

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS, CRITICAL REFLECTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

#### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

The literature presents compelling evidence of a positive correlation between parent involvement in the education of learners and an increase in learners' learning and achievement. The literature further indicates a strong relationship between poor practices or difficulty in practising parental involvement and parents' socio-economic background. Therefore, parental involvement is reported in the literature as being difficult to implement in rural schools and its practices are less likely to take root in schools that serve rural and low-income populations than in schools that serve urban and high-income populations. Some of the major conclusions from findings of various studies on parental involvement indicated in the literature include the following: professional educators in rural schools want to involve parents more but they do not know the best ways to do so; schools regard parental involvement as a problem because parents do not show support for schools (Dryfoos & Maguire, 2002); implementation of parental involvement in low socio-economic status areas meets a lack of parental support and resistance (Lapp et al., 2002; Sanders, 2001); and whenever parents are involved, they are more involved in non-academic spaces (Henneveld & Craig, 1996).

These long-held assumptions and traditional parental involvement conclusions do not seem to recognise parental involvement activities in rural schools nor the knowledge and resources of poor parents. The practice of parental involvement in rural schools is regarded as subordinate. Such beliefs imply that rural communities lack the knowledge, skills and network resources to create activities and strategies that have the potential to make a difference in children's educational development. Furthermore, the conclusions indicate very little (if ever) information on whether attempts were made to find out how possible parental involvement strategies could be encouraged and sustained in rural schools. Documented information about the recognition of the existing activities and strategies of parental involvement in rural schools is not widely available, especially in Namibia.

The existing conclusions in the literature about parental involvement are more than enough to warn rural schools to handle the theory of traditional parental involvement practice with care. The Critical theory encourages intellectual engagement with such form of oppressive beliefs. Critical

Theory argues that some research results should not be accepted as correct and unquestionable (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000). Therefore, the current study attempted to critically analyse whether and how rural lower primary schools in Namibia involve parents in the academic education of learners, and generated knowledge that challenges some of these oppressive ideologies.

In Chapter 2 (Sub-section 2.4) I affirm that I lend my support to other research claims that parents across different social classes have the ability and unique capital to support the education of their children and highly value the education of their children. It is that quality of parental involvement among low socio-economic status parents and schools that this study tried to critically examine and expose. The study investigated and can reveal to rural lower primary schools the processes, strategies and activities they can perpetuate to keep themselves working successfully with parents to encourage the academic education of learners.

A mixed method design was chosen to direct this study. Research questions were formulated to investigate and establish responses that could be measured both quantitatively and qualitatively. The reflective thinking emerging from the literature review resulted in the formulation of propositions. Quantitative research questions which directed Phase 1 of the study were asked to test the propositions. I postulated that rural lower primary schools practise parental involvement in ways that are possible in their contexts and that it would be exhibited by the following indicators: conducive climate for parental support; provision of educational opportunities for knowledge development about parental involvement to parents and teachers; use of community resources and knowledge of community experts; 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 school policy formulation and school governance; professional educators' positive attitude towards involvement; schools' understanding and valuing of involvement; and addressing sources of conflict between parents and school staff. Therefore, the propositions say that according to the perceptions of professional educators, schools with high, average or low ratings on the above-mentioned indicators of parental involvement will have high, intermediate or low parental involvement practice respectively (see Section 3.3 for the detailed formulations and presentations of the propositions).

The statistical analysis of Phase 1 data grouped schools into three groups (high, intermediate and low). Six schools were identified across all the three groups to be studied in-depth during Phase 2 of this study. Of the six schools, two were identified from schools which indicated a high practice of parental involvement (Schools A and B), two were identified from schools which indicated an

intermediate practice of parental involvement (Schools C and D) and two were identified from schools which indicated a low practice of parental involvement (Schools E and F).

The quantitative approach has limited possibilities for exploring parental involvement in a natural setting and provided me with the understanding of the meaning professional educators attach to it in order to define that part of their reality as professionals. Therefore, qualitative questions were also asked in order for the study to make an in-depth investigation of the professional educators' and parents' definitions of the reality they live. The combination of quantitative and qualitative methodological research supplemented by the literature review revealed the findings that are presented in this chapter. The aim of the current study is to critically analyse whether and how rural lower primary schools in Namibia involve parents in the academic education of their children. The research questions which directed the entire study were:

- How is parental involvement perceived and practised by professional educators to support learners' academic education in rural lower primary schools?
- How do parents demonstrate their parental involvement in the education of their children?
- How do lower primary schools with high parental involvement organise their involvement strategies and activities differently from schools with intermediate and low parental involvement in rural Namibia?
- What barriers to parental involvement do rural lower primary schools in Namibia experience?
- How do rural lower primary schools in Namibia deal with factors that challenge their efforts to involve parents in learners' academic education?

The objectives were:

- To explore the perceptions of and thoughts about parental involvement among lower primary schools and the extent to which those schools in northern Namibia involve parents in their children's academic education;
- To explore how parents demonstrate their parental involvement in the education of their children;
- To conduct a study that critically analyses and identifies how schools with high parental involvement organise their activities differently from schools with low parental involvement in rural Namibia; and

- To identify, critically analyse and describe the ways in which lower primary schools deal with barriers that affect schools' efforts to involve parents in the academic education of learners.

## **5.2 SUMMARY OF THE LITERATURE REVIEW**

The provision of free education proclaimed in the Constitution of the Republic of Namibia (December, 1991) implies the promotion of education for all, expansion of access to education and improvement in the quality of education in schools. The provision of quality education allows for the recognition of educational benefits arising from parental involvement in the education of their children. The government encourages schools to aim for the provision of quality education and learners' high academic achievement. Hence, the policy of the Ministry of Education and Culture in Namibia strongly supports the practice of parental involvement in the education of learners by schools (MEC, 1993).

### **5.2.1 Perceptions about parental involvement**

According to the literature review, parental involvement is perceived as an approach to improve the quality of education (Singh, Mbokodi & Msila, 2004; MEC, 1993). Its rationale is rooted in the belief that in order for schools to educate children effectively, parents and families should become fully involved in the process of educating learners (Rothstein, 2005; Sanders & Epstein, 1998; MEC, 1993). Parental involvement occurs when schools bring together multiple resources and complementary learning support, including parental support, and build on their strengths to promote children's learning and school success (Rothstein, 2005; Brown, 2001). Schooling improves when a variety of resources (e.g. professional educators, parents and other community members) share and combined their talents and benefits (Kakli, Kreider & Ross, 2005). Moreover, parental involvement is regarded as a meaningful, respectful and authentic relationship which schools and parents co-construct. It is a means that schools can use to convey a sense of parental rights and responsibilities within the school to parents.

### **5.2.2 Critical and Ecological theories and parental involvement**

The other understanding of parental involvement gained from the literature review is based on the tenets of Ecological Theory. One of the premises of this theory is that the child's world is an interrelated series of nested environmental systems and resources which influence each other and

within which a child learns and develops (Barton et al., 2004). The Ecological Theory regards both parents and schools as valuable contributors to children's learning, both at home and at school.

Critical Theory criticises traditional parental involvement and claims that schools tend to maintain the beliefs of a capitalist culture, positioning the space, capital, resources and cultures of poor families as inferior (Creswell, 2003). The assumption of the capitalist culture about parental involvement regards parents from rural contexts and poor backgrounds as lacking the knowledge, skills and network of resources to know how to enter into the kinds of conversations and activities that make a difference in the educational development of their children (Lee & Bowen, 2006; Hammond, 2001). Valencia (1997, in Lee and Bowen, 2006) argues that this kind of deficit perspective, not only devalues the educational involvement shown by parents from poor backgrounds, but also takes attention away from the professional responsibility of schools to establish effective parental involvement activities for those parents. Critical Theory challenges beliefs that reproduce oppressive ideologies (Henning, Van Rensberg & Smit, 2004). This oppression remains if disadvantaged people accept their social status as natural, inevitable and inviolable (Briton, 1996). Until such a time that researchers study contextually-based parental involvement in rural schools and recognise the current initiatives of parental involvement practice, rural schools will be seen as unable to implement involvement, and rural parents will be viewed as deficient educators. Thus, the schools are cautioned against the generally accepted knowledge and should handle that knowledge with care (Leonardo, 2004; Creswell, 1998).

### **5.2.3 Cultural and social capital and the importance of parental involvement**

According to Lee and Bowen (2006), Brubaker (2004) and Lareau (2001), social capital is a means by which parents promote the school achievement and educational attainment of their children through visits to the schools and interaction with other parents at school and by attending parent meetings, providing attention to children's personal needs, engaging in volunteer activities, providing help with homework, and discussing school work and experiences with their children.

When parents possess cultural capital, it magnifies the effects of parental involvement and makes them procure additional capital that promotes children's academic enhancement (Lee & Bowen, 2006). When parents are involved at school, it promotes the connections between them and the schools and creates congruence in behaviours, values and attitudes across children's micro-systems. Parental involvement guarantees quality education (Chapman & Aspin, 1997). It improves learning

and performance of learners because the families of learners are considered as crucial factors in their children's education. The more parents are involved, the better understanding and knowledgeable they become about the school programme and about the teachers' roles. School activities which involve parents make it more pleasant, productive, and secure for learners. Parents develop positive attitudes towards teachers and their teaching, and develop strong confidence in the school (Stern, 2003). Parental involvement sends a strong message to the learners about the importance of schooling, safety, and punctuality. It creates an atmosphere of trust and cooperation and strengthens the relationship between home and school (Wright & Stegelin, 2003).

#### **5.2.4 Foundations of parental involvement**

The premises that constitute the foundation of parental involvement are the doctrine of parents' rights, the family influences on the child and the democratic process. These premises constitute the foundation for providing accessibility, quality and equality of learning opportunities for all children of all races and social classes. According to Holmes (1998), professional educators in schools used to feel that their status was undermined when parents tried to get involved in their children's education. As a reaction, parents decided to fight for their rights. Moreover, from the pedagogical perspective, low achievement rate, especially among poor and marginalised children, has led educators to change their attitude and become more aware of the importance of parental involvement for learners' quality learning in the education process. From the political perspective, the realisation of democracy and empowerment of all stakeholders in education contributed to the development of this important educational approach. On the other hand, economists argue that education of the child becomes a heavy undertaking if it is left on the shoulders of schools alone. Therefore, for schools to provide learners' effective and successful education, the establishment of democracy and empowerment of marginalised parents to collaborate with professional educators is needed.

#### **5.2.5 Indicators of parental involvement**

The literature review (Epstein et al., 2002; Sanders & Epstein, 1998; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Dryfoos & Maguire, 2002; Shah, 2001; Henneveld & Craig, 1996) inter alia, identified the following as indicators of parental involvement: the linking of schools to community resources; facilitating opportunities for parents to provide schools with financial and/or material support; open, frequent and various communication options between schools and parents; allowing parents to

participate in academic learning related activities; involving parents in policy formulation and school governance; providing parents with educational and knowledge development opportunities; supporting a good and strong relationship between schools and parents; creating a positive school climate; requiring professional educators to have positive perceptions and attitudes towards parental involvement; consulting teacher training programmes for teachers in-service education about how to involve parents in the education of learners; defining staff members as liaisons between schools and parents; and developing a process for resolving conflicts between parents and school staff.

### **5.2.6 Challenges and common barriers associated with parental involvement in rural schools**

The literature identified common barriers to the practice of parental involvement in primary schools. Among these are increased distances between professional educators and parents; illiteracy, isolation, poverty, unemployment; low achieving children; lack of understanding and knowledge about each other's roles and responsibilities; time constraints; parents' negative experiences with schooling; school climates which are not conducive to parental involvement; and professional educators' negative attitudes towards parental involvement.

## **5.3 FINDINGS FROM THE EMPIRICAL STUDY**

I agree that rural schools experience some challenges in the processes of implementing parental involvement in education of learners. However, this study provides support for my reservations about the conventional belief that this approach to education is difficult if not impossible to implement and take root in rural schools. While I acknowledge the generalisations of the findings, I also knew that, as a researcher, I had to investigate and understand the practice of parental involvement in Namibia's rural schools from within, i.e. from the professional educators and parents who live this life. I believed that if they shared their experiences of the reality they live with me, then I might challenge or redefine this conventional beliefs.

The framework of this study has been influenced by Ecological and Critical Theories. Ecological Theory views the child's world as a series of nested environmental resources that influence each other and within which the child learns and develops. The same theory further regards parents and schools as valuable contributors to the child's learning, at home and at school. It is commonly held that parents regardless of their social class want the best for their children. Therefore, this study is

rooted in a framework that states that in order for schools to educate children effectively, parents and families should become involved in the process of educating learners. I lend my support to an African proverb which says, ‘It takes a village to educate a child’. This proverb implies that all complementary learning support in which parents are included should contribute to the school endeavours to educate children. Complimentary support fosters school success and improvement. Successful schools and successful learners have parents who are involved. Critical Theory cautions against generally accepted knowledge and oppressive ideologies about parental involvement that are positioned to inhibit and suppress already economically disempowered schools’ practice of democracy. The same theory recommends for rural schools to believe in the application of a Freirian approach, characterised by an educational philosophy of pedagogy for democratic schools. Pedagogy for democratic schools implies recognition of indigenous ways and ability to support learning and the value of aspirations, knowledge and skills of all stakeholders in which parents are included. People involved in rural schools should not fold their arms and believe that what other researchers found is final and natural. Rural schools should stand up and liberate themselves from the hopeless idea that it is difficult for them to involve parents in the education of their children.

### **5.3.1 Summary of the results of the quantitative study**

- **Demographic profile of the respondents and schools which participated in the investigation**

The research was conducted in Oshiwambo. One hundred and forty six professional educators responded to the questionnaire. The ages of respondents ranged from 24 to 59 years. The qualifications of the respondents ranged from a two-year certificate to a five-year postgraduate degree. The most frequently reported qualification was the three-year certificate. The number of years in the teaching profession of the respondents ranged from 1 to 35. The school with the lowest number of learners had 43 and the school with the highest number had 960 learners. Perceptions about parental involvement were sought through two research questions at Phase 1 of this study. Summary of the results of each of the research questions is presented below.

Research question: *How is parental involvement perceived and practised by professional educators to support learners’ academic education in rural lower primary schools?*

Professional educators’ perceptions of parental involvement indicate that the establishment of Teacher-Parent Organisations and functioning of school board committees at schools are indicators

of this phenomenon. The findings suggest that Teacher-Parent Organisations should be responsible for discipline, health and counselling of staff members, parents and learners. This organisation should take the responsibility for contributing to the development of management and quality assurance of schools. School boards should manage schools, control discipline and provide security for schools. Perceptions of the respondents further show that parental involvement in schools should focus on communication and strong relationships between schools and parents, use of community resources by the schools, participation and support of school activities by parents and the provision of children's needs by parents.

Perceptions of professional educators indicate that rural, lower primary schools:

- **create a conducive climate for parental involvement**

The perceptions of the professional educators indicate an open, warm, inviting and productive school climate as they describe the sites of their schools as clean and well maintained. Respondents perceive their school environments as safe for teachers, parents and learners. Parents are free to visit schools in their free time. According to Warren (2005) this freedom encourages parents to come to the school and give support even when they have not been formally invited.

- **provide parents with educational opportunities for knowledge development about parental involvement**

Schools hold meetings in which teachers and parents discuss the importance of parental involvement, parents' roles and responsibilities, and specific subject curricula. Parents of children with behavioural problems are provided with counselling services. Through these activities, parents develop a sense of efficacy, pride and confidence to support their children's academic education (Warren, 2005; Epstein et al., 2002; Sanders & Epstein, 1998).

- **use community resources to support school activities**

Some schools use community members as interpreters and invite community members for fundraising events. This recognition of community members as interpreters and committees members symbolises respect and value for parents' knowledge and skills as well as clear communication between schools and parents.

- **provide parents with opportunities for technical support for classroom activities**

Many schools ask parents to monitor children's school work at home. When parents monitor and support learners' homework, it enhances their children's effective learning. Some schools invite parents for lesson observations, contributions to lesson presentations and fund raising activities.

- **use various communication options**

It was found that rural schools use communication strategies which are not burdensome to either teachers or parents. Those strategies of communication are traditional (letter writing, meetings and parent days) yet effective. Telephones, home-school diaries and home visits were rarely, if ever, used by many schools.

- **involve parents in decision making and power-sharing activities**

Schools are ready to listen to parents' ideas as they invite parents to serve on school boards and other school development committees. This practice reflects that schools create equality of knowledge and operate from within a culture of democracy.

- **show a respectful attitude towards parental involvement**

The attitude of professional educators towards parental involvement was found to be welcoming, respectful, co-operative and satisfactory. They regard parental involvement as an approach to contribute to the administration and quality of the schools. Professional educators value the unique skills and support of parents in assisting with the school work of their children at home. These findings show openness in the attitude of professional educators towards parental involvement.

Research question: *What barriers to parental involvement do rural lower primary schools in Namibia experience?*

From the data collected at Phase 1 of this study, the following **barriers to parental involvement** were listed: parents' fear of responsibilities, lack of confidence, illiteracy, lack of time, insufficient positive responses to the invitations for parents' meetings, and insufficient provision of literacy education classes.

### 5.3.2 Summary of the findings of the qualitative study

All six schools were situated in poor communities in which many community members were unemployed and uneducated. However, some members of the communities understood the importance of education and, therefore, expected schools to give quality education to their children.

High parental involvement schools were found organising some involvement activities that were different from other schools' (intermediate and low) activities. The difference of parental involvement practice between intermediate and low parental involvement was not prominent. However, this finding does not disqualify the results from Phase 1 (quantitative) data that indicated the two schools (E and F) as of lower involvement than schools C and D which were found to be average, but rather confirms the reality and essence of the qualitative approach to this research which was conducted after the quantitative study. The qualitative inquiries (Phase 2) went beyond the quantitative descriptive information to give an explanation and conduct an in-depth investigation to present participants' experience of reality (Henning, Van Rensburg & Smit, 2004). Other researchers agree that the qualitative data presents the accounts of insiders as the accounts of reality (Wiersma & Jurs, 2005).

Research question: *How is parental involvement perceived and practised by professional educators in supporting learners' academic education in rural lower primary schools?*

Interviews conducted among the professional educators reported findings which indicate that they perceive parental involvement in academic education of learners as: parents cooperating with teachers; parents participating in lesson observations and presentations; parents assisting their children with school work at home; parents providing their children with stationery, health care, child care and other basic needs; parents visiting schools; parents monitoring learners' punctuality and attendance; and parents encouraging learners to study hard.

Professional educators perceive the following as the roles and responsibilities of schools: daily lesson planning and preparations; making sure that learners are taught according to the prescribed curricula; assessment of learners' learning, grading and promotion of learners; ascertaining whether learners have the needed learning materials in class; and visiting parents at home. Sending children to school; supporting schools financially; advising schools; assisting children when doing school work at home; providing learners' personal and school needs; contributing to the creation of a

positive school climate; and motivating teachers and boosting their morale are all believed to be the roles and responsibilities of parents.

In relation to the practice of parental involvement, findings indicated that rural lower primary schools:

- **provide a conducive climate for parental involvement**

Schools invite parents to visit the schools during their own free time. Professional educators visit parents at home, work with parents as friends and make them welcome at school.

- **provide parents with educational opportunities for knowledge-development about parental involvement**

Parents are invited to do classroom observations and participate in teaching. Teacher-parent meetings are held at schools to discuss the following: the importance of education, cooperation between parents and teachers, the influence of absenteeism and late-coming of learners on their performance, roles and responsibilities of parents in their children's education, and other school needs. Parents are shown how to assist their children with school work, especially reading at home, and they are provided with literacy education classes.

- **use community resources to support school activities**

Members of the communities serve on various school management and development committees (e.g. school board and fund raising). They are invited as guest speakers at parent-teacher meetings. They support teachers in teaching curricula content which teachers found challenging (e.g. culture-related content). Community members are invited to advise parents and share with them how to be with children. Health professionals disseminate information about HIV and AIDS to parents, learners and professional educators. Moreover, schools seek financial support from non-governmental organisations and community members.

- **provide parents with opportunities for technical support for classroom activities**

Schools encourage parents to participate in lesson observations and teaching, do informal assessment of learning at home and assist their children with homework. Professional educators seek advice from parents on what to do about learning problems in specific subjects.

- **use various communication options**

The following communication options were found to be used by schools in making contact with parents for the sake of learners' academic education: meetings, letters, parent days, radio, headmen and councillors, churches as well as learners themselves.

- **involve parents in decision-making and power sharing activities**

Schools involve parents in the process of making decisions so that parents own the decisions. Findings show that schools use avenues such as school boards and other school development projects for generating money and committees for dealing with lower primary issues such as poor performing learners, discipline and codes of conduct to share leadership and decision-making with parents.

- **show a positive attitude towards parental involvement**

Good and polite behaviours and mutual respect between parents and professional educators, as well as cooperation and a good relationship characterised schools' attitude towards parental involvement.

Research question: *How do parents demonstrate their parental involvement in the education of their children?*

Important findings of how schools involve parents in the academic education of learners were identified through the parents' views. Parents affirm that they send their children to school on a daily basis; provide their children with school stationery; share their knowledge with learners in classrooms and at home; advise teachers and school leaders; donate awards for hardworking learners; serve on school boards and other school development committees; visit schools; assist children with homework; and encourage children to study hard.

Parents also expressed what they perceive as the importance of parental involvement: encouragement of teachers to work hard; improvement of the performance of learners; support for newly qualified and inexperienced teachers; development of good relationships between teachers and parents; and the guarantee of a better future for learners. Therefore, parents would like to be allowed to do more lesson observations, participate in teaching, provide whatever they can afford to, and monitor lesson planning and preparations of teachers.

Research question: ***How do lower primary schools with high parental involvement organise their involvement activities differently from schools with intermediate and low parental involvement in rural Namibia?***

Although the findings of intermediate and low parental involvement schools mostly indicate similar practices of involvement activities, high parental involvement schools indicate some different activities of involvement. High parental involvement schools:

- provide direct services to learners which pleases parents (e.g., selling school uniforms at a much lower price to learners; giving free uniforms to orphans and vulnerable children; and providing free lunches to orphans and vulnerable children).
- seek financial support from non-governmental organisations.
- discuss with parents about the importance of parents asking their children what they learn at school on a daily basis.
- provide literacy education classes.
- create projects (e.g. sewing project) in which parents and other community members were employed.
- provide and seek advice on how to deal with slow learners and other children with problems.
- 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.

Research question: ***What barriers to parental involvement do rural lower primary schools in Namibia experience?***

During Phase 2 of this study barriers that constrain parental involvement in substantive academic education were explored and strategies for overcoming these barriers were described. Parents' priorities of issues other than the education of their children (e.g household chores and other personal business); lack of electricity at schools; insufficient and improper infrastructure; lack of financial support; ignorance and insufficient participation in meetings by parents; estranged relationships; and lack of school policies on parental involvement were found to be the major barriers interfering with the practice of parental involvement by rural lower primary schools. Lack of and/or limited understanding and knowledge; unemployment; poverty; inability of elderly parents to assist in school activities; and illiteracy among parents were also found as the causes for barriers by rural lower primary school level.

Research question: *How do rural lower primary schools in Namibia deal with factors that challenge their efforts to involve parents in learners' academic education?*

It was further found that most of the schools do not know how to address the barriers they experience. Additionally, a few schools organise fund raising projects or advise parents on the possibilities of generating money in order to contribute to the school development fund. Schools try to make parents understand their roles and responsibilities and what is expected from them for the promotion of academic learning.

### 5.3.3 Propositions

As stated in Chapter 3, three propositions were tested in this study. They are presented here in condensed form. The propositions presupposed that according to the perceptions of the teachers and principals, schools would receive either **high** ratings, **average** ratings or **low** ratings on each of the following - conducive climates for parental support, provision of educational opportunities for knowledge development about parental involvement to parents, use of community resources and funds, knowledge of community experts and the parents of learners, provision of opportunities for technical support for classroom activities to parents, use of options to communicate with parents, involvement of parents in power sharing and decision making, and positive attitudes towards involvement. Schools were then determined to have **high**, **middle** or **low** parental involvement (See Chapter 3, Section 3.3).

This study formulated *a priori* propositions. This means that the propositions were stated before the data were collected. The schools A and B were found dissimilar from school C, D, E and F in their practice of parental involvement. Therefore, the decision was made during the analysis of data to accept and support the propositions. The original propositions were accepted because the probabilistic evidence obtained from the data provided an appropriate level of support. During Phase 1 of this study I found an agreement between increased or decreased parental involvement and the perceptions, practices and attitudes of professional educators. Schools A and B were found to be practising high parental involvement, i.e. the two schools involve parents prominently more than the other four schools (C, D, E and F). Schools C and D were found to practise an average level of parental involvement, i.e. the two schools' involvement of parents was found less than in schools A and B but more prominently than in schools E and F. Schools E and F were found to be practising low parental involvement, the two schools' involvement of parents was found less in Schools A, B, C and D.

### 5.3.4 Attainment of aim and objectives

Empirical support of whether and how rural lower primary schools in Ohangwena Region practise parental involvement was found. The findings of Phases 1 and 2 of this study show the empirical evidence that there is also a strong agreement between the positive perceptions of participants and the increased practice of parental involvement in rural lower primary schools in the Ohangwena Region. This association was indicated by the findings from the professional educators that they created open, accepting, respectful, warm, inviting, cleaner and productive climate for parental involvement; provided parents with educational opportunities for knowledge development of parental involvement; made use of community resources as well as various communication options; provided parents with opportunities for technical support for classroom activities; and involved parents in decision making and power sharing activities which were found to be related to increased parental involvement.

Moreover, there is no consistent support for the claims that parental involvement is difficult, if not impossible, to practise in rural schools. To a certain extent the findings of this study indicate a level of success in the implementation of parental involvement in the education of learners in many aspects of involvement. In addition, although I agree to a certain extent with the literature that some rural schools struggle to involve parents in the education of their learners, I would like to emphasise that rural lower primary schools in Ohangwena Region practise the parental involvement strategies which are possible in their contexts.

However, the findings presented are worthy of recognition, albeit not without acknowledgement of the barriers experienced. Professional educators and parents expressed dissatisfaction with some parents' discouraging behaviours and laissez-faire attitudes towards parental involvement. Parent background variables (lack of understanding, illiteracy, lack of income, ignorance) were found related to the roots of barriers to involvement in rural lower primary schools. The difficulties that are experienced in some aspects of involvement are caused by the living standard of the communities in which schools are situated and the educational background of the residents of the community. Creation of fundraising projects, provision of advice to parents by the professional educators and community members; explanations of roles and responsibilities, creation of inviting and productive climate for involvement, and making use of community resources, are some of the strategies schools can use to address barriers to parental involvement.

The chosen sentiments and opinions expressed by the principals and teachers in Phase 1 describing what happened at their schools as well as the actual activities reported as performed by participants in Phase 2 indicate that parental involvement is evident in most of the lower primary schools in the Ohangwena Region. The perception of professional educators fits the conceptual framework under which parental involvement in schools is seen through an ecological perspective.

To sum up, there are a number of things that rural lower primary schools do to promote parental involvement.

- Schools position and engage parents and various community members (e.g. health care professionals, spiritual leaders, traditional and community-based authorities) within various spaces. However, while schools try to involve parents, some parents are not motivated and do not show interest in creating authentic and productive spaces in schools.
- Professional educators' perceptions, attitudes and opinions of parental involvement are powerful examples of understanding of this phenomenon in rural lower primary schools and this understanding is not unlike most of what they and parents have reported as having experienced through practice.
- Professional educators at lower primary schools in the Ohangwena Region have a positive attitude towards involvement.
- Schools convene meetings, engage parents in authentic conversations, facilitate opportunities for parents to share their concerns and listen to suggestions parents make about professional educators' mistakes. Schools make efforts to respond to parents' ideas and corrections, and encourage them to actively take part in conversations for the benefit of learners' academic education.
- Schools require parents to volunteer at the school and encourage parents to visit classrooms and provide technical support for classroom and other school activities.
- Schools link their work to community resources, and provide parents with avenues to develop as organisers and leaders by involving them in various committees.
- Schools provide orphans and vulnerable children with food at school.
- Some schools offer literacy classes. However, female parents are more involved than male parents.

- Schools build trust, respect and strong relationships with parents.
- Schools direct parents in working with their children at home, and provide them with support on parenting.
- Teachers provide subject-specific information to parents to activate the needed capital and for parents to develop understanding and learn skills to assist learning at home.
- Schools seek financial support from local business people and other community members.
- Schools use simple and affordable communication options to parents, and they translate for parents who do not understand and speak the official language (English).

## **5.4 CRITICAL REFLECTIONS**

### **5.4.1 The study's contribution to the existing knowledge-base of parental involvement in rural lower primary schools**

A valuable contribution to the literature was made by this study. Many researchers reported discouraging findings of parental involvement practices in rural schools and among parents from economically stressed backgrounds. Refuting the prevailing deficit perspective and generally acceptable belief that rural schools and parents do not practise parental involvement, this study provides evidence that rural lower primary schools have strategies in place that proved to be effective in promoting parental involvement in the academic education of their children. This study identified many aspects in which rural, lower primary schools in Ohangwena Region succeeded in involving parents in the promotion of the academic learning of their children. Those aspects are worthy and serve as examples for other rural, lower primary schools (within and outside the Ohangwena Region) attempting to practise parental involvement in the academic education of their learners.

Professional educators and parents in rural schools are encouraged to become free of oppressive ideas about poor practices or difficulty in practising parental involvement in rural schools by not accepting the view of conventional studies as natural, inviolable and truer than any other perspective. This is no absolute knowledge they can grasp unquestionably (Mertens, 2003). Those perspectives may be an ideological hegemony expressed to produce consent to the status quo.

This kind of deficit perspective not only devalues parental involvement exhibited by rural schools but undermines the educational involvement activities exhibited by rural parents. Moreover, this perspective also suppresses, demoralises, and discourages rural schools from taking up this very important professional responsibility of implementing parental involvement.

Recognising and appreciating the existing efforts and attempts made by rural schools, no matter how little or trivial they are, would encourage them to do more as far as parental involvement is concerned. Suggestions for improving the ways in which rural schools practise parental involvement instead of reporting what rural schools are not able to do with the living conditions in which they find themselves should be given priority in research on parental involvement. Failure to recognise and appreciate their existing efforts of parental involvement may become psychological barriers to both professional educators and parents in rural areas.

Rural schools in Ohangwena Region tried to apply the pedagogy for democracy and create possible strategies and activities of parental involvement. Professional educators facilitate the co-construction of strong, productive and respectful relationships between home and educational setting and share power over educational activities with parents. Research findings which conclude that involvement of less educated and impoverished parents is dim are to be handled with care if they are not to be referred to as inappropriate. It seems that there is a growing interest of rural schools in implementing parental involvement. Parental involvement activities performed in rural lower primary schools are worthy of recognition as they demonstrate the fact that the role of parents is valued in rural schools and inspires them to become sites of resistance to oppressive ideas.

Although not all, many rural parents have high aspirations for their children and are positive, confident and optimistic about the ability of teachers and schools to contribute to a better life for their children. High hopes and optimism of parents about their children's education have the potential to raise their (parents) interest and willingness to promote parental involvement in schools. Parental interest influences their attitude to become positive towards supporting school activities. When parents show confidence in school activities, it influences professional educators' perceptions of their own competency and about parent support itself. I consider these positive feelings as contributions to effective parental involvement.

Rural parents in Ohangwena Region expressed concern about the efforts of the schools to engage them (parents) in school activities, especially teaching culture-related subject contents, which is another indication of interest and willingness to support their children's education. Additionally,

positive attitudes towards parental support, and the expression and recognition of a set of overlapping roles and expectations of parents as partners by the schools indicates that rural lower primary schools in Ohangwena Region do not involve parents as a grudging obedience to the educational policies. Lower primary schools regard the parental involvement approach as one of the best means they can use to convey a sense of parental rights and responsibilities toward children's education.

I lend my support to Bourdieu's theory that parents' lack of education is equated with limited access to capital relevant for supporting the academic education of their children (Bourdieu, 1977). However, this does not always mean that less educated parents have lower educational expectations. Lack of educational attainment does not necessarily negatively influence parents' desire and interest to support their children's education. Educational expectations have various influences. A good example of this was indicated by the findings regarding admiration of educated people and parents' wishes for their children to become like those people they admire in life. These feelings encourage parents to support their children's education.

Reflecting on the findings of the study, I found that the promotion of social relationships, networks and connections between adults in the two primary micro-systems of children (home and school) and the congruence in their attitudes and behaviours are important for the practice of parental involvement. The establishment of social relationships, networks and connections between professional educators and parents is good for addressing the problem of alienation among parents.

Lower primary schools in Ohangwena Region reach out to parents who are generally thought of as 'difficult to reach'. The rural lower primary schools further understand that parents do not exist out of context but interact with their surroundings, i.e. communities. Thus, they realised that there should be interconnections and multi-directionality of parent, school, and community relationships.

Professional educators in rural lower primary schools are competent to initiate parental involvement. Communication with parents is viewed as a means through which parents are involved to support and promote the academic education and achievement of their children. Therefore, opportunities to obtain capital were organised for parents by schools. They include adult education classes, parent-teacher meetings and individual parent-teacher discussions and workshops provide parents with social, informational and material rewards. This capital represents the power of parents to promote their children's academic enrichment. In addition, rural lower primary schools have professional educators who are responsive to the needs of parents. Parents are given freedom to visit

schools at any times. Schools provide parents with the information about child-care, invite health professionals to provide health-related information to parents and learners (i.e. the use of needed resources in the community) and professional educators behave in a friendly way to parents and make them welcome to schools.

Indicators of parental involvement practices by lower primary schools in the Ohangwena Region are the creation of conducive climate to parental support; provision of educational opportunities for knowledge development about parental involvement to parents; use of community resources and knowledge of community experts and learners' parents; provision of opportunities for technical support (pedagogy, curriculum and assessment) for classroom activities to parents; involvement of parents in power sharing and decision-making; and a positive attitude towards involvement. These indicators of parental involvement practised by the rural lower primary schools are regarded as evidence of the answer to the main research question - whether and how professional educators and parents of rural lower primary schools in Namibia perceive, think about and practise involvement in the academic education of learners.

Instead of considering parents as hopeless, rural lower primary schools promote practices which are implementable and workable. The practices the schools implement appear to be salient contributors to effective school-parent collaborations which are relevant to learners' academic education.

There are rural parents who recognise the importance of parental involvement and, therefore, try to use their precious free time despite other house chores, and lack of capital and resources, to support school activities. Parents demonstrate their involvement by engaging in educational discussions (school work and experiences of school) with their children, providing children with a supportive home learning environment and assisting them with homework. These practices of parents reveal their attention, devotion and interest in the education of their children. Attention, care and devotion of time are some of the important aspects of practice that have positive ramifications for academic learning. The literature reports a lack of confidence by rural parents in their interaction with professional educators and the education system and that they usually defer to teachers' expertise (Lee & Bowen, 2006). However, there are parents in rural schools who strongly believe that they can and would like to help with classroom teaching, provision of teaching and learning materials, checking lesson planning and preparations of teachers regardless of their educational level. Rural parents have confidence in contributing to the education of their children. This confidence represents the unique strengths of parents living in rural areas. Therefore, professional educators

should respect, value and consider these strengths of parents in their efforts to foster parental involvement in the academic education of learners.

The fact that parents visit schools may be interpreted as a demonstration of interest in their children's education. However, the reason that some parents do not visit schools and do not respond positively to school invitations which indicate lack of interest in their children's education should not be left without being considered as one of the barriers schools experience.

I should also admit that some parents lack confidence in their interactions with the education system and usually defer to professional educators' expertise. Moreover, it appears as if rural parents who get more involved are those whose children are not doing well in schools. However, according to Lee & Bowen (2006), this is a common practice across social groups. If rural schools were found to be struggling to practise parental involvement, it should be regarded as challenges of the process which might be experienced by all schools in any environment.

Lack of physical energy due to old age limits the ability of some parents/caretakers to support school activities. Many children in rural areas live with elderly people. Parents either work away from home to reduce poverty, or parents have died from HIV and AIDS-related diseases. It is common knowledge that HIV and AIDS is more associated with poor and less educated people. Therefore, lack of education, poverty and children living with old people were found to be the greatest challenges to the practice of parental involvement in rural lower primary schools in Ohangwena Region.

## **5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS**

Parental involvement in the academic education of learners is associated with learners' attendance, achievement, development and better future life. Therefore, parental involvement should continue to be an important focus of professional educators, parents and the whole community at large in all contexts.

- **Recommendation to the Ministry of Education**

Although the findings from the schools under study indicate that they manage to implement parental involvement strategies reasonably despite the reported challenges, findings about the barriers to parental involvement imply that professional educators need in-service education about

developing a diverse involvement focus and a varied menu of practices to obtain the knowledge and skills needed to create, implement and maintain attractive strategies of involvement with parents and local communities. The Ministry of Education have a responsibility to ensure that parental involvement and lifelong learning opportunities in rural schools are adequately resourced and provided. School-partnership with parents should continue to feature in schemes of professional development. This is important if old stereotypes of parental involvement in rural schools are to be demolished and negative preconceptions removed. Instead of treating the practices of parental involvement in rural schools as inferior and having rural schools accept the situation as natural, factors fuelling an approach to parental involvement among rural schools should be explored and recommended. These include encouraging schools to appreciate the importance of ecological settings and the government improving rural conditions. The government should look into the issue of lack of financial resources in rural areas. There is a need for the creation finance-generating projects and empowering rural communities with self employment creation skills. This same attempt may make young parents become available for support of their children and for many parents to develop a desire for collaborative partnerships with schools.

- **Recommendations to rural lower primary schools**

Low self-esteem of some parents and their view that teachers were experts on classroom matters and concerns about their ability to work with educational professionals seemed to influence their insufficient participation (as suggested in reported obstacles and limitations) in their children's education. Schools need to make special efforts to encourage and empower parents who are less confident about their ability to support schools and not motivated in assisting their children's academic education. Subject specific training, and psychological and pedagogical guidance should be provided through literacy programs and practices to these parents. According to Barton et al. (2004) if that effort is made, parents will respond and children will benefit academically.

I find it as a good practice of parental involvement when professional educators in rural schools do not regard parents as people to approach for advice only when learners experience learning problems or other some sort of difficulty, but are approached as trustworthy friends and partners with whom they hold discussions for amicable solutions. However, the discussions between professional educators and parents about poor performance of learners may have a narrow focus of involvement. This finding may support other researchers' findings that parents from poor economic backgrounds help their children with schoolwork only when their children are not doing well academically (Fan, 2001). Discussions about learner performance should be held even when the

children are doing well in schools. Moreover, this finding may suggest that rural schools and parents need to make an effort to make their discussions about the performance of learners with parents inclusive and applicable to both poor and good performers.

Efforts to increase parental involvement activities at school and reward initiatives for parents as far as involvement is concerned should be given serious attention based on the findings that parents expressed the desire to be more involved in school-based activities. However, such strategies will need to draw upon the capabilities for action and contribution that are within the means of the communities in which the schools are situated. Methods of involvement must take heed of the life situations of parents. Increased activities in which parents are involved at school are associated with high parental involvement (Hill & Taylor, 2004). When schools acknowledge and reward involvement efforts by parents, it makes their relationship and collaboration more productive. In addition, the findings have an implication for the establishment of programmes focusing on the development of understanding about parental involvement and nurturing the importance of parental involvement in parents. The understanding of parents improves their involvement level in school and at home. Schools would be much richer and more thriving places for education if parents are encouraged to come into them, are warmly welcomed, comfortably accommodated and challengingly involved in their work.

An inviting, warm and productive school climate such as a flexible school schedule for parent visits and professional educators' friendly and welcoming attitude towards parents, as well as the provision of literacy education lessons are some of the best combating strategies of practical barriers to parental involvement. These behaviours show that schools are sensitive to parents' time, emotions and needs.

Schools should develop forms of recruiting and training parental leaders, and appoint lead teachers for school and family connections. In addition, schools need to create and establish ways and strategies within which professional educators and parents can work effectively in partnership with each other. In these ways schools will quickly learn how best to utilise the skills and knowledge of parents and make the fullest use of the full range of resources available in the community. Parents will learn and gain knowledge and understanding of how schools operate and for purposes.

- **Recommendations to professional educators**

We all know that the need for the skills of literacy and numeracy is particularly pressing in rural areas. This study found that only a few of the schools studied help parents and community members address these needs by offering them adult literacy lessons. Professional educators should also help parents develop skills in numeracy and modern mathematics so that parents who are challenged in this way may profit.

Professional educators should create spaces in schools where parents feel at home and feel that they belong in the school. Professional educators should also develop a sense of partnership and co-operation in schools by establishing representative committees at the local level and welcome all parents (literate and illiterate, employed and unemployed) to serve on committees. Professional educators should provide parents with opportunities and encourage them, especially male parents, to engage in their own lifelong learning.

Professional educators should empower parents to engage more in lesson presentations at the classroom level and teach other academic skills than reading at home. Other findings suggest that the success of this experience indicate that all parents, even those with limited formal education, can help teach children. Moreover, teaching at home could be a context within which lifelong education can be instituted and protracted.

Professional educators in individual schools need to be encouraged to carry out individual action research projects at the classroom levels. The results of these projects, although not necessarily generalisable, can lead to the identification of both successful and unsuccessful practices in parental involvement at the local level.

- **Recommendations to rural parents**

Rural parents should be invited to participate in school functions, community-based fundraising projects and encouraged to improve their own literacy and numeracy skills through adult education programmes. Those with skills related to Namibian culture (e.g., basketry, pottery, dance and music, story-telling) should be invited to lead and participate in programmes in the schools. Parent leaders should be trained to train other parents how to interact with learners at home in order to reinforce and extend academic skills in all areas, but especially in literacy and numeracy. The importance of volunteering to serve on school committees and on the school board should be presented to parents as one way to improve the education of their children.

- **Recommendations to stake holders in collaboration**

Identifying and creating strategies for addressing and reducing barriers to involvement in rural lower primary schools should be one of the priorities the Ministry of Education in collaboration with the communities in which schools are situated should consider. At some of the schools, parents were spoken of as being ‘poor’, ‘old’ and lacking understanding and, therefore, unable to provide proper parenting and school support. References were made to alcohol abuse, ignorance and a laissez-faire attitude by parents. These findings have an implication for the establishment of programmes focusing on the development of understanding about parental involvement and nurturing the importance of parental involvement in parents. The understanding of parents improves their involvement level in school and at home.

## **5.6 LIMITATIONS AND STRENGTHS OF THE STUDY**

The rate of returned questionnaires was not as high as one would have wished for. Therefore, the results of this study cannot be generalised beyond rural lower primary schools in the Ohangwena Region. Informal discussions with two school inspectors and a few school principals revealed that this may have been caused by unfamiliarity with the culture of research among some professionals. They mentioned that from their experience, some professionals are not willing to participate in research activities which are not initiated by the government ministries. They normally agree to complete questionnaires from the government institutions since they are government employees, but not from private individuals.

Teachers who were informally asked why they think people did not complete and return the questionnaires mentioned that the cause could be lack of time. Since it was near the end of the year, professionals in schools were busy with examinations and related activities and, therefore, did not have time to give to non-work related agendas.

This study used purposive sampling (sometimes called judgmental sampling) in which I have specified the characteristics of a population of interest: rural regions in which the Oshikwanyama dialect is spoken. Among the targeted four rural regions in northern Namibia, Ohangwena was located as the only region which has met these characteristics. Therefore, the ability to generalise the results from lower primary schools in one region (Ohangwena) to all lower primary schools in all the northern rural regions is severely limited. However, the strongest quality of this design was a

possible zero sampling error within the studied region. The study sampled the complete population of the whole Ohangwena Region.

Another limitation of this study was its reliance on a questionnaire results alone to identify schools with high, intermediate and low parental involvement which were studied at Phase 2 of this study. Response choices on the questionnaire may be biased to the extent that principals and teachers may rate their schools higher or lower than what they really are. However, this limitation was attenuated, to some extent, by the fact that the investigation of the school practices of parental involvement included parent interviews at Phase 2 of the study to capture more information as much as possible. Extreme case sampling was utilised to identify high, intermediate and low parental involvement schools for a comparative examination. Although the examination of the six extreme schools provided rich descriptions of what and how parental involvement activities are implemented in rural lower primary schools, the qualitative analysis produced limited information on what circumstances lead to the differences in schools' practices. Therefore, further improvement in construction of interview questions and the questions during the process of interviews to be more probing, is certainly necessary. In addition, approaches that add direct observations of involvement would greatly add depth to the study of parental involvement.

Strengths of this study lie in the use of the following strategies:

- Low inference descriptors – Descriptions phrased very close to the participants' accounts were used so that the readers can experience the participants' actual language and personal meanings. Therefore, the participants' exact words are provided in direct quotations.
- Multiple perspectives – The study explained how different theories explain parental involvement to provide more insight on the practice of parental involvement.
- Peer review – Discussions of my interpretations with a colleague who is familiar with the research provided useful challenges and better insights.
- Reflexivity – I did a critical self-reflection on my potential biases as an attempt to avoid any predispositions which might have interfered with the study's process.
- Method and data triangulation – The use of more than one method (quantitative and qualitative) and multiple data sources (principals, teachers, parents and, of course, the literature) to study rural lower primary schools' practices of parental involvement in academic education of learners were employed. The methodology of this study (mixed method) adds to the strength of this study. In a two-phase sequential design, the Phase 1

(quantitative) results were used to inform the design of the Phase 2 (qualitative) component. This design produces better complete knowledge necessary to add to the existing theory (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

The current study's data collection process excluded learners' views. This, I acknowledge, might be a limitation of the study but might also indicate the strength of the study. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000: 279) warn researchers on unreliable data collected from young children. They believe that "*children tend to say anything rather than nothing at all, thereby limiting the possibility of data*" (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2000: 279). The study's critical analysis of parental involvement implementation in rural schools resulted in a new trend in the perception of whether and how rural lower primary schools practice this approach to education. The current trend is towards rural lower primary schools' ability and interest to practice parental involvement. Where there is an interest, there is always a way and initiatives.

## **5.7 FUTURE RESEACH**

This study focuses on how rural lower primary schools involve parents in academic education of learners. Further studies which focus on how interactive networks, collaborations and links between and among stakeholders serve as resources for effective operations by schools will add more knowledge to the existing knowledge base. Networks of different stakeholders have the potential of fostering a sense of responsibility, trust and involvement in all partners.

There is a need for research which provides information about which strategies are likely to improve parents' commitment to and participation in parental involvement. Further studies are needed which identify those strategies which produce positive changes in the academic performance of learners at all levels of the educational system.

Studies are needed to assess the changes or improvements noted in the involvement of parents who attended literacy education classes, meetings about subject specific information sharing and meetings in which parents are shown how to assist their children with reading at home. This type of study will measure the effect of those parental involvement strategies on literacy skills of lower primary learners.

Strengthening and improving the types of parental involvement at school and at home requires further investigation. Samples from more than one rural region would also be a valuable addition to the research on the practice of parental involvement in schools. Comparative studies need to be carried out to identify strategies that lead to success regardless of the region or socio-economic situation of the adults in the region.

From the parents' point of view, many are interested in the entire gamut of possible involvement but professional educators are not sufficiently involving them. There is a surprising, encouraging and strongly expressed interest from parents to be involved in all facets of their children's education. Therefore, action research is needed to critically inquire more into and support for rural lower primary schools to capitalise on the interest of parents in how they (parents) would like to become more involved. The outcome of this inquiry might produce better and more viable structured strategies for effective parental involvement in education of learners. Schools should become reflective and find out what the whole community wants, and then develop and articulate strategies that will encourage parents and community members to become more fully involved in school lives. Schools are a community resource. Therefore, part of their responsibility is to be accountable to the community.

The degree to which parental involvement is emphasised in teacher preparation programs needs to be assessed. The commitment and expertise of teacher educators to present teacher education majors with current information and research on this critical issue in Namibian education needs to be researched and possible changes and/or additions to the curricula of teacher education need to be engendered.

The role of technology in elevating the level of parental involvement in schools, especially in regions where poverty is the norm, needs to be investigated and programs developed which help parents in areas where they feel powerless in helping their children academically.

## **5.8 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

All the schools studied were located in the same educational region (Ohangwena) and were using one and the same language (Oshiwambo) as the medium of instruction at the lower primary phase. Generally, the schools were situated in poor communities where there was a lack of education and employment among community members.

At the outset of this study, I wanted to find out how lower primary schools involve parents in the academic education of learners. At the heart of this study was a desire to generate descriptions of the practice of parental involvement in the academic education of learners by rural, lower primary schools in the Ohangwena Region of Northern Namibia. Perceptions of and attitude towards parental involvement frame what and how professional educators practise it. Therefore, this study tried to inquire into professional educators' perceptions and attitudes towards involving parents as well as their practice of parental involvement. I assumed that there were some barriers that permeated attempts of rural lower primary schools to practise parental involvement. Thus, barriers were also investigated. I also examined how schools tried to address the barriers to parental involvement that were experienced. Since ecologies of the parental involvement framework place parents within a network of actors, the study tried to look into how parents use their knowledge and abilities to promote relationships with schools, other parents and community members, and to position themselves as authorities of their children's learning. Informed by their experiences about the impact of involvement on their children's education and their experiences that their participation makes a difference in their children's learning, parents reported that their children's performance and school attendance improved as a result of increased interaction between them and schools.

The educational relationships exhibited in rural schools is complex and linked to the improvement of lives and aspirations of the beneficiaries, in this case, schools, parents and learners. Professional educators and parents in rural lower primary schools in Ohangwena Region try to work together to maximise educational endeavours and parents' lifelong learning in schools. The complexity of corroborations and interrelationships between schools and parents indicate the insight that parental involvement in education of learners as practiced in rural schools is not merely about parents being members of school boards or contributing to the school development fund as per preconceptions. But, when I reflect on all that rural lower primary schools reported doing, it appears that despite the barriers and difficulties they experience, I am convinced and wish to advocate for rural lower primary schools' ability to implement worthy parental involvement activities and strategies. The reported practices by the studied schools are more than enough to convince other rural schools that despite challenges such as difficult rural conditions, they are still able to implement parental involvement strategies that they regard relevant and compatible with their circumstances.

We must be realistic about factors that tend to inhibit the maximum implementation of the co-operation between rural schools and parents. Firstly, the government under colonial rule deprived and denied the then South West African people the right and legal responsibility to participate and contribute to education of their children. This was reflected in the provision of the Segregatory

Education. Many black Namibians have never been to school. Most of adults were not enlightened about education and its importance. This situation resulted in poorly skilled and illiterate human resources, especially in rural areas. Therefore, patience to schools' gradual moving from this colonial legacy in which the struggle to implement parental involvement is included is needed.

Recognition of educational benefits of parental involvement in children's education should start by recognising and heartening rural schools' current efforts. Secondly, it is a reality that in any context (rural, urban or semi-urban) not everyone wants to be involved in the life of the school. Moreover, there are rural parents who want the best of their children and therefore want to be involved. However, they cannot be available for every form of service and cannot contribute constantly to the schools' undertakings all the time. Therefore, the findings of this study suggest a caveat that people must accept the reality that most of the members of rural school population are unemployed and live below the poverty line, or disadvantaged in other ways. As a result, some parents may not have full confidence or sufficient time to become involved in the activities of the schools, especially when they are in the poverty ambush. But this does not mean that they are not interested. What rural schools need to do is to challenge the preconceptions which are trying to look down on their parental involvement initiatives and promote the belief that only urban and educated parents have confidence to engage in interactions with schools. It is here that issues of social justice arise. If parental involvement in rural schools is encouraged, then social class in terms of the level of ability to support school activities disappears.

The current perceptions, actions and behaviours of the rural lower primary schools studied as far as parental involvement is concerned, is encouraging. The studied schools perceive parental involvement as a joint endeavour between home and school. They understand involving parents in education of learners as a co-construction of a productive relationship by schools and parents. The purpose is to convey and instil in parents a sense of parental rights and responsibilities for children's education. Activities performed by the studied schools reflect that they operate from within a culture of democracy. Studied schools demonstrate the recognition of parents right to be involved in the education of their children. Schools create an open, warm, inviting, respectful and productive climate for parental involvement practice. Schools' practice of parental involvement instils pride and a sense of being part of the school in parents. Consequently, these feelings encourage parents to have a hand in broad-based participation and take a meaningful role that in its own way influences and shapes teaching and learning.

Therefore, I find it appropriate to say that the conventional trend is reversed in this study. The current trend exposed by this study demonstrates the potential of rural lower primary schools in implementing positive parental involvement. Strengthening and improving initiatives of the rural lower primary schools and parents to network with each other and other potential stakeholders for the improvement of learners' academic education seems to be the way forward.