is that, if the learners who are the subject of the partnership between the school and their parents do no not appreciate the merits of this partnership, it is easy for them to rebel against it and thus to put the partnership in jeopardy. DP2–SB summarised the situation by making the following remark: "*The challenge is that learners regard themselves to have freedom to do whatever they want at any time they want it. As a result, they are not cooperative towards initiatives meant to strengthen the family-school partnership.*"

His perception was supported by T4–SA, who stated: "*Government policy on learners' rights has impaired both parents and teachers in working together to train these children. Too much emphasis on learners' rights, with little emphasis on learners' responsibility. Even parents fear their children, they can't discipline them. I have taught the parents of some of the learners and I had liberty to work with them because learners' rights were not as enforceable as they today are. Things have now changed. One needs to be more cautious when dealing with children because they seem to be the most protected by the human rights and this makes the management of family-school partnership difficult.*"

In addition, teaching participants argued that it was exactly the parents of troublesome learners (with whom the school needed to be involved to help their children) who were not active in their engagement with the school. DP1–SB argued: "*Some of the parents*

experience violence from their children. For this reason, they do not cooperate with us with the fear that their children will turn against them. In such cases they rely on the school to help raise the children 100%." T5–SA supported this argument and stated: "*Parents who are responding very positively are the ones whose children don't give problems with schoolwork. They try their level best to assist their children. But the troublesome ones, their parents don't even come to school.*"

The findings above point to a correlation between learners' academic performance and families' active engagement with their children's school.

5.2.4 Overcoming the family-school partnership challenges

To address some of the challenges discussed above, the stakeholders have come up with plans to boost their engagement with one another. The following emerged as solutions to the challenges of the family-school partnership as expressed by the stakeholders.

5.2.4.1   Open Day

An 'Open Day', as indicated by one of the principals, is an informal consultative forum, where teachers and the SMT meet with parents to discuss issues about learners. It is a less formal meeting than a parents' meeting, and because of its informal nature it attracts greater participation from parents. PR2–SB explained:

> *"We use an Open Day as our strategy to bring parents' attention to their children's education. On this day, parents meet with teachers and their children to discuss the performance of the learners. It is an informal event that is about consultation with parents on different issues that pertain to their children's development."*

5.2.4.2   Home visits

Several teachers highlighted the paying of visits to their learners' homes as one of their roles in the family-school partnership. They also raised it as one of the solutions they devised to tackle the challenges facing the partnership. According to the teacher participants, paying visits to their learners' homes to check on the latter's welfare in terms of their educational development, enable the teachers to gain the knowledge of the learner's background. This helped them to understand the child better, and to factor that knowledge in when engaging with the child. T3–SA explained:

"I have opted to visit homes of those learners whose parents are unable to attend to my calls. I must admit that it hasn't been a smooth sail in the beginning because I would receive excuses from parents. I however insisted with the help of the child who would inform me when the parents are at home. I must also say learners like it to see the teacher at his/her home. To them, it is an honour regardless of the mission behind the visit. This has made our relationship with such parents and their children stronger."

5.2.4.3   Community platforms

Community platforms such as church and community gatherings can be used by schools to create awareness of the family-school partnership. A school cannot be separated from the community in which it operates as the community is part of the social capital or eco system of the school. The school management and teacher participants in my study took advantage of this by using various community platforms to create awareness of the importance of the family-school partnership. T5–SB related her experience in this regard:

"I have used community platforms like my church and community meetings to engage with parents. When I have an issue that requires parents' attention, I request a platform from the Pastor who has never turned me away. I found it to be an honour to them for a teacher to address them from that platform and they turn to be cooperative. I have also discovered community meetings to be one other useful platform. Addressing parents from these platforms has benefited our family-school partnership a lot."

This approach is supported by empirical evidence based on Epstein (2010)'s theory of 'overlapping spheres of influence'. Many researchers have established that collaboration between the three spheres – family, school, and the community – works for the benefit of the learners.

5.2.4.4   Parents seeking outside assistance

The parent participants revealed how they navigated the challenge of illiteracy that inhibited the partnership from their side because they were unable to assist their children with their schoolwork. They went to great lengths to assist their children with their homework by engaging the help of third parties outside of the school or by

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seeking help around them, like from educated neighbours or educated older siblings. This was a clear indication of parents being engaged stakeholders who were interested in making the partnership work. By seeking outside assistance, parents relieved the teachers of expending too much time and energy in assisting the learners to catch up with the schoolwork they could not manage at home. P2–SB explained: "*When my child arrives at home, I ask about his homework and ask if she will need help with it. If yes, I seek help from neighbours.*"

5.2.4.5   Educating parents on their involvement as partners

Apart from the strategies that the schools and parents in my study came up with to tackle the challenges facing the family-school partnership, participants also suggested that schools should initiate ways to educate parents on how to partner with the schools over the education of their children. T1–SA proposed training on involvement for parents and said: *"Many parents want to participate, but they don't know how to. I should think that as schools, we need to initiate workshops to empower them on how they can actively get involved in their children's education."* T1–SB suggested: "*School should introduce Parent Awareness Programme.*"

This was in line with empirical evidence that suggests a general concern in this regard among African American families. LaRocque *et al.* (2011) found that when they wanted to engage with the school over the educational development of their children, these parents were not always sure of how to be engaged in a way that the school would value.

Conclusion

The study findings revealed how the tripartite stakeholders perceive their individual roles in family-school partnership. And the strategies they employed in playing those roles in the management of the partnership in the schools.

In addition, the findings also revealed the challenges faced both by the schools and the parents in the management of the family-school partnership. And the solutions they have come up with to address those challenges.

5.3   Recommendations based on the study findings

5.3.1   Recommendation 1: Increasing parent engagement

Since it has been established throughout the study that lack of cooperation from the parents is a major challenge faced by the family-school partnership, schools need to find more creative ways of attracting parents to school. For example, they could organise workshops and seminars that parents can relate with and that speak to their immediate needs (e.g. economic empowerment and improving their socio-economic situation). In the process of attending the seminar, parents could be drawn into further engagement with the school. In addition, schools need to work with those parents who are already actively involved, to brainstorm on how to reach and involve the non-involved parents in the family-school partnership.

5.3.2   Recommendation 2: Introducing a parent awareness programme

As one of the teachers suggested, schools should consider introducing a parent awareness programme – a platform for educating parents on the rules of engagement with the school over their children. This might be a good way of getting parents interested in partnering with the school.

5.3.3   Recommendation 3: Formulating a formal policy on the family-school partnership

It was established from the interviews with the two principals that neither of their schools had a formal policy on the family-school partnership. Since this finding is also backed by empirical evidence (Okeke, 2014; Gestwicki, 2010), there is a need for education policymakers to consider the formulation of a clear policy on the family-school partnership. This will serve as a toolkit for schools in their engagement with families about the education of their children.

5.3.4   Recommendation 4: Introducing a handbook for parents on the curriculum

Finally, a strong point raised by most parent participants concerned their inability to assist their children with schoolwork at home, because of the ambiguities in the curriculum. My recommendation to policymakers will be the introduction of a handbook for parents on the curriculum for each subject. This handbook should be designed in a simplified format so that any average parent would be able to relate with the content.

5.4   Recommendations for further research

As the world migrates fast into the Information Technology era, it is important to explore to what extent the family-school partnership can be enhanced by using the latest Information Technology. The success of Mzali, the communication app being used by School A, gives credence to this recommendation.

Furthermore, many studies have been conducted on the correlation between academic achievement and socio-economic status in disadvantaged communities. There is, however, a need to conduct an in-depth study to find out if there is correlation between the success of the family-school partnership and learners' academic achievement in township schools.

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ANNEXURE A: GAUTENG DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION – APPROVAL

GAUTENG PROVINCE
Department: Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

8/4/4/1/2

GDE RESEARCH APPROVAL LETTER

Date:	25 June 2019
Validity of Research Approval:	04 February 2019 – 30 September 2019 2019/107
Name of Researcher:	Olusegun R.A
Address of Researcher:	192 Althea Avenue
	Murrayfield
	Pretoria, 0184
Telephone Number:	076 167 4326
Email address:	rachaelsegun@gmail.com
Research Topic:	Managing family-school partnership in Gauteng Secondary Schools: The case of "Success Stories".
Type of qualification	Masters' in Education
Number and type of schools:	Three Secondary Schools
District/s/HO	Tshwane West and Tshwane south

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.

26/06/2019

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
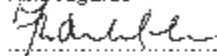7th Floor, 17 Simmonds Street, Johannesburg, 2001
Tel: (011) 355 0488
Email: Faith.Tshabalala@gauteng.gov.za
Website: www.education.gpg.gov.za

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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 outline 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

Mrs Faith tshabalala
Acting Director: Education Research and Knowledge Management

DATE: 26/06/2019

Making education a societal priority

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ANNEXURE B: ETHICS CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA
Faculty of Education

RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	**CLEARANCE NUMBER:** EM 19/03/07
DEGREE AND PROJECT	MEd
	Managing family-school partnerships in Gauteng secondary township schools
INVESTIGATOR	Ms Rachael Adebola Olusegun
DEPARTMENT	Education Management and Policy Studies
APPROVAL TO COMMENCE STUDY	02 May 2019
DATE OF CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	27 October 2020

CHAIRPERSON OF ETHICS COMMITTEE: Prof Funke Omidire

CC

Ms Bronwynne Swarts

Dr Maitumeleng Nthontho

This Ethics Clearance Certificate should be read in conjunction with the Integrated Declaration Form (D08) which specifies details regarding:
- Compliance with approved research protocol,
- No significant changes,
- Informed consent/assent,
- Adverse experience or undue risk,
- Registered title, and
- Data storage requirements.

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ANNEXURE C: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT SCHOOLS

Department of Education Management and Policy Studies

04 – 02 – 2019

The Chairperson of the School Governing Board

Dear Sir/Madam

Request for permission to conduct research at your school

My name is **Rachael Adebola Olusegun**, and I am a student at the University of Pretoria, currently studying towards a Master of Education degree. I would hereby like to apply for permission to conduct a study titled '**Managing family-school partnerships in Gauteng secondary township schools'** at your school. The purpose of the study is to explore how the school principal, parents and teachers manage the successful family-school partnership in the school. The study intends to understand the strategies that your school has used to establish a successful family-school partnership.

The process of fieldwork is detailed below:

- The research will take the form of semi-structured individual interviews and focus group discussions, where the principal, teachers in Grades 8 to 12, and parents of Grades 11 and 12 learners will be requested to share their experience of the successful management of the family-school partnership in the school.

- If I am granted permission for this study, I intend to be at the school for two sessions on two different days after school to avoid disruption of teaching and learning. The first day will be for individual interviews of approximately 45 – 60 minutes, and the other day for a focus group discussion of approximately 45 - 60 minutes. The individual interview with the principal will be conducted during one session of approximately 45 - 60 minutes.

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- The interview will be conducted at a venue and time that suit all the participants, and it will not interfere with teaching time. It will be audio-taped and afterwards be transcribed by me for purposes of analysis. Only my supervisor and I will have access to the information. (Please find attached copies of the interview protocols for your information.)

- To ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants, I will keep private not only the names of the school, the principal, teachers and parents, but also their contributions to the study – except if it is their express wish to be named.

- The interviews will be conducted in English. However, for parents who might not be proficient in English, I will engage the services of an interpreter who is proficient in the language predominant in the community.

- I do not foresee anything bad or risky to happen to the participants in this study. If problems do arise, they can speak to me, and I will consult on the issue and/or refer them to someone who is best able to help. If there is a serious problem about their safety, I will inform both the school principal and the chairperson of the SGB.

- Participants will receive no incentives for taking part in this study. However, I trust that participation will make them feel good about themselves, for being a major contributor to this study and for their contribution to the family-school partnership.

If you agree to allow me to conduct this research in your school, please complete and sign the consent form below. Should you have any questions or concerns pertaining to the study, do not hesitate to contact my supervisor or me via the contact details given below.

Yours sincerely

Researcher: Rachael Adebola Olusegun

Student number: 16150822

Telephone: 076 167 4326   **E-mail**: rachaelsegun@gmail.com

Supervisor: Dr Nthontho

Telephone: 012 420 2499   Email: maitumeleng.nthontho@up.ac.za

Consent Form

I_____, chairperson of the school governing body of

_____, agree/do not agree (delete which is not applicable) to allow **Rachael Adebola Olusegun** to conduct research in this school on the topic titled **"Managing family-school partnerships in Gauteng township secondary township schools".** I understand that the fieldwork will include the following:

- The research will be conducted in the form of semi-structured interviews and Focus Group Discussions, where the principal, teachers in Grades 8 to 12 and parents of learners in Grades 11 and 12 will be requested to share their experience of the successful management of the amily-school partnership in the school.

- Each interview session will be held at a time and place that suit the participating principal, teacher or parent. This will occur after school hours so as to avoid any disruption of teaching and learning.

- The individual interviews with teachers will last approximately 45 to 60 minutes and the focus group interview with parents will be completed within approximately 45 to 60 minutes. The individual interview with the principal will be conducted in one session of approximately 45 to 60 minutes.

- Should language be a barrier between the researcher and the participants, an interpreter will be used.

- I also understand that both the researcher and the interpreter (should there be a need for one) will subscribe to the following principles:

- *Voluntary participation* in research, implying that the participants might withdraw from the research at any time.

- *Informed consent,* meaning that research participants must always be fully informed about the research process and purposes, and they must give consent for their participation in the research.

- *Safety in participation,* in other words, the human respondents should not be placed at risk or harm of any kind.

- *Privacy*, meaning that the *confidentiality* and *anonymity* of human respondents should always be protected.

- *Trust*, which implies that human respondents will not be subjected to any acts of deception or betrayal in the research process or in its published outcomes

Signature: _____ Date: _____

ANNEXURE D: INVITATION LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

Faculty of Education
Fakulteit Opvoedkunde
Lefapha la Thuto

Department of Education Management and Policy Studies

192 Althea Avenue
Murrayfield
Pretoria

01–03-2019

Dear Participant

Invitation to participate in a research project

My name is **Rachael Adebola Olusegun,** and I am a student at the University of Pretoria, currently studying towards a Master of Education degree. I would hereby like to invite you to participate in my study titled '**Managing family-school partnerships in Gauteng secondary township schools'.** The purpose of the study is to explore how you manage the successful family-school partnership in your school and to understand what strategies your school has used to establish this partnership.

In this letter I wish to tell you what may happen if you agree to participate in this study. Once you understand what the study is about, you can decide if you want to participate or not. If you agree, you are requested to complete and sign a consent form attached to this invitation letter.

The process of fieldwork is detailed as follows:

- The research will take the form of semi-structured individual interviews and focus group discussions, where you will be requested to share your experience of the successful management of the family-school partnership in the school.

- The interview sessions will be held at a time and place that suit you and they will be scheduled to take place after school hours to avoid disruption of teaching and learning. The interviews will initially be audio-taped and afterwards I will transcribe them for purposes of analysis. Only my supervisor and I will have access to the information.

- The interviews will be conducted during two sessions on two different days, after school hours, to avoid disruption of teaching and learning. On the first day I will conduct a personal interview with you, which should require approximately 45 to 60 minutes of your time, and on the second day I wish to hold a focus group discussion that will last approximately 45 to 60 minutes.

- To ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of all participants, I will keep private both your name and that of the school, as well as the contributions to the study – except if it is your express wish to be named.

- The interviews will be conducted in English. However, should you prefer to use your mother tongue, this will be arranged, as I will engage the services of an interpreter.

- I do not foresee anything bad or risky to happen to you. If problems do arise, you can speak to me and I will consult on the issue and/or refer you to someone who is best able to help. If there is a serious problem about your safety, I will inform both the school principal and the chairperson of the SGB.

- You will receive no incentives for taking part in this study. However, I trust that your participation will give you the satisfaction of knowing you have been a major contributor to this study.

Should you have any questions or concerns pertaining to the study, you are welcome to contact Dr Nthontho on 012 420 2499.

Yours sincerely

Researcher: Rachael Adebola Olusegun
Student number: 16150822
Telephone: 076 167 4326   **E-mail**: rachaelsegun@gmail.com
Supervisor: Dr Maitumeleng Nthontho
Telephone: 012 420 2499   **Email**: maitumeleng.nthontho@up.ac.za

ANNEXURE E: INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR PRINCIPALS AND DEPUTY PRINCIPALS

School's Name:

School's Code (Mark with x)

SA	SB

Principal/Deputy's Code

Interview schedule

Study title: Managing family-school partnership in Gauteng secondary township schools

Date:

Time:

Duration:

Place:

Study purpose: The aim of this study is to explore the management of family-school partnership in township secondary schools. What are your roles in the management of the partnership, your management strategies, the challenges you encounter in the partnership, and how you handle the challenges.

Thank you for your participation.

Interview procedure: The interview will consist of 10 questions. You are not obliged to answer all of them, should you feel uncomfortable to do so.

Note: There are no wrong or right answers to the questions asked in this interview.

Remember:

1. Everything we share and discuss will be treated as confidential and will not be revealed to a third party. I am interested in your personal understanding and experiences of how

you manage the family-school partnership in your school. I also wish to hear about your roles and responsibilities as a principal and am not interested in what the Department of Education and the school expect from you.

2. You are welcome to seek clarity should anything be unclear.

3. Everything we share and discuss will be audio-recorded.

4. You may stop participating at any time without giving a reason.

Are there any questions that you would like to ask for clarification before we start?

Interview questions

1. What do you understand by the concept of a family-school partnership?
2. Does the school have a policy on a family-school partnership? Please give more details.
3. What is the school policy on the involvement of parents in decision making?
4. What volunteering programme does the school have for parents?
5. How do parents respond to the programme?
6. Does the school have any programme that supports parents to assist learners in home learning activities? Please give more details.
7. How does the school motivate new parents to be part of the family-school partnership?
8. Describe the communication channels used between the school and families.
9. What challenges does the school face in respect of the management of the family-school partnership?
10. What measures does the school take to handle these challenges?

Is there anything else you would like to share with regard to your experiences of managing the family-school partnership in your school, or about your role and responsibilities as the principal?

Concluding remarks

Thank you for taking the time to share with me this important and valuable information.

I would appreciate it if you would make yourself available to provide further clarity should I need it.

Should you have questions and/or wish to share additional information regarding this study/interview, do not hesitate to contact us.

ANNEXURE F: FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR TEACHERS

School's Name:

School's Code (mark with x)

A	B

<u>**Interview schedule**</u>

Study title: Managing family-school partnership in Gauteng secondary township schools

Date:

Time:

Duration:

Place:

Study purpose: The aim of this study is to explore the management of family-school partnership in township secondary schools. What are your roles in the management of the partnership, your management strategies, the challenges you encounter in the partnership, and how you handle the challenges.

Thank you for your participation.

Interview procedure: The interview will consist of 10 questions. You are not obliged to answer all of them, should you feel uncomfortable to do so.

Note: There are no wrong or right answers to the questions asked in this interview.

Remember:

5. Everything we share and discuss will be treated as confidential and will not be revealed to a third party. I am interested in your personal understanding and experiences of how you manage the family-school partnership in your school. I also wish to hear about your roles and responsibilities as a teacher and am not interested in what the Department of Education and the school expect from you.

6. You are welcome to seek clarity should anything be unclear.

7. Everything we share and discuss will be audio-recorded.

8. You may stop participating at any time without giving a reason.

Are there any questions that you would like to ask for clarification before we start?

Interview questions

11. What do you understand by the concept of a family-school partnership?
12. What are your roles in the partnership?
13. What is your relationship with your learners' parents?
14. Do you have a programme in place to assist parents in helping learners at home with their schoolwork? Give details please.
15. How do the parents respond to such assistance?
16. Describe the communication channel used between you and your learners' families.
17. What kind of assistance do you get from the school management to play your role in the family-school partnership?
18. How do you work with parents of learners who are struggling academically to assist those learners?
19. What are the challenges you encounter in partnering with your learners' parents?
20. How do you think such challenges can be overcome?

Is there anything else you would like to share with regard to your experiences of managing the family-school partnership in your school, or about your roles and responsibilities as a teacher?

Concluding remarks

Thank you for taking the time to share with me this important and valuable information.

I would appreciate it if you would make yourself available to provide further clarity should I need it.

Should you have questions and/or wish to share additional information regarding this study/interview, do not hesitate to contact us.

ANNEXURE G: INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR PARENTS

School's Name:

School's Code (Mark with x)

SA	SB

Parent's Code

Interview schedule

Study title: Managing family-school partnership in Gauteng secondary township schools

Date:

Time:

Duration:

Place:

Study purpose: The aim of this study is to explore the management of family-school partnership in township secondary schools. What are your roles in the management of the partnership, your management strategies, the challenges you encounter in the partnership, and how you handle the challenges.

Thank you for your participation.

Interview procedure: The interview will consist of 10 questions. You are not obliged to answer all of them, should you feel uncomfortable to do so.

Note: There are no wrong or right answers to the questions asked in this interview.

Remember:

9. Everything we share and discuss will be treated as confidential and will not be revealed to a third party. I am interested in your personal understanding and experiences of how you manage the family-school partnership in your school. I also wish to hear about

your roles and responsibilities as a parent and am not interested in what the Department of Education and the school expect from you.

10. You are welcome to seek clarity should anything be unclear.

11. Everything we share and discuss will be audio-recorded.

12. You may stop participating at any time without giving a reason.

Are there any questions that you would like to ask for clarification before we start?

Interview questions

21. What do you understand by the concept of a family-school partnership?
22. What roles do you play in the partnership?
23. How do you relate with your child's teachers over academic work?
24. What type of support do you get from the school to assist you with helping your child at home?
25. Describe the type of environment in which your child studies at home.
26. How do you assist your child with his/her schoolwork at home?
27. Are you involved in any volunteer work at your child's school?
28. Describe the mode of communication used between you and your child's school.
29. Please describe the challenges that you encounter in partnering with your child's school?
30. How do you think such challenges can be overcome?

Is there anything else you would like to share with regard to your experiences of managing the family-school partnership in your school, or about your role and responsibilities as a parent?

Concluding remarks

Thank you for taking the time to share with me this important and valuable information.

I would appreciate it if you would make yourself available to provide further clarity should I need it.

Should you have questions and/or wish to share additional information regarding this study/interview, do not hesitate to contact us.

## ANNEXURE H: INTERPRETER'S CONSENT FORM AND DECLARATION OF RESOPONSIBILITY

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Informed Consent Letter

I ▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬, agree to serve as interpreter in a study conducted by Mrs Olusegun RA titled: 'Managing family-school partnership in Gauteng secondary schools: The case of "Success Stories"'. I understand research process will be in the form of semi-structured interviews and Focus Group Discussions, where I will be requested to interpret the research protocol in the dominant language in the community to participants who might not be proficient in English. I have been properly briefed on the research protocol, Ethical principles and Institutional requirements guiding the research.

I have received contact details of the researcher and the supervisor should I need further clarifications of my role in the research.

Signed: _Mabuse_   Date: 15/02/2019

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Faculty of Education
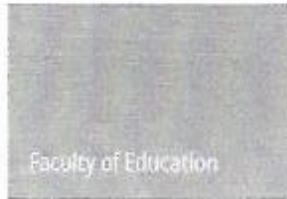
Reference	

PERSONAL DECLARATION OF RESPONSIBILITY

Title of research project:

1. I/we declare that I am/we are cognisant of the goals of the Research Ethics Committee in the Faculty of Education to
   - ❏ develop among students and researchers a high standard of ethics and ethical practice in the conceptualisation and conduct of educational research;
   - ❏ cultivate an ethical consciousness among scholars especially in research involving human respondents; and
   - ❏ promote among researchers a respect for the human rights and dignity of human respondents in the research process.

2. I/We subscribe to the principles of
   - ❏ *voluntary participation* in research, implying that the participants might withdraw from the research at any time.
   - ❏ *informed consent*, meaning that research participants must at all times be fully informed about the research process and purposes, and must give consent to their participation in the research.
   - ❏ *safety in participation* put differently, that the human respondents should not be placed at risk or harm of any kind e.g. research with young children.
   - ❏ *privacy*, meaning that the *confidentiality* and *anonymity* of human respondents should be protected at all times.
   - ❏ *trust*, which implies that human respondents will not be subjected to any acts of deception or betrayal in the research process or its published outcomes.

3. I/we understand what plagiarism entails and am/are aware of the University's policy in this regard. I/we undertake not to make use of another person's previous work without acknowledgment or to submit it as our own. I/we also undertake not to allow anyone to copy our work with the intention of using it as their own work.

4. I/we understand that the data collected in the course of our research become the institutional property of the University of Pretoria and I/we undertake to transfer all raw data and documents related to our research for safekeeping as required by the Faculty of Education.

5. I/we understand that any amendment to the approved protocol needs to be submitted to the Ethics Committee for review prior to data collection. Non-compliance implies that approval will be null and void.

NiE. MABUSE
Applicant

Mabuse
Signature

15/02/19
Date

_____
Supervisor (if applicable)

_____
Signature

_____
Date

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