

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN, METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS OF PHASE 1: QUANTITATIVE STUDY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Research design indicates the structure and procedure followed to answer research questions. Based on this premise, the research was conducted in a sequence process of two phases (Phase 1, presented in this chapter and Phase 2, presented in Chapter 4). The purpose of this study at Phase 1 was to determine rural lower primary school principals' and teachers' perceptions of parental involvement in the academic education of learners and how they describe the involvement activities they employ. Phase 1 employed a quantitative research methodology centred on survey responses and statistical analysis. The purpose of the research at Phase 2 was to understand parental involvement in the academic education of learners as it is practiced in rural lower primary schools and to construct a knowledge base on how and why parental involvement is done the way it is in a rural context in Namibia. The methodology regarded suitable for Phase 2 was interviewing and qualitative data analysis. Thus the study implemented a mixed method type research design. This chapter presents how the quantitatively focused research questions of this study were addressed. The chapter also presents the methodology, and how quantitative data were collected and analysed. The chapter concludes with the summary of main ideas discussed in this section.

3.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following sub-questions were investigated in Phase 1 of the study:

- Whether and how is parental involvement perceived and practised by professional educators (principals and teachers) for supporting learners' academic education in rural lower primary schools?
- What barriers to parental involvement do rural lower primary schools in Namibia experience?

As indicated in 1.5.1.12 (Chapter1) respondents to the questionnaire (principals and teachers) of this study are referred to as professional educators throughout this study's report. This is done to maintain consistency of the use of terminologies and concepts in reporting and discussing this study's results and findings (chapter 3-5).

3.3 PROPOSITIONS

Hypotheses are statements of the relations between two or more variables (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000; Cone & Foster 1993). Hypotheses are predictions about the nature of the relationship between the variables identified in the research questions (Cone & Foster, 1993). This study's process of reviewing literature and reflective thinking on literature reviewed led to the formulation of hypotheses required for advancement of scientific knowledge about parental involvement practice in rural lower primary schools (Wiersma & Jurs, 2005; Cone & Foster, 1993). The general existing research theory states that involvement of parents in the education of learners is enhanced by related conditions within the context of schools such as geographical locations, social, cultural and economic conditions, education, and policy. I agree with some researchers who speculate that high involvement at schools is characterised by a climate conducive to parental support; schools' understanding and valuing of involvement; provision of educational opportunities for knowledge development about parental involvement to parents and teachers; use of community resources and funds of knowledge of community experts, and the learners' parents; provision of opportunities for technical support (pedagogy, curriculum and assessment) for classroom activities to parents; use of various options to communicate with parents; involvement of parents in power sharing and decision- making; and positive attitude towards involvement (Barnard, 2004; Barton et al., 2004; Epstein & Salinas, 2004; Stern, 2003; Dryfoos & Maguire, 2002; Epstein et al., 2002; Fan, 2001; Maynard & Howley, 1997; WCER, 1995).

The relationship expressed in this theory of deduced educated guesses (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000) indicates tentative statements of relationship explored by Phase 2 of this study. The evidence to support the claims of this study (i.e. there is a relationship between increased parental involvement and professional educators' (principals and teachers) perception and practice of involvement as well as their attitude towards involvement) was collected. The propositions explored by this study were:

- According to the perceptions of professional educators, schools with *high ratings* on conducive climate to parental support; provision of educational opportunities for knowledge

development about parental involvement to parents; use of community resources and funds, and knowledge of community experts and learners' parents; provision of opportunities for technical support (pedagogy, curriculum and assessment) for classroom activities to parents; use of various options to communicate with parents; involvement of parents in power sharing and decision-making; and positive attitude towards involvement *will have high parental involvement*.

- According to the perceptions of professional educators, schools with *average ratings* on conducive climate to parental support; provision of educational opportunities for knowledge development about parental involvement to parents; use of community resources and funds and knowledge of community experts and learners' parents; provision of opportunities for technical support (pedagogy, curriculum and assessment) for classroom activities to parents; use of various options to communicate with parents; involvement of parents in power sharing and decision-making; and positive attitude towards involvement *will have intermediate parental involvement*.
- According to the perceptions of professional educators, schools with *low ratings* on conducive climate to parental support; provision of educational opportunities for knowledge development about parental involvement to parents; use of community resources and funds, and knowledge of community experts and learners' parents; provision of opportunities for technical support (pedagogy, curriculum and assessment) for classroom activities to parents; use of various options to communicate with parents; involvement of parents in power sharing and decision-making; and positive attitude towards involvement *will have low parental involvement*.

3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN: QUANTITATIVE STUDY

As critical educational research, this study's substantive agenda was to examine and interrogate the relationships and collaborations between lower primary schools and communities (parents being defined as part of communities). The study further examined how schools perpetuated equalities and reduced inequalities through power sharing between professional educators and parents. As indicated in Section 1.6 of Chapter 1, this study is established on a combination of theoretical paradigms that assumes a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methodological research approaches.

I chose a mixed method design, which is based on my underlying research questions and objectives, rather than by a particular approach which is popular in social science research. My reasoning draws upon Teddlie and Tashakkori (2003) who consider “*research questions to be more important than the method or the paradigm that underlies the method*” and they refer to this as the “*dictatorship of the research question*”(Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003: 21). Therefore, this study operated from a common belief among many researchers that research questions determine the research design. In accordance, the study’s research questions influenced what was to be investigated (Henning, Van Rensburg & Smit, 2004).

According to Sechrest and Sidana (1995) mixed method design embodies strengths of both quantitative and qualitative methodologies and results in outstanding outcomes. Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004: 15) concur as they state that “*taking a non-purist or compatibilist or mixed position allows researchers to mix and match design components that offer the best chance of answering their specific research questions*”. Teddlie and Tashakkorie (2003) introduce two decision rules for combining qualitative and quantitative data collection in a study:

- *deciding the priority of either the quantitative or the qualitative method*
- *deciding on the sequence of the two by identifying the order of conducting the complementary method (either a preliminary or a follow up phase)* (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003: 27)

Accordingly, in this study, quantitative data collection precedes qualitative in order to explore and test variables. However, the qualitative approach was given the dominant status in the whole process. The emphasis on the qualitative phase was determined by considerations of research questions (see 1.3). Most of the research questions in this study are concerned with the way in which professional educators and parents define the reality they live. Although quantitative approach (Phase 1) might demonstrate causality, it might be limited in realism. Therefore, a qualitative approach (Phase 2) facilitated the exploration of the phenomenon (the practice of parental involvement) in a natural setting because of the concern for context, and to maintain an openness about what was observed, and collected in order to avoid missing something important. Hence, realism is increased. From the phenomenological point of view, the situation could be understood from the meaning participants attach to it in order to define their own reality. The purpose of the study was to understand the reality of parental involvement in rural, lower primary schools. Wiersma and Jurs (2005) view the accounts of reality as accounts of insiders, that is, those

who live the lives or do the things that are being analysed. Parents, teachers and principals were the most important informants for the study. Therefore, the qualitative approach was the best method to capture their perceptions in order to obtain an accurate measure of reality.

This sequence (quan – QUAL) was done to make inquiry move beyond exploration and description to explanation and in-depth investigation for understanding with six case schools. The quest for understanding and in-depth inquiry is one of the aims of qualitative approach (Henning, Van Rensburg & Smit, 2004; Creswell et al., 2003). Therefore, the Phase 1 results were used to develop factors that informed the identification and purpose of Phase 2 that served as the backbone of this entire study.

A mixed methods design enabled me to answer simultaneously confirmatory, exploratory and explanatory questions presented in 1.3 of chapter 1.

The use of both types of questions, exploratory and explanatory, verified (quantitatively) and generated theory (qualitatively) from data (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003)

The explanation of this research project process is interwoven with a visual model showing the matrix of the study’s design and key steps reflecting on the process (Harry, Sturges & Klingner, 2005; Creswell et al., 2003). Hence, the following table (Table 3.1) indicates the visual presentations of the study design typologies and the key steps of the research process which reflect quantitative preliminary basic and qualitative predominantly design (quan →QUAL (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003; Creswell, 2003):

TABLE 3.1: The major typologies of the study design and the key steps reflecting on the research process (Adapted from Creswell et al., 2003)

Quan →QUAL¹

Quan → Data Collection	Quan→ Data Analysis	Quan → Data Interpretation	QUAL → Data Collection	QUAL → Data Analysis	QUAL → Data Interpretation	Interpretation of Entire Analysis
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¹ Quan stands for quantitative, QUAL stands for qualitative, '→' stands for sequential, capital letters denote high weight/dominant/more priority, and lower case or small letters denote lower weight or less dominant in the table.

The major rationales for choosing the Mixed Method Research Design are:

- Development, initiation and expansion. The quantitative data in Phase 1 lead to the design of a second phase which is qualitative. The findings from Phase 1 inform Phase 2 (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003)
- Best chance of producing more complete knowledge and answering research questions. My decision was influenced by investigators who are well informed in mixed methods (Creswell, 2003; Creswell et al., 2003; Onwuegbuzie & Teddlie, 2003; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, October; Phillips, 2004). These investigators assert that researchers who prefer to use Mixed Design should do it with respect to their underlying research questions, rather than with regard to some preconceived biases about which research paradigm should have hegemony in social science research. Research questions function as the heart of the design (Maxwell & Loomis, 2003), because they guided initial data collection. Punch says research questions direct empirical procedures (Punch, 2005). Nevertheless, research questions answered by Phase 2 data improved after the empirical study had taken place (Punch, 2005; McMillan & Schumacher, 2001).
- To increase and improve generalisability of the study results. Surveying a random selection from the population of interest improves generalisability (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, October). However, one of the main limitations of this study is that results cannot be generalised.
- Methodological triangulation and complementarity. This refers to the use of multi-methods to study a single problem (parental involvement in academic education of learners in rural lower primary schools), to reduce the problems associated with singular methods, and contact effective research (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003; Janesick, 2000; Stake, 2000). My reasoning also draws upon Sechrest and Sidana (1995) who believe that mixed methods research incorporates the strengths of both methodologies and produces a superior product.

3.4.1 Methodology

The methodology of the investigation denotes the value of selected measurement instruments and the reasoning behind the selection. Measurement instruments are techniques characterised by questions which are asked (in a survey questionnaire) to provide data relevant to the research questions (Punch, 2005). In this study, a questionnaire with closed and statement questions (see Appendix C for school principal and teacher survey on practice of parental involvement in learners’

academic education) was used to collect data for Phase 1. As well, this section presents the population and sampling, development of the questionnaire, how the draft questionnaire was piloted and how the final questionnaire has been applied.

3.4.1.1 The Research population and consecutive sampling

The population of 764 lower primary schools in rural northern Namibia is distributed over four regions (Ohangwena, Omusati, Oshana and Oshikoto). All four regions are similar in regards to economic and educational levels of the inhabitants of rural areas across northern Namibia. The major differences, pertaining to this study, across these regions rest in ethnic/lingual divisions and geographic location. Therefore, a judgement was made to select the schools based primarily on dialect (i.e. Oshikwanyama, a dialect of Oshiwambo, the principal language). In this case, it was decided to select the region using the dialect in which I am most fluent as it was expected that not all participants would be fluent in written or spoken English.

The Ohangwena region with 205 lower primary schools (See Appendix D for statistics of schools in Ohangwena region) was deemed sufficient and feasible for this study to allow the drawing of conclusions. Hence a judgement sampling of all lower primary schools in Ohangwena region was done for this study. The whole population of the lower primary school was regarded a sufficient size to achieve acceptable population validity. Moreover, this sample size would allow reasonable generalisation to the population of the region. Questionnaires were sent to the principal and one of the lower primary teachers of all schools with a lower primary phase in the Ohangwena region.

Schools which participated in this study were chosen according to the following general standards:

- Location: Rural area. Schools should be located in a rural area. This criterion was based on the fact that the silence in the research findings revealed by the literature reviewed indicated the need for further research to be done in rural areas and among parents from low socio-economic status.
- Phase Level: Lower primary. Schools with full lower primary phases were chosen. The focus ‘academic education at lower primary phase’ was chosen because academic education influences a child’s future and its foundation is laid at the lower primary level. Therefore, this phase was chosen based on the belief that the foundation of academic education is at the lower primary level and early intervention has important long-term effects (Hornby, 2000). Success or failure at this level influences academic performance throughout a child’s life.

3.4.1.2 Development of the questionnaire

The content of this study's questionnaire (for principals and teachers) was developed after reviewing literature and other empirical studies (Neuman, 2003; Dryfoos & Maguire, 2002; Epstein et al., 2002; Burke & Picus, 2001; Hornby, 2000; Chapman & Aspin, 1997; Smith et al., 1997; Heneveld & Craig, 1996) on factors impacting parental involvement. Hence, the knowledge gained from this literature served as guiding frameworks for measurement development.

A hypothetico-deductive quantitative (top-down) methodology, in which empirical data is tested as objectively as possible, was followed to determine whether certain generalizations about parental involvement found to exist in other parent populations (see 2.10) were also true for the practice of this educational approach in rural Namibia's lower primary schools. First, the hypotheses were stated based on existing theory (currently available scientific explanations). Then, a questionnaire was developed to collect data to be used to test the hypotheses empirically. The central concept of the study, which is parental involvement, had been looked at to determine the suitable and appropriate method (i.e. questionnaire) to measure the variable. Therefore, measures of the concept were operationalised as questions. To ensure that reliable results would eventually be generated by the questionnaire, the questions were written and rewritten for clarity and completeness. Questions were clustered according to variables to be measured, and were weaved together for a smooth flow.

- Content validation of the questionnaire

Neuman's (2003) recommendation for measurement validity guided the construction and development of this study's questionnaire. As recommended by Neuman (2003), a process of three steps was followed: (1) identification of constructs (2) definition of constructs and (3) development of indicators that tap the whole definition. The productive relationship which makes the two environmental systems (school and family) improve one another's effectiveness (Weiss, 2005; Singh, Mbokodi & Msila, 2004) and ultimately share the responsibility of educating learners together for the enhancement of learners' intellectual development implies the following constructs and their definitions. Indicators of parental involvement as represented by statement questions (per construct) in a questionnaire tap from the constructs' definitions (Neuman, 2003). The following constructs covered the content of the questionnaire:

Section B: School climate; Development opportunities for parents; Schools' linkages with community resources; Use of parents as resources; Communication options; Power sharing and

joint decision- making. Section C: Schools' perceptions and beliefs of parental involvement; Schools' consultations with advisory services to empower teachers. Section D: Barriers that prevent or interfere with schools' practice of parental involvement.

- Item format used in the questionnaire

Closed-ended questions were asked. Delpont (2005) acknowledges the use of closed questions for a meaningful and verified comprehensiveness of the phenomenon, quick but fair availability of the investigation results, better comparisons of responses, easy coding and statistical analysis. I chose the survey questioning type of method due to its popularity, greater uniformity of responses, easy processing (Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Babbie, 1992) and the nature of the data needed (see Appendix B for statistics of schools in Ohangwena Region).

This survey (questionnaire) of the study consists of four sections, A: Demographic Information; B: Schools' Practice of Parental Involvement; C: Schools' Attitude towards Parental Involvement and D: Barriers to Parental Involvement. Section A is comprised of demographic information to compile a demographic profile. The demographic information section consists of questions asked for information about respondents' personal attributes, his/her professional qualifications and the size of the school. Demographic questions were asked to reveal who the respondents were and what type of school they are working in. Section B was comprised of 5 questions. The Section C was comprised of 2 questions and the Section D was comprised of 1 question. Each question of each section consisted of a list of statements/indicators (the concepts 'statement' and 'indicator' are used interchangeably in this thesis) provide empirical representation of parental involvement. Code numbers indicated the value of words respondents believed represented their beliefs, understandings, thoughts and experiences: Always (A) designated as 4, Most of the time (MT) designated as 3, Sometimes (ST) designated as 2 and Never (N) designated as 1 were used in answering sub-section 3-8 (of Section B). Code numbers indicated Strongly Agree (SA) designated as 4, Agree (A) designated as 3, Disagree (D) designated as 2 and Strongly Disagree (SD) designated as 1 were used in answering sub-section 9-10 (of Section C). Code numbers indicated Often (O) designated as 4, Sometimes (STS) designated as 3, Seldom (S) designated as 2 and Never (N) designated as 1 were used in answering sub-section 11(of Section D). This information helped to (a) explain the results of survey (b) explore the findings of research and (c) identify schools for phase 2. The respondents answered the questions by circling an appropriate number.

3.4.1.3 Pilot application of the draft questionnaire

The questionnaire was piloted on five principals and five teachers. Small-scale piloting is recommended for feasibility, convenience and cost effectiveness (Harry, Sturges & Klingner, 2005; Punch, 2005; Janesick, 2000). The people who participated in a pilot study were typical of the people from which the main study intended to collect data. After the respondents finished completing the pre-testing questionnaires, they were asked to give their comments or constructive criticism on wording and sequence, redundancy, missing and confusing questions. These comments were invited to reveal errors in and validate the content clarity of the instrument, improve questions and format, and to refine the research instrument before the main investigation commenced (Delport, 2005; McMillan & Schumacher, 2001). The respondents did not suggest any change to the instrument. The results of the pilot study were not included in the main findings of the study.

3.4.1.4 Application of the questionnaire

For this study the survey strategy was used to collect adequate, relevant quantitative data from principals and teachers on the particulars of parental involvement in rural schools. Quantitative data refers to empirical information provided by school principals and teachers which were turned into assigned numeric codes. Numbers, indicating participants' responses, were used to construct variable degrees of participants' sentiments. Results were expected to provide descriptive information and shed light on research questions 1, 2 and 3 (see section 1.3 of Chapter 1 for research questions).

A survey was conducted in all rural lower primary schools (205 schools) in the purposefully chosen Ohangwena Region with the intention of describing rural lower primary schools' strategies and processes of parental involvement. The survey data was also hoped to identify schools with high, average and low participation rates of parental involvement. The questionnaire strategy provided a numeric description of opinions of school principals and teachers on the particulars of parental involvement applied and experienced by rural schools. Self-completion questionnaires were sent to schools via school cluster heads. The principals and teachers were asked to give their permission to be involved in the study and to sign the consent forms (see Appendix C). Separate agreements were made about the date to return the questionnaires to either the school cluster heads, or the inspectors' offices or to post them directly to me through my postal address. Schools which could be reached via telephone were contacted to remind them of the due date for the questionnaires. However, most schools did not have telephones thus could not be reached to be reminded of the due date. The bad roads to and distances between schools made it practically difficult for all the schools which did not

return their questionnaires to be reached in person within a limited time in which the data was to be collected. Although the pilot test (see 3.4.1.3) established that the language and reading level of the questionnaire were appropriate, the relatively low return rate of the main study's questionnaire (see Table 3.2) suggests that the second language questionnaire presented an obstacle to most principals and teachers. This is evidenced by the increased level of co-operation received at Phase 2 of the study when all but three of the participants opted for the interview to be conducted in their own language.

3.5 DATA ANALYSIS

After collection, the data had to be prepared for data entry. The coding of all the information on the questionnaire was done by assigning numbers to the answers indicated in all sections of the questionnaire. After the responses on the questionnaire were coded, the Department of Statistics at the University of Pretoria captured them in Microsoft Excel and then imported them into SAS v8.2 software (SAS Institute Inc. 2004) for analysis. Before the analysis of data started, the checking of the dataset for mistakes and errors was done to avoid the distortion of the results of statistical analysis. Errors were crosschecked by the inspection of the frequencies for each of the variables. The corrections of errors in the data file were done by going back to the questionnaires and checking what value should have been entered. A thorough attempt was made to start the analysis process with a clean, error-free data set. Pallant (2001) argues that the success of research depends on this process. The descriptive statistics, including tallying of frequencies in the calculation of percentages, and central tendency summaries were used for data analysis.

3.5.1 Frequency analysis

One of the most basic ways to describe the data value of variables is to construct a frequency distribution. A frequency distribution is a systematic arrangement of data values in which the frequencies of each unique data value are shown (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). The meaning of the data is conveyed by arranging the data into a more interpretable form (i.e. by forming frequency distributions, calculating percentages and generating graphical displays).

Professional educators' answers are separated into categories, and the responses to those categories are reported by frequency and percentage. The frequency tables list response categories of different variables.

Frequency analysis generated demographic information from Section A, schools' practice of parental involvement information from Section B, schools' attitude towards parental involvement information from Section C, and information about barriers to parental involvement as experienced by schools from Section D. The demographic section presented information on age (categorised), gender, mother tongue, professional qualification and the number of years (categorised) respondents have been in the teaching profession, describing the sample participating in the study (see Table 3.3: page 15). When a variable has a wide range of data values, interpretation may be facilitated by collapsing the values of the variables into intervals (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). Therefore, in this study, a grouped frequency distribution for respondents' ages and number of years in teaching was constructed around nine and ten equal sized and mutually exclusive intervals respectively. The frequencies of variables in Sections B, C and D of the questionnaire are shown in Tables 3.4 (p. 19), 3.5 (p. 21), 3.6 (p. 22), 3.7 (p. 24), 3.8 (p. 29) and Figures 3.1 (p. 18) and 3.2 (p. 20).

3.6 RESULTS OF PHASE 1 OF THE STUDY: QUANTITATIVE

The order of the results and interpretation presentations correspond with the order of the sections in the data collection instrument (questionnaire). This was done to maintain consistency and easy understanding of results. Consistency in presentation allows the reader to refer much more easily to instruments for comparisons and understanding.

The Department of Statistics at the University of Pretoria, Ms J. Sommerville (Senior Consultant Department of Statistics) and Dr F Reynecke (Senior lecturer, Department of Statistics) assisted with the analysis of the data obtained from the questionnaire and quality control of the interpretation of the results.

3.6.1 Sample return

Four-hundred and ten questionnaires were sent out to 205 schools (i.e., two questionnaires per school). Schools were requested to send two responses, one from the principal and one from any lower primary (grades 1-3) teacher selected by the principal. Responses were received from 87 schools (a return rate of 42.43% of the schools), broken down into 66 principals and 80 teachers. School responses were as indicated in the table (Table 3.2) below.

TABLE 3.2: Schools from which questionnaires were received

Respondents returned the questionnaires	Number of schools from whom questionnaires were received	Number of questionnaires received
Principal and one teacher	39	78
One teacher	15	15
Principal alone	21	21
Principal and two teachers	5	15
Principal and three teachers	1	4
Three teachers	1	3
Two teachers	5	10
TOTAL	87	146

- Establishing the consistency between the responses of principals and teachers

Because the entire population of the Ohangwena region was targeted, the response rate was not sufficient to analyse principal and teacher responses separately. Therefore, it was considered necessary to analyse the combined responses, if possible. To combine responses required the establishment of the similarity between the responses of principals and teachers. Cronbach alpha was used to test for internal consistency in the responses to all items except for demographics (questions 1 and 2). Cronbach alpha is designed to determine whether the items that made up the scale are measuring the same underlying construct, so generating co-efficients of internal consistency (Wiersma & Jurs, 2005; Borg & Gall, 1989). Furthermore, Borg and Gall recommend Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha "*when items are not scored dichotomously*" (Borg & Gall, 1989: 261). Pallant (2001) recommends that ideally the Cronbach's alpha of a scale should be above 0.7.

Where sufficient internal consistency was found in the subsections of the questionnaire, independent t-tests were used to compare the average scores of the respondents based on their position.

- opinions of school climate, school's provision of educational opportunities for parents, what happens at school in terms of parental involvement, schools' ways of communicating with parents and the extent to which schools involve parents in various committees and policies (question 3-4, 6-8)
- attitude towards involvement (question 9)
- experience of barriers to involvement(question 11)

Where internal consistency was insufficient in the subsections of the questionnaire, Chi-square tests were used to assess the relationship among the item score of the respondents based on their position.

- use of community resources (elderly community members to educate parents on child care; professional health workers to develop parents' understanding about the importance of providing children with healthy food, appropriate clothes and protection from diseases; community members specially invited for fund raising events) (question 5.1, 5.2, 5.4)
- their thoughts (parents are too poor to provide and strengthen their children's education; teachers are skilled enough to take care of learners' needs, no need for parents' support at all; parents have unique skills and knowledge to assist their children's academic learning; rural contexts do not interfere with parental involvement practice) (question 10.1, 10.2, 10.4, 10.5)

Since the Chi-square test found statistical evidence of a significant association between the position of respondents in questions 5.3 and 10.3, these questions were excluded from the average. The exclusion was done to avoid the possibility of biasing the averages for schools from where the responses from 1 principal and 1 teacher have not been received. From this point, all analyses in Phase 1 were combined regardless of the position of the respondent.

3.6.2 Section A: Demographic profile of the professional educators and rural lower primary schools who participated in the investigation

Section A of the questionnaire comprises information describing the demographic profile of the school principals and teachers participated in the study. The demographic information of the participant sample (n = 146) is shown as frequencies and percentages in Table 3.3. The ages of respondents varied between 24 and 59 years, with the majority of participants being between 40 and 49 years old, and the next largest group between 30 and 39 years old. Twenty seven (18.49%) of the remaining participants' were 50 years old or above. Eight (5.47%) participants' ages varied between 24 and 29 years. Two participants did not indicate their ages. Of 146 respondents, 86 were females and 59 were males.

Approximately nine languages are taught in Namibian schools. The dominant language in the region in which the research was conducted is Oshiwambo. All but five of the respondents reported Oshiwambo as their mother tongue. The remaining five reported Silozi (3), Otjiherero (1) and Other (1) specified as Subiya.

Possible qualifications include certificates (two-year or three-year (16%), bachelor or honour degrees (three-year or four-year) and postgraduate degrees (five-year minimum (15%). The most frequently reported qualification was the three-year certificate (66%). The postgraduate degree had the lowest response (3%). Nine (9) respondents provided no answer to this item. Respondents were asked to write the number of years that they have practiced the teaching profession. This included the principals as well as the teachers. Respondents' years in the teaching profession ranged from 1 to 35, with a wide range of years among the respondents. Ten participants did not respond to this question.

TABLE 3.3: Demographic profile of the professional educators

Characteristic	Group	Frequency*	Percentage
Age	50 and older	27	19
	40 – 49	69	48
	30 – 39	40	28
	24 – 29	<u>8</u>	<u>5</u>
	Total	144*	100
Gender	Female	86	59
	Male	<u>59</u>	<u>41</u>
	Total	145*	100
Mother Tongue	Oshiwambo	141	96.57
	Silozi	3	2.05
	Otjiherero	1	0.68
	Other	<u>1</u>	<u>0.68</u>
	Total	146	100.00
Professional Qualification	2-year certificate	22	16
	3-year certificate	91	66
	3/4-year bachelor/ honours	20	15
	5-year postgraduate	<u>4</u>	<u>3</u>
	Total	137*	100
Number of Years in the Teaching Profession	1- 10	42	31
	11- 20	56	41
	21- 30	31	23
	31- 35	<u>7</u>	<u>5</u>
	Total	136*	100

*Frequencies may not sum to 146 because of non-responses.

- Professional educators' description of schools
 - Number of learners and teachers per school:

With respect to the number of learners at each school (question 2.1), 143 out of 146 responded to this item. The data indicate 43 as the lowest and 960 as the highest numbers of learners per school. The smallest school has one teacher and the largest has 28 teachers (question 2.3).

- Basic need facilities

The data indicate that among the listed facilities (question 2.6) toilets/latrines were the most available facilities at most schools. Electricity and telephones were the least available facilities at many schools. Although the data indicate the availability of piped water in Ohangwena region schools, the rate of the score is low in terms of the importance of this human basic need and therefore, the data shows a lack of clean water in many schools.

- Respondents' description of the community

According to the responses to question 2.7, 127 (88.82%) of professional educators indicate that most of Ohangwena region communities' living standard ranges from a poor to acceptable living standard. Only 10 (6.99%) regard the communities' living standard as very poor while 6 (4.20%) consider it good. Three respondents provided no answer to this item.

- Professional educators' perception regarding the functions of Teacher-Parent Organisation

Only 22 (15.38%) professional educators indicated "yes" to the question as whether their schools have a Teacher-Parent Organisation (question 2.8). One hundred and twenty-one (84.62%) professional educators indicated a "no" answer. Three professional educators did not provide answer to this item. Fifteen professional educators responded to the follow-up question which asked the functions of the Teacher-Parent Organisation. All responses from the 15 people were combined and grouped into 4 categories. Nine professional educators indicate that one of the least functions of a Teacher-Parent Organisation (question 2.9) is to present parents with activities which contribute to the promotion of a good relationship between the school and the home/community (137 did not respond to this item). Four respondents indicate that discipline, health and the counselling of staff members and learners were functions of the Teacher-Parent Organisation (142 did not respond to this item). The functions the Teacher-Parent Organisation performs the most often include activities which contribute to the development of school management and quality assurance (9 responded and 137 did not respond) to school infrastructure developments (15 responded and 131 did not respond to this item).

- Professional educators' perception regarding the functions of the school board

Questions 2.10 - 2.12 (Section A) of the questionnaire asked professional educators to indicate the following: functions of the School Board (2.10); three aspects individual professional educators (themselves) would like to focus on regarding the involvement of parents in Grade 1-3 learners' academic education (2.11); and three aspects the professional educators would like parents to focus

on regarding the Grade 1-3 learners' academic education (2.12). Again, all responses to each question were combined and grouped, and categories were created from the data to integrate the same responses from different professional educators, and which indicated one or more related idea(s). Four categories were created to include all responses to question 2.10; three categories were created to include responses to question 2.11 and 2.12 each.

The responses (118) show that school boards mostly manage schools. However, the controlling of discipline and security safeguarding appear prominent in professional educators' responses (137). Management in the responses of both groups (School board and Teacher-Parent Organisation) mentioned functions.

- Professional educators' perception on the three aspects on which they would like to focus regarding the involvement of parents in the academic education of Grade 1 to 3 learners

Fifty point four five percent (50%) of the professional educators who were asked to name three aspects that they would like to focus on regarding the involvement of parents in the academic education of Grade 1-3 learners. They indicated that they would like to focus on participation and support. Twenty-nine (29%) percent indicated that they would like to focus on communication and good relationships while 21% indicated that it would be important to them to link family to community resources. However, the data indicates that they would like to focus more on making parents participate in and support school activities.

- Professional educators' perception on the three aspects they would like parents to focus on regarding the academic education of Grade 1 to 3 learners

Question 2.12 of the questionnaire asked professional educators to name three aspects they would like parents to focus on regarding the academic education of learners. The data shows that 45 of them would like parents to focus on assisting in school activities (101 did not respond to this item). Others, 126 would like parents to focus on provision of children's needs (20 did not respond to this item). A small number (44) of professional educators feel school-parent relationships should also be a focus of parents (102 did not respond to this item).

Responses indicate that assistance support and relationships are regarded as the focus for principals and teachers, as they are repeated in what principals and teachers want parents to focus on. This is a clear indication of an important focus of schools as far as involvement is concerned.

3.6.3 Section B: Rural lower primary schools’ practices of parental involvement

The schools’ practices of parental involvement were sought through requesting respondents to indicate the extent to which the statements describe the climate of their schools (questions 3.1-3.5); the extent to which statements represent what their schools do regarding the participation of parents in educational opportunities (questions 4.1, 4.3-4.7); the extent to which their schools make use of community resources (social capital in the community) (questions 5.1-5.4); how often the statements indicate what happens at their schools (question 6.1-6.2, 6.4-6.6); the extent to which their schools make use of the indicated communication options (questions 7.1-7.8); and the extent to which their schools involve parents in school policy formulations (question 8.5).

3.6.3.1 Professional educators’ perceptions of schools’ climate to parental involvement

Figure 3.1 below in general shows that professional educators see their school climate as inviting. Safety (item 3.2: 40% indicated always, and 38% indicated most of the time), and cleanliness and maintenance (item 3.1: 54% indicated most of the time) are in evidence as strengths in most of the schools. As well, parents’ freedom to visit at any time of the day (item 3.5: 44% - always) is thought to be in keeping with most of the schools. However, in regards to what the school directly does to make parents feel welcome, there appear to be some deficiencies. Schools are only slightly more likely than not to show appreciation to parents (item 3.4: 38% - sometimes, and 35% - most of the time) and 88% of the professional educators indicate that their schools never provide snacks and drinks during parent-teacher meetings (item 3.3).

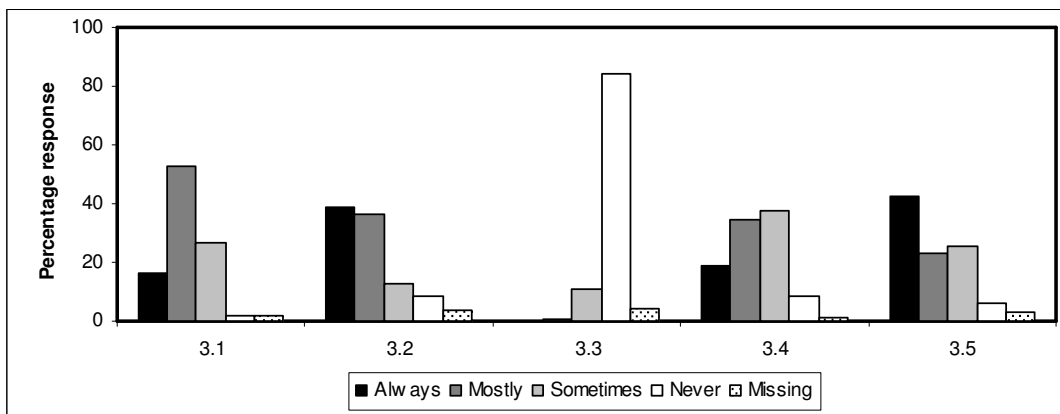


FIGURE 3.1: Professional educators’ perceptions of schools’ climate to parental involvement.

3.6.3.2 Professional educators' perceptions of school's provision for parents with educational opportunities for knowledge development about parental involvement

Table 3.4 below shows that, in practice, schools seem to give the most of their efforts toward organising meetings in which the importance of involvement is discussed with parents (item 4.1: 46.58% indicated always, and 37.67% indicated most of the time). The next most effort seems to be toward providing counselling opportunities for parents of children with behavioural problems (item 4.7: 33.56% indicated most of the time, and 23.97% indicated always). Responses are more ambivalent on discussing the contents and philosophy of the curriculum (item 4.3: 25.34% - most of the time, 37.67% - sometimes, and 18.49% - never), providing workshops for making parents understand their roles, rights and responsibilities (item 4.4: 28.77% - most of the time, 30.82% - sometimes, and 27.4% - never) and organising counselling opportunities for parents of children with specific learning needs (item 4.6: 37.67% - sometimes, and 21.92% - most of the time). Schools are deficient on question 4.5. Although 3.42%, 17.81% and 21.92% of the schools indicated that they always, most of the time and sometimes respectively offer parent lessons, eighty-one (55.48%) professional educators indicated that their schools never offered parent literacy lessons.

TABLE 3.4: Professional educators' perceptions of how schools provide parents with educational opportunities for knowledge development about parental involvement

Statement	N	No response		Never		Sometimes		Most of the time		Always	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
4.1 Our school organises meetings in which teachers discuss the importance of involvement with parents.	146	2	1.37	6	4.11	15	10.27	55	37.67	68	46.58
4.2 Our school experiences at least 50% parent attendance at parent teacher meetings.	146	4	2.74	5	3.42	35	30.82	53	36.3	39	26.71
4.3 The contents and philosophy of the curriculum of specific subjects are discussed at the parents' meetings.	146	4	2.74	27	18.49	55	37.67	37	25.34	23	15.75
4.4 Our school organises workshops in which parents are made to understand their roles, rights and responsibilities in terms of their children's academic education.	146	2	1.37	40	27.4	45	30.82	42	28.77	17	11.64



4.5 Our school offers parents literacy lessons in which parents are guided on what they should do when assisting their children in reading, writing and computation at home.	146	2	1.37	81	55.48	32	21.92	26	17.81	5	3.42
4.6 Our school organises counselling opportunities for parents of children with specific learning needs.	146	2	1.37	33	22.6	55	37.67	32	21.92	24	16.44
4.7 Our school organises counselling opportunities for parents of children with behaviour problems.	146	2	1.37	16	10.96	44	30.14	49	33.56	35	23.97

3.6.3.3 Professional educators’ perceptions of how schools make use of community resources

Professional educators gave the use of community resources a very low score overall: Aspects such as the use of elderly community members (indicated by 54.79%) and utility of professional health workers (indicated by 45.89%) were never done by many schools. However, to the use of community members as interpreters, responses split equally: Forty nine professional educators (33.56%) say they never use community members as interpreters, 49 (33.56%) professional educators always do it, 20 (13.69%) do it most of the time and 26 (17.80%) do it sometimes. In the area of inviting the community for fund raising, responses are more equally split across all categories: Thirty five professional educators (23.97%) do it always, 36 (24.65%) do it most of the time, 45 (30.82%) do it sometimes and 30 (20.54%) never.

3.6.3.4 Professional educators’ perceptions of how schools provide parents with opportunities for technical support for classroom activities

Figure 3.2 below presents both the practices of teachers and the practices of schools. Responses on teachers’ practices show that teachers are not likely to make parental involvement part of their regular teaching (item 6.1: 52% indicated sometimes), or ask parents to do lesson demonstrations (item 6.2: 43% indicated sometimes, and 45% indicated never). However, there were mixed responses on inviting parents to observe teaching in progress (item 6.5: 33% indicated always, 24% indicated most of the time, and 26% indicated sometimes). From the schools, mixed responses were also reported on including parent volunteers in preparation of fundraising (item 6.6: 26% indicated always, 23% indicated sometimes, and 32% indicated never). However, 43% of the schools always ask parents to support and monitor learners’ home work activities (6.4).

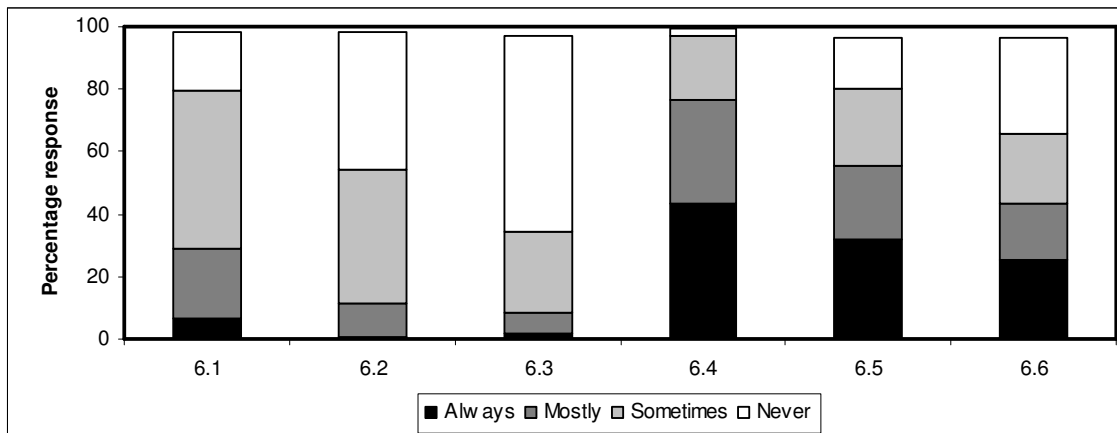


FIGURE 3.2: Professional educators’ perceptions of how schools provide parents with opportunities for technical support for classroom activities.

3.6.3.5 Professional educators’ perceptions of how schools make use of communication options

The results show that letter writing (50.68% of the responses indicated always, 29.45% indicated most of the time, 11.64% indicated sometimes); meetings (36.98% indicated always, 41.09% indicated most of the time, 17.12% indicated sometimes, 3.42% indicated never); and parents’ days (24.65% indicated always, 26.71% indicated most of the time, 23.28% indicated sometimes) are the communication options schools favour using to contact parents. Conversely, the use of telephone (72.60% indicated never, 4.79% indicated always,) home-school diaries (56.16% indicated never, 2.73% indicated always,) and home visits (46.57% indicated never, 2.05% indicated always) were the communication options many schools never use.

TABLE 3.5: Professional educators’ perceptions of the extent to which schools make use of communication options

Statement	N	No response		Never		Sometimes		Most of the time		Always	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
7.1 Our school organises meetings to provide information on school policies, regulations, mission statements and goals.	146	2	1.37	5	3.42	25	17.12	60	41.1	54	6.99
7.2 Individual parent-teacher meetings provide the school with valuable information about learners’ conditions and backgrounds.	146	4	2.74	17	11.64	39	26.71	49	33.56	37	25.34
7.3 We write informative and encouraging letters to parents whose children are performing poorly.	146	2	1.37	15	10.27	42	28.77	41	28.08	46	31.51
7.4 Our school sends letters to parents which serve as effective means of getting many of them to attend meetings.	146	3	2.05	9	6.16	17	11.64	43	29.45	74	50.68
7.5 The telephone is one of the means our school uses to communicate to parents.	146	4	2.74	106	72.6	20	13.7	9	6.16	7	4.79
7.6 Parents are invited to parents’ days with the aim of reviewing and discussing learners’ academic work.	146	6	4.11	31	21.23	34	23.29	39	26.71	36	24.66
7.7 Our school uses home visits as opportunities for parents to discuss their concerns about their children on a one- to- one basis with teachers.	146	2	1.37	68	46.58	56	38.36	17	11.64	3	2.05
7.8 Home school diaries are used to communicate regular school programmes the school uses.	146	6	4.11	82	56.16	32	21.92	22	15.07	4	2.74

3.6.3.6 Professional educators' perceptions of how schools involve parents in decision-making and power-sharing activities

The professional educators' responses on the extent to which schools share power and decision making in activities that promote education of learners show that schools (76.71%) always make parents members of school boards (item 8.1); and schools always (41.78%) and most of the time (30.82%) are likely to involve parents on school improvement committees (item 8.2). As to parents as represented in learners' code of conduct development committee (item 8.3: 30.82% indicated never, 27.4% indicated most of the time) and homework policy development committees (item 8.4: 32.19% indicated never, and 32.19% indicated most of the time), respondents reported mixed levels of involvement. On seeking for parents' critical comments on school policies (item 8.5), respondents split into nearly equal numbers for all categories (26.71% indicated always, 26.03% indicated most of the time, 20.55% indicated sometimes, and 24.66% indicated never).

3.6.4 Section C: Rural lower primary schools' attitudes towards parental involvement

The professional educators' attitudes towards parental involvement were sought through requesting them to indicate the extent to which they agree with statements which represent their sentiments (question 9) and describe their thoughts (question 10).

3.6.4.1 Professional educators' sentiments towards parental involvement

Professional educators seem to see parental involvement with learners as contributing to the quality of education in schools. They either strongly agree or agree with the statements that say: an important way to improve the quality of education in schools is to involve parents in school activities (85.62% - strongly agree and 12.33% agree); involvement of parents in learners' learning activities reduces the feeling of alienation between schools and parents (41.1% - strongly agree and 32.88% agree); and parents' support and monitoring of homework activities cultivate and promote the daily habit of completing homework (56.85% strongly agree and 36.99% agree). There are no disagreements indicated about the first statement (that parental involvement improves the quality of education in schools). However, responses indicated disagreements on the last two statements (involvement reduces the feeling of alienation (10.96% disagree and 10.27% strongly disagree).

The contribution of parents to the administrative level was shown by professional educators' responses that strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree with the statements such as:

parents have a right to contribute to the decisions that affect their children’s education (70.55% - strongly agree, 24.66% - agree, 2.05% - disagree and no strongly disagreements were indicated); the distribution of school policies and rules enables parents to learn their rights and responsibilities in supporting their children’s education (62.33% - strongly agree, 32.88% - agree, 1.37% - disagree and 0.68% strongly disagree); schools should allow parents to carefully examine and constructively question the practices of schools (38.36% - strongly agree, 44.52% - agree, 8.22% - disagree and 4.79% strongly disagree); and schools should allow parents to monitor teachers’ attendance (57.53% - strongly agree, 30.14% - agree, 6.85% - disagree and 1.37% - strongly disagree). The professional educators’ ‘strongly agree’ responses on statements that say no matter how qualified teachers are, they need parents’ support (77.4% - strongly agree and 17.81% agree. No disagreement was indicated to this statement) and parents’ feedback helps teachers learn their strengths and weaknesses (64.38% - strongly agree, 29.45% - agree, 0.68% - disagree and 0.68 – strongly disagree) is an evidence of perceptions that show role of parents in actively contributing to the classroom level.

TABLE 3.6: Description of professional educators’ sentiments towards parental involvement

Statement	No response			Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	N	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
9.1 An important way to improve the quality of education in schools is to involve parents in school activities.	146	3	2.05	0	0	0	0	18	12.33	125	85.62
9.2 No matter how qualified teachers are, they need parents’ support.	146	5	3.42	2	1.37	0	0	26	17.81	113	77.4
9.3 Parents have a right to contribute to the decisions that affect their children’s education.	146	4	2.74	0	0	3	2.05	36	24.66	103	70.55
9.4 The distribution of school policies and rules enables parents to learn their rights and responsibilities in supporting their children’s education.	146	4	2.74	1	0.68	2	1.37	48	32.88	91	62.33
9.5 Involvement of parents in learners’ learning activities reduces the feeling of alienation between schools and parents.	146	7	4.79	15	10.27	16	10.96	48	32.88	60	41.1
9.6 Schools should allow parents to											



carefully examine and constructively question the practices of schools.	146	6	4.11	7	4.79	12	8.22	65	44.52	56	38.36
9.7 Schools should allow parents to monitor teachers' attendance.	146	6	4.11	2	1.37	10	6.85	44	30.14	84	57.53
9.8 Parents' feedback helps teachers learn their strengths and weaknesses.	146	7	4.79	1	0.68	1	0.68	43	29.45	94	64.38
9.9 Parents' support and monitoring of homework activities cultivate and promote the daily habit of completing homework.	146	6	4.11	2	1.37	1	0.68	54	36.99	83	56.85
9.10 Home visits give teachers a chance to develop an awareness and understanding of learners' backgrounds and life styles.	146	4	2.74	2	1.37	3	2.05	37	25.34	100	68.49

3.6.4.2 Professional educators' opinions regarding parental involvement

Most of the schools (64.38%) disagree with a question that says teachers are skilled enough to take care of all learners' needs, therefore, they do not need parental support. Professional educators' perceptions on how much parents assist with homework, as well as whether parents have unique skills to assist the learners, are almost equally split between agreement and disagreement. Thirty four point ninety three percentages (34.93%) and 30.13% of the professional educators agree and disagree respectively to the statement that says parents do not assist their children with homework activities. Thirty seven point sixty seven (37.67%) and 30.82% of the professional educators agree and disagree respectively to the statement that says that parents in rural have unique skills and knowledge to assist in their children's academic learning.

3.6.5 Section D: Barriers to parental involvement in rural lower primary schools

The answer to this question was sought through asking professional educators to indicate the extent to which the statements describe the barriers their schools experience (question 11).

3.6.5.1 Professional educators' indications of barriers to parental involvement that are experienced at their schools

The responses indicate that the barriers that were mostly experienced at their schools include unawareness and lack of understanding of parents about the fact that they also have a share in formal education of their children (20.55% – often, 44.52% - sometimes, 14.38% - seldom,

15.75%), parents' fear for responsibilities (8.9% - often, 42.47% - sometimes, 17.81% - seldom, 26.03 - never), parents' lack of confidence (28.08% - often, 41.78% - sometimes, 16.44% - seldom, 8.22% - never), illiteracy (21.92% - often, 36.3% - sometimes, 32.19% - seldom, 3.42% - never) and lack of time (14.38% - often, 33.56% - sometimes, 32.19% - seldom, 15.75% - never) on the side of parents were indicated as barriers they experience either seldom or sometimes. Barrier, which were least experienced were teachers' inability to involve parents due to lack of initial training (56.85% - never, 13.7% - seldom, 21.92% - sometimes, 2.74% - often); teachers not being sure of what to involve parents in (51.37% - never, 18.49% - seldom, 22.6% - sometimes, 2.74% often); teachers' lack of understanding about the value of family support (47.26% - never, 17.81% - seldom, 21.23% - sometimes, 8.9% - often) and teachers' attempts to avoid scrutiny from parents (54.79% - never, 12.33% - seldom, 18.49% - sometimes, 5.48% - often).

TABLE 3.7: Barriers to parental involvement that are experienced at rural lower primary schools

Statement	N	No response		Never		Seldom		Sometimes		Often	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
11.1 Parents avoid contacting the school because they fear being put into positions of authority and responsibility.	146	7	4.79	38	26.03	26	17.81	62	42.47	13	8.9
11.2 Most parents in this community are unable to read and/or write.	146	9	6.16	5	3.42	47	32.19	53	36.3	32	21.92
11.3 Parents feel that formal education is the school's responsibility alone.	146	7	4.79	23	15.75	21	14.38	65	44.52	30	20.55
11.4 Teachers do not involve parents because they had never been taught the benefits of parent involvement.	146	7	4.79	83	56.85	20	13.7	32	21.92	4	2.74
11.5 Teachers do not involve parents because they are not sure of what to involve parents in.	146	7	4.79	75	51.37	27	18.49	33	22.6	4	2.74
11.6 Parents are grappling with problems of survival and have little time and energy for school involvement.	146	6	4.11	23	15.75	47	32.19	49	33.56	21	14.38
11.7 Lack of confidence among parents prevents them from becoming involved in school's academic work.	146	8	5.48	12	8.22	24	16.44	61	41.78	41	28.08

11.8 Teachers do not understand the value of family support.	146	7	4.79	69	47.26	26	17.81	31	21.23	13	8.9
11.9 Teachers try to avoid parents' scrutiny.	146	13	8.9	80	54.79	18	12.33	27	18.49	8	5.48

3.6.6 Interpretation of the results of phase 1 of the study: quantitative

Although half of the professional educators (50%) indicate that they encourage parents to support school activities, the majority did not have any suggestions of the exact academic education activities on which they would like parents to focus.

The fact that professional educators singled out relationships as the important aspect of involvement they would like to focus on suggests the possibility of their intention for working together with parents to implement necessary changes in schools. According to Warren (2005), a strong relationship between schools, parents and community members allows schools to develop a common vision for school reform. Moreover, strong relationships serve as evidence that schools see parents as partners in the provision of services, and not just as their recipients.

The results indicate that schools make efforts to create and maintain cleaner and better looking sites. The professional educators create an open, warm, inviting and productive climate and ensure security on the playgrounds. Warren (2005) and Beck and Murphy (1999) contend that schools which create an open, accepting, respectful culture and environment, and safe grounds for children when they are not in classrooms make their school climate inviting for parental involvement. The same researchers argue that if parents feel welcome at school, they believe that they develop a sense of belonging and they might end up offering suggestions and ideas that would be acted upon by the schools. This sense of being part of the school encourages parents to feel more comfortable about entering the classroom and rendering support even when they have not been formally invited.

Schools experience acceptable and fair attendance of meetings and workshops for parents' educational purposes where the discussions focus on importance of parental involvement, philosophy of the curriculum of specific subjects, parents' roles, rights and responsibilities in terms of their children's academic education and counselling for parents of children with specific learning and behavioural problems. Activities such as subject-specific information and training for families, as well as workshops, have a positive influence on families' interests in their children's education which helps parents who would not otherwise have done so to become involved. These services

instill confidence and pride in parents and increase their sense of efficacy for supporting their children's education. Nevertheless, the fact that many schools never offer literacy classes to parents is a challenge facing rural schools. Rural schools are in a unique position to address the concerns of uninvolved parents by establishing literacy programs and practices that target to prepare, empower and encourage all parents to participate in their children's education. It is Warren's (2005) and Sanders and Epstein's (1998) argument that when parents are provided with parenting education and subject-specific training by educators, they become more effective in teaching and tutoring their children.

Although communities contain rich cultural traditions and social resources that have much to offer the work of schools, and may serve as an important supporter of home and school by making beneficial services available to children and families, and by providing a context supportive of educational endeavours, most professional educators indicate that schools either do not really or sufficiently engage community resources in their school lives. Warren (2005) strongly believes that when parents and community members are engaged in the life of the school, they can support teaching and strengthen the environment for learning. Nevertheless, a number of schools who recognise the resources available within the community ask community members to interpret for parents when the language of the meeting is not understood by parents. Beck and Murphy (1999) recommend the use of interpreters because the obvious expertise of teachers and their use of professional words and phrases are unfamiliar to most parents and inhibit the parents' ability to become involved in powerful conversations with teachers about classroom practices and learners. Therefore, the professional educators' positive perceptions of schools' use of community members as interpreters is a symbol of respect, true value of parents' presence and an attempt for better communication and understanding of each other (Carreon, Drake & Barton, 2005).

The results reveal that there is insufficiency of involving parents in lesson demonstrations, material donations for teaching, and preparation of fund-raising activities. However, the data indicate less opposition to involving parents in supporting and monitoring learners' homework activities and observing teaching in progress. Lopez et al. (in Lee & Bowen, 2006) argue that insufficient effort to involve parents at school does not mean that parents lack the capacity to provide adequate home learning environments for children or that they are not involved in their children's schooling at home. This means that by making parent involvement part of their regular teaching practice, schools make parents increase their interactions with their children at home. Supporting and monitoring their children's homework could also have a direct impact on learners' learning. Nevertheless, Carreon, Drake and Barton (2005) and Sanders and Epstein (1998) argue that the parents who

volunteer in classrooms learn more about the teacher's job and problems, and about the classroom life of a child. As a result, they find it easier to talk to teachers and ask questions. Therefore, schools' increased efforts to make parents demonstrate lessons, design and/or donate materials for teaching and include parents in preparation of fund-raising need to be taken seriously and advance the level of involvement of families.

The results present evidence that to a certain extent, schools communicate with parents. According to Lee and Bowen (2006) communication is one of the best opportunities schools use for the encouragement of parents and for accessing information and resources for supporting homework and other school activities. As shown by the data, many schools always use a traditional, yet effective, communication method (letter writing) to invite parents to meetings and for informing parents about their children's performances. Most of the time schools organise meetings (individual or group) for discussions about school policies, regulations, goals and learners' conditions and backgrounds. The teacher-parent meeting is one of the strategies schools use most of the time to directly meet with parents and make them raise concerns and offer ideas about school improvements and making schools better places for children's learning. It is hoped that schools use this method to create a platform for professional educators and parents to better understand each other, and work collaboratively for learners' holistic development. This interpretation is based on Sanders and Epstein's (1998) findings that learners benefit holistically when they see that their parents and teachers know and respect one another and communicate regularly. It is obvious schools in rural areas use communication methods that are not too burdensome on teachers and parents. The schools' use of these communication options (meetings, letters and parent days) indicates their recognition of parents' rights to be involved in the education of their children. Moreover, the schools show their determination to advance their goals regarding the education of learners.

The results indicate that lower primary schools in Ohangwena region make it possible for parents to have a hand in broad-based participation in school decision-making. This interpretation is based on the evidence consistently revealed by the data that parents participate in school boards and other school development committees. Through participating in decision making and other school development committees, parents speak up, are listened to and help make decisions that in ways positively influence and shape learning and teaching (Warren, 2005; Beck & Murphy, 1999).

The responses of professional educators indicate openness in their views and attitudes towards involving and interacting with parents in school activities for the enhancement of learners' learning.

Their attitudes reflect a belief that parents should be involved in the decision-making processes. The fact that professional educators have a strong belief against ‘teacher - as - expert’ (Epstein et al., 2002) and therefore, do not need parental support, create an equality rather than a hierarchy of knowledge, value and status that influences their collaboration with parents as equals in the process of educating children. Their attitudes reflect that they operate from within a culture of democracy, which fosters a curriculum and pedagogy that promote harmony and cooperation between schools and parents. Many of the attitudes and opinions of the professional educators show respect and value of the contributions of the parents as they see them (parents) as people with the power to monitor their (educators) attendance and people whose contributions can improve professional educators’ weaknesses and can develop an awareness and understanding of the backgrounds and life styles of learners.

The results clearly show that although schools attempt to collaborate with families, there are deeply ingrained stumbling blocks that need to be addressed for good collaboration to advance. These include parents’ lack of understanding and confidence, fear of responsibilities, insufficient responses to parents’ meetings and other educational training opportunities, insufficient involvement of parents in classroom activities and unavailability of literacy lessons for parents at schools. These barriers should not be accepted without any attempt to overcome them. The argument is that the measure of a school’s commitment to equalising power relationships is not the absence of struggles in this effort, but rather the way in which professional educators and parents address problems and persist in spite of them.

Although Phase 1 results revealed the practices of schools towards parental involvement in terms of providing parents with avenues to develop as leaders, engaging parents in authentic conversations such as counselling, and facilitating the support parents give their children at home, an in-depth understanding of parental involvement requires the study of involvement from the perspective of parents and would be enhanced by finding the rationales that motivate, sustain and/or inhibit these practices from both parents and professional educators. In Phase 2 of this study the parents’ and professional educators’ reasoning for their involvement practices was investigated.

3.6.7 Identification of the rural lower primary schools with high, intermediate and low parental involvement

Extreme case sampling was used to select cases (schools with high, average and low involvement) from extremes and then to study them in depth in Phase 2 of the study. Extreme case sampling provides rich sources of information (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). Therefore, schools for Phase 2 of the study were identified based on their level of parental involvement. The identification process was done according to the following criteria:

- The average response/scores for questions 3-8 (section B) were used as a measure of parental involvement practised by the school
- The responses/scores for the principal and/or teachers at each school were used to calculate the average for each school
- Questions 5.3 and 10.3 were excluded from this average because statistical evidence of a significant association between the responses and the position of professional educators was found on this item, and this could ‘bias’ the averages for schools where there were not responses from one principal and one teacher as requested.
- Responses to the items in scales 3 through 8 were averaged to create the combined scores of the respondents on the data collection instrument and the schools were ranked from highest to lowest average parental involvement score (see Table 3.8 below).
- The parental involvement scores were ordered so that they could be categorised into ‘high,’ ‘intermediate’ and ‘low’ levels of parental involvement.

Three levels of parental involvement practice were indicated. Two schools from each level were selected for interviews and further investigation in the qualitative part (Phase 2) of the study. A list of schools’ parental involvement practice scores is shown in Table 3.8 below.

TABLE 3.8: Parental involvement practice scores per school

School	N	Mean	Median	Std Dev	Minimum	Maximum	
38	1	3.2941	3.2941	.	3.29	3.29	1
74	1	3.1765	3.1765	.	3.18	3.18	2
44	2	3.0735	3.0735	0.19	2.94	3.21	3
28	2	3.0588	3.0588	0.75	2.53	3.59	4
46	3	3.0037	3.0294	0.04	2.95	3.03	5
52	2	2.9706	2.9706	0.17	2.85	3.09	6
59	2	2.9706	2.9706	0.00	2.97	2.97	7
15	3	2.9210	2.9394	0.03	2.88	2.94	8
19	1	2.9118	2.9118	.	2.91	2.91	9
54	1	2.9118	2.9118	.	2.91	2.91	10
66	1	2.9118	2.9118	.	2.91	2.91	11
24	2	2.9108	2.9108	0.08	2.85	2.97	12
31	2	2.9006	2.9006	0.48	2.56	3.24	13
62	2	2.8824	2.8824	0.21	2.74	3.03	14
77	1	2.8824	2.8824	.	2.88	2.88	15
83	2	2.8485	2.8485	0.21	2.70	3.00	16
25	2	2.8382	2.8382	0.19	2.71	2.97	17
33	2	2.7739	2.7739	0.05	2.74	2.81	18
53	2	2.7206	2.7206	0.23	2.56	2.88	19
87	1	2.7059	2.7059	.	2.71	2.71	20
32	2	2.6912	2.6912	0.40	2.41	2.97	21
61	3	2.6895	2.5588	0.59	2.18	3.33	22
57	1	2.6667	2.6667	.	2.67	2.67	23
23	2	2.6618	2.6618	0.19	2.53	2.79	24
51	1	2.6471	2.6471	.	2.65	2.65	25
78	1	2.6471	2.6471	.	2.65	2.65	26
29	2	2.6386	2.6386	0.30	2.42	2.85	27
20	1	2.6364	2.6364	.	2.64	2.64	28
73	1	2.6364	2.6364	.	2.64	2.64	29
85	2	2.6212	2.6212	0.02	2.61	2.64	30
47	2	2.6176	2.6176	0.33	2.38	2.85	31
34	2	2.6110	2.6110	0.09	2.55	2.68	32
41	1	2.5882	2.5882	.	2.59	2.59	33
68	1	2.5882	2.5882	.	2.59	2.59	34
88	1	2.5882	2.5882	.	2.59	2.59	35
13	1	2.5588	2.5588	.	2.56	2.56	36
71	1	2.5588	2.5588	.	2.56	2.56	37



4	2	2.5294	2.5294	0.62	2.09	2.97	38
18	1	2.5152	2.5152	.	2.52	2.52	39
55	1	2.5000	2.5000	.	2.50	2.50	40
42	2	2.4559	2.4559	0.10	2.38	2.53	41
82	2	2.4559	2.4559	0.02	2.44	2.47	42
56	1	2.4545	2.4545	.	2.45	2.45	43
35	2	2.4528	2.4528	0.47	2.12	2.79	44
12	2	2.4340	2.4340	0.11	2.35	2.52	45
10	2	2.4323	2.4323	0.05	2.39	2.47	46
7	2	2.4314	2.4314	0.14	2.33	2.53	47
69	1	2.4242	2.4242	.	2.42	2.42	48
72	1	2.4118	2.4118	.	2.41	2.41	49
6	2	2.4086	2.4086	0.54	2.03	2.79	50
22	1	2.3824	2.3824	.	2.38	2.38	51
43	2	2.3676	2.3676	0.64	1.91	2.82	52
5	2	2.3529	2.3529	0.87	1.74	2.97	53
40	1	2.3529	2.3529	.	2.35	2.35	54
80	1	2.3529	2.3529	.	2.35	2.35	55
36	2	2.3485	2.3485	0.28	2.15	2.55	56
67	2	2.3378	2.3378	0.52	1.97	2.71	57
70	2	2.3235	2.3235	0.33	2.09	2.56	58
65	4	2.3220	2.2206	0.55	1.79	3.06	59
14	3	2.3101	2.1471	0.48	1.93	2.85	60
58	1	2.2941	2.2941	.	2.29	2.29	61
17	3	2.2858	2.1515	0.51	1.85	2.85	62
26	2	2.2843	2.2843	0.07	2.24	2.33	63
30	2	2.2821	2.2821	0.14	2.18	2.38	64
79	1	2.2813	2.2813	.	2.28	2.28	65
8	3	2.2659	2.5294	0.49	1.71	2.56	66
3	2	2.2353	2.2353	0.42	1.94	2.53	67
9	2	2.1818	2.1818	0.21	2.03	2.33	68
76	1	2.1515	2.1515	.	2.15	2.15	69
1	2	2.1439	2.1439	0.50	1.79	2.50	70
16	2	2.1029	2.1029	0.02	2.09	2.12	71
48	2	2.0996	2.0996	0.22	1.94	2.26	72
2	1	2.0882	2.0882	.	2.09	2.09	73
84	1	2.0588	2.0588	.	2.06	2.06	74
39	1	2.0294	2.0294	.	2.03	2.03	75
86	1	2.0294	2.0294	.	2.03	2.03	76
37	2	1.9892	1.9892	0.60	1.57	2.41	77

50	2	1.9840	1.9840	0.11	1.91	2.06	78
27	2	1.9559	1.9559	0.60	1.53	2.38	79
49	2	1.9559	1.9559	0.06	1.91	2.00	80
63	2	1.9559	1.9559	0.02	1.94	1.97	81
21	1	1.9118	1.9118	.	1.91	1.91	82
75	1	1.9118	1.9118	.	1.91	1.91	83
60	1	1.8824	1.8824	.	1.88	1.88	84
11	2	1.7647	1.7647	0.04	1.74	1.79	85
45	2	1.7647	1.7647	0.04	1.74	1.79	86
81	1	1.6176	1.6176	.	1.62	1.62	87
64	2	1.5735	1.5735	0.19	1.44	1.71	88

The findings summarised here point to the need of further inquiry. The question, then, is why some schools manage to orchestrate higher involvement than others in the Ohangwena region. The claim, on the basis of literature reviewed (Carreon, Drake & Barton, 2005), is that higher involvement is the result of all stakeholders’ positive attitudes, perceptions, beliefs and process in which schools and parents interact, using specific forms of capital, to truly improve the school experiences of learners. The explanations of professional educators of their attitudes, perceptions, beliefs, processes and circumstances lead to this outcome were explored in Phase 2 of this study and findings are presented in Chapter 4 of this thesis.

TABLE 3.9: Schools selected for phase 2 (qualitative) of the study

Low Parental involvement	Medium or Intermediate Parental involvement	High Parental involvement
64 (F)	35 (D)	44 (B)
11 (E)	12 (C)	28 (A)

3.7 CONCLUSION

This study investigated parental involvement in the academic education of their children in rural lower primary schools. Phase 1 of the study examined how and the extent to which rural lower primary schools in the Ohangwena region practice parental involvement. This phase further explored the perceptions and attitudes of school professional educators towards parental involvement. Barriers to the practice of parental involvement were also solicited.

Using a 59-item Likert-scaled instrument, a sample of 87 schools was surveyed. The results provided descriptions of activities schools execute as part of parental involvement practice, and the perceptions of professional educators which according to Charles-Welsh, Green and Howard (2004) can serve as a valuable reflection of parental involvement awareness and a valued contributing factor towards fostering the academic success of learners.

The results of Phase 1 fairly answered research questions 1 and 3 of the study (see section 1.3). The findings denote professional educators' positive perceptions of and experiences with parental involvement. Positive perception reveals a belief that the chances of success of learners in life is initiated by the home, and maximised when the home and the school are collaboratively involved in the child's education (Charles-Welsh, Green & Howard, 2004; Epstein et al. 2002).

Although professional educators indicate evidence of the attempts of schools to encourage the support of parents for the academic education of their children, the overall findings indicate that schools still need to take more effort to initiate and invite parents to participate in school academic activities such as monitoring learners' work at home, classroom teaching observation, and lesson demonstrations at schools. Parents have important roles to play in a complete education of their children as they serve as powerful forces in helping to shape the destiny and outcome of their children.

Moreover, the results reflect challenges schools experience in the process of implementing parental involvement. The overall underlying problem rests within the realm of the use of community resources. Apart from inviting community members for fund-raising events, many schools do not make use of community members and other resources to support learners' learning. These results will serve to influence the qualitative measures of Phase 2 of this study.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH DESIGN, METHODOLOGY AND FINDINGS OF PHASE 2: QUALITATIVE STUDY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the use of qualitative methodology in Phase 2 of this study. It further presents the data collected through interviews, to investigate the processes and strategies used in the six identified lower primary schools in the Ohangwena Region to implement parental involvement in academic education of learners. I was particularly interested in identifying the activities employed in rural lower primary schools' practice of parental involvement, and how professional educators build relationships between them and parents for the sake of promoting the academic education of learners. Therefore, in Section 4.4 I have reported on how parental involvement was perceived by professional educators; how schools organise their parental involvement strategies and activities meant for making parents participate in their children's academic education; barriers schools experience in the process of practising parental involvement in academic teaching of learners; and professional educators' attitudes towards involvement of parents in academic learning of children, and the support they are expected to provide to them. I also noted ways professional educators sought to overcome the barriers. Furthermore, views of parents towards involvement in their children's academic education are also presented in this chapter. At this Phase of the study (Phase 2), the term participant is used to refer to the principals, teachers and parents together. When reference is made of the principals and teachers alone, the term professional educators is used. Parents and/or guardians are referred to as parents in this chapter.

4.2 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY: QUALITATIVE STUDY

As indicated in 1.6 (chapter1) and 3.4 (chapter 3), this whole study is based on a combination of both the quantitative (Phase1) and qualitative (Phase 2) methodological approaches. Hence, the study has implemented a mixed method type research design. Research design indicates the way a researcher interprets and understands the world and associated rules of investigation to determine the research methodology. At Phase 2 of this study, I adopted an interpretive approach to explore

and explain the rural lower primary schools' practice of parental involvement in academic education of learners. I adopted interpretive approach because I believe that individuals construct meaning to their environment by experiencing the world from inside. Thus, this study's Phase 2 looked at different interpretations of reality among insiders ('emic perspective' (Patton, 1990: 241).

Researchers who accept anti-positivist epistemology usually use interpretive qualitative methodology to gain understanding of social reality (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). Thus, in this study's context qualitative approach is better equipped to answer the question "How and why do principals, teachers and parents of rural lower primary schools in Namibia perceive, think about and practise involvement in the academic education of learners?" The main and sub-questions that formed the focus of Phase 2 of the study were presented in Chapter 1, Sub-section 1.3.

4.2.1 Data collection procedure

4.2.1.1 Sampling

For this phase of the study six schools (three units of analysis: schools A and B as high parental involvement; C and D as intermediate parental involvement; E and F as low parental involvement) were selected (see 3.6.7 for how the selection was done). Five interviewees: a principal, two teachers and two parents per school were selected. The concept 'parent' at this stage of the study refers to any family member (adult) whose child attends the selected schools. In total, 30 people were interviewed. Harry, Sturges and Klingner (2005) argue that a researcher achieves a more refined analysis of data with a small sample size, and reduces too much when striking a compromise between quality and quantity. Stake (2000) reasons that on representational grounds, even though the epistemological opportunity may seem small, one can learn some important things from almost any case. Therefore, I regard the possibility and opportunity to learn from a small sample of six schools not only, but also realistic of primary importance. The sample of parents consisted of one school board member and an ordinary parent.

Teachers and parents were identified with the assistance of the principals. Stratification of the participants (in terms of gender and age) was not considered because I observed, without any doubt that most of the teachers at lower primary phase are females. In this study, stratification sampling refers to drawing samples according to segments of a population such as gender and age characteristics (Strydom, 2005). This study's focus is on the lower primary phase as stated earlier,

and the majority of teachers at this level are females. Hence, sufficient representation of different genders and age among participants was not of significance for this study.

4.2.1.2 Data collection strategy: interviews

Although some researchers regard interview as the most expensive strategy of data collection, some deem it as one of the most effective instruments one can use to collect information about people's thoughts, knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, likes and dislikes (Swarts, 1998). Moreover, Bless and Higson-Smith (2000) recommend interview as the most suitable technique for poor sectors of the population in less industrialised countries. Harry (2005) argues that researchers and participants misunderstand one another. Therefore, to minimise this possibility, two-way communication as the most basic form of human interaction was considered in this study. The analysis of this communication was a therefore justifiable basis from which I tried to understand this study's participants' activities and behaviours. Practical ways of managing the implementation of parental involvement and effective strategies of dealing with factors that affect teachers' efforts to involve parents are part of the information this study tried to produce. Hence, the interview is regarded as an effective method of collecting data on schools' process (and its particulars) of involving parents in the academic education of their children from educators for lower primary learners, especially in Namibia's rural areas (See Appendix E for interview questions).

- **One-on-one interview to collect data**

Interview is a meaning-making research process in which I was in conversation with individual research participants who were describing their experiences of parental involvement and reflecting on their descriptions. Individual interviews were preferred due to the belief that respondents would not be influenced by the perceptions and opinions of their colleagues and the outcome would be a more valid account of their own experiences (Henstrand, 2005).

- **Pair interviews to collect data**

According to Henstrand (2005), it could have been good if data collection of Phase 2 is done by individual interviews using a semi-structured interview constructed from questions raised by the literature and from both personal and professional experiences. However, four of the sample teachers preferred pair interviews. Teacher pair interviews were held at two of the six schools. The respondents argued that pair interviews provide a supportive atmosphere that encourages them to disclose attitudes and behaviour that they may not reveal in an individual interview.

4.2.1.3 Pilot application of the draft interviews

Since piloting of the process is part of the preparation, the quality of the preparation influences the quality of the data. Drawing upon Singleton et al. (cited by Strydom, 2005) the designed measuring instruments were tried out “on a small number of persons having characteristics similar to those of the target group of respondents” (Strydom, 2005: 206). Interview questions were tested on five people (Punch, 2005), one school principal, two teachers and two parents, to validate the content of the questions and to improve the clarity of the questions (Delpont, 2005).

4.2.1.4 Conducting the interviews

- **Participants**

The participants were six lower primary school principals, 12 lower primary education teachers (together referred to as professional educators in this study) at six selected schools and 12 parents (six parents whose children attend at the six selected schools and six parents who were members of school boards at those schools). The following tables (Tables 4.1 and 4.2) present the biographical data of the professional educators and parents respectively. Participants’ names were changed to ensure anonymity.

According to the following table (Table 4.1), 29 professional educators belonged to the same ethnic and cultural background. Only one teacher at C school (teacher Daan) belonged to a different ethnic group and cultural background. Fifteen professional educators live in the same communities as their schools and three do not live in the same communities as their schools.

TABLE 4.1: The biographical data of professional educators interviewed

Name	School	Position	Gender	Community member
Fudeni	A	Principal	Male	Yes
Shoye	A	Teacher	Female	Yes
Ina	A	Teacher	Female	Yes
Mkwana	B	Principal	Female	Yes
Line	B	Teacher	Female	Yes
Kali	B	Teacher	Male	Yes
Puni	C	Principal	Female	Yes
Shiwa	C	Teacher	Female	Yes
Daan	C	Teacher	Male	No
Shange	D	Principal	Male	Yes
Kajolo	D	Teacher	Female	Yes



Kandaha	D	Teacher	Female	Yes
Uusiku	E	Principal	Male	No
Rose	E	Teacher	Female	Yes
Lesheni	E	Teacher	Female	Yes
Kavena	F	Principal	Female	Yes
Bekky	F	Teacher	Female	No
Sheeli	F	Teacher	Female	Yes

The next table (Table 4.2) indicates biographical data of parents interviewed. The information in the table shows that from each school, one school board member and one ordinary parent have been interviewed. Nine of the interviewed parents were female whose ages ranged between 30 and 60 years old. Three interviewed parents were males and they were all above the age of 50 years.

TABLE 4.2: The biographical data of parents interviewed

Name	School	Age	Gender	Role at school
Kapau	A	32	Female	Ordinary Parent
Weyulu	A	52	Male	School Board member
Hambelela	B	47	Female	School Board Member
Namwenyo	B	42	Female	Ordinary Parent
Nepeti	C	42	Female	School Board Member
Kavisi	C	47	Female	Ordinary Parent
Tolina	D	48	Female	School Board Member
Ely	D	50+	Female	Ordinary Parent
Shingwena	E	45	Female	Ordinary Parent
Ndjedele	E	55	Male	School Board Member
Kornelius	F	53	Male	School Board Member
Nghitu	F	53	Female	Ordinary Parent

The data in both tables indicates that 73% of participants of Phase 2 are females and 27% are males.

- **The procedure followed in conducting the interviews**

Schools were first contacted either in person or telephonically to make appointments for interviews at a date and time convenient to the respondents. The interviews were done at the locations chosen by the principals but also convenient for the interviewees. Interviews at schools A, B, C and E were done in the principals' offices during break times (A, B and C) and immediately after school (E). These locations were therefore noisy. School D chose for the interviews to be done on a Sunday afternoon at the principal's house. School F chose a Saturday morning, and the interviews were done in my car. Four schools' (A, B, D and F) parents were interviewed in their homes. Two schools' (Schools C and E) parents were interviewed at schools. The parent interviews for School C took place on the day of a teacher parent meeting.

The purpose of the interview was explained at the beginning of each interview and permission was obtained to record the interviews. The principal and teacher interviews lasted for 30 to 60 minutes. The parent interviews lasted for 20 to 45 minutes. An interview guide was used, and the interview followed the sequence of questions.

4.2.1.5 Recording techniques

Recording the data means "capturing the actual words of the person being interviewed ... actual quotations spoken by interviewees" (Patton, 1990: 347), and this is always done during the interviewing process itself. Therefore, a tape recorder was used to collect all interview data instead of taking verbatim notes during the interview.

4.2.1.6 Keeping field notes

Field notes refer to the researcher's reflections on what has been seen and heard during the data collection and analysis process (Patton, 1990; Rossman & Rallis, 2003; Wiersma & Jurs, 2005). Therefore, analytical and reflected information that was regarded important, and contributed to the understanding of the collected data and their analysis processes were noted in a diary.

4.2.2 Data analysis process

According to Rossman and Rallis (2003), the early stages of data analysis occur simultaneously with data gathering, because as the researcher gathers data, willingly or unwillingly, he/she is analysing them. Therefore, in this study the two activities (data collection and data analysis) were

conducted concurrently. However, greater emphasis was placed on collection of data at first, but as the process continued, the emphasis also became greater on analysis of data. The interpretation began early in the process, and was influenced by my pre-knowledge of parental involvement and the literature reviewed (Henning, Van Rensburg & Smit, 2004). I have transcribed the interviews to construct integrated data sets to analyse. I made use of content analysis to determine the presence of certain concepts and meanings. The content analysis enabled me to explore meaningful aspects and indicators of parental involvement. Thus, this study was aimed to explore and understand parental involvement as demonstrated by specific groups of schools (high, intermediate and low parental involvement) and determined by participants' perceptions, attitudes, experiences, limitations, aspirations and relationships with their respective environments.

Although this study bears the characteristics of a descriptive study (i.e. a detailed account of the phenomenon, parental involvement, however, seen by critics as lacking in depth), it went further to adopt interpretations. Interpretations means that the participants' explanations of parental involvement practice could be understood from their own perspectives. The interpretation also included understanding of the limitations of participants' practices of the phenomenon. The following section presents the detailed steps of this study's Phase 2 data analysis (see Appendix F for qualitative data analysis)

- **Transcription**

Transcription is the process of transforming the audio recording of interviews into a transcript. Babbie and Mouton (2001) explain transcribing as writing a text of the interviews. After interviews, full transcriptions of interviews were first done by hand in the informants' home language. The informants' language transcripts were translated into English and typed.

- **Coding and creating categories**

Coding is a process of attaching meaning to segments of data. The reviewed literature guided me to determine what I needed to look for in the units of analysis. Literature stipulated factors regarded as indicators of parental involvement schools (Lee & Bowen, 2006; Carreon, Drake & Barton, 2005; Harry, Sturges & Klingner, 2005; Barton et al., 2004; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Epstein et al., 2002; Lapp et al., 2002; Burke & Picus, 2001; WCER, 1995). I have identified main categories (theory codes) that have been directly or indirectly indicated by the literature as indicators of high parental involvement (see 2.8 for indicators of high parental involvement) worth being considered when studying to understand the practice of involving parents in the academic education of learners. In this study, the meanings of segments were marked with descriptive words describing the content

of segments (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). Then, the clear descriptive words were merged to form abstract inductive categories (See Appendix G for Qualitative data analysis).

4.2.3 Validity of the qualitative study

When qualitative researchers speak of research validity, they are usually referring to “qualitative research that is plausible, credible, trustworthy, and therefore defensible” (Johnson & Christensen, 2004: 249). The following strategies were used to promote this study’s Phase 2 validity and come up with more credible and defensible findings:

- Low-Inference Descriptors – descriptors phrased very close to the participants’ accounts were used. Participants’ exact words were provided in direct quotations. This was done for the reader to experience the participants’ actual language, dialect, and personal meanings (Johnson & Christensen 2004).
- Data Triangulation – this refers to the use of multiple data sources using a single method to collect data at different places, with different people and different times. Participants’ interviews that were done at six different schools at different times provide multiple data sources while using a single method (i.e. the interview method) of data collection. I applied reflexivity. Reflexivity involves self-awareness and critical self-reflection on my potential biases and dispositions as these might affect the process and conclusions. External audit and theory triangulation were also considered in this study. For example, an attempt has been made to ask an expert for language editing, and the use of multiple theories and perspectives (presented in Chapter 2) helped me to interpret and explain the data.
- Researcher as detective – this was my attempt to search for cause and effect evidence. This position increased my understanding of the data. Thus, rival explanations were systematically eliminated until the final case was made beyond a reasonable doubt.

As alluded to earlier, interpretation has been a built in element, and it took place throughout the whole process. Researchers refer to this analysis procedure as spiral image – a data analysis spiral (Creswell in De Vos, 2005), or cyclical and recursive process (Johnson & Christensen, 2004).

4.2.4 Construction of the interview schedules

Interview data were collected through individual interviews which were conducted with professional educators and parents. The standardised open-ended interview questions were constructed for parents, while the interview guide format was applied to school principals and teachers.

Two processes were used to construct the content of interview schedules (interview guide and standardised open-ended), conceptualisation and operationalisation (Neuman, 2003). A construct (involvement) was refined by giving it a conceptual or theoretical definition, i.e. a definition in abstract and theoretical terms (see Section 2.10 of Chapter 2 for a conceptual definition of parental involvement). A construct was turned into a precise conceptual definition as literature had been reviewed, i.e. the definition drawn from what other researchers say. The definition turned the construct (involvement) into its indicators as they are clearly elucidated in Table 2.1 of Chapter 2 of this study. The indicators formed the content of what was asked in interviews.

The standardised open-ended schedule consisted of questions for all the sampled parents. All questions had the same wording and were determined beforehand in order to minimise issues of legitimacy and credibility. The questions were posed in the same wording and order as they appeared in the guide. Although the standardised approach did not permit the pursuit of the topics that were not anticipated when the interview was written, the data collected was still open-ended in the sense that the respondents supplied their own words, thoughts and insights in answering the questions.

4.2.5 Content validation (Authenticity) of the interview schedules

Qualitative researchers are more interested in capturing an inside view and conveying a detailed account of how those being studied feel about, understand and experience events. Therefore, qualitative researchers refer to “*authenticity*” (information based on facts provided according to people’s experiences) than “*validity*” (Neuman, 2003: 185). This study’s interview questions were developed to search for a fair, honest and balanced account of parental involvement as practised in Namibian rural lower primary schools from the viewpoint of professional educators and parents. These are the people who experience this concept on a daily basis. Honesty/truthfulness is the core principle of validity in qualitative research.

Right at the beginning of the session, the interviewees were asked who they were and I introduced myself and explained the purpose of the study. It was pointed out to the participants that their responses were anonymous and confidential. Respect for the interviewees' valuable time was shown by showing them appreciation for their time and information. The questions and the expected outcomes of the interview questions are tabulated in Appendix G (See Appendix G for objectives of the interview questions).

4.3 PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA: QUALITATIVE STUDY

The analysis of the interview data collected from professional educators in six rural lower primary schools were conducted to:

- Elicit information on their understanding and perceptions of the concept of parental involvement in academic education of learners.
- Explain activities that indicate schools' parental involvement practices.
- Identify barriers to schools' practices of parental involvement and explain strategies they use to overcome these barriers.
- Explore and find out whether there are differences in schools' parental involvement activities and how schools implement those activities to become high, intermediate or low parental involvement schools.

Analysis of the data collected from parents was conducted to learn and document how they experience and demonstrate parental involvement. It also determined what parents want to do to improve their involvement in academic education of their children.

In so doing, I provided information on how rural lower primary schools in Ohangwena region practise parental involvement in the academic education of learners. The analysis of Phase 1 data of this study had identified six schools to be studied at Phase 2 (see Table 3.9 for the identified six schools) and the schools were classified into three groups: high parental involvement schools (Schools 44 and 28), intermediate parental involvement schools (Schools 35 and 12) and low parental involvement schools (Schools 11 and 64). As indicated in sampling (4.2.2.1), the same six schools were referred to as A and B (high parental involvement), C and D (intermediate parental involvement) and E and F (low parental involvement).

The analysis of the data collected to indicate and give evidence of how lower primary schools in Ohangwena region practise parental involvement in academic education of learners is presented in this report according to the three groups (three units of analysis) in which schools were categorised. This was done as it was regarded a better way to present answers to the research questions focused on at Phase 2 of this study (see section 1.3 for research questions) and aligned with the purposes of the qualitative investigation of this study (see 4.4 for the purpose of the qualitative investigation). The next paragraphs briefly describe the communities in which each group of the parental involvement schools was situated to familiarise the reader with the environment where the data were collected.

4.3.1 Description of communities in which the rural lower primary schools are situated

Presentation and analysis of qualitative data is structured into three levels (high, intermediate and low) according to the three groups of parental involvement schools identified by the analysis of quantitative data at Phase 1 of this study.

High parental involvement schools (A and B)

The professional educators interviewed reported that the communities in which those schools were situated lived below poverty lines. Most of the people in those communities were unemployed and there were no business opportunities in the communities. When it comes to the communities' understanding of education, professional educators from both schools perceived the communities as divided into two groups. The first group consisted of people with better understanding of education and their roles in the education of their children. As a result, they expected schools to deliver quality education that should be able to make their children productive citizens. The other group consisted of people who had less interest and understanding of education. Consequently, this group did not satisfactorily participate in school meetings and other related parental activities.

Intermediate parental involvement schools (C and D)

According to the professional educators the communities in which the two schools were situated were generally responsible, supportive and with better understanding of the education of their children. They interpreted parents sending children to school and parents visiting the school as indicators of an understanding of education.

Low parental involvement schools (E and F)

According to the professional educators, the two schools were situated in communities where members were not so committed to school activities themselves. Generally, most of the parents in those communities were uneducated and did not understand what education is or its importance. Therefore, most parents did not send or motivate their children to go to school and learn. Thus, most of the learners in those communities do not continue beyond grade 10. Professional educators regarded parents' lack of understanding and poverty as the reasons why the communities' children did not proceed beyond Grade 10.

Generally, all six schools were situated in poor communities in which many community members were unemployed, uneducated and lacked understanding of what education is, as well as its importance.

4.3.2 Rural lower primary schools' practices of high, intermediate and low parental involvement

The data on schools' practices of parental involvement is presented under the same themes used to present the data in chapter 3 to maintain reliability of the study' research questions.

4.3.2.1 Rural lower primary schools' practice of positive climate to parental involvement

High parental involvement schools

Professional educators' self reported practice indicates the climate that is conducive to parental involvement. Educators reported that they invite parents to visit the schools and view learners' performance their own time. They further indicate that they welcome, and encourage parents to visit the schools.

Intermediate parental involvement schools

The data from intermediate parental involvement schools was discouraging because professional educators did not provide clear and relevant information in terms of how they create positive climate for parental involvement.

Low parental involvement schools

Low parental involvement schools' professional educators reported that they employed strategies for creating conducive climate and attracting parents' involvement in their children's academic education. Educators reported that they work with parents as friends, visit parents at their homes, provide parents the freedom to visit the school and participate in lesson observations and presentations. Furthermore, these parents are awarded certificates of appreciation, and are requested to maintain the school properties and its surroundings.

Giving parents the freedom to visit schools at convenient times, welcoming them and awarding their initiatives to support schools, characterise the positive climate at high- and low parental involvement schools. Teacher Lesheni of school E explained personal contact and relationship building with parents as best ways to get them involved successfully.

'Parents, I greet them nicely, try to make them my friends. When the parent comes to you, you will tell him/her to support and assist the child when doing school work. Some parents have problems of not knowing how to read. When you invite them to school, they think that they will be asked to do something which will require them to read or write. Now you make them become closer to you until they understand.' (Lesheni, 18 July 2007).

4.3.2.2 Rural lower primary schools' practice of provision for parents with educational opportunities for knowledge development about parental involvement

High parental involvement schools

Educators of high parental involvement schools provide parents with educational opportunities in which they (parents) would gain knowledge and skills needed for supporting their children's academic education. Reported opportunities included: asking and allowing parents to observe teachers teaching; observing their children's classroom work; convening parent meetings to discuss the importance of education; providing literacy education classes; advising parents about the importance of feeding their children before they come to school; discussing school needs with parents; identifying how parents are expected to assist schools; and showing parents how to assist their children with reading at home. Related to empowering parents with literacy skills Principal Fudeni of school A reported:

'When becoming to literacy, we having the program have running, parents are invited to come to attend literacy classes. ...we have convince them the idea that they have to help the school, to help the learners. While they are at the home to assist the kids for learning.' (Fudeni, 12 July 2007).

Principal Mkwana's (of school B) response gave more examples of how schools reach out to parents, engaging them in authentic conversations, that educate and teach them how to help their children with reading. Principal Mkwana related:

'Sometimes the school invites the parents to come to the Parents Day, and the teachers, the responsible teachers for a certain grade has to show them how they ... how they assist their kids in terms of reading at home.' (Mkwana, 19 July 2007).

Intermediate parental involvement schools

According to the participants, the two schools in this group employed activities meant to educate, support and facilitate parental empowerment among parents in order for them to support and assist their children's academic education. Therefore, the data suggested the following activities as employed by intermediate parental involvement schools:

Schools established committees consisting of parents and teachers to deal with lower primary issues; share ideas on how to assist poor performing children; set days for parents to inspect their children's progress; encourage parents to give children enough time for school work at home; invite parents to observe teaching in classrooms; use parents who attend meetings to explain the importance of attending meetings to those who do not attend; organise events for parents where learners' demonstrate (through role-playing) what and how they learn at school; call meetings for parents to share with them important information about HIV/AIDS, how they (parents) can support the school; and hold parent-teacher meetings to discuss learners' performance and behaviours.

According to the professional educators' responses, activities such as parents' involvement in teaching, lesson observations, how to provide assistance with homework and organising events at which learners role play what they learn at school, do not only benefit learners, but also develop parents' understanding of education. Teacher Shiwa of school C claimed:

'Parents assist us also in teaching. I ask them to come and teach children about stories, or how to make pots etc. I ask parents to assist children when doing their homework. ... Attending and observing lessons help parents to develop understanding of the education of their children.' (Shiwa, 16 July 2007).

Low parental involvement schools

The data collected from low parental involvement schools indicates that professional educators discuss with parents about how they can help their children with school work; the importance of attending meetings and coming to schools to inspect their children's work. Professional educators invite parents for lesson observations and discussions about learners' absenteeism, tardiness, their (parents) roles and responsibilities in terms of learners' academic learning; and provide parents with

opportunities for lesson presentations. Principal Kavena of school F spelled out some examples of what she and her colleagues discuss with parents:

'We talk about things such as absenteeism; late coming and class visits. We advise parents to free themselves from their busy schedules, come to school, sit in the classrooms and observe their children's participation.' (Kavena, 21 July 2007).

Teacher Lesheni of school E added: *'Pastors are requested to teach children Religious and Moral Education'* (Lesheni, 18 July 2007).

4.3.2.3 Rural lower primary schools' practice of the use of community resources

High parental involvement

The practice of using community resources (financial, material and human) was revealed by the professional educators' responses. The specific activities employed by the two schools were:

Seeking financial support from non-governmental organisations; making school board members liaisons between the school and parents; asking the government to provide books and other teaching and learning materials; securing parent advices on how to deal with slow learners and other problematic children; inviting other parents as guest speakers at parent meetings; and asking community members to assist teachers in teaching contents that are challenging to them. Explaining how her school involves community members to support teaching, Teacher Ina of school A said:

'If a teacher experiences part of his/her subject content of which he/she does not have enough information, that teacher can approach a community member for assistance. This is better than sending children to look for information on their own.' (Ina, 12 July 2007)

Intermediate parental involvement schools

Apart from the fact that professional educators of intermediate parental involvement schools advise parents on how to be with children, they also invite guest speakers from the community to talk to parents. Teacher Kajolo of school D reported on how this activity is carried out at her school. She said:

'Many times we organize meetings for them, meetings in which we give them advice on how to be with children. Advice is given by us, teachers, parents or let me say fellow parents, as well as invited guests from the community.' (Kajolo, 15 July 2007).

Low parental involvement schools

Professional educators in low involvement schools know that teaching about HIV/AIDS remains everyone's responsibility. Also, because this disease is incurable and terminal, they believe in giving correct and accurate information to their learners. They involve health professionals in

information dissemination about the disease. Nurses were invited to talk to learners about prevention, treatment and understanding of HIV/AIDS. Moreover, the two schools invite parents and community members to meetings to discuss problems about learners and other school problems as well as request community members to contribute to school development fund. The data suggest that low involvement schools request donations from community members and involve parents in the decision making process. Interviewees reasoned that they could not exclude community members because the children they taught were part of the community. Teacher Lesheni of school E explained how her school involves health workers:

'The government realises that HIV/AIDS becomes everyone's concern and responsibility. The government recommends for all school curricula to include knowledge and understanding of this disease. Curricula should address how to prevent and treat HIV/AIDS, as well as how to take care of people affected by HIV/AIDS. Our school requests nurses to come and explain these things to our learners. We ask hospitals and clinics to provide us with necessary facilities to use for prevention.' (Lesheni, 18 July 2007).

4.3.2.4 Rural lower primary schools' practice of the provision of opportunities for technical support for classroom activities to parents

High parental involvement schools

Professional educators of high parental involvement schools provide parents with opportunities for technical support by discussing with parents their (parents) needs and encourage them to participate in teaching culture related content and children's informal assessment at home. They practise this as they advise parents to discuss school work with their children on a daily basis. Educators discuss with parents about learners' learning problems in a specific subject or area of education. Furthermore, they seek parents' advice on what to do with the specific learning problems. According to the collected data, this strategy makes parents become interested in helping children with learning problems at home. In relation to this, Teacher Kali of school B explained:

'We invite parents to come in and look at their learners' work. They see where his/her child stands. From there, teachers talk to parents, informing them that this learner needs help in this subject or in this area of education. Teachers seek ideas from parents of how to look after this. The parent becomes interested to ask learners to bring the book home. They will sit and help the learners.' (Kali, 19 July 2007).

Intermediate parental involvement schools

Professional educators of intermediate parental involvement schools claim that they involve parents in lesson observations and teaching, especially traditional contents, and ask them to assist children when doing homework. Teacher Shiwa of school C asserted:

'Parents assist us also in teaching I ask them to come and teach children about stories, or how to make pots etc. I ask parents to assist children when doing their homework. ... Attending and observing lessons help parents to develop understanding of the education of their children.' (Shiwa, 16 July 2007).

Low parental involvement schools

Apart from the fact that low parental involvement schools provide parents with opportunities for lesson presentations, the data did not suggest much about how the two schools in this group create educational opportunities for parents to provide technical support for their children's academic learning.

4.3.2.5 Rural lower primary schools' practice of the use of communication options

With regard to the question about mechanisms and options professional educators use to communicate with parents for the benefit of learners' academic education, the three groups of schools came up with the following:

Professional educators from **high parental involvement schools** mentioned that they use meetings, parent days, letters and memos, and fellow professional educators to make contact and communicate with parents and other stakeholders. The stakeholders that share the responsibility of learners' academic education were parents, nurses, councillors, pastors, headmen, the Ministry of Education as well as teachers and learners themselves.

Intermediate parental involvement schools' professional educators reported that they make use of letters, telephones, radios, other learners from the school, neighbours, churches and meetings to get hold of and communicate with parents and other stakeholders. Apart from parents, the other stakeholders they communicate with and share the responsibility of academic education for learners were the Ministry of Education and fellow teachers.

Low parental involvement schools make use of letters, meetings, churches, radios and headmen as communication options for getting in touch with stakeholders. The other potential stakeholders they mentioned apart from parents were business people, nurses, councillors, pastors, headmen, the Ministry of Education and fellow teachers.

In general this study's data gave multiple communication types through which schools make contact with parents and community members for the promotion of academic learning of learners.

However, only meetings and letters were commonly mentioned across the three groups of schools as communication options. Parents, the Ministry of Education and fellow teachers were indicated as common stakeholders at all school.

Although there were two schools that involved the stakeholders from local business as well as cultural and community institutions as part of their involvement practice, it is obvious there is under utilisation and/or undervaluing of other important services for promoting parental involvement available in communities. Other important services neglected were health care; national services and volunteer organizations; church organisations; and cultural and community based institutions.

4.3.2.6 Rural lower primary schools' practice of involvement of parents in decision-making and power-sharing activities

High parental involvement schools

The popular dimension of parental involvement practised by the two high parental involvement schools was making parents part and parcel of school boards and money generating committees and projects. Professional educators reported that involvement of parents in fund-raising committees contributed to the promotion of learners' academic education because the money generated from the projects were used to buy materials needed for academic teaching and learning. Principal Fudeni of school A elaborated on how he and his colleagues make use of money generated from a project of sewing school uniforms in which parents play a major role at his school:

'...we try to organize some kind of fundraising for developing of the school, since we really experience some problems on facilities which, may be the Ministry could not distribute enough to each of the learners. So we make some fundraising for getting some additional mathematics for the learners so that learners could do very well.' (Fudeni, 12 July 2007).

Intermediate parental involvement schools

According to the data, establishing special committees (that include teachers, parents and learners) meant to deal with lower primary issues such as discussing how to assist poor performing children, is a clear testimony of intermediate parental involvement schools' action to make parents support learners' academic education. Teacher Daan of school C reported of his school's attempt to involve parents in such a decision making committees for the sake of supporting learners' academic education:

'We experience difficulties in coping up with teaching learners. We came up with a plan of involving them much, and then we decided to form a committee for lower primary. We share ideas on how we can help such learners who perform badly ... In return, some parents responded positively that, they teaching their kids also at home on some topics.' (Daan, 16 July 2007).

Low parental involvement schools

The data collected from professional educators suggest that low parental involvement schools involved parents in decision making processes. Professional educators argued that they did not impose decisions on parents, but involved them in the decisions making processes so that parents are part of the decisions. On this practice, Principal Uusiku of school E elucidated:

'When the school realizes that it needs something, the community members are the first people to be approached to do something, even donating few cents to contribute to the erection of infrastructures. We try to make the community understand first about the problems at school because the children we teach are the community's children and the school belongs to the community in which it is situated. We make decisions together. ... It makes us happy because parents feel that the decisions are theirs, and they made them for their school.' (Uusiku, 18 July 2007).

Professional educators across the three groups of schools reported on school boards, committees for generating money and dealing with lower primary issues and poor performing learners as the avenues they normally use to share leadership and decision making with parents.

4.3.3 Rural lower primary schools' attitudes towards parental involvement on a high, intermediate and low level

Professional educators' attitudes towards parental involvement were sought through requesting parents to describe the attitude they normally experience from the professional educators of the schools where their children attend. The idea of investigating this aspect of parental involvement practice from the parents' perspective was explored to find out whether what educators said they were doing in 3.6.4 (chapter 3) corresponds with what parents claimed they experienced. Therefore, the following paragraphs present educators' attitudes towards involvement from the parents' views.

High parental involvement schools

For the high parental involvement schools' parents with whom I spoke to indicated that they felt quite welcome and respected at their schools and that this sense of belonging was very important to them. In addition, parents reported that the professional educators showed satisfaction with their participation in discussions.

Intermediate parental involvement schools

The data indicate that intermediate parental involvement schools convene parent-school official interactions for the sake of a common goal - the academic development of learners. This shared

outcome has been sustained by the two intermediate parental involvement schools dynamics of cooperating (with parents, which typically results in sharing information with them), and listening to each other and sharing positive perspectives on involvement.

Low parental involvement schools

Although low parental involvement schools also reported educators' positive attitudes towards parental involvement, this was not without its setbacks from some parents. Parent Ndjedele of school E lamented that some parents have a 'never mind' attitude towards invitations from the school. Ndjedele testified that when those parents are called for meetings they refuse and say, '*Let the school expel my child if it so wishes, I will not go there.*' (Ndjedele, 18 July 2007).

To the professional educators' attitude towards parental involvement, Parent Kapau of school A commented:

'They behave very well. They respect parents. Parents play a major role during parent meeting discussions. The principal and teachers indicate satisfaction when we parents participate in discussions.' (Kapau, 14 July 2007).

The data across the three groups of schools indicated that parents experienced a welcoming attitude, positive behaviour, cooperation, good relationships and mutual respect from professional educators. Hence, the parents claimed that they were allowed to play major roles during meeting discussions. Furthermore, parents reported that the principals and teachers showed satisfaction with their participation in discussions.

4.3.4 Professional educators' perceptions regarding parental involvement in academic education of learners in rural lower primary schools

High parental involvement schools

The data collected from professional educators of high parental involvement schools suggested their perceptions of parental involvement which include: parents' cooperation with teachers, participation in lesson presentations and assistance for learners' activities in classrooms and at home. The same people further believe that involvement is when parents make sure that arrangements of services such as school stationery, health care, child care and basic needs are in place.

For instance, Teacher Kali of school B defined parental involvement as:

'The parents come to school and present something to the learners, may be the teacher might not really aware of, like the cultural issues. The parents can come and explain more and more about that. Or may be is when the parents come in and look after learners' activities in the classroom, and then see where the learners need help and then from there may be they help the learners to do their activities

better. (Kali, 19 July 2007).

In the same vein professional educators described academic education as education that offers the content that enhances learners' knowledge, skills and wisdom, and serves as an anchor on which the learner's future will be based.

Intermediate parental involvement schools

The responses of professional educators of intermediate parental involvement schools define involvement as: parents' visits to the schools, monitoring and observing of teachers' teaching and learners' punctuality and attendance. They understand involvement in the light of a good relationship between the schools and parents, parents' encouragement for children to study hard, and parents' participation in school organisation and development.

Principal Puni of school C is of the opinion that:

'When we talk about parental involvement, we mean parents visiting the school to see what their children do, their good performance, making sure that their children arrive at school on time, seeing if their children do their daily activities, making sure whether teachers teach properly and learners are engaged in teaching and learning. ... They assure themselves of their children's presence at school'
(Puni, 16 July 2007).

According to the professional educators of intermediate schools, academic education could be defined as education that teaches learners basic skills which they can apply in the present everyday life, and in the future.

Low parental involvement schools

The concept parental involvement was perceived by professional educators of low parental involvement schools as parents' commitment to education when they establish a good working relationship with teachers for the sake of learners' progress; parents visit the schools to observe, participate in teaching and do other schools activities (e.g. active participation in fundraising events), observe lessons and learners' classroom activities; ensure learners' attendance and punctuality; and assist learners with the application of what they learn at school. In relation to this Teacher Sheeli of school F stated:

'Yes, I understand it that parents should ask their children what they learn from school, assist them when they experience a problem in learning at home, come to visit and observe how their children are performing. They can also teach children stories, etc.' (Sheeli, 21 July 2007).

About academic education, professional educators describe it as education of reading, writing, arithmetic and speaking correctly. They further explain academic education as education that shapes the child's future, makes the child to become a useful person in the future and a responsible citizen. Shedding light on this, Principal Uusiku of school E had this to say:

'It is the education the child receives to support and help him/her in the future. Education that makes the child able to do something and become a useful person in the future. The education that makes a child help the nation.' (Uusiku, 18 July 2007).

Professional educators' (across all three groups of schools) perceptions of parental involvement emphasised cooperation and good relationship between them and parents, parents' participation in teaching and assisting learners with homework. They understand academic education in terms of educating learners to acquire knowledge and skills of reading, writing and arithmetic.

However, most of the professional educators' understanding of involvement indicates a one-way kind of involvement. Parents provide service and schools receive support from parents but schools do not provide support to parents.

4.3.5 Professional educators' perceptions of the schools and parents' roles and responsibilities regarding parental involvement in rural lower primary schools

The question about the roles and responsibilities of schools and parents was asked with the assumption that talking with professional educators would provide insight into their understanding of their and parents' roles and responsibilities as far as parental involvement in academic education of learners is concerned. The following are their perceptions of the roles and responsibilities of the schools in learners' academic education:

High parental involvement schools

Professional educators regard all the activities that require formal training and activities which parents are not able to assist their children with as the responsibility of schools.

They felt that since parents are not formally trained to do some of the tasks, schools should take the responsibility of those activities such as daily planning and preparation of lessons as well as assessment, grading and promotion of learners. Explaining why planning and preparation should be the teachers' responsibilities, Teacher Line of school B clarified:

'For example, preparing for a specific lesson is my task. Preparing learners' activities is my task. These are my tasks because there are some of the things parents cannot do, they are not trained to

do so.' (Line, 19 July 2007).

Furthermore, professional educators consider: giving advice to the school; contributing to the school development fund and providing other financial support; buying school uniforms; assisting children when doing their projects and other school activities at home as the responsibility of parents.

Principal Mkwana of school B summarised these and gave her explanation about home approaches to parental involvement:

'I think the responsibility of parents is to pay the school fees for their children, and to buy the school uniforms. ... so the task is like a home-work. A homework should be done at school as well as at home. A project also, and reading also, parents need to assist their children when it comes to reading.'

(Mkwana, 19 July 2007).

Intermediate parental involvement schools

The following are other schools' roles and responsibilities that were mentioned by intermediate parental involvement professional educators:

Teachers making sure that the prescribed syllabi are followed; teaching of learners to obey school rules and regulations; and providing the needed learning materials to the learners.

Furthermore, supplying schools with teaching aids; providing learners' physical needs; supporting a positive school climate; and motivating teachers and boosting their morale were referred to as part of parents' responsibilities. In addition, professional educators felt that parents should have the responsibility of informing the school about children's problems and monitoring children's learning at home and at school. With regards to supporting school climate, motivating teachers and boosting their morale, Principal Shange reported:

'Parents are responsible for supporting the school climate. The movements of parents at school increase teacher's motivation as teachers realize that what they do at school please parents. Teachers do their work properly. It gives them moral support.' (Shange, 15 July 2007).

Low parental involvement schools

Parents at the low parental involvement schools felt that activities such as work distributions, visiting parents on a daily basis and making sure that the learners have needed materials for learning in class such as exercise books and pens, examination sheets, chair and desks are the roles and responsibilities of schools. In relation to that, Principal Uusiku of school E stated:

'For example, deciding who to teach which subjects, on what level ... and who to do what. As well, who is responsible for attending to parents who visit the school on a daily basis.'

(Uusiku, 18 July 2007).

In addition, professional educators feel that parents are responsible for paying for and/or negotiating school development fund with schools, provision of children's physical needs, sending children to school every day and on time, as well as asking children what they learn at school on a daily basis.

According to the data collected from professional educators at all three school groups, the content and activities in which parents were not formally trained, assuring that the contents taught are in line with the syllabi and providing learners with needed learning materials and stationery in class, were regarded as the roles and responsibilities of schools.

According to the data, high parental involvement schools were found organising some involvement activities that were different from other schools' (intermediate and low) activities such as:

- Provide direct services to learners which are welcomed by parents, such as sell school uniforms at a much lower price to learners; provide free uniforms to orphans and vulnerable children; and serve lunch to orphans and vulnerable children.
- Seek financial support from non-governmental organisations.
- Discuss with parents about the importance of their ongoing involvement in their children's education (e.g assessing their school work on a daily basis)
- Provide literacy education classes.
- Create projects (e.g. sewing) in which parents and other community members were employed.
- Secure parent advice on how to deal with slow learners and other problematic children.
- Advise parents about the importance of feeding their children before they come to school.
- Teachers for different grades show parents how to assist their children with reading at home.

4.3.6 Professional educators' reports of barriers to parental involvement that were experienced at their rural lower primary schools.

When asked about the obstacles they faced in practising parental involvement as well as what they thought could be the causes, professional educators from each of the three groups of schools reported several obstacles and their possible causes as indicated in the following tables 4.4 – 4.6 respectively.

High parental involvement schools

The data indicated that most of the barriers experienced by the high parental involvement schools were caused by parents' lack of understanding, unemployment and poverty.

TABLE 4.3: Barriers to parental involvement and their causes experienced by high parental involvement schools

Barriers	Causes
Parents and guardians prioritise other issues than the education of their children.	Unemployment and poverty; lack of understanding of the importance of education; and lack of time due to too much domestic work.
Lack of financial support and payment of the school development fund.	Unemployment; lack of understanding; and ignorance.
Exclusion of the lower primary phase when government officers' visit schools.	Undervaluing of the lower primary phase by the government.
Male parents do not attend literacy classes.	Male parents' prejudice against literacy lessons/classes.
Lack of and/or insufficient participation in meetings and other school activities.	Children live with elderly people; lack of time; lack of understanding; long distances; ignorance and fear of embarrassment.
Lack of electric and modern equipments.	Lack of donations, unemployment and poverty.

Intermediate parental involvement schools

Also, in the intermediate parental involvement schools illiteracy and poverty appear to be some of the major causes of barriers to parental involvement in the two schools experience in their practice of this phenomenon.

TABLE 4.4: Barriers to parental involvement and their causes experienced by intermediate parental involvement schools

Barriers	Causes
Parents and guardians prioritise other things than the education of their children.	Lack of vision and assets like cattle and 'mahangu' fields are more valued than education of their children.
Lack of financial support and payment of the school development fund.	Unemployment and poverty.
Insufficient infrastructure	Lack of water at schools
Parents are unable to assist their children academically.	Illiteracy and parents who work far from home.

Low parental involvement schools

Generally, the data collected from low parental involvement schools gives an impression that the problem of parents' lack of participation in meetings is commonly experienced by both schools. The data further suggested that this problem is caused by inability of elderly guardians to come to schools and participate in activities as well as poverty and the impact of HIV/AIDS

TABLE 4.5: Barriers to parental involvement and their causes experienced by low parental involvement schools

Barriers	Causes
Parents and guardians prioritise other things than the education of their children.	Limited understanding about the importance of education, and poverty.
Lack of financial support and payment of the school development fund.	Unemployment and poverty; learners live with elderly people and they do not have enough money to contribute to school development fund; guardians misuse the money provided for orphans' school needs by the government; lack of materials in the environment; and lack of means to reward committed and hardworking parents.
Some parents do not assist their children academically.	Elderly people do not reach schools for educational development opportunities; professional educators are unable to visit parents and guardians at home due to long distances; and lack of commitment on the side of parents.
Lack of and/or insufficient participation in meetings and other school activities.	Impact of HIV/AIDS on children's living with elderly people; lack of job opportunities in the environment, therefore, employed parents work away from home.
Some children live alone.	Ill-health and death of parents and/or family relatives due to HIV/AIDS.

Parents' priority of other issues than education of their children, lack of financial support and insufficient participation in meetings were reported as some of the common barriers to all schools. Lack of understanding, unemployment, poverty, inability of elderly and illiterate guardians to assist children's learning, were indicated as the causes for barriers schools experience across the three groups.

4.3.7 The strategies used by rural lower primary schools in dealing with the barriers to parental involvement

Professional educators' reports on this aspect were not encouraging. Some of the interviewees did not provide relevant information on the strategies they employed to address barriers encountered during parental involvement practice. However, some schools across all three groups of schools explained how they addressed a few of those barriers that were mentioned.

High parental involvement schools

To address the issue of financial support, high parental involvement schools organise fund-raising projects and events such as bazaars, ask parents for advice on how to deal with a specific challenge, and advise parents on the possibilities for generating money for themselves in order to be able to afford payments for the school development fund.

In relation to parents lack or insufficient participation in meetings and other school activities, the data shows that staff organised parent meetings in which professional educators enlightened parents about their responsibilities. Professional educators reported that they have requested school boards to speak to parents on their behalf and acting as a liaison between the school and the parents. Regarding how her school dealt with the challenge of lack of or insufficient participation, Teacher Line of school B stated:

'We discuss the problem about individual parents with the school board. The school board contacts the parent for the parent to contact the school.' (Line , 17 July 2007).

Intermediate parental involvement schools

About the parents and guardians who prioritise other issues than the education of their children, professional educators asserted that they invited parents to discuss with them about the impact of absenteeism on learners' performance.

Another strategy the schools used was to organise parent meetings and invited regional councillors to participate in discussions with parents about their (parents) obligations and how the government expects them to contribute to the education of their children. Principal Shange of school D explained:

'We discuss with a parent and show him/her the weakness of his/her child, or what the child could not do due to daily absenteeism.' (Shange, 15 July 2007).

Low parental involvement schools

Low parental involvement schools requested village headmen to help discuss the problem with parents in their villages, and help them (parents) understand the importance for children to attend school on a daily basis. Concerning the lack of financial support as well as payment to the school development fund by parents, professional educators claimed that schools established a negotiation system in which parents who were unable to contribute to the school development fund could discuss their problems with the schools. In this regard, Principal Uusiku of school E is of opinion that:

'It is the parent's role to pay the school development fund when he can, and if he cannot, then he is responsible to come and negotiate with the school.' (Uusiku, 12 July 2007).

The data show that the schools across all three groups tried the following strategies to address the barriers they experience during the process of implementing parental involvement: organise fund-raising projects, advise parents on the possibilities of generating money, explain to parents about their responsibilities and the impact of learners' absenteeism on their performance, ask the school board members to liaise between the school and parents, and task regional councillors to discuss with parents about the government's expectations of parents.

4.3.8 Parental involvement activities and strategies which are relevant to learners' academic education but not compatible with the current rural conditions in Namibia.

About parental involvement activities which are relevant but not compatible with the current rural conditions, the three groups of schools' professional educators responded as follows:

High parental involvement schools

High parental involvement schools' educators claimed that learning activities that need electric equipments such as computers were not possible with rural schools because most of rural areas did not have electricity. A convincing example was given by Teacher Kali of school B as he further explained this problem in relation to parents' support for learners' academic education:

'We do not have electricity and even if we get electricity, it is only at school. At home learners will not be able to continue with these things. They cannot practice computer skills at home. Parents do not have electricity and computers at home. Therefore, one cannot ask parents to help with computer skills at home.' (Kali, 19 July 2007)).

Intermediate parental involvement schools

Intermediate parental involvement schools' educators felt that without sufficient buildings and lack of space to be used as libraries at most of rural schools, requesting parents to assist learners in developing reading skills and a love of reading at schools was not possible. For schools without library space like Puni's school, they find it very difficult to implement this strategy. Puni of school C commented:

'We need buildings, especially the library buildings. It is a problem for learners and parents. They cannot come, sit and read in the office. Also, they cannot take books out of this office. They may lose or damage books. This is just a problem.' (Puni, 16 July 2007).

Low parental involvement schools

Government support in the form of funds for orphans' school needs was referred to by low parental involvement schools as one of the incompatible involvement strategies in rural schools. Educators claimed that because of poverty, guardians eventually end up using children's money for their own needs other than for the learners' schools needs. Teacher Lesheni of school E suggested how this practice could be improved to fit rural community:

'However, our government gives money to orphans for their school needs. But guardians misuse this money. Instead of using this money for orphans' needs, they use it for their own needs. Children come to school without proper school uniforms. They have no warm clothes and most come with bare feet even in winter time. I'm suggesting, I mean I wish it could be possible for the government to give vouchers instead of cash. The vouchers can be used to pay for the school development fund, medical treatment, food and clothes as well as school supplies.' (Lesheni, 18 July 2007).

The activities mentioned by parents from the three groups of schools were learning activities that need electric equipment such as computers, requesting parents to contribute to learners' development of love of reading skills at school and government support in the form of funds for orphans' school needs. The reasons given were lack of electricity in rural areas, lack of spaces in schools, and poverty in the communities.

4.3.9 How parents support rural lower primary schools for the academic education of their children

In order to get the whole picture around parental involvement, I have attempted to research parents' experiences of involvement in terms of what they do to support schools in educating their children academically, the effect of their support for schools in academic education of learners, how they might be allowed to contribute more, and the limitations and difficulties they experienced in the process of supporting schools. This data offered helpful information on how parental involvement is

practised in rural lower primary schools in the Ohangwena Region. In terms of what parents actually do, they claimed that they support schools and spelled out activities in which they may get involved.

High parental involvement schools

Parents from high parental involvement schools claimed that they support schools by attending meetings and giving advice to teachers and school leaders (especially in school board meetings); donating awards for hardworking learners; sharing knowledge with learners (such as culture related topics as well as HIV and AIDS); providing learners with school stationery and allowing children to attend school regularly. In Parent Weyulu's (of school A) words:

'I donated a trophy to this school. The trophy was to be given to any hardworking learner, the child who performs higher than every learner in the whole school. I also serve in the school board committee where I give my advice to the leadership of the school.' (Weyulu, 14 July 2007).

Intermediate parental involvement schools

Intermediate parental involvement schools' parents affirmed that their actions of serving on school board committees; providing learners with school stationery; sending children to school on a daily basis and on time; visiting schools; reminding children about and assisting them with homework characterised their support for schools. Tolina's (of school D) response serves as an example of intermediate parental involvement schools' parents' claims:

'When a teacher complains about children coming to school late, I try for my child to be punctual. If they say children do not learn hard, I commit myself by asking my children what they have done at school on a daily basis and assist the child in doing his/her school work.' (Tolina, 15 July 2007).

Low parental involvement schools

Low parental involvement schools' parents also reported that they support schools to educate learners academically. They stated their contribution as being the provision of required school stationery to their children; their service on school board committees; their encouragement of learners to study hard; payment for school development fund; provision of teaching and learning aids; and making sure that learners attend classes on a daily basis. To these claims, parent Ndjedele stated:

'I chase them to school every day. Go to school, do not absent yourself from school. If one of them happens not to go to school or goes half way, I take him/her myself to school. I follow them until I see that they enter the school yard.' (Ndjedele, 18 July 2007).

These responses indicate that parents involvement seem to be reaction and action based. In terms of reactions, some of the talks performed by parents were mostly endorsed within the prescribed structures and norms set up by the Ministry and/or form part of the school policies. For example parent's contributions to the school development fund; providing learners with school stationery; sending learners to school on a daily basis; attending school board meetings and giving advice to school leaders. However, there were also critical activities manifested by the actions such as parents assisting teachers in sharing knowledge with learners; providing teaching aids; donating awards for hardworking and best learners; and giving financial or any other form of donations.

4.3.10 Parents' report on the reasons and impact of their support for rural lower primary schools in the academic education of their children

When asked why they thought it was important for them to support their children's academic education and whether they saw any impact of their support in their children's learning, parents from the three groups of schools responded as follows:

High parental involvement schools

Parents reported that attending meetings together with professional educators and discussing children's education and school needs encourage teachers to work very hard. Good relationships between them and teachers provide them with a chance to collaboratively focus on the learner's progress, and encourage teachers and learners to work hard as well as improve their performance. To illustrate these notions, Parent Weyulu's (of school A) verbatim remarks are presented here.

'I do this as my contribution to the encouragement for teachers and learners to work very hard. It is very encouraging to the teachers when they see that parents are supporting them.' (Weyulu, 14 July 2007).

The data indicated that by supporting the schools, parents may also assist newly qualified teachers with the employment and application of teaching contents. Parents believe that newly qualified teachers are inexperienced and have limited knowledge, especially in culturally related information.

Intermediate parental involvement schools

Reasons why parents felt it was important to support schools were also given by parents from intermediate parental involvement schools as they reasoned that they view education as one of the most important aspect of life. Support creates good relationships between parents and teachers, and contributes to the progress of the school as well as the progress and future of the children. It was

their view that parents support their children's academic education because they do not want to be the cause of children missing education. Secondly, they are aware that to cope with life, education is needed. To these, Ely's (of school D) words were:

'Education is the most important thing in the whole world, everyone who has not progressed in life in terms of education feels it is their parents who are to be blamed. Now we are living in a progressed and civilized world, we want our children to be educated.' (Ely, 15 July 2007).

The same parents maintained that parent support encourages children do their homework, become committed and perform well.

Low parental involvement schools

Parents believed that if they support their children's education, their children may obtain success in life than them (parents). That means children would become professionals, secure employment and become useful citizens in the community. Parent Ndjedele of school E expressed his confidence in the potential of parents' support to influence their children's future. He said:

'Our children should not be like us. I did not attend school in my life. My school was 'looking after cattle', and from there I stayed home. It was my peer group who taught me reading and writing. Nowadays, our children are educated in school. Education produces teachers, nurses as well as officers. If your child does not have a certificate, he/she will not get a job.' (Ndjedele, 18 July 2007).

Furthermore, the data indicated parents' belief that the school development would be realised if parents support their children's education today, because they (children) may determine the nation's future success or lack of it. If children develop today, they will develop the school in the future.

The data across the groups suggest the following effect of parental involvement: encouragement of teachers to work hard, improvement of learners' performance, support for newly qualified and inexperienced teachers, development of good relationships between teachers and parents' commitment of learners, guarantee of learners' successful future.

4.3.11 Parents' experiences of difficulties in the process of parental involvement

When parents were asked about difficulties they experienced in attempting to contribute and support schools' academic activities, they came up with the experiences as tabulated in Table 4.6.

Table 4.7 shows that the data collected from high parental involvement schools suggests that parents' lack of and/or limited knowledge made them feel inferior to professional educators and this developed into estranged relationships. Moreover, parents viewed alcoholism as a cause of lack of active participation schools activities. Lack of school policies on parental involvement and/or

ownership of policies were some of the difficulties causing parents not to support schools. Parents stressed that their poverty status also prevented them from participating in school activities. Although school A offers literacy education classes, parents from school B listed illiteracy as another hindrance. Parent Namwenyo's (of school B) responses related:

'Yes, like us in our community, many parents cannot read. How can they assist their children if they cannot read?' (Namwenyo, 20 July 2007).

Intermediate parental involvement schools

Parents from intermediate parental involvement schools indicate lack of understanding and alcohol abuse as the major setbacks prevent them from exercising substantive participation in their children's academic education. The data reported that when it comes to parents supporting schools in solving learner-related learning problems, parents become defensive towards their children's mistakes. They also reported that some parents were too busy performing personal business. These parents, by not sending their children to school, encouraged them (children) to drop-out. Poverty was also found to be one of impedes on parents' way of supporting schools' academic activities. For example, School C's parents claimed that it was almost impossible for them to send their children to school during winter time. At that school, lower primary learners receive their lessons in sheds. As sheds become very cold during winter time, schools find it hard to carry on with school activities during winterseason. This suggested that most of academic activities at schools are interfered with. Parent Kavisi explained this situation at her school. Kavisi put it like this:

'Another thing is infrastructures. During winter time, small children are not taught because the sheds are very cold. You find all children standing in the sun for the whole day.' (Kavisi, 16 July 2007).

Low parental involvement schools

Parents admitted that most of them in that community were illiterate. As a result, they were unable to assist their children academically. The data indicates lack of cooperation during meetings. According to the data, parents explained that they had no other source of income apart from communal farming. Parent Nghitu of school F related:

'It is about income. Here in rural area we do not have income. If you do not work in your field to produce something, and take some of your produce and sell it, then truly speaking there is nothing.' (Nghitu, 21 July 2007).

TABLE 4.6: Difficulties experienced by parents in the process of parental involvement

High parental involvement schools	Intermediate parental involvement schools	Low parental involvement schools
Alienation. Lack of understanding of the value of education. Low self- esteem and lack of confidence. Parents’ preference for drinking rather than attending to their children’s education. Lack of school policies on parental involvement Illiteracy.	Lack of understanding of the value of education. Parents’ preference for drinking rather than attending to their children’s education. Lack of income. Lack of cooperation and collaboration among parents, as well as parents who are defensive about their children’ faults. Insufficient classrooms. Parents are too busy and dedicated their time to domestic and other income generating activities.	Lack of understanding. Lack of cooperation among parents. Lack of income. Lack of communication between parents and professional educators.

The difficulties experienced by parents across the three groups of schools include among others alcoholism, lack of school policies on parental involvement, parents’ poverty status, illiteracy, lack of understanding, parents’ defensive attitude, learners’ absenteeism, lack of proper infrastructure, lack of cooperation among parents and unemployment.

4.3.12 What parents would like to be allowed to do for the promotion of their good relationship with professional educators in rural lower primary schools

Although parents reported on good relationships and a respectful attitude they experienced from professional educators, they still emphasised that they preferred an allowance to contribute more for the promotion of good relationships.

High parental involvement schools

The data indicated parent’ wishes of what each group of schools’ parents prefer to do. For example, high parental involvement schools’ parents would like to sit in lessons when teachers are teaching

so that they may learn and be able to support their children at home. They would like to participate in teaching as well as contributing to the provision of teaching and learning materials. Parent Weyulu of school A explained why this is an important aspect of parental involvement:

'I would like parents to be allowed to sit in lessons because, this may help them to learn also and be able to support their children's ability to do their school activities and learn at home.' (Weyulu, 14 July 2007).

Intermediate parental involvement schools

Intermediate parental involvement schools' parents would like to be allowed to observe teaching, monitor teachers' commitment in terms of lesson planning and preparations, assist with teaching, and inspect children's books. Parent Kavisi's (of school C) response highlighted an aspect of their wishes:

'We want to be allowed to attend children's lessons, to listen and observe how teachers teach. School board members should be allowed to look at teachers' lesson planning and preparations.' (Kavisi, 16 July 2007).

Low parental involvement schools

Low parental involvement schools' parents indicated that they were more willing to participate in teaching children culture related content as well as story telling. They would like to see school board members engaging parents who do not send their children to schools every day in discussions.

The data across the three groups of schools emphasised that parents are interested in doing classroom related activities such as observations of teaching and learning, contributing to teaching and learning materials, and participating in teaching as part of their contributions to their children's academic education.

4.4 INTEGRATION AND COMPARISON OF THE FINDINGS OF HIGH, INTERMEDIATE AND LOW PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN RURAL LOWER PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Although all three groups of schools were generally situated in poor communities, parents who showed involvement in schools at high or intermediate level had better commitment towards education. They send their children to school regularly and expect schools to deliver quality education to their children. The findings from the high and intermediate groups of schools showed

acceptable level of commitment and support by parents for the academic activities of schools. Findings from schools with low parental involvement indicate that parents are not so supportive, show a lack of understanding of education and therefore do not often send their children to school. The six schools managed to identify, communicate, collaborate and work with a variety of partners to educate learners academically. The potential partners identified are categorised as follows: local business people; health care professionals; national service officers; spiritual leaders; individuals in the community ; government agencies; and traditional and community based authorities.

According to the findings, schools with high and low parental involvement work with a wider variety of partners than those schools with intermediate parental involvement. These two groups of schools make use of community resources and the skills and knowledge of community experts such as health care professionals, national service officers, traditional and community based authorities, and spiritual leaders. The schools with intermediate parental involvement cooperate with parents, the Ministry of Education and the individual teachers. Such cooperation is also preferred by those schools with high and low parental involvement. The possible explanation of why all schools make use of those partners may be explained by their greater visibility, availability, and familiarity (Sanders, 2001). Schools know that parents have obligations to make sure their children receive a proper education. Moreover, the schools' preference to liaise with the Ministry of Education may be due to the Ministry's obligation and commitment to fund public educational institutions.

The reliance on some partners only by schools with intermediate parental involvement may result in schools' underestimating, undervaluing and underutilising other potential partners who could also provide goods and services relevant to the needs of the school. Therefore, these schools need to learn more about available community resources and network with individuals within and outside their immediate geographic area to secure potential partners. Sanders (2001) advises that one of the best way for schools to do this is for professional educators to attend local community events and meetings.

Parental involvement could be a matter of perception of the roles of schools and parents as viewed by the professional educators. This could mean that what professional educators perceive as parents' roles and responsibilities influence what they expect from parents and what they ask parents do to support the academic education of learners. For example, parents may regard their involvement as being adequate, whereas professional educators regard it as being inadequate. It is worth exploring and clarifying what professional educators perceive as the roles and responsibilities of themselves and of the parents. The outcome of this part of the investigation may help

professional educators to appropriately apply parental involvement strategies to enhance home-school collaboration in the academic education of learners.

A consistent pattern is seen between the perceptions of professional educators regarding parental involvement and their claim towards practising this concept. This means that what professional educators think as involvement is what they practice. Moreover, according to the findings, it appears that there is a close agreement between teachers' reported activities and parents' reported activities. What parents reported as parental involvement practice is the same as what principals and teachers reported. In addition, most of the perceived indicators and claimed practised activities of involvement by professional educators focus on direct benefits to schools and parents. Very few focus on learners and communities. Most of the parents reported activities that they get more involved in activities that provide direct services to learners. Nevertheless, implementation of strategies which benefit parents and schools is regarded as the most important involvement (activities) for resource-poor schools (Sanders, 2001).

Many of the strategies practised by the three groups of schools are in line with the six types of involvement according to Epstein's framework (Epstein et al., 2002; Lindsay, 2001; Sanders, 2001; Sanders, 1999; Sanders & Epstein, 1998). According to Epstein (2001) research that has not considered the broad range of this framework has produced questionable analysis and interpretations. The analysis of the types and indicators of parental involvement practised by each group of studied rural lower primary schools is presented in 4.5.1.

Schools' perception of the concept parental involvement in academic education of learners is presented in subsection 4.3.4. Perceptions of professional educators of those schools with high and intermediate parental involvement referred to cooperation and good relationships between schools and parents, and participation of parents in school activities. However, schools with high parental involvement focused on the participation in lesson presentations, and provision of care to learners and their personal needs. Schools with intermediate parental involvement focused on the participation in lesson observations, and monitoring of the teaching by teachers and the attendance by learners. Perceptions of parental involvement by schools with low parental involvement are broader than schools with high and intermediate parental involvement. It referred to all aspects mentioned by the two groups of schools and added an aspect of the assistance of s assistance with children's home work.

Important strategies have emerged from the inquiry across the schools that were studied. Those strategies are worth increasing the knowledge base about involvement strategies which have been successfully practised in rural schools. All those studied schools' strategies of parental involvement, to a certain extent, covered what other researchers have recommended as strategies by which schools should be judged in relation to the degree of parental involvement (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Epstein et al., 2002; Lapp et al., 2002; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Lareau, 2001). Therefore, the findings reveal factors and indicators that qualify these schools to be regarded as practising parental involvement in the academic education of the learners. The following are a list of the factors that are perceived as important by the informants in assessing the degree of parental involvement as high, intermediate or low in a rural primary school:

- **Conducive climate** – schools serve meals for orphans and vulnerable children, reward hard working learners and parents, keep clean environments, are friendly and welcome the parents to the school, and have a democratic leadership style.
- **Provision of educational opportunities** – schools provide literacy classes; hold teacher-parent meetings mostly on subject teaching, learners' behaviour and learning performance. Parents are invited as guest speakers to meetings to talk about how and why it is important to provide for their children's needs. Individual teacher- parent workshops are held in which parents are guided on how they should help their children with reading at home.
- **Use of community resources** – Community members are invited to provide parents with information on how to be with children, and explain to them as well as to the learners how to prevent infection by HIV/AIDS and be with people infected and affected by HIV/AIDS.
- **Provision of opportunities for technical support** – Involvement such as parents observing and assisting in teaching, supporting learners when doing home work, and preparing teaching and learning aids are all of utmost importance in the six schools which were the subject of the study.
- **Power sharing and involvement in decision- making bodies** – parents are appointed as members of school boards and other decision- making committees.

4.5 INTERPRETATIONS OF THE FINDINGS OF PHASE 2 OF THE STUDY: QUALITATIVE

4.5.1 Interpretations of the findings of rural lower primary schools with high parental involvement

- **Perceptions of professional educators on parental involvement in academic education of learners**

The perceptions of parental involvement by the professional educators at high parental involvement schools are in accord with Bowen and Lee's (2006) view on parental involvement. Professional educators perceive this phenomenon as good relationship and cooperation of parents with teachers, participation in teaching, and assistance in learners' learning at home and at school. These activities of the parents support the objectives of promoting education of learners to make them literate, critical thinkers and independent problem solvers (Warren, 2005).

The perceptions of professional educators which refer to the participation of parents in teaching and assistance for homework activities imply that schools should implement involvement strategies that make them tap into the knowledge, skills and other resources of parents and community members (Lee & Bowen, 2006). Schools should exploit what parents are good at, to support the academic education of learners.

- **Perceptions of professional educators of the roles and responsibilities of schools and parents regarding parental involvement**

Professional educators regard the preparations of subject content and other activities which require professional expertise (like assessment and promotion) as the roles of professional educators. Parents are expected to perform tasks which prepare children to be ready for and enjoy learning at school and home. The findings of parents regarding taking care of children's physical needs and offering support in academic tasks are in line with some of the findings in the existing literature that indicate parents' collaborative efforts such as provision of resources and physical care to the learners, creating a positive school climate, and offering support in academic education related activities (Shah, 2001; Sanders, 2001; Hornby, 2000).

- **The practice of parental involvement in schools**

According to the findings from those schools with high parental involvement, professional educators associate involvement activities they practised at their schools with Epstein et al.'s (2002) types of involvement: parenting, communicating, learning at home, decision making, collaboration with the communities and volunteering. The Parenting type of involvement is recommended by other researchers because it makes parents become more effective teachers or tutors at home and learners gain academically (Epstein et al., 2002; Sanders and Epstein; 1998). Strategies like contributing to lesson presentations, ensuring what children do at school and assisting with

homework are considered more useful for educating parents and making them gain the necessary experience to assist schools and learners. This necessary experience make parents develop and activate other forms of input such as critical analysis skills that lead them to express new spaces for involvement in the schools.

The use of various forms of communication options and the invitation of the parents as guest speakers at teacher-parent meetings serve as a clear demonstration of communicating type of involvement. Demonstration of learning at home as a type of involvement practised by the schools is indicated by professional educators who show parents how they can assist their children with reading at home. The establishment of a sewing project in which community members were employed and remunerated, and the request for the community members to teach computer skills to the learners show the practice of collaboration with the community by the schools.

The findings reveal that those schools with high parental involvement practice broad parental involvement because such schools explored involvement activities across all types of involvement and demonstrate most of the indicators of parental involvement as indicated in Chapter 2 (2.8). Findings about the strategies practiced by schools with high parental involvement are discussed in subsection 4.3.2. Findings indicate the practice of setting a positive climate by schools. The practice of positive climate forms a foundation from which both schools and parents easily enter collaboration on a more equal footing. The findings reveal that the strategies of schools which employed parental involvement include those that help parents to develop literacy skills. Such skills can empower parents to take initiatives in school activities especially assisting learners with reading. Sanders and Epstein (1998) reason that parents who attend literacy classes develop love, confidence and a positive attitude towards involvement in schools and this influences the literacy performance of learners. Subject specific information for parents in reading helps many to become involved who would not otherwise do so. The idea implies that if parents assist learners with their earlier reading competencies, then this could significantly increase the reading skills of learners. Furthermore, the fact that teachers and parents talk about children's learning problems and about parents monitoring their children's completion of homework implies higher expectation by parents for their children performance at school. Parents with higher expectations tend to be involved in their children's learning.

The findings about the schools' identification and integration of resources and services from the community suggest that schools try to strengthen parents' belief in school. This practice motivates parents to continue supporting school activities. The practice by schools to provide the opportunity

for technical support indicates that schools respect parents as change agents for quality teaching of learners. Schools make decisions together with parents as the latter are encouraged to serve on the school board and other decision-making committees. This practice reflects decision-making type of involvement, which improves the parent teacher relations (Lee & Bowen, 2006; Lindsay, 2001; Sanders, 2001). Furthermore, parents' representation on school boards and/or decision-making committees is an indicator of very democratic systems in schools which promote family-school connection for supporting learning (Sanders, 1998). Without the voice of parents in the schooling of their children, schools are at a disadvantage for academic education, and children are at risk of being miseducated (Olsen et al., 1994).

- **Schools' attitude towards parental involvement**

The findings suggest that parents are respected and their ideas are valued. Respect of parents by the schools gives them (parents) confidence. Being viewed as respected and important partners by professional educators gives parents a sense of belonging and responsibility within schools (Sanders, 1998).

4.5.2 Interpretations of the findings of rural lower primary schools with intermediate parental involvement

- **Perceptions of professional educators on parental involvement in academic education of learners**

The findings from those schools with intermediate parental involvement reveal that aims of involvement such as parents' visits to schools, encouragement of children to study hard and the intellectual development of learners are of interest to such schools. Furthermore, findings indicate that professional educators' understanding of parental involvement goes beyond parents attending meetings and doing classroom observations to include participation in school organisation and development. These goals are best achieved through cooperative action of schools and parents together with good relationships and mutual support. Warren (2005) argues that these qualities are resources which enable stakeholders to achieve collective objectives, namely the effective education of children.

- **Perceptions of professional educators of the roles and responsibilities of schools and parents regarding parental involvement**

When schools allow and encourage parents to become actively involved in various activities is regarded as the role of the school. The findings show that schools offer parents opportunities to acquire knowledge and build relationships with one another and with professional educators. This relationship makes parents and professional educators to work as a team for the academic education of learners. Creating a home environment that encourages learning, taking care of children's personal needs and communicating children's emotional and social feelings were perceived as some of the roles and responsibilities of parents. The value of the presence of parents at school pleases the learners and encourages them to work harder. To the professional educators in schools with intermediate parental involvement parental involvement is not interference but an encouragement in their (professional educators) practice and a booster of their morale. Charles-Welsh, Green and Howard (2004) maintain that schools which are pleased by the involvement of parents inspire parents to create an environment either at home or school that encourages learning. Professional educators' perceptions indicate their belief in ability of parents to monitor the child's learning at school and at home.

- **The practice of parental involvement in schools**

Schools with intermediate parental involvement practice 'parenting': they organise meetings for parents in which they give parents advice on how to assist children academically. Moreover, the practice of parenting at the two schools is further indicated by the schools' way of asking and/or allowing parents to observe teachers teaching and learners learning, and participating in lesson presentations has a positive effect on the sense of well-being of the learners. These same schools practise communicating as indicated by the use of various communication options. Strategies such as lesson observations, teaching and assisting children with homework makes parents find it easier to talk to teachers and ask questions. Being there for their children and when their children need them at home, in classrooms and in schools is a way of activating a particular kind of interactive capital (Lareau, 2001; Coleman, 1988). This activation of capital did not depend on high levels of traditional resources that these parents typically did not possess, but instead required only that parents be present, observant and willing to assist in classrooms. Moreover, "*parents develop more positive attitudes about the school, greater trust of school personnel and confidence in approaching the school and teachers, and increased attendance at parent-teacher meetings*" (Sanders, 2001: 491). By involving parents in various decision-making committees, these schools demonstrate the belief that parental rights to democratic participation in the schools cannot be separated from parent

involvement. Parents have the primary responsibility, best knowledge and deepest love for their children, therefore, they have the greatest need and right to a say in the schooling of their children (Olsen et al, 1994). When parents position themselves with their presence in their children's schools, they create capital out of resources or situations where status quo norms generally only recognise a deficit (Lareau, 2001).

The practice of schools with intermediate parental involvement seems to neglect the practice of creating positive climate to parental involvement. A positive climate towards parental involvement in the school is very crucial to the practice of parental involvement because it encourages and ensures communication between home and school.

- **Schools' attitude towards parental involvement**

The findings indicate that interaction meetings between professional educators and parents take place. Findings of parents suggest that through interaction meetings they are involved in the discussions aimed at the correction of the bad-behaviour of some learners and at establishing discipline, as well as correcting faults of professional educators. According to Warren (2005), meetings of parents and teachers provide a great chance to both groups to listen to each other and learn about each other's concerns. Meetings are opportunities in which professional educators make parents involved in cooperative as well as personal spaces within which they could locate and activate forms of capital more valued in schools (Barton et al., 2004). Interaction meetings and tolerance of criticisms of their practice by the professional educators indicate schools' positive attitude towards parental involvement. Constructive questioning of schools' practice by other stakeholders is regarded by the Critical theory as one of the strategies which influence the practice and policies of schools for the benefit of learners' academic education (Barton & Drake, 2002).

4.5.3 Interpretations of the findings of rural lower primary schools with low parental involvement

- **Perceptions of professional educators on parental involvement in academic education of learners**

Specifically, the key conceptual findings of the meaning of parental involvement from the perspective of professional educators at these schools reveal a dynamic and interactive process in which schools expect parents to draw on their multiple experiences and resources to form a relationship with schools and be engaged in school activities. Thus, professional educators'

explanations of parental involvement characterised this concept with the qualities and actions such as: good working relationship between schools and parents; classroom observations by parents; monitoring of learners' punctuality and attendance by parents; provision for learners' personal needs and care by parents; and assistance with learning at home by parents. The perspectives of parental involvement as a relationship and as actions by parents are supported by the findings of Barton et al. (2004) that regard parental involvement as a relational phenomenon that relies on networks of individuals and resources, and is indicated by what parents do.

The findings from all three groups of schools indicate perceptions and understanding of parental involvement in line with the description of this phenomenon by Barton et al. (2004) – the expressions and attempts by parents, however, supported and sometimes directed by schools to have an impact on what actually transpires around the children in schools and on the kinds of human, social, and material resources that are valued within schools. Professional educators' perceptions of academic education emphasise the development of the basic skills (i.e. reading, writing and numeracy) to lay the foundation for a child's future and self reliance. The future life of the learners depends on support for learning in schools and at home. Parents and schools should engage in cooperation and a positive relationship as well as mutually supportive activities to enhance learners' ability to learn (Lee & Bowen, 2006; Walker, 2006; Carreon, Drake & Barton, 2005).

- **Perceptions of professional educators of the roles and responsibilities of schools and parents regarding parental involvement**

Creating an appealing atmosphere for involvement by giving welcoming reception to visiting parents is seen by professional educators as the role of schools. Warren (2005: 149) believe that *“if parents get involved through friendship, they have a foundation from which to enter collaboration on a more equal footing and this makes a better chance for them to exert authentic involvement.”* Furthermore, the findings indicate that professional educators believe that successful children have committed parents who provide for their physical needs, other needed learning materials and send them to school on a daily basis. It is other researchers' (Warren, 2005; Dryfoos & Maguire, 2002) belief that children cannot learn well if they lack health care, nutrition and learning materials needed to support the teaching-learning process.

- **The practice of parental involvement in schools**

The findings from professional educators at schools with low parental involvement show that these two schools implement volunteering, communicating, decision making and collaborating with the

community. Evidence of these types of parental involvement is: professional educators visit parents at home and parents are given the freedom to visit schools at a time convenient to them. Professional educators and parents visiting each other indicate communication and the parents' freedom to visit the schools indicates a positive school climate. A good relationship prevails between professional educators and community members as demonstrated by the two schools' request for parents and community members to maintain school fences. This practice further shows the collaboration with the community type of involvement. Classroom observation by parents indicates the parenting type of involvement. This strategy greatly benefits parents and eases the burden of academic education on schools. Through observation parents learn and become able to contribute a wealth of talent to the learners (Hornby, 2000). Decision-making and power -sharing is also practised when these schools make parents members of school boards and other committees. Schools thereby implement the idea of the rights of parents to participate in decisions that affect their children's educational experiences. For schools with low parental involvement, this idea includes discussions about learners' absenteeism and latecoming, as well as the roles and responsibilities of schools and parents. Moreover, parents are encouraged to participate in teaching and assist children with homework which reflects the volunteering type of involvement. According to Sanders and Epstein (1998), volunteering is recommended because parents learn more about what their children are learning, the teacher's job and problems, as well as the classroom life.

The findings from schools across the three groups indicate the positions of parents as being what Carreon, Drake and Barton (2005: 492) refer to as '*strategic helpers*' and '*listeners*'. The findings show that schools manage to give parents a voice in the formal and informal spaces. When parents are given opportunities for doing teaching and learning observations in classrooms or participating in other teaching or parent-related school events this demonstrates parents as strategic helpers in the formal space. Daily assistance with children's homework activities and helping them with reading at home also demonstrates parents as strategic helpers in the informal school activities. Limited attendance of meetings for parents, limited participation in parent related school academic events and daily conversations with their children about school demonstrate parents as listeners. Through these activities, and working in cooperation, schools and parents try to bridge the gap between home and school, which linkage is crucial for children's learning (Heneveld & Craig, 1996).

- **Schools' attitude towards parental involvement**

Other findings indicate that teachers in rural schools hold 'deficit' views of parents, and therefore, reserve their respect for them and their contributions to education of the learners (Walker, 2006; Sanders, 2001). On the contrary, this study's findings revealed the efforts by professional educators

to build trust and foster a meaningful collaboration with parents. The findings show the mutual trust and interpersonal relationships between schools and parents which have been initiated by the professional educators. Although the attitude of some parents toward their obligations in terms of supporting schools has interfered with the initiatives of professional educators, the findings of parents in general indicate an appreciation of their conduct and attitude by professional educators.

4.5.4 Reports by professional educators and parents of barriers and difficulties that were experienced in the process of parental involvement practice at their schools

Interpretation of barriers and causes experienced by the three groups of schools is presented in one sub-section because of the many similarities and overlapping views between the findings across the groups. Although convincing information and evidence of how schools practise parental collaboration and involvement is reported by professional educators, implementing and sustaining such collaboration is not without barriers. There were barriers at schools that needed to be addressed so that effective parental involvement could be implemented. The barriers are presented in 4.3.6.

While few professional educators could explain how they addressed those difficulties, most of them avoided that question or asked me to continue with the next question during the interviews. This finding serves as clear evidence that despite some schools' attempts to implement strategies to address the experienced barriers to parental involvement (as reported in 4.3.7), most schools are either struggling or do not know how to go about addressing some of these barriers. At the same time there is no acknowledgement or little knowledge and/or inability to do that from schools.

These findings suggest the urgency of creating practices and structures that address barriers to the implementation of parental involvement in lower primary schools in rural areas. Schools need to build a social support network in order to acquire the 'how to' knowledge needed for addressing these barriers. This study's empirical evidence supports other researchers' (Lee & Bowen, 2006; Carreon, Drake & Barton, 2005) findings that the major common problems in many rural areas are caused by poverty, lack of resources, illiteracy and lack of understanding. Problems such as lack of education and understanding of parents, and illiteracy go hand in hand with lack of stimulation in homes, reduced ability of parents to support their children's academic education and so learners experience lack of support for learning at home.

Other factors such as undervaluing the lower primary phase, prejudice, stereotyping, and HIV/AIDS illustrate the dilemma of schools that want more parent involvement but find it challenging because of the realities of parents' circumstances. Although these factors are acknowledged as genuine concerns in rural schools, in the end it depends on how the schools try to handle these challenges not to discourage the possibility of parental involvement. Beck and Murphy (1999) argue that the measure of a school's practice of parental involvement is not the absence of struggles in this effort, but rather the way in which professional educators and parents address problems and persist in spite of them.

4.6 CONCLUSION

The analysis of qualitative data on the practice of parental involvement by six rural lower primary schools in the Ohangwena region revealed that most schools seem to have explored involvement activities that are regarded as important for high- need and poor resource schools in at risk communities (Warren, 2005; Sanders, 2001) to benefit the academic aspect of learners' education and to improve learners' learning.

Interestingly though, parents expressed little discomfort with the ways they were treated and involved in their children's academic education by schools. Indeed, most felt very welcome at schools and offered service, suggestions and ideas that were acted upon by the schools. However, their suggestions for more involvement strategies they would like to do should be a warning to schools that they (schools) still need to do more for the implementation of substantial involvement. In Chapter 5 the most important aspects from the literature reviewed and of both the quantitative and qualitative research will be integrated and discussed. Critical reflections, limitations and strengths of the study, as well as recommendations and indications for future research based on the findings will be put forward.