

**SCHOOL MANAGEMENT TEAMS' EXPERIENCES OF COMMUNICATING WITH
RURAL PARENTS IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS**

by

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DECLARATION

I declare that **SCHOOL MANAGEMENT TEAM'S EXPERIENCES OF COMMUNICATING WITH PARENTS IN RURAL PRIMARY SCHOOLS** is my own work and that all the sources that have been used or quoted have been indicated or acknowledged by means of complete reference.

Sambo SI

Date

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Daniel Shilavi and Mijaji Anah Nwa-Misengi Sambo. You took care of me through storms and times of happiness. It is also dedicated to my older brother, Richard Nghezimani Sambo, for his social and financial support and last, but definitely not least, to my dear wife, Basani Sylvia, and our four children, Nsuku, Nhlayiseko Nhlavutelo and Nkateko. Thank you for all your love and the moral support and sacrifices that you made when I could not be there for you during my studies. God bless you all and may you prosper.

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ABSTRACT

The study is located within the interpretative paradigm, qualitative research approach, a case study design and purposeful sampling to select principals who participated in the study. It collected information using multiple sources including personal interviews, observations and document analysis. The use of the qualitative approach assisted the researcher to explore the experiences of SMTs and teachers when communicating with parents in rural primary schools.

Effective communication between parents and schools is essential in order to support the overall performance of learners. Parents and schools need to discuss learner progress on an on-going basis. Feedback between the two parties will help motivate learners perform better. There are many ways in which parents can ensure that their children do well at school. The ideal would be for parents to pre-empt teachers and School Management Teams (SMTs) calling them to the school. Schools, on the other hand, need to adopt an open door policy; they should welcome parents to their schools. The purpose of this study was to investigate the SMTs' experiences of communicating with parents of children in rural primary schools in the Mopani District of Limpopo Province in South Africa. SMTs are regarded as an essential support structure in the instructional learning activities of schools. The study aimed to investigate mechanisms of effective communication between rural parents and schools in their efforts to cooperate for the benefit of the children and to understand how decisions are taken between SMTs and parents.

The study revealed that SMTs and parents use one- and two-way communication strategies to discuss important issues about the progress of learners. Factors that hinder effective communication between parents and SMTs in rural schools were identified, such as a lack of conveying information by SMTs; limited involvement of parents in making decisions regarding major issues involving their children; and language as a major barrier between parents and schools in rural areas. Many parents in rural communities have a low level of education and, therefore, struggle to engage with schools. It was also found that poor socio-economic circumstances affect communication between parents and teachers. Many parents cannot afford to buy mobile phones to ease the process of communication between themselves and the schools. The use of mobile phones is also a major hurdle for parents.

Key words: Barriers; broadcasting of information; effective communication; involvement of parents; one-way communication; rural areas; rural communities; School Management Teams; socio-economic circumstances; and two-way communication.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AGM	Annual General Meeting
CDC	Centres for Disease Control and Prevention
CFS	Child Friendly Schools
DBE	Department of Basic Education
ELRC	Education Labour Relations Council
GCR	Giyani Community Radio
HOD	Head of Department
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
LDBE	Limpopo Department of Basic Education
PI	Parental Involvement
RSA	Republic of South Africa
SASA	South African Schools Act, No. 84 of 1996
SGB	School Governing Body
SMS	Short Message Service
SMT	School Management Team
UN	United Nations

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 2.1: COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES ESPOUSED BY GRAHAM-CLAY (2005).....	17
FIGURE 4.1: DATA ANALYSIS ACCORDING TO THEMES ORIGINATED FROM GRAHAM-CLAY's (2005) PRINCIPLES.....	80

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 3.1: STUDY PARTICIPANTS	63
TABLE 4.1: BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION OF THE PARENTS INVOLVED.....	78
TABLE 4.2: BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION OF THE TEACHERS.....	78
TABLE 4.3: BIOGRAPHICAL DETAILS OF HODs.....	79
TABLE 4.4: BIOGRAPHICAL DATA OF THE PRINCIPALS.....	79
TABLE 4.5: RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND THEMES.....	84
TABLE 4: 6: TRIANGULATION OF THE FINDINGS.....	111

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION	i
DEDICATION	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	iii
ABSTRACT	iv
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	v
LIST OF FIGURES	vi
LIST OF TABLES	vii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	viii
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND	1
1.1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.2 PURPOSE STATEMENT	3
1.3 RATIONALE AND PROBLEM STATEMENT	4
1.4 RESEARCH QUESTION(S)	5
1.5 RESEARCH AIMS	5
1.6 LITERATURE REVIEW	6
1.6.1 Parental involvement in schools	6
1.6.2 Communication with parents	7
1.7 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	9
1.7.1 Research paradigm	9
1.7.2 Research design	9
1.7.3 Sampling	10
1.7.4 Data collection	11
1.7.5 Data analysis	11
1.8 CREDIBILITY AND TRUSTWORTHINESS	12
1.9 ETHICAL ISSUES	12
1.10 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY	13
1.11 LIMITATION OF THE STUDY	13

1.12 SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS	13
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	15
2.1 INTRODUCTION	15
2.2 THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK	16
2.3 STRATEGIES OF COMMUNICATION	18
2.3.1 One –way communication	18
2.3.1.1 Newsletters	19
2.3.1.2 Notebooks	20
2.3.1.3 Report cards	20
2.3.1.4 Newscards	21
2.3.1.5 Personal notes	21
2.3.1.6 Short message services (SMS)	22
2.3.1.7 Radio Announcements	22
2.3.2 Two-way communication	23
2.3.2.1 Telephone calls	23
2.3.2.2 House visits	24
2.3.2.3 Parent meetings	25
2.3.3 Barriers to effective communication	25
2.3.3.1 Low level of education	26
2.3.3.2 Lack of proper guidance	26
2.3.3.3 Lack of information communication technology	27
2.3.3.4 Language barriers	28
2.3.3.5 Unwelcome feelings parents’ experience	29
2.3.3.6 Time constrains	29
2.3.3.7 Socio-economic factors	30
2.3.3.8 Past experiences of parents	31
2.3.3.9 Limited understanding of PI amongst schools and parents	32
2.4 PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOLS	33
2.4.1 Legal framework and perspective on parental involvement in South Africa	33
2.4.2 Influnce of school governing bodies on involvement of parents in schools	37

2.4.3 International perspectives on parental involvement in schools	38
2.4.4 Parental involvement in decision making	43
2.5 COMMUNICATION	45
2.5.1 Communication between teachers and parents	45
2.5.1.1 <i>Effective communication in schools</i>	46
2.5.1.2 <i>The effects of communication</i>	48
2.5.1.3 <i>Challenges facing parents when communicating with teachers</i>	51
2.6 SCHOOLING IN RURAL SCHOOLS	52
2.6.1 School setting	52
2.6.1.1 Involvement of parents in school issues	52
2.6.1.2 <i>Socio-economic factors in rural areas</i>	53
2.6.1.3 <i>Language communication.</i>	54
2.6.2 Teaching and learning	55
2.6.2.1 <i>Involvement of parents in the children, s education</i>	55
2.6.2.2 <i>The role of parents and teachers in learner education</i>	56
2.6.2.3 <i>Learner education</i>	57
2.7 CONCLUSION	58
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	59
3.1 INTRODUCTION	59
3.2 RESEARCH APPROACH	59
3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN	60
3.4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	63
3.4.1 Research population	63
3.4.2 Sampling	64
3.4.2.1 <i>Purposeful sampling</i>	65
3.5 DATA COLLECTION	67

3.5.1 Interviews	67
3.5.1.1 <i>In-depth semi-structured interviews</i>	69
3.5.2 Observation	70
3.5.3 Document analysis	71
3.5.1.2 <i>Data collection process</i>	72
3.6 DATA ANALYSIS	73
3.7 CREDIBILITY AND TRUSTWORTHINESS	74
3.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATION	75
3.9 CONCLUSION	76
CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS ON HOW RURAL PARENTS AND SCHOOL MANAGEMENT TEAMS COMMUNICATE	77
4.1 INTRODUCTION	77
4.2 BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION OF THE PARTICIPANTS	77
4.2.1 Biographical information of the parents involved	78
4.2.2 Biographical information of the teachers	78
4.2.3 Biographical details of the HODs	79
4.2.4 Biographical data of the principals	79
4.2.5 Data analysis according to themes originated from Graham-Clay's(2005)'s principles and Epstein(1995)'s theory	80
4.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND THEMES	81
4.3.1 Research questions and themes	81
4.4 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS ACCORDING TO THEMES	82
4.4.1 Findings from the interviews	83
4.4.1.1 Theme 1: Strategies used by parents in communicating with the schools	83
4.4.1.1.1 <i>One-way communication by parents</i>	83
4.4.1.1.2 <i>Two-way communication by parents</i>	85
4.4.1.2 Theme 2: Strategies used by schools to communicate with parents	88
4.4.1.2.1 <i>One-way communication by schools</i>	89
4.4.1.2.2 <i>Two-way communication by schools</i>	94
4.4.1.3 Theme 3: Barriers to communication	97
4.4.1.3.1 <i>Little dissemination of information by SMTs</i>	98

4.4.1.3.2 <i>Lack of involvement in decision making</i>	98
4.4.1.3.3 <i>Lack of trust by schools</i>	99
4.4.1.3.4 <i>Little cooperation from teachers</i>	100
4.4.1.3.5 <i>Learners reporting incorrect information to parents</i>	101
4.4.1.3.6 <i>Low socio-economic status of parents</i>	102
4.4.1.3.7 <i>Child-headed families</i>	103
4.5 DECISION-MAKING BY SCHOOLS AND PARENTS	104
4.5.1 Collaborative decision making	104
4.5.2 Non-collaborative decision-making	106
4.6 FINDINGS FROM OBSERVATIONS	107
4.6.1 School A	107
4.6.1.1 <i>Attendance of meetings by parents</i>	107
4.6.1.2 <i>Participation of parents during meetings</i>	108
4.6.1.3 <i>Decision-making by parents</i>	108
4.6.2 School B	108
4.6.2.1 <i>Attendance of meetings by parents</i>	108
4.6.2.2 <i>Participation of parents during meetings</i>	108
4.6.2.3 <i>Decision making</i>	108
4.6.3 School C	109
4.6.3.1 <i>Attendance of meetings by parents</i>	109
4.6.3.2 <i>participation during meetings</i>	109
4.6.3.3 <i>Decision-making</i>	109
4.7 FINDINGS FROM DOCUMENT ANALYSIS	109
4.7.1 School A	110
4.7.1.1 <i>Attendance of meetings by parents</i>	110
4.7.1.2 <i>Participation during meetings</i>	110
4.7.2 School B	110
4.7.2.1 <i>Attendance of meetings by parents</i>	110
4.7.2.2 <i>Participation during meetings</i>	110
4.7.3 School C	110
4.7.3.1 <i>Attendance of meetings</i>	110
4.7.3.2 <i>Participation during meetings</i>	110
4.8 CONSOLIDATION OF FINDINGS	111
4.9 CONCLUSION	112

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	113
5.1 INTRODUCTION	113
5.2 RE-STATEMENT OF THE AIMS OF THE STUDY	113
5.3 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS	114
5.3.1 Strategies used by parents when communicating with the schools	114
5.3.1.1 <i>One-way communication</i>	114
5.3.1.2 <i>Two-way communication</i>	114
5.3.2 Strategies used by schools when communicating with parents	115
5.3.2.1 <i>One-way communication</i>	115
5.3.2.2 <i>Two-way communication</i>	115
5.3.3 Barriers to communication	115
5.3.4 Decision-making processes used by the schools and parents	116
5.4 CONCLUSION	116
5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS	117
5.6 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY	118
5.7 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY	119
5.8 RESTRICTIONS	119
5.9 CONCLUSION	120
REFERENCES	121
ANNEXURES	
ANNEXURE A: PERMISSION LETTER FROM DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION	130
ANNEXURE B: PERMISSION LETTER FROM CIRCUIT MANAGER	132
ANNEXURE C: APPLICATION LETTER TO CONDUCT RESEARCH	133
ANNEXURE D: CONSENT LETTER (PRINCIPAL)	134
ANNEXURE E: CONSENT LETTERS (HOD/ TEACHER)	136
ANNEXURE F: CONSENT LETTER (PARENT)	138
ANNEXURE G: ETHICS CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	140

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The beginning of true democracy in South Africa saw the introduction of various legislative measures that aimed at involving parents in school governance. According to Msila (2012), policies were formulated to address inequalities in education and to ensure that education became a vehicle for democracy in society. The South African Schools Act, No. 84 of 1996 (SASA, 1996) encourages parents to participate and support the School Management Teams (SMTs), teachers and other staff members in the performance of their professional duties. Schools are expected to continuously communicate with parents on issues that affect the education of their children, including providing them with development progress reports on their children throughout the year as well as personally communicating with them by inviting them to attend school meetings. In turn, parents are expected to attend meetings and to interact with their children's teachers; they should become conversant with the problems and successes of their children. Lemmer and Van Wyk (2004) indicate that conversations that take place between parents and schools increase parental involvement (PI) in schools, but that it is usually inadequately executed.

Many schools situated in rural areas find it difficult to communicate with parents on issues that affect their children's education which result in SMTs and teachers seldom communicating with parents on issues that affect the schools. The schools' *modus operandi* of communication (or lack of it) with parents tends to be unsuitable as many rural parents are illiterate and are challenged by modern technology (Jooste, 2011); notices are not read unless there is someone who can read them to the parents (Risimati, 2001). The result is that schools rarely communicate with the communities in which they are situated concerning projects that are aimed at uplifting the community (Kgaffe, 2001) and parents are, therefore, not afforded opportunities to initiate programmes at the schools, which implies that there is a gap in communication between the schools and families.

Effective communication involves one-way communication, two-way communication and non-verbal communication. Ideally, communication starts with welcome signs at the schools, their appearance of cleanliness and a warm welcome from the teachers (Van wyk and Lemmer, 2009). Johnson (2013) believes that in communicating with the schools parents look for someone who will speak to them, listen to what they have to say and treat them with

consideration and respect. Blue-Banning, Summers, Frankland, Nelson and Beegle (2004) stress that conversations should be regular, truthful and open; information should not be forced to suit a particular situation. Magaldi-Dopman and Conway (2012) are of the opinion that in relationship-building schools should ensure that they meet the day-to-day needs of the parents and respect their cultural viewpoints which will strengthen relationships and increase trust between the partners.

In South Africa Nyama (2010); Singh, Mbokodi and Msila (2004); Msila (2012), and Sedibe (2012) have researched parent involvement (PI) in schools. Their findings suggest that there is a high occurrence of low parental involvement and that parents constantly fail to participate in the activities of the schools. The reasons for this are that parents work far from home, ignorance, poverty and low levels of education. Also, the attitudes of teachers, especially members of SMTs in schools, discourage parents even further which the results of this study show to be the root cause of low PI.

The works by international researchers, such as Lightfoot (2004), Van Roekel (2008) and Arias and Morillo-Campbell (2008), on parental involvement reveal that a large number of parents do not participate in school activities because they become discouraged and because they feel rejected by the schools. According to the scholars, parents feel alienated by the way the educational system operates, resulting in their not being comfortable to contribute constructive ideas and to communicate with school officials. According to the studies, a further reason for poor participation of parents in school activities is work commitments which consume most of their time.

Lemmer (2007), Nyama (2010) and Mmotlane, Winnar and Wa Kivilu (2009) suggest that good school and family connections enhance academic performance, social behaviour, self-confidence and the regular school attendance of learners. Their findings also reveal that good teacher-parent relations tend to strengthen mutual support and that both parents and teachers are pleased when learners improve academically at school. The scholars further mentioned that SMTs and parents can work together in partnership to ensure that what is taught in schools has a firm foundation for what is practised at home and *vice versa*. This will effectively enhance the learners' social and interpersonal relations with the entire schooling system, including their classmates and personnel.

1.2 PURPOSE STATEMENT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences of SMTs in communicating with rural parents in primary schools. Although the SASA (1996) provides parents of learners in public schools opportunities to work hand-in-hand with SMTs in the governance of the schools, there is, generally, poor communication between the schools and the parents in Man'ombe Circuit (Msila, 2012). Raborife and Phasha (2010) maintain that schools rarely engage parents in school activities - except when they encounter problems with the learners and when they ask parents for financial support; they do not seem to keep parents up-to-date on issues that affect their children's education. These factors tend to keep parents away from the schools. When parents are invited to the schools they are under the impression that they are there because their children have misbehaved or because of subject-related issues. However, only when they arrive at the schools do they learn the real reason why their presence was requested and they are reminded of their obligations to the schools. Apart from poor communication from the teachers, parents also experience a cold, condescending attitude in the teachers, especially when they want to discuss issues that their children experience with the curriculum (Cordero, 2015). They feel unwelcome in some classrooms where their children have difficulties learning as certain teachers are not comfortable with the presence of parents in schools - especially parents from low income groups (Jooste, 2011; Lemmer, 2007).

The above-mentioned problems are confirmed by Risimati (2001) who believes that although teachers assert that parents are free to visit schools at any time, when they do arrive at schools, they are ignored and badly received, which, according to Arias and Morillo-Campbell (2008), discourages, confuses and frustrates parents in their attempts to connect with the schools; this results directly in a decrease in day-to-day communication. The lack of programmes and PI policies seem to be fundamental causes of a communication breakdown in rural schools. Schools should provide policy guidelines and programmes to parents on how and when they should interact with them to avoid unnecessary misunderstandings (Kgaffe, 2001). The lack of effective communication does not only come from schools but also from parents. Although parents receive invitations to be involved in school activities from the schools, most of them do not attend meetings. Some reasons that contribute to non-attendance include work commitments; a lack of knowledge of what to do; ignorance; and not being empowered in terms of what is required and how to accomplish it (Mannathoko & Mangope, 2013). The lack of parent-teacher communication and teacher-parent communication affects the social behaviour and the academic performance of learners. Sugawara, Hermoso, Delale, Hoffman

and Lupsic (2012) are of the opinion that if parents are engaged in the education of their children, and they are respected by the teachers, they are likely to attend school activities and connect with the school. Ultimately, the academic performance of learners will improve significantly.

The purpose of this study was to investigate SMTs experiences in communicating with parents of children in rural primary schools. The study probed participants' knowledge and experiences to collect a rich supply of relevant data for the proposed study. SMTs consist of a team of school managers who are at the forefront of building relations in a school, both internally and externally.

1.3 RATIONALE AND PROBLEM STATEMENTS

The rationale for this study is embedded in the experience I have had in rural school governance. Being a teacher serving on an SMT has enabled me to observe the poor, low level of communication in rural primary schools in the Man'ombe Circuit. Lemmer (2007) sees it, essentially, as a poor job of communication with families.

As the researcher, I am a teacher working in a rural primary school and I have discovered that SMT members and teachers have poor communication with parents. Teachers do not often communicate with parents during learning and teaching hours. Parents are only involved in signing their children's homework and other classroom written assignments and meeting the obligations of the children. During the year teachers seldom communicate the progress of the learners; this only happens when they issue progress reports at the end of each term. SMTs only appear to have some open communication with the chairperson of the parent representatives (CPR). The principal is in close communication with the CPR and involves him/her in making instant decisions without referring matters to other members or parents, in general. Another mistake that SMTs make is to discourage parents from visiting schools during school hours – which are often the only time that suits some parents. The SMTs seem to be of the opinion that parents interfere with the professional work of the teachers; they accuse parents of disturbing lessons and therefore, discourage them from coming to school during school hours. The only time that SMTs allow parents to visit the schools is when their children have problems and when they are invited to the schools to solve issues, such as payments of money owed to the schools (Msila, 2012).

At times, parents are isolated from decision-making that affects the education of their children. SMTs, together with teachers, take unilateral decisions on behalf of the parents. For

instance, some of the items that are never discussed with the parents include uniform that the learners must wear and the amount of money parents are required to contribute to supplement school funds and trips which learners take. There is, therefore, little interaction between SMTs and parents. Parents receive messages mainly when the schools are in dire need of finances, and when learners experience social and academic problems. The problems are exacerbated by some of the schools' communicating strategies that are not user-friendly for the parents; the less educated parents struggle to read and understand notices, such as consent forms that are written in English unless there is someone to read and explain it to them. Arias and Morillo-Campbell (2008) feel that language should not be an obstacle to parental participation and that all written material which is sent out to parents should be in their home language and in English. Bilingual staff should be available to speak to parents when they come to the schools and interpreters should be present at meetings and events.

Literature (Cordero, 2015; Parmaswar, 2014) on parental involvement states that parents are unable to respond to messages from teachers and therefore communication between the two parties is difficult. Although the arguments indicate the challenges, none of them focus on rural parents. So, this current study emphasises the problems occurring in rural schools in the Man'ombe Circuit.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The primary research question is: *What are the School Management Teams' experiences of communicating with rural parents in primary schools in the Man'ombe Circuit?*

Emanating from the primary research question, the following secondary research questions were formulated:

- *How do rural parents experience communication with SMTs in schools?*
- *How are decisions taken between SMTs and parents in rural areas?*
- *How are the communications barriers between the rural parents and SMTs addressed?*

1.5 RESEARCH AIMS

This study had the following aims:

- To explore how parents and SMTs communicate in rural schools.
- To understand how decisions are taken between parents and SMTs in rural areas.

- To explore the challenges that rural parents encounter when communicating with teachers.

The achievement of these aims will enhance communication strategies between schools and parents in rural schools.

1.6 LITERATURE REVIEW

A review of the available relevant literature was undertaken in terms of parental involvement in schools and communication with parents.

1.6.1 Parental involvement in schools

The former Minister of Education of South Africa, Professor Kader Asmal, in the study conducted by Bender and Heystek (2003) on educational leadership and the community stipulates that in South Africa the priority of the school-community relationship is becoming a reality by implementing the school effectiveness programme, *Tirisano*, in all provinces. *Tirisano* is a Sotho word meaning ‘working together’. This implies that educational authorities should encourage schools to implement PI by communicating and interacting with parents on a regular basis.

In the studies conducted by local and international researchers there is agreement that PI yields multiple benefits in the education of school children. The studies conducted by Ibrahim, Jamil and Abdullah (2012); Epstein (2010); Bender and Heystek (2003); Fiore (2011); Chindanya (2011); Martin (2009); and Nyama (2010) all maintain that PI leads to improved learner academic achievement, school attendance, social behaviour and self-esteem and that it minimizes drop-out rates. It also improves teacher-parent teamwork, school programmes and climate conditions. Besides the above-mentioned advantages, Epstein (2010) suggests that when parents and schools are sincerely connected, parents tend to obtain family services and support they need and that the schools also expand their socio-economic backgrounds through the support of parents.

The lack of PI policies in schools particularly affects rural schools negatively. Kgaffe (2001) maintains that many schools do not have clear guidelines on how, where and when to involve parents in decision-making that benefits the learners. Parents with low levels of education lack the confidence to contribute to school affairs due to their uncertainty regarding the acceptability of their points of view (Raborife & Phasha, 2010). Parents should be involved in various programmes and committees that may influence the lives of the school children. Van

Wyk and Lemmer (2009) suggest that parents should be informed about elections for school representatives; new educational policies; and legislation that allows them to connect and communicate with other parent leaders and governors. The skills and knowledge parents acquire can be used to assist in meeting the needs of the school and the community.

Rural parents can help to advance PI in schools by working on the schools' feeding schemes, revamping the schools' gardens and planting vegetables to help raise funds. They can also make a contribution to the schools by restoring broken windows; assisting with plumbing needs; and painting classrooms - to name a few activities. According to SASA (1996:s20), parents serving on School Governing Bodies (SGBs) have a responsibility to encourage parents, learners, teachers and other staff members to render voluntary services. When problems arise in the schools they can arrange meetings with parents and teachers to discuss the issues that affect the smooth running of the schools. Parents should be encouraged to participate in the planning, managing, monitoring and evaluation of service delivery interventions at grass root level (Shah, 2003). Bender and Heystek (2003) suggest that parents can participate in the education of their children by helping them with their homework; by assisting the schools with specific tasks; and by serving on official governing bodies. It is also important for parents to create an atmosphere of learning at home. Nyama (2010) is of the opinion that PI in children's school activities can be utilised to facilitate socialisation, positive attitudes and socially acceptable behaviour. All these suggestions and recommendations indicate that parents have various responsibilities and if they are fully committed the academic performance and social behaviour of rural learners can drastically improve in the schools.

1.6.2 Communication with parents

The term 'communication' refers to impressions created and words to share thoughts and ideas (Graham-Clay 2005). According to Graham-Clay (2005), the words used in signs that are usually visible in the schools' entrances convey meaning to people who visit the schools. The ways in which schools communicate with parents and communities determine the level of PI; the academic achievement of the learners and schools that frequently interact with parents appear to generate learners who progress well academically and socially. According to Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009), schools can design effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communication in order to involve parents and communities throughout the year; they can institute various programmes to interact with parents and communities. When schools have farewell parties and graduations parents are usually engaged in making decisions. In

scheduled meetings parents may be given opportunities to discuss and resolve school issues, such as budgets, the curriculum and discipline, and they may have an opportunity to view learners' work and discuss their progress on a quarterly basis with teachers. However, understanding and reading of children's progress reports is often a major problem and many parents rely on other people to explain and interpret their contents (Risimati, 2001).

A study conducted by Kgaffe (2001) concludes that parents are never given an opportunity to initiate programmes in schools. Bender and Heystek (2003) are of the opinion that even if parents cannot read or write, they may assist their children. SMTs in rural schools should review their ways of communicating with families to determine whether they are effectively engaged in the schools' activities. They need to establish whether or not their means of communication is readable, clear and regular; families headed by grandparents may experience challenges if they communicate by electronic mail (e-mail), telephone and letters if there is no-one to assist them with what may unfamiliar means of communication. Bonuke (2013) explains that most rural parents do not use e-mails, letters or mobile phones because they cannot read or write and mobile phones and computers are too expensive to buy. Davenport and Eib (2004) found that parents cannot use the technology due to the fact that the language of communication is foreign to them; the assumption being that most rural parents in South Africa do not understand foreign languages, such as English. This suggests that schools should think of better ways of communicating with parents and families which will address various communication levels of families. Effective communication should be a two-way process instead of being one where one partner dominates the other. It should be ensured that structures and opportunities exist for parents to contact the school; to share their views; and to express their opinions (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009).

Schools should be sensitive to the manner in which they communicate with families. The ways in which schools receive members of families can affect the quality of their partnerships. Raborife and Phasha's (2010) study shows that teachers, generally, are insensitive towards learners and parents. According to these authors, if parents and learners fail to meet the requirements of the schools, teachers pass insensitive remarks that are upsetting and unacceptable. Such practices inhibit effective communication between schools, families and communities. When schools act in this way they send the following message to the families: "even if you are invited you are not wanted" and such actions tend to push families away. Magaldi-Dopman and Conway (2012) and Fiore (2011) argue that the main goal of PI is to create a good relationship which will ensure that parents are comfortable to communicate their

concerns and wishes to those in authority at the schools that will ultimately benefit their children.

This study aimed at exploring the SMTs' experiences in communicating with rural parents of children in primary schools. SMTs in rural schools are encouraged to collaborate with the parents of learners in order to minimise unnecessary problems which, in the end, might decrease effective communication in schools.

1.7 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research methodology refers to the basic ways used by a researcher to accumulate rich, solid and valuable data when studying a particular phenomenon. This study included establishing a research paradigm, research design, sampling, data collection and data analysis.

1.7.1 Research paradigm

The study is located within an interpretative paradigm and a qualitative research approach in order to investigate SMTs' experiences in communicating with parents in rural schools in the Man'ombe Circuit. Qualitative research studies the phenomenon in a natural setting which is in the "real world" (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010; McMillan & Schumacher, 2014; Maree, 2007). It deals with aspects, such as observation, motivation, experience, perception, description, thoughts, behaviour, interpretations, comparison and analysis of the characteristics of the participants. The researcher interacted with the participants in a well-arranged setting which motivated the participants to share their deeper thoughts and experiences related to the study. Qualitative research was used due to its flexibility and the approach permitted the researcher to use multiple strategies, including individual interviews and observation to acquire in-depth information which would not have been possible with other research approaches. This facilitated the researcher's interaction with all the participants involved in the study; he was able to reach a greater understanding of the attitudes, explanations and experiences of the SMTs and teachers while interacting with parents. The researcher asked SMTs open-ended questions and probed further when clarification was needed.

1.7.2 Research design

The researcher selected a qualitative case study to understand SMTs' experiences in communicating with parents in rural schools. McMillan and Schumacher (2014) describe the case study as an in-depth analysis of a single entity. According to Leedy and Ormrod (2010),

in a case study a particular individual, programme or event is studied in depth for a particular period of time. In the context of this study, the researcher used multiple-case studies to interact with selected rural schools in the Man’ombe Circuit and to understand how SMTs interacted with parents to improve the social life and academic performance of the learners.

The study was able to determine the manner in which communication was set up and established between SMTs and learners’ parents and families; it also investigated how the SMTs communicate with parents and involve them in schools’ decision-making processes as well as the challenges that hinder effective communication in the schools.

A case study was used on the basis of its benefits. Baxter and Jack (2008) stipulate that people use a case study when the focus of the study is to answer “how” and “why” questions. The behaviour of the participants involved in the study cannot be manipulated when there is a desire to explore contextual condition. Cohen Manion & Morrison (2013) add that a case study provides in-depth and rich information which is rarely supplied by means of other methods.

1.7.3 Sampling

This study followed decisive sampling which was intended to provide data from the sample of selected SMTs, teachers and parents in the rural schools of a selected circuit in the Mopani District of Limpopo Province. The circuit office provided the researcher with a list of rural primary schools in this selected circuit. A sample of three schools with the highest number of learners was selected: School A had 758 learners, School B had 691 learners and School C had 585 learners. The assumption was that bigger schools would have more varied characteristics to associate with than schools with smaller enrolments.

The sample of school principals who had five years’ experience or more in rural schools was purposively selected. The idea was that principals who have more experience in their current posts would be able to share quality experiences with regard to the involvement of parents in their schools. The selected principals assisted the researcher in the cumulative selection of HODs or senior teachers who had a better knowledge and experience of working with the children’s parents in their schools. The rationale for selecting SMT members and teachers was based on the fact that they interact with parents on a daily basis in various ways and they are more experienced in, and knowledgeable about, issues that affect the education and social aspects of learners. The principals also assisted the researcher to select parents who represent

the population of parents on specific School Governing Bodies (SGBs). Candidates who are selected by the parents to represent them in schools have an in-depth knowledge of the activities that take place in those schools.

1.7.4 Data collection

Quantitative data collection allows the researcher to employ various ways of collecting data (Cohen *et al.* 2013; Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). This study made use of semi-structured interviews, document analysis and observation to collect data. Semi-structured interviews were used in interviewing school principals, HODs, teachers and parents with the purpose of answering research questions and generating data related to the SMTs' experiences in communicating with parents in rural schools and to accumulating extensive data regarding their perceptions and experiences on how the schools interact with parents throughout the year. Data was also collected through observation which Creswell (2012) and Maree (2007) describe as a systematic process of recording the portrait of participants, physical setting, objects and occurrences without, necessarily, questioning or communicating with them. The researcher observed verbal and non-verbal communications between the sampled parties. Non-verbal communication included the settings of the schools; their welcome signs; and their use of letters and notices while verbal communication involved the two-way communication that took place during contact between the SMTs, teachers and the parents. The researcher used field notes and tapes to record data which was of value to the study.

1.7.5 Data analysis

McMillan and Schumacher (2014) believe that quantitative data analysis is primarily an inductive process of organising data into categories and identifying patterns. Data analysis in this study was done according to the Graham-Clay (2005) strategies of communication which include one-way communication, two-way communication and barriers to communication. After the information had been gathered by means of interviews, document analysis and observation, the interviews were transcribed *verbatim* and studied to fully understand the information they contained. The information was then coded and clustered in categories; similar information was categorised in themes and sub-themes and, finally, the information was used to write this research report.

1.8 CREDIBILITY AND TRUSTWORTHINESS

According to Leedy and Ormrod (2010), credibility is when the entity yields uniform results - if measured by the same instrument. To ensure that this study was credible the researcher used various techniques, including the use of a case study to conduct research; member checking; triangulation; and prolonged engagement. The researcher was able to verify data with the participants using a member-checking process whereby the participants were involved in checking whether the information provided was recorded correctly or not. The participants were given time to correct mistakes and to make some clarification, where necessary, before the data was analysed. The researcher conducted individual interviews, document analysis and observation to acquire further data as well as continued engagement with members of SMTs, teachers and parents who were continually interviewed until the data was considered to be sufficient. Cohen *et al.* (2013) use the concept 'validity' to refer to trustworthiness and to ensure that the study was trustworthy; the researcher used field notes and a high quality tape recorder to record the interviews.

1.9 ETHICAL ISSUES

Permission to conduct research was requested from the Limpopo Department of Basic Education (LDBE) and the Circuit Manager of Man'ombe Circuit in the Mopani District. The researcher also applied for ethical clearance from the University of Pretoria.

Participants were provided with sufficient information to make informed decisions and judgments on whether to participate in the study. The researcher informed them that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time during the process. They were also informed about the risks, benefits and the purpose of the research. Each participant signed the protocol for informed consent.

The researcher also ensured that the study protected the anonymity of the participants. According to Wiles, Graham, Heath and Charles (2008), anonymity is maintained by recording data in a way that does not identify the participants from whom the information is obtained. The researcher ensured that participants' information was presented in a way that readers would not be able identify their names and settings. This was done to protect participant's human rights to privacy in terms of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Republic of South Africa, No.8 of 1996, s14) which states that everyone has the right to privacy. Leedy and Ormrod (2010) maintain that under no circumstances should a

researcher report - either orally or in a written form - in a way that others become aware of how a particular participant has behaved unless the participant specifically permission was first obtained in writing. As the researcher I, therefore, replaced their names with pseudonyms or arbitrary code numbers and labelled documents with numbers.

1.10 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences of SMTs in communicating with rural parents of children in primary schools. The study aimed at understanding how SMTs communicate with parents in rural schools. It was also intended that the challenges rural teachers encounter while communicating with parents be investigated and that an understanding be reached on how decisions are taken between parents and SMTs in rural areas. The findings and the recommendations of this study should assist the Department of Basic Education (DBE) in becoming aware of the challenges that SMTs encounter while communicating with parents in rural areas - as well as their the successes. The findings may also assist the DBE and educational authorities to establish and present improved programmes, workshops and strategies to improve communication and decision-making in rural primary schools.

1.11 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Most learners in rural schools live with families headed by older siblings and less educated grandparents because their parents work in urban areas. There are some learners who are orphans. When schools inform parents of school issues by means of letters, it is often difficult for the grandparents to read and respond to the notices, especially when their grandchildren cannot read or write either; a result they miss out on attending parent meetings and being informed about crucial school-related issues. Older siblings, who are still learners, are also unlikely to attend the parent meetings because they, themselves, will be in class as parent meetings are normally organised to take place during schools hours. The few sample schools may not be a representation of all rural schools in the Man'ombe Circuit and, therefore, the outcome of the study cannot be generalised.

1.12 SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS

Chapter 1 introduces the study by providing information in terms of background, purpose statement, rationale and the significance of the study. It presents the identified research questions and discusses the research aims, theoretical and conceptual framework. A brief

literature review is given and the research methodology, research paradigm, research design, sampling, data collection, data analysis, credibility and trustworthiness, ethical issues and limitations are outlined.

Chapter 2 is a more in-depth discussion of the relevant available literature in terms of the influence of SGBs on the involvement of parents in schools; strategies for effective communication; schooling in rural areas; barriers to communication; and a theoretical and conceptual framework.

Chapter 3 presents the research methodology, research approach, research design, research population, sampling, data collecting, data analyses, credibility, trustworthiness and ethical considerations.

Chapter 4 examines the biographical information of the participants, the research questions and the identified themes. It analyses and interprets data and discusses themes and findings.

Chapter 5 provides an overview and summary of the study; conclusions are drawn and recommendations are made.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Although SASA (1996) mandates schools to involve parents in the education of their learners, teachers seem to be unwilling to interact with parents. This is confirmed by Msila (2012) who suggests that many schools situated in rural areas find it difficult to involve parents in the education of their children. The author is of the opinion that SMTs in rural areas seldom communicate with parents and that they rarely involve them in decision-making on school matters which results in SMTs making major decisions without involving the parents, and therefore, communication between SMTs and parents is flawed.

Mncube (2009) argues that although parents are part of school governance, most of them are not fully involved and some of them are seldom given an opportunity to participate in making crucial decisions that ultimately affect their children. According to Raborife and Phasha (2010), parents do not know much about everyday school activities, but they are contacted and involved more specifically when the schools are required to deal with their children's disobedience, learning difficulties and when financial help and support is needed. Kgaffe (2001) maintains that rural parents are not involved in projects aimed at uplifting the community in which they are situated; they are also not given any opportunities to initiate programmes at schools. This situation renders the involvement of parents in rural schools difficult. According to Nyama (2010), most South African schools have a problem with low PI which is caused by low levels of education, especially among parents from rural areas, and by the attitude of teachers, particularly members of SMTs. Raborife and Phasha (2010) suggest that parents/guardians abandon their PI responsibilities and schools are required to step in and teachers do not seem to have a problem with that. Researchers agree that if the problem of a lack of PI in rural schools is not solved, it may lead to further alienation between parents and teachers which may contribute to the loss of vital support systems which are available in the education of learners.

Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009) are convinced that the existence of PI in schools improves the academic performance of learners and their social behaviour and for this. Jooste (2011) recommends that schools should establish effective communication with parents to strengthen relationships. According to Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009), effective communication includes schools providing parents with information about their programmes and children's progress

reports and parents giving feedback. Graham-Clay (2005) believes that relationships between parents and teachers can be achieved through the use of both one- and two-way communication. One-way communication includes the use of newsletters, report cards and personal notes, while two-way communication takes place by means of telephone calls, home visits and parent meetings (Jooste, 2011). Kimu (2012) asserts that schools should establish two-way communication with continuous communication between teachers and parents which is mutual and conducted in a relaxed manner.

This study also examines barriers that hinder effective communication between parents and teachers. Kgaffe (2001) cites the lack of school policies, skills, knowledge and the poor interaction between parents and SMTs as factors that negatively affect schools. Several other factors, which inhibit effective communication in rural primary schools which include a limited understanding of PI by school and parents low socio-economic status of parents; the feelings parents experience of not being welcome at schools a lack of proper guidance; and language barriers. This chapter discusses factors that affect schooling in rural areas and ends with the conceptual framework espoused by Epstein (1995) as well as three themes of communications developed by Graham-Clay (2005)

2.2 THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study boaders on Epstein's (1995) theory of overlapping spheres, especially communication which is directly linked to this study. The author explains six types of parent involvement which are parenting, communicating, volunteering, home learning, decision-making and collaboration. However the aspects that are more relevant to this study are communications and decision making. This theory encourages schools to engage parents in school programmes, develop parents into leaders and representatives (Epstein, 2010). Epstein (2010) also encourages teachers to conduct traditional communication with parents through out the year. The schools ensure that families are kept informed by frequent interaction through parent-meetings, newsletters, progress reports, memos and by involving them in the school decision-making (Epstein, 1995). This theory is suitable to the current study because it encourages a close partnership between teachers and parents in schools. It is also in line with South African legisltitative, SASA, No. 84 of 1996. This legislative mandates schools to involve parents in issues that affect education of their children and in school governance. Although Epstein's theory explains the importance of communication in schools does not go deeper into detail about how communication is used in a school situation. Instead Graham-

Clay (2005)'s principles are more relevant to this study of Epstein's superficial explanation of what communication entails.

According to the Graham-Clay (2005), communication is essential in creating a healthy relationship between teachers and parents in schools. The author asserts that schools should use various avenues of communication in order to attract parents. According to the principles, communication involves one or two-way communication. One-way communication takes place when schools want to update parents on school activities, learners' progress and events through the use of letters, radio announcements, notebooks and others while two-way communication includes interactive conversations between schools and families (Graham-Clay, 2005). According to the author, schools should employ different ways to communicate important issues with parents. The theory suggests that effective communication includes regular parent-teacher meetings to explain the curriculum and, if needed, suggests ways in which grades can be improved as well as schoolwork that is sent home for review; report cards to communicate progress; quarterly notices; communications of school policies and regulations. In line with Graham-Clay's principles, Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009), recommend that schools should review their ways of communication to ensure that they are clear and consistent. Graham-clay also posits that effective communication in schools begins when parents enter schools. Welcome signs that reflect the local communities contribute to a friendly and approachable atmosphere (Graham-Clay, 2005). Parents also feel welcome when they enter the premises of a neatly maintained school. They may be influenced by the cleanliness of the school grounds and/or learners artwork on the walls (Jooste, 2011).

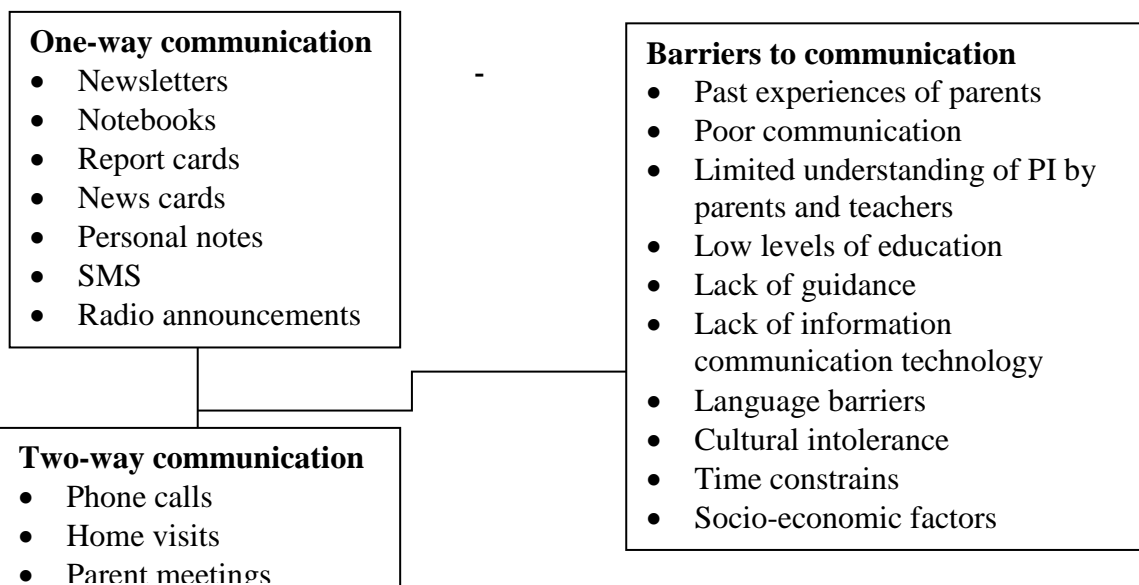


Figure 2.1: Communication Strategies Espoused by Graham-Clay (2005)

2.3 STRATEGIES OF COMMUNICATION

According to Epstein (1995)'s theory and Graham-Clay (2005)'s principles, there are different strategies that schools and parents use to communicate. These strategies of communication are either one-way or two-way.

2.3.1 One-way communication

Schools rely on written communication to convey messages to parents and communities. Written communication is clearly one-way communication that is valuable for on-going correspondence between parents and teachers (Joshi, Eberly and Konzal, 2005). Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009) are of the opinion that the quality and frequency of this type of communication may differ and Jooste (2011) warns that written communication is a permanent product that requires careful considerations when formatting the content.

According to Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009), schools may never meet some parents in person and some parents only receive letters from the schools. Schools should consider parents' education backgrounds; some families do not find written forms of communication helpful because of language barriers, reading difficulties and lack of time to read notices (Murphy, 2009). Arias and Morillo-Campbell (2008) recommend that all letters to parents should be written in two languages: their home language and English. Schools should ensure that the information is clear, accurate, legible and can be understood by parents. Similarly, Womble (2014) specifies that the information that is sent to parents should be concise, relevant and consistent. His study also suggests that parents do not always receive the information that is sent to them by schools; they should find out what the reasons for this are and, perhaps, institute new effective means of communication that are guaranteed to reach parents as some methods of communication are ineffective (Womble, 2014).

Related to the failure of parents receiving information, Johnson's findings (2013) reveal an absence of one-way communication and a lack of responsiveness - especially in terms of larger schools and districts. He cites the fact that districts do not communicate important issues - even in drastic circumstances, such as when they want to close schools (Johnson, 2013). According to Michael *et al.* (2012), all correspondence is sent to parents in the form of newsletters telling them about upcoming meetings. Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009) suggest that when schools write letters to parents they should ensure that they proofread them before

sending them out as errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar create a bad impression and should be eliminated. Various forms of one-way communications are reviewed below.

2.3.1.1 Newsletters

Newsletters are usually the way of communication with parents. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (2012), newsletters can be used to communicate with parents about school and community matters. Murphy (2009) maintains that the exchange of communication between parents and schools establishes trust and leads to the development of an effective rapport that provides an environment in which learning can take place; the use of newsletters encourages parents to share their knowledge and expertise on certain topics and they help them understand what their children learn. Furthermore, newsletters enhance communication in which teachers can efficiently and effectively inform parents of academic activities in the classroom. This indicates that the existence of newsletters is important in schools because it forms a link between schools and parents. This makes it possible for schools to inform parents of the activities that their children are involved in while they are at school; parents get to know what activities take place in schools and they have an opportunity to share their experiences, knowledge and skills with the schools. Graham-Clay (2005) believes that the consistent use of several strategies can make classrooms and school newsletters even more effective communication tools. In addition, Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009) suggest that newsletters could be bound in the form of a booklet that could be distributed to learners and staff on a quarterly basis. They see newsletters as covering a variety of topics that can include the following: messages from principals; contributions of essays, poems, puzzles, jokes and cartoons from learners; community issues; projects and articles related to general social life. Learners could be included to serve on the editorial staff of the newsletter (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009).

Davern (2004) suggest that newsletters should be written in parents' home languages because most parents do not use English as their first language. Teachers should use the same colour, quality and paper size for all newsletters. They should be written plainly so that learners in the junior grades can understand them and they should be free from spelling and grammatical errors (Graham- Clay, 2005).

2.3.1.2. Notebooks

School-to-home notebooks are another means generally used to exchange information between schools and parents. Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009) call them learners' news books that involve parents in their children's education and keeps them informed of their children's progress - especially those in the junior grades. The schools give the news books to the learners every Friday to give to their parents who, in turn, respond, and on Mondays the books are returned. School-home communication gives parents a voice and minimises chances of belittling them (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009). Jooste (2011) believes that it is important for schools to clearly establish what information will be communicated, by whom, and how often. Teachers should be encouraged to use titles, such as Mr, Mrs and Ms, to establish good relationships with parents and to balance good and bad feedback (Jooste, 2011). Davern (2004) further recommends that teachers should make use of notebooks to communicate important information to the parents on a daily basis, especially when their children experience difficulties with certain subjects or other learners. Davern (2004) also mentions that schools sometimes write in the notebooks at the request of parents to maintain continuous communication with them and to improve the academic performances of learners. Messages can be written once or twice a week (Jooste, 2011). This indicates that notebooks are necessary in schools, especially for learners who have learning problems. It may be concluded that schools that establish a notebook system encounter limited challenges in terms of learners' learning obstacles and their social problems. It can also be assumed that schools that involve parents promote PI.

2.3.1.3 Report cards

Jooste (2011) and Graham-Clay (2005) indicate that schools use report cards to update parents about their children's progress. In South Africa, report cards are generally given to parents on a quarterly basis. According to Emerson *et al.* (2012), communication between parents and schools needs to take place so that parents can be informed about curricula, courses, school rules and assessment. The Department of Education (2005) stipulates that there should be recurring communication between schools and families *via* reports to identify the learners' successes and challenges of the term. It also instructs schools to provide necessary support for parents that make it easier for them to understand their children's potential and progress.

Report cards should contain school details, like the school logo in the letterhead. The information should be clear and easy for parents to understand and should include a

breakdown of learners' academic development in different subjects, their strengths and weaknesses, learning methods, assessment of learners' social development, specific areas that learners need work on, and related suggestions for parents (Jooste, 2011; Graham-Clay, 2005).

Schools are obliged to give feedback to parents at the end of every term. The feedback should be based on learner performance recorded on report cards. The protocol of the schools requests parents to give feedback and comment on the report cards before returning them to the schools. Teachers are required to review parents' responses timeously to see if there is any need for the school to do a follow-up (Jooste, 2011; Graham-Clay, 2005). It is suggested that after parents receive the report cards parent-meetings should be scheduled for the beginning of the new term to reflect on the learners' progress and challenges for the new term.

2.3.1.4. News cards

Another form of communication is by means of 'good news cards'. Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009) consider good news cards as an excellent means of telling parents about the positive activities taking place in schools. These cards can be made to stand out and be seen as positive and using colour paper, teachers and learners can decide on logos that they want to use on the cards. The 'good news cards' are given to learners for achievement during the week; for example, learners who achieved the best marks in Mathematics. It is recommended that teachers keep a register of who received a good news card to ensure that all learners are regularly praised in this way (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009).

According to the theory of overlapping spheres developed by Epstein (1995), if children feel cared for and they are encouraged to work hard they are more likely to do their best to learn and remain in school.

It may be concluded that the implementation of good news cards in schools is important because it is a way to acknowledge the ability of each learner and appreciate it. These cards enhance the performance of learners because they gain motivation from being applauded when they are thriving academically.

2.3.1.5 Personal notes

Teachers can also use personal notes to communicate with parents. According to Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009), writing a personal note is one of the most difficult forms of

communication because it is sensitive and may lead to misunderstandings. To eliminate these misunderstandings, most teachers arrange with their principals to initial the letters before sending them to parents. Alternatively, teachers can arrange to meet parents in person at their schools or even visit them in their home to discuss the challenges faced by their children. Teachers can also point out to parents that their primary aim in writing the personal note is not to complain about the children, but to work together with parents to help them succeed. It can be assumed that writing a personal note to parents may yield good results because it paves the way to help learners succeed in life. If all teachers are committed to discussing personal problems, including academic issues, most learners in rural schools would improve academically and socially.

2.3.1.6 Short Message Service (SMS)

Another way for teachers to communicate with parents is through the SMS. According to Lemmer and Van Wyk (2004), SMSs are used to remind parents of important dates and events. Parents can receive messages any time and read them at a convenient time. They also believe that SMS messages are an excellent way to communicate factual information, such as times and venues of sports matches, and to remind parents of upcoming events. It is also an excellent vehicle for a good news messages. When teachers send messages to parents they should avoid using education terminology and jargon; they should use simple clear language that parents are familiar with in day-to-day communication. If messages are in a foreign language, they should be translated into parents' home languages since some parents cannot read or understand English well. Emerson *et al.* (2012) remind schools that parents may find education jargon confusing or intimidating which can hinder constructive, significant communication between parents and teachers. They consider it important that formal communication mechanisms are translated into a language that parents with different educational and cultural backgrounds can understand.

2.3.1.7 Radio announcements

Schools can communicate with parents by means of radio announcements. In the study by Graham-Clay (2005) it can be seen that radio announcements are commonly used to convey important information regarding school issues. An assumption is that radio announcements can assist to communicate messages to parents. For example, when schools want to circulate information to parents about particular subjects they can provide a radio station with the details for broadcasting. When parents receive information *via* that medium they value it and

tend to respond promptly. Radio announcers are suitable to broadcast messages to the parents as they stress and repeatedly announce the messages to listeners.

2.3.2. Two-way communication

Two-way communication refers to communication between teachers and parents to enhance the academic performance of learners. Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009) recommend that schools should not just send messages to parents, but they should also give parents opportunities to respond. According to Jooste (2011), PI is active when there is regular two-way communication. Teachers should take the responsibility of initiating two-way communication in schools (Agbo, 2007). Teachers can encourage daily discussions with parents, develop warm caring relationships, and demonstrate to families how PI can enrich the school programme (Murphy, 2009). They can also invite parents to share their culture, customs and traditions with learners. Hoberg (2004) believes that the more interaction there is between individuals over time, the greater the trust between them will be and the greater the willingness to cherish that trust. The study by Lawrence and Lightfoot (2004) indicates that effective dialogue develops out of a growing trust, a mutual concern and an appreciation of contrasting perspectives. Schools should, therefore, establish good relationships with parents to support efficient and effective two-way communication. Teachers should respect and welcome parents to schools; listen to their concerns; and respond accordingly which, according to the researcher, will enhance two-way communication in schools.

2.3.2.1 Telephone calls

Telephone calls are a more conventional form of communication that teachers use. Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009) are of the opinion that teachers can use mobile phones to send messages and request information. Teachers can make short calls to talk to the parents and use mobile phones to communicate in terms of issues, such as verifying postal addresses of children or arranging times of meetings with parents (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009). Graham–Clay (2005) believes that telephone calls can be used by parents and teachers to discuss important information and to attend to concerns, such as extracurricular activities, bullying experiences and cases of death. However, Graham-Clay also suggests that telephone calls can be used to convey good news, such as the positive progress of children or to congratulate parents on jobs well done and as a way of promoting positive bonds with parents. Despite the benefits of telephone calls being well documented, Davis (2000) shows that most schools have insufficient financial support to help them with their telephone communication with parents.

Schools have only one or two telephone lines which make it difficult for parents to always reach teachers. However, telephone calls remain an important method of communication between teachers and parents as they can be used to attend to various issues with parents ranging from academic performance of learners to the social behaviour of learners and community issues.

2.3.2.2. *House visits*

Another way of communicating is in the form of physical house visits. Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009) believe that house visits are a powerful communication tool which is, unfortunately, neglected by almost all schools. Teachers have provided several reasons why they fail to arrange house visits, ranging from safety issues to time constraints. The benefits of house visits are well-documented. According to Davis (2000), when teachers visit parents in the comfort of their own homes they can share thoughts more privately with parents on what school and classroom expectations are and the parents can share information regarding home circumstances which might affect student achievement. The benefits of rural house visiting programmes are strengthening home-school partnerships; developing more positive relationships with learners and their families; and improving communication with parents – all of which lead to a better understanding of the learners and of the impact children's home environments have on their school performance (Meyer and Mann, 2006).

In addition, Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009) believe that house visits are beneficial in certain cases, such as when children are ill for long periods of time; when there are serious problems regarding behaviour and work; and when schools wish to establish a connection with hard-to-reach parents or communities. They indicate that parents speak more freely in the safe and familiar environment of their own homes (Van Wyk and Lemmer, 2009). If teachers are committed to working with families, PI in rural schools should increase significantly. Furthermore, Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009) advise that teachers intending to pay house visits should first establish whether these visits are the best way to achieve their goals and to find a time that is also suitable to the parents. They recommend that teachers contact parents in advance and set a date; and speak in the language of the family by using words and definitions that are familiar and that include a minimum of terminology and jargon.

2.3.2.3 Parent meetings

Parents and teachers also communicate by means of parent meetings. According to Michael *et al.* (2012), parent meetings are the primary means of contact between parents and teachers. However, there is normally poor attendance of parents as it appears that only the parents of the more intelligent learners attend meetings. SASA (84 of 1996, s18 [2] [b]) instructs schools to conduct one meeting, which in South Africa is generally known as the Annual General Meeting (AGM), at least once a year; it should be attended by parents, teachers, learners and other staff members of schools. The purpose of the meeting is to discuss issues that affect the education of learners. Blakesley (2010) adds that the purpose of the AGM is to inform the parents of the activities of the council and issues from the previous year, and then allow for input from parents before approving the report of the previous year. This indicates that AGMs are very important in schools because they involve all stakeholders concerned with the education of learners.

Stakeholders meet and discuss important issues that affect learners, including their social behaviour, academic performance and financial issues. Michael *et al.* (2012) declare that most of these meetings are conducted in English which results in many parents failing to follow the discussion; schools' personnel members are not always aware of this. It seems, therefore, that parents who have a low proficiency of English do not benefit from parent activities.

According to Ibrahim *et al.* (2012), parents and other stakeholders feel welcome when teachers and members of the SMTs speak to them. When schools organise parent meetings they should ensure that the medium of communication suits all parents and if it does not, then they should provide a translator. Graham-Clay (2005) asserts that the use of everyday dialect and a non-aggressive voice encourages discussion and that appropriate open- and close-ended questions help to obtain information and ensure parental input. In addition, teachers should show respect for the parents' input by inviting them to ask questions and express their concerns (Murphy, 2009).

2.3.3 Barriers to effective communication

Although schools do communicate with parents regarding learners, parents are also expected to communicate with the schools. According to Magaldi-Dopman and Conway (2012), effective communication between parents and schools offers an increased level of support that may be helpful in terms of learner achievement and goals. This suggests that parents and

schools should be encouraged to maintain on-going interaction in order to enhance teaching and learning. However, rural parents encounter some challenges when it comes to communicating with rural schools. Studies conducted by researchers, such as Msila (2010), Graham-Clay (2005), Raborife and Phasha (2010), Risimati (2001), Bagarette (2012) and Jooste (2011), reveal various factors that inhibit rural parents in communicating effectively with their children's schools. Their findings show that parents fail to communicate with schools for various reasons, including the following: low levels of education, lack of proper guidance from schools, lack of information, communication technology that is not user friendly, not feeling welcome at schools, and language barriers.

2.3.3.1 Low levels of education

A review of the relevant literature indicates that the low levels of education of rural parents affect their day-to-day communication with schools. According to Raborife and Phasha (2010), parents with low levels of education encounter problems in reading and understanding text messages from the schools. Bagarette (2012) is convinced that schools overlook parents who are poorly educated in their meetings and during decision-making processes as he discovered that poorly educated parents participate minimally in school issues because they struggle to interpret school policies and regulations. Consequently, they are not given time to share their ideas in discussion on school matters and all school issues are left in the hands of the teachers. The vulnerability of parents is attributed to their lack of confidence arising from the fact that they have little knowledge of, and skills related to, school issues (Bagarette, 2012). Risimati (2001) found that the poor education of parents is the cause of low PI in rural schools; their low levels of education inhibit them from obtaining information regarding school management and changes taking place in education. When parents struggle to read and understand written information it will be difficult for them to read and correctly interpret invitation letters, progress reports, school policies and programmes. In order to curb ineffective communication Bagarette (2012) suggests that parents serving on school governance bodies should have certain levels of education and literacy and a skill capability to make positive contributions in the best interests of the schools.

2.3.3.2 Lack of proper guidance

The lack of proper guidance from rural schools on how parents should interact with them affects the way in which they communicate with schools. Studies conducted by Msila (2012) and Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009) reveal that parents do not know what teachers expect of

their children. Many parents are willing to spend time at schools if teachers are willing to provide guidance (Van Wyk and Lemmer, 2009). Risimati (2001) highlights the fact that rural schools lack methods of involving parents in the education of their children. He maintains that parents in rural schools are limited to signing their children's homework books. According to Che (2010), schools and parents face challenges with PI in terms of time, inadequate communication and a lack of knowledge on how to involve parents. She suggests that schools do establish decent PI programmes but fail to improve and maintain them. Risimati (2001), on the other hand, states that most schools do not have school policies regarding PI that outline on how parents should interact with their schools and that although schools maintain that parents are welcome to visit them when they encounter problems with the education their children receive, they are not given the necessary courtesy and attention when they do go to the schools. Parents find this challenging because they are hindered in their communication with the schools.

When parents do not receive appropriate attention they tend to withdraw their day-to-day communication with the schools as they are very sensitive to the way schools receive and communicate with them. Epstein (1995) argues that the way in which schools care for the children is reflected in the way they interact with parents. It is, therefore, important that schools should introduce proper ways to involve parents in their day-to-day activities; parents need guidance from the school on how and when to communicate. Rural parents, generally, do not participate in school activities unless they are guided to do so. Lemmer and Van Wyk (2004) suggest that schools should develop programmes which will assist parents who are not involved of their own volition. Jooste (2011) recommends that schools should communicate their procedures of communication to parents correctly to avoid uncertainties about who should be contacted when there are issues to be discussed.

2.3.3.3 Lack of information communication technology

Rural parents' unfamiliarity with new information communication technology affects their day-to-day communication with the schools. In the study conducted by Risimati (2001) it was found that most children in rural areas are cared for by their grandparents, care-givers and parents who do not have the skills and knowledge to understand the present-day technology. According to Jooste (2011), a paucity of technology knowledge inhibits communication opportunities for many parents and Raborife and Phasha (2010) indicates that the low levels of education of parents inhibit them in reading and understanding information received from

the schools that use technology, such as e-mails, school websites, SMSs and computers; in rural areas technology is a major challenge for parents and, therefore, schools should consider other methods to communicate with parents instead of relying on technology.

Simple methods to communicate with parents could include, for example, a ‘word-of-mouth’ strategy by which information is sent to the parents *via* the learners and community structures. The use of SMSs and mobile phones as a means of communication between schools and parents may be a challenge - especially for grandparents who have difficulty in reading and understanding written information. Besides being poorly educated, rural parents lack the resources as most of them are not employed (Msila, 2012). Dzansi and Amendzo (2014) confirm this in their study on integrating Information Communication Technology (ICT) into rural South African schools that have a very limited, or no, access to the internet. They point out that even where internet coverage is available, the charges are high. Jooste (2011) encourages schools to find out whether parents have access to voicemail, computers and internet before they use them as a means of communication with parents. Even if some parents in rural areas have access to, and knowledge of how to use, ICT many schools in rural areas still lack skills and knowledge of ICT and, therefore, many teachers are still uncomfortable to use technology (Jooste, 2011).

2.3.3.4 Language barriers

Language barriers hinder effective communication in rural primary schools. According to Jooste (2011) educational jargon is a familiar communication roadblock for parents. Lemmer and Van Wyk (2004) indicate that the use of jargon by schools when they are communicating with poorly educated parents may have a negative implication as parents fail to understand the language and assessment strategies. Furthermore, Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009) maintain that parents who have little education struggle with their day-to-day communication with schools, especially those that use educational jargon.

Teachers should not assume that parents always understand them. They should first make sure of whether parents understand their language before they use educational jargon. According to Emerson *et al.* (2012), schools should use the language that is accessible to parents and the way of communication should not undermine the knowledge of parents. They assert that schools should refrain from using educational jargon when communicating with parents because the language may be confusing and intimidating for them; the use of jargon may

hinder constructive and meaningful communication between parents and schools (Emerson *et al.*, 2012).

2.3.3.5 Unwelcome feelings parents' experience

Another factor that hinders continuous communication between schools and parents is when parents do not feel welcome in schools (Boscole, 2012). Msila's study (2012) shows that some rural parents are unhappy about the way rural teachers speak to them. It seems that when parents attempt to address issues that affect the education of their children with teachers, the teachers do not show them respect. Furthermore, Raborife and Phasha (2010) found that teachers are insensitive to parents' feelings; they use unacceptable language that offends parents, especially when parents fail to meet their obligations, and such behaviour tends to hamper continuous communication between parents and schools. When parents do not receive a hearty welcome from the schools, it is likely that they will break off their relationships with the schools. In the case of this study it may be concluded that parents find it hard to maintain continuous communication with schools if teachers show their annoyance at their presence. Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009) assert that schools and parents should establish two-way communication for both parties to share their respective information about learners. Schools should also ensure that they apply appropriate moral ethics to encourage continuous communication with parents.

2.3.3.6 Time constraints

Generally, relevant studies cite time constraints as a factor that contributes to poor communication in rural schools. According to Finders and Lewis (2009), time constraints affect parents who do not have professional jobs; their jobs do not allow them to be flexible and independent as they work in gruelling jobs and they are still expected to attend to household responsibilities and personal matters. They further indicate that some parents work night shifts which results in their failing to attend meetings held during the day or in the evenings. Raborife and Phasha (2010) add that most parents fail to attend school activities because they only arrive at home when school activities have ended. Lemmer (2007) is of the opinion that parents affected by time constraints are mostly single parents with a low income in big families with a high level of unemployment. Parents also fail to attend school activities because they do not have their own transport and often require a babysitter or someone who can look after an elderly person. Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009) show that many of the parents work far away from home and spend most of their time commuting to and from their homes.

They indicate that single parents have an obligation to take care of their children and they are not comfortable in leaving them alone. According to Erlendsdottir (2010), parents' work schedules may also contribute to them failing to attend school activities; although parents are willing to attend school activities they might fail to do so by circumstances that are beyond their control. The research recommends that schools should try to implement better ways to enable parents to attend school activities.

The study by Lemmer (2007) suggests that schools can provide childcare facilities where children can be taken care of while parents attend school functions. Graham-Clay (2005) recommends that appointments should be scheduled accordingly to accommodate working parents; teachers should also talk to parents at the beginning of the year regarding their schedules in order to determine how they can arrange meetings and how teachers can be more approachable. It is also recommended that meeting times should be flexible to accommodate parents working shifts and commuting.

Risimati (2001) is of the opinion that schools should use various methods to support parents to enhance their parenting skills and their networks and also to reduce their stress levels in parenting. Furthermore, Chindanya (2011) recommends that schools and parents should work together to effectively utilise what is available to them.

2.3.3.7 Socio-economic factors

Chindanya (2011) and Risimati (2001) indicate that socio-economic factors are barriers that hinder parent-teacher communication in rural schools. At times parents' financial constraints present a major obstacle for them in terms of their participation in their children's school activities (Finders & Lewis, 2009). Chindanya (2011) believes that most families in rural areas lack basic items, such as books, computers, playing cards and board games and that when opportunities for educational interaction between parents and children are limited, PI decreases. Low socio-economic circumstances lead to some parents failing to meet their obligations to their children and, as a result, they find it difficult to interact with schools (Finders & Lewis, 2009).

According to Risimati (2001), families living in low income conditions are less likely to have the time or energy to assist with homework and play a meaningful role in the education of their children. Nyama (2010) adds that parents living in poverty find it difficult to understand and communicate with teachers due to their low economic status and results in them feeling

inferior to the teachers. A low socio-economic status, therefore, has a negative influence on the education of learners and on PI because it affects day-to-day communication with schools; parents with a low socio-economic status feel unfit to communicate, question and discuss certain things which, according to them, they need to discuss further (Ngwenya, 2010). They perceive teachers as being highly educated, knowledgeable and people of a high status; in order to control these perceptions schools should develop better methods to assist parental participation in school activities, regardless of their economic status.

2.3.3.8 Past experiences of parents

Parents' own negative school experiences can influence their relationships with teachers although they simply may not know how to effectively interact with the educational system; obstacles can, therefore, become particularly problematic when parents are faced with concerns regarding their children's behaviour or their academic growth (Jooste, 2011; Graham-Clay, 2005). According to Finders and Lewis (2009), teachers often do not take into account how a parent's own experiences may influence school relations. They suggest that for many parents their own personal experiences created obstacles; parents who have dropped out of school do not feel confident around schools.

SMTs in rural schools need to find better methods to assist parents who fail to attend school activities because of different factors, like past experience. Instead of assuming that the non-attendance indicates uncaring parents, teachers should try to understand the obstacles that hinder parents from participating in their children's education (Finders & Lewis, 2009). Although parents may not directly attend school activities to discuss their concerns, SMTs should consider strategies to learn about such parents. Schools should work hard to prolong partnerships by encouraging on-going communication with parents – despite the effort required; they should build strong relationships that encourage effective communication even with parents who still have negative images of schools because of past experience. The assumption is that schools which have good relationships with parents enhance PI. The idea is that parents prefer to relate to partners who cooperate well and teachers who write good news cards to parents promote respectable relationships between schools and parents.

Poor communication can be a barrier that hinders effective communication in schools. According to Witte (2011), there are teachers whose expectations are beyond the abilities of parents; they tend to expect parents to participate in the education of their children without communicating with them. If their expectations are not met they become frustrated and feel

that parents are not committed to PI. Misinterpretation often occurs because of flawed ways of communicating information (Letsholo, 2006). Teachers should talk to parents about their roles in the schooling of learners and with regard to their relationships with schools to meet their expectations. Erlendsdottir (2010) shows that parents want open and frequent conversations with schools. Blue-Banning *et al.* (2004) assert that parents should be provided with quality communication that is clear, free of jargon and coordinated in such a manner that they have easy access to it. Furthermore, teachers are sometimes hindered in their communication with parents because of rigid hierarchical rules which mandate that several individuals must be informed, given permission or participate in conversations with parents. There is also a possibility that the conversations may be disrupted by noise, limited time and privacy issues (Letsholo, 2006). It is suggested that two-way communication is needed in schools.

2.3.3.9 Limited understanding of PI amongst schools and parents

The limited understanding of PI by SMTs and teachers hinders it in rural schools. Raborife and Phasha (2010) indicate that most parents lack confidence of their view points and the value of their contributions regarding school issues and they have a limited understanding of how schools function; they are regularly not permitted to interact with teachers because they perceive themselves as more educated than the parents. According to Risimati (2001), principals have little knowledge of strategies to establish comprehensive PI programmes which can involve the majority of parents in a variety of ways and teachers complain that they do not have written policies concerning school-family-community partnerships. Chindanya (2011) found that SMTs also have little understanding of PI and concludes that the limited understanding of PI originates in teacher colleges and university education departments that give PI insufficient attention in the curriculum.

This has a negative effect on SMTs and teachers because they experience problems in involving parents in the education of their children. The issue of limited understanding of PI does not only affect SMTs and teachers, but also the parents, many of whom display low levels of PI although a few did indicate a remarkable appreciation of the concept by suggesting interesting ways in which they could be involved (Chindanya, 2011). Chindanya (2011) recommends that teacher development programmes and the universities education departments should include PI in their curricular and also provide workshops and in-service training for teachers in schools.

2.4 PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOLS

Parental involvement in schools is discussed in terms of a legal framework and perspective in South Africa, the influence of school governing bodies on the involvement of parents in schools, international perspectives on parental involvement in schools and parental involvement in decision-making.

2.4.1 Legal framework and perspective on parental involvement in South Africa

Since the establishment of democracy in 1994 South Africa has adopted a number of legislated policies aimed at democratising education in the country. These include the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) and South African Schools Acts (1996). The Constitution of the RSA provides the basis on which national and provincial government can act on matters that affect education. Section 29 of the constitution (RSA, 1996) acknowledges the transformation and the democratisation of the education system which includes partnerships and the roles of all stakeholders - parents, teachers, learners and community members - in schools while SASA (1996) is the cornerstone of democratic governance in schools. Naidoo (2005) is of the opinion that the introduction of new policies for school governance is intended to pursue national goals of economic growth, democratisation and equity. Parents are involved in school governance where their functions include oversight, policy formulation and decision-making. SASA (1996, s23 [2]) mandates the formation of SGBs comprising parents, teachers and non-teaching staff to oversee the governance of public schools. The involvement of teaching staff, non-teaching staff and families in school governance is intended to enhance the academic performance of learners, teaching and schools management (Van Wyk, 2004). When parents participate in school governance they are able to curb some of the problems faced by learners in schools, such as discipline issues and drug abuse (Duma, Kapueta & Khanyile, 2011). Although SMTs manage the schools on a day-to-day basis, SGBs have a statutory or legal duty to ensure that there is efficient and effective governance in public schools.

SASA (1996, s18 [2]) mandates SGBs to convene meetings at least once every school term, and to provide reports on their activities to parents, teachers, learners and non-teaching staff at least once a year. In addition to parents' attending general meetings, they must ensure that their children complete their school work and perform assigned homework (SASA, 1998, s6). According to SASA (1996, s21), SGBs must encourage parents and other staff members to perform voluntary work in schools, adapt the school constitution, improve the mission

statement of the school, administer and control school property, pay for services at the school, and also support the principal, teachers and the other staff members of the school in the performance of promotional functions. The Department of Education (2005) (now called Department of Basic Education) maintains that the involvement of parents should be based on equal interaction between schools and parents. As the Department of Education (2005) observes teachers are reluctant to telephone parents when there is a problem with their children at school which may result in parents being defensive or feeling intimidated. Schools are encouraged to invite parents to be involved in educational matters by sharing information with their children and by giving support to other learners in classrooms. Parents should be involved in workshops and support groups by providing them with the necessary skills. They should also be involved in the development of school policies which means that schools should empower parents to support their children, at home and at school. However, parents should refrain from interfering in school affairs in a manner that can negatively affect the smooth running of the school. When parents go to schools in support of their children they should show respect for the teachers by not disrupting classes as well as for school policies in order to avoid conflict.

Bender and Heystek (2003) cite the former Minister of Education of South Africa, Professor Kader Asmal, in a study on educational leadership and the community when he stipulated that in South Africa the priority of school-community relationships was becoming a reality by implementing *Tirisano*, the school effectiveness programme, in all provinces which, in Sesotho, means working together. SASA (Act No.108 of 1996) empowers parents to play a meaningful role in public school governance and to be efficiently involved in the functions of schools. It also provides a guideline for schools that parents serving on school governance bodies must remain in the majority to avoid them being outvoted during decision-making. Duma, Kapueta and Khanyile (2011) are of the view that parents can be mandated to serve on school governance bodies with the sole purpose of supporting school management structures and the performance of teachers and other staff members. This can lead to educational authorities encouraging schools to implement strategies that ensure that more parents participate in their children's education.

Even with encouragement from the educational authorities for parents to participate, rural schools continue to experience a lack of PI. Kgaffe (2001) indicates that because their parents work in urban areas many school children are cared for by their, mostly illiterate grandparents who are not able to attend school activities. Msila (2012) agrees that the involvement of black

parents in South African schools is particularly lacking, and suggests that rural schools experience little participation from parents. According to Msila (2012), SMTs find it difficult to manage schools without parental involvement and that rural schools experience many challenges, including bullying, working in dilapidated structures, and learners who come to school with incomplete homework. Rural parents' main reasons for their reluctance to participate in school governance are that they do not have the necessary skills and knowledge and they believe that teachers are better equipped to run the schools. A study by Mashau (2011) shows that parents do participate in their children's education while they are still young, but as their children grow up their participation declines drastically. This suggests that rural schools should start thinking of better strategies to involve parents in school governance. Kgaffe (2001) suggests that community leaders should guide grandparents on how they can become involved in the education of their grandchildren.

Studies conducted by South Africans, such as Bender and Heystek (2003), Nyama (2010) and Risimati (2001), suggest that PI leads to improved academic achievement, school attendance, social behaviour and self-esteem; it minimises drop-out rates, improves teacher-parent teamwork and contributes to improved school programmes, climate conditions and the socio-economic circumstances in the communities. Michael (2004) adds that PI leads to a sense of ownership, and that when schools perform well in areas, such as education and sports, parents feel proud and they tend to associate themselves more with the schools as they believe that their contributions have a positive effect on school activities. In effect, it may help to reduce certain costs in schools because when parents volunteer to perform certain services it helps to reduce some of the financial burden.

Parents are also able to play a role in the academic performance of their children, regardless of their educational backgrounds. Raborife and Phasha (2010) maintain that families with low levels of education do not feel sufficiently confident to make a contribution to the schools. They are uncertain as to whether their viewpoints would be welcomed by teachers and other school staff members. Bender and Heystek (2003) suggest that although parents' levels of literacy may be a problem - being unable to read or write, they can still assist their children in other ways. According to Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009), parents who have dropped out of school or who are on the fringes of society for various reasons, show that they deeply care about their children's education and they try to help their children avoid the mistakes that they made. Schools should ensure that they welcome parents from a variety of backgrounds. With reference to the findings of Mashau (2011), parents are regarded as difficult by the schools

when they attempt to participate in solving issues that affect the education of their children. However, as parents rarely communicate with the schools, the schools tend to assume that they do not have an interest in the education of their children. Parents should be treated with respect in order to avoid a decline in PI because when parents are not treated justly they tend to withdraw their involvement in their children's schools. In communicating with parents the schools should avoid using educational terminology or jargon. Furthermore, Mashau (2011) cautions against schools using offensive signs, such as 'no parents beyond this point'; 'please will parents refrain from entering the corridors'; and 'parents are welcome when they make appointments.' Mashau (2011) explains that such statements antagonise parents and result in a disconnection between the schools and parents. PI is best explained by the following comparison: PI is like a tree; it constantly needs water to grow well. When schools involve parents and treat them with the respect and dignity that they deserve - regardless of their background, they will feed the seed (parents) and that, in turn, will lead to more active participation from the parents in the school's social and academic activities.

Researchers have found that there are various factors that inhibit PI in schools. Studies conducted by Risimati (2001) and Kgaffe (2001) reveals that most schools do not have any written policies relating to PI, teachers and parents, therefore, have access to very limited information about PI. Many schools do not have clear guidelines on how, when and where to involve families in the decision-making process from which learners can benefit. Chindanya (2011) maintains that teachers' and SMTs' limited understanding of PI is the result of colleges and universities that fail to provide sufficient time and space in curricula for PI which results in them struggling to involve parents in the education of their children. In some cases, SMTs and teachers even resent PI because they believe that it interferes with their day-to-day work and they are also of the opinion that parents should not be allowed to be involved in the education of their children because they, themselves, lack education. They maintain that teachers should be solely responsible for education matters because they are professionally trained to work with learners. According to Van Wyk (2004), parents who are involved in school governance lack confidence; they are uncertain of their responsibilities, and therefore, depend on the teachers and SMTs to use their professional knowledge. This suggests that rural parents do not have sufficient knowledge or skills to be involved in PI, but the findings of this study show that parental participation has a positive effect on the academic improvement of learners; it is necessary for parents to be involved in various programmes and committees which can bring about change to the lives of school children.

Nyama (2010) believes that schools, especially those situated in rural areas, should establish special programmes to help empower parents acquire knowledge related to educational curriculum development and for taking part in decision-making processes. Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009) are adamant that parents should be given information about the elections of school representatives and new educational policies and legislation that need to be considered and that a connection and communication path be established with other parent leaders and governors. They assume that if SMTs, teachers and parents have a better understanding of the role of PI in schools it is a process that will be successfully improved. Parents should be informed about the relevant issues listed above, regardless of how disinterested, hard to reach or uninvolved they may be.

2.4.2 Influence of school governing bodies on the involvement of parents in schools

Parents serving on SGBs have the power to influence parental involvement in schools. SASA (1996, s20) stipulates that SGBs have the responsibility to motivate parents, teachers and learners as well as non-teaching staff to perform their duties for schools. When problems occur in schools, parents who serve on SGBs, together with other SGB members, should arrange meetings to discuss issues that affect the education of their children. SGBs should encourage parents to participate in school activities, such as volunteering to perform manual work by helping to develop and grow vegetable gardens, cleaning schools and surroundings after heavy rainfalls or long school holidays, and by volunteering their spare time to teach cultural activities, like drama, traditional songs and stories. SASA (1996, s36) mandates SGBs in public schools to use resources supplied by the state to enhance the value of education for all learners. SGBs are required to communicate with parents on how to improve the collection of school funds, which can be accomplished by making use of various resources, such as fundraising drives, donations and other financial contributions.

At the beginning of the year, SGB members may involve parents in the drafting of year plans whereby parents and teachers can plan excursions for learners and other important projects together which can be helpful for the schools and the learners. Parents may be involved in evaluating, managing and monitoring projects which may give them a sense of ownership. If this is achieved, many school projects would be successful. SASA (1996, s21) mandates SGBs to purchase textbooks, educational materials and equipment for schools and to pay for services provided to schools. SGB members are required to ensure that parents buy school

uniforms for their children, maintain them and make sure that their children wear them on stipulated days.

Parents are encouraged to help take care of school resources, such as text books. When learners receive new books, parents should be requested to cover the books with plastic wrapping. SGBs should also encourage parents to interact with schools and their activities. Parents are expected to attend school meetings throughout the year, check the performance of their children, and motivate their children to complete their homework and learn their work. In school governance, SGBs are the heartbeat of every public school, and educational authorities should, therefore, try by all means possible to sustain the existence of PI in schools. According to SASA (1996, s7), all parents - be they educated or uneducated, rural or urban - are given powers to govern schools through their SGBs. With the power bestowed on them, parents are expected to perform their duties that affect and sustain the effective running of schools.

2.4.3 International perspectives on parental involvement in schools

Internationally, the United States (US) also experiences a paucity of PI. Finders and Lewis (2009) conducted a study on why some parents do not attend parent meetings or events and found that parents fail to attend meetings due to their working hours or having more than one job. After a day's work parents go home; tend to household duties; pay attention to their children; and prepare dinner. In addition to these tasks and family obligations mothers, particularly, are expected to take care of school related matters too. Some parents work night shifts which make it impossible for them to attend evening programmes or school functions, such as concerts and parent evenings; they also find it difficult to attend events during the day as that is the only time they have to rest and tend to household and family obligations. Lightfoot's (2004) study in the US revealed similar findings regarding parental involvement in urban schools and the social and academic competencies of urban kindergarten children. According to his study, people failed to attend parent meetings because of work commitments, which took up most of their time. According to Boscole (2012), fostering parent's involvement in the elementary classroom shows that PI enhances children's learning, social skills and growth. However, he warns that PI may be threatened because of the disconnect that exists between the learners' families and school cultures, especially in rural households in South Africa.

Boscole (2012) believes that an evolving cultural environment in the US requires teachers to practise PI in an improved way that will help their learners survive in a multicultural society. Furthermore, he suggests that building a rapport and trust with parents helps to promote a mutually beneficial relationship; teachers who attempt to understand learners' families and their backgrounds better create a more welcoming atmosphere in their classroom for the parents. Similarly, Harris, Caldwell and Longmuir (2011) are of the opinion that relationships between schools and families form an integral component in schools and that good relationship between schools and parents and their general expectations of learners' positive academic achievement are possible to achieve through regular contact between the partners. In conjunction with a trusting relationship, a high level of engagement with the families may also enhance the performance of learners. A study conducted by Tam and Chan (2009) in Hong Kong concerning PI in terms of the homework of primary school learners reveals that parents seldom participate in the education of their children when they are young. This results in high school children not performing well. They further suggest that it is often parents from poor cultural backgrounds who fail to assist their children with homework or guide them properly. With intense homework pressure, younger children depend on the emotional and practical support of their parents, and when such support is forthcoming, their learning improves. In terms of the findings of this study, PI is important to the learners' homework, and it seems that parents should participate in their children's education in order to establish strong relationships with the schools.

Deslandes (2001) believes that parental role construction is very important as it determines the type of activities parents should consider when interacting with their children. Sanders and Epstein (1998) suggest that the decline of parental involvement reflects weaker family involvement practices. The studies by Liske (2011), Van Roekel (2008) and Arias and Morillo-Campbell (2008) found that parents fail to participate in school governance because they lack formal training in PI as well as no time to attend to school issues. The authors found that parents fail to communicate with schools effectively due to language differences, their own past experiences with schools, a lack of information and proper guidance on PI, the use of educational jargon by teachers, and their low levels of education. Parents are apparently dissatisfied with schools that have limited approaches to PI, instead of focusing on what parents can do to support the school and learners' academic achievements, schools should focus on how they can support parents. As a result parents do not attend school activities - even when they are requested to do so and this is assumed to have a negative impact on PI in

schools. Positive action should be considered to avoid the total malfunction of PI in rural schools. Arias and Morillo-Campbell (2008) suggest that teacher training can assist in addressing such problems and improve the perturbing situation. Furthermore, Mannathoko and Mangope (2013) recommend that schools should invite parents to meet teachers on a monthly basis and to involve parents by including them in planning and policy development at schools. However, Sanders and Epstein (1998) also affirm that schools cannot expect to accomplish their ideal programmes overnight.

The changes in educational policies do not only affect schools and learners in South Africa, but also in other parts of the world. According to Shah (2003), many countries, particularly developing countries, have initiated a process of decentralising their education systems with the aim to transfer power and decision-making to local units of government. Dunne, Akyeampong and Humphreys (2007) feel that the new relationship, which is emerging in the form of decentralised governance, will help provide equitable basic education in African countries. They maintain that decentralisation is an initiative that seeks to provide citizens with the opportunity to participate in local decision-making and, in turn, to improve access to education. For a long time community members did not have opportunities to participate in the schooling of their children. Education systems were centralised and bureaucratic, which meant that even if certain individuals showed an interest in the education of the learners, they were denied access of involvement. The development of a decentralised system in school governance should provide opportunities for community members to contribute to decision-making processes and to take ownership in their schools.

UNICEF Ethiopia established a Child-Friendly School (CFS) model in 2007 in selected schools which placed an emphasis on teaching effectiveness and community involvement, with the hope that it will promote school quality (UNICEF, 2010). Although much remains to be done, all the stakeholders seem to be happy with the progress of community involvement. The programme has contributed to increased enrolments and parental involvement in school affairs. This implies that PI in schools does not move on its own, but that it requires people who are fully committed and dedicated to take it forward. When educational authorities formulate policies, they should also offer guidelines to ensure that the role players do not act unlawfully.

A study conducted by Che (2010) in New Mexico on parental involvement in education reveals that schools in New Mexico, Utah and Arizona have a low level of PI. The author

recommends that schools should improve their ways of involving parents and communities by using innovative approaches that make parents feel welcomed in schools. They should distribute information about events and they should invite parents to attend at least one event per annum, and they should distribute student-teacher handbooks at the beginning of the year. Che's study also shows that most participants agree that there are no parent resource centres, where parents are educated through workshops to participate in PI.

A study conducted in Croatia by Sugawara *et al.* (2012) on parental involvement in an emerging democracy, reveals that even when PI receives attention in schools, there is still little empirical research on the topic. They suggest that PI takes place as a result of educational reforms which are intended to prepare the Croatian community for entry into the European education system. Their PI encompasses school members, parents, community members, local government and the international development community. Besides the learners' improved academic performance and social behaviour, PI helps parents to work more closely with government institutions to voice their interests to work together, and to become involved in decision-making processes which indicate that Croatian communities are actively involved in the education of their children. In the Netherlands, Bakker and Denessen (2007) are of the opinion that empirical research lacks consistency in the processing and measurement of PI. However, PI expects parents to participate in school-based activities, such as assisting in the classroom and with home-based activities. According to Hamutenya (2013), rural parents are more reluctant to involve themselves in school activities. This reluctance is often caused by a fear of interacting with schools and their more educated members. Most parents in rural schools have low levels of education and feel threatened by teachers whom they regard as "highly educated," and which results directly in the poor involvement of parents in schools.

A study in Nigeria by Grace, Jethro and Aina (2012) shows that the level of involvement of parents, in terms of the academic performance of pupils in elementary schools, depends on their social class and the maternal levels of education. According to the findings of their study, PI decreases as children get older. In a study published a year earlier, Liske (2011) made a similar observation. Furthermore, Grace *et al.* (2012) argue that the way in which schools interact with parents may affect learners negatively, but if PI is well coordinated the social life and academic performance of children may be enhanced. The study further indicates that parents are expected to assist their children with homework, encourage them in terms of school issues, and recognise and acknowledge their academic performance.

The study conducted by Chindanya (2011) on parental involvement in schools found that in Zimbabwe there is still a lack of PI in schools. His study concluded that school board, teachers and parents have little understanding of PI as there are few school policies to guide them in their responsibilities. In Zimbabwean schools, PI basically refers to parent involvement in paying school fees and levies and in providing services for renovating and building schools. Most of the teachers believe that parents are incapable of contributing to the education of their children due to their low levels of education and poor socio-economic status. Nonetheless, there are some parents who participate meaningfully. According to Chindanya (2011), when parents do not have high aspirations for their children, they do not make much of an effort to enhance their children's education, but when schools are welcoming, respectful, communicate openly with parents and show an interest in meeting the educational needs of the children, parents are more inspired to participate in the education of their children.

The studies conducted by international and African researchers reveal that PI contributes to better results in the education of school children. Proponents of PI, such as Martin (2009), Fiore (2011), Bakker and Denessen (2007), Smith, Wohlstetter, Kuzin and De Pedro (2011), and Semke and Sheridan (2011) agree that PI leads to improved school attendance, social behaviour, academic performance, self-esteem, and climate condition, enhances the socio-economic background of communities, and it leads to a reduced drop-out rate of learners and to improved programmes.

Emerson, Fear, Fox and Sanders (2012) further suggest that beyond educational achievement, PI is associated with various indicators of learner development, such as improved adaptation in schools, increased social capital, a greater sense of personal competence; greater engagement in school work; and more self-efficacy in learning.

Deslandes (2001) is of the opinion that parents with a strong ability to help their children succeed, tend to believe that their involvement will yield better results and that they are more likely to develop strategies for solving school-related problems. Grace *et al.* (2012) add that when schools collaborate with parents to support the education of learners, the learners do not only succeed academically but they also succeed in life.

2.4.4 Parental involvement in decision-making

The inclusion of parents in decision-making processes has received a great deal of attention in educational reform strategies in South Africa since 1994 (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009). According to Bagarette (2012), parents who are given the freedom to become more involved in the governance of schools that their children attend are involved in making decisions about the standard and quality of their education and SASA (1996) encourages this kind of participation by legalising governing bodies. Bagarette (2012) explains that school principals do not always welcome PI in schools and, according to Jansinski (2012), SMTs and teachers have a tendency to underestimate the involvement of parents. Risimati (2001) believes that the roles of parents in decision-making should be limited to voting and to serving on school governing bodies and that they should not have a direct influence on curriculum delivery. This suggests that even when parents are empowered to participate in the education of their children, schools still do not understand the involvement of parents in decision-making processes, and therefore, it can be assumed that teachers think parents are not fit to participate on school issues. According to Sugawara *et al.* (2012), when parents participate in the education of their children, teachers become annoyed with them as they see it as interference in their professional duties, even when teachers are the ones who ostensibly encourage greater involvement from the parents.

To reduce the constant misunderstandings that exist between parents and schools with regard to decision-making in schools, Risimati (2001) recommends that principals should allow parents to participate in decision-making on all matters that affect them and the education of their children, and that schools must understand how parents can be included in decision-making at certain levels. However, it appears that schools do not trust parents and Heystek (2004) warns that a lack of trust between schools and parents can disturb their relationship, and ultimately, this can lead to a loss of support from parents. According to Heystek (2004), when parents and schools do not trust each other their meetings could turn into power struggles rather than being constructive ones from which learners benefit. Teachers are encouraged to change their attitudes if they want to engender partnerships and to show their trust in parents to avoid unnecessary conflict. Negative attitudes towards parents are likely to drive parents away.

PI in decision-making benefits both families and schools in day-to-day activities because when parents are involved in the schools' decision-making, they participate in the formulation

of school policies and are acquainted with procedures on how to conduct meetings and prepare organisational budgets (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009). In turn, the SMTs may benefit from the constructive opinions of parents. SMTs are encouraged to frequently communicate with families and communities to acquire a better knowledge of their experiences, which will support the education of learners and maintain established partnerships.

The ways in which schools communicate with families determine the levels of PI and the academic achievements of learners. Epstein (1995) maintains that schools that manage limited communication and interaction with families balance three spheres of influence, namely: schools, families and communities which affect learning directly and which develop relatively separately. Schools may use numerous high-quality communication systems and interaction processes that are designed to bring these three spheres of influence closer together. Schools that frequently interact with families produce learners who will develop well academically and socially. Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009) suggest that partnerships in decision-making entail power-sharing. They advise schools to view parents as partners - not as clients - and to provide workshops that will teach them how to:

- influence decisions;
- raise issues and concerns;
- resolve problems;
- respect all parents;
- provide continual training for parents; and
- schedule regular meetings.

According to Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009), schools should establish improved ways of communicating with parents in order to involve families throughout the year. Schools can devise various programmes to encourage interaction with parents and communities. Che (2010) argues that although schools may establish good programmes related to PI, they often fail to implement, improve and sustain these programmes. This suggests that many schools simply obtain these programmes to pass time and impress their employers, while the programmes go unused throughout the year. The efforts that they put into obtaining the programmes are worthless because they are not used for the functions for which they were intended.

When schools conduct farewell parties and graduations parents take part in making decisions concerning those events. During parent meetings school issues, such as the budget, the curriculum, discipline and the opportunity to view and discuss learners' progress quarterly with teachers, are discussed and resolved. A major problem seems to be the reading and understanding of children's progress reports and many parents rely on other people to explain and interpret their contents.

2.5 COMMUNICATION

The term 'communication' will be reviewed under the following headings: Communication between teachers and parents; the effects of communication in schools; the effects of communication; and Challenges facing parents when communicating with teachers.

2.5.1 Communication between teachers and parents

The informal communication that exists between parents and teachers is not always sufficient to maintain PI in schools, so schools have a responsibility to communicate with various stakeholders at different levels to strengthen their relationships. According to Lemmer and Van Wyk (2004), communication between parents and schools is important for PI, but it seems to be poorly managed. Ibrahim *et al.* (2012) believe that communication involves creating better ways through which parents and schools may communicate with one another throughout the year. Schools should formulate programmes which are intended to update parents about school activities and with other information. As communication should be a two-way process, schools should establish channels of communication that will inspire parents to communicate throughout the year. In turn, parents should ensure that they communicate with the schools by attending meetings, responding to notices and interacting with the teachers.

According to Erlendsdottir (2010), it is not sufficient for principals to do all the communicating; they should also communicate with parents by reaching out to them and establishing good relationships with them. Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009) maintain that good communication includes the dispersal of better information on programmes and children's progress report and those parents should be allowed to provide feedback. Jooste (2011) firmly believes that quality and effective communication improves parent/teacher relationships, and that schools should find better ways to communicate with parents which motivate them to participate in the education of their children. Johnson (2013) found that parents prefer schools

that make use of two-way communication when interacting with them as they want to be heard and responded to. This means that the ways that schools use to communicate with parents should be efficient and effective. They should promote partnerships and continuous communication instead of encouraging a decrease in PI. According to Emerson *et al.* (2012), relationship building and continual communication is intended to update parents on school issues, to familiarise them with the language of communication, and to allow them to feel free to communicate with the teachers. It may be concluded that if the schools make the effort to encourage ongoing communication with parents, the academic performance as well as the behaviour of learners will improve.

2.5.1.1 Effective communication in schools

Effective communication refers to the process of understanding and sharing information, where listening also plays an important role (Jooste, 2011). Parents believe that good communication should be a two-way process, where someone will speak and listen to them and treat them as worthy of consideration and respect (Johnson, 2013). Most schools communicate with parents on a face-to-face basis when they visit the schools, in groups during parent meetings, during consultations to inspect their children's academic progress, *via* written forms of communication, by telephone, and Short Messages Service (SMS). Teachers are encouraged to listen when communicating with the parents, to show respect and not interrupt while parents are speaking as some parents feel offended by teachers interrupting them which they may consider to be a sign of disrespect. Teachers' lack of effective communication with parents during discussion adds to the problems the latter have with teachers.

It is vital that schools consider their time when communicating with parents regarding important issues. When they need to discuss sensitive issues with parents, they must prepare for the meetings (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009). The schools' personnel must create a favourable atmosphere that will help encourage parent participation. This may be done by having an open door policy to inspire parents to participate in school activities, to communicate their problems, and even to encourage them to contribute helpful ideas to the school. Agbo (2007) feels that it is necessary for teachers to take responsibility for opening paths of communication with parents and community members who want to interact with them, and to show parents that they are valued and that they are prepared to work with them. According to Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009), teacher-parent conversations should be well

planned before parents are invited to the school. When school personnel need to discuss sensitive issues with parents, they should ensure that there is a private classroom or office available so that no one else listens to their conversations. They should make use of various ways of encouraging PI, including the following:

- Allow parents to speak their own language.
- When parents are upset they should be given time to relax before they speak again - even when it is felt that the parents are wrong.
- Parent should not be interrupted before they have finished speaking.
- Unless schools communicate properly with parents there may be a gradual break-up of their relationships.

Effective communication is aimed at building good relationships with respect and the trust of parents. Hoberg (2004) is of the opinion that it is difficult to build trustworthy relationship when teachers lack basic work ethics while Agbo (2007) found that it takes trust, friendship and understanding on the teacher's part to get parents involved in schools. Therefore, schools should be alert when communicating with learners' parents and they should be polite when they talk to them. It can be assumed that if teachers lack work ethics and do not cooperate and respect parents and other partners, their relationships will be negatively affected.

Rural parents do not interfere in school issues - even when there are some serious problems that affect the education of their children (Ngwenya 2010). They believe that teachers are professionals and that they do not need any interference in their work. If there are issues that concern them, parents are convinced that teachers will contact them. Teachers should, therefore, ensure that they involve parents if there are matters that affect their children as it is not easy for parents to come to school uninvited. When schools start to involve parents more regularly, parents tend to gain more trust in the teachers and their relationships will grow. Schools can communicate with parents either in groups or as individuals, depending on what they wish to communicate, and these forms of communication allow their partnerships to flourish. Bender and Heystek (2003) suggest that effective communication and regular meetings between parents and teachers assist in improving PI levels.

Traditionally, schools communicate with parents *via* written communications, such as short notes, notices, letters, telephone calls and SMS's, for group meetings which include parent meetings, parent consultations and face-to-face conversations. Schools send either verbal or non-verbal messages with learners to inform parents. According to Van Wyk and Lemmer

(2009), schools should learn how they can start communicating earlier in the year regarding positive events as this will make communication much easier later on if problems arise. Johnson (2013) argues that having more information about schools is helpful but that it does not, necessarily, mean that the lines of communication are open.

2.5.1.2 *The effects of communication*

All forms of communication delivered by either teachers or parents determine the success or failure of PI. A well-expressed message can influence even the most difficult people to change their attitudes to respond, while a poorly communicated message can influence them to respond negatively. Letsholo (2006) acknowledges that there are times when parents and teachers have not been successful in communicating with each other because of unclear and distorted messages which hamper the communication process. Teachers should be polite when speaking to parents in order to make them feel welcome. When a message is not well communicated, parents may feel offended and humiliated and, ultimately, distance themselves from the schools' activities. According to Mestry and Gobler (2007), because of a lack of proper communication parents may start to believe that they are not welcome in schools and may experience an extreme degree of alienation and hostility.

Nandal (2014) asserts that schools should use everyday dialects as well as non-threatening, strengthening and encouraging language. Jooste (2011) suggests that since we constantly send messages of which we are unaware *via* our body language, we need to be aware of how we express ourselves when it comes to facial and body expressions, posture, eye contact, body movement and how closely we stand or sit next to other people. Communication does not only refer to an exchange of words, but also includes body language, which means that people can also express themselves through non-verbal communication. When school personnel interact with parents they should be conscious of their body language since it may just convey the opposite meaning to their verbal communication. According to Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009), when verbal and non-verbal information conflict, the non-verbal information almost always prevails. For example, if one person calls another "honey" in a sarcastic tone, that person is likely to feel disliked which Magaldi-Dopman and Conway (2012) refer to as misconception. If teachers have misunderstood parents and *vice versa*, it places the development of a true partnerships in jeopardy. Graham-Clay (2005) believes that conversation can also include impressions created or words expressed. Words and signs that are usually visible in school entrances provide visitors with meaning which could encourage parents to feel embraced and

accepted when visiting schools. Signs such as ‘welcome’ and ‘call again’ encourage parents to visit schools regularly and they find it easy to contribute their ideas and suggestions.

Schools should, therefore, use various forms of communications in order to enhance PI. When schools communicate regularly with parents, it may improve the performance of learners. In the school-setting, particularly, school principals are encouraged to develop an open door policy, which is one aspect that schools need most because it encourages parents to interact with schools regularly. According to Michael, Wolhuter and Wyk (2012), if there were policies on PI, more parents would become involved in school issues as they want to know about issues happening inside their children’s classrooms. Therefore, the lack of open policies negatively affects the smooth running of schools. If schools are not open enough to the parents, parents do not feel free to visit the schools. When parents are free to visit the schools, they can share their good ideas on school issues. Hoberg (2004) emphasises that the more interaction there is between individuals over time, the greater their willingness will be to nurture trust. My view is that schools should be encouraged to enhance their communication with their partners in order to advance PI.

According to Emerson *et al.* (2012), PI can be promoted in the home by continuous communication between parents and teachers which also encourages constructive exchanges at home. The authors are of the opinion that there is no need to show the space between parents and school-based engagement, more especially where they complement one another. It is clear that parents and teachers work together to advance the lives of children. Teachers teach and guide learners while they are at school, and they give learners work to do both at school and at home. Emerson *et al.* (2012) maintain that learning in children begins before they enter school and continues when they start attending school. By implication learners learn inside and outside classrooms. Parents should assist in teaching children at home and link what they learn at school with what they learn at home. They should ensure that their children are taken care of from birth and guide them through various aspects of life, such as showing respect, being hardworking, acquiring acceptable social behaviour, and encouraging them to learn at home and at school. Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009) add that teachers provide professional skills, while parents tend to be more holistic and are concerned with the children’s ongoing development. According to Davis (2000), if parents and teachers share their ideas regarding the learners with one another, they will achieve better ways of providing skills that lead to success. Emerson *et al.* (2012) agree that regular communication between

parents and teachers enhances the trust between the two parties which is necessary to build positive rapport and partnerships.

When children attend new schools, parents and teachers start working together. According to Bender and Heystek (2003), a working partnership between parents and teachers enhances the probabilities or chances of successfully assisting children and becoming involved in school activities. They suggest that parents could, for example, be involved in such partnerships on three levels, namely: helping and showing an interest in the homework of their children, assisting the schools with specific tasks, and serving on the official governing bodies. It is assumed that teachers, in collaboration with SMTs and parents, can improve the lives of learners. The schools communicate their rules, programmes, policies and curriculum to parents; parents are given forms to fill in by the schools on which they write the details of their children, including their full details and their contact numbers. Parents also take contact details of teachers and SMT members so that they are can contact one another during the year. The schools discuss better approaches with the parents that they will use to assist learners academically.

Finders and Lewis (2009) feel that if teachers are truly interested in establishing a conversation with parents they need to understand the parents' points of view. During the year, the SMTs should invite parents to discuss important issues regarding the development of school infrastructure, the social behaviour and the academic progress of learners. Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009) recommend that parents and teachers should continuously share their thoughts and ideas about the education of learners throughout the year. They should discuss issues regarding news about school policies, programmes and reforms. Parents need to know what is expected of their children and of themselves when assisting with homework. In order to reach greater heights of success, learners need positive feedback regarding their work and behaviour. Schools and parents should discuss what the best strategies would be in addressing the work and behaviour of learners. A good example would be for teachers to send parents simple SMSs to report their children's good progress and behaviour. School may also encourage parents to compliment their children for good performance in the classroom when they get home and the school should do the same in the morning during the administration period to encourage the whole class. Learners who perform poorly should receive extra encouragement to read and participate in school activities. The sharing of views between teachers and parents should include any decisions that need to be implemented for the good of the schools.

2.5.1.3 Challenges facing parents when communicating with teachers

There are various challenges parents encounter when communicating with teachers in rural schools that end up hindering the good rapport between parents and teachers and which may also influence the attendance of parents of school activities. Finders and Lewis (2009) believe that learners who perform poorly at school have parents who do not attend to school issues. According to Emerson *et al.* (2012), the academic performance of learners is more efficient when parents collaborate with teachers in encouraging a supportive learning environment, both at home and at school (Emerson *et al.*, 2012). Chindanya (2011) found that many parents are reluctant to attend school activities because they are seldom given the opportunity to share their views during meetings and that some parents do not attend meetings because they feel unwanted and are scared of being questioned about their debts.

Risimati (2001) laments that in most cases principals and teachers limit parents' roles in home activities to that of signing learners' homework books. Finders and Lewis (2009) suggest that parents may contribute numerous ideas which can assist teachers and administrators with ways that can promote PI as their views sometimes differ from those of the teachers. Parents do not appreciate schools dictating terms to them; they need schools to at least consider their view points; and instead of operating on the assumption that absence automatically translates into non-caring the focus should be on the ways to lure parents into schools (Finders and Lewis, 2009). Chindanya (2011) suggests that the way to increase parents' attendance at school events is to give them opportunities to express their expectations and concerns and to suggest how certain problems can be confronted and solved. Including them would make them feel needed and useful in terms of their children's education and this may disperse some of the misplaced low views they and teachers have regarding the attributes of PI.

Parents should not be embarrassed or feel exposed when they visit schools; rather they should be respected. For example, in Msila's (2012) study it is evident that parents were aware that the teachers disrespect them as they queried the presence of the parents and their qualifications. Parents are also frustrated by the unfriendly attitude of teachers as well as the insufficient information that they get from the schools (Frank 2010). In addition, Kgaffe (2001) argues that schools rarely reveal the projects that are aimed at uplifting the local community. Parents are not given the opportunity to initiate programmes for the school and when schools do not involve parents in any decision-making it signifies that parents have no value in PI which can lead to weakened communication between parents and schools.

2.6 SCHOOLING IN RURAL AREAS

Schooling and schools' relationships with parents in rural areas are examined in terms of the available relevant literature with reference to, particularly, setting and teaching and learning.

2.6.1 School setting

Schooling in rural areas is governed by various factors that affect the activities performed by parents and teachers and that make it unique from other settings. According to Witte and Sheridan (2011), the parents of learners in rural schools struggle with similar challenges to those encountered in urban schools. Redding and Walberg (2014) show that even if parents in rural schools do attend school events - sometimes even more often than those in urban and suburban communities - there still seems to be little communication with their children about school programmes or any interaction with teachers. Hamutenya (2013) states that school programmes are essential because they help parents take an active role in their children's education and development. This suggests that rural parents who do not participate in programmes aimed at assisting their children in school are depriving them of information that can help them improve academically.

2.6.1.1 *Involvement of parents in curriculum issues*

It is important that parents in rural areas are familiar with what their children are taught in schools and how they can help them to learn at home. Kgaffe (2001) indicates that most of the learners live with their grandparents because their parents go to the cities to work or to seek better jobs. According to her study, the grandparents are poor, illiterate and need assistance in providing for the educational needs of their grandchildren. Some of the learners are orphans and do not have adults who can offer support, guidance or participation in their education (Raborife & Phasha, 2010). Kimu (2012) is of the opinion that parents also fail to participate in the education of their children due to illiteracy and their long working hours. Bonuke (2013) found that most parents in rural areas cannot read and write and that their low levels of education affect their participation in schools. Parents also feel that they are ineffective mediators and that they are not capable of sharing constructive ideas. It could, therefore, be possible for teachers to easily manipulate and undermine parents, resulting in them not to performing their roles effectively. The parents also feel that they are not equipped to help their children at home with school activities which contribute to their insecurity in attending school

meetings. This indicates that schooling in rural areas differs from other settings in that children in rural areas do not receive proper support or guidance from their parents.

Studies by Risimati (2001) and Kimu (2012) reveal that rural schools lack developed and written school policies that stipulate what the parents' roles should be and how schools should support PI. It is not surprising that most parents are unaware of what their roles should be. According to Chindanya (2011), most parents have a limited understanding of PI; they believe that school matters are solely the responsibility of SMTs and teachers who are trained to perform their professional roles. It is also discouraging to think that SMTs and teachers do not appear to have a common understanding of PI. Agbo (2007) affirms that teachers in rural schools, especially if they are not from the community where they teach, lack the training needed to communicate effectively with parents. In addition to the lack of written policies Kgaffe (2001) suggests that, on the whole, parents lack the knowledge and skills to attend to school issues. Rural parents, particularly, lack the knowledge of what to do (Mannathoko & Mangope, 2013). Murphy (2009) maintains that most of the parents require guidance from schools on how they can assist their children to learn successfully.

2.6.1.2 Socio-economic factors in rural areas

Socio-economic factors have an effect on the education of learners. Kaur's (2013) findings show that high socio-economic status leads to academic achievement in learners and better PI while low socio-economic status results in learners having limited access to important resources which causes additional stress and tension in the home. According to Kaur (2013), the availability of resources also plays an important role in the social and mental development of learners. His findings are supported by various other researchers. Kgafe (2001) and Msila (2012) indicate that most rural schools occupy old buildings with no proper play grounds and little, or no, teaching media and administrative help. They maintain that poverty in rural areas contributes to a lack of participation by important stakeholders who include parents and community members and that the problems that exist in rural schools are due to the following:

- Parents who do not want to attend school activities and only go to school when there are problems.
- Poor parents who cannot afford school fees.
- Teachers who are required to work overtime to cope with their responsibilities.
- An environment that is not favourable in terms of learning and teaching.

In addition, Schafft, Prins and Movit (2008) cite factors, such as the lack of child care; irregular employment of parents; and their limited access to social and health services. Furthermore, rural parents do not use mobile phones as a form of communication because they are too expensive (Bonuke, 2013). They also find it difficult to provide their children with materials, like textbooks, pencils and other stationary. Similar findings emerge in the work by Hossain and Zeitlyn (2010) who indicate that it is not unusual for children in Bangladeshi rural schools to attend classes without writing supplies such as pens, pencils and notebooks. They maintain that parents in the rural areas of Bangladesh are the poorest of the poor; they cannot afford to pay for books, private tutoring from teachers or any fees that may be required. These economic constraints hinder rural parents in providing their children with the education they need and they contribute to the low morale of teachers and the underperformance of learners (Hossain and Zeitlyn, 2010). According to Msila (2012), the lack of resources in rural schools is, mainly, due to parents being unemployed.

In addition to the lack of learning materials, the environment at home is not favourable for learning. Learners do not have sufficient time to do their homework because they are required to assist their parents with household chores; homework cannot be properly done at night due to poor, or no, light (Bonuke, 2013). Extreme poverty in rural areas forces parents to marry their children off before they complete their schooling; another option for the parents is to send them to work on farms or to have them employed as casual labourers (Kimu, 2012). Stofile (2008) argues that poverty clearly has a devastating effect on efficient teaching and learning in schools.

It can be concluded that the low economic status of parents in rural areas negatively affects the education of their children. Many, if not most, learners seek manual work on weekends and after school in order to earn pocket money. If they are involved in manual work after school it is obvious that they will not have time to study or complete their homework. Learners also give up their studies for work in order to support their parents and siblings in terms of clothing, food and other needs.

2.6.1.3 Language of communication

Most parents in rural areas struggle with the language used in general communication when interacting with teachers in schools, more especially multi-cultural schools. Some children, for example, are children of refugees who have fled their countries because of political unrest

(Raborife & Phasha, 2010). During school activities parents find it difficult to understand, speak and respond to teachers in a language which is not their mother tongue. This can lead to a failure in communication between the school and foreign and indigenous parents which can result in messages getting lost in translation. Jooste (2011) shows that the translation of documents may result in schools responding to, or interpreting, information incorrectly which may negatively affect teacher-parent relationships. To curb this problem, Kombo (2015) suggests that interpreters should be used when foreign parents communicate with the teachers of their children. The learners can also be affected in the learning and teaching process if they are not acquainted with the language of tuition. At times rural schools write and send messages to the parents who are illiterate in English and who do not understand the language; the result is that the parents fail to read them (Jooste, 2011). Frank (2010) gives evidence of communication between parents and teachers being hindered by learners who withhold circulars and letters of information from their parents; however, if they happen to reach the parents there is often difficulties in terms of understanding the terminology used. It can be seen that various language factors related to rural areas affect the day-to-day communication of schools with parents; schools should ensure that they use a language that is accessible to parents when communicating with them to avoid any misunderstandings.

2.6.2 Teaching and Learning

Teachers and parents play important roles in the education of learners and without them there would be no learning and teaching in schools. According to Hamutenya (2013), schools have a responsibility to actively involve parents in the learning process of their children by explaining the importance of education to them; by inviting them to school meetings; by arranging a day where parents get to review their children's school work; and by encouraging parents to provide school necessities for their children. The study by Ngwenya (2010) recognises parents as assets, modification agents and equal partners in the education enterprise - not as fault-finders determined get rid of teachers that they dislike. This indicates that teachers are not the only ones who are necessary in educating learners; they also need support from their parents. Parents and teachers should acquire better ways to communicate with each other so that they can help the learners as well as each other without a power struggle.

2.6.2.1 Involvement of parents in their children's education

Research shows that rural parents lack the knowledge and skills to assist their children with school matters (Hamutenya, 2013). Chindanya (2011) and Parmaswar (2014) reports that

parents feel that they are poorly equipped, they are uncomfortable in the school environment, they lack confidence in their ability to help their children with school assignments, and they feel intimidated by being made to believe that they do not have a right to interfere in school practices. It is because of these reasons that schools need to develop better ways to help parents feel more comfortable in working alongside teachers by providing them with the knowledge and better skills that can make them more productive in terms of the education of their children. Fortunately, many rural schools already have mechanisms in place that can be extended to promote family-school partnerships (Witte & Sheridan, 2011). Epstein (2001) suggests that parents and school personnel should work together to help create better programmes and further opportunities for learners. Risimati (2001) believes that schools could design programmes that assist parents who experience difficulties planning when, where and at what time parent-workshops should take place. According to Hamutenya (2013), school programmes can be used to train parents on how to get involved in their children's education as well as teach them some educational skills, including assisting them with teaching their children good morals; encouraging them to explain the importance of education to their children; and assigning them related topics to discuss with their children. Epstein (2010) maintains that partnership activities can have multiple focal points, such as addressing the needs of learners and parents.

The Department of Education (2005) mandates schools and parents to provide complete support by allowing all learners to learn and participate in schools. Schools and parents can only provide full support to learners if they work together as a team and create an environment that is favourable for effective teaching and learning to take place in schools.

2.6.2.2 The role of parents and teachers in learner education

Learners, parents, teachers and SMTs each fulfil distinct roles and behave in a variety of ways in order to achieve their goals (Womble, 2014). Sedibe (2012) says that parents are responsible for home education while teachers are responsible for learners' education in schools. However, teachers and parents must work together to improve the education of learners. Although the proponent of this study encourages teachers to work together with parents during the teaching and learning process, teachers remains accountable for the education of learners. Teachers must ensure that all different methods are used for learners to succeed in life and that all they are encouraged to realise their abilities, goals and potential.

Epstein (2001) maintains that the goal of collaboration in schools is to help learners succeed academically and to attend to life in its totality.

2.6.2.3 Learner education

The circumstances in which parents, teachers and learners operate in rural schools directly affect the academic performance of the learners. Rosenberg (2011) found that teachers and principals in rural areas are, generally, less educated and, therefore, they receive lower salaries and benefits than their urban colleagues. Community members prefer teachers from their own villages rather than teachers who come from other cities or provinces; the “foreign” teachers may experience geographical and social isolation. Teachers are required to teach multiple subjects due to low enrolment numbers; they should be qualified to teach all the subjects but in many cases they are not. Although teachers in rural areas are qualified to teach, researchers like Kimu (2012), Risimati (2001) and Kgaffe (2001) have found that they have not receive formal training in PI and this lack of training makes them unwilling to share authority with parents; they do not encourage parents to participate in their children’s education. Consequently, teachers also fail to involve parents in school governance and school activities.

Learners in rural areas do not have sufficient time to study. Adedeji and Olaniyan (2011) found that many families depend on their children assisting during busy times; for example, when they harvest agricultural products. According to the study by Wabike (2013) on ‘arming the rebels for development’ related to parental involvement among fishing communities in Tanzania, the boys often help their parents straighten fishing nets; clean boats; and transport fish to the marketplace while the girls often help their mothers clean; dry the fish; and help at the market in selling the fish. This indicates that for learners in rural areas life is different from that of their urban counterparts in that during these times rural learners do not have time for their schoolwork. It is no wonder that the studies by Wabike (2013), Kimu (2012) and Adedeji and Olaniyan (2011) found that learners in rural areas perform poorly.

These researchers discovered that most learners in primary schools repeat standards regularly and that nearly half of the pupils do not complete their education. The literature demonstrates that both parents and teachers contribute to the low performance of learners in some way or another. Similarly, Wabike (2013) believes that dropout rates are even more alarming in learners who complete primary school but do not continue to secondary (high) school. When teachers do try to involve parents in PI, it seems that they do so without guidelines (Risimati, 2001). That parents do not receive the necessary support from teachers is confirmed by

Hamutenya (2013) who states that schools do not have programmes in place to provide parents with the required knowledge and skills to help their children with homework and, as a result, parents do not know what to do in terms of assisting their children (Chindanya, 2011). According to Hamutenya (2013), children are aware that their parents cannot read or write and so they do not ask their parents to help them with homework. Msila's (2012) study also found that teachers do not see the necessity of giving homework to learners because they know that they come to school on a daily basis with incomplete homework. Tam and Chan (2009) argue that some teachers do not involve parents directly in the homework of their children due to a lack of understanding of other cultural backgrounds. The above findings imply that teachers do not work diligently to help parents assist their children with homework and that parents fail to help their children because of a lack of proper education and commitment.

2.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter has reviewed information from the relevant available literature on how schools communicate with parents in rural schools, including parental involvement in schools, communication, schooling in rural schools and a theoretical and conceptual framework. Parental involvement in schools was dealt with in terms of a legal framework and perspectives on parental involvement in South Africa and internationally. The chapter highlighted various ways of communicating that involve one- and two-way communication. One-way communication includes factors, such as newsletter, notebooks and news cards while two-way communication involves aspects, such as parent meetings, phone calls and house visits. This chapter also discussed factors that hinder effective communications in rural schools, such as parents' low levels of education; lack of proper guidance from schools; language barriers encountered by parents; and other factors. The next chapter, Chapter 3, documents the research methodology.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1. INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter reviewed the relevant available literature regarding the experiences of SMTs in rural primary schools in communicating with parents. The literature unlocked factors that are important to this study, such as parental involvement, communication between parents and teachers, schooling in rural areas and an appropriate theoretical and conceptual framework. This chapter examines the methodology, the research approach and the research design adopted for this study as well as the process of how data was collected and analysed and how ethical considerations were attended to.

3.2 RESEARCH APPROACH

The study is located within the interpretative paradigm and qualitative research approach. Creswell (2012) describes qualitative research as a form of inquiry in which researchers interpret what they see, hear and how they understand the information. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2014), Maree (2007), and Leedy and Ormrod (2010), qualitative research is a study of a phenomenon in all its complexity in a natural setting. Cohen *et al.* (2013) add that a qualitative approach should be studied in full rather than in fragments in order to reach a better understanding. The use of the qualitative approach assisted the researcher to explore the experiences of SMTs and teachers when communicating with parents in rural primary schools.

The researcher arranged the participants in a natural setting which motivated them to share their thoughts and experiences with regard to the topic. According to Leedy and Ormrod (2010), qualitative research deals with observation, motivation, experiences, thoughts, problems and behaviour as well as discovering describing, comparing and analysing characteristics of a particular unit. This research collected information using multiple sources, including personal interviews, observation and document analysis. Creswell (2012) indicates that qualitative researchers collect data by examining documents, observing behaviour and interviewing participants. The researcher interacted with SMTs, teachers and parents to explore how they communicate among themselves to enhance the academic performance of learners. The use of qualitative research also helped the researcher to understand the factors that contribute to poor communication between teachers and parents in rural schools. In the

context of this study, the researcher conducted a deep investigation into the issues that hinder PI in rural schools.

According to Chindanya (2011), a lack of PI is a problem in rural primary schools because it negatively affects the education of learners; they tend to come to school late; they do not respect their teachers; and they rarely complete their homework. The researcher had time to listen to the participants' statements in order to understand the problems that cause low PI in rural primary schools. The use of qualitative research allowed the researcher to conduct the research according to its principles. The SMTs, teachers and parents were given sufficient time to share their experiences regarding issues that hinder ineffective communication in rural primary schools. The researcher assimilated all information provided through word-of-mouth action and behaviour.

The study by Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest and Namey (2005) provide the characteristics of qualitative research as follows: the study is conducted in the natural setting that provides the researcher with details needed and it is flexible. It allows for a greater spontaneity and adaption of interaction between the researcher and the participants. The researcher asks open-ended questions without being controlled, the wording of the interview schedule is used which permits the participants to respond in detail and elaborately, and the researcher is able to probe participants in order to obtain further in-depth information needed for the study.

The characteristics of qualitative research, listed above, guided the researcher to interact accordingly with the participants who were asked open-ended questions which enabled them to elaborate on the topic of the study.

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

McMillan and Schumacher (2014) describe research design as a general plan that the researcher uses to select sites, subjects and data collection methods to answer the research question. Leedy and Ormrod (2010) add that it is a plan of what researchers intend to do when conducting research. These statements indicate that a research design provides the researcher with clear guidelines on how to obtain information that will answer the research question(s).

A case study research design was used which, according to Neale, Thapa and Boyce (2006), is a story about something unique, special or interesting and which can be about individuals, organisations, programmes, neighbourhoods, institutions and events. Creswell (2012) further

indicates that it involves the study of an issue explored through a case within a bounded system.

Leedy and Ormrod (2010) maintain that a case study examines a particular individual, programme or event in depth for a certain period. In the context of this study, the researcher used a case study to interact with selected rural schools in a chosen circuit in the Mopani District of Limpopo Province. The case study was undertaken to understand how SMTs and teachers in rural schools interact with parents to enhance the social lives and academic performance of learners. Three schools were selected to conduct personal interviews, observation and document analysis. The researcher explored how SMTs communicate with parents, involve them in school decision-making and collaborate with communities. The schools were suitable for the study because they allowed the researcher to explore and understand individuals and organisations in context.

The case study was aimed at understanding the experiences of SMTs when communicating with rural parents in primary schools. The researcher used a multiple case study to examine issues that hinder effective communication between SMTs and parents. Rowley (2002) suggests that case studies may offer certain insights that cannot be achieved by other approaches. He believes that it is a useful source for the primary exploratory stage of a research project. According to Baxter and Jack (2008), a case study is undertaken for the following reasons and in the following circumstances: to answer how and why questions, when the researcher wants to cover contextual conditions believed to be relevant to the phenomenon under study, and when the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not clear.

The use of how and why questions in the study assisted the researcher to understand the study's topic better. The participants were able to elaborate on their responses and the researcher could probe for clarity. The researcher was able to comprehend the experiences shared by parents which caused their non-participation in the education of their children.

Maree (2007) suggests that a major advantage of a case study is that it provides the researcher with an opportunity to provide a voice for the voiceless in the different ways of collecting data from children and marginalised groups. When using multiple sources and techniques to collect data the researcher determines and advances the type of evidence that the study intended to gather, analyse and be used to answer the research question. A case study largely uses a

qualitative approach to accumulate data and tools, like surveys, interviews, observation and a documentation review to collect data.

Cohen *et al.* (2013) add that the findings of a case study are more easily understood by a wide audience as they speak for themselves; they provide insights into other similar situations and cases, thereby assisting with the interpretation of similar cases, and they can be understood by a single researcher. The case study is a clear and logical way of following the research procedure and the use of multiple sources. The use of the case study enabled the researcher to understand the topic more fully.

As a researcher, one should be aware of the disadvantages that could derail research in a case study. According to Neale *et al.* (2006), the main disadvantage for inexperienced researchers in using a case study is that many novices fail to manage the length of the study; participants often provide a great deal of information about the case in a narrative form which tends to make it difficult for researchers to maintain the interest of the participants. Case study researchers are not always systematic in their data collection which tends to make their studies lose objectivity. It is also difficult to generalise a case and, according to Maree (2007), the lack of generalisation in case studies is caused by the use of a single study. Researchers ensure that studies are protected against issues that may derail them by collecting sufficient information in a practical and useable manner.

A case study has unique characteristics. According to Cohen *et al.* (2013), and Leedy and Ormrod (2010), a case study enables readers to understand ideas more clearly, rather than simply providing them with the abstract themes and principles, a focus on individuals or groups, and seeking to understand their perceptions. It studies the unknown and poorly understood situations, it is useful for studying how individuals and programmes change over time and in providing preliminary support for a hypothesis, and it is worthy of use to study contemporary events - particularly when the behaviour of participants is not manipulated. Based on the above characteristics of a case study, the researcher ensured that the behaviour of the participants was not manipulated to avoid prejudice and a lack of rigour. The researcher used the case study to study individuals and situations over an extended period of time which is reported in simple clear language that may be understood by everyone.

3.4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2014), research methods are the methods which the researcher uses to collect and analyse data. Researchers believe that research methods are systematic and purposeful and that they are developed to acquire reliable and valid information. Leedy and Ormrod (2010) view research methods as the general approach the researcher takes in carrying out a project. Murchison (2010) is of the opinion that research methodology in qualitative research describes the way in which the researcher approaches the study.

3.4.1 Research population

Table 3.1: Study Participants

Participant group	Number of participants
Principals	3
HODs	3
CS1 teachers	3
Parents	3
Total	12

Neuman and Robson (2012) describe a research population as a large pool which plays an important role in sampling. For McMillan and Schumacher (2014) a research population is a group of elements or cases - individuals, objects or events - that conform to generalise the results of the research while Cohen *et al.* (2013) perceive population as a category of people who researchers intend to write about in their report and from which they plan to extract a sample. The researcher selected the participants in order to understand their thoughts and experiences about how they communicate with one another in rural primary schools. According to Diccico-Bloom and Crabtree (2006), the sample of an interview should be fairly homogeneous and share critical similarities related to the research question.

The research population for this study consisted of principals, HODs or senior teachers, CSI teachers and parents of children in rural primary schools located in Giyani in the Mopani District of Limpopo Province. The researcher used a convenient sample to select rural primary schools located in Giyani because they were nearby and the study aimed at studying deep

rural areas in Limpopo Province. Deep rural schools were relevant for the study because they had features that were similar to those of other schools in the same context, such as poor infrastructure, many unemployment people and low levels of education. The researcher requested a list of primary schools in the selected circuit from the Circuit Manager which included private schools, schools in township and schools in rural areas. The private and township schools failed to meet the geographical requirement for the study of being located in a rural area. According to Cohen *et al.* (2013), qualitative researchers prefer to collect data from a smaller group or subgroup of the total population in such a way that the knowledge acquired is representative of the total population.

McMillan and Schumacher (2014) believe that researchers can use their knowledge of populations to make a judgment about which subjects should be selected to provide the best information. Leedy and Ormrod (2010) add that researchers should look at everything that has a potential relevance to the research problem.

3.4.2 Sampling

Sampling is an important aspect of qualitative research as it is a major step in the research process that determines the success of the study. When researchers want to conduct particular studies, careful decisions should be made regarding the selection of participants who can provide valuable information for the project. According to Maree (2007), sampling is a process used to select a percentage of the population for a study. Cohen *et al.* (2013) specify that sampling is the division of the population into equal groups comprising subjects with similar characteristics. Punch (2009) maintains that in a case study qualitative sampling involves identifying the case(s) and establishing the boundaries where researchers point out the chosen aspects and construct a model framework. Punch (2009) suggests that sampling is not only aimed at interviewing people or observing events, but that it is also about processes, settings and activities that are crucial for the collection of data.

Creswell (2012) is of the opinion that researchers can use one or more sampling strategies in a single study. The selected circuit in this study has 24 primary schools. Among these schools are four private schools and eight government schools which are located in a township; six of them have less than five hundred learners and the principals have less than five years' experience. Six schools were deemed suitable for sampling; three of them were purposefully selected for the research by the researcher. Two principals were male and one was female. Maree (2007) believes that homogeneous populations, where the participants tend to have

similar characteristics with regard to variables, are important for studies. According to Punch (2009), the use of identical participants minimises variations. Cohen *et al.* (2013) maintain that sampling strategies are categorising according to probability samples and non-probability samples. According to them, probability sampling includes simple random sampling, systematic sampling, stratified sampling, cluster sampling, stage sampling and multiphase sampling, while non-probability sampling includes convenience sampling, quota sampling, purposive sampling, dimensional sampling, snowball sampling, volunteer sampling and theoretical sampling. The strategy used to draw the population was purposefully done to represent the population in the study.

3.4.2.1 Purposeful sampling

This study used purposeful sampling as a strategy to select the participants which, according to Leedy and Ormrod (2010), refers to people or other units that are chosen for a particular purpose. Punch (2009) maintains that purposeful sampling assesses in a deliberate way and with a purpose in mind. Cohen *et al.* (2013) believe that researchers handpick cases that will be part of their research on the basis of particular characteristics that are sought after.

In this study purposeful sampling was used with the participants that would engender ample information about the experiences that teachers on SMTs and CS1 teachers encounter when interacting with parents in rural primary schools. Creswell (2012) maintains that researchers select individuals and locations for the study to purposefully form an understanding of the research problem and central significance of a study. Maree (2007) adds that the purpose of sampling is to obtain the most valuable source of information and to answer the research question(s). The researcher selected participants who would be a source of valuable data, since they were in a position of authority in their respective schools as teachers, principals and members of SGBs. In addition, McMillan and Schumacher (2014) state that a qualitative research sample group is one that includes 1 to 40 or more people. This is low when compared with other approaches. Researchers select participants according to experience, geographical location of schools, enrolment of schools and type of school. The criteria used in the selection of the participants for this study included the following:

Geographical area - Participants were selected on the basis that their places of work were rural primary schools in the selected circuit in Giyani in the Mopani District of Limpopo Province. All schools falling outside the selected area were not considered.

Experience - Principals with five years or more experience in rural primary schools were chosen. The principals were selected on the basis that they had several years interacting with parents and learners, i.e., they had more experience of PI in rural schools.

Learner enrolments - Principals who were selected headed schools with 500 or more learners. Principals working in schools with large enrolments were selected because the researcher believed that they would be able to contribute detailed information to the study

Types of schools - The researcher selected his participants from the rural and semi-rural primary schools located in the selected circuit. Private schools, high schools and tertiary institutions were excluded from the research sample.

The researcher selected principals as the main participants on the basis that they are school managers, whose work positions qualifies them to interact with parents and teachers in terms of day-to-day activities. They are, generally, more informed and experienced on issues that affect the education and social traits of school children. They are accountable for the efficient running of their schools and also ensure that the schools communicate efficiently and effectively with parents.

In selecting HODs, CS1 teachers and parents, the study made use of snowball sampling. The researcher requested the selected principals to assist in the selection of HODs, teachers and parents who would produce the most valuable information with regard to the research topic. According to Maree (2007), the use of purposeful sampling is to select participants based on some defining characteristics and Cohen *et al.* (2013) write that in snowball sampling researchers identify a small number of individuals who have characteristics that reflect their interests. These individuals are used to identify or provide the names of participants who would be suitable for the study. In the context of this study, the principals provided the names of participants who could provide valuable information about the topic. The researcher decided to use snowball sampling due to the difficulty of identifying other participants for the study. However, a drawback of this form of sampling is that it may result in the researcher selecting passive participants who contribute little to the data being collected.

HODs or senior teachers were selected on the basis that they work in conjunction with the principals in school management; that they work directly with teachers and parents; and that they also manage the school when the principal is not available. HODs interact with school personnel in terms of all activities that affect the education of the children, including being

involved in decision-making; participating in school meetings; monitoring the progress of the children; and encouraging them to do their schoolwork. They also ensure that teachers implement the curriculum. Teachers work and interact directly with parents on the issues that affect the education of their children as well as curriculum issues which include teaching and learning activities and feedback on the academic performance of the children by providing the parents with progress reports and engaging in parent consultations.

Parents were selected on the basis that they are the primary teachers of the learners at home and that they are legally required to participate in the education of their children by educational authorities. The researcher considered all these participants to be essential in reaching valid findings in the study. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2003), sampling in qualitative research involves seeking out individuals, groups and settings where the specific processes being studied are most likely to occur.

The final sample for this study consisted of three principals, three HODs, three CS1 teachers and three parents. Each of these was from the three rural primary schools of the selected circuit - a total of twelve participants. The researcher purposively selected the participants with the aim to acquire more experience, rewarding information and a thorough understanding of the topic. The purpose of the study was to investigate how SMTs, teachers and parents communicate with each other on matters relating to the education of learners in schools.

3.5 DATA COLLECTION

Cohen et al. (2013) indicate that qualitative data collection involves various techniques in gathering information. Leedy and Ormrod (2010) list the multiple forms used for data collection as observation, interviews, objects, written documents, audio-visual material, electronic documents and any other form of data that the researcher may deem to be of use. In this study interviews, document analysis and observation were used as a method of collecting data. According to Punch (2009), it is a sound strategy in qualitative research for the researcher to combine observation and interview data collecting techniques.

3.5.1 Interviews

Boyce and Neale (2006) consider interviews to be a method that involves intensive interviews with individuals; where their perspectives on particular ideas, programmes or situations are analysed. Usually they consist of a small number of focus group participants. Maree (2007) describes interviews as two-way communication where the interviewer asks the participants

questions to collect data and observe and document their behaviour. For Cohen *et al.* (2013) an interview is a flexible tool for data collection which uses multi-sensory channels that are both verbal and non-verbal. Interviews can be used for various purposes.

Maree (2007) suggests that the purpose of the qualitative interview is for participants to explain what is happening in their worlds. Provided that the interviews are correctly managed, they will provide the researcher with an important collection of data that will help understand the participants' knowledge and their reality. Boyce and Neale (2006) show that interviews are useful when researchers wish to obtain detailed information about participants' thoughts and behaviour; explore new in-depth issues; and provide a context for other data to create a complete picture of a topic. Punch (2009) and Cohen *et al.* (2013) indicate that interviews can be used to release data for academic analysis; to measure the perspectives of individuals or groups; to test and develop hypotheses; to select or promote employees; and to evaluate people.

The advantages of qualitative interviews as suggested by Boyce and Neale (2006) are the following: they provide much more detailed information other methods; they provide a more relaxed atmosphere in which to collect information; and the participants are more comfortable to share their ideas with the researcher. According to Cohen *et al.* (2013) and McMillan and Schumacher (2014), interviews are flexible and adaptable and they can be used to address different issues.

Besides the advantages that qualitative interviews seem to have, they also have some drawbacks. Boyce and Neale (2006) and McMillan and Schumacher (2014) maintain that the disadvantages of interviews are that they are prone to bias as candidates who participate in research projects tend to provide biased information. Apart from conducting the interviews, the researcher is required to transcribe what was said by participants *verbatim* and analyse the written record. Researchers should, therefore, be properly trained in interviewing techniques and have the skill to make individuals comfortable; be interested in participants' responses; and probe further to acquire more detailed information. The low number of participants selected in a sample tends to narrow the views and responses of participants.

In this study the interviews were conducted in different settings. The researcher was required to visit parents in their homes where they were sometimes busy with their routine tasks. The duration of the interviews was between 50 and 70 minutes and was found to be time consuming. However, the length of the interviews provided the researcher with ample time to

understand the experiences and behaviour of the participants related to the topic of the study; participants were given time at a later stage to verify transcriptions and to suggest corrections, where necessary (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). The study was conducted through the use of in-depth and semi-structured interviews.

3.5.1.1 In-depth semi-structured interviews

Maree (2007) maintains that semi-structured interviews are commonly used in research projects to support data obtained from other data sources. According to Leedy and Ormrod (2010), interviews are informal and friendly with the researcher using a set of prepared standard questions and one or two individually formulated questions to probe for greater clarity of responses. A semi-structured interview was suitable for this study as it aims at collecting in-depth information from participants through the use of semi-structured questions. The use of this type of interview helped the researcher to interact with the participants effectively; he was able to ask unrestricted questions based on the research topic and the participants were able to respond in their own words. The participants gave descriptive information which contributed to answering the research questions and they elaborated on their explanations when the researcher probed statements for a better understanding of the responses.

According to De Vos, Delpot, Fouche and Strydom (2011) researchers establish a rapport with participants in order to elicit information. In this study the researcher started the interviews with questions which required participants to provide some personal information. This encouraged the participants to relax, feel free to participate in the discussion and to proceed with the interview. Leedy and Ormrod (2010) and Paulsen (2009) cite the following advantages of interviews:

- Researchers are able to establish a rapport with the participants that enables improve cooperation during the interview process.
- The interview provides the researcher with an opportunity to study the participants' gestures and facial expressions.
- The conversation between the interviewer and the interviewee is informal and friendly which tends to motivate participants to share more information.
- Participants are assured that they can provide confidential information which will not be revealed in the final report.

Semi-structured interviews are considered to be excellent tools for collecting data but De Vos *et al.* (2011) and Maree (2007) warn researchers to be aware of irrelevant information in the responses of the interviewees as it is easy to get diverted by trivial information that is not relevant to the study. Participants may be reluctant to share information and researcher may lack the skill to provoke sought after responses. Participants may also provide incorrect information. The use of translators could hold up the process because they may not translate accurately which affects the meaning and expression of the participant. The use of tape-recorders and unrestricted questions can make participants feel vulnerable. Interrupting participants can make them lose their train of thought and more time will be wasted on getting participants back to the point.

To guard against trivial information, the researcher should only transcribe information which is relevant to the study. The researcher should personally translate information to avoid any unnecessary interruptions while interviewing the participants; it also allows for the interviewee to freely share their experiences without disturbance.

3.5.1.2 Observation

McMillan and Schumacher (2014) maintain that observation is a way in which researchers listen and observe what is happening in the research location. Maree (2007) perceives observation as a systematic process of recording the behavioural patterns of participants' objectives and events without, necessarily, questioning or communicating with them. He suggests that observation is a daily activity in people's lives; they use their senses and intuition to gather data about the ordinary. Maree (2007) recommends that a researcher should first obtain permission to access the location, then determine who or what, when and how long the observation will take place. Punch (2009) emphasises that when researchers visit people to collect data they must ensure that their approach is ethical and professional.

In this study observation was aimed at the SMTs, including principals and HODs, Csl teachers and parents in rural primary schools. The researcher was interested in the communication between parents and teachers as well as attendance of parents at parent-meetings and school activities. The use of observation provided the researcher with a deeper insight and understanding of how teachers and parents communicate in rural schools (Maree, 2007). Creswell (2012) recommends that researchers should make arrangements before beginning with interviews and observation. This researcher made arrangements beforehand by requesting permission in writing and verbally for the research from all the selected schools;

they all responded positively and were prepared to provide information about meetings and school activities. According to Creswell (2012), researchers should design an observation protocol to record notes in the field; the protocol should include both descriptive and reflective notes. The researcher used observation protocols and a tape-recorder to record data.

Researchers should be relatively quiet and inconspicuous, but friendly to anyone who approaches them (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). Maree (2007) recommends that researchers acquire location where they can then act as observers; they should not participate in events or influence the behaviour of the participants. Cohen *et al.* (2013) add that observers should spend sufficient time with the participants to reduce reaction. This researcher spent some time in each school observing how parents interact on SGBs; with teachers in parent meetings; and during other school activities. The researcher was able to visit the selected schools repeatedly; for example, the researcher visited the schools during the first term and at the end of the term when parents came to collect report cards and when they attended parent meetings.

3.5.1.3 Document analysis

The study also used document analysis as a way of collecting information. According to Cohen *et al.* (2011), documents are useful in a more observable study. Documentary analysis can enable the researcher to reach even the most unapproachable people. Many researchers suggest that official documents are in abundance at organisations and provide an internal perspective of them; they are available in many forms: memos, minutes of the meetings, working papers and drafts of proposals (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). Punch (2009) maintains that both historical and contemporary documents are a rich source of data for education and social research.

In this study the researcher used various documents which could provide detailed information about the research topic. The documents were selected by using keywords that relate to the study, such as effective communication, rural schools, one way communication and two way communications. The researcher studied the roll call and attendance registers and gate control registers to investigate the attendance of parents in rural primary schools. Minutes of meetings were also analysed to reach conclusions on the participation of parents during parent meetings and school activities. The analysis of minutes also helped the researcher identify barriers that inhibit rural parents' communication with teachers and establish how SMTs and parents reach decisions. The researcher used the five strategies for collecting and analysing artefacts suggested by McMillan and Schumacher (2014) which are: location, identification, analysis,

criticism and interpretation. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2014) the interpreted meanings of artefacts must be validated through observation and the information collected in interviews.

Before the process of interviews and document gathering can start the researcher must obtain permission from the school principals - both verbally and in writing. The researcher explained the purpose of the study in detail and assured the principals that ethical issues would be respected. SMTs and teachers should be informed that the information provided by them and their schools would be protected from public exposure. The approachable character of the researcher motivated the schools to grant access to their documents and he used field notes and a tape-recorder to record data.

3.5.2 Data collection process

The first question for the interviews required participants to provide biographical information which included number of years working in the school; attendance of parent meetings; and experience of working with partners. This encouraged the participants to relax and feel free to interact with the researcher. According to Leedy and Ormrod (2010), when a researcher starts an interview the conversation should begin with small talk just to set the ball rolling which enables the researcher to establish a rapport with participants and it helps to gain their cooperation. Cohen *et al.* (2013) are of the opinion that the researcher is responsible for establishing a rapport with the participants and should ensure that they are informed about the aim of the research and the type of information that is expected from them (Maree, 2007). The researcher did this and participants were given time to share their thoughts and ideas. Maree (2007) believes that good interviewers are good listeners who know that their roles when asking questions and listening to the answers. The researcher was very attentive and recorded detailed information and ensured that the participants could continue uninterrupted.

During the interviews the researcher used a laptop, tape-recorder and handwritten notes to record information. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2014), the use of a tape-recorder does not replace the need to take notes. The notes may be used by the researcher to formulate research questions, enquiries and record non-verbal communication. The researcher ensured the consent of participants for collecting data using the above mentioned instruments. Leedy and Ormrod (2010) indicate that it is important that the researcher records all responses from the participants. After the interviews the researcher listened to the tapes and reviewed and reflected on notes to identify any gaps (Maree 2007).

The researcher then chose 6 interviews which contained valuable detailed information concerning the research topic. After transcribing the data *verbatim*, the researcher requested participants to confirm that the information was recorded correctly. The participants added and corrected any information which they thought was omitted from the interviews. The researcher used participant validation as a means to enhance validity, reliability and the authenticity of the study. According to Ritchie and Lewis (2008), participant validation is a process that involves obtaining feedback about the collected data, analytic categories, interpretation and conclusions related to the study group.

3.6 DATA ANALYSIS

McMillan and Schumacher (2014) describe data analysis as involving the use of an inductive process of arranging data into categories and identifying patterns and relationships among the categories. The researchers indicate that qualitative researchers use inductive analysis to synthesise and make sense of data and patterns. Maree (2007) suggests that qualitative data analysis uses a range of processes, approaches and procedures. According to Leedy and Ormrod (2010), data analysis in qualitative research makes use of interviews, observation, transcripts and other sources to draw conclusions about large and more general occurrences and that considerable inductive reasoning is needed to analyse data. They also believe that data analysis is subjective in nature (Leedy and Ormrod, 2010). The purpose of analysing data in qualitative research is to summarise what the researcher has seen or heard in terms of frequency of words, phrases, themes and patterns that assist to understand and interpret the collected data (Maree, 2007). The researcher analysed data as it was collected in order to generate an understanding related to the topic of the study and the research question. According to Creswell (2012), in case study analysis, the researcher seeks to gather instances from the data in order to recognise any evolving significance. Data is dissected and put back together again in a more meaningful way. The researcher establishes patterns and looks for a connection between one or more categories in terms of similarities and differences.

The data analysis for this study was guided by the strategies of communication developed by Graham-Clay (2005). After the researcher had collected the data he transcribed it *verbatim* to examine it for important information most relevant to the topic and the research question. The details were organised whereby specific facts about the case were arranged in a logical order and important categories were identified. Data that seemed to have meaning was coded and single instances were interpreted. Specific occurrences, documents and other forms of data

were examined for value that might have references to the case. The data and its interpretations were analysed in terms of essential themes and patterns. The researcher combined the information in order to construct an overall representation of the case and finally draw conclusions.

3.7 CREDIBILITY AND TRUSTWORTHINESS

Leedy and Ormrod (2010) describe the validity of a measurement instrument as the way in which the instrument measures what it is intended to measure. Winter (2000) adds that the use of validity is to establish whether the means of measurement is accurate. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Creswell (2012), qualitative researchers use terminology, such as trustworthiness, transference, dependability and conformability, rather than validity and reliability. For the purposes of this study the researcher used the concept ‘trustworthiness’ instead of ‘validity’. Leedy and Ormrod (2010) describe reliability as the consistency with which a measuring instrument yields certain results when the entity being measured has not changed. Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Creswell (2012) prefer to replace the concept ‘reliability’ with the following terminology: credibility, consistency, applicability, dependability, trustworthiness and transferability in terms of the notion of dependability.

In order to obtain detailed information for the study, the researcher used a sample of three schools to acquire different perspectives on how SMTs and parents communicate in rural primary schools. Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007) believe that comparing information from multi-sites can be extremely enlightening. The researcher provided the participants with the opportunity to check whether the information given was correct or not. According to Leedy and Ormrod (2010), researchers should offer their conclusions to participants to validate the information. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that participant validation establishes credibility. During the interview sessions with participants the researcher had time to analyse and follow up on questions.

To ensure rigor and the credibility of the study the researcher used various methods to collect data. The methods included semi-structured interviews, observation and document analysis. Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007) maintain that the use of triangulation can reduce the possibility of bias in a study. The researcher used prolonged interaction with the participants in the field in order to understand their involvement in, and experiences of, the topic. The extra time allowed the researcher to build rapport with the participants, who were unhindered in providing information.

The researcher used a tape-recorder and field notes to record the information provided by the participants. Creswell (2012) believes that reliability can be enhanced if the researcher obtains detailed field notes by employing good quality tapes for recording and transcribing them. These items are deemed reliable in collecting and analysing data as they record all information that could be missed by researchers when using only one type of method to record data.

3.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Cohen *et al.* (2013) explain ethics as the application of systems of moral principles to preserve the dignity of the participants as human beings; to prevent the harassment of others; to promote good; to be respectful; and to be fair. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2014), guidelines for ethics include policies regarding informed consent, lack of deception, confidentiality, anonymity, privacy and caring. These writers also indicate that the researcher is ethically responsible for protecting the welfare and rights of the participants; all the participants should be free from any interference prior to and after the study.

After motivating his research proposal to the Education Management Committee, the researcher applied to the University of Pretoria for ethics clearance. The researcher also sought permission to conduct research in the selected schools in the selected circuit in writing from the LDBE of Polokwane. Thereafter, written and verbal permission was obtained from the principals to collect data from them, HODs, CS1 teachers and parents before the study commenced and the nature, purpose and the significance of the study was explained to the participants. Each participant was provided with a letter of informed consent containing the summary and the aim of the study, the procedures of the research process and risks and benefits. The researcher provided sufficient information to the participants for them to make informed decisions about whether to participate or not before they signed the informed consent letters. The researcher arranged times, dates and places to meet with the participants and requested their consent to use a tape-recorder.

As anonymity is important in conducting a study, the researcher ensured that the information participants provided was presented in such a way that readers would not be able to identify names and settings. This was basically aimed at protecting participants' human rights to privacy. According to the Constitution of the RSA (1996) No 8 of 1996 (s14), everyone has right to privacy. Leedy and Ormrod (2010) maintain that under no circumstances should a researcher report, either orally or in writing, in such a way that others become aware of how particular participants behaved - unless specifically given permission by participants in

writing for this to happen. The researcher replaced participants' names with pseudonyms or arbitrary code numbers and labelled documents with numbers.

3.9 CONCLUSION

This chapter discussed the research approach, research design and methodology used in detail. It also set out the process of data collection and data analysis, including how credibility and trustworthiness, and ethical considerations were dealt with. The next chapter, Chapter 4, gives the biographical information of the participants and the findings drawn from the interviews with teachers, principals, HODs and parents as well as an observation and document analysis.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS ON HOW RURAL PARENTS AND SCHOOL MANAGEMENT TEAMS COMMUNICATE

4.1. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter the data collected during the interviews with document analysis and observation of parents, teachers, HODs and principals in rural schools is presented. The relevant available literature suggests that poor communication still exists in rural areas between schools and parents. It is assumed that parents are not involved in the decisions that affect the education of their children. SMTs seldom communicate with parents which has a negative effect on their day-to-day interaction with them. SASA (No. 84 of 1996) encourages schools to work with parents to enhance the academic performance of their children in schools.

The primary aim of this study was to understand the experiences that SMTs have when communicating with parents in rural schools. The questions asked in the study were intended to understand how parents and SMTs communicate; to investigate how they experience working together in rural schools; and to determine how decisions are taken between parents and SMTs. The analysis of this study is related to the following themes:

- Strategies used by parents to communicate with schools.
- Strategies used by schools to communicate with parents.

Each of these themes is discussed under one- and two-way communication (Graham-Clay, 2005). The themes include barriers to communication and decision-making processes between parents and schools. These themes emanate from observation, document analysis and interviews with SMTs, teachers and parents.

4.2 BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION OF PARTICIPANTS

The data collected related to personal information of the parents include the positions they occupied on the SGBs, their gender and number of children they had enrolled at the school and number of years they have been involve on the SGBs; this information is contained in the Table 4.1 below.

Table 4.1: Biographical Information of the Parents Involved

School	Participants	Number of years involved in SGBs	Position occupied in SGBs
School 1	Parent A	13 years	Chairperson
School 2	Parent B	7 years	Additional member
School 3	Parent C	12 years	Chairperson

All the parents who were interviewed for this study were members of SGBs. The parents (A & C) of Schools 1 and 3 were chairpersons. Parent B was an additional member on the SGB. All the parents had more than five years' experience serving as SGB members; Parent A had 13 years Parent, B had 7 years and Parent C had 12 years experience respectively. It is assumed that the number of years that parents have served as members of SGBs may have provided them with knowledge and an understanding of the policies and decision-making processes used in the governance of the schools as well as better communication skills. Experience gained while working as members of SGBs plays a key role in providing parents with better communication skills. It is assumed that due to these improved communication skills parents are able to communicate better with schools and their stakeholders.

It can be concluded that having a good comprehension of the policies and decision-making processes might also assist in improving communication between parents and schools; the parents may have a better understanding of policies in education and they may, then, participate more vigorously during robust SGB discussions.

The biographical data collected from to teachers was biographical information, including gender, number of as a teacher and the type of school in which they worked.

Table 4.2: Biographical Information of the Teachers

School	Participants	Gender	Number of years working as a teacher
School 1	Teacher A	Female	10 years
School 2	Teacher B	Female	7 years
School 3	Teacher C	Male	18 years

All the teachers that participated in this study have working experience ranging between 7 and 18 years. The number of years that these teachers have been working has helped them gain more experience in interacting with parents and other community members. As a result they have knowledge and communication skills to interact and work with parents on issues that affect the education of the children. They also have the ability to guide parents in helping their children complete their homework and participate in school activities.

Table 4.3: Biographical Details of HODs

School	Participants	Gender	Number of years working as a HOD
School 1	HOD A	Male	7 years
School 2	HOD B	Female	8 years
School 3	HOD C	Male	13 years

The HODs who participated in this study had working experience ranging between 7 and 13 years. Their years' experience as SMT members is assumed to have assisted them to gain some knowledge on how to communicate with different parents; to be able encourage teachers to work with parents and to have acquired communication skills to facilitate parent meetings effectively. It can be concluded that they have a better knowledge and communication skills, which are suitable for encouraging PI in rural schools. Their experiences in serving on SMTs may have stood them in good stead to communicate better with teachers and to guide them in assisting parents when it comes to attending to issues that affect the education of their children.

Table 4.4: Biographical Data of the Principals

School	Participant	Gender	Number of years working as Principal
School 1	Principal A	Male	8 years
School 2	Principal B	Female	18 years
School 3	Principal C	Male	6 years

The principals who were involved in this study had working experience in rural primary schools ranging between 6 and 18 years. The number of years they had worked as principals is assumed to have equipped them with knowledge and communication skills to work better with various stakeholders including parents, communities and teachers in rural schools to sustain

PI. They may also have acquired good managerial and social skills which are necessary for PI in schools. It can be concluded that principals know how to involve parents in school governance and implement policies while working with parents in terms of school governance to sustain PI in schools.

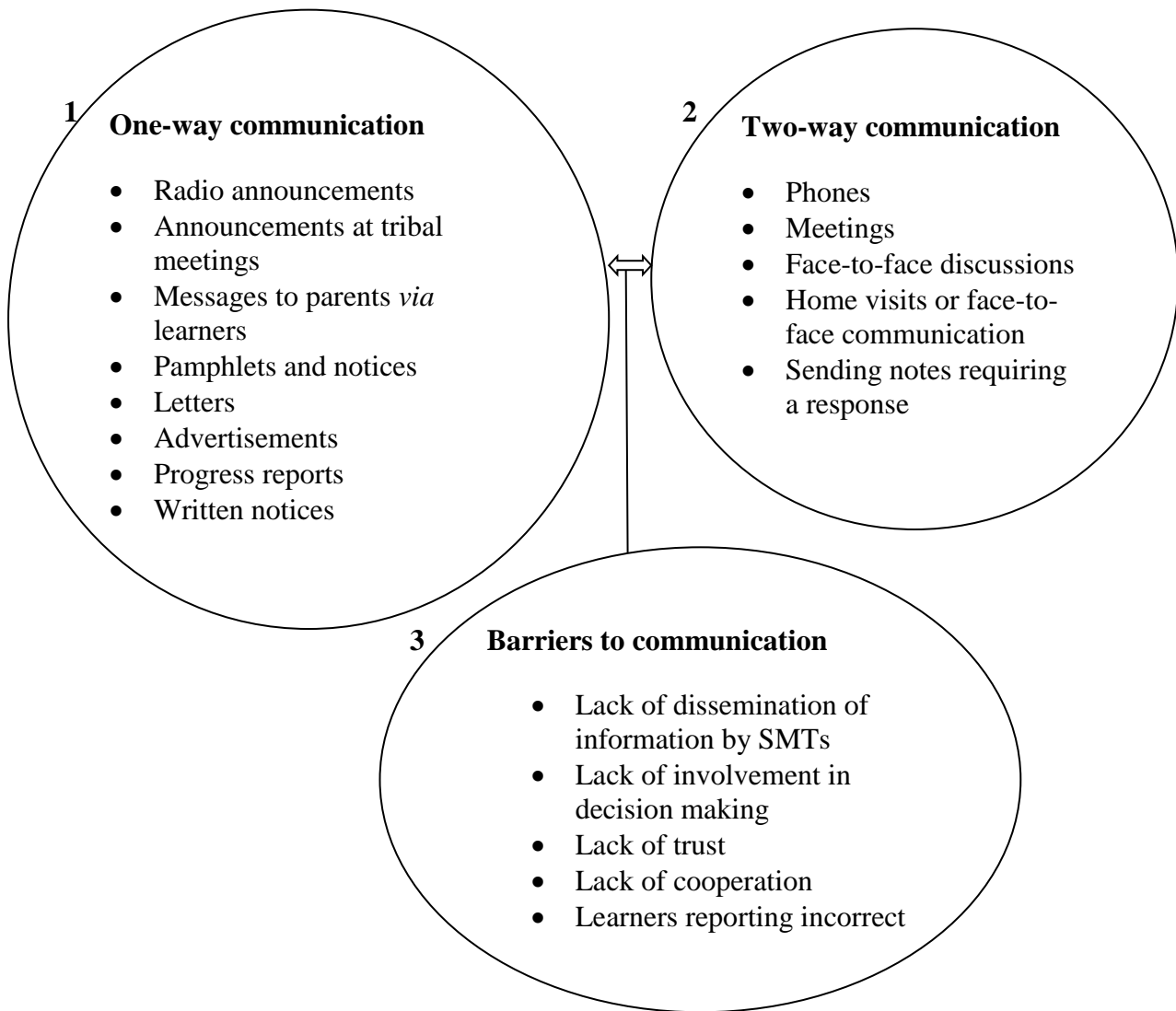


Figure 4.1: Data Analysis According to Themes Originated from Graham-Clay’s (2005) principles and Epstein (1995)’s Theory

Both Graham-Clay (2005) and that of Epstein (1995) agree that home to school and school to home communications take place through one- and two-way communication. According to the authors, parents and schools use one-way communication when they want to pass messages to each other. For example, schools can communicate with parents by means of radio and tribal meeting announcements, pamphlets, letters, written notices and progress reports. They also suggest that two-way communication takes place when both partners

converse with one another, such as when they communicate using phones, during meetings, home visits, and when they engage in face-to-face discussions. According to Epstein (2010), schools engage parents by communicating school programmes and school issues. Epstein believes that the purpose of speaking to parents is to enhance the academic performance of learners and partnerships. Epstein also postulates that when the schools have little communication with parents, it creates a barrier to communication which negatively affects the smooth running of the school.

4.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND THEMES

The data collected was analysed according to the themes given in the table below.

Table 4.5: Research Questions and Themes

Research Questions	Themes and sub-themes
1. How do parents communicate with schools?	1.Strategies used by parents to communicate with schools 1.1 One-way communication by parents 1.1.1 Non-verbal communication 1.1.1.1 Letters 1.1.1.2 Written notices from community stakeholders, such as tribal authorities 1.2 Two-way communication 1.2.1 Verbal communication 1.2.1.1 Phones 1.2.1.2 Meetings 1.2.1.3 In person discussions 1.2.2 Non-verbal communication 1.2.2.1 Sending notes requiring a response to the school
2. How do schools communicate with parents?	2. Strategies used by schools to communicate with parents 2. 1 One-way communication 2.1.1 Verbal communication 2.1.1.1. Radio announcements 2.1.1.2 Announcements at tribal meetings 2.1.1.3 Messages to parents through learners 2.1.2. Non-verbal communication 2.1.2.1. Pamphlets and notices 2.1.2.2 Letters 2.1.2.3 Advertisements 2.1.2.4.Progress reports 2.2 Two-way communication 2.2.1 Verbal communication

	<p>2.2.1.1. Phones 2.2.1.2 Meetings 2.2.1.3. Home visits or face-to-face discussions</p> <p>2.2.2 Non-verbal communication 2.2.2.1. Letters with a request for a response</p>
3. What barriers do schools and parents encounter when communicating with each other?	<p>3.Barriers to communication 3.1 Barriers encountered by parents while communicating with the school:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of dissemination of information by SMTs • Lack of involvement in decision making • Lack of trust • Lack of cooperation <p>3.2 Barriers encountered by schools when communicating with parents:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learners reporting incorrect information • Low socio-economic status • Child headed families
4. How do parents and schools make decisions?	<p>4. Decision-making processes between parents and the school 4.1 Collaborative decision-making 4.2 Uncollaborated decision-making</p>

4.4. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS IN TERMS OF THEMES

An analysis of the collected data revealed themes and sub-themes related to how SMTs and parents communicate in rural primary schools; these are discussed in detail in the sub-sections below. The following were the three main emerging themes:

- Strategies used by parents to communicate with schools.
- Strategies used by schools to communicate with parents.
- Barriers to communication and how parents and schools reach decisions.

These themes are explained using the communication theory propounded by Epstein (1995) and Graham-Clay (2005)'s principles who show that communication is either a one- or two-way. Strategies used specifically by the different stakeholders with an interest in education are also discussed.

4.4.1 FINDINGS FROM THE INTERVIEWS

4.4.1.1 Theme 1: Strategies used by parents in communicating with schools

The findings revealed that parents communicate with schools using both one- and two-way communication.

4.4.1.1.1 *One-way communication by parents*

The study revealed that schools and parents communicate using one-way communication which includes verbal and non-verbal means. Verbal strategies encompass communication, such as announcements in class and instructions while non-verbal strategies include communication, like sending letters with learners to parents.

Apart from verbal communication, parents also use non-verbal strategies to communicate with schools. The findings suggest that many parents use letters to communicate with schools rather than making appointments where they need to communicate directly with school personnel. According to one parent the use of letters assists parents, who are weighed down by commitments, to quickly reach the school and resolve any issue linked to their children. The parent further indicated in the following quote that letters are used to convey decisions made by a parent regarding the behaviour, performance and any other issues that require the consent of parents via learners.

When I am busy and cannot go to school to check on the progress of my child, I simply write a letter to the school giving them power to act according to my wish (Parent B).

Parents supported the use of letters as a means of communicating with schools by indicating that when they were invited to SGB meetings and they were unable to attend the meetings, they wrote letters to the school authorities or teachers to offer an apology. One parent said:

When I am invited to attend an SGB meeting and I am busy with something else, I write to the secretary and give an apology (Parent C)

Parents indicated that they wrote a note or letter when they have to inform the school about the absence of their children due to sickness and for other reasons. In this regard, some parents commented as follows:

When my child is ill and feels that she cannot go to school, I write a letter or short note and give it to a nearby learner to give to her class teacher or the principal. I also write a letter to her teacher to apologise when her books are not covered or

having not fulfilled a particular obligations and promise to accomplish it (Parent B).

I write a letter when I want to inform teachers that my child is unable to go to school (Parent A).

The findings suggest that the use of letters by parents to communicate with schools seem to solve challenges of parents not attending meetings and it is seen as a means of bringing parents and schools closer together. The researcher believes that sending a letter containing a decision or point of view of the parent on a particular issue to be discussed at the meeting makes it easier for members who are present to reach decisions. This finding agrees with that of Cordero (2015) who indicates that there is a need for schools to keep parents updated and to help them understand of how things happen in schools. This is also supported by the principles of Graham-Clay (2005) which state that written communication is a form of communication used for connecting families and schools.

The study also found that parents communicate non-verbally with schools by using notices that they are sent. According to two parents, written notices often include announcements that directly affect schools to inform them about community events or important issues. One parent indicated that these written notices were usually sent by community stakeholders, such as a tribal authority.

As a member of the tribal authority, we sometimes send written notices to school to inform them about community events (Parent A).

Another parent indicated that through the use of notices, the community was able to make the school aware of community developments which provided schools with opportunities to make decisions on appropriate actions to be taken in relation to activities occurring in the community. One parent explained this:

As a member of the community and royal council, we send notices to school to inform them of activities taking place in the community such as voter education and immunisation of children (Parent C).

The findings suggest that the community also takes the initiative in communicating with schools. It is not only the schools that have the responsibility to foster communication with the community - as many believe. The researcher also considers that for schools to function effectively, the community with all its stakeholders - has to make inputs into the day-to-day running of schools. This is supported by Kemp (2015) who suggests that family portals, such as email addresses, can be established so that parents are able to communicate directly with

schools. According to the author, family portals enable parents in providing valuable information about their children to schools. Furthermore, Epstein's (2010) theory indicates that when schools interact with parents, more learners tend to receive common messages from people that schooling is important for them; they work harder and yield good results.

4.4.1.1.2 Two-way communication by parents

Parents also communicate with schools using two-way communication strategies which include verbal and non-verbal communication. According to the findings of the study, parents communicate in a two-way manner using verbal communication strategies, such as telephones, meetings and in-person discussions. Parents use mobile phones when communicating with schools to save time. They normally use a telephone to communicate with schools when they have other pressing commitments, including work and domestic issues, which prevent them from personally visiting schools. Two parents made the following comments in this regard:

When I am called to visit the school and I cannot manage due to some commitments, I phone the school to discuss the matter and find a solution (Parent B).

When my child is ill or absent in school due to particular reasons, I phone the school and inform it about her situation (Parent A).

The findings also show that the use of mobile phones by parents as a means of communication with schools has certain disadvantages. These include the fact that they are expensive and scarce, especially in rural areas. Some of the parents complained that the use of mobile phones was expensive and that most of them could not afford them. According to one parent, most of the time she does not have money to buy airtime to communicate with the school:

Phoning the school is expensive, I do not work and I have no money to buy airtime (Parent C).

Another parent said that it is sometimes a problem when communicating with the school through the use of mobile phones, because most of the parents in the community do not have mobile phones, and have to travel to the school to sorting out problems:

Many of us in this community do not have phones. When the school needs to communicate with us, they send a message with our children and we have to go to school to discuss everything (Parent C).

The findings suggest that parents in rural communities communicate differently with schools from parents in semi-rural and urban communities where the means of communication easier.

This may be because of the accessibility of technology and familiarity with different communities. Parents in rural communities have problems when communicating with mobile phones in personal communication while parents in urban communities do not face the same problems. This difference may result in a situation where parents in rural communities are unable to communicate their ideas that could contribute to the efficient running of the school. To curb poor communication by parents in rural schools, Parmaswar (2014) recommends that teachers, as subject-specialists, should commit themselves to accept, promote and improve communication with parents and ensure that they meet parents personally at school meetings. Epstein's (2010) theory which indicates that when schools take few communication and interaction initiatives with parents, this affects students learning and encourages parents to disconnect from the school.

The findings revealed that parents use meetings as a way of communicating with schools. Parents attend different types of meetings that are organised by the schools, including SGB meetings, Annual General Meetings (AGMs), parent consultation meetings, meetings to discuss excursions and one-on-one meetings between teachers and parents. According to the parents (who participated in this study), these meetings provide them with a platform to raise issues, discuss them and find immediate solutions. Some parents indicated that attending, and being part of, meetings has advantages because their voices are heard which are hard to ignore. One parent said:

During meetings I get the opportunity to ask questions which might be difficult for me to ask if I was not in the meeting (Parent B).

Another parent added that when parents sit down to have discussions with teachers concerning the progress of their children, the teachers have an opportunity to provide clear and simple ways in which they may assist the learners in their future development. One parent made the following contribution:

When I am requested to visit the school and have a meeting with a teacher, I get a chance to ask everything concerning my child (Parent B).

The findings suggest that meetings between parents and teachers play an important role in improving learner performance. According to Kimathi (2014), quality and effective communication strengthens parent-teacher relationships. Teachers can invite parents to meetings where they can discuss matters affecting the education of their children. Johnson

(2013) suggests that parents prefer schools that use two-way communication when interacting with them so that they can be heard and have a chance to respond accordingly.

The study also found that some parents use individual discussions to communicate with schools. According to the parents, individual discussions solve issues of misunderstanding. One parent indicated that he often attended individual meetings with teachers that deal with the academic performance of his child. The parent further indicated that due to this type of meeting he was able to understand what his child needed to improve academically as stated below:

I have attended many face to face meetings with the teacher who was teaching my child. Due to these meetings, my child was able to pass (Parent C).

Another parent said:

My child was underperforming in Mathematics and I had to go to the school. His teacher indicated that he was not writing homework and classwork, and we both communicated with him and his performance has changed radically (Parent B).

Parents indicated that individual communication is helpful in that it helps solve issues at schools. According to them, teachers sometimes make unilateral decisions and they do not involve than as parents. When issues were discussed in person by both partners solutions were found. In this regard, one parent stated these:

When we communicate, it is good because it gives us an opportunity to air our views. When we discuss our issues face to face, the schools sometimes hear us, for instance, there was a lady who worked as a volunteer and the school terminated her service without our knowledge. After we have discussed the matter, the issue was resolved and she was reinstated (Parent B).

Another parent also indicated that she visited the school and talked to the person concerned on an individual basis when a need aroused. She further maintained that these individual talks allowed for quick decision-making and they saved time. She stated as follows:

If I have a problem or the school has a problem with my child, I visit the school and have a talk with the teacher or principal (Parent A).

According to the findings, it seems that meetings - especially individual meetings - are important in communication between parents and schools. Michael *et al.* (2012) agree that meetings are a primary means of contact between parents and schools as long as there is always a good turn out by parents. In addition, Kombo (2015) indicates that parents' ability to communicate with schools and to participate in school activities yields good results in terms

of learner progress. The findings further suggest that individual meetings assist in creating an understanding between the parties involved, especially when they are conducted in a language understood by all. According to Graham-Clay (2005), the use of everyday language in a non-threatening voice encourages conversation.

The study also discovered that parents are able to use a two-way communication strategy with non-verbal communication. According to the findings, parents communicate non-verbally by sending notes *via* their children containing a request or a message concerning school issues and require a response from the school. Most of the parents said that they sometimes sent notes to school and that the schools often responded to these messages in a written form carried by *via* learners to school. The parents commented further that they sent notes when they did not have time to visit schools personally due to other commitments. One parent indicated that sending notes to school is a good way of receiving information from the school:

I sometimes send a note with my child to school when I do not have time to go myself (Parent A).

Another parent stated that sending notes was sometimes problematic as the children sometimes forget to give the notes to the teachers or the teachers never received them because they lost the notes. This particular parent said:

Sending a note instead of personally going to school is good, but my child forgets or loses the note on the way to school (Parent C).

It may be concluded that sending notes is not always a reliable means of communication between parents and schools if, according to the findings, children sometimes lose the notes before they reach the schools, resulting in a breakdown in communication. However, Letsholo (2006) believes that teachers and parents, at times, fail to communicate with each other due to the use of inappropriate communication methods. On the other hand, Graham-Clay's (2005) suggests that notebooks are forms of written communication that can be used to share information between home and school, which indicates that schools and families can share information through using written methods.

4.4.1.2 Theme 2: Strategies used by schools to communicate with parents

The findings of the study revealed that schools communicate with parents using both one- and two-way communication strategies and they indicate that schools also communicate verbally and non-verbally with parents.

4.4.1.2.1 One-way communication by schools

According to the findings, schools communicate with parents using one-way verbal and non-verbal communication methods. One-way verbal communication includes radio announcements and sending messages to parents *via* learners while one-way non-verbal communication is found in the use of pamphlets, notes, letters, advertisements and progress reports.

Schools are able to communicate with parents using verbal communication strategies that underline one-way communication. One of these strategies is radio announcements that the school principals maintained are a quicker and inexpensive way of conveying information to parents. One principal spoke in favour of announcing information on radio, specifying that it was also time-saving, partly because parents who heard the messages on radio informed their neighbours as noted by one principal below:

Announcing news and information on radio is cheap and a quicker way of giving out information to parents (Principal A)

Again, all the principals said that they used local radio stations to broadcast information to the parents. One principal confirmed that schools sent notices to the media, such as local radio stations which like Munghana Lonene FM and Giyani Community Radio (GCR) stations. One principal said:

At times we write notices to the media, for instance in our local radio stations, Munghana Lonene FM and Giyani Community Radio (GCR) station (Principal B).

The findings suggest that radio announcements are an effective method of distributing information to parents and other stakeholders. Graham-Clay (2005) believes that radio announcements can be used by schools to foster positive relationships with parents if schools use them to provide specific information related to school activities. My view, as the researcher, is that radio announcements can be used to solve the problem of reaching parents whenever there is an emergency at school.

The research showed that schools also used meetings arranged by chiefs and *indunas* during tribal authority meetings to make relevant announcements related to the schools. An *induna* is the head of a particular clan or tribe and there are three tribes in the area. The role of the *induna* is to lead the tribe and manage day-to-day affairs. All the principals indicated that their schools used chiefs and *indunas* to convey information and messages to parents in the community. According to one principal, tribal chiefs and *indunas* announced the information

to parents during their tribal meetings and sometimes a community messenger was given the task of announcing information by walking around the community with a loudhailer. Two principals agreed that principals sometimes made requests to attend tribal authority meetings, where they are given an opportunity to make announcements related to their schools. They said:

We also communicate with the indunas that they announce in their tribal meetings. Or else, we use the announcer in the community to walk around and shout aloud that, “there is a meeting at school.” All people who have learners at school please come! Please attend the meeting (Principal A).

Sometime, the induna invites me to attend the tribal meeting where I also give announcements related to the school (Principal B).

Two participants confirmed that when their schools want to hold AGMs, the principals inform the *indunas* in the village and request that they announce the message to the parents at their communal gatherings:

Sometimes we use the local indunas to announce information to them when they have their gatherings (HOD C).

Sometimes when we want to have AGMs, we use the indunas around the village to announce the message to the parents while they meet in their communal gatherings (Teacher B).

The findings suggest that announcing information related to schools during tribal meetings is beneficial to both schools and parents, and that it might also assist in fostering positive relationships between the schools and the community. The schools have easy access to parents and parents can receive school information without setting foot in school. The use of tribal authorities to convey information creates and fosters healthy and workable relationships between the two entities. The only problem is that this type of meeting between parents and schools does not substitute parent-school engagement on school premises. According to Epstein (2010), parental involvement is active when there is a regular two-way communication between schools and parents, while Agbo (2007) maintains that teachers should take responsibility for initiating two-way communication with parents.

The study also shows that schools communicate verbally with parents by sending messages *via* learners. According to the principals, they messages are announced during assembly or in classes, and learners are told to pass on the information to their parents at home. One teacher indicated that the school sometimes communicated with parents through word-of-mouth, where teachers sent a message to parents through learners:

If it is not an emergency, the learner is requested to tell them to come to school, however, there are other kids that we know cannot be trusted and in this case a neighbour is sent with a letter from the school (Teacher A).

One teacher indicated that when the school planned to organise a parent meeting, the school principal announced the information to learners who are so that they could pass it to their parents. Another teacher said that most of the announcements were made during assembly in the morning. The teachers added that they also went round the classes telling learners to inform their parents about meetings as seen in the statement below:

Sometimes we go around telling learners to tell their parents to come to school. Learners eventually tell their parents that they are wanted at school. This strategy seems to be working because most parents attend our meetings even if it is not all of them (Teacher B).

In the assembly, we announce the message to the learners to inform their parents or guardians. Sometimes we move around the school disseminating information to learners that they inform their parents at home (Principal C).

According to another teacher, though the strategy mentioned above seems to work, some parents did not attend meetings. The researcher, therefore, believes that sending messages to parents through learners might have certain disadvantages. The information being conveyed to parents may get distorted and, at times, not be delivered because learners may forget to do so. This is supported by Davis (2000) who states that messages sometimes do not reach parents due to learners who forget or struggle to rephrase the information originally announced at school. In addition, Epstein (2010) recommends that when schools communicate with families by means of written communication, they should ensure that their documents are readable and written in a language that parents can understand. This suggests that schools should not take it for granted that all parents can read and write.

Schools use pamphlets as a way of communicating with parents. One HOD described how the school placed pamphlets at strategic points around the community as a way of inviting parents to meetings. The participant further indicated that the school mainly distributed pamphlets at shops, *spaza* shops, on busy street corners and at places where the elderly receive their pension money. This is what he said:

When we want to invite parents to attend school meetings, we paste pamphlets at different places around the village (HOD B).

Most teachers agreed that pamphlets were also used by schools to advertise vacancies at the schools. The schools paste pamphlets on schools gates, in public areas within the village and

in the circuit office. Pamphlets are circulated around the local community with the aim of attracting qualified people who live in and around the village; providing them with information; and encouraging them to apply. This is what a teacher said:

When our school has vacancies, it uses pamphlets to advertise and it pastes them on the school gate, and in public places within the village, and in the circuit office. This assists local people to get information who ultimately apply and get jobs (Teacher A).

The researcher believes that pamphlets should be used on regular basis to provide information to community members. When schools use pamphlets they should ensure that they are in a language that the parents comprehend; most parents fail to acquire information due to their low levels of education. This is supported by Emerson *et al.* (2012) who indicate that schools should use language that is accessible to parents and their communication should respect the knowledge of parents. They also assert that schools should refrain from using educational jargon when communicating with parents because the language may be confusing and intimidating.

Participants cited letters as a one-way communication approach that schools used to communicate with parents whenever there were issues that require their attention. All the teachers indicated that they used letters to communicate with parents. One teacher commented that when the school invited parents to a general parents' meeting, it sent letters with return slips two weeks in advance of the meeting.

We write letters to the parents and give them to the learners so that they may have reference or full information about the issue (Principal C).

But the most common way is that one of writing letters even though we know that they are not able to write and read. It is the method that we think is effective (Principal B).

The findings suggest that rural schools communicate with parents by means of letters as they seem to be a more convenient way for teachers to reach parents when they want to invite them to attend meetings. The researcher feels that this communication method is positive because it keeps the schools and parents connected. It gives parents a chance to participate in the education of their children, and involves them in decision-making processes. This supports the findings of Bagarette (2012) who indicates that parents are given the freedom to become involved in the governance of the schools that their children attend and make decisions about the standard and quality of their education.

Schools use one-way communication with parents by making use of advertisements as another non-verbal communication strategy. The findings state that advertisements are often used when schools want to advertise posts. One principal stated:

As a principal, I make sure that when there is a post, it is advertised so that everyone in the community sees the advert (Principal B).

Another principal indicated that advertisements are posted at strategic locations around the community, where they are available for everyone to see. The participant indicated places, such as *spaza* shops, shops and busy street corners:

We put advertisements at places where everyone can see it (Principal A).

The use of letters, pamphlets and advertisements seems to be effective in communicating information. On the positive side, information may reach its target without being distorted; however, pamphlets and advertisements are often trashed before they are read by someone who could benefit from them. Also, pamphlets, letters and adverts are aimed at people who have the ability to read which means that those who are illiterate do not receive the intended information. According to Bagarette (2012), most rural communities consist of poorly educated parents who find it difficult to read and write which makes the use of pamphlets, letters and adverts rather ineffective as a means of distributing information to these parents in rural communities. Graham-Clay (2005) also highlights that over and above their low level of education some, families lack technological resources which became barriers to communication.

The findings indicate that schools also communicate using non-verbal communication in the form of progress reports. All the participants in the study agreed that the issuing of progress reports is an effective way of sharing the academic achievement of the learners. According to one participant, progress reports offer parents an opportunity to see how their children are performing. The HODs reported that this exercise is usually carried out at the end of a term and suggested that the collection of progress reports by parents provided an opportunity for in-depth discussions on the performance of the learners. HOD B said:

The schools also use the issuing of progress reports as a platform to communicate with parents. It is during this time that teachers get the opportunity to have personal face to face discussions with the parents about the progress of the learner (HOD B).

In summary, based on the findings it may be concluded that schools send messages directly to parents and communicate with them through verbal communication and non-verbal communication. Verbal communication includes announcements during assembly, class-to-class announcements, announcing important information at tribal gatherings and phone calls while non-verbal communication includes letters, pasting notices in strategic places and using progress reports.

These forms of communication seem to work as important information is able to reach their targets and, as Magaldi-Dopman and Conway (2012) indicate, effective quality communication between parents and schools offers an increased level of support that may be helpful for learners to achieve their academic goals.

4.4.1.2.2 Two-way communication by schools

The study identified the schools' use of two-way communication strategies; verbal two-way communication including telephones, meetings and home visits and individual discussions, while two-way non-verbal communication is, largely, in the form of letters with requests for responses. The following discussion will provide a detailed report on these communication strategies in terms of the findings of the study.

Schools use telephones and mobile phones that belong to school personnel as well as land line phones found in the principals' offices. One principal reported that schools call parents when there are emergencies, for example, when learners are ill or when SGBs call meetings to solve urgent problems. Principals A and C said:

The school usually phones parents when there is an emergency SGB meeting
(Principal A)

I phone a parent when there is an emergency such as when a learner is sick
(Principal C).

One principal complained that it was not easy to communicate with parents telephonically because most parents do not own phones and the area is not technologically connected:

It is sometimes difficult to speak to parents using a phone because many parents in this area do not own phones (Principal B).

Some teachers also said that they use phones to communicate with parents, where possible. They apparently communicate with parents to report children's behaviour and their learning

progress - or lack of it. According to one teacher, he calls parents when there is evidence that the academic performance of the learners is poor and that they may not pass:

I phone parents to report about the performance of the learner and to invite parents to come and discuss a way forward for the learner (Teacher B).

The findings suggest that the use of telephones in schools to communicate with parents differs in terms of the schools' situations. According to Jooste (2011), a lack of technology inhibits communication opportunities for many parents and, from this study's findings; it seems that in the rural areas schools are unable to communicate effectively with parents by means of telephones. However, schools also use a two-way communication strategy in terms of meetings for various purposes. The schools invite parents to meetings that are planned (scheduled) and unplanned (urgent). Kombo (2015) argues that interaction between parents and the teachers by means of frequent meetings, one-on-one conversations as well as teachers' visits to learners' homes can foster two-way communication. Some participants maintained that urgent meetings were usually organised by the DBE. One parent serving on an SGB said:

As a chairperson of SGB, I attend scheduled and emergency meetings. I sometimes attend meetings organised by the DoE in the form of workshops and trainings (Parent A).

In terms of general parent meetings, most of the participants agreed that schools convene one meeting *per* term. These participants stated that they convene four parent meetings in a year and these meetings are convened by the SGBs. One parent added:

We also conduct one parent meeting quarterly (Parent B).

Another parent explained:

Parent meetings are four per year meaning it is one meeting per quarter (Parent C).

Parents seem to attend various meetings in a year which are convened by the schools but the study found that parents are reluctant to attend meetings that affect the education of their children and which, in turn, has a negative effect on learner performance. This is supported by Raborife and Phasha (2010) who revealed that parents and families appear to neglect their obligation related to this matter by leaving the responsibility solely to schools. Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009) believe that even in the schools where PI is high, it is unlikely that every family is involved or shows some level of commitment to the schools. However, schools tend to be more successful when they communicate verbally in a two-way communication mode

with parents in individual discussions; these are secured by school members making house visits.

According to the findings, teachers and principals visit the home of parents to discuss issues that are important to both schools and parents. Visiting parents at their homes is usually done when schools want to inform parents about the behaviour or performance of their children. This is confirmed by Principal B:

As a principal, I visit the family of the learner when I want to inform the parent about the performance or behaviour of the learner (Principal B).

Another principal indicated that visiting a family helps with individual discussions; the benefit of these is immediate feedback on the topic under discussion. Another principal added that having a personal discussion with parents is important as it allows for a better understanding of the issues being discussed:

Talking to a parent face-to-face gives me the opportunity to provide a clear explanation of the problem to the parent (Principal A).

It appears that teachers favour home visits or individual discussions with the parents and they often go out of their way to visit parents at their homes. The teachers all agreed that having a conversation with parents and learners, where possible, assist in conveying a sense of importance and urgency to the issue being discussed:

Talking to a parent and a learner face-to-face makes the issue under discussion readily understandable (Teacher C).

The researcher believes that when teachers and principals have individual discussions with parents, it assists in bringing about an understanding of the issue being discussed. It also allows the parties involved to receive immediate feedback. Individual communication between parents and schools can assist to develop trust between them. It may also help to build relationships with parents who will create better communication and more effective schooling. As Magaldi-Dopman (2012) argues, the main goal for PI is relationship-building and creating opportunities for parents to communicate needs and concerns.

According to the findings of this study, schools also communicate by means of two-way non-verbal communication with parents through the use of letters with requests for responses. They send letters containing information regarding learners. One principal described the information in the letters as usually containing the concerns schools regarding learner

behaviour and poor performance; they could contain requests for parents to purchase extra study materials or to provide money for extra study classes.

The finding suggests that schools write letters to parents and wait for their responses regarding any issue, mentioned above. The researcher is of the opinion that this practice may work in a community where the parents are literate but sending letters with requests for responses might be problematic in a community of illiterate parents who are unable to read the letters, let alone respond to them. One principal and another HOD said:

As a school, we send letters to parents with concern of learner behaviour (Principal C).

We send letters when we invite parents to the meetings. We give letters to the learners and they take them to their parents. Parents append signatures on those letters to acknowledge that they have received and read the letter. When the child misbehaves we do not have time for the letter, we call them telephonically (HOD B).

The findings confirm that schools use letters with requests for responses to address issues that affect learners and in which parents are invited to meetings. According to the study, when parents receive a letter from the school, they are expected to acknowledge receipt of the letter by signing a tear-off slip attached to the letter. Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009) assert that schools should not only send messages to parents, but they should also give the parents an opportunity to respond. The researcher believes that the use of these letters is effective because the responses from parents assure the school that they receive them. This form of communication is beneficial because it strengthens two-way communication between parents and schools. Agbo (2007) maintains that teachers should take the responsibility of initiating two-way communication in schools.

4.4.1.3 Theme 3: Barriers to communication

The study revealed barriers encountered by various stakeholders when communicating with each other in schools. The findings focus on obstacles encountered by parents when communicating with the school and *vice versa*.

Parents encountered barriers that include a lack of receipt of valuable information from SMTs; a lack of involvement in decision-making and; a lack of trust by teachers – amongst others - when communicating with schools.

4.4.1.3.1 Little dissemination of information by SMTs

According to one parent, teachers receive valuable information from the departmental authorities but they do not communicate it to the parents and they also organise activities without involving them which affects the smooth running of schools. Another parent, serving on an SGB mentioned that the lack of information from teachers affects parents negatively; they only tend to receive information from parents of children from neighbouring schools. The parent also indicated that the fact that teachers hide information from makes them feel valueless. Parents A and C said:

When members of the SMT receive information from their authorities they do not communicate with us but just instruct us to jump without listening to our view (Parent A).

Our teachers are wicked. They hide information from us because they do not want to update us with recent information, more especially which they get from the education department. (Parent C).

The non-involvement of parents in schools may be the result of parents feeling unwelcomed and less important when it comes to decision-making and general involvement in matters affecting schools; parents feel that they are looked down upon by schools, in general. According to Msila (2012), when rural parents attempt to address issues that affect the education of their children with the teachers, the teachers are disrespectful and that makes parents to unhappy and unwilling to visit schools.

4.4.1.3.2 Lack of involvement in decision-making

This study found that a lack of involvement in decision-making is also an obstacle that parents encounter when communicating with the schools. Schools, especially SMTs, do not involve parents in making major decisions regarding learners despite the fact that parents are the learners' guardians who have a legal say concerning issues that involve learners and their education. This is in violation of the Department of Education (2005) which stipulates that the involvement of parents should be based on an equal interaction. Some parents indicated that SMTs only invite them to report on and confirm their decisions - which were reached without their involvement. Although South African parents have a legal right to participate in their children's schooling which is entrenched in the SASA (1996), the parents suggested that this practice creates frustration and leads to misunderstandings. One parent was adamant:

They only call us to give a report of their decision which they took alone. They must call us before they take such decisions (Parent C).

Parents also mentioned that teachers and SMTs want the school to spend more money on their own needs rather than on those of the learners and when they try to address the matter they are ignored. Another parent stated that when the SMT recruits staff, it selects a panel and makes recommendations without the involvement of the parents. The school embarks on those activities alone and when parents question it, the SMT does not respond to it. One parent commented:

When it comes to recruitment of staff, for example, teachers, the SGB selects the panel and also makes recommendations. At most there is problem because SMT wants to do these things alone (Parent A).

The parent also complained that, at times, parents have to argue with the SMT and insist on the implementation of projects; the SMT then is critical of parents. The parent had this to say:

We sometimes have serious debate with SMT members when they are reluctant to approve certain projects which according to us are good in raising funds, such as gardening project and others (Parent A).

The comments made by participants suggest that some rural schools do not involve parents in decision-making or allow them to contribute to the day-to-day running of schools. This may be happening due to the fact that some schools fail to bring parents on board due to lack of communication. According to Jasinski (2012), schools have a tendency to under value the involvement of parents in education which is the result of poor communication between schools and parents. However, Cordero's (2015) study found that most parents do not understand how the system works and are intimidated; they retreat and do not participate.

4.4.1.3.3 Lack of trust by schools

A lack of trust by schools was also found to be an obstacle that parents encounter when communicating with schools. Parents are aware that schools do not trust them as most of the parent participants maintained that a lack of trust is mostly evident during SGB meetings. The parents complained that during these meetings teachers on SGBs often down played everything they mentioned. The parents further explained that this led to arguments which ended up in quarrels between the two factions. According to another parent, the lack of trust by schools in parents also made parents desert teachers who work alone. Parents B and C had the following to say:

When we have SGB meetings, the teacher always aims to arguing and looking down at whatever parents raise. We end up having unnecessary debates (Parent B).

When teachers want to start a new project, they do not communicate with us. They communicate amongst themselves while we are at home and agree amongst themselves, and they later call us to inform us about what should be done with their school as if we were part of them (Parent C).

The lack of trust between schools and parents may cause a break down in communication as teachers could decide to ignore parents and stop involving them in school matters and parents may retaliate in a similar way. According to Hoberg (2004), it is difficult to build good trustworthy relationships when schools, especially teachers, lack basic principles of a work ethic. Agbo (2007) further stresses that it takes trust, friendship and understanding to get parents involved in schooling.

4.4.1.3.4 Little cooperation from teachers

The findings of this study suggest that a lack of cooperation on the part of teachers, when they work with parents, is an obstacle that hinders effective communication in rural schools. One parent who is a member of an SGB stated that teachers do not treat parents as equal partners. According to the parent, teachers recruit and recommend new staff without parents' involvement, and when they question the processes, the teachers ridicule them. One parent said that SMTs do not want to use school finances to benefit learners, but rather to benefit themselves. Instead of employing non-teaching staff that can assist in cleaning the school, including the children's toilets, they want the school to buy them what they need and when parents question this, they are told that they are wrong. They sometimes bring blank cheques for parents to sign without informing them of their purpose. A parent lamented that schools may have SGB meeting lasting from the morning until late afternoon without any refreshments and when they questions this, they are told that they are there to represent other parents, not to eat. Furthermore, when teachers have planned to do something without parent approval, they insist on doing it. Parents A, B and C said:

When it comes to recruitment of staff, teachers select the panel and also make recommendations alone. When parents want to know about the processes, teachers fight us and that cause friction between the school and us (Parent A).

When teachers want to start new projects, they do not communicate with us. They communicate amongst themselves behind closed doors and when have taken a decision they call us to support them as if they involved us in their discussion and when we refuse to comply they mock us (Parent C).

We usually have meetings which start in the morning as early as 8 o'clock to afternoon without food. They indicate to us that we are there to work not to eat (Parent B).

Another parent who is also a member of an SGB indicated that teachers seem to have a problem when parents intervene in school issues. According to the participant, when parents want to address issues that are of concern to the school, teachers stop them claiming that the parents are overstepping their authority. Teachers do not want parents to interact with them and correct situations which seem to be going in a wrong direction. This is what a parent said:

Some teachers are problems. For example Teacher X and Z in this school usually do not come to school after they have received their salaries. When we try to address it, teachers charge us with overstepping their duties and we are not happy about that because it directly affects the education of our children (Parent A).

The evidence suggests that schools are not willing to share power with parents and cooperate on matters related to school finances; they are insensitive to parents' wishes; and they are disrespectful towards them. The fact that teachers ridicule parents when they query issues is questionable. It creates unnecessary tension between parents and schools. The exclusion of parents by teachers in school activities is a barrier to effective communication that is supposed to prevail between them. This conclusion is supported by Raborife and Phasha (2010) who believe that teachers are insensitive in dealing with parents and that they use unacceptable language that upsets parents, especially when they fail to meet their obligations which results in parents abandoning the schools – leaving them to their own devices.

The findings also suggest that teachers encounter obstacles when they communicate with parents; these barriers include a lack of commitment from parents; learners conveying the incorrect information to the parents; and parents' low levels of education.

4.4.1.3.5 Learners reporting incorrect information to parents

One teacher stated that learners regularly provide incorrect information regarding their parents, including incorrect telephone numbers which they noticed when they needed to phone parents regarding issues or events; after introducing themselves they realise that the person who answered is not the parent but a sibling or another family member. According to another teacher when they hand letters to the learners to deliver to their parents, the learners forget about the letters and teachers later finds out that some parents did not receive the letter. Teachers A and B and HOD B commented:

The most frustrating is when a learner has given out wrong information about their parents, and when you try to call you realise the number is either not working or that of a sibling instead of a parent (Teacher A).

When we give learners written notes to give their parents sometimes they forget to give them and thus they do not honour that invitation (Principal B)

Some children are not faithful. They do not give letters to their parents. Parents attend the meetings after they heard others saying, “We are going to the meeting.” We may end up blaming the parents, yet their children did not give letters to the parents (HOD B).

The fact that learners provide teachers with incorrect information and that they do not give notices to their parents constrains efficient communication between parents and schools which can eventually affect academic performance as a consequence of their non-compliance. Their forgetfulness or deliberately providing incorrect information leads to poor communication between parents and teachers and negatively affects the learner support system. This is supported by Parmaswar (2014) who believes that parents are concerned about their children who do not pass on progress reports sent to them. Magaldi-Dopman and Conway (2012) are of the opinion that effective communication between parents and schools offers an increased level of support that may be helpful for learner in the achievement of goals.

4.4.1.3.6 Low socio-economic status of parents

According to the findings, the low level of socio-economic status of rural parents hinders effective communication in rural schools. Most participants indicated that most rural parents are unemployed and poor. One participant said that most of the parents receive an income in the form of social grants and those who do work earned little salaries which could not meet the educational needs of their children. The participant further suggests that failing to meet their own financial obligations also limits parents in attending school activities. This, according to the participants, negatively affects day-to-day communication with the schools. Some participants had the following to say:

Some learners do not have school uniform even if they get social grants as some of the money is spend on food and other expenses (Principal C).

Most parents are not working and they are indigent (Teacher B).

From the years that I worked in this school, parents failed even to pay for their children when it comes to educational trips. This resulted in the school failing to undertake important educational trips and this has also contributed to low learner performance (HOD A).

The situation gets even worse when it comes to pay for educational trips, which results in the school not going out any trip for the whole year (Principal A).

It seems that most parents in rural areas live in poverty which results in their failure to pay for the educational needs of their children and the payment of school funds. According to Kombo (2015, most parents who live in rural areas are personally unable to adequately meet their children's educational costs and, as a result, the United Nations (UN) and others assist them by means of donations. The fact that parents cannot pay what is expected of them for their children makes them afraid to attend school activities in case they are asked for the money they owe the school. Parents' low level socio-economic status inhibits them from acquiring technological items, such as computers and mobile phones, which are useful in communicating with schools. The researcher believes that parents feel uncomfortable in interacting with schools because of their inferiority complex to teachers. They see teachers as of higher academic and economic standing. Nyama (2010) asserts that parents living in poverty find it difficult to understand and communicate with teachers due to their low economic status; they feel inferior compared to teachers. Ngwenya (2010) adds that parents with a low socio-economic status feel unfit to communicate, question and discuss issues which, according to them, might need further deliberation.

4.4.1.3.7 Child-headed families

Child-headed families are also seen as a barrier to communication between parents and schools in rural communities. Most participants indicated that many of the learners do not have parents. The parents either work far away or have died, possibly due to HIV/AIDS. The children stay with their grandparents, with caregivers or they are left on their own. When the schools invite parents to meetings the grandparents fail to attend because of their age and they tend to send the older children, who are high school learners, to represent them in parent meetings. Some participants mentioned that when schools organise parent meetings during school hours, there is a low attendance of parents as the older learner representatives of grandparents are in classes. Some participants had the following to say:

We have situation where the child is responsible for the family not because the parent is dead but working far away like in Gauteng and other provinces. They only come home during festive seasons and on December Christmas. This indicates that at times parents are not there to support (Principal A).

Some children remain with their grannies. When we invite parent meetings, some grannies fail to come because they are old. At most they delegate the elderly children who are also learners at post primary schools to represent them in parent meetings (Principal B).

Most children are orphans. Their families are headed by the elderly siblings who also attend the schools (Principal C).

Some participants mentioned that most of the caregivers and grandmothers are illiterate and they do not see the value of education; for this reason they do not attend school activities. According to the participants, when learners are left alone or with their grandmothers there is a lack of educational support which results in many learners returning to school with incomplete homework and they behave badly at school. Jooste (2011) is of the opinion that the elderly are capable of taking care of the children, but that dealing with school issues is difficult because they lack the necessary education. Kimu (2012) maintains that if learners are left alone by parents they tend engage in nefarious activities. My opinion is that when the parents of learners are absent schools in conjunction with parents should appoint people who are educated to be their children's guardians during their absence.

4.5 DECISION-MAKING BY SCHOOLS AND PARENTS

The analysis of data collected in the study revealed that schools and parents make decisions together and separately. According to the findings, there are instances where schools and parents collaborate to make decisions and other instances where schools make decisions without involving parents. Chindanya (2011) and Hamutenya (2013) believe that there are two forms of relationship existing between schools and parents; one is a positive partnership where parents take an active role in the day-to-day decision-making processes of schools and the other is a negative relationship where schools make unilateral decisions without involving parents.

4.5.1 Collaborative decision-making

The findings indicate that teachers and parents reach decisions by consensus, by majority rule and by agreeing among themselves. According to one teacher, if learners have a problem with teachers, they appear before the parents and SMTs where the teachers present their side of the story and the learners do the same. After hearing both sides, the teachers and parents eventually reach consensus. Another two teachers added that during the general SGB and parent meetings, decisions are reached by a show of hands or majority rule (voting). One of them said:

During general meetings, decisions are often arrived at by show of hands or voting (majority rule) (Teacher C).

The teachers mentioned that teachers and parents sometimes work together to reach decisions that affect the schools and the education of their children. During meetings, the school personnel give detailed information to parents, also indicating their needs and, thereafter, the forum makes decisions on the issues. One teacher added that although parents sometimes agree amongst themselves to volunteer to undertake certain activities, such as maintaining the school surroundings, they never did.

The study found that collaborative decision-making is sometimes hindered by to a lack of participation by parents during decision-making processes. One HOD commented that parents do not fully participate during meetings and most of them do not understand the policies governing schools which results in parents making decisions that are out of line with policies. This is what was said by HOD A:

During decision-making, parents do not participate fully during the meetings. I suspect that this low-level of participation might be the result of the low level of education (HOD A).

The results of this study suggest that school principals believe in collaborative decision-making with the parents. All the principals stated that parents contribute to decision-making during parent meetings, SGB meetings and one-on-one meetings with different stakeholders involved in schools. The principals felt that if more parents were actively involved in this process, the schools would gain more. There seems to be some conflicting views in the reports from HODs and those from the Principals. The principals indicated that parents did attend meetings organised by the schools, while HODs said that parents do not attend the meetings. The view of the researcher is that parents do attend meetings organised by SGBs, such as general parent meetings, but fail to attend meetings that specifically focus on the curriculum; that is why HODs said parents do not attend meetings. According to Principal A,

Many parents take part in making decisions in the school. It is only parents who do not attend who miss out on this opportunity. If more parents attended, the situation would be better (Principal A).

Another principal indicated that schools have suggestion boxes where parents may suggest ideas on how to improve school governance. According to the principal, the suggestion box is kept by the security personnel and the administrative clerks. Parents can put their ideas in the suggestion boxes at any time they wish. Security personnel control the entering and exiting of visitors at the gate. The principal further suggested that decisions taken by committees should be approved by all parents and they should be allowed to bring new ideas that are practical for

the schools to implement. The principal added that parents do agree on certain school-related issues and all decisions made in the meetings are binding:

We invite those parents for the parent meetings and we come out with any plan or idea. We are able to arrive at certain conclusions where a decision is taken (Principal B).

All the principals agreed that when the schools want to draw up school policies teachers request parents to make inputs in meetings in order to include them in the formulation of such policies.

The findings on how participants at meetings come to decisions suggest that parents and teachers reach decisions by consensus; by majority rule; through agreement amongst themselves; and by suggesting good ideas. The SASA (1996, Chapter 3, Section 18) stipulates that parents are part of the governance in schools and have the power to make decisions. The finding is in line with the theory of Epstein (1995) which states that schools should ensure that they involve parents in decision making and school programmes.

4.5.2 Non-collaborative decision-making

The study found that schools sometimes make decisions without involving the parents. Schools may reach decisions alone and later report those decisions to the parents. Some teachers supported the actions of the school in making unilateral decisions as they are of the opinion that parents and teachers have a different understanding of issues related to education. The teachers believe that involving parents is a waste of time when they make no contribution by their presence. Teachers A and C said:

We make decisions as a school and report them to parents later (Teacher A)

Parents do not always understand educational issues and involving them only assists to prolong the decision making process (Teacher C).

The study also revealed that parents are aware of the reasons why schools make unilateral decisions. Two parents indicated that understanding issues differently by teachers and parents does exist. One of the parents mentioned that when teachers differ with parents, some of the parents feel offended and they eventually stop attending meetings. Two of the participants said the following:

Teachers sometimes differ with us as parents when we make decisions and this is an offence to parents who may eventually stop attending parent meetings (Parent A).

We have a challenge of seeing things differently (Parent C).

It seems that schools take the opportunity to make decisions unilaterally, without the involvement of parents. Parents stop attending meetings as a result of the pressure that teachers put on them by being harsh during meetings.

Often, when teachers undertake educational excursions and want to start new projects they neither inform parents nor involve them in making decisions. The parents further suggested that parents are only involved when teachers need their support and when they experience some obstacles. According to SASA (1996, Chapter 3, Section 18), it is imperative that schools always involve parents in school activities because parents are part of school governance and have influence conferred on them by SASA (1996).

When teachers under take educational trip they neither inform us nor involve us in decision making (Parent B).

It appears that parents and schools are capable of making decisions collaboratively and non-collaboratively. According to the findings, it was reported that schools often reach decisions in consensus with parents and at times take decisions without involving the parents. Making decisions without the involvement of either party at school, is discouraged as it may result in unilateral decisions that only favour one side.

4.6 FINDINGS FROM OBSERVATION

The researcher examined attendance by studying gate control registers and observing parent participation during meetings and decision-making. Observation was conducted at three schools: Schools A, B and C. The findings emerged from the analysis of attendance of meetings by parents, their participation in meetings, and decision-making.

4.6.1 School A

The school had an enrolment of 789 learners at the time of fieldwork in 2015 and is situated in a rural area.

4.6.1.1 Attendance of meetings by parents

The researcher observed three meetings; two were general parent meetings and one was an SGB committee meeting. During the two general parent meetings the number of parents who attended was 200 and 167 respectively, which is low when compared to the total enrolment of

learners. The SGB consisted of eleven members - six of the members were parents. In that meeting, only three parents attended.

4.6.1.2 Participation of parents during meetings

In all three meetings that the researcher observed, teachers dominated the discussions and very few raised their hands to speak. This occurred even when the chairperson mentioned some of the parents by name to invite them to speak; however, most parents declined the offer.

4.6.1.3 Decision-making by parents

As indicated above, many of the parents who attended meetings did not participate in making decisions. Teachers were the ones who were vocal and dictated the direction in which decisions were taken.

4.6.2 School B

School B had an enrolment of 801 learners and situated in a rural area.

4.6.2.1 Attendance of meeting by parents

The researcher observed two meetings at the school: a general parents' meeting and one SGB committee meeting. The attendance of parents at the general parents' meeting was 137 parents. The SGB consisted of twelve members and six of those were parents. During the SGB members, only four parents attended and two of them were absent, they did not even send apologies.

4.6.2.2 Participation of parents during meetings

The researcher found that the participation of parents during the general parents' meeting was poor. It seemed that many of the parents agreed with whoever was speaking by making muffled sounds which the researcher at first took to signify agreement, but was soon puzzled when the same sounds were repeated for opposing ideas. For the record, only one parent stood up and gave her opinion. The researcher later questioned the parent and discovered that she was a teacher teaching at a nearby school.

4.6.2.3 Decision-making

Parents who attended meetings did not actively participate in decision-making and seemed to agree with all decisions being taken - even if they differed. The researcher noticed that parents made sounds in agreement with speakers and would make the same sounds later when anyone else opposed the speakers. The parents in this school do not appear to understand the order of

debates, but voted energetically when requested to raise hands in support of certain decisions. The researcher observed the same behaviour during the SGB committee meeting. In this meeting parents seemed reluctant to raise their hands to offer opinions and only raised their hands when voting.

4.6.3 School C

School C is situated in a rural area and had an enrolment of 568 learners.

4.6.3.1 Attendance of meetings by parents

The researcher observed two meetings: a general parents' meeting and an SGB committee meeting. The number of parents attending the general parent meeting was 73. The SGB committee consisted of nine members of which five were parents but only one parent was able to attend the SGB meeting.

4.6.3.2 Participation during meetings

The researcher observed that parents did not actively participate in the general parents' meetings or the SGB committee meeting. It seemed that parents were hesitant to share their opinions; they only showed some interest when they were required to vote through the show of hands.

4.6.3.3 Decision-making

The parents did not participate in the decision-making. The researcher noticed that only two parents raised their hands and offered their opinions during the meeting. Parents seemed content to allow the teachers to make decisions on their behalf.

4.7 FINDINGS FROM DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

The researcher collected information from documents, such as attendance registers, gate control registers and minutes of meetings. Of these documents the researcher concentrated on the attendance registers of meetings that parents attended and their participation during these meetings. The researcher was able to assess participation by reading through the minutes and compared the names of the people that were recorded in the minutes with the roll call and gate control registers.

4.7.1 School A

4.7.1.1 Attendance of meetings by parents

According to the gate control register of School A on the dates of the two general parents' meetings, the attendance of parents at the meetings was 200 and 167, respectively. The attendance was poor when compared with the school's enrolment of 789 learners.

4.7.1.2 Participation during meetings

As recorded in the minutes of the two general parents' meetings, none of the parents offered opinions throughout the meeting. Although they apparently withheld their personal opinions or questions during the meeting, they took part in voting (decision-making) by raising their hands.

4.7.2 School B

4.7.2.1 Attendance of meetings by parents

The roll call and gate control registers showed that a total of 137 parents attended the general parents' meeting. The attendance was meagre, considering that 801 learners are enrolled at the school.

4.7.2.2 Participation during meeting

The minutes of the meeting indicated that only one parents took the opportunity to speak during the meeting while the other parents kept quiet. The minutes also showed that parents voted by a show of hands.

4.2.3 School C

4.2.3.1 Attendance of meetings

According to the roll call and gate control registers 73 parents attended the general parents' meeting. The attendance was very poor when considering that 568 learners were enrolled at the school.

4.2.3.2 Participation during meetings

The minutes show that parents of children at school C made a poor contribution during meetings and the decision-making process. According to the minutes only two parents raised hands to add their voices to decisions taken, while the other 71 parents remained silent.

4.8 CONSOLIDATION OF FINDINGS

Table 4.6: Tringulation of the findings

Interview data	Documents collected	Participation in decision making observations made
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication between teachers and parents: Commuincation took place through one-way and two-way communication. • Lack of trust between teachers and parents: Parents and teachers did not trust each other. • Lack of cooperation: Teachers alleged that parents do not cooperate well when they want to interact with them while parents alleged that teachers are hard and undermine them. • Low socio-economic: Most rural parents are unemployed, and poor. • Child-headed families: Most learners are orpahns. Parents work far away or might have died due to HIV/AIDS. • Literacy level of parents: Most parents are 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roll call : 40% of the parents attended meetings. • Invitation letters to the parents: Often presented in English. • Minutes of the meetings: These were written in English. • Attendance registers of parent meetings: Some parents struggled to sign the register; instead they made a cross. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation of parents during meetings: Most parents were passive and seemed to agree with all decisions taken by teachers, while teachers were vocal and dictated the decisions. • Collaborative decision making: Teachers and parents reached decisions by consensus, majority rule and secret ballot. • Language of communication: Teachers and SGB members presented their speeches in Xitsonga but at some stage would switch to English and illiterate parents were not comfortable speaking. • Order of debates: Parents seemed not to understand the order of debate.

illiterate and cannot read and write well.		
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The results of the interviews, document analysis and observation showed that parents do not attend school - as required by SASA (1996) - which hinders the effective running of schools. During the interviews, the researcher discovered that parents fail to attend to school matters due to work commitments and illiteracy. The data collected from documents and through observation supported the findings from the interviews, signifying that in all the schools the attendance of meetings by parents was way below expected levels. The findings also revealed that parents do not actively participate during meetings supporting conclusions drawn from document analysis and observation that very few parents actually take part in discussions during meetings. This confirms the data gained from the interviews that parents do not participate but rely on teachers to make decisions for them.

4.9 CONCLUSION

This chapter has revealed various strategies that parents and schools employ when communicating with each other and obstacles that prevent effective communication between them. The strategies are one- and two-way communication that could be either verbal or non-verbal. The findings of the study suggest that parents are faced with barriers, such as the absence of information dissemination by SMTs and a lack of parent involvement in decision-making. Parents have little trust in school personnel and for schools there are obstacles, such as learners providing them with incorrect information of parents. Parents appear to lack commitment and they have low levels of education.

The study also found that schools and parents reach decisions collaboratively and non-collaboratively. The next and final chapter gives a summary of the research results; it draws conclusions; it makes recommendations; and it provide suggestions for further research on the topic.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTIONS

This chapter will give the summary of findings based on the analysis of the collected data, the recommendations and conclusions drawn from the study. However, before embarking onto these, the researcher would like to re-state the aims/purpose of the study and also give a brief overview of the study.

5.2 RE-STATEMENT OF THE AIMS OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to explore the proficiency of SMTs in communicating with parents who have children in rural primary schools where the SMTs are regarded as an essential support structure in the instructional learning activities of schools. The study aimed to investigate mechanisms of effective communication between schools and parents in their efforts to cooperate for the benefit of the children and to understand how decisions are taken between SMTs and parents.

For this purpose the researcher used various ways of investigation that include documentation, observation and interviews with parents, teachers, HODs and principals. The researcher collected different documents, such as attendance registers, gate control registers, roll calls and minutes of the meetings. From these documents, the researcher compared minutes of the meetings with gate control registers and roll calls to explore the attendance and the participation of parents. Interviews were conducted through one- and two-way communication to investigate the participation of parents and school personnel. Observation was conducted to explore how parents reach decisions, their language of communication and the level of their participation in school meetings. All information collected from various data collection methods were recorded and ultimately analysed.

The study aimed at determining the experiences of SMTs when communicating with parents in rural primary schools and found that there are challenges that go beyond the control of the schools. Significantly, the complexity of this study lies in the gap that exist between the rich and the poor who resulted from the unfortunate apartheid system, economic depression challenges as well as globalisation. Many rural citizens still suffer in various ways; they are

poorly educated and this has a negative effect because they do not obtain better jobs that can earn them better salaries. Their main struggle is to receive basic education which is unacceptable and they should be protected by the country's constitution.

5.3 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The study identified methods of communication used by both schools and parents. Obstacles that hinder effective communication between schools and parents were observed as well as how schools and parents make decisions. The summary of findings based on the analysis of the data collected from the participants, including strategies used by parents when communicating with schools; strategies used by schools to communicate with parents; barriers to communication; and the decision-making processes of schools and parents.

5.3.1 Strategies used by parents when communicating with the school

The study revealed that parents communicate with schools through one- and two-way communication strategies which are carried out both verbally and non-verbally.

5.3.1.1 One-way communication

According to the findings parents communicate with schools using a one-way communication strategy. This one-way communication strategy could be either verbal or non-verbal. It appears that parents prefer to communicate with the schools non-verbally by means of letters and notes. Rural parents only write letters when they need to communicate with schools; for instance, when learners are sick and are unable to go to school. These letters are sent *via* other learners to schools.

5.3.1.2 Two-way communication

The findings revealed that parents also communicate with schools using a two-way communication strategy. As with the one-way communication strategy, the two-way communication strategy is either verbal or non-verbal. Parents are able to communicate with schools verbally at meetings and individually in personal discussions. The findings confirm that parents are able to communicate non-verbally using two-way communication strategy by sending notes to schools that require a response from them.

5.3.2 Strategies used by schools to communicate with parents

According to the findings, the schools also use the two different communication strategies, one- and two-way communication, to interact with parents.

5.3.2.1 One-way communication

Schools communicate with parents using a one-way communication strategy which can be verbal or non-verbal. According to the findings, schools communicate with parents verbally by making use of radio announcements, announcement at tribal authority meetings and by sending messages to parents *via* learners. Schools communicate with parents non-verbally by making use of pamphlets, letters, advertisements and progress reports. The negative aspect of using non-verbal communication strategies, such as pamphlets, letters and advertisements, is that they favour the literate parents.

5.3.2.2 Two-way communication

The study established that schools are able to communicate with parents using two-way communication strategies that include verbal modes, such as via telephone messages and conversations, parent meetings, SGB meetings, AGMs, home visits, and individual conversations at school. Schools also communicate with parents non-verbally by means of letters that request a response. The parents can choose to respond either in writing or verbally. The challenge, as indicated in the findings, is that most of the parents are unable to read and write and often rely on their children to read and respond to letters for them.

5.3.3 Barriers to communication

This study revealed that obstacles or barriers are encountered by both schools and parents when communicating with each other. Parents encounter obstacles that hinder effective communication with the school, such as SMTs' not disseminating information; their lack of involvement in decision-making; and their lack of trust in school personnel. Schools, on the other hand, also encounter obstacles that make it difficult for them to communicate with parents. The schools' obstacles are learners who provide incorrect information to schools and about their parents, lack of commitment in parents, and their low levels of education.

5.3.4 Decision-making process of schools and parents

The study shows that schools and parents achieve consensus in making decisions most of the time. According to the findings, schools reach final decisions by involving parents during formal parent and SGB meetings where both parties vote, either by a show of hands or a secret ballot. The findings also revealed that schools sometimes reach decisions without involving parents and those parents are only informed of decisions after they have been made.

The discussion of the summary of findings is based on the analysed data collected from the participants, which will include strategies used by parents when communicating with schools, strategies used by schools to communicate with parents, barriers to communication, and the decision-making processes of schools and parents.

5.4 CONCLUSIONS

The study sought to explore how parents and SMTs communicate in rural schools; to understand how decisions are taken between parents and SMTs in rural areas; and to explore the challenges that rural parents encounter when communicating with teachers. The study used multiple methods to collect data such as personal interviews, documents analysis and observations.

The findings revealed that parents and teachers in rural primary schools used one- and two-way communication to convey issues that affect the education of the learners. Through one way communication, parents communicate with schools verbally and non-verbally. Verbal communication includes parents sending messages to teachers *via* their children or neighbour's children. Parents also communicate with the teachers of their children non-verbally; they use letters and notices to share information with teachers, such as when they want to report important information and when their children are ill. Similarly, teachers use one way communication to converse with parents verbally; they announce messages on local radio stations, send messages to the parents with learners and make announcements at tribal authority meetings. Two way communication is used when parents send notes that need responses from the teachers and when they communicate with teachers at school meetings. Teachers also communicate with parents in holding telephone conversations, paying home visits, at SGB meetings, AGMs and individually in the school setting.

The study also revealed that schools reach decisions collaborately and non-collaborately with parents concerning learners; they reached decisions collaborately through the use of secret

ballots and formal voting. However, decisions are also reach unilaterally by sidelining parents at school meetings and dominating them as most rural parents lack knowledge and skills related to school issues.

The findings of the study also suggest that teachers and parents encounter barriers to communication when working together. Parents alleged that SMTs withheld important information that was supposed to be disclosed to them; they were not involved in decision-making; there was a lack of cooperation and trust. The schools, on the other hand, claimed that it was hard for them to communicate with parents because of their low levels of education; lack of commitment; and because learners provided wrong information about their parents. The parents' low levels of education was a problem in that they could not read important notices directed to them as well as school policies that are important in the smooth running of schools. This, according to the teachers, was a challenge as it negatively affected their day-to-day relationships.

5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

A study of the SMTs experiences in communicating with parents in the rural primary schools has prompted the following recommendations:

- Schools prefer the use of non-verbal communication strategies or written communication, such as letters, pamphlets and advertisements. This type of communication does not take the literacy levels of parents in the community into consideration. It is, therefore, recommended that schools should consider using the native (indigenous) language of the community when delivering messages. In this case, an ideal language chosen in this area is Xitsonga.
- Many rural schools prefer to use telephones/mobile phones to communicate with the parents. Most parents do not have phones due to the costs involved in purchasing and maintaining them. It is recommended that the Department of Basic Education should find some strategies to encourage parents to attend school meetings and participate in its activities.
- Many parents in the rural areas have low levels of education and this gives rise to a situation where schools have limited ways of communicating with them. The researcher recommends that schools should embrace user-friendly methods to

communicate with parents rather than using complicated methods which are problematic.

- Most of the learners live in child-headed families because their parents work far away from their homes. This leaves the learners without guardians, and as a result, nobody pays attention to their school activities. It is recommended that schools should formulate a policy which requests all parents who live far away from their children to delegate elderly people to be responsible for their children's school activities and other social needs.
- Many rural parents do not attend school meetings. According to this study parents only attend school meetings at the end of the year when they collect their children's last progress reports. This is usually when meetings have refreshments in the form of snacks available and when there are discussions regarding the problems the school has, or has had with their children. The researcher recommends that schools in rural areas should request the parents of their learners to attend school meetings throughout the year and also stress the importance of attending these meetings concerning the education of their children.
- Most rural parents are poor, and as a result they fail to provide for the needs of their children and to support the schools. Since they cannot adequately provide the school with the necessary and extra finances needed, they are afraid of interacting with the schools. The researcher recommends that the Department of Basic Education should allocate more money to rural schools to encourage PI.
- Many learners provide schools with incorrect information about their parents and the schools only realise this when they try to communicate with parents. The researcher recommends that schools should obtain parents' contact details at the beginning of each school year when they come to enrol their children. It is recommended that this data should be stored by the schools on computer or, if that is not possible, in a filing cabinet. This forms part of caring about the welfare of the learner and creates an understanding of the socio-economic conditions in which the children live.

5.6 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

The study of SMTs' capabilities to communicate with rural parents in primary schools suggests that further research may be done to close gaps in communication in rural areas. Some suggestions of the areas where further research can be done include the following:

- An in-depth study on how schools - with the help of the principals - can reach out to parents in rural areas.
- The obstacles that hinder parental involvement in decision-making.
- How schools can engage with poorly educated parents to encourage them to participate in the education of their children.
- How schools can use different ways of communication to enhance attendance of meetings in rural areas.

5.7 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Most of the learners in rural schools live in families headed by older siblings, less educated parents and grandparents. This is a result of parents who work in far away areas and parents and grandparents who are not fully literate. Sometimes parents and grandparents do not see the value of education in that they do not attend to school matters relevant to their children or grandchildren. Some children are orphaned because of HIV and AIDS. When schools invite parents to engage with them on school issues, they send out letters. The grandparents experience difficulty in reading and responding to the invitations coming from the school, and as a result, they do not attend parent meetings or any other school-related events. When the older siblings who are still learners themselves play the part of guardians, parent meetings are also unattended because they are attending their own classes. Another issue that is seen as limiting in the research is the language barrier. The researcher had to ask research questions in Xitsonga and later translate them to English. The researcher chose to interview SGB members because of their knowledge and experience in working and communicating in schools. Urban working parents were not eligible for the study since they do not have the opportunity of interacting with schools on a day-to-day basis. It must be noted that the few schools that were used in this study may not be a full representation of the all the rural schools of the Man'ombe Circuit.

5.8 RESTRICTIONS

The participants in this study were limited to the SMTs that included principals, HODs, CS1 teachers and parents whose children attend selected primary schools in a circuit of the Mopani District in Limpopo Province. The principals selected had five years' experience working in rural primary schools and their schools had an enrolment of 500 learners or more. The study excluded principals whose schools had enrolments of less than 500 learners and those with

less than 5 years' working experience in the Man'ombe Circuit. The study also excluded all schools in the Man'ombe Circuit, located in urban areas.

5.9 CONCLUSION

In this study it emerged that effective communication between parents and schools, in general, is vital. Communication is a valuable tool that keeps all parties informed about the needs and expectations of all the role-players. The ability of the SMTs to perform a number of roles and to intervene at various levels is determined by effective communication.

All people, whether educated or not, require polite communication in order to maintain ongoing relationships. According to the findings of the study, most parents in rural schools feel uncomfortable, unwanted and undermined by teachers who are insensitive to their needs. The language used by teachers while communicating with parents was not deemed acceptable which tends to make some parents reluctant to attend school activities. Poor communication between parents and teachers appears to be due to a lack of respect, cooperation and trust on the part of the teachers. The study also revealed that teachers tend to use educational terminology when communicating with rural parents who are mostly illiterate and do not understand English well. The study also showed that parents' low levels of education have a negative effect when it comes to reaching decisions. Most of them are uncomfortable in discussing school issues because they lack the skills and knowledge to read and interpret policies written in a foreign language/English; this allows teachers to dominate parents in decision-making and makes parents feel inferior, believing that they are not in the same social category as the teachers. To bridge the gap in communication between parents and teachers, schools should treat parents with respect and trust - even if they are illiterate; this would increase PI in schools.

The study also showed the low socio-economic status of rural parents to be a barrier to communication. The fact that most parents in rural areas live in poverty contributes to a lack of modern communication resources; for example, most parents struggle to acquire cell phones and technological items, such as laptops, as well as internet gadgets because they are expensive to buy and to maintain. These are major sources of poor communication between schools and teachers in rural schools.

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ANNEXURE A: PERMISSION LETTER FROM DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



LIMPOPO
PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Enquiries: Dr. Makola MC, Tel No: 015 290 9448. E-mail: MaakolaMC@edu.limpopo.gov.za

PO BOX 5436

GIYANE

0826

SAMBO SI

RE: Request for permission to Conduct Research

1. The above bears reference.
2. The Department wishes to inform you that your request to conduct a research has been approved- **TITLE: SCHOOL MANAGEMENT TEAMS EXPERIENCES COMMUNICATING WITH RURAL PARENTS IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS**
3. The following conditions should be considered
 - 3.1 The research should not have any financial implications for Limpopo Department of Education.
 - 3.2 Arrangements should be made with both the Circuit Offices and the schools concerned.
 - 3.3 The conduct of research should not anyhow disrupt the academic programs at the schools.
 - 3.4 The research should not be conducted during the time of Examinations especially the forth term.
 - 3.5 During the study, the research ethics should be practiced, in particular the principle of voluntary participation (the people involved should be respected).
 - 3.6 Upon completion of research study, the researcher shall share the final product of the research with the Department.
4. Furthermore, you are expected to produce this letter at Schools/ Offices where you intend conducting your research as an evidence that you are permitted to conduct the research.

Page 1 of 2

Cnr. 113 Biccard & 24 Excelsior Street, POLOKWANE, 0700, Private Bag X9489, POLOKWANE, 0700
Tel: 015 290 7600, Fax: 015 297 6920/4220/4494

The heartland of southern Africa - development is about people!



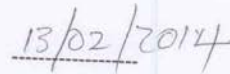
5. The department appreciates the contribution that you wish to make and wishes you success in your investigation.

Best wishes.



Dederen K.O


Acting Head of Department



Date



ANNEXURE B: PERMISSION LETTER FROM CIRCUIT MANAGER

**LIMPOPO**
PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA
DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION

MOPANI DISTRICT – MAN'OMBE CIRCUIT

Enq : MR. Maringa S.S
Tel : 015 812 0637

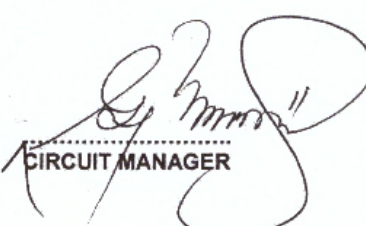
Date: 25 July 2014

TO: MR. SAMBO S.I
P.O. Box 5436
GIYANI
0826

CONSENT TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN MAN'OMBE PRIMARY SCHOOLS: YOURSELF.

1. The above matter bears reference.
2. The Circuit Manager wishes to inform you that your request to interview SGB members, CS1 Educators, HODs and principals in Man'ombe Circuit has been granted.
3. When conducting interviews with the above participants, the following conditions must be adhered to:
 - 3.1 No person may be forced to participate in the study.
 - 3.2 No disruption of the normal teaching and learning programme in schools.
4. This letter may serve as proof of permission to conduct research when visiting SGB members, CS1 Educators, HODs and principals in schools.
5. Your co-operation in this regard will be highly appreciated.

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
MAN'OMBE CIRCUIT - MOPANI DISTRICT
EXAMINATIONS
2014 -07- 25
PRIVATE BAG X0054, GIYANI, 0826
TEL: 015 812 0637
LIMPOPO PROVINCE


CIRCUIT MANAGER

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
MOPANI DISTRICT, Man'ombe Circuit, Private Bag X 9654 GIYANI, 0826
Tel 015 812 0637 Fax No. 015 812 4421 or 015 812 1689

The heartland of Southern Africa – development is about people



ANNEXURE C: APPLICATION LETTER TO CONDUCT RESEARCH



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

Enq: Sambo S.I – Cell-0728073695/0832754604
E-mail address- isasambo@gmail.com

P. O. Box 5436
Giyani
0826
07 February 2014

Departmental Head (HOD)
Limpopo Department of Education
Private Bag X 9489
Polokwane
0700

Dear Sir/ Madam

APPLICATION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN LIMPOPO: MAN'OMBE CIRCUIT

I, Sambo Sosa Isaac, a MEd candidate studying Education Management, Law and Policy at University of Pretoria, hereby request your permission to conduct research interviews with the principals, Departmental Heads (HODs), Cs1 educators and School Governing Bodies (SGB) members attached to Mopani schools at Man'ombe Circuit, Giyani. Furthermore, I would like to observe their parent meetings in order to explore the way the schools, parents and communities interact with one another while they attempt to address issues of their children in schools.

My research Topic is: **"School Management Teams' experiences communicating with rural parents in primary schools"**. This research is aimed at understanding the way in which SMTs and parents communicate in their effort to enhance the academic achievement of children in rural primary schools. The outcome of the study may assist to eliminate the lack of parental involvement in schools while on the other hand encourage maximum participation.

The issue of dates and times will be mutually negotiated with the schools involved. I will also ensure that the research does not interfere with their teaching contacts.

I hope my request will receive your favourable considerations.

Yours sincerely

Sambo S.I

ANNEXURE D: CONSENT LETTER (PRINCIPAL)



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

P. O .Box 5436
Giyani
0826

The Principal

Sir/Madam

Consent for an interview

This letter serves as a request for permission to conduct research at your school. I am presently studying for a Masters Degree at the University of Pretoria. My research topic is: **School Management Team's experiences communicating with rural parents in primary schools.**

Besides your participation, I would like to interview an HOD or any senior educator, a CS1 teacher and a parent who has a child at your school. Data collection for this study will employ semi-structured interviews, document analysis and passive observation. Observations will be conducted during parent meetings. All these will help me to understand how the school interacts with parents while working together to enhance the academic performance of school learners.

Interviews conducted with each participant at your school will take 45 to 60 minutes. A tape recorder and field notes will be used to capture the essence of this study. All documents and information will be treated with the strictest confidentiality and will be used solely for the purposes of this research.

The findings of this study may prompt educational authorities to help encourage parental involvement in primary schools , particularly in rural areas. Furthermore, the study may be able to reveal barriers to communication and come out with recommendations to facilitate parental involvement in schools. Lastly, the study will minimize unhealthy relationships between, schools and parents.

Participation in this study is voluntary. All members who agree to participate in this study will have the right to withdraw at any time when they loose interest in the study without any penalty. Under no circumstances will the identity of the interview participants be made known to any parties or organisation . Your names and the names of your staff will never be revealed. The Interviews will be conducted after teaching hours to avoid disturbance during contact

time. For any clarity, you are welcomed to contact me at 072 8073695 /083 2754 604 or E-mail address:samboisaac01@gmail.com. My supervisor's details are: Dr MAU Mohlakwana; University of Pretoria; Faculty of Education: Groenkloof Campus; Pretoria. Contact details: (012) 4205752.

Yours sincerely

Sambo SI..... (Researcher)

Dr. MAU Mohlakwana..... (Supervisor)

Consent

Agree/disagree to participate in the research.

If you agree, please sign the section below.

I..... (Print your surname and names) have read and understood the purpose of the study and I agree to participate. I understand the nature of the study and give my consent for the researcher to interview and record my responses. I understand that my identity and that my school will be kept confidential and anonymous. I understand that my participation is voluntary and have the right to terminate if I feel uncomfortable during the research. I am also not compelled to divulge information that I feel uncomfortable in disclosing.

Participant's name.....

Participant's signature.....

Participant's contact number (Work)..... (Home).....

ANNEXURE E: CONSENT LETTERS (HOD/ TEACHER)



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

P. O .Box 5436
Giyani
0826

The HOD/ Teacher

Sir/Madam

Consent for an interview

This letter serves as a request for permission to interview you at your school. I am presently studying for a Masters Degree at the University of Pretoria. My research topic is: **School Management Team's experiences communicating with rural parents in primary schools.**

Data collection for this study will employ semi-structured interviews, document analysis and passive observation. All these will help me to understand how the school interacts with parents while working together to enhance the academic performance of school learners.

Interviews conducted with each participant at your school will take 45 to 60 minutes. A tape recorder and field notes will be used to capture the essence of this study. All documents and information will be treated with the strictest confidentiality and will be used solely for the purposes of this research.

The findings of this study may prompt educational authorities to help encourage parental involvement in primary schools , particularly in rural areas. Furthermore, the study may be able to reveal barriers to communication and come out with recommendations to facilitate parental involvement in schools. Lastly, the study will minimize unhealthy relationships between, schools and parents.

Participation in this study is voluntary. All members who agree to participate in this study will have the right to withdraw at any time when they loose interest in the study without any penalty. Under no circumstances will the identity of the interview participants be made known to any parties or organisation . Your names and the names of your staff will never be revealed.

The Interviews will be conducted after teaching hours to avoid disturbance during contact time. For any clarity, you are welcomed to contact me at 072 8073695 /083 2754 604 or E-mail address:samboisaac01@gmail.com.

My supervisor's details are: Dr MAU Mohlakwana; University of Pretoria; Faculty of Education: Groenkloof Campus; Pretoria. Contact details: (012) 4205752.

Yours sincerely

Sambo SI..... (Researcher)

Dr. MAU Mohlakwana..... (Supervisor)

Consent

Agree/disagree to participate in the research.

If you agree, please sign the section below.

I..... (Print your surname and names) have read and understood the purpose of the study and I agree to participate. I understand the nature of the study and give my consent for the researcher to interview and record my responses. I understand that my identity and that my school will be kept confidential and anonymous. I understand that my participation is voluntary and have the right to terminate if I feel uncomfortable during the research. I am also not compelled to divulge information that I feel uncomfortable in disclosing.

Participant's name.....

Participant's signature.....

Participant's contact number (Work)..... (Home).....

ANNEXURE F: CONSENT LETTER (PARENT)



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

ANNEXTURE F

P. O .Box 5436
Giyani
0826

Dear parent

Sir/Madam

Consent for an interview

This letter serves as a request for permission to interview you at your school. I am presently studying for a Masters Degree at the University of Pretoria. My research topic is: **School Management Team's experiences communicating with rural parents in primary schools**. I would like to interview you on the basis that you are a parent of a learner at the school.

The interview will take 45 minutes to 60 minutes. Interviews will be tape recorded and field notes will be taken.

This study will help to create awareness and understanding of the school's importance of communicating with rural parents in primary schools. The findings of this study may prompt educational authorities to help encourage parental involvement in primary schools, particularly in rural areas. Furthermore, the study may be able to reveal barriers to communication and come out with recommendations to facilitate parental involvement in schools. Lastly, the study will minimize unhealthy relationships between, schools and parents.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any time when you lose interest in the study without any penalty. Confidentiality and anonymity is fully assured. Under no circumstances will the identity of the interview participants be made known to any parties or organisation. The Interviews will be conducted at the school at any time of your convenience. For any clarity, you are welcomed to contact me at 072 8073695 /083 2754 604 or E-mail address: isasambo@gmail.com

My supervisor's details are:

Dr MAU Mohlakwana; University of Pretoria; Faculty of Education; Groenkloof Campus; Groenkloof; Pretoria. Tel: (012) 4205752

Yours sincerely

Sambo S.I  (Researcher)

Consent

Agree/disagree to participate in the research.

If you agree, please sign the section below

I..... (Print your surname and name) have read and understood the purpose of the study and I agree to participate. I understand the nature of the study and give my consent for the researcher to interview and tape record my responses. I understand that my identity and that of my school will be kept confidential and anonymous. I understand that my participation is voluntary and have the right to terminate if I feel uncomfortable during the research. I am also not compelled to divulge information that I feel uncomfortable in disclosing.

Participant's name.....

Participant's signature.....

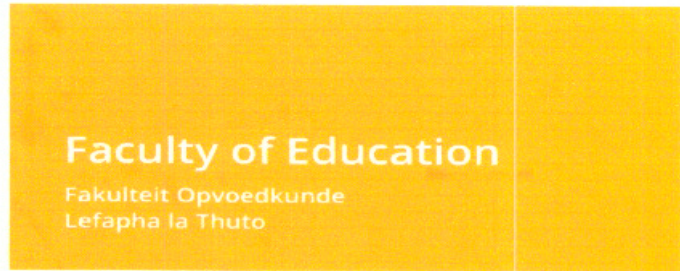
Participant's contact number (Work)..... (Home).....



ANNEXURE G: ETHICS CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA



RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

DEGREE AND PROJECT

INVESTIGATOR(S)

DEPARTMENT

DATE PROTOCOL APPROVED

DATE CLEARANCE ISSUED

CLEARANCE NUMBER :

EM 14/03/03

MEd

School management teams' experiences of communicating with rural parents in primary schools

Sambo Sosa Isaac

Education Management and Policy Studies

16 September 2014

25 November 2015

Please note:

For Masters applications, ethical clearance is valid for 2 years

For PhD applications, ethical clearance is valid for 3 years.

**CHAIRPERSON OF ETHICS
COMMITTEE**

Prof Liesel Ebersöhn

DATE

25 November 2015

CC

Jeannie Beukes

Liesel Ebersöhn

Dr MAU Mohlakwana

This ethical clearance certificate is issued subject to the condition that the approved protocol was implemented. The Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education does not accept any liability for research misconduct, of whatsoever nature, committed by the researcher(s) in the implementation of the approved protocol.

Please quote the clearance number in all enquiries.

ANNEXURE H: LETTER FROM THE LANGUAGE EDITOR

DECLARATION OF LANGUAGE EDITING

22 February 2016

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This is to confirm that I have language edited and proof-read the dissertation by Mr Isaac Sosa Sambo entitled

SCHOOL MANAGEMENT TEAMS' EXPERIENCES OF COMMUNICATING WITH PARENTS IN RURAL PRIMARY SCHOOLS

The language editing/proof-reading process included the checking of spelling, punctuation, syntax and expression. An attempt was made to simplify complex sentences and, where necessary, combine short sentences to clarify meaning. Attention was given to the use of various language elements, such as prepositions, consistency in language usage and formatting as well as tenses and capital letters.



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