Management of Parental Engagement Amongst Lower Income Families in a Gauteng Primary School

by

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR of PHILOSOPHY

in the Faculty of Education

at the

UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

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

RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	CLEARANCE NUMBER: **EDU199/20**
DEGREE AND PROJECT	PhD Management of parental engagement amongst lower income families in a Gauteng primary school
INVESTIGATOR	Ms Tanya Lee Greenhalgh
DEPARTMENT	Education Management and Policy Studies
APPROVAL TO COMMENCE STUDY	07 December 2020
DATE OF CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	09 September 2022

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Abstract

This study builds on and contributes to work in the field of parental engagement among lower income families in Gauteng. Although a number of studies have examined the importance of parental involvement and the challenges experienced by lower income families, there has not been a strong focus on the management of parental engagement in children's learning and the recognition of more subtle forms of engagement. The purpose of this study was to explore practical forms of parental engagement that could be implemented by socio-economically vulnerable parents. It aimed at giving recognition to a wider range of efforts and behaviours, which might seem subtle or be overlooked. This study thus sought to investigate ways in which parental engagement could practically be managed by the school under study and the lower income parents within the school community. The data for this mixed methods study were collected through a survey in the form of a questionnaire using purposive sampling. In addition, focus group interviews in the form of a workshop and semi-structured individual interviews were conducted. This study draws strongly on the work of Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler who explained how parents' perceptions of themselves and of the school influenced their decisions to be involved and engaged in the learning of their children. This study further drew on work conducted by Joyce Epstein who identified different types of parental involvement, including parenting, communication, and learning at home. This action research study therefore collaboratively explored practical ways in which parental engagement in the learning of children could be managed.

Key terms:

Parental engagement, parental involvement, socio-economic status, parental empowerment.

List of abbreviations

SES	Socio-economic status
SGB	School governing body
DoE	Department of Education
SIAS	Screening, identification, assessment and support

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26 September 2022

CONFIRMATION OF EDITING

I, Margaret Linström, hereby confirm that I language edited the doctoral thesis of Tanya Lee Greenhalgh titled *Management of parental engagement amongst lower income families in a Gauteng primary school.*

The editing was done electronically, using Track Changes, to enable the candidate to accept or reject the suggested changes.

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Chapter 1

Background and Context

The significance of parental involvement in the schooling and learning of children is not a recent phenomenon. Numerous studies across the globe have identified and discussed the benefits associated with this involvement and the challenges impeding its successful implementation (Myende & Maifala, 2020; Mohapi & Netshitangani, 2018; Luet, 2017; Robinson, 2017; Kimu & Steyn, 2013; Oyebade, 2013; Bolivar & Chrispeels, 2011; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011).

Parental involvement in schooling refers to the time, money and energy parents invest and dedicate towards the academics and schooling of their children. This involvement encompasses a range of activities, which have largely been sub-divided into two main forms of involvement, namely, school-based involvement and home-based involvement (Barger, *et al*, 2019; Hamlin & Flessa, 2018). School-based involvement is typically understood as parents' participation on the school premises through volunteering or governance. It involves direct contact and communication between parents and school personnel. Examples of such involvement include, but are not limited to, attending parent meetings, being a member of the school governing body, speaking to teachers about learner progress, attending events and sports matches and volunteering in fundraising endeavours (Barger, Kim, Kuncel & Pomerantz, 2019).

Home-based involvement, on the other hand, refers to the time and energy parents commit to their children's schooling outside of the school premises. Examples of home-based involvement include, but again, are not limited to, discussions about school and schoolwork, assisting with homework, and reading to or reading with a child (Barger *et al*., 2019; Murray, McFarland-Piazza, & Harrison, 2014). It is important to note here that parental involvement is generally understood as parents' participation in school-based activities – whether at school or at home (Dighe & Seiden, 2020).

To comprehend what parental involvement encompasses, it is also necessary to be clear about the meaning of 'parent'. As explained by Goodall (2018), 'parent' in the

context of involvement constitutes any adult who is responsible for a child. Therefore, it may include any guardian, whether a biological, step- or adoptive parent, a grandparent or other relative who is the caretaker or custodian of the child. Parental involvement therefore refers to the participation of a child's caregiver in the academics or education of that child.

As mentioned, numerous studies have explored and proven the significance of parental involvement in the academic development and overall well-being of a child. In short, this involvement results in improved academic performance and achievements (Robinson, 2017; Kimu & Steyn, 2013; Oyebade, 2013; Bolivar & Chrispeels, 2011), increased school attendance and fewer dropouts, higher levels of motivation and positive attitudes towards school and learning. Apart from the academic advantages, Barger, Kim, Kuncel and Pomerantz (2019) suggest that parental involvement contributes to the social, emotional, and behavioural development of the child. This is supported by Mohapi and Netshitangani (2018) who attribute parental involvement to improved behaviour at school and at home, and to positive social interactions. Children are further likely to experience a sense of stability as involvement allows for consistent expectations at home and at school (Robinson, 2017).

This understanding of the importance of parental involvement has led to the development of policies and frameworks across the globe to promote the involvement of parents at school and the establishment of parent-school partnerships. To mention a few, Zambia's *Educating our Future* policy of 1996 encourages schools to establish Parent Teacher Associations (Singogo, 2017), The *Every Child Succeeds Act* of 2015 was implemented in the United States to promote parent-school collaboration (Robinson, 2017), Australia implemented its *Family-School Partnerships Framework* in 2008, and the *Early Childhood Education Act (Article 5)* and the *Childcare Act (Article 6-11)* in Korea encourage parent-school partnerships. In addition, several policies are aimed at establishing councils or governing bodies that empower parents to partake in the school's decision-making (Bolivar & Chrispeels, 2011). In Hong Kong, for example, the government inaugurated the Home School Cooperation Committee aimed at facilitating the implementation of parent-school associations in schools (Cheung, 2009). Similarly, the curriculum and school law in Sweden (2011) requires

all schools to establish Parent and Student Representative Boards to assist in schools' decision-making (Kristoffersson *et al*., 2013).

Policies and frameworks aimed at establishing parent-school partnerships have also been developed and implemented in South Africa. The White Paper on Education and Training (1995) and the South African Schools Act of 1996 require all South African public schools to establish a school governing body (SGB) composed of teachers, non-teaching staff, parents, and learners (in secondary schools) (Mohapi & Netshitangani, 2018). The purpose of this elected body is to promote democratic governance in schools by giving a voice and decisive power to a representative parent body. The roles and responsibilities of the SGB include administering, maintaining and controlling the school's property and resources. Moreover, the SGB is intended to foster shared decision-making, to empower the various stakeholders, and to form valuable partnerships among members (Mohapi & Netshitangani, 2018).

While national and international policies for parental involvement have been developed and mandated, little evidence suggests that their implementation has led to improved partnerships between parents and schools. This is largely due to several challenges experienced by families and more especially among families with a lower socio-economic status (Dighe & Seiden, 2020; Fataar, 2012), such as minimal access to resources, low levels of education, and limited time and flexibility.

Although parent-teacher councils or SGBs aim at empowering parents and encouraging shared decision-making, this only applies to a small representative group and does not trickle down to the majority of parents in the school community (Kimu & Steyn, 2013; Bolivar & Chrispeels, 2011). Over and above that, Mohapi and Netshitangani (2018) assert that, in South Africa, even these elected representative parents often do not truly possess the power instituted by these policies. Despite parents being the majority representatives in these bodies, principals largely still maintain much of the decision-making power and teachers participate more than parents do. In resource-deprived areas, in particular, the appropriate roles and participation of parents are impeded by the limited skills set and literacy levels of many parents, resulting in principals fulfilling these roles (Mohapi & Netshitangani, 2018).

Families from a lower socio-economic status are often faced by challenges of low parent education and limited access to resources to assist their children academically (Luet, 2017; Murray *et al*., 2014; Oyebade, 2013). In addition, many mothers in the 21st century have entered the labour market and consequently they spend less time at home. For some, this may be to promote themselves professionally, but for others, it is necessary to provide their families with an additional income to meet their financial demands. Furthermore, single parent households commit to longer working hours to make ends meet. These parents often experience high stress levels, have little room for flexibility, and have minimal time to spend at home with their children (Murray *et al*., 2014; Sarmento & Freire, 2012; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Crozier & Reay, 2005).

Thus, even though policies regarding parental involvement exist, implementation becomes problematic among families who do not have the time or the means to adhere to the recommendations proposed by schools. Bolivar and Chrispeels (2011) attribute this to a perceived lack of interest among parents as they often do not participate or respond to school-based initiatives in the ways that they are expected to. Luet (2017), however, suggests that this lack of involvement is not due to a lack of interest, but rather the outcome of a narrow and limited approach to forming parent-school partnerships.

Elias, Patrikakou and Weissberg (2007) explain that opportunities for involvement are usually presented by schools as fundraising initiatives, volunteering time on the school premises, or assisting their children with homework. Moreover, a study conducted by Harris and Goodall (2008) indicated that schools still understood and promoted parental participation in the form of providing support to the school and its teachers. This approach to parental participation caused a rift between the school and parents rather than a partnership as parents withdrew due to lack of capacity or means to meet these expectations (Elias *et al*., 2007). This is particularly true among vulnerable families who experience low levels of education, limited access to resources, and low incomes. This often creates the impression that parents are disengaged or uninterested in partnering with the school. According to Oyebade (2013), however, all parents have a fundamental desire to be fully invested in the education of their children and ultimately, they want them to succeed. It is their circumstances, capacity and

understanding of involvement that prevent them from partnering with the school (Kimu & Steyn, 2013).

In addition, teachers are not adequately trained or equipped to engage and involve vulnerable parents in the learning process of their children. This is especially problematic among resource-scarce schools and where schools' infrastructure is under pressure. Thus, they are unable to present parents with practical suggestions on how to partner with the school amid their existing challenges (Kimu & Steyn, 2013). Hornby and Lafaele (2011) attribute this to a lack of training on parental involvement and a feasible guiding framework.

For this reason, a shift from an elementary approach to parental involvement to a deeper understanding of parental engagement in the learning of a child is necessary (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). This understanding of engagement needs to encompass a wider range of activities and efforts that are fundamentally established in the home. It should operate beyond the surface level of participation and the parameters of school-based involvement and promote attitudes and behaviours that ultimately create conducive conditions for optimal learning and development.

1.1 Problem Statement

Although the numerous advantages presented by parental involvement is understood and accepted, many countries, including South Africa, have not yet found ways to incorporate parents successfully into the school community as active stakeholders. This challenge may not necessarily be an indication of disinterested parents, but rather a result of the limited understanding and narrow approach by schools to parental involvement. This is especially true among lower socio-economic communities where parents are often unable to be involved in the ways recommended and expected by schools due to a lack of capacity, access and time. Consequently, many of these parents withdraw from the school community as they are perceived as inadequate and uninterested. In addition to this, teachers have not been adequately trained on how to engage and collaborate with families who experience these barriers to involvement. Teachers are thus unable to recommend ways in which parents can be involved in the learning process of their child despite the challenges they face. As a result, these

families are often unintentionally side-lined or excluded from the privileges associated with parent-school partnerships.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was therefore to explore practical co-constructed, participatory forms of parental engagement that could be implemented by socio-economically vulnerable parents using a participatory action research approach. It aimed at giving recognition to a wider range of parental efforts and behaviours regarding their children's learning that might seem subtle or be overlooked. This study thus sought to investigate ways in which this parental engagement could practically be managed by the school and the vulnerable parents themselves, within the broader school community.

1.3 Rationale

Parental participation is largely impeded by the challenges experienced by families with a lower socio-economic status (Luet 2017; Oyebade, 2013). Hence, this study is pertinent in the context of South Africa as a large percentage of the country's population belongs to a lower socio-economic status (Southall, 2016), with nearly 20% of the citizens living below the poverty threshold (measured at the international poverty line of $1,90 per person per day) (World Bank Report 2022). These families confront issues of low income, low parent education, limited access to resources, and constraints regarding time and transport. Consequently, many of these parents have trouble in partnering with their children's schools. This study therefore aimed at exploring practical forms of engagement that could be implemented by these vulnerable families amid their prevailing socio-economic challenges, and how this could be managed and promoted by schools in a way that accommodated their needs.

This study further offered a positive and empowering perspective on vulnerable parents in the context of partnering with a school. All parents should be empowered to participate fully in the development and learning of their children despite their socio-economic status. As suggested by McFarland-Piazza and Harrison (2014), vulnerable

parents are often unintentionally excluded from the school community. Due to their low levels of education, they tend to feel undermined and incompetent, as they possess limited knowledge to contribute to the academic work of their children. In addition, their limited access to resources makes it difficult for them to create academically engaging environments at home (Kochhar-Bryant & Heishman, 2010; Murray *et al*., 2014). Moreover, these parents feel disempowered by their circumstances, and they may be unintentionally side-lined in their children's education. This study therefore explored a wider range of parental engagement activities that could be implemented by all parents despite the challenges associated with their socio-economic status. Thus, this study is valuable as it provides an understanding of the perceptions held by these families regarding their role in the education and learning of their children. It further investigated strategies employed by the school under study, which empower vulnerable parents to fully partner with the school despite the challenges they experience.

This action research was collaborative in nature as it incorporated the ideas, insights and experiences of the parents and the school stakeholders. The different practices explored and implemented in this study were thus collaboratively decided on by the participants and the researcher. It allowed these school community members, who have hands-on experience, along with the researcher, to develop an action plan that was realistic and feasible in their homes and at school. This study was therefore not only theoretical in nature but allowed for the implementation and revision of possible engagement practices among these families and it valued the interpretation of participants' experiences. This knowledge provided insight on feasible practices that could potentially be implemented and promoted by schools to manage parental engagement.

Finally, although some studies have explored the importance of making a shift from parental involvement in school-based activities to parental engagement in learning, there is gap in literature regarding parental engagement in South Africa. This study is valuable as it explored ways in which this shift can be made in a South African school in Gauteng.

The findings of this study, therefore, present alternative approaches to parental engagement which are more accessible for parents from lower socio-economic backgrounds and are not dependent on parent education or access to resources. These findings also provide possible approaches to parental engagement that schools can take to encourage increased participation from all parents within the school community.

1.4 Research Questions

Primary research question:

How can parental engagement be achieved and managed despite challenges experienced by vulnerable families?

Secondary research questions:

- What strategies are being implemented by the school under study to encourage parental engagement?
- What school-based initiatives contribute to the empowerment of vulnerable parents?
- What perceptions do parents have of their roles in the learning of their children?
- What engagement practices can parents implement despite their prevailing socio-economic challenges?

1.5 Research Method

In this study, a pragmatist paradigm was used. This paradigm allowed the researcher to make use of both quantitative and qualitative research methods to find practical solutions to the research problem and to address the research questions. It allowed her to acknowledge and appreciate the value and advantages of using both quantitative and qualitative methods in a mixed methods approach. The quantitative method was used to identify and establish the existing attitudes and general

circumstances of participants regarding parental engagement, while the qualitative method was used to gain further insight and understanding of the personal experiences and perspectives of participants. The researcher made use of an action research design. The action plan for this study was developed collaboratively by the researcher and the parent participants who implemented the action plan. The quantitative data were collected using a questionnaire and the qualitative data were collected through focus group interviews (in the form of a workshop) and semi-structured individual interviews.

1.6 Limitations of the Study

This study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic when the lockdown regulations were enforced. As a result, some parents were reluctant to participate in the study as the action research process involved face-to-face contact. This meant that the sample size was smaller than initially planned. In addition, due to the lockdown, group gatherings were prohibited, and the workshop was postponed. This resulted in less time being allocated for the implementation of the action plan. There were further last-minute cancellations for the workshop as participants fell ill or were in contact with other people who tested positive for COVID-19 and needed to be isolated. Thus, fewer parents attended the workshop and participated in the action research process.

All the parents who attended the workshop understood and could speak English. For this reason, the researcher did not arrange for a translator for the workshop. In hindsight, however, she realised that the English language proficiency of some of the parents was very basic and inadequate to fully grasp all the contents that were discussed at the workshop. These parents therefore did not benefit as much from the workshop as the others did and consequently did not implement the action plan to the extent that it was intended.

Due to the regulations and limited time available to conduct the study, there was only time for one round of implementation. Ideally, the parents should have implemented the action plan, provided feedback so that it could be improved, and then implemented

it a second time. The findings of this study were thus based on one implementation period and the feedback received from this experience.

However, this study remains pertinent as several engagement strategies were tested and regarded effective and feasible by the parent participants. In addition, the study provides more insight on the understanding and approach to parental engagement adopted by schools in Gauteng and the number of challenges they experience in attempting to engage parents.

1.7 Outline of Chapters

The chapters are outlined as follows:

Chapter 2 consists of a literature review, which discusses parental engagement with regards to stereotypes often associated with parents of lower socio-economic backgrounds, the role of school leadership in promoting and managing engagement, and the need for parent empowerment.

Chapter 3 discusses a self-constructed conceptual framework that identifies factors among parents and schools that may contribute to the successful management of parental engagement in children's learning. This conceptual framework primarily draws on work conducted by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, and Epstein.

Chapter 4 elaborates on the method used in this study. The research approach, epistemological paradigm and research design are discussed. This chapter further details the sampling and selection of participants and the execution of the data collection process. Mention is also made of the ethical considerations and the measures and procedures followed to enhance the quality of the research results.

Chapter 5 presents and analyses the findings of the study according to the following themes: the demographic profile of participants, the school's approach to parental engagement, parental perceptions of engagement, parental engagement in learning, and the action research process.

Chapter 6 provides a discussion on the analysis and findings presented in Chapter 5. This discussion considers the approach of the principal and the School Management Team (SMT) in managing parental engagement among parents with a lower socio-economic status.

Chapter 7 indicates the ways in which the research questions have been addressed throughout the study. It provides recommendations for practice and for further research.

The next chapter is therefore a literature review on existing approaches to parental involvement and parental engagement.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Parental engagement in the learning of a child is imperative in ensuring his/her academic success and well-being. This review discusses parental engagement by confronting stereotypes often associated with parents of lower socio-economic backgrounds, the roles of school leadership in promoting and managing engagement, and the need for parent empowerment.

2. 1 Addressing Stereotypes: Parents do Care

Regardless of background, culture, educational level or socio-economic status, parents play a pivotal and irreplaceable role in the well-being and learning of their children (Mohapi & Netshitangani, 2018). According to Sarmento and Freire (2012), many parents, however, are not actively fulfilling their educational roles in the learning and schooling of their children.

Parents increasingly tend to place responsibilities on teachers that should not rightfully be executed by teachers. Many of these parents, for example, have neglected their responsibilities to socialise their children and to instil discipline and values in them. Consequently, teachers are expected to take on roles and functions that do not form part of their professional positions or expertise. Thus, rather than collaborating with the school in the learning of their children, schools are viewed as external service providers to families (Murray *et al*., 2014). This might be due to increasing work demands, limited time available at home, low levels of education, or misconceptions of their roles and responsibilities as parents (Walker *et al*., 2005).

While this might be true, Robinson (2017) argues that parents are aware of their responsibilities as parents in the education and learning of their children and ultimately desire to play a significant role in that. All parents fundamentally want their children to succeed and perform well academically but some believe that their circumstances and access to resources significantly limit their ability to do so (Oyebade, 2013). Thus, their

lack of involvement or participation is not an indication of carelessness or disinterest, but rather a reflection of the challenges they experience as barriers to participation (Robinson, 2017). While parents want to be involved, they do not know how to participate in the education of their children despite, and in the face of their challenges and limitations.

Hence, even if schools were to reach out to families, many parents would still not be able to respond effectively due to their prevailing challenges (Oyebade, 2013). As discussed, these challenges include time constraints, long working hours, lack of access to resources, low levels of education, and minimal room for flexibility (Madaio *et al*., 2019; Murray *et al*., 2014; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Crozier & Raey, 2005;). These parents experience difficulties in availing themselves to participate in the opportunities and activities proposed by the school. Thus, they are unable to participate in the ways that schools expect them to (Bolivar & Chrispeels, 2011). Because of this, these parents are usually seen as inadequate or lacking the necessary knowledge and skills to assist their children academically.

Parents are thus portrayed as disengaged and passive when they do not fully accommodate or participate in the activities and opportunities presented by schools. Bourdieu refers to this as “symbolic violence” (Luet, 2017: 680). Luet (2017) explains that symbolic violence is enacted when the school misinterprets the intentions of vulnerable families by attributing their lack of involvement to disinterest or carelessness. These families are treated with injustice when their inability to meet the school’s expectations and opportunities for involvement is perceived as apathy (Kimu & Steyn, 2013). Even when the school recognises and acknowledges the economic and social constraints experienced by these families, the parents might have a limited capacity to respond appropriately. Consequently, many of these parents feel isolated and unwelcome at school. Their lack of meaningful contribution to the school and the education of their children leaves them feeling undermined and powerless (Kim *et al*., 2018).

Even though some of these families do not participate in the activities offered by schools, they might be engaged in the learning of their children in other ways (Murray, *et al*., 2014). These parents might, for example, read to their children at home, assist

them in setting goals, or teach them values of excellence and perseverance. These activities, however, are not always recognised as parental involvement. Luet (2017) therefore suggests that some forms of involvement are recognised and valued above others. In agreement with this, Elias, Patrikakou and Weissberg (2007) argue that the problem is rooted in a narrow and inaccurate perspective of parental involvement. When participation is limited to a one-way support structure whereby parents support school-based initiatives, a large group of families is unintentionally excluded based on perceived indifference and passivity. Watkins and Howard (2015) consequently suggest that an alternative approach to parental involvement needs to be explored that considers the strengths and efforts of all parents.

2.1.1 Debunking the "Culture of Poverty"

The 'culture of poverty' is a term developed by Oscar Lewis in 1961. This theory, as explained by Gorski (2008:32), is based on the idea that "poor people share more or less monolithic and predictable beliefs, values and behaviours". This theory is based on studies conducted on small Mexican communities whereby Lewis identified 50 attributes or behaviours that were consistent within these poor communities. Some of these attributes included violent behaviour and a lack of planning. Based on these findings, Lewis suggested that poor communities tend to have a similar "culture" (Goodall, 2021; Gorski, 2008).

Since then, researchers across the globe have proven that this "culture of poverty" does not exist (Goodall, 2021; Small *et al*., 2010; Gorski, 2008). Differences in values, beliefs and behaviours exist among the poor as much as among the wealthy or middle-class populations. Despite the numerous studies that disprove or contradict this theory, it is still a widely accepted belief about the poor that ultimately influences behaviour towards those of a lower socio-economic background – whether intentionally or not. Bearing this in mind, Gorski (2008) and Small, Harding and Lamont (2010) challenge educators and researchers to think critically and to abandon this way of thinking.

One myth or perception based on the culture of poverty is that poor communities tend to have a poor work ethic and lack self-motivation. This, however, has been disproven, as many poorer families, with low levels of education, tend to find employment in low paying jobs. Consequently, these families tend to embark on two jobs or work longer hours to make ends meet. It can thus be said that they work equally as hard as their wealthier counterparts, or in some instances, harder (Gorski, 2008). Another myth or stigma associated with poor communities is that they are uninterested in the learning and schooling of their children and tend to undermine the value of education. This is based on the idea that poorer parents are less likely to attend school meetings or participate in school-based events. Once again, evidence suggests that this is not true. A study conducted by Bayat and Madyibi (2022) in Cape Town, South Africa, found that parents in rural communities tended to be less involved in their children's schooling. They, however, explain that this is not due to parents' lack of concern but rather that their illiteracy and low levels of education led them to hand over educational responsibility to schools who they believe know better. This notion is further supported by Sibanda and Netshitangani (2021) who suggest that illiterate parents in these rural communities are reluctant to partner with schools and educators (see also Zenda, 2020). Gorski (2008) suggests that such parents are not necessarily apathetic towards school and learning, but rather experience limited access to the school and have consequently been excluded or "alienated" from the school community (Gorski, 2008).

Gorski (2008) goes on to suggest that it is not a culture of poverty that exists, but rather a culture of classism. This culture of classism is based on the deficit theory, which typically defines people or groups of people by their weakness and what they do not possess, rather than on their strengths and what they have to offer (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014; Llopart & Esteban-Guitart, 2018). Gorski (2008) explains that deficit theorists have primarily based their work on two strategies, namely, using well-established stereotypes and disregarding systemic conditions.

This deficit perception of poor communities implies that poverty is a consequence of poor attitudes, beliefs and decision making (Goodall, 2021; Small *et al*., 2010). In the context of engagement, it suggests that families and children experience poverty because of poor parents – thus, poor parents, parent poorly. Bearing this in mind, it has been said that good and skilful parenting can equip children to overcome systemic

barriers or obstacles and thus to overcome poverty (Goodall, 2021). Consequently, many initiatives have been developed with the intention of improving parenting skills. This, then, ignores the major influence of systemic issues over which these communities have little control. This approach places the “blame” for poverty on those who experience it. Goodall (2021) further indicates that this is problematic as it implies that there is a universal method of parenting, which can be taught and acquired. Instead of recognising that different cultures, environments and children require different ways of parenting, it suggests that a set of skills can be acquired through an education programme, which consequently reduces the probability of continued poverty to the next generation. While the ineffectiveness of these programmes or this way of thinking has been proven, policies on parental engagement tend to follow this limiting perception and understanding (Goodall & Vorhaus, 2011).

It is important to mention here that this does not undermine the value and importance of parenting and the need to improve on parenting skills. Rather, this is to point out that it should not be universally accepted that good parenting allows children to overcome the systemic issues they encounter or to overcome the effects poverty has on their learning and schooling. Poverty cannot solely be the consequence of individual choices and lifestyles. The systemic issues these families encounter from generation to generation cannot be disregarded. It is, thus, imperative for the government to intervene to “disrupt” the generational passing on of poverty by confronting the systemic issues that perpetuate this cycle (Goodall, 2021).

It is unfortunate that, instead of recognising and addressing these systemic issues that effectuate this generational cycle of poverty, the blame is passed on to the idea of a “cycle of deprivation”. Goodall (2021) explains that this cycle of deprivation implies that poverty is inherited because children are inclined to adopt the attitudes, beliefs, behaviours, and cultures of their parents. This again ignores systemic issues and attributes poverty to the decisions of individual people within a poor community.

Thus, when addressing parental engagement, one needs to take into account not only the attitudes and perceptions of parents and their parenting skills, but also consider the influence or effects of the systemic issues (systemic issues will be discussed further in Section 2.2.1).

2.1.2 Addressing Deficit Perceptions and the Concept of "Othering"

For the relevance of this study, it is important to consider this "culture of poverty" within the context of parental engagement. As discussed by Goodall (2021), this theory influences and brings about the notion of "othering".

"Othering" refers to segregating and differentiating between "us" and "them". Rohleder (2014:1306) defines "othering" as "the process whereby an individual or groups of people attribute negative characteristics to other individuals or groups of people that set them apart as representing that which is opposite to them". Thus, it occurs when one individual or group identifies himself or herself as different or superior to another individual or group. In the context of engagement, this distinction becomes "us" (those who are engaged and partnering with the school) and "them" (those who are not engaged). This "othering", once again, has negative connotations as the "them"; hence, those from poorer backgrounds and those less involved are classed together as a whole and are portrayed as inferior. Goodall (2021) further emphasises that this "othering" eliminates and ignores the effects of the systemic issues that perpetuate these two distinct groups. Moreover, it promotes the idea that these groups from poorer backgrounds have less to offer within the context of schooling and learning.

This deficit way of thinking is challenged by Moll, Amanti, Neff and Gonzalez (1992) in their funds of knowledge theory. This theory challenges the deficit way of thinking of working-class families as being socially and academically inadequate due to economic, cultural and linguistic limitations (Llopart & Esteban-Guitart, 2018). Rather, the funds of knowledge theory hold a positive, transformative view of local households as being competent and containing valuable cultural, intellectual and social resources. It thus suggests that all households have an accumulation of knowledge, skills and abilities developed by life experiences that can be used as resources for learning and schooling (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014).

Ultimately, this theory aims to recognise the various knowledge, skills and abilities present in these families and identifies these as useful resources for learning. Bearing

this in mind, one can recognise that parents – educated or uneducated, affluent, or underprivileged – play a crucial role in the learning and development of their children (Llopart & Esteban-Guitart, 2018).

2.2 The Role of School Leadership in Promoting Parental Engagement

The building of strong parent-school partnerships requires the involvement and investment of the various stakeholders within the school community, such as school leadership, parents, learners, educators, administrative staff and community members. Principals, as leaders, have relations with these various stakeholders and are thus in a prime position to ensure valuable partnerships between these entities (Keetanjaly *et al*., 2019; Robinson, 2017).

Principals are in the best position to establish connections between the school stakeholders based upon their mutual interest in the success of learners. Thus, it is crucial that principals adopt transformative attitudes aimed at establishing equity and optimal conditions for active involvement amongst all stakeholders. A study conducted by Barr and Saltmarsh (2014) indicates that families and teachers regard the principal of a school as the leader and initiator of partnerships. The way in which the principal manages the school and the values he/she promotes, cultivates the culture and conditions for involvement. This study suggests that the attitude of the principal towards parents and families is a major determinant of their involvement with the school. When parents feel welcomed and supported by the principal, they are more likely to make an effort to be involved. Parents thus attribute much importance to the position and role of the principal as setting the parameters for involvement and the forming of partnerships (Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014). Concurring with this, Goodall (2018) suggests that initiatives aimed at increasing parental engagement tend to be more successful when the initiatives are encouraged and supported by the school leadership. The school leadership includes not only the principal, but also the school governing body and other staff members occupying leadership roles. Goodall (2008) further suggests that these initiatives become transformative when they are no longer considered an initiative or project, but rather are embedded within the school culture. These initiatives and measures aimed at engaging parents should therefore be an on-going effort.

As explained by Myende and Maifala (2020), the roles and responsibilities of principals in South Africa are laid out in three policies. They are The South African Schools Act (SASA) (No. 84 of 1996); The South African Standard for Principalship (2014); and the

revised personnel and performance measures (PAM) (Education Labour Relations Council, 2016). These three policies provide guidance on the expected roles and responsibilities of principals in the country.

Principals are expected to ensure the successful running of the school day, support teaching and learning, draw up annual reports on the use of provided resources, serve on the school governing body, and assist members of the school governing body in executing their responsibilities. They are expected to fulfil administrative roles regarding personnel, co-curricular and extra-curricular activities, and to maintain contact with other stakeholders (Myende & Maifala, 2020). Considering 21st century skills and context, principals are further expected to provide on-going training and professional development to their staff to ensure adequate and quality teaching and learning. This involves training on the use of technology in teaching and learning. Principals are also required to be innovative and creative in developing strategies for optimal teaching and learning and to ensure best practices (Myende & Maifala, 2020).

Finally, principals are called upon to engage and build relationship with families and the wider community. This should be done through effective communication, positive and welcoming attitudes and clear expectations (Keetanjaly *et al*., 2019). Principals are therefore responsible for recognising and empowering parents by giving substance to their contributions, ideas, and opinions. All parents, regardless of their background and socio-economic status, should be given a platform and opportunity to be involved in a meaningful way and it is up to the principal to establish these platforms. Principals ultimately play a vital role in leading the school's teachers and staff in creating an environment that welcomes families and conduces involvement (Robinson, 2017).

Principals can establish these platforms and parameters for parental involvement through school-specific policies. School policies on involvement are essential as it elevates the importance of parent-school partnerships and holds educational leaders accountable. It allows educators to develop initiatives that engage parents within the parameters set by these policies (Robinson, 2017). It thus encourages well-meaning educators to insist on parental involvement with legislative support and approval. While national policies for collaboration exist, Kimu and Steyn (2013) suggest a need for clear and feasible guidelines on how to achieve this collaboration within a school

setting. It is therefore necessary for school-specific policies and guidelines to be developed to ensure the successful implementation of these initiatives. This allows for the establishment of clear, mutually beneficial expectations and cooperation between the school leadership, educators, and parents (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011).

2.2.1 Considering Systemic and Contextual Issues

While these policies provide guidance on the expectation of principals, they do not take into consideration the different contexts present in South Africa. The expectations and roles of principals in urban areas may look very different from those in rural areas, as principals need to adapt to their environments. These outlined roles and responsibilities are not as easily accomplished in rural schools that are confronted with several contextual challenges (Dichaba & Mohapi, 2018). For example, providing training on incorporating technology into teaching and learning practices may not be a viable option for principals whose schools do not even have basic resources and infrastructure, not to mention the use of technology (Myende & Maifala, 2020).

Principals in rural areas in South Africa are confronted with many contextual challenges. These challenges include large classrooms, a lack of qualified and experienced teachers, minimal access to resources and teaching technologies, and inadequate infrastructure (Dichaba & Mohapi, 2018). This makes the roles of these principals especially complex as they are expected to provide the same quality of education as schools in urban areas. Myende and Maifala (2020) point out that principals operating in these difficult and complex environments need specialised knowledge and training. The concern, however, is that this specialised training is not made available in South Africa, and principals' efforts to counter these issues are insufficient.

In South Africa, rurality is not only understood as a location distant from urban areas as might be understood in more developed countries. Rather, rurality is determined by "demographics such as income per capita, population growth rate and size, location or proximity between the area and the city and the type of governance that exists in the areas"; for example, traditional leaders (Myende & Maifala, 2020:229). These rural

areas in South Africa are typically not self-sufficient, as inhabitants tend to be farm workers rather than farm owners. The children living in these areas tend to attend Quintile 2 schools, which cater for poorer families.

The South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 (SASA) divides South African schools into two main categories, namely, private schools and public schools. All privately owned schools are responsible for their own funding and financial management. Public schools, on the other hand, are further sub-divided into quintiles, which determine the amount of state funding they receive according to a poverty scale called the Quintile Ranking System (Maistry & Africa, 2020). These schools therefore receive a ranking between 1 and 5, with Quintile 1 schools receiving greater government funding per child. Schools that fall between Quintile 1 and Quintile 3 are regarded as no-fee paying schools and they may not request any school fees from parents. Quintile 4 and 5 schools, on the other hand, receive less funding from the government and may therefore charge school fees to meet financial demands and to ensure quality teaching and learning (Myende & Maifala, 2020). The primary purpose of the quintile system is to protect poorer families from being burdened with school fees (Maistry & Africa, 2020).

While schools that fall between Quintile 1 and Quintile 3 accommodate families from poorer backgrounds and they are exempted from paying school fees, the quality of education provided in these schools is worrisome. These schools are typically characterised by their large class sizes, minimal resources and infrastructure, and insufficient qualified and experienced teachers (Myende & Maifala, 2020). Moreover, these schools often do not have clean running water or appropriate toilets. Since schools in rural areas tend to fall within Quintile 1, they are not allowed to charge school fees. However, with insufficient funds from the government, these schools are unable to build the revenue needed to improve the sanitary conditions, purchase necessary resources, or employ sufficient qualified teachers. As a result, smaller schools with insufficient teaching staff combine different grades in one classroom, affecting the learning of the children and putting pressure on teachers (Myende & Maifala, 2020). As much as these schools do not have resources, the families whose children attend these schools do not have basic educational resources at home; thus, minimal learning takes place after school hours.

Mncube (2009) poses the question of whether parent-school partnerships are a feasible option in South Africa and more especially amongst families with a lower socio-economic status? While these partnerships have proven to yield many benefits, they might not be practical for many families in our country.

Many of these lower socio-economic families are burdened with issues of low levels of parental education (Madaio *et al*., 2019; Murray *et al*., 2014; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Crozier & Raey, 2005;), access to resources (Deslandes, 2006), language barriers (Madaio *et al*., 2019; Murray *et al*., 2014), and access to transportation. In addition, these parents face time constraints as they work long hours and do not necessarily have the time or capacity to be involved at school or to assist their children academically (Cox, 2005; Crozier & Raey, 2005; Tatto *et al*., 2001). Moreover, many of these parents struggle to create an academically engaging environment at home, as they have limited access to resources and information (Dighe & Seiden, 2020; Madaio *et al*., 2019). These circumstances and challenges thus leave many families vulnerable to low levels of involvement as they do not have the means or capacity to partner with their children's schools. This is further problematised when schools do not actively engage in measures to promote and facilitate involvement amongst families with a lower socio-economic status (Myende & Nhlumayo, 2020).

Bearing in mind all the above and similar challenges, the busy lifestyles of middle-class families, Braunschweig, Kappler and Chiapparini (2019) refer to the possibility of an all-day school programme, which has already been implemented in several European countries. The reasoning behind an all-day school is to have enough time to provide all learners with co-curricular activities and additional support, which would then eliminate the need for homework. This provides all learners with equal learning opportunities and does not disadvantage some learners who do not have educated parents or educational resources at home. Thus, all learning takes place at school and none at home through an extended school day. This approach then removes the role of parents in the school learning of their children.

While this may seem like a viable option, one cannot ignore the important role of parents in their children's learning. Parents need to play a vital role in their children's

learning and in the process build meaningful parent-child relationships. If learners are at school all day, even less time becomes available for children to spend with their parents – if any time at all. By following this approach, we undermine the responsibility of parents, and while all learners will receive equal education, it does not solve the problem of disengaged and disempowered parents.

2.3 A Shift from Parental Involvement to Parental Engagement

It is therefore evident that, although parental involvement in schools and school-based activities yield many benefits, it is often not a viable option for parents. Goodall and Montgomery (2014) have therefore suggested a shift from parental involvement in schooling to parental engagement in learning.

This shift requires a new understanding of parents' roles in the learning of their children. In parental engagement, the focus moves away from a relationship between parents and the school to a relationship between parents and the child's learning. Thus, more focus is placed on the learning of the child in different contexts. While parental involvement is primarily based on involvement at school and with school-based activities, parental engagement in learning goes beyond these boundaries and encompasses the holistic learning of the child in his/her various environments (Braunschweig *et al*., 2019; Goodall & Montgomery, 2014).

A parent-child relationship is the most important and fundamental relationship. Therefore, in the context of engagement, parents have the power to either facilitate or encourage learning or to hinder and undermine the learning of children. Although this does not necessarily exist within the boundaries of school-related activities, Barger (2019) suggests that when parents cultivate an importance and love for learning in their children, the children's learning in the classroom is also enhanced. Similarly, Mayer, Kalil, Oreopoulos and Gallegos (2019) emphasise the crucial role of parents in instilling non-cognitive skills such as a good work ethic, self-efficacy, and determination. These skills, imparted by parents and not by the school, have the potential to affect the learning that takes place at school to a significant degree (Bayat & Madyibi, 2022; Zenda, 2020).

Parental engagement in children's learning consequently requires more ownership from parents as they take control of their children's learning. They, therefore, become agents in their own right and do not depend solely on the guidance and instructions of the school. Greater commitment from parents is thus necessary as they take responsibility for the learning and development of their children (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014).

It is important to note that parental engagement in children's learning is not dependent on their involvement with the school. Thus, families from lower-socio economic backgrounds, who find it challenging to be involved at school due to their various constraints can still be engaged in their children's learning (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014).

This does not suggest that parental involvement in schools is unnecessary or undermines the value of parental involvement in school-based activities. As evidenced, there are numerous advantages to this form of involvement (Bolivar & Chrispeels, 2011; Kimu & Steyn, 2013; Oyebade, 2013; Robinson, 2017). Rather, this shift encourages an increased focus on the child's learning and the crucial role parents could play in that learning, whether in the school or home environment. While involvement with the school is important, it does not necessarily empower parents to create an environment at home that is equally conducive to learning as is present at school. This shift to engagement encourages parents to take ownership of their children's learning at home and to play a pivotal role in their children's development, especially in the early years of their lives.

2.4 Parental Engagement and Literacy Development

The development that takes place early on in a child's life is a significant predictor of their future academic performance, as suggested by Dighe and Seiden (2020). Thus, home learning during these early years is essential to achieve their optimal development and potentials. Similarly, Sun, Lau, Sincovich and Rao (2018) explain that parents play a crucial role in nurturing and fostering the cognitive and social development of children, which ultimately influences their well-being and ability to

learn. For example, reading to children increases their aptitude for reading in school, singing songs assists in building vocabulary and developing attention maintenance, and taking them outdoors to explore the environment encourages communication and builds the parent-child relationship. Similarly, a study conducted in South Africa by Zenda (2020) suggests that parents' have a significant impact on children's ability and willingness to learn by simply taking interest in certain topics and praising desirable behaviours. There are thus multiple ways in which parents can stimulate their children and cultivate their talents and skills (Bayat & Madyibi, 2022).

Bearing this in mind, parental efforts have a significant bearing on the literacy development of their children (Madaio, *et al*., 2019). Parents can stimulate learners' literacy through joint reading activities, letter recognition, language and vocabulary development, instilling positive attitudes towards learning, and providing a secure and stable home environment. However, this approach to parental engagement, once again, is problematic for families with limited access to resources and low levels of education. Thus, parents who are illiterate are unable to adequately support their children's learning in developing pre-literacy skills and are unlikely to have reading materials available at home. In this instance, Madaio and colleagues (2019) explain that such parents can still support their children's literacy development by instilling a love for learning, and an understanding that reading is important. These children might then develop a sense of self-motivation towards learning and literacy development.

Hence, it is important to be cautious in our understanding of parental engagement and what it entails. If the understanding of this engagement is limited to parents' support and engagement in children's reading and academic learning, we once again exclude families from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Rather, if engagement is understood as parents' investment in factors that contribute to enhanced learning and not just support in learning itself, it gives recognition to and is inclusive of a wider range of parents. Thus, efforts towards goal setting, instilling a love for learning, building strong child-parent relationship, developing child resilience, imparting a good work ethic, building a strong sense of child self-efficacy, providing a stable home environment, and so forth, should also be regarded as parental engagement as they have a bearing on the child's motivation towards learning (Madaio *et al*., 2019; Mayer *et al*., 2019; Sun *et al*., 2018).

This shift from parental involvement in schooling to parental engagement in learning is thus a call for a wider understanding of how various parental efforts may influence the learning of children. It does not limit parents to participation at school or in school-based activities, but ultimately encourages and focuses on the parent-child relationship, with the purpose of enhancing children's learning (Goodall 2021; Goodall, 2018).

2.5 Parents' Perceptions and the Need for Empowerment

Years of research have emphasised the important role parents play in the early development of their children, which ultimately influences their academic success in their later years (Robinson, 2017; Kimu & Steyn, 2013; Oyebade, 2013; Bolivar & Chrispeels, 2011). However, often parents are oblivious to the important role they are meant to play in the learning of their children or seem to be unaware of how they can contribute to this learning (Madaio *et al*., 2019).

In alignment with this, Dighe and Seiden (2020) state that parents' perceptions of child development and learning significantly influences or determines their decision to be engaged. These perceptions are further influenced by their socio-economic status. Mayer, Kalil, Oreopoulos and Gallegos (2019) explain that parents from poorer backgrounds tend to engage less in their children's learning as they lack information on the importance of this engagement. An example of this was comes from a study conducted in Ethiopia by Dighe and Seiden (2020) who found that many parents were unaware that children learn through play.

Mayer and colleagues (2019), however, also point out that in many instances parents are aware of and understand the importance of their engagement in their children's learning, but they still do not become engaged. They attribute this to psychological factors influencing parents' engagement. According to them, many parents, especially those from poorer backgrounds, tend to discount the future. They may not consider the value present engagement might have on the future learning of their children. They, therefore, are less willing to make present sacrifices for the sake of future benefit. Parents who experience many challenges, such as precarious forms of

employment, may have less time and energy to make these sacrifices, when it only offers future benefits. In these instances, parents may be more concerned with overcoming the day-to-day obstacles than making investments in the future learning of their children (Pabilonia & Song, 2013). This is further supported by Kaiser, Li, Pollmann-Schult and Song (2017) who explain that financial challenges negatively influence the emotional and relational functioning of parents, which consequently disrupts effective parenting practices. These parents are primarily focused on attending to immediate needs and they may pay little attention to providing supportive environments for their children.

In addition, Dichaba and Mohapi (2018) suggest that parents from poorer backgrounds may feel self-conscious of their low levels of education and fear being exposed, causing them to withdraw and engage less. Perhaps parents would be more engaged if they had a better understanding of how to be engaged and if a wider range of parental efforts were recognised (Dichaba & Mohapi, 2018). Thus, there is a need for parents, especially those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, to be empowered to be engaged in the learning of their children, despite and in the face of the numerous obstacles they encounter.

2.6 Parental Empowerment for Parental Engagement: A Social Justice Issue

The ultimate purpose and goal of conducting research on issues of parental engagement, especially amongst those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, is rooted in social justice and the need for equality (Goodall, 2012).

As explained by Moorosi, Bantwini, Molale and Diko (2020:166), social justice is “a process of understanding how social forces, structures and institutions support equity across different social identity groups… Social justice is a preferred framework for understanding the South African context because of its broad sense in dealing with injustices.” These authors (2020) further outline key principles in understanding the aims of social justice regarding issues of school governance and equal parental representation in schooling and children’s learning. These principles include equity and inclusion, the development of partnerships with the wider community, and the

provision of quality education for all learners from different socio-economic backgrounds (Moorosi *et al*., 2020).

Bearing this in mind, the issue of parental engagement and the numerous challenges that impede this engagement amongst families of a lower socio-economic status is a matter of social justice. Parents should not be excluded or undermined in their engagement in their children's learning based on their background, access to resources, or level of education. All parents should be encouraged to engage in their children's learning in their own capacity and within their own cultural contexts. Schools should further be open to and recognise different forms of engagement, and be inclusive of more parents (Fataar, 2012). Moreover, schools should move away from the conventional understanding of parental involvement, and receive and build on the contributions and efforts of all families.

This study, therefore, aimed to identify ways in which parental engagement could be encouraged and managed by the school leadership. It sought to investigate engagement practices that could be implemented by vulnerable families despite the challenges they experienced. These practices are not limited to school-based involvement, but they encompass any engagement that may positively influence or contribute to the learning of a child.

This chapter provided a discussion on existing literature regarding parental engagement. The next chapter discusses a self-constructed conceptual framework that identifies factors among parents and schools that may contribute to the successful management of parental engagement in children's learning.

Chapter 3

Conceptual Framework

As discussed in the previous chapter, this study sought to explore ways in which parental engagement could be achieved and managed despite the challenges experienced by vulnerable families. The self-constructed conceptual framework identifies factors amongst parents and schools that may contribute to the successful management of parental engagement in children's learning. This conceptual framework primarily draws on works by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995; 1997; 2005; 2007) and Epstein (1991; 1995; 2001), but also includes existing literature on parental empowerment and school initiatives aimed at parental engagement. Each of these models will be discussed considering their relevance to this study.

3.1 Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's Model

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler developed a model to explain the reasons why parents do or do not become involved in the education of their children, and the effect this involvement has on a child (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey *et al*., 2007; Walker *et al*., 2005). They focus on the psychological aspects that influence parents' perspectives, behaviours, and decisions. This model is valuable as it considers the engagement process from parents' perspectives, and it is focussed on understanding parents' ways of thinking and reasoning. It, furthermore, acknowledges parents' experiences and environments as factors that may influence the engagement process (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). This model is based on the premise that an understanding of the psychological factors that influence parents' decisions to become involved will assist in creating appropriate conditions for increased involvement (Walker *et al*., 2005). Although it may not be possible to change the environments, familial conditions or socio-economic statuses of families, it may be possible to influence fundamental perspectives regarding engagement amongst parents (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997).

The first model, developed in 1995, comprises five sequential levels explaining the process of parental involvement. Through continuous exploration and empirical evidence, the first two levels of the model have been reconsidered and reorganised (Hoover-Dempsey *et al*., 2005; Walker *et al*., 2007; Yamauchi *et al*., 2017).

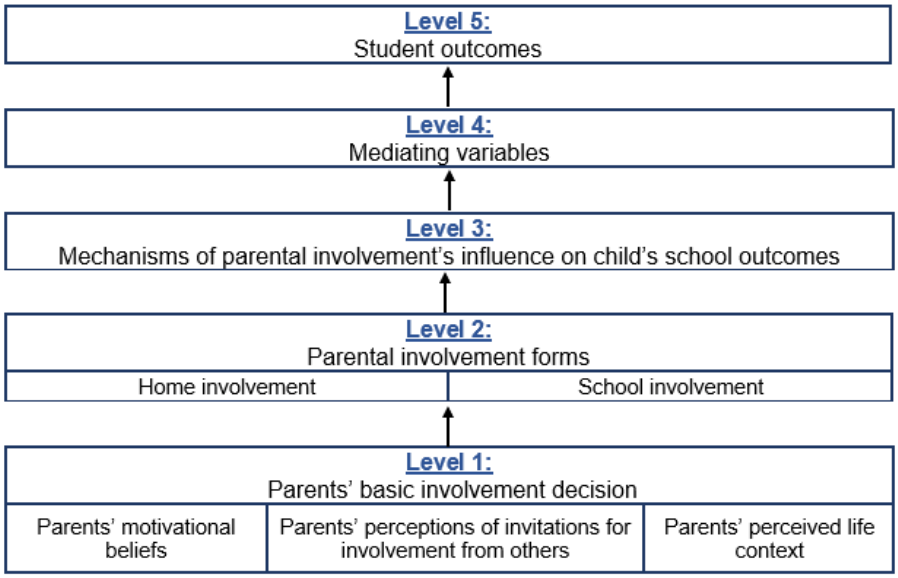

Figure 1: Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's revised model for parental involvement process (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, 1997; 2007)

The conceptual framework constructed for my study draws specifically on the first two levels of Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's revised model (Walker *et al*., 2007; Hoover-Dempsey *et al*., 2005). These two levels of the model are discussed below in more depth and detail.

Level 1: Parents' Basic Involvement Decisions

The first level of this model presents three psychological perspectives that motivate parents and influence their decisions to become involved in the education of their children. This includes parents' motivational beliefs; parents' perceptions of invitations for involvement from others; and parents' perceived life context (Yamauchi *et al*., 2017; Green *et al*., 2007; Walker *et al*., 2005). Each of these psychological perspectives is discussed in more details below.

Parents' motivational beliefs constitute parents' role construction and their self-efficacy. Role construction refers to parents' beliefs about their roles and responsibilities as parents in relation to their children's education. This includes

parents' perceptions and interpretations of the expectations placed on them, as parents, by other groups and individuals such as the school, the community and their children (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Parents' role construction is further significantly influenced by their understanding of child development and child rearing. This role construction may develop over time or be influenced by the parents' interactions and experiences with other individuals or groups, such as a principal, teachers or other parents (Green *et al*, 2007).

Self-efficacy refers to parents' beliefs about the influence and substance of their actions and efforts. It is the perceptions they hold of their ability to make a difference in or impact the learning of their children (Yamauchi *et al*., 2017; Green *et al*., 2007; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Parents' motivational beliefs influence the degree of resilience vulnerable parents possess. Parents with a stronger perceived self-efficacy believe that their actions have the potential to bring about a positive outcome. Consequently, this influences the goals they set and their degree of commitment to achieving these goals (Green *et al*., 2007). It further significantly influences the way that they approach challenges, and their persistence and perseverance in overcoming these challenges. It is thus suggested by this model that, even though parents may have a low socio-economic status and experience related difficulties, when they have a strong sense of self-efficacy, they are likely to set goals and persevere through these difficulties.

On the other hand, parents with a low sense of self-efficacy are likely to avoid difficulties and do not believe that their efforts have the potential to bring about change. These vulnerable parents thus tend to succumb to the factors that disadvantage them (Deslandes, 2019; Green *et al*., 2007; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). It is also important to note that parents' sense of self-efficacy is susceptible to change through various social interactions and prior experiences of engagement. Parents who have experienced positive outcomes in their relationship with the school or in their children's learning because of their efforts are likely to increase their level of engagement. On the other hand, parents who have experienced negative interactions or who have not identified valuable outcomes because of their efforts are inclined to feel hopeless or believe that their engagement is inconsequential (Green *et al*., 2007; Jarrett & Coba-Rodriguez, 2019).

Another source of motivation for involvement is *parents' perceptions of invitations to involvement from others* including the school, the teacher, and the child. The way parents perceive invitations for involvement, communication and attitudes expressed towards them influences how welcome and needed they feel and ultimately influences their decision to become involved (Green *et al*., 2007; Walker *et al*., 2005). The school, and more specifically the management of the school, play a vital role in creating an inviting, open and inclusive school environment and culture. When parents feel welcome at school, are supported by the school, are well informed and experience freedom to enquire and make suggestions, they are more likely to be engaged in the learning and schooling of their children. The school climate is thus conducive to parental participation when parents believe their contributions are valued (Green *et al*., 2007; Walker *et al*., 2005). The school culture, furthermore, trickles down to teachers within the school and tends to influence teachers' perspectives and attitudes towards parental engagement.

Moreover, parents' decisions to participate in the learning of the child are significantly influenced by the encouragement and interest of the child's teacher (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). In alignment with this, Epstein (1994) suggests that parents are more positive about a school and tend to be more engaged when the child's teacher actively creates opportunities for involvement amongst parents and encourages participation in the learning process of the child. These invitations may include regular contact with the parents, inviting parents to visit the classroom, or assigning homework that intentionally requires the involvement of the parents. These specific teacher invitations are most effective when parents have sufficient time and energy available to respond to these invitations (Walker *et al*., 2005). It is important to note here that the focus of this theory, concerning invitations by teachers, is primarily on a conventional understanding of parental involvement and not necessarily on parental engagement, and thus is limited. However, it is still valuable to acknowledge that teachers play a pivotal role in shaping parents' desire and willingness to participate in the schooling and learning of their children.

Finally, invitations by the child are effective in prompting parental involvement as parents are inclined to respond to the needs and desires of their children (Green *et*

al., 2007). The invitations made by a child and a parent's response to these invitations are generally influenced by the level of work of the child and his/her need for assistance, and whether the parent feels capable of assisting the child. In addition, the relationship that exists between the parent and the child may be a significant determinant of whether the child will request involvement or not (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Ultimately, invitations for involvement by the child are powerful because they convey the child's needs and his/her disposition to accept this involvement (Walker *et al*., 2005).

Parents' perceptions of life context variables refer to the perceptions parents have of their own skills and knowledge and the available time and energy they possess for involvement. Parents are more likely to be involved in the education and learning of their children if they believe they have the necessary skills and knowledge to do so. In addition, parents' perceptions of the amount of time and energy they have available further influence their decisions about involvement. This includes their work demands and family responsibilities, and what they consider priorities (Green *et al*., 2007).

Level 2: Parents' Choice of Involvement Forms

The second level of the model presents two forms of involvement, namely school-based involvement and home-based involvement. Once parents have made the decision to be involved (as influenced by the psychological factors in level 1), they make decisions about the kind of involvement they will engage in (Yamauchi *et al*., 2017). School-based involvement includes attending school events, meetings or sport matches, or volunteering in various activities.

Home-based involvement includes assisting with homework, reading to children, discussions about school and learning, and monitoring progress (Green *et al*., 2007; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997).

This model has been used in several studies exploring parent-school-community involvement nationally and internationally. In 2007, Hoover-Dempsey, Sandler, Green and Walker conducted a study involving 853 parents in the United States to explore the ability of a theoretical model to predict the types and degrees of parental involvement in the first six years of schooling. In this study, they made use of the

revised model of 2005. The findings of this study suggest that parents' decisions for home-based involvement were primarily influenced by their perception of child invitations, self-efficacy, and perceived time and energy available for involvement. On the other hand, parents' decisions for school-based involvement were largely influenced by their perceptions of school and teacher invitations. Another noteworthy finding in this study suggests that parents' decisions for involvement were predicted more by elements of their social context (such as their relationships with the school, teachers and child) than by their socio-economic status. This does not imply that socio-economic status is insignificant in its impact on parental involvement, but rather that the relationships and the perception that their involvement is needed and desired is a bigger determinant of involvement amongst parents. These findings thus indicate that this model could be applied to parents from different socio-economic backgrounds.

In 2019, Deslandes used Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's model (1997), along with other existing literature on parental involvement and parent-school collaboration, to propose a new, integrated model of the components and processes involved in this collaboration. In 2015, Meier and Lemmer used the revised model (2005) to conduct research on parents' perspectives of school communication, instruction, and culture in a public school in Gauteng, South Africa. Parents expressed their views and opinions through a questionnaire, which indicated mostly positive attitudes about the school's initiatives and efforts to communicate and include parents.

A limitation presented in this model is its comprehensiveness and several intricate elements. This has resulted in many studies conducted on the model, or that utilise the model, to focus only on the first two levels. A study that encompasses the entire model would be extensive and lengthy in nature. This means that the complete model is still to be explored and tested, and more research is required on the other three levels (Yamauchi *et al.*, 2017).

Application of Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's Model

The purpose of this study was to identify ways in which parental engagement can effectively be encouraged and managed by the principal and SMT through an understanding of the factors that influence parents' decisions to be involved. This is

based on the premise that an understanding of parents' perceptions and attitudes, and what influences these perceptions and attitudes, will provide school management with guidance on how to target and address issues of minimal parental engagement. Although Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's model focusses specifically on the involvement of parents through a conventional understanding of school-based and home-based involvement, these concepts are used and applied to a broader understanding of parental engagement (as explained in the previous chapter). For the purpose of this study, the three psychological perspectives (level 1) that influence parents' decision for involvement are used to analyse parents' current perspectives regarding engagement. This is then used to identify existing perceptions of the school and understanding their roles as parents and the areas that need support. Focus is placed on home-based engagement, which includes Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's interpretation of home-based involvement (level 2) and other aspects of parental engagement (structure and routine, goal setting, praise, etc.). This, however, does not imply that school-based involvement is less important – rather, attention is paid to engagement activities that are more accessible to all parents despite their socio-economic backgrounds, family or time constraints. Therefore, such an approach was important in this study to understand parents' existing perceptions and attitudes regarding engagement, and to accurately identify the factors limiting parents in the school under study from being full engaged in their children's learning.

Due to the nature and purposes of this study, only the first two levels of this model will be incorporated into the conceptual framework. As levels three to five begin to analyse the influence parental involvement has on the academic performance of the child, it goes beyond the aims and outcomes of this study. In addition to this model, Epstein's typology of parental involvement will be included in the conceptual framework and it is discussed below.

3.2 Epstein's Typology of Parental Involvement

Joyce Epstein's typology of parental involvement is the second theory used to construct the conceptual framework for my study. Epstein (1991; 1995; 2001) developed a model to describe the different types of parental involvement that exist. She emphasises the interconnectedness that exists between parents, the school, and

the wider community. It is based on the proposition that parental involvement can be increased through school and teacher initiatives.

The six types of involvement outlined in Epstein's model include parenting, communication, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making and collaboration with the community (Hamlin & Flessa, 2018; Yamauchi *et al*., 2017; Kimu & Steyn, 2013; Epstein & Dauber, 1991).

1. *Parenting*: This includes the provision of basic needs, parenting skills and approaches to child rearing that best prepare children for school and provide conditions conducive to learning at home. Schools assist parents in gaining a deeper understanding of the various stages of development of their children through training, information sessions and workshops.
2. *Communication*: This refers to the various means of communication provided by the school to families and includes newsletters, conferences, report cards, and phone calls. This should allow for effective two-way communication between parents and the school.
3. *Volunteering*: This refers to the parents' participation in school-based activities with the purpose of supporting the school, teachers and children. This could include involvement in the schools academic, cultural, sport and social events, outings, co-curricular activities and fundraising.
4. *Learning at home*: This includes parents' participation and assistance in children's learning activities at home. Teachers provide parents with guidance and support on how to assist their children at home.
5. *Decision-making:* Parents can participate in the school's decision-making by making contributions to school policies through governance or by forming part of various parent-school associations and committees.
6. *Collaborating with the community:* This involves parents' participation in community groups to coordinate community resources and services for the benefit of the school, parents and children. This could include the use of community libraries, counselling, recreational services and the provision of learning opportunities outside of the school.

Figure 2: Self-constructed diagram representing Epstein's typology of parental involvement

The typology above is widely used and has been a significant contributor to research on parental involvement (Hamlin & Flessa, 2018; Munje & Mncube, 2018; Meier & Lemmer, 2015; Ndebele, 2015; Kimu & Steyn, 2013; Jeynes, 2012).

In South Africa, the Parent-School-Community Framework developed by the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT) in 2016 is based on Epstein's six types of involvement. The Framework provides schools with guidance on engaging with parents and the wider community with the purpose of improving the learning of the child.

In 2018, Hamlin and Flessa conducted a study to investigate whether the various types of involvement initiatives undertaken by schools were influenced by the school setting. They also explored the various areas in which parents requested support to increase their involvement in schools, and how consistent these identified areas were with Epstein's six types of involvement. The results of this study suggest that parents desire assistance and support in the parenting, home learning, and communication areas of involvement. They seem to show little concern or attribute little importance to

volunteering, decision-making and collaborating with the community. In addition, parents specifically mentioned well-being and parent-child communication as areas needing support and guidance, which falls under the broader umbrella of parenting. Hamlin and Flessa (2018) further suggest that volunteering and decision-making are not always a feasible option for parents who have work constraints and responsibilities. Parenting, home learning and communication, on the other hand, are more relevant to and practical for a wider range of parents.

Although Epstein's typology has been instrumental in the study of parental involvement, a number of researchers have identified limitations within this typology. According to Jeynes (2010), Epstein's typology and the understanding of parental involvement is limited and need to be reconceptualised to include a broader range of involvement activities, which are often not acknowledged but have a significant impact on the learning of the child. Another limitation identified in this typology is its tendency to prioritise school-based involvement with limited acknowledgement of the social and cultural contexts influencing the accessibility of this form of involvement (Hamlin & Flessa, 2018). Yamauchi and colleagues (2017) further suggest that each form of involvement within this typology should be redefined and expanded upon, as it is too simplistic. They also recommend that the typology not only considers the benefits of parental involvement for the children, but also extends these benefits to parents and the school as a whole.

In this study, Hamlin and Flessa's (2018) perspective and insight on Epstein's typology of parental involvement is applied to construct my conceptual framework. The conceptual framework guiding this study therefore only includes parenting, communication, and home learning as the forms of involvement to be explored. In addition, each of these three types of involvement is considered more broadly to include subtler (but still significant) involvement activities, which in turn will align more closely with the concept of parental engagement. This does not suggest that the other forms of involvement are unimportant or irrelevant, but rather that they are less feasible options, especially amongst vulnerable parents who have limited time, access to resources and lower levels of education.

In addition to Epstein's typology of involvement and Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's model, existing literature on the importance of school initiatives in promoting parental empowerment and engagement is used in this study's conceptual framework.

3.3 Conceptual Framework Developed for this Study

As previously discussed, this study aims to investigate ways in which parental engagement can be encouraged and managed by the principal and the school management team (SMT). It specifically focusses on vulnerable families from lower socio-economic backgrounds who experience barriers to parental involved, as typically understood. In this study, the focus shifts from parental involvement to parental engagement in learning.

The conceptual framework constructed for this study incorporates the first two levels of Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's model, three of Epstein's six types of parental involvement, and existing literature on school-based initiatives and parental empowerment. The diagram below illustrates the ways in which these concepts and theoretical elements are used in this conceptual framework to guide the study and address the research questions:

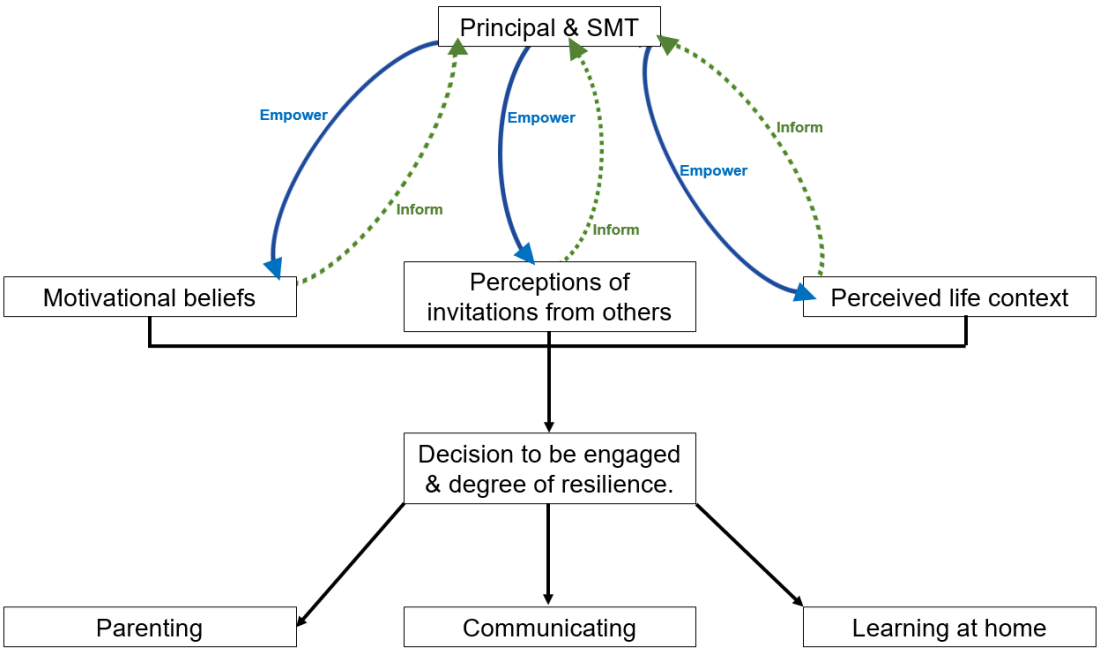

Figure 3: Conceptual Framework for Management of Parental Engagement

As discussed in the previous chapter, the way in which the principal manages the school and the values she/he promotes, cultivates the culture of the school and influences the degree of parental involvement. The attitude of the principal towards parents and families is a major determinant of his/her participation in the learning process (Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014). This is indicated in the diagram above, as the principal and SMT are at the top and have the power to influence and manipulate the school culture and climate.

As indicated by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's model, parents' perceptions and motivational beliefs (that is, their role construction, self-efficacy, perceptions of invitations and perceived life contexts) significantly influence their decisions to be involved. Bearing this concept in mind, this framework further suggests that an understanding of parents' perceptions and motivational beliefs may allow principals and SMTs to make informed decisions regarding their efforts in encouraging and managing parental engagement. This may allow the management of the school to better target areas that require support and empower parents by positively influencing their perceptions regarding engagement. Similar to the existing model, these perceptions then influence parents' decisions to be engaged and they have a bearing on parents' degree of resilience. This framework thus suggests that positive motivational beliefs and perceptions regarding engagement will prompt parents to participate actively in the learning process of their children and will allow them to overcome the challenges they encounter.

This framework further includes three of Epstein's six types of involvement (1995, 2001), namely, **parenting, communicating and learning at home.** Since this study focusses on parental engagement as opposed to involvement, recognition is given to a range of activities and efforts. These three types of involvement have been selected as they align well with the concept of engagement and do not limit parents to participation in school-based activities. Each of these types of involvement will further be considered more broadly to include all aspects of parenting that may influence or contribute to the learning of their children, such as discipline, providing structure, having conversations about school, setting goals, and instilling values of excellence

and perseverance. In addition, recognition is given to any form of learning that may take place at home, such as reading books and developing vocabulary.

This approach to engagement allows for the inclusion of a wider group of families and is not reserved for those who are educated, or have the time, means and capacity to be present on the school premises, or assist with formal learning. These concepts and approaches to parental engagement have been used to guide the study and answer the research questions.

This conceptual framework is thus based on the presupposition that with the engagement of parents – influenced, encouraged and effectively managed by the school – parents and schools might reach a mutual understanding of their different but complementary roles. It suggests that this mutual understanding and commitment between parents and the school could perhaps allow for engagement despite prevailing socio-economic challenges. This approach to parental engagement also encourages the school to recognise and welcome various, and even subtle, efforts and activities, and for parents to grasp and appreciate their valuable roles and responsibilities in their children's learning. This study, therefore, aims to make engagement a feasible option amongst vulnerable families and to allow them to be empowered in the learning of their children.

This chapter provided a discussion on the development and use of the conceptual framework in this study. The next chapter elaborates on the method and research design used in this study.

Chapter 4

Research Method

In this chapter the research approach, the epistemological paradigm and the research design will be discussed. The chapter further details the sampling and selection of participants and the execution of the data collection process. Mention is also made of the ethical considerations and the measures and procedures followed to enhance the quality of the research results.

4.1 Pragmatist Paradigm

In this study, a pragmatist paradigm is utilised. Pragmatism, as a paradigm, allows one to think and operate beyond the boundaries or limitations of a purely positivist or purely constructivist worldview (Morgan, 2007, 2014). Rather, the focus is placed on practicality and desirable outcomes. This paradigm thus allowed the researcher to make use of both quantitative and qualitative research methods to find practical solutions to the research problem and to address the research questions (Shannon-Baker, 2016). Pragmatism further encourages reflexive research practice by continuously asking practical questions throughout the research process, such as, 'Which method would be most useful in addressing the research question?' and 'How does my involvement in the research process influence the data gathered from the participants?' (Feilzer, 2010).

In using such a paradigm, there is a need to balance subjectivity and objectivity: subjectivity in the researcher's interpretation of data and the direct role she plays as the researcher in an action research study, working alongside participants; and objectivity refers to the data collection and data analysis processes. This is particularly relevant to this study as the insights and experiences of the participants were vitally important, and they were used to guide much of the research process (Shannon-Baker, 2016). It was necessary, as a pragmatic researcher, to anticipate the emergence of unexpected data, to accept the unpredictability of human responses, and to allow this uncertainty to guide the research process (Feilzer, 2010;

Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005). This has forced the researcher to remain flexible throughout the research process and challenged her pre-conceived ideas and expectations. Moreover, a process of continuous self-reflection was necessary to ensure reliable data were collected and used.

4.2 Mixed Methods Approach

In adopting a pragmatist paradigm, the researcher's focus in the research process has been on practicality and finding practical solutions. Decisions regarding research methods have thus been based on the usefulness of different methods in addressing the research questions. It has allowed the researcher to acknowledge and appreciate the value and advantages of using both quantitative and qualitative methods in a mixed methods approach. These methods have been used concurrently to inform and complement each other as they each addressed a different layer or aspect of parental engagement (Shannon-Baker, 2016). This has enabled the researcher to present a more complete and reliable study (Feilzer, 2010).

In using a mixed methods approach, the researcher have collected and used both numerical data (through a survey) and linguistic data (through interviews and an interactive workshop). The quantitative method was used to identify and establish the existing attitudes and general circumstances of the participants regarding parental engagement, while the qualitative method was used to gain further insights in and an understanding of the personal experiences and perspectives of the participants (Maree, 2016; Onwuegbuzie, 2005). A mixed methods approach has allowed the researcher to answer questions of both 'what?' and 'how?'.

This approach has further allowed the researcher to present findings that are reliable and a more holistic picture of the study. The quantitative approach to the study ensures that the data remain objective and is not influenced by the researcher. It has also enabled me to include a larger sample of participants to gain insight into the circumstances and attitudes of foundation phase parents in a more general sense. The quantitative approach in this study has been used for descriptive purposes only (Maree, 2016) and the findings of this study have been used to guide the qualitative methods used. The qualitative approach to the study has further allowed the

researcher to interact with the participants on a more personal level through meaningful interactions to gain insight into their individual experiences and perspectives. This method allowed the researcher to gain an understanding of how the participants integrate themselves into their different environments and their community. These data are naturally more subjective as they rely on the perceptions and openness of the participants and the explication of the researcher (Atieno, 2009; Maree, 2016). Bearing this in mind, a mixed methods approach is valuable as it ensures triangulation as the data gathered from the different methods are used to complement and support one another, and to uncover any discrepancies that may exist (McAteer, 2013; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005).

4.3 Action Research Design

In this study, the researcher made use of an action research design. Creswell, Hanson, Clark Plano and Morales (2007) describe action research as a collaborative practice whereby the participants and the researcher jointly explore solutions to problems experienced by the participants. It evaluates current practice and circumstances and aims at identifying better ways of conducting such practice to improve the quality of life of the participants (Mertler, 2017). It can thus be said that the fundamental purpose of conducting action research is to improve practice through action and reflection (McAteer, 2013; McNiff, 2013).

Characteristics and Principles of an Action Research Study

The key characteristics and principles of action research (as identified by Mertler, 2017; McAteer, 2013; McNiff, 2013; Cohen *et al.*, 2007; Creswell *et al.*, 2007; Kemmis & McTaggart, 1992; McKernan, 1991; Hult & Lennung, 1980) were applied to this study in the following ways:

- *Aimed at practical problem solving:* The aim of this study was to identify practical ways in which parental engagement could be achieved and managed amongst vulnerable families. Put differently, how could parents who experience multiple constraints due to their low socio-economic status be optimally engaged in the learning of their children and how could this engagement be

encouraged and managed by school leadership? This study further aimed at finding practical ways in which parents and schools could improve the level and quality of parental engagement.

- *Improves competencies of participants*: Participation in this study required the participants to reflect on their own practices and existing competencies to identify areas needing assistance and improvement. An action plan was developed and implemented by the participants, which allowed them to improve on their own practices, gain new knowledge, and implement new practices in their own environments.
- *Is collaborative and participatory in nature:* The action plan for this study was developed collaboratively by the researcher and the parent participants who were to implement the action plan. The insights and experiences shared by the principal and the school management team were also taken into consideration during the process of developing the action plan. This study, thus, required the participation of the participants and decisions were made collaboratively.
- *Is carried out and applied directly in targeted environment:* The action plan developed by the researcher and the participants were carried out by the parent participants in their own homes and within their families.
- *Is a cyclical process:* This action research was cyclical in nature as it started with a process of reflection and the identification of problematic areas and ended with reflection and the identification of areas needing improvement. The reflection on and identification of problematic areas thus took place before and after the development and implementation of the action plan.
- *"Seeks to understand particular complex social situations" (Cohen et al., 2007:299).* This study sought to understand the complexities of parents' daily constraints and their attitudes and perceptions regarding parental engagement. The first step of the research process was aimed at gaining an understanding of existing attitudes and factors that might influence these attitudes. This study also sought to understand the complexities of the school's challenges and experiences regarding parental engagement. The purpose of this study was not only to find practical solutions but also to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences and perceptions of the parties involved in managing parental engagement.

- *Aims to improve quality of practice*: The primary purpose of this action research was to improve the degree and quality of parental engagement amongst foundation phase parents in a particular school.
- *Requires continuous reflection*: This study required a process of continuous reflection by the researcher and all the participants. The principal and school management team reflected on current practice, existing challenges, and areas for improvement. The parent participants engaged in a process of self-reflection before, during and after the implementation of the action plan, the researcher participated in a process of reflection to determine the researcher's role and influence in the research process and the effectiveness of the action plan.
- *Seeks to be emancipatory*: This study sought to enhance the capabilities of the participants as they implemented the action plan. The intention of this process was to encourage long-term application of successfully applied practices and to encourage an attitude of continuous self-reflection and improvement.
- *Requires flexibility and open-mindedness*: As this study followed a pragmatist paradigm and relied on the direct involvement of the participants, it was necessary to remain flexible and be open to contradictory or surprising findings.

The Action Research Process

Due to COVID-19 and the ensuing restrictions, it was necessary to simplify and shorten the initial action research process designed for this study. The restrictions which limited and, at times, prohibited contact with the participants delayed the research process. While online interviews and an online workshop was considered to ensure that the research process continued as planned, the availability of data and access to online platforms were problematic. Many of the families in the school under study did not have sufficient data for online contact and others were not adequately acquainted with online platforms. To be inclusive and accommodating of all interested participants, the decision was made to wait for the restrictions to be lifted, which required a shortened and simplified research process. Furthermore, the nature of the study relied on the personal interaction of the participants with the researcher and with the other participants in a group setting. For interactions and the collection of data to be optimally valuable, personal contact was necessary.

The initial action research design for this study was adapted from Kurt Lewis' model (Mertler, 2017). Below is a self-constructed diagram depicting the initial research process:

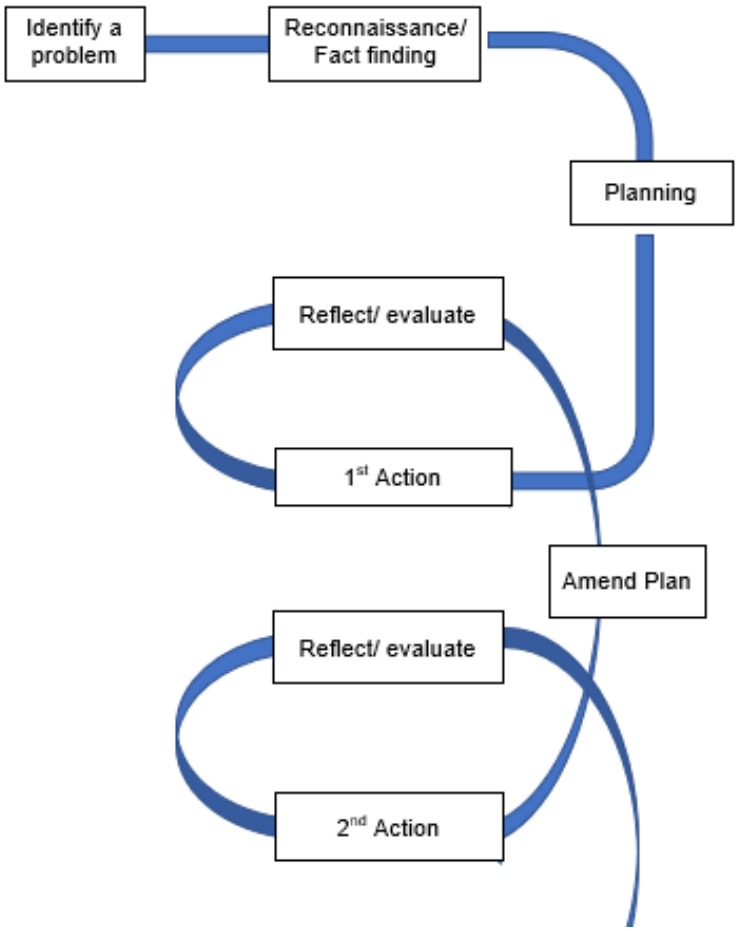

Figure 4: Initial action research design

The first step of this process was completed before the data collection process began and is discussed at length in the research problem (Chapter 1) and the literature review (Chapter 2). While existing research and studies indicate that parental engagement is problematic amongst vulnerable families, it is essential to confirm these claims within the community where the research is to be conducted (McAteer, 2013). Thus, the second step in the design involves a reconnaissance or fact finding. An action plan is then developed using both the data gathered in the reconnaissance phase, as well as from existing literature (planning). This action plan is discussed and evaluated with the participants who then implement it. After a given period, the participants and the

researcher evaluate and reflect on the success and practicality of the implemented plan. The participants provide feedback on their experiences and challenges and make recommendations. Considering the feedback, the action plan is amended and implemented a second time. Finally, the participants once again reflect on and evaluate the feasibility of these practices based on their experience (Mertler, 2017) and conclusions regarding these reflections are made.

While the action research design that was implemented was similar to the initial design, the second phase of implementation was omitted. It is thus necessary to bear in mind that although challenges to the action plan were identified in a process of reflection, an amended plan could not be developed and implemented a second time, due to the lockdown restrictions, which were discussed in the limitations section earlier.

Below is a self-constructed diagram depicting the amended action research process:

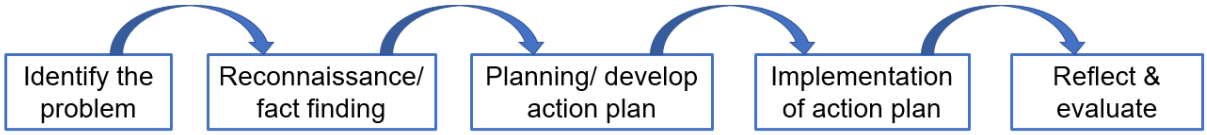

Figure 5: Amended action research process

As discussed above, self-reflection and flexibility are essential when engaging in a participatory action research design and adopting a pragmatist paradigm. The diagram below has been adapted from Arnold's *Two Track Model of Pedagogic Action Research* (2020), and depicts the process of self-reflection used throughout the action research process:

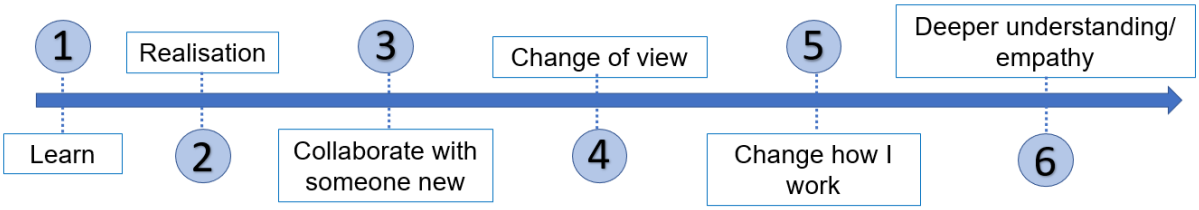

Figure 6: Self-reflection process

An example of the application of this self-reflection process is provided in the following section, as much self-reflection was done throughout the data collection and data analysis processes.

4.4 Data collection

The data gathered in this study were collected from one public primary school in the Gauteng province of South Africa. Throughout the research process, the researcher made use of both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection. The quantitative data were collected using a survey and the qualitative data were collected through focus group interviews (in the form of a workshop) and semi-structured individual interviews.

The diagram below depicts the data collection process and methods used:

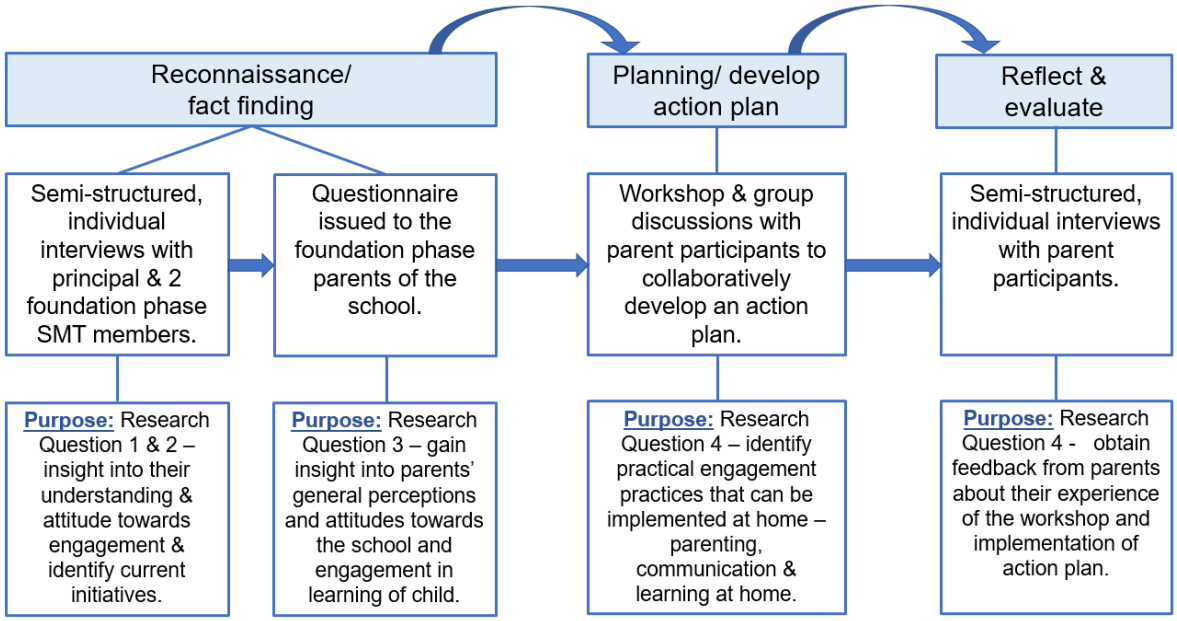

Figure 7: Data collection process

The first step of data collection took place in the reconnaissance phase of the research process. Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with the principal and two foundation phase members of the SMT. The purpose of these interviews was to gain insight into the school's existing approach to parental engagement, and to gain

an understanding of any school-based initiatives that were already in place. It was necessary to have knowledge of the different strategies already in place before attempting to implement any practices amongst parents. These interviews were also helpful in understanding the school's attitude towards parents and to gain insight into the daily experiences and challenges of educators and the principal regarding the management of parental engagement. The data collected in these interviews were used to answer the first and second research questions, namely: (1) What strategies are being implemented by the school to encourage parental engagement? (2) What school-based initiatives contribute to the empowerment of vulnerable parents?

At the start of these interviews, the researcher once again explained the purpose of the study and the purpose of their participation in this stage of the research process. The researcher assured them of the anonymity and confidentiality of their responses and explained that they were in no way obligated to participate. Once they agreed to the terms, the researcher asked them to read and sign a consent form (Appendix A and Appendix B). The interview with the principal took place on 10 May 2021, the interview with the first SMT member on 25 May 2021, and the interview with the second SMT member was conducted on 28 May 2021. With the permission of the participants, these interviews were audio recorded to ensure the accurate documentation of their responses. A copy of the principal interview schedule is attached as Appendix F, and a copy of the SMT interview schedule is attached as Appendix G.

The second step of data collection in the reconnaissance phase of the research process consisted of a survey in the form of a questionnaire (201). The purpose of this questionnaire was to assess the parents' existing circumstances and perceptions regarding their engagement in the learning of their children. This method of data collection allowed me to identify common or generalised experiences and perceptions of the foundation phase parents in the school (Feilzer, 2010). A questionnaire was an appropriate tool to use as it allowed the researcher to gain access to this data quickly and from a large group of participants. Using a standardised tool to collect this data further allowed the data to be objectively measured (Tuli, 2010) as it did not involve any personal engagement from the researcher or the school. It was important to understand the parents' existing perceptions and experiences regarding engagement

prior to the development and implementation of an action plan. This provided insight into the challenges these families experience, the time they have available, and their interest in engaging in their children's learning. The data gathered in this phase were used to address the third research question: What perceptions do parents have of their roles in the learning of their children?

The questionnaires was issued to the majority of the foundation phase parents of the school. Bearing the language barrier in mind (as indicated in the interview with the principal and SMT members), the questionnaire was presented in English and Tswana (the language spoken most often in the area). A letter explaining the purpose and process of the study, as well as a consent form, was attached to the questionnaire and issued to the foundation phase learners to hand over to their parents. In the letter, the parents were informed that their participation would be solely on a voluntary basis and that their identity and responses would remain confidential and would thus not be disclosed to any other parent, learner, or staff member of the school. All interested parents placed the completed consent forms as well as the completed questionnaire in a sealed envelope (which was attached to the questionnaire) and returned it to the school where it was collected. A copy of the consent letter is attached as Appendix C, and a copy of the questionnaire is attached as Appendix H. All completed questionnaires were collected by 4 June 2021.

The data gathered in the reconnaissance phase of the research process were then used in collaboration with existing literature and the conceptual framework to plan a workshop with all the interested parents (16). The primary purpose of the workshop was to create an opportunity for the parents to interact with the researcher and with other parents, and to collaboratively develop a feasible action plan to improve parental engagement at home. The workshop was based on the three broad areas of engagement as identified in the conceptual framework, namely parenting, learning at home, and communication with the school. Due to the limited time available to conduct research, and even more so with the uncertainty and pressures of the COVID-19 regulations, a proposed plan was already developed prior to the workshop with the intention of having the participants add to it or amend it. This provided the parents with a guideline to work from. In addition, the workshop involved some presentations in which the importance of parenting, learning at home, and communication with the

school were discussed. These presentations provided parents with the findings of previous studies and success stories of parents who have been actively engaged in the learning of their children.

On arrival at the workshop, the participants were offered refreshments and given an opportunity to mingle and familiarise themselves with one another. They then divided themselves in five groups of three. Each group sat at their own table and participated in discussions together throughout the workshop. The participants willingly participated, sharing their ideas in their groups and providing feedback to other groups. The half-day workshop was held on 28 August 2021.

Each group was given an A2 page with an outline of two mountains (a low and a high mountain) and a valley. This page was used to guide discussions in the workshop and to write down the groups' key ideas. The 'Low Mountain' was used to signify the current circumstances and challenges the parent participants experience in engagement; the 'High Mountain' signified the desired outcomes; and the 'Valley' represented the action plan to reach the desired outcomes. An example of this template is provided below:

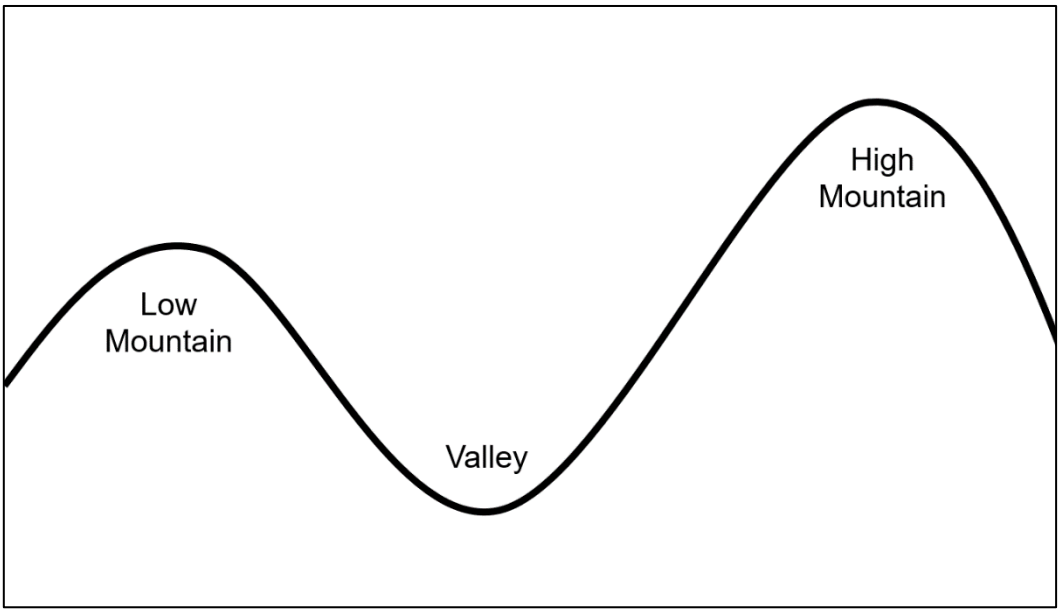

Figure 8: Template used to guide discussions and ideas throughout the workshop

The table below depicts a broad outline of the workshop and what it entailed:

TIME	ACTIVITY	CONTENT
08h30	Arrival and logistics	Participants familiarise themselves with one another, divide into groups, and participate in an icebreaker.
09h00	Presentation provided by researcher.	Child development and learning: • the significance of early development • the role of parents in the development of a child • the benefits of parental engagement.
09h20	Group discussion and feedback – parents discussed topic in their groups and wrote some key points on the 'low mountain' on the page provided. Each group gave feedback to the other groups.	What are the current challenges you experience in engaging with your child and his/her learning and development, e.g., limited family time.
09h50	Break	Refreshments provided.
10h00	Presentation provided by the researcher.	Parenting: • Positive parent-child relationships • Modelling desired behaviour • Structure and routine • Praise
10h20	Group discussion and feedback - parents discussed topic in their groups and wrote some key points on the 'high mountain' on the page provided. Each group gave feedback to the other groups.	What kind of characteristics, attributes and behaviours would you like to see in your child, e.g., perseverance.
10h50	Break	Refreshments provided.
11h00	Presentation provided by the researcher.	Learning at home and communication with the school: • Language development • Reading • Communication with the teacher
11h20	Group discussion and feedback - parents discussed topic in their groups and wrote some key points in the 'valley' on the page provided. Each group	What practices can be implemented at home (in the valley) so that we can bridge between the low mountain (current circumstances) and the high mountain (desired outcomes)?

	gave feedback to the other groups.	
11h50	Closing	All ideas were recorded and an action plan will be developed based on the feedback provided by the participants.

Table 1: Outline of the workshop

Below are examples of two groups' feedback as indicated on the template provided:

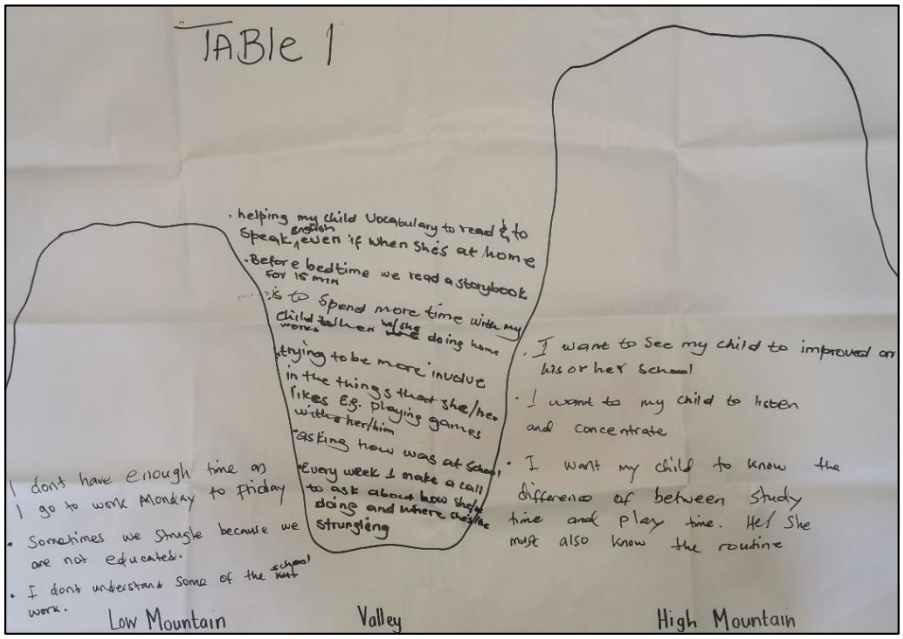

Figure 9: Group 1's feedback and ideas using the provided template

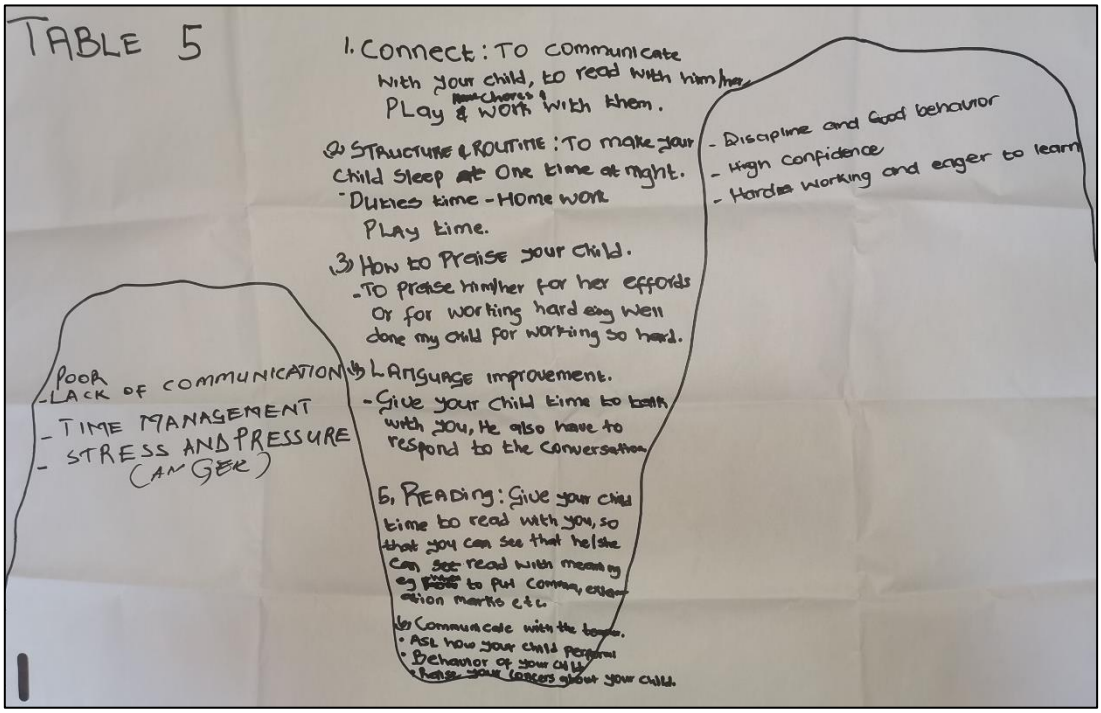

Figure 10: Group 5's feedback and ideas using the provided template

At the workshop, the researcher made use of two facilitators to assist with the logistics and to ensure the successful running of the workshop. These facilitators assisted by encouraging responses and discussions among groups, re-explaining concepts, restating questions as needed, providing refreshments, facilitating the icebreaker, setting up, packing up, and so forth. The purpose of the study and the workshop, as well as the importance of maintaining confidentiality, was discussed with the facilitators prior to the workshop, and facilitators signed a confidentiality agreement. An example of this confidentiality agreement is attached as Appendix E.

Using the documented feedback and ideas of the participants, along with some of the ideas shared in the presentations (based on existing literature and studies), an action plan was developed. The action plan involved a number of easy and time-efficient activities to be tried and tested by the participants at home. This action plan specifically took into consideration the fact that the parents had limited time and resources available at home, and some parents were not adequately literate. It was also a flexible action plan, allowing room for the parents to explore and change the methods of implementation based on what worked for them. This also allowed for the sharing of a variety of methods aimed at achieving the same goal and keeping the focus on practicality. This action plan was shared with the participants on 2 September 2021. The parents were encouraged to implement as much of the action plan as possible during the months of September and October 2021, after which feedback of their experiences would be provided.

The table below depicts the action plan that was to be implemented:

ACTION	**METHOD**
Build a strong bond between you and your child.	This can be done by playing games with your child, asking him/her questions, speaking to your child every day (even while completing daily chores such as cooking and cleaning).
Implement structure and routine at home.	This can be done by implementing a bedtime (perhaps 20:00), having structured homework time and playtime, and eating dinner together as a family.
Praise your child's efforts and desired behaviour.	Praise child once homework is completed, chores are completed, for behaving well, being kind, following instructions, etc. (Note, praise should not be given in

	excess and should be well deserved in order for it to be meaningful).
Develop your child's English language proficiency.	Speak a bit of English at home every day, talk about different kinds of things to develop vocabulary, ask questions and allow your child time to think and answer in full sentences, explain words that they may not understand, and play word games such as 'I spy with my little eye'.
Read with your child.	Try to allocate only 15 minutes a day to reading. This can be done at bedtime or any available time throughout the day. You can read to your child and ask him/her questions to assess understanding, they can read to you, and you can discuss content with them. Look at the pictures together and talk about what you see and how it relates to the story.
Communicate with the teacher.	If possible, communicate with the teacher from time to time (weekly or bi-weekly) to check in on your child's progress and behaviour. Respect the teachers at school and do not undermine the teacher in front of your child at home. Ask the teacher for guidance as needed and for areas needing improvement.

Table 2: Action plan practices to be implemented

At the workshop, the participants were encouraged to exchange contact details with one another to create a support base. This would allow the participants to share ideas and to give each other advice throughout the process. The purpose of the workshop and the action research was to encourage a sense of partnership and collaboration between parents and myself as the researcher. The participants also had my contact details and were able to contact me at any time to ask questions or to share feedback. Throughout the months of September and October (the period of implementation), I contacted the participants to find out how they were experiencing the implementation of the action plan. This allowed me to build a relationship with the participants, as some were very willing to share their experiences and challenges and they would ask for advice at times. Others, however, only responded briefly from time to time.

The final stage of data collection and of the action research process involved individual semi-structured interviews with the participants (11). The purpose of these interviews was to obtain feedback from the participants on their experiences in implementing the action plan. These interviews allowed the researcher to gain an understanding of the practicality of the action plan – what worked and what was challenging – as well as the different methods of implementation the participants explored. The nature of the

semi-structure interview allowed for flexibility and for follow-up questions and prompting throughout the interview. The interviews were mostly successful as the participants felt comfortable talking to the researcher as they knew who she was and what the interview would be about. These interviews took place throughout the month of November 2021 and each interview was between 30 and 60 minutes long. With the permission of the participants, the researcher audio-recorded the interviews to ensure the accurate recall and documentation of their responses. Once again, participants were ensured that their identity and responses would remain confidential and that their participation was voluntary.

The timeline below illustrates the data collection process in sequence:

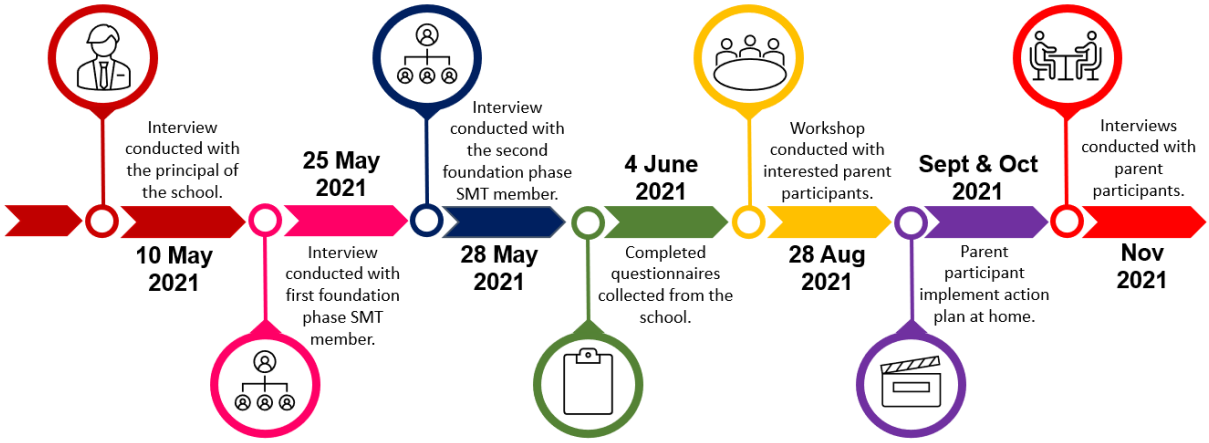

Figure 11: Timeline of Data Collection Process

As discussed in Section 4.1 and 4.3, self-reflection and flexibility are essential when using an action research design and adopting a pragmatist paradigm. For this reason, a process of self-reflection was followed throughout the data collection process. An example of the application of the self-refection process depicted in Figure 6 in Section 4.3 is presented below:

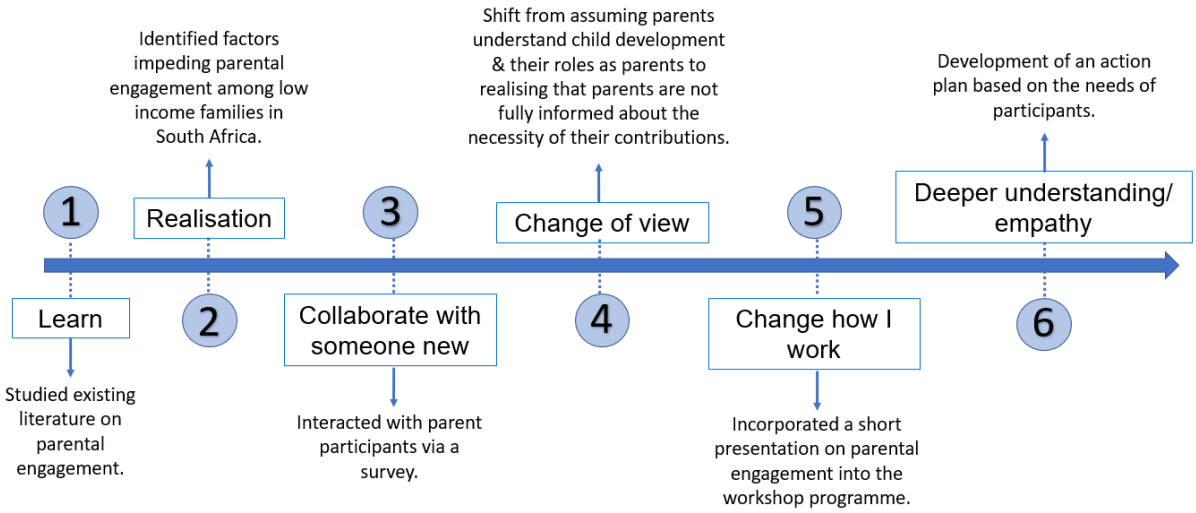

Figure 12: Example of Application of Self-reflection

As depicted above, self-reflection was done while analysing the data collected through the questionnaire issued to parents and the researcher practised flexibility when preparing for the workshop. Initially, bearing existing literature in mind, the researcher assumed that the parents understood the importance of their roles and contributions to their children's learning, and that a lack of parental engagement was primarily attributed to the socio-economic barriers experienced by low-income families. The focus of the researcher was therefore solely on finding solutions or ways around these barriers to improve the level of engagement among the parents. While analysing the data collected through the questionnaire, the researcher however realised that many of the parents did not understand the importance of their contributions and how this influenced the development and learning of their children. Once the researcher changed her point of view and had a better understanding of the parents and their perceptions, she was able to make appropriate changes to the data collection plan. The researcher consequently added a presentation to the workshop programme on the importance of parental engagement and the impact parents' actions have on the development and learning of children. This self-reflection and flexibility allowed the researcher to better cater for the needs of the participants and to better understand their way of thinking and the various challenges involved in parental engagement among these participants.

4.5 Sampling

In this study, the researcher made use of purposive sampling to select the participants. In doing so, the researcher intentionally selected the participants according to a predetermined criteria based on the purpose and requirements of the study (Creswell, 2012). This method of sampling was necessary to ensure that the data collected were relevant to the study (Cohen *et al*., 2007).

The purpose of this study was to investigate ways in which parental engagement could be achieved and managed despite the challenges experienced by vulnerable families. The participants in this study were selected from one public primary school. Parents tend to be more directly involved in the education of their children in primary school as opposed to secondary school. As explained by Hill and Tyson (2009), adolescence is characterised by dramatic cognitive and emotional development as they become more autonomous and take increased responsibility for their education. As a result, direct parental involvement is reduced during secondary schooling. For this reason, it was more feasible to select participants from a primary school (with particular focus on the foundation phase) where optimal parental involvement was more likely. In addition, the study focused on vulnerable parents who experienced challenges to engagement due to their existing circumstances often associated with a lower socio-economic status. For this reason, the primary school was selected from a low-income area in Merafong City (*Housing Development Agency*, 2013). Many families in this community experience precarious forms of employment, single parenting, limited access to resources, low levels of education, or time constraints (Greenhalgh, 2019). This area, thus, acted as a filter to targeting families who were likely to experience such challenges.

As the study sought to explore the management of parental engagement, the principal as well as the two foundation phase Head of Department members were invited to participate in the reconnaissance phase of the study. These three participants are directly involved in the management of the school, and more specifically, in the foundation phase (Grade 1 to Grade 3). The purpose of this was to gain insight into existing school initiatives and policies aimed at encouraging and managing parental engagement, and to understand the general attitudes regarding parental engagement amongst educators as well as foundation phase parents. Below is a table depicting the position, qualifications, and experience of the three participants:

Pseudonym	Position	Qualification	Experience
Principal A	Principal of primary school	PhD in Education	22 years of experience as principal, and a total of 33 years of experience in education (all experience obtained at this school).
HoD participant A	Senior HoD of foundation phase (Grade 2 & Grade 3)	B Ed Hons in Education Management, Law, and Policy	13 years of teaching experience, and 7 years of experience as HoD of foundation phase (all experience obtained at this school).
HoD participant B	HoD of foundation phase (Grade R & Grade 1)	BSC in Psychology and Nutrition, and a PGCE	10 years of teaching experience, and 4 years of experience as HoD of foundation phase (all experience obtained at this school).

Table 3: Qualifications and experience of principal and HoD members

The researcher started the sampling process by approaching the principal of the school via email and sent a letter requesting permission to conduct research at the school. A copy of this letter is attached as Appendix A. The researcher arranged a meeting with the principal and explained the research process and whom she intended to include as participants in the study. The principal willingly granted permission to conduct research at the school and assisted the researcher throughout the research process. Once the interview with the principal was conducted, he put the researcher in contact with the two Foundation Phase HoD members. A letter was sent to them explaining the purpose and process of their involvement and the researcher arranged an individual meeting with each of them to conduct the interviews. This letter is attached as Appendix B. Both HoD members willingly participated in the interviews.

The second part of the reconnaissance phase of the data collection process included the foundation phase parents of the school. A larger sample size was needed to identify common characteristics and circumstances amongst the parents, as well as their general attitudes and perceptions regarding engagement. With the permission of the principal, a letter was sent out to the majority of foundation phase parents

explaining the purpose of the study and requesting their involvement. At this stage of the research process, their involvement included the completion of a questionnaire. This letter and the questionnaire were printed out (in English and Tswana to accommodate as many parents as possible) and distributed to all foundation phase learners to hand over to their parents. A copy of this letter is attached as Appendix C. This was the most feasible way to approach the parents and request their participation as COVID-19 regulations restricted the parents from coming to the school. In addition, many families in the school have limited access to electronic communication such as email, and the school is ethically obliged to protect the personal information and contact details of the parents. A hard copy of the letter and the questionnaire ensured that all interested and willing parents could participate in the study. The principal and the two HoD members willingly assisted by ensuring that all letters and questionnaires were sent out quickly and collected again once the learners returned them to the school. To ensure confidentiality, the parents were given envelopes to place the completed letter and questionnaire in and to seal them. The researcher then collected all the sealed envelopes with the returned letters and copies of the questionnaire from the HoD members.

Although the intention was for all foundation phase parents to be included in this phase of the data collection, some factors prevented this. Due to COVID-19 regulations, the learners attended school on a rotational basis. This meant that not all the children attended school every day. In addition, many learners were kept home and were expected to isolate when they were in contact with someone who had COVID-19 or presented with any COVID-19 symptoms. This restricted the educators from sending out the letters and questionnaire to all parents and thus a number of parents were left out of this phase of the data collection.

Below is a table and diagram depicting the total number of learners in the foundation phase of the school and the copies of the questionnaire sent out and returned (thus, the sample size for this phase of the research process). When analysing these statistics, it is also important to bear in mind that there are some siblings within the foundation phase and therefore only one letter/questionnaire per family was required to be sent out. The information obtained from the school only reflects the number of learners in the foundation phase and not the number of families. There is thus a slight

discrepancy in the information regarding the copies of the questionnaire sent out and the number of learners/ families represented.

Number of learners in the foundation phase	498
Number of copies of the questionnaire sent out	365
Number of copies of the questionnaire returned and completed (sample)	201
Number of copies of the questionnaire returned but not completed	15
Number of copies of the questionnaire not returned	149

Table 4: Sample size of questionnaire compared to number of learners in foundation phase

As mentioned above, although the sample size is 201 (number of copies of the questionnaire returned and completed), it may represent more than 201 learners, as there may be more than one learner per family within the foundation phase. The diagram below depicts the percentage sample size according to the number of invitations for participation sent out and according to the number of learners in the foundation phase.

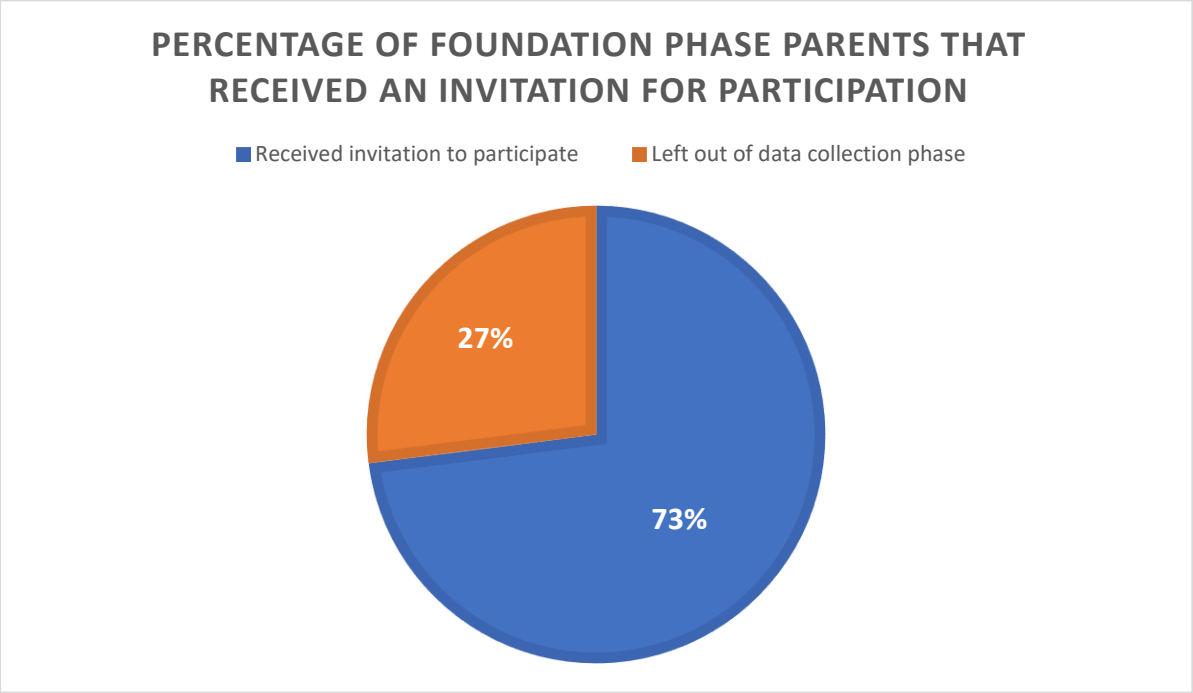

Figure 13: Percentage of foundation phase parents who received an invitation for participation

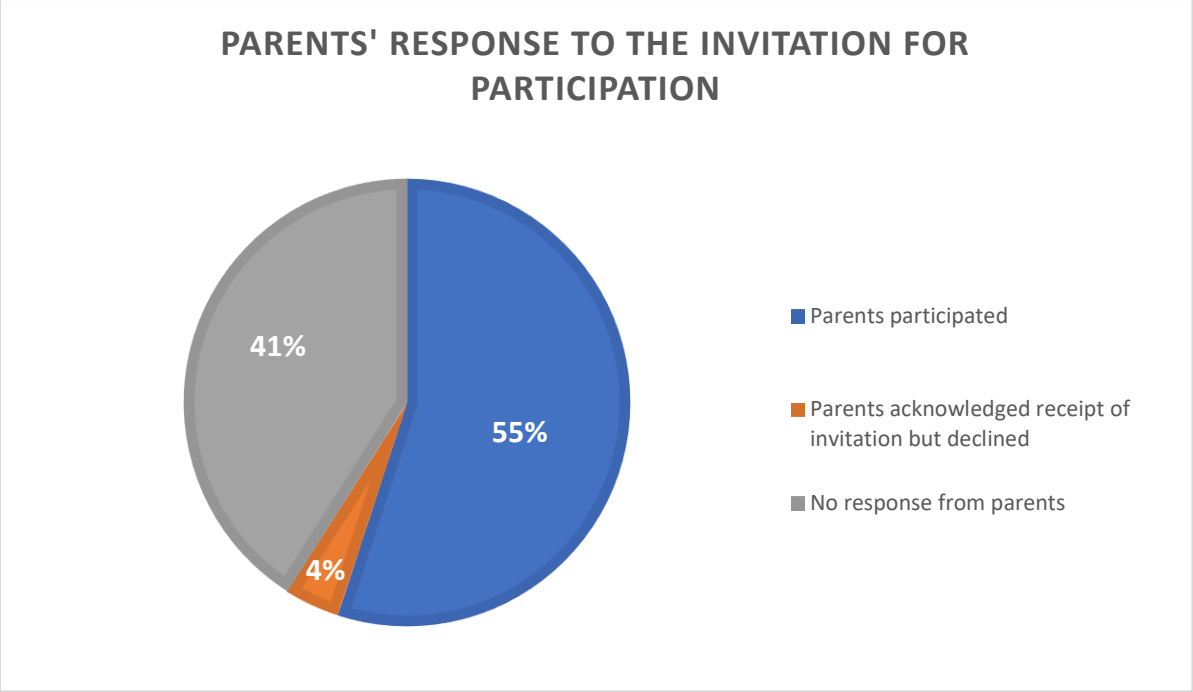

Figure 14: Parents' response to the invitation for participation in questionnaire

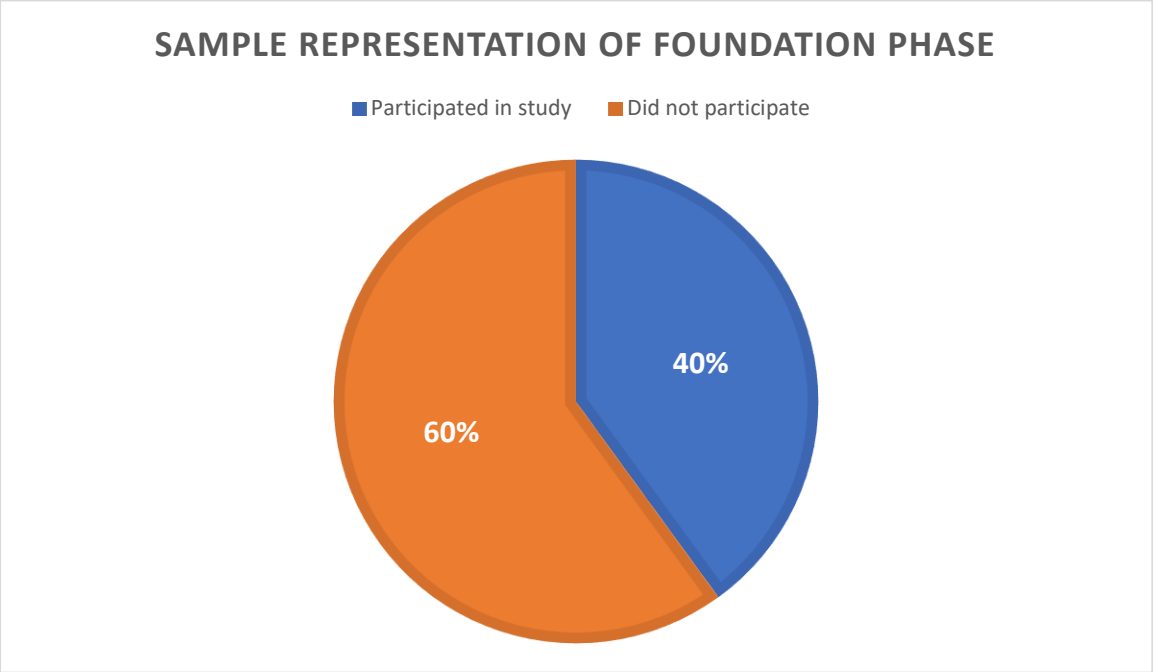

Figure 15: Sample representation of foundation phase

The table below further depicts the race representation of the sample compared to the race composition of the learners in the school and in the foundation phase, more specifically (as provided by the school).

School			Foundation Phase			Sample		
Race	**No. of learners**	**% of total**	**Race**	**No. of learners**	**% of total**	**Race**	**No. of learners**	**% of total**
Black	1012	93%	**Black**	468	94%	**Black**	179	89%
Coloured	13	1%	**Coloured**	5	1%	**Coloured**	16	8%
Indian	14	1%	**Indian**	7	1%	**Indian**	1	0.5%
White	54	5%	**White**	18	4%	**White**	5	2.5%
Other	-	-	**Other**	-	-	**Other**	-	-
Total	1093	100%	**Total**	498	100%	**Total**	201	100%

Table 5: Race representation of the sample

When looking at the sample's race representation, it does not align with the race compilation of the learners of the school. This discrepancy can be explained by the fact that the race of the sample is indicative of the parent/guardian representative of the child (which may include grandparents, aunts and uncles, adoptive and stepparents, etc.) and not the child, whereas the race compilation of the school is indicative of the learners' race.

The diagrams below further depict the race representation of the sample:

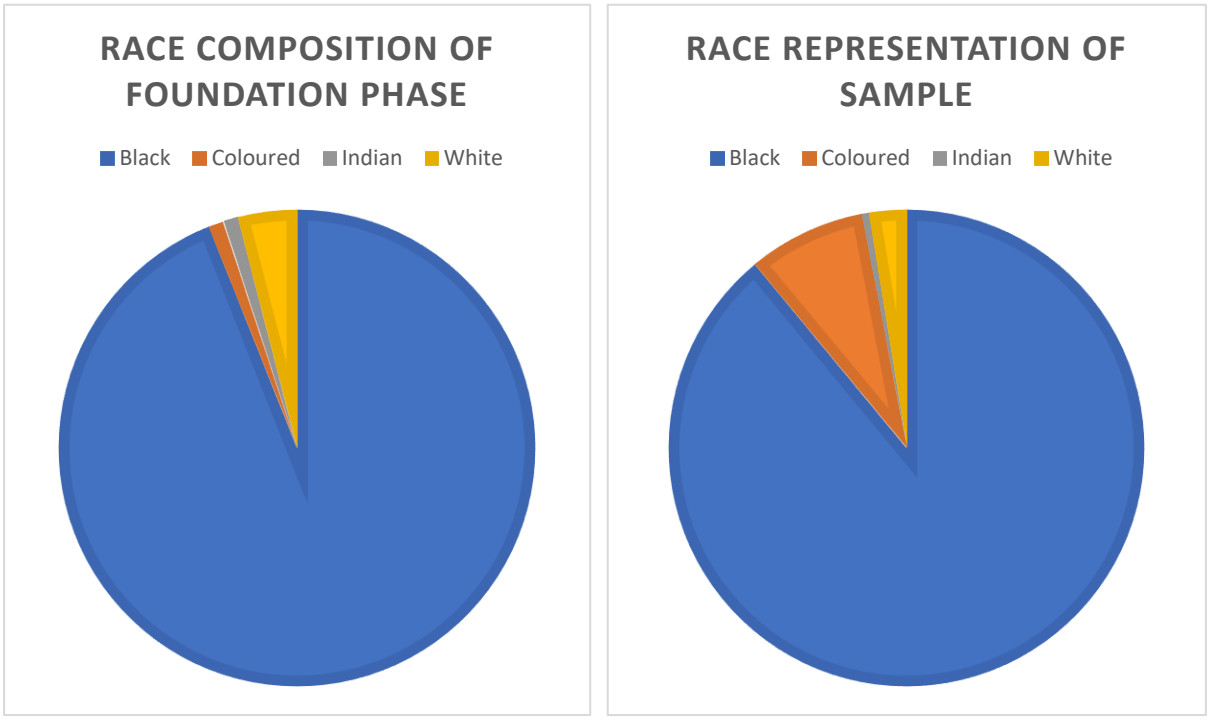

Figure 16: Race composition of foundation phase and race representation of sample

The sample in this stage of the research process is somewhat representative of the race composition of the school. There is, however, a larger Coloured and smaller white representation in the sample compared to that of the school. The sample, furthermore, consists of parents/guardians in each grade of the foundation phase and is representative of the grade composition of the foundation phase of the school. This is depicted in the table below:

Foundation Phase			Sample		
Grade	**No. of learners**	**% of total**	**Grade**	**No. of learners**	**% of total**
Grade 1	184	37%	**Grade 1**	72	36%
Grade 2	159	32%	**Grade 2**	73	36.5%
Grade 3	155	31%	**Grade 3**	53	26%
			Unknown (not specified)	3	1.5%
Total	498	100%	**Total**	201	100%

Table 6: Grade representation of sample

Apart from the three participants who chose not to disclose the grade of their children, the sample is spread relatively evenly across the grades. Although there is a slightly smaller representation of parents of Grade 3 learners, this does not have much of a bearing on the validity of the data gathered from the sample. As the study focussed on parental engagement of learners in the foundation phase, and considering that parents are generally more engaged in the learning of younger children, the grade representation of the sample seems fitting and appropriate. The diagrams below depict the grade representation of the sample compared to the grade composition of the foundation phase:

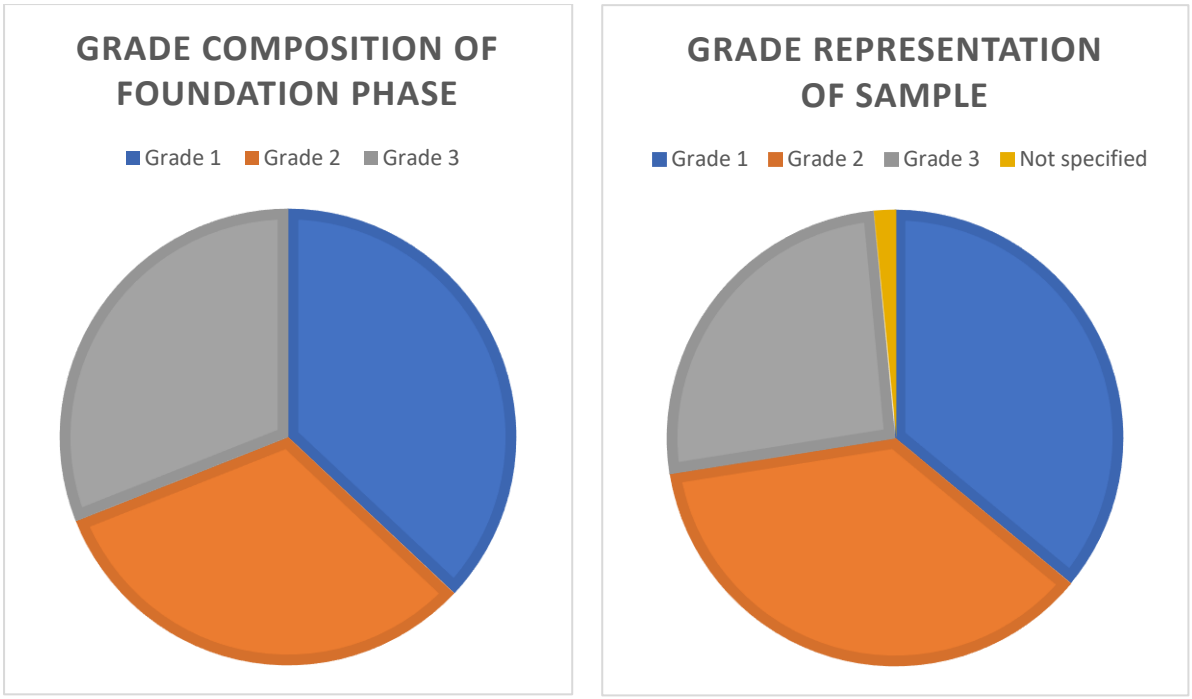

Figure 17: Grade composition of foundation phase and grade representation of sample of questionnaire

Based on the responses of the questionnaire, the parents were then invited to participate in the action research process. On the questionnaire that was completed, 159 parent participants indicated their interest to participate in the action research and provided their contact details. Initially, the researcher planned to only invite 20 of these parents to participate in the action research based on their position of vulnerability – thus, parents who experienced challenges to engagement due to their socio-economic status, access to resources, challenging family dynamics such as single-parent households, long working hours, and perceptions that undermine their value as parents (as reflected in the completed questionnaire). However, bearing in mind the challenges and limitations posed by COVID-19, and the researcher's concern that many parents would decide not to participate despite their initial interest, by choice or by their need to isolate, the researcher decided to invite all 159 parents to participate in the action research process, with the hope of having 20 participants see the whole process of the action research through. Due to the participatory and in-depth nature of an action research study, only a few participants were needed. Furthermore, the action research process was time consuming, and due to the limited time available to collect data according to the regulations of the Department of Education, the researcher decided to aim for more or less 20 committed participants.

As the workshop was the first stage of the action research process, an invitation to the workshop was sent out to the 159 participants via WhatsApp. A copy of this invitation is attached as Appendix J. Of the 159 parents, only 29 accepted the invitation and planned to attend the workshop and participate in the research process. The invitation was sent out a month in advance to allow the participants time to plan and make the necessary arrangements. Although the workshop was set to take place on 31 July 2021, COVID-19 regulations increased to LEVEL 4 lockdown and gatherings were prohibited again. Consequently, the workshop was postponed to 28 August 2021. Although social distancing still had to be maintained, we were able to gather and conduct the workshop. Of the 29 participants who accepted the invitation to participate in the action research, only 16 arrived and participated in the workshop. Of the 13 participants who did not arrive as expected, three excused themselves. One of these participants had had the COVID-19 vaccine and was experiencing side effects, another participant had an urgent matter to attend to, and the last participant had to go to work. The researcher did not hear from the other ten participants again and cannot say what the reason was for their lack of attendance. There were, however, a few issues that might have influenced this, such as exposure to COVID-19 and the need to isolate, work commitments, family commitments, or the weather, as it was a very cold morning. However, none of these issues were confirmed.

All the participants in the action research process were Africans, and thus there was no racial diversity in this sample. The majority (93%) of the learners in the foundation phase of the school are African; however, this does not have much bearing on the data collected and is still somewhat representative of the school's racial composition. The table below depicts the gender and employment status of the parent participants, as well as the grade of their children:

	Grade 1		Grade 2		Grade 3		**Total**
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Employed	2	4		2	1		9
Unemployed		1		5		1	7
Total	2	5	0	7	1	1	**16**

Table 7: Sample of action research

The diagrams below further depict the information presented in the table above:

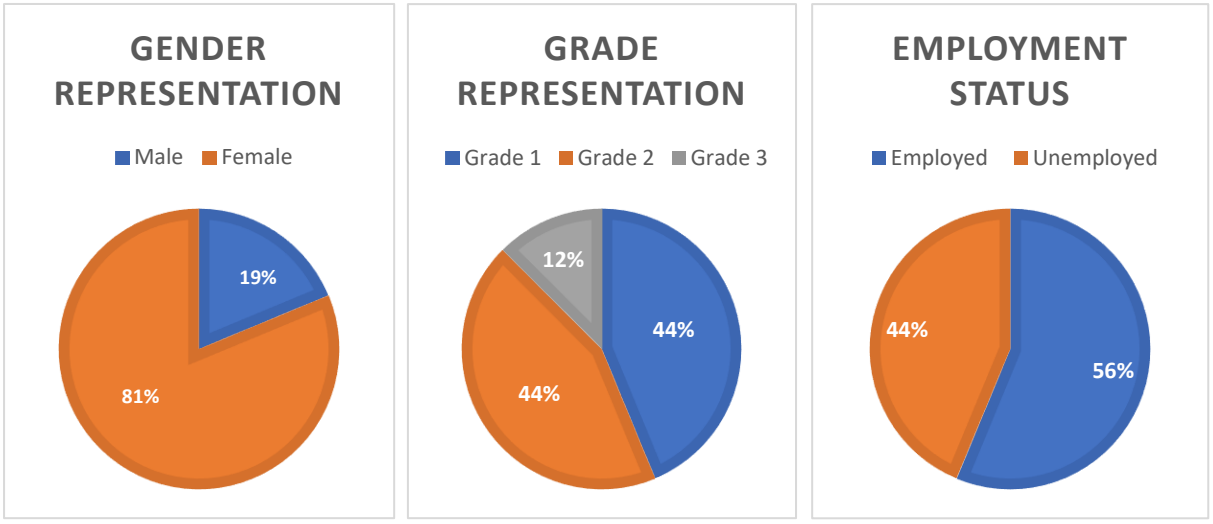

Figure 18: Gender, grade representation and employment status of parent participants

As depicted in the table and diagrams above, most of the parent participants were female, with only three male participants, and in alignment with the sample of the questionnaire, there are fewer parents of Grade 3 learners compared to Grade 1 and Grade 2 learners. Moreover, nearly half (44%) of these parents were unemployed, which is a large percentage considering the small size of this sample. It can further be assumed that this sample was somewhat representative of the lower socio-economic population of the school.

The 16 participants who attended the workshop participated further in the application of the action plan developed collaboratively at the workshop. In the final stage of data collection, all 16 participants were invited (via WhatsApp) to participate in an individual interview to provide feedback on their experiences. However, only 11 of these participants participated in the interview process. Three participants were seriously ill, of which two were hospitalised, and the third was on bed rest. None of these three participants were able to participate in the interview process. The other two participants postponed and cancelled several planned dates to conduct the interviews and over time stopped contact and no longer showed interest to participate. The table below depicts the gender and employment status of the 11 participants, as well as the grades of their children, who completed the whole action research process and participated in the interview process until the end:

	Grade 1		Grade 2		Grade 3		**Total**
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Employed	2	3		3	1	0	9
Unemployed		1		1			2
Total	2	4	0	4	1	0	**11**

Table 8: Sample of interview process

As reflected in Table 4 and Table 5, all five of the participants who dropped out of the research process were females, of which three were unemployed and three were parents of children in Grade 2. The diagrams below further depict the information presented in the table above regarding the participants who completed the whole action research process:

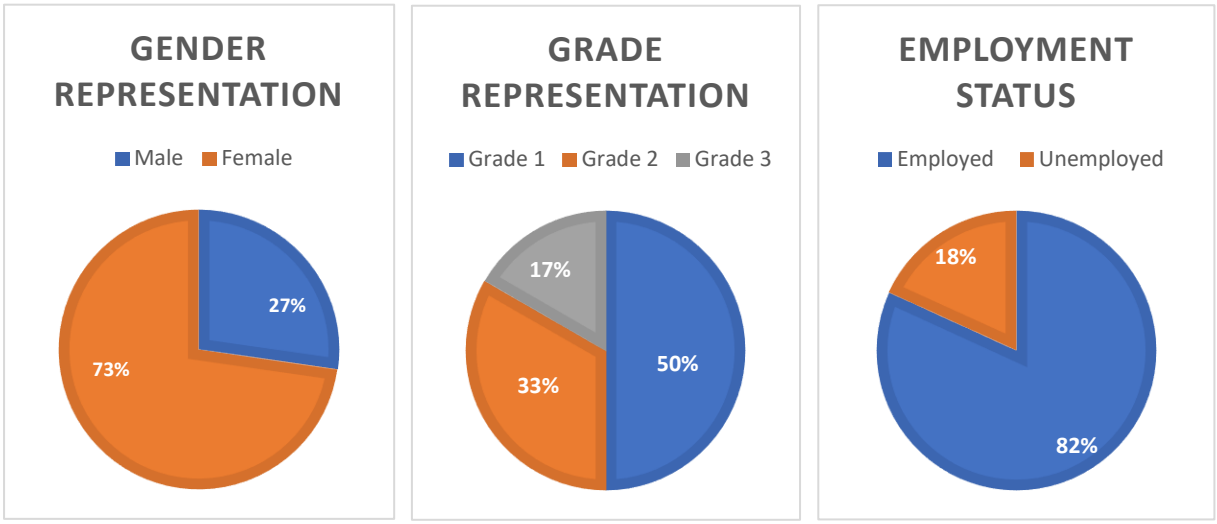

Figure 19: Gender representation, grade representation and employment status of parents who participated in the action research

Although five participants did not participate in the individual interviews, they did participate in the application of the action plan and kept in contact throughout the process. Feedback of their experiences regarding the application, however, were not obtained and therefore not documented. Due to the loss of these five participants, the percentage representation changed significantly as the sample size was small. The desired sample size was not achieved despite 159 parents being invited initially to participate. This is partly indicative of the effects of COVID-19, but perhaps also indicative of the challenges to engagement amongst the parents (to be discussed in the next chapter).

In this study, the researcher made use of the data collected by one more unexpected participant. The researcher initially planned to conduct the study at a primary school in an informal settlement in Merafong City. This school would have provided the ideal sample for the study as all the families within the school community live in the surrounding informal settlements and form part of the lower socio-economic cohort, of which, the majority of parents are unemployed (as explained by the participant).

When starting the sampling process, the researcher went directly to the school to address the principal, as there was no website or information online about the school and she could therefore not contact him by telephone. Although the principal was not available at the time, one of the staff members provided the researcher with his contact details. The researcher contacted the principal and set up a meeting to discuss the possibility of conducting the research in the school. The principal was welcoming and willing to assist the researcher in any way necessary. The researcher explained the research process and the intention to include the SMT and parents in the study, and he willingly consented.

The successfully conducted an interview with the principal as part of the first stage of the research process; however, contact with the parents posed a serious challenge. In an attempt to assist the researcher, the principal set up a parents' meeting and invited all foundation phase parents to the school. He also provided the researcher with three assistants, who could effectively communicate with the parents, to assist in explaining the research process and the parents in completing the questionnaire. Despite all the efforts, only 25 parents arrived at the meeting. Taking into consideration the nature of the research process, the severe language barrier between the parents and the researcher, and the challenges involved in contacting parents, the researcher realised that conducting the study in this school would be unsuccessful. Since the majority of the parents in this school did not have transport or access to electronic communication or data, contact with the parents would require going to their homes in their communities. This would be an invasion of privacy as obtaining permission from the parents to do so would not be possible (due to lack of communication methods available). In addition, crime is rampant in these areas, which posed another threat, and prevented the researcher from doing so.

Bearing these factors in mind, the researcher decided to conduct the study at another school where contact with the parents would be more viable. The researcher, however, decided to include and use the data gathered from the interview with the principal of this school, as he provided valuable information regarding the reality of schools in informal settlements in South Africa. Moreover, the data were relevant to the purpose and topic of this study and were thus used in conjunction with the data collected from the school where the study was conducted. This principal participant is referred to by the pseudonym *Principal B*.

4.6 Research Site

This study was conducted at one public primary school in Merafong City (More information regarding Merafong City is provided in Section 5.1). Due to the nature of the action research study, the different stages of data collection took place at different venues. When interviewing the participants throughout the research process, the researcher took into consideration what was most convenient for the participants and asked them what date, time and place they preferred.

The principal of the school was interviewed on the school premises. The interview with the first foundation phase member of the School Management Team was conducted at her house after school hours. As we live in the same town, this was easy and convenient for both the participant and the researcher. The second SMT member was interviewed at my house on a Friday afternoon after school hours. This was the most convenient time and place for the participant.

As discussed in the previous section, the questionnaire was sent home to the parents via the learners at school. The parents therefore completed the questionnaires at home and then returned them to the school where they were collected.

The workshop was conducted on the school premises. The principal of the school was supportive of the workshop and willingly provided the facilities, including the use of the school hall, tables and chairs, sanitiser, and the use of the bathrooms. The principal also ensured that the school's groundsman was available on that Saturday morning to

open and close the premises and to assist with the lighting of the school hall. Conducting the workshop at the school was ideal as it was accessible to all the participants, and it was spacious enough to maintain COVID-19 regulations.

The individual interviews were conducted in my house. When contacting the participants, they seemed more comfortable conducting the interview in my house than in their own houses. The fact that my house was close to the school, also made it easier for the participants to locate it. Some of the participants, who had their own transport, came to my house by their own means. The participants who did not have any transport were picked up at their homes and dropped off again afterwards. The researcher willingly transported these participants, considering their convenience.

4.7 Data Analysis

The data collected throughout the research process was analysed using AtlasTi and SPSS. All the qualitative data (including the interviews with the principal, SMT members and parent participants) were audio recorded, transcribed, and then analysed using AtlasTi. This allowed the researcher to conduct a thematic analysis according to predetermined themes. These themes were based on the research questions and the key concepts identified in the conceptual framework. The qualitative data were therefore analysed according to the following major themes:

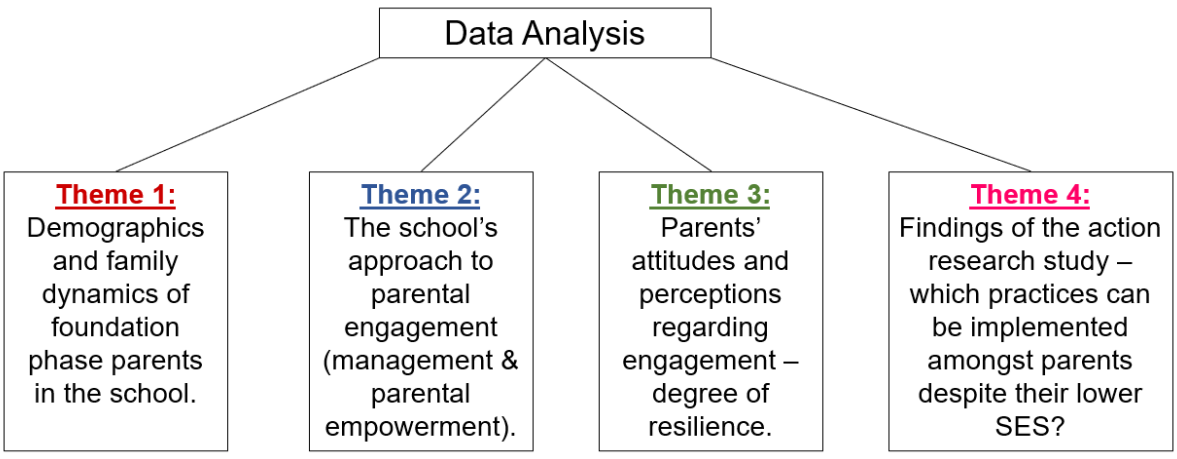

Figure 20: Thematic analysis of qualitative data

In the process of analysing the data using AtlasTi, several sub-themes emerged. Through coding on the software, the researcher was able to categorise the data according to similar findings and related ideas. The coded data were then further categorised into code groups, which were translated into carefully identified sub-themes in relation to the major predetermined themes mentioned above. Below is an

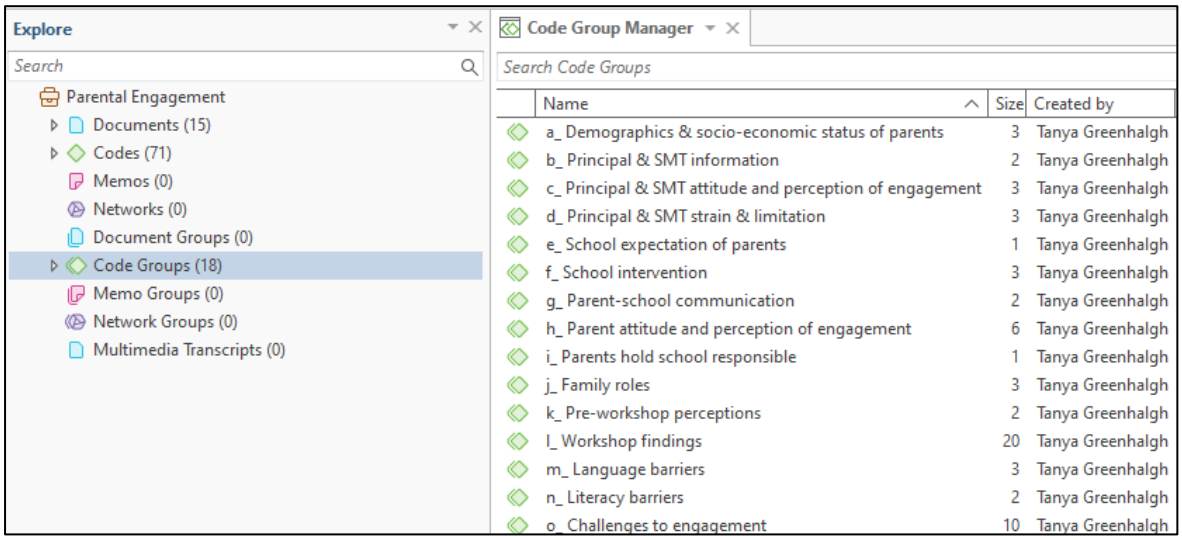

Figure 21: Example of identified code groups

example of some of the code groups that were identified once all the transcribed interviews were analysed and coded:

These identified code groups were then carefully divided and placed under the four major themes as sub-themes. The example below indicates how some of these code groups were translated into sub-themes under the second major theme, namely, the school's approach to parental engagement:

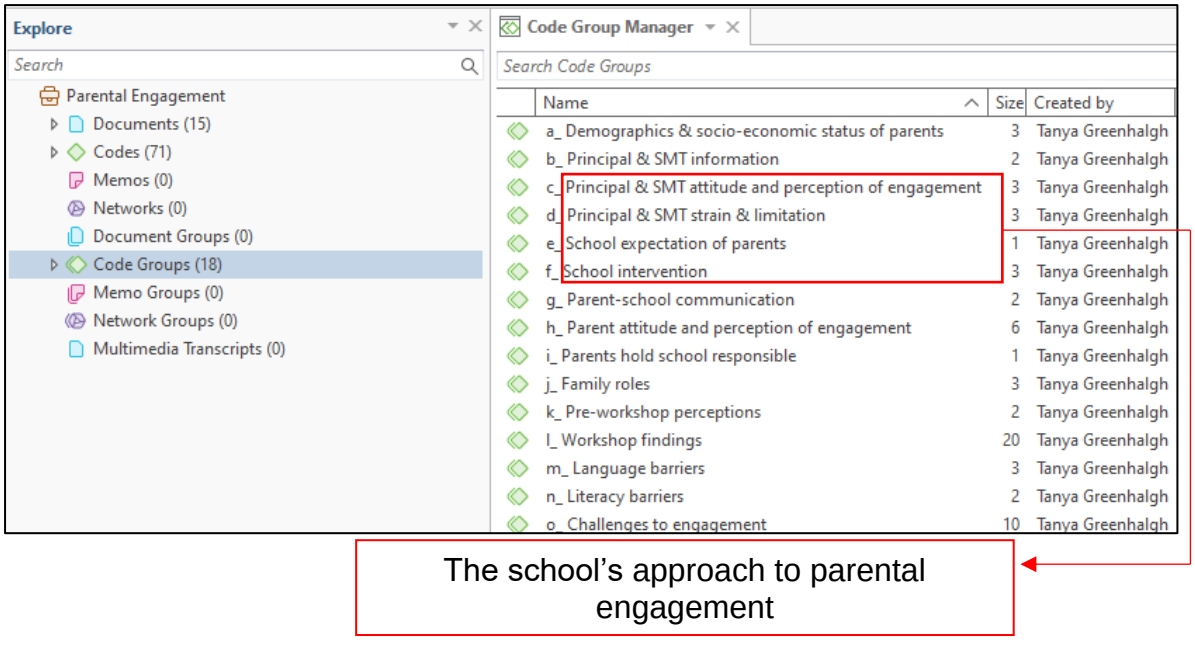

Figure 22: Code groups identified as sub-themes

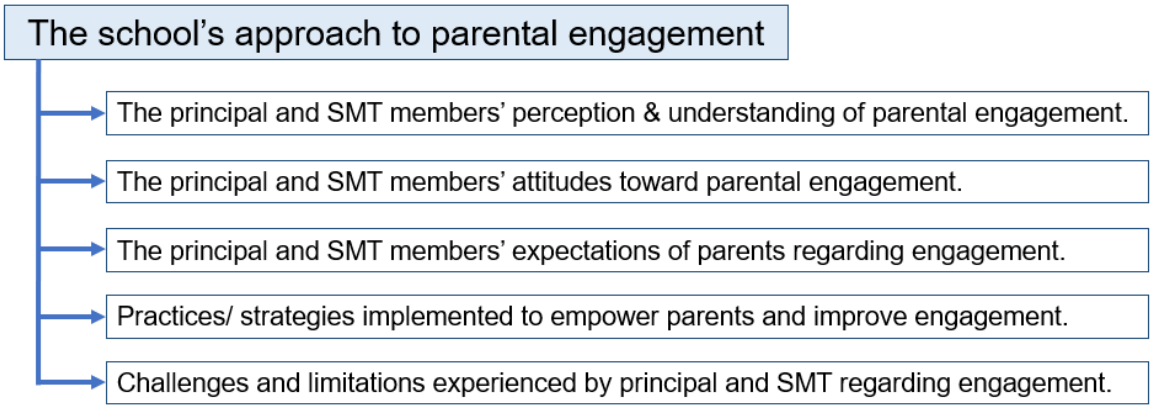

Figure 23: Identified sub-themes based in code groups

The quantitative data (collected through the questionnaire) were inputted and analysed using the SPSS software. The analysis of this data was descriptive in nature with the purpose of identifying (1) the general circumstances and lifestyles of foundation phase parents and (2) their perceptions and attitudes regarding engagement. The quantitative data were categorised under the same major themes as the qualitative data, and specifically under Theme 1 and Theme 3. The data was further sub-categorised according to the concepts identified in the conceptual framework. The diagram below depicts the sub-themes according to which the quantitative data were categorised under the third major theme, namely, parents' attitudes and perceptions regarding parental engagement.

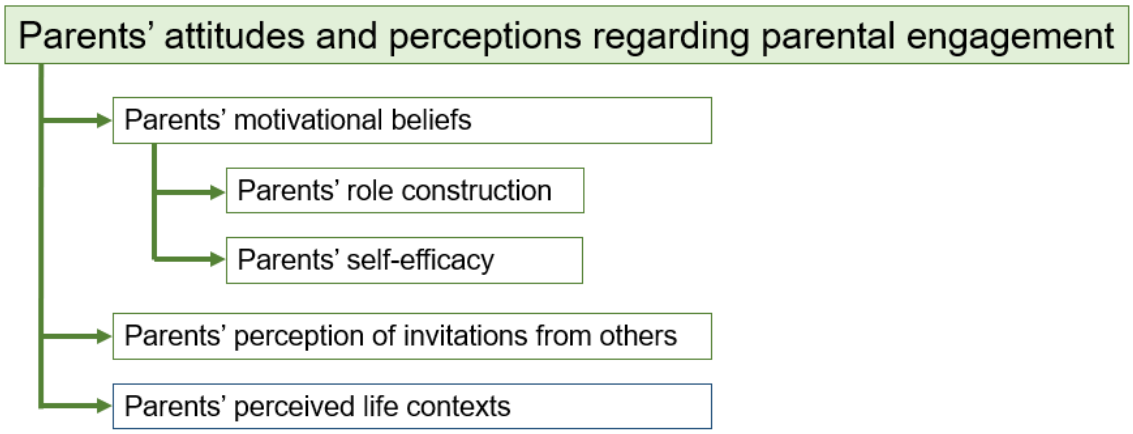

Figure 24: Identified sub-themes for quantitative data according to concepts identified in conceptual framework

Although the quantitative and qualitative data were initially analysed separately, using different software, the data were categorised under the same themes and considered collectively. Due to the nature of this action research study, the data were collected and analysed in stages. This allowed for the analysis of data collected in one stage to inform the collection and analysis of data in the next stage. The diagram below depicts the data analysis process:

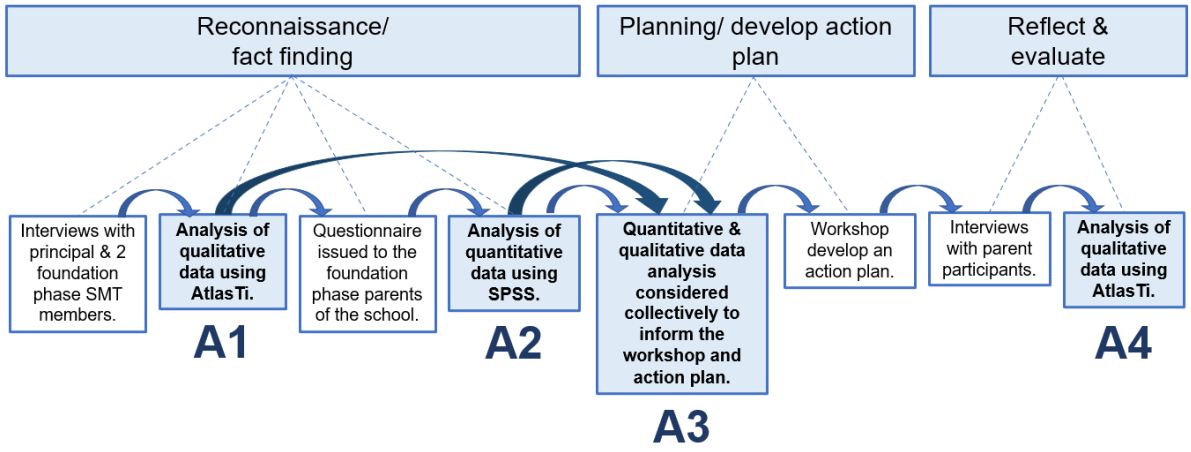

Figure 25: Data analysis process

4.8 Ethical Considerations

Several measures were put in place and specific procedures followed to ensure the ethical execution of the study. Prior to data collection, the researcher obtained ethical clearance from the University of Pretoria as well as permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct research in this community and the school.

Before approaching the SMT and foundation phase parents regarding their participation in the study, the researcher obtained permission from the principal of the school. The purpose of the study was clearly explained to the participants prior to their involvement in the study. All willing participants provided informed consent to engage in the study and had the freedom to withdraw at any time. All the participants in the study participated voluntarily and no compensation was provided. In addition, the participants were ensured that their responses would be kept confidential and would be used for the sole purposes of this study. The school as well as the participants therefore remained anonymous throughout the study.

It was further essential to take into consideration the sensitivity surrounding the socio-economic status and the position of vulnerability of the participants. While this study was aimed at including vulnerable parents, they were not directly addressed based on their socio-economic status. For this reason, the questionnaire conducted in the reconnaissance phase of the study was used to identify these participants based on their access to the school, their availability of resources, their level of education, the family dynamics, and the perceptions they have of their roles as parents.

Moreover, this study was value driven and thus axiological in nature. It was, and is, intrinsically valuable as this action research allowed the participants to be actively involved in transforming their own contexts. The study further committed to social change as it promoted equal opportunities for involvement amongst families with a lower socio-economic status. It was thus potentially empowering as these parents were given a platform to contribute significantly to the study and to investigate practical options for engagement.

As this study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting regulations, it was essential to bear in mind the safety of all the participants. The researcher maintained social distancing at all times and provided sanitiser at the workshop and interviews. In addition, masks were worn, and all amenities were thoroughly sanitised prior to the workshop. The date of the workshop was postponed to ensure that the researcher and the participants complied with the regulations at the time regarding gatherings and the number of people allowed at an indoor venue. Thus, the safety of the participants was taken into consideration at all times.

4.9 Enhancing the Quality of the Research

In conducting a mixed methods study, different validity checks were considered for the quantitative and qualitative phases of the study. In the quantitative phase, measures were taken to ensure the reliability and validity of the findings; while measures of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were taken into consideration during the qualitative phases of the study.

In the quantitative phase of the study, the reliability of the findings was determined and ensured by comparing the data to the interview transcripts to determine the degree of consistency, and thus the reliability of the data. To ensure the validity of the findings, the correct framing of the survey items was essential (Cohen *et al.*, 2007). This ensured that the instrument correctly measured what it intended to measure, and that the data was relevant to the purpose of the study. The researcher therefore ensured that the questions were asked in a detailed and clear manner to minimise misinterpretation of the questions asked and the responses received. The language used in the survey was simple and therefore easy to understand, and clear instructions were provided to avoid ambiguity. In addition, efforts were made to avoid leading questions to reduce personal bias. This ensured that the data obtained through the survey were accurate and representative of the participants' perspectives. Before administering the questionnaire for this study, pre-testing was done by selecting a small pilot sample of respondents to complete the questionnaire. This assisted in identifying ambiguous questions, determined whether the instructions were clear, and determined the length of the questionnaire and its practicability. This ensured that the final questionnaire was feasible and appropriate for the population sample used in this study.

During the qualitative phase of the study, it was essential to ensure that the findings were credible. Therefore the researcher conducted member checks throughout the interview process by confirming with the participants that the researcher's interpretation and understanding of their responses were correct. This was done by rephrasing responses and asking additional questions to gain clarity. In addition, a pilot interview was conducted to identify any questions that were unclear or may have allowed for misinterpretation. Transferability was achieved by providing thick descriptions of the context and the participants interviewed. This allowed the reader to make judgements regarding the transferability of the findings in this study. Moreover, a journal was kept documenting the decisions made throughout the research process including changes and decisions made regarding data collection and analysis. This allowed the reader to better understand and follow the researcher's reasoning and therefore ensured that the findings were dependable. Finally, confirmability was ensured by minimising unintended bias through triangulation. The interview responses were compared and analysed along with the survey responses.

This ensured that the data were not solely dependent on the researcher's interpretation but were supported by the quantitative responses.

4.10 Conclusion

This chapter detailed the research approach, the research paradigm, and the research design used in this study. Furthermore, the data collection, sampling, research site and data analysis were discussed, as well as the ethical considerations. The next chapter presents and analyses the findings of the study.

Chapter 5

Data Presentation and Analysis

As previously mentioned, the purpose of this study was to explore practical forms of parental engagement that could be implemented by socio-economically vulnerable parents, and to identify ways in which these forms of parental engagement could be encouraged and managed by the school management team. This study therefore focussed on ways in which vulnerable families could be engaged in the learning of their children despite and in the midst of these challenges. This chapter presents and analyses the findings according to the following themes: demographic profile of the participants; the school's approach to parental engagement; parental perceptions of engagement; parental engagement in learning; and the action research process.

5.1 Demographic Profile of Participants

This section of analysis provides a description of the school community and the demographic details of the 201 participants who completed the questionnaire, and the 16 participants who participated in the action research process with reference to their area of residence, employment, education, family dynamics, and language.

5.1.1 The School Community

The school (*School A*) that participated in the study is a public primary school situated in Carletonville. Carletonville is a mining community situated in Merafong City. It is surrounded by several other communities such as Fochville, Welverdiend, Khutsong, Kokosi and Wedela, which all form part of the larger Merafong City.

As indicated by the principal and the SMT members, this school has been identified as a school of choice by many families in the community and surrounding communities. Although Khutsong (a large township situated outside Carletonville) has a primary school and high school available to the community, many families prefer to send their children to schools in Carletonville, and this school in particular. This is

made possible as many families travel in and out of Carletonville daily for work. The description of the school community provided below is largely based on the information provided in the interviews with the school principal and the SMT members.

As socio-economic status is a significant factor in this study, it is necessary to understand the socio-economic status of the families within the school community. Based on the data gathered in the interviews, the financial status of the families in the school ranges from very wealthy to devastatingly poor. The majority of the families, however, are middle or lower-middle class, which is representative of the economic status of the families in the town.

The largest percentage of the population in Merafong City is employed by the mining sector. In more recent years, however, there has been a major downscaling in the mining industry resulting in nearly 75% of the original workforce being retrenched in 2011 (Merafong City Local Municipality, 2018; HDA, 2015). Consequently, this has led to a general decline in economic opportunities in the city (De Lange, 2019). Many families in Carletonville have therefore experienced retrenchment, unemployment or have precarious forms of employment, such as part-time jobs or contractual work.

This is true for a large percentage of parents in *School A*. Many of the parents are unemployed and actively seeking work, while others may be shift workers or tend to work long hours to make ends meet. This means that these parents are often unable to assist their children academically or to attend school meetings and events. The financial circumstances of these families are further reflected in the fact that a significant number of parents apply for subsidies each year, as they are unable to pay the required school fees. Although these families struggle financially, it has been said that they faithfully make payments when they can according to pre-arrangements, indicating a general sense of commitment to the school. It is also important to note that although a large percentage of the families experience financial stain, it is not a general statement that applies to all families within the school community or even within Carletonville. As mentioned, the school community also consists of financially secure and affluent families. It, however, reinforces the fact that this school was a suitable filter/medium to target parents who are likely to fall within the lower middle-class.

The level of education of the parents within the school community is also relevant when discussing their socio-economic status. As indicated by the principal and the SMT members, the education level of parents within the school community varies from higher education to illiteracy. It was noted that a large percentage of the parents have their Grade 12 certificates and have received on the job training or have undergone academic courses through their places of employment. However, there are also many parents who did not complete school and have a low level of education or are completely illiterate. More specific information regarding the employment and the education of the parents (based on the responses of the parent participants) is provided later in this section.

Family dynamics is another aspect of the school community that is relevant to the study as it affects the daily lives of the parents and children and has a bearing on the level of engagement provided by parents. Due to the working conditions of parents, many children are left with the grandparents as their guardians. In many cases, this places huge strain on grandparents as they have limited financial means and often depend on social grants. These grandparents generally have an even lower level of education, are often illiterate, and do not speak English. Consequently, communication between the school and these guardians is arduous, and children do not receive the academic support they require at home. It has further been noted that the school community consists of many single parent households and even some child-headed households. More details regarding the family dynamics of the households within the school community (based on the responses of the parent participants) is provided later in this section.

In discussing the school community, it is also necessary to make mention of the staff and educators of the school. It has been indicated that the staff members and the educators of *School A* are generally committed to the education and well-being of the children. Much effort is made to communicate with parents and to provide the necessary support to families. Educators do however take strain as their classes consist of between 38 and 40 learners. In addition, they are bogged down with administrative duties over and above their teaching and extramural commitments.

Finally, the pressure placed on educators and families was exacerbated by the COVID-19 regulations and the rotational school attendance of learners. Educators struggled to complete the curriculum on time and were unable to send additional work home as learners received limited academic support outside of the school. Parents experienced stress and anxiety as children were left unattended at home and they were concerned about the academic competence of their children because of the rotational attendance. As this study was conducted during the COVID-19 regulations, it is important to bear in mind the ways in which this has affected the well-being of the school community.

The remainder of this section discusses the demographic profile of the 201 participants who completed the questionnaire, as well as the 16 participants who engaged in the action research process. These findings provide more concrete information regarding the socio-economic status and family dynamics of the school community.

5.1.2 Area, Type of Residence and Type of Employment as Indicators of Financial (In)Stability

The area and type of residence of the participants are essential in understanding the likely financial status and lifestyles of the families. Families who reside in Khutsong, the neighbouring township, are likely to have a lower financial status, whereas families who live in town are likely to be more financially stable. This, however, is not a blanket statement and does not imply that all families residing in a particular area maintain a certain socio-economic status or lifestyle. Rather, data regarding area of residence should be considered alongside type of housing (townhouse, backroom apartment, RDP house, etc.) and employment status for a more complete and accurate understanding of the financial security and lifestyle of the participants.

The table and diagram below depict the area of residence of the 201 participants:

Area of residence	Number of participants	Percentage of participants
Carletonville	105	52.2%
Khutsong	71	35.3%
Fochville	5	2.5%
Blyvooruitsig	1	0.5%
Welverdiend	6	3%
Other	9	4.5%
Not specified	4	2 %
Total	201	100%

Table 9: The area of residence of the 201 participants

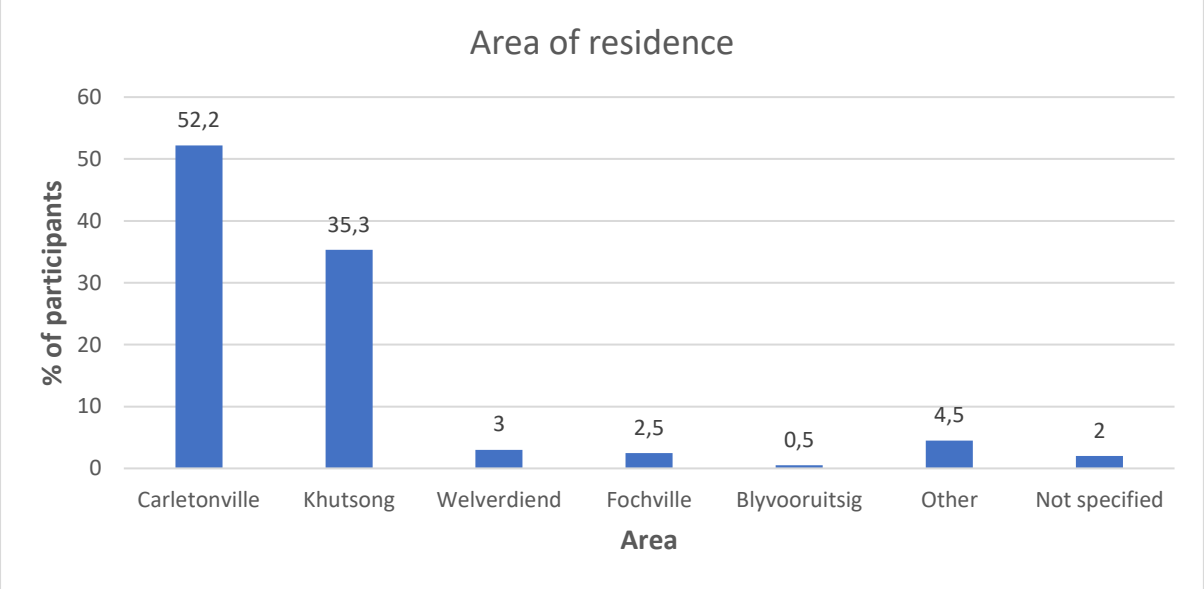

Figure 26: Area of residence of the 201 participants

Of the 201 participants who completed the questionnaire, only 52,2% live in Carletonville. A large percentage of the participants (35,3%) live in the township. Together this accounts for 87,5% of the participants. The other 12,5% of the participants live in the other surrounding communities. This suggests that 47,8% of the participants travel in and out of Carletonville daily to bring their children to school and possibly for work.

The table and diagram below depict the type of housing of the participants who live in Carletonville compared to those who live in Khutsong (as this accounts for the majority of the participants). This reflects the probable difference in the degree of financial

stability of the participants based on their area of residence. The other 12,5% of the participants living in the other surrounding communities is discussed later in this section.

Type of housing	Carletonville			Khutsong		
	No. of participants	% of participants living in Carletonville	% of total participants	No. of participants	% of participants living in Khutsong	% of total participants
House	68	65%	33,83%	13	18,3%	6,47%
Apartment	16	15%	7,96%	5	7%	2,49%
Backroom apartment	15	14%	7,46%	3	4,2%	1,49%
RDP house	0	0%	0%	33	46,5%	16,42%
Informal housing	0	0%	0%	11	15,5%	5,47%
Other	3	3%	1,49%	5	7%	2,49%
Not specified	3	3%	1,49%	1	1,5%	0,49%
TOTAL	**105**	**100%**	**52,2%**	**71**	**100%**	**35,3%**

Table 10: Type of housing of the participants who live in Carletonville and Khutsong

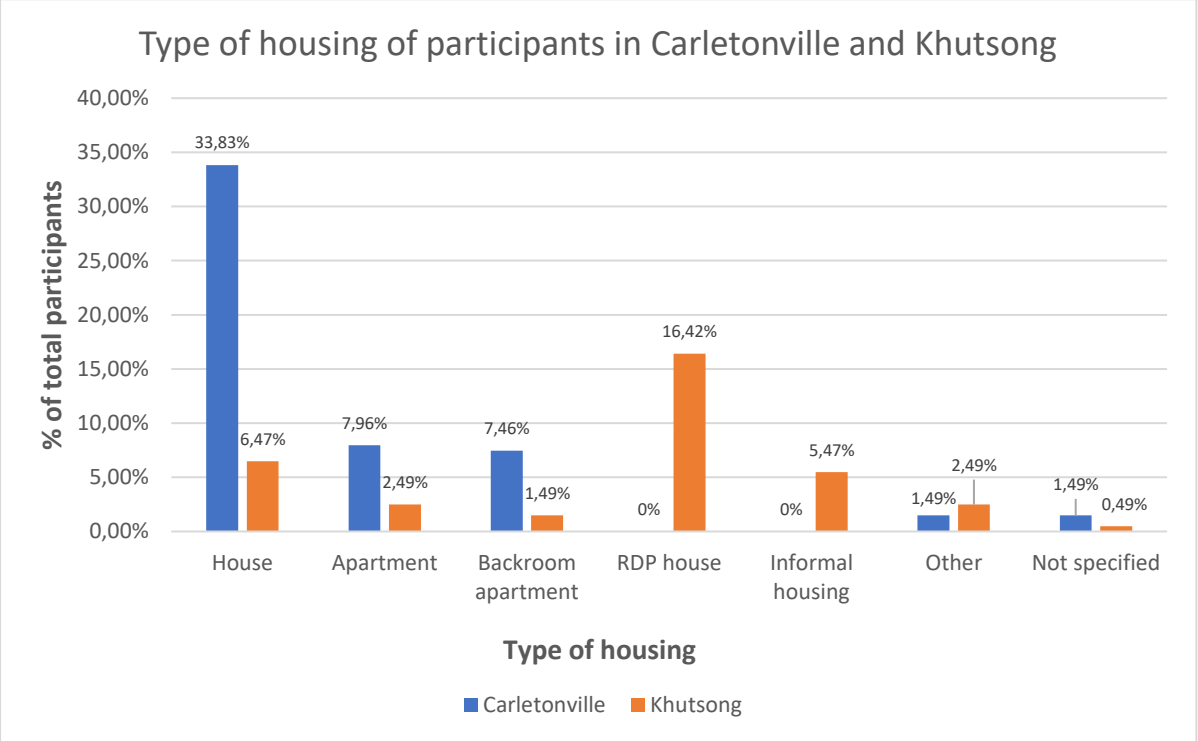

Figure 27: Type of housing of the participants who live in Carletonville and Khutsong

5.1.2.1 Participants Living in Carletonville

As depicted in the table and the graph above, the majority of the participants who live in Carletonville tend to live in townhouses, and perhaps suggests a degree of financial stability. As a mining community, many of the residents in Carletonville live in mine houses as the mining companies provide housing to their employees at a reduced cost as a company benefit. These residents are likely to be financially secure as mining companies only provide housing to employees of certain categories/positions, which require skilled labour and/or qualifications. Other participants rent houses or are homeowners, again suggesting a degree of financial stability. However, other participants live in apartments (approximately 8% of the total participants) and backroom apartments (approximately 8% of the total participants). These participants are likely to earn less but it still suggests that they earn enough to live in town and to pay rent.

The table below shows the number of incomes per household and the number of children of the participants living in houses in Carletonville. It is necessary to consider the number of children/dependents per household as this is further likely to have a bearing on the standard of living of the participants.

Number of incomes per household	**Number of children per household**							
	1	2	3	4	5	+5	Not specified	Total
No income	2	2						**4**
One income	2	7	12	5	1			**27**
Two incomes	2	11	13	4	3			**33**
More than two incomes								**0**
Not specified	1	1	1				1	**4**
Total	**7**	**21**	**26**	**9**	**4**	**0**	**1**	**68**

Table 11: Number of incomes per household and number of children of the participants living in houses in Carletonville

The information above suggests that most of the participants who live in houses in Carletonville have between one and two incomes per household. Twenty-seven (40%) participants indicated that their household receives one income and 33 (49%) participants indicated that their household receives two incomes. The income level of these participants are not disclosed; therefore, one cannot fully know to what extent these families are financially stable.

It is further necessary to consider how many individuals are dependent on each of these incomes. Twelve participants indicated that they have three children, and that their household receives one income, which suggests that four to five people (children and parents included) are dependent on a single income. Another five participants, whose household receives one income, indicated that they have four children. Again, this suggests that between five and six people are dependent on a single income. This may have a bearing on the standard of living of the participants, depending on their level of income. A similar concept applies to the participants whose household receives two incomes. Their financial stability and standard of living are dependent on their level of income and the number of dependents.

Although the level of income of the participants is not disclosed, the type of employment, and thus the type of income, that these households receive may provide more clarity on the probable degree of stability. The table below depicts the type of employment of the participants who indicated that they receive one income per household and who live in a house in Carletonville.

Type of employment	Number of participants/ households receiving one income
Permanent full day employment	20
Permanent half day employment	3
Temporary employment	0
Contractual employment	0
Other	4
Total	**27**

Table 12: The type of employment of the participants who receive one income per household and who live in a house in Carletonville

The information above indicates that the majority of the households who receive one income, receive a reliable and consistent salary through permanent employment. Although this does not necessarily imply a comfortable lifestyle, it does suggest a likely sense of financial stability.

Furthermore, of the 33 participants who indicated that their households receive two incomes, 24 households receive two incomes from permanent full day jobs, and nine households receive one income from a permanent full day job and the other income through temporary or contractual employment. This means that even though some of these households currently receive two incomes, the second income is precarious. These households thus only receive one reliable and consistent income, which may again have a bearing on the standard of living of these households.

Based on the above information, it can be suggested that the majority of the families who live in houses in Carletonville receive at least one reliable and consistent income through permanent full-day employment. However, this does not apply to all families living in this area and in this type of housing. As indicated in Table 11, four households living in a house in Carletonville currently have no income. As previously mentioned, one should bear in mind the recent decline in economic opportunities in the city and the increase in retrenchments and unemployment, which has affected numerous families living in Merafong City. Although most participants living in houses in Carletonville receive a consistent monthly salary, it should not be generally assumed that all these families are financially comfortable and secure. One can deduce, however, that compared to the other participants, these households are likely to be the most stable.

Another 16 participants (24%) living in Carletonville indicated that they live in apartments. The table below shows the number of incomes and number of children per household of the participants living in apartments in Carletonville:

Number of incomes per household	Number of children per household							
	1	2	3	4	5	+5	Not specified	Total
No income								**0**
One income	**3**	**3**	**7**				**1**	**14**
Two incomes		**2**						**2**
More than two incomes								**0**
Not specified								**0**
Total	**3**	**5**	**7**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**1**	**16**

Table 13: Number of incomes and number of children per household of the participants living in apartments in Carletonville

Based on the information above, 14 of the 16 participants who live in apartments in Carletonville receive one income per household, and two participants receive two incomes per household. All the participants who live in apartments in Carletonville earn at least one income. However, one must again take into consideration the number of children and people dependent on that income. While it may be assumed that these families are somewhat financially stable, seven participants indicated that they receive one income and have three children. This implies that there are between four and five people (including children and parents) living in a single apartment on a single income – this may suggest a poorer quality of life.

Of the seven participants who indicated that they live in an apartment in Carletonville, receive one income and have three children, six participants stated that either they or their spouses have a permanent full-day job. Even if it is a low income, it does suggest a degree of stability in the sense that at least one member in the household receives a reliable and consistent monthly salary. The other participant stated that she is not married, and is not employed, yet the household receives one income. This could suggest that she lives with a partner or another family member/friend, or that she receives an income in the form of a grant.

The table below shows the number of incomes and number of children per household of the participants living in backroom apartments in Carletonville:

Number of incomes per household	Number of children per household							
	1	2	3	4	5	+5	Not specified	Total
No income			**1**					**1**
One income	**2**	**3**	**2**	**1**				**8**
Two incomes		**3**						**3**
More than two incomes								0
Not specified	**1**	**1**	**1**					**3**
Total	**3**	**7**	**4**	**1**				**15**

Table 14: Number of incomes and number of children per household of the participants living in backroom apartments in Carletonville

The information above again indicates that almost all of the participants living in backrooms in Carletonville receive at least one income per household. Of these 15 participants, two participants indicated that their household receives two incomes from two full-day jobs; four participants indicated that their household receives one income from a permanent full-day job; four participants indicated that their household receives one income from temporary or contractual employment (and is thus unstable); and one participant indicated that their household receives two incomes, both from temporary employment. This suggests that families who live in Carletonville in backroom apartments are more likely to have precarious forms of employment than those living in houses or apartments in Carletonville.

When comparing the number of children of the participants living in houses, apartments and backroom apartments, it can be deduced that the participants whose households receive two incomes and live in houses tend to have more children per household than those earning one income and living in apartments or backrooms. This may suggest that households who earn more and live in houses can afford to have more children, or even take in children from extended family members. Families who only earn one income and who live in a smaller space (apartments/backrooms) tend to have fewer children.

Even though many of the households of the participants living in Carletonville have an income, it is not specified what the income is or what employment these participants or their spouses/partners have. It does not necessarily imply that they are financially comfortable or well off. Rather, it simply indicates that these families probably earn enough to pay monthly rent as they receive a reliable monthly salary. The quality of life of these participants and their households would still largely depend on their level of income and the number of dependents in the household.

It can therefore be suggested that the households of the participants living in Carletonville generally receive at least one income. The households of the participants living in houses are likely to receive a higher and more reliable income, while those living in apartments tend to receive one reliable income and those living in backroom apartments tend to receive income from more precarious forms of employment. This is depicted in the diagram below and is a generalisation based on the information presented above:

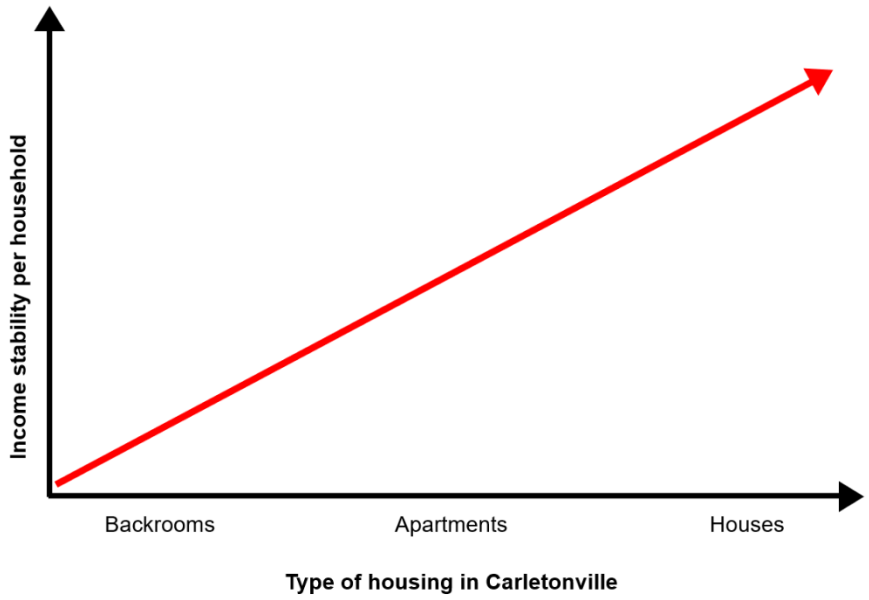

Figure 28: Generalised likely income stability based on housing

5.1.2.2 Participants Living in Khutsong

The participants living in Khutsong are likely to have lower incomes and more precarious forms of employment. As reflected in Table 10, fewer participants who live in Khutsong live in houses than those who live in Carletonville. Of the 71 participants

living in Khutsong, only 13 participants indicated that they live in houses, while 33 participants live in RDP houses and 11 participants live in informal houses, such as shacks. This alone suggests that the participants living in Carletonville earn more and tend to be more financially stable than those living in Khutsong.

Although 13 participants indicated that they live in houses in Khutsong, the cost of living and monthly rent would be significantly less than that in town. This means that families would rather live in Khutsong, where the cost of living is much cheaper and travel in and out of Carletonville every day, than live in Carletonville.

The table below shows the number of incomes and number of children per household of the participants living in houses in Khutsong:

Number of incomes per household	**Number of children per household**							
	1	2	3	4	5	>5	Not specified	Total
No income		2		1				**3**
One income		3	2					**5**
Two incomes		3			2			**5**
More than two incomes								**0**
Not specified								**0**
Total	**0**	**8**	**2**	**1**	**2**	**0**	**0**	**13**

Table 15: Number of incomes and number of children per household of the participants living in houses in Khutsong

The table above indicates that of the 13 participants living in houses in Khutsong, three households receive no income, five receive one income, and five receive two incomes. Again, the income level of these participants is not disclosed, and one cannot determine with accuracy the financial stability of these households; however, one can deduce that it may be cheaper for these families to live in a house outside of town and travel in and out daily than to live in town. These participants probably earn less and experience a lower degree of financial stability than those who live in town.

Nearly half of the participants living in Khutsong (33 of the 71) live in RDP houses. As stated by the National Department of Human Settlements, to be eligible for an RDP house, South African citizens must either be married (or cohabit with a partner) or have children/dependents, and they must earn less than R3500,01 per month per household. This suggests that as many as 33 of the participants' households are dependent on less than R3500,01 per month. The table below depicts the number of children per household of the families living in RDP houses:

Families living in RDP houses (earning less than R3500,01/month per household.)	**Number of children per household**					
	1	2	3	4	5	Total
	9	10	10	3	1	33

Table 16: Number of children per household of the families living in RDP houses

As reflected in the table above, there are between three and seven people (children and parents included) living in a single RDP house, who are dependent on less than R3500,01 per month. The livelihoods and standard of living of these participants and their families are significantly lower than those living in Carletonville. These families are likely to experience severe financial instability and anxiety to make ends meet.

Thus, it can be deduced that families living in Carletonville are generally more financially stable than those living in Khutsong. As previously mentioned, however, this does not imply that all the participants living in Carletonville are well off or financially secure. Rather, a significant number of the participants live in smaller spaces such as apartments and backrooms suggesting that they too experience financial strain. In addition, the participants living in houses, earning a single income, may also experience financial strain depending on their level of income and number of dependents in the household.

5.1.2.3 Participants from other surrounding communities in Merafong City

The table below shows the type of housing and number of incomes per household of the 25 participants living in the other surrounding communities:

	Number of incomes per household					
Type of housing	**No income**	**One income**	**Two incomes**	**>two incomes**	**Not specified**	**Total**
House	2	4	5			**11**
Apartment			1			**1**
Backroom						**0**
RDP house	2	1				**3**
Informal house		2				**2**
Other		1	1			**2**
Not specified	1	3	1		1	**6**
Total	**5**	**11**	**8**	**0**	**1**	**25**

Table 17: Type of housing and number of incomes per household of the 25 participants living in the other surrounding communities

The information above shows that five of these participants do not receive any income, 11 participants receive one income per household, and eight participants receive two incomes per household. These participants are likely to vary in financial status based on their type of housing and number of incomes per household.

5.1.2.4 Employment and Type of Housing of All Participants Residing in Merafong City

Based on the data regarding the area of residence, the number of incomes and the type of employment, it is evident that the sample for this study included participants from different financial statuses.

When considering the area of residence of all the participants, it is evident that, although the majority of the participants reside in Carletonville and Khutsong, the sample included participants from several communities within Merafong City.

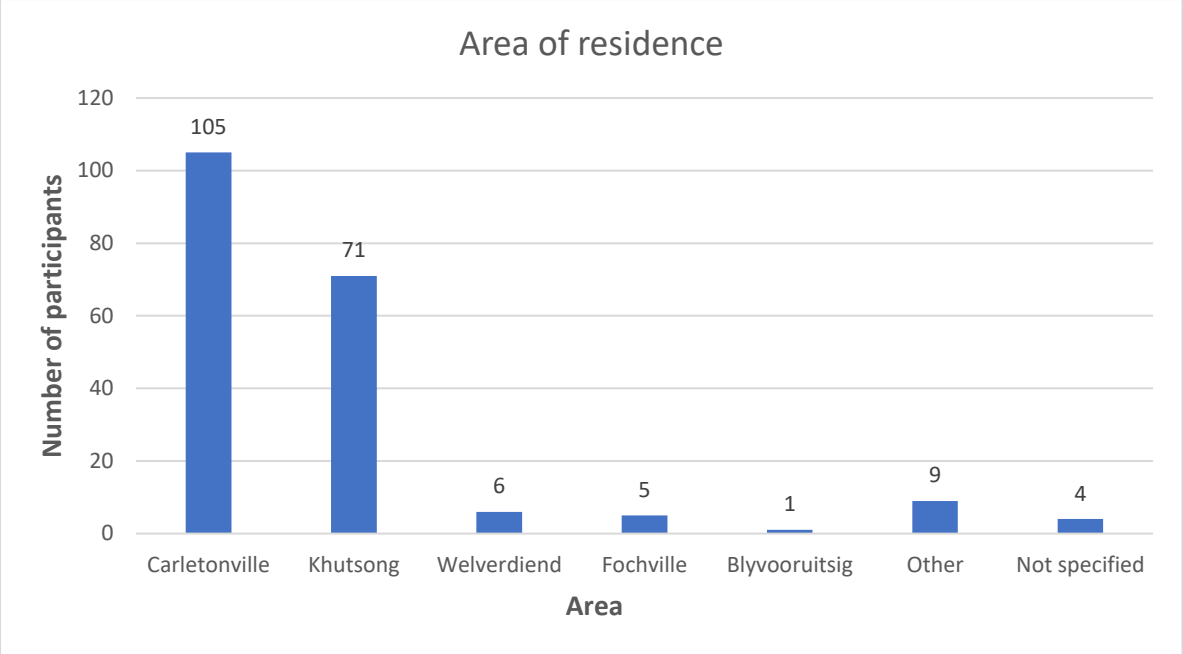

Figure 29: Area of residence of all 201 participants

It is also noteworthy that approximately half of the participants reside in the same community as the school that they send their children to. As previously mentioned, although schools exist and are available to these families in their own communities, parents seem to prefer to send their children to this school in Carletonville. Naturally, this may have a bearing on parents' ability to be involved and present at school during parent meetings, events and sport practices, as it would require these families to travel in and out of Carletonville. It is, therefore, important to consider these families' access to transportation. The diagram below shows the forms of transport used to get the children to school and back every day.

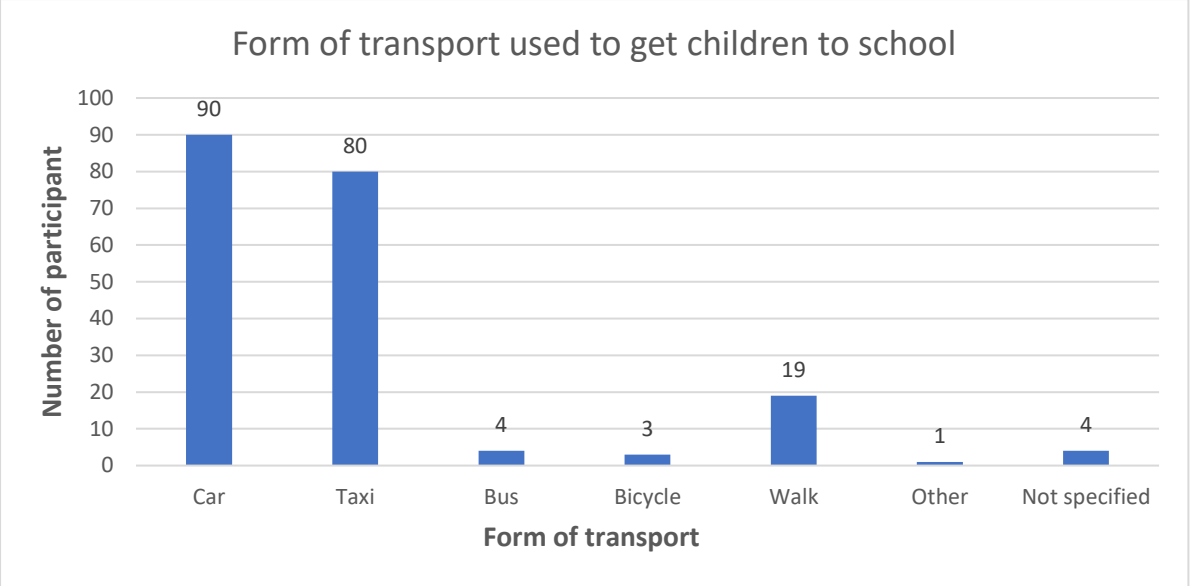

Figure 30: Form of transport of 201 participants

As reflected above, most of the participants use either a car or a taxi. This further suggests that nearly half of the participants have access to their own form of transport. Eighty participants (40%) make use of taxis to send their children to school. This, however, does not necessarily imply that these participants do not have access to their own transport. Some families may use their own cars to get to and from work and use taxis to send their children to school. Nineteen participants (9%) indicated that their children walk to school and back home, with or without their parents. The diagram below shows the form of transport used by the participants who do not live in Carletonville and therefore travel in and out of town every day or arrange for their children to travel in and out of town.

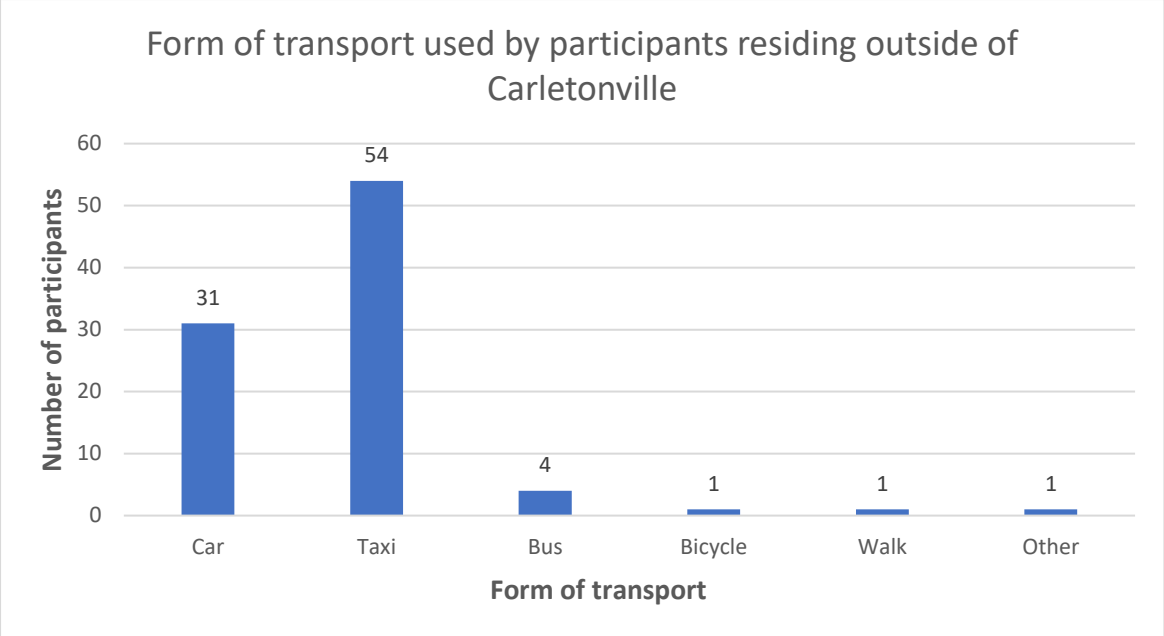

Figure 31: Form of transport used by participants who do not live in Carletonville

As reflected in the diagram above, 31 participants who live outside of Carletonville use a car to take their children to school and back and 54 participants make use of taxis. This may suggest that travelling in and out of town after normal working hours may be a challenge for families who are dependent on public transport. If parent meetings or school events are held in the evening, for example, these families may have trouble attending these events or meetings. Again, however, this does not imply that all families who use public transport do not have access to their own vehicles, but rather that these families are more likely to experience challenges regarding transportation than those who use cars.

Furthermore, when considering the type of housing of all the participants in Merafong City, it again suggests that the sample for this study included families from a range of financial statuses and degrees of financial stability. The diagram below depicts the type of housing of all 201 participants:

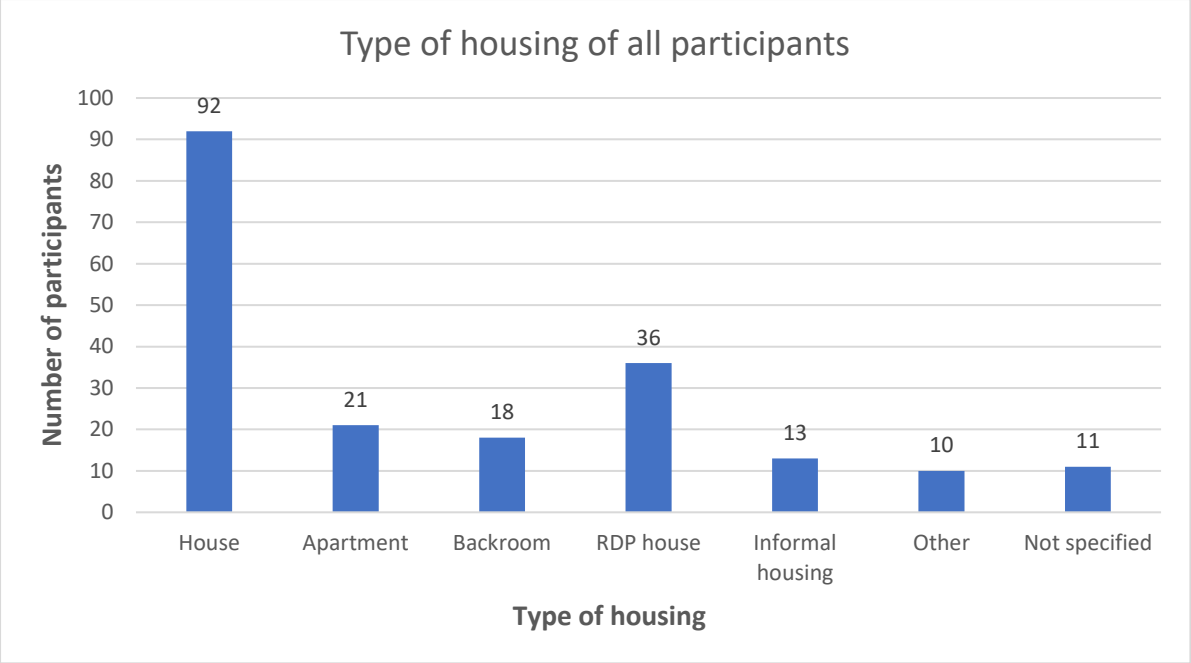

Figure 32: Type of housing of all 201 participants

As reflected above, 92 participants (46%) live in houses (in and out of Carletonville), 21 participants (10%) live in apartments, 18 participants (9%) live in backrooms, 36 participants (18%) live in RDP houses, and 13 participants (6%) live in informal housing such as shacks. This reiterates what was stated by the school principal and the SMT members that the school consists of a wide range of parents, from different backgrounds and different financial statuses. This is further reflected in the number of incomes per households and the type of employment, as presented in the diagrams below:

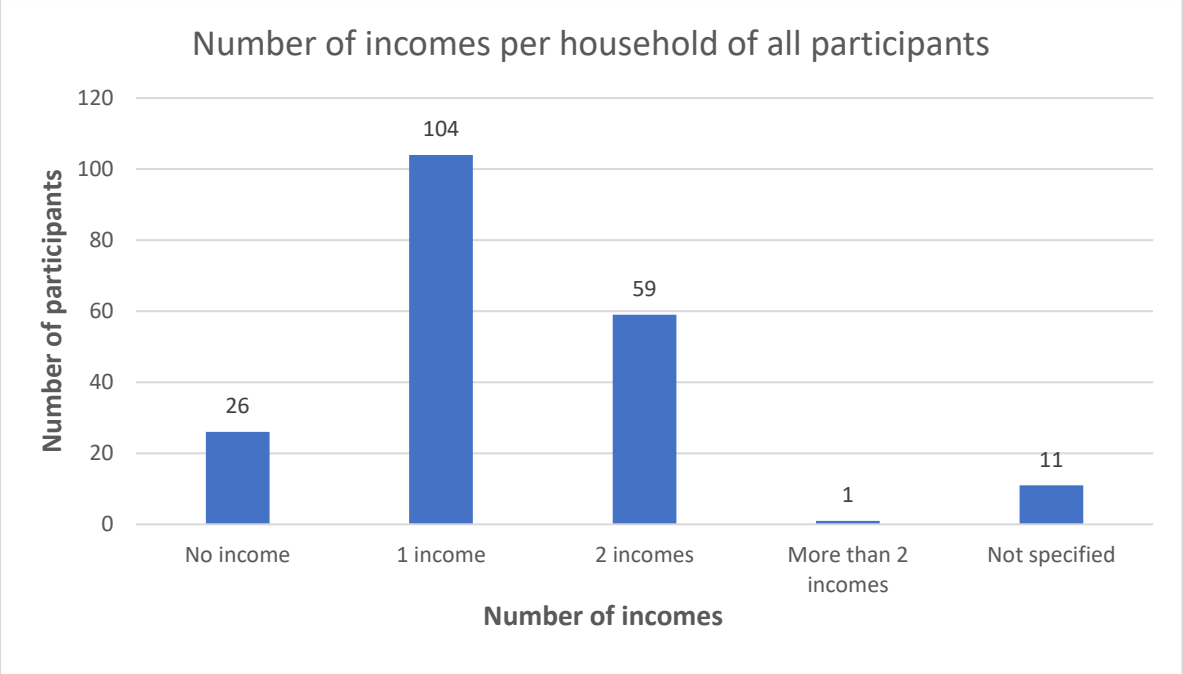

Figure 33: Number of incomes per household of 201 participants

The majority of the participants receive one income per household. A significant number of participants receive two incomes per household and 26 participants indicated that their household receives no income. This again suggests that the participants included in this study range in financial status and stability. It is important to note, however, that several participants indicated that their household receives one income but that neither they, nor their spouses/partners, are employed. This may suggest that these households are dependent on other family members for an income, or that they potentially rely on a grant as a source of income.

The diagram below shows the types of employment of all the participants living in Merafong City:

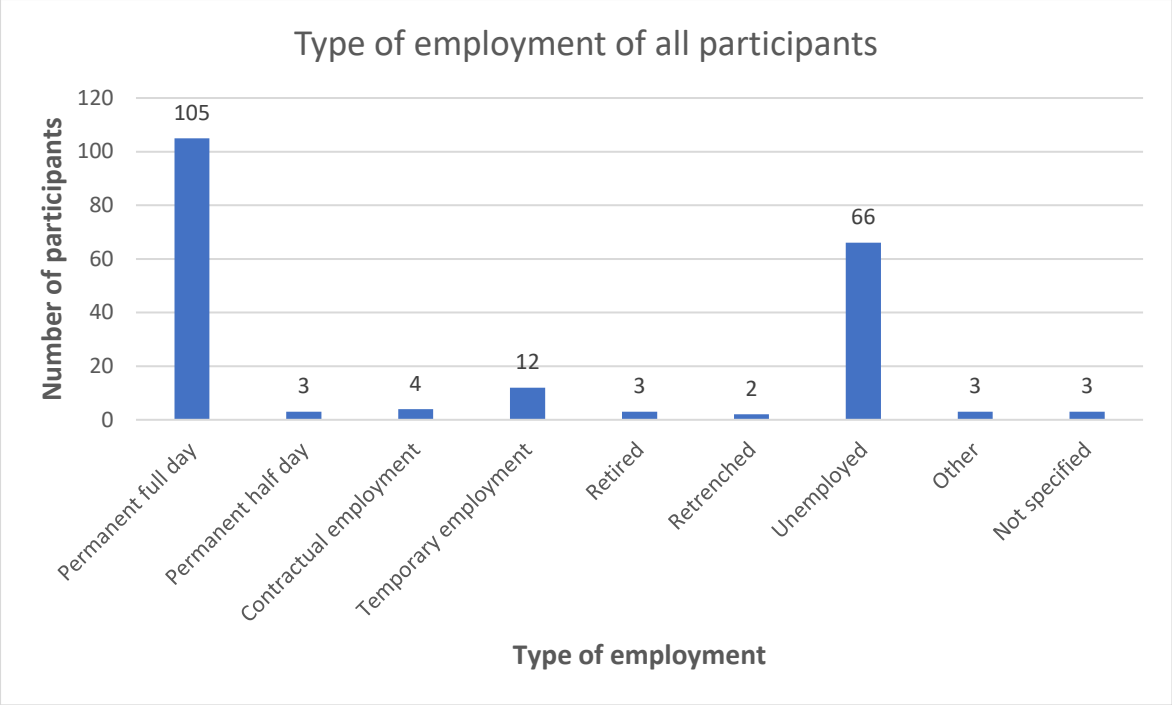

Figure 34: Types of employment of all the participants living in Merafong City

Based on the graph above, 105 participants (52%) are employed in permanent full-day jobs, 4 participants (2%) are employed in contractual jobs, and 12 participants (6%) have temporary employment. This data does not correlate accurately with the number of incomes per household, as it only reflects the type of employment of the participants themselves and does not reflect the employment of their spouses, partners, or other family members earning an income in the household. It is therefore important to note that although 66 participants (33%) indicated that they themselves are unemployed, their household may still receive an income. In some households, this unemployment may be by choice, especially amongst married couples, as one of the parents may be a stay-at-home parent. To reflect the unemployment status of the participants' households better, the diagram below depicts the employment status of the spouses of those participants who indicated that they themselves are unemployed. This is to illustrate which of the parents/partners are both unemployed or are dependent on precarious forms of employment. This thus only includes the 66 participants who are unemployed.

Figure 35: Employment status of spouses/partners of unemployed participants

Seventeen participants indicated that both they and their spouses/partners are unemployed. In addition, 22 of the unemployed participants indicated that they do not have partners. This means that 22 participants are single, unemployed parents. Another 4 unemployed participants indicated that their partners are only employed contractually or temporarily, implying that their households' sources of income are precarious. Thus, 43 participants are likely to experience severe financial strain due to unemployment or precarious forms of employment.

Understanding the financial stability of the participants is essential in this study as it has a probable bearing on the well-being of the participants and their families. Furthermore, it is likely to have a bearing on the availability, degree of anxiety, and motivation of the participants regarding engagement in the learning of their children. Although this study was aimed specifically at families from a lower socio-economic status, it was useful and valuable to have a sample that included families from a variety of backgrounds and socio-economic statuses. This provided a unique and unforeseen opportunity to consider and analyse the way in which these participants from different financial statuses approach parental engagement. This sample has allowed me to compare the perceptions of poorer families to those who are more financially stable

and to better determine the possible effects of socio-economic status on their perceptions regarding engagement.

5.1.3 Marital Status of Participants

The marital status of the participants is relevant to the study as it may have a bearing on the availability, energy and perceptions of the participants regarding engagement in the learning of their children. A single parent, for example, is likely to have less available time and energy to engage fully in the learning of his/her child than parents who are married and can share household responsibilities. The table below depicts the marital status of all 201 participants:

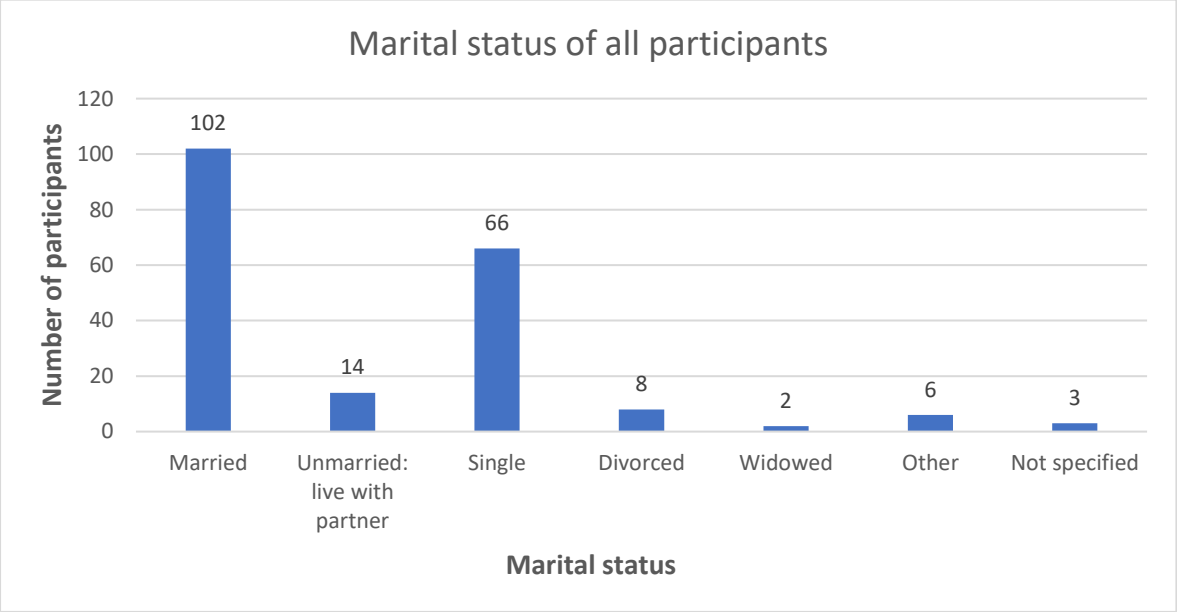

Figure 36: Marital status of all 201 participants

As reflected above, approximately half of the participants (51%) are married and another 14 participants (7%) currently live with a partner. 66 participants (33%) are single parents. Although it should not be understood as a generalisation that applies to all single parents, it is likely that these participants experience increased levels of stress and anxiety and have less time and energy available to assist their children academically or engage in the learning of their children at home. The table below depicts the number of incomes and children per household of all the single participants:

Number of incomes per household of single participants	Number of children per household							
	1	2	3	4	5	+5	Not specified	Total
No income	5	5	1				2	**13**
One income	10	21	12	2		1		**46**
Two incomes	3	1						**4**
More than two incomes		1						**1**
Not specified		2						**2**
Total	**18**	**30**	**13**	**2**	**0**	**1**	**2**	**66**

Table 18: Number of incomes and children per household of all the single participants

Thirteen of the 66 single participants do not receive any income, 46 participants receive one income per household, and 5 participants receive 2 or more incomes. The table below depicts the type of employment of the single participants who indicated that they receive one or more incomes:

Number of incomes per household of single participants	Type of employment of single participants							
	Permanent full day	Permanent half day	Contractual employment	Temporary employment	Unemployed	Retrenched	Other	Total
No income					13			**13**
One income	26	1		2	15	1	1	**46**
Two incomes	3		1					**4**
> two incomes	1							**1**
Not specified					2			**2**
Total	**30**	**1**	**1**	**2**	**30**	**1**	**1**	66

Table 19: Type of employment of the single participants who receive one or more incomes

The table above shows that all 13 participants who indicated that their household does not receive any income are unemployed. However, of the 46 participants who indicated that their household receives one income, 15 single participants are unemployed. This suggests that they might rely on other family members as a source of income, or that they might be dependent on a grant. It is also noteworthy that 4

single participants indicated that their household receives 2 incomes. All four of these are permanently employed. This could suggest that they live with other family members to make up the second income, or perhaps that they themselves work more than one job.

Based on the information above, it is evident that a large number of participants are single. This may have a significant impact on the pressure these single parents experience, as they are likely the breadwinner and the sole parent in the household. As indicated in Table 19, some single parents receiving one income for their household provide for between two and four children. This may contribute to a lack of available time and energy, and even create a sense of apathy regarding parental engagement.

It is further necessary to consider the possible available time amongst married parents, especially in households where both parents are permanently employed in full-day jobs. Of the 116 participants who indicated that they are either married or living with their partner, 40 indicated that both they and their spouses/partners work full-day jobs. This may affect the available time and energy parents have to engage in the learning of their children or to be involved at school.

It is valuable to identify ways in which parents can be engaged in the learning of their children, despite long working hours and minimal available time and energy. This is true for parents who work full-day jobs and especially single parents who solely take on household responsibilities. Furthermore, the participants whose households are dependent on precarious forms of income may also have limited time available and may be prone to high levels of stress and anxiety. It is therefore essential to identify ways in which parents can be engaged in the learning of their children without having to be present at school or spend long periods on schoolwork.

5.1.4 Education of Participants

The participants in this study varied in their level of education. This is depicted in the graph below:

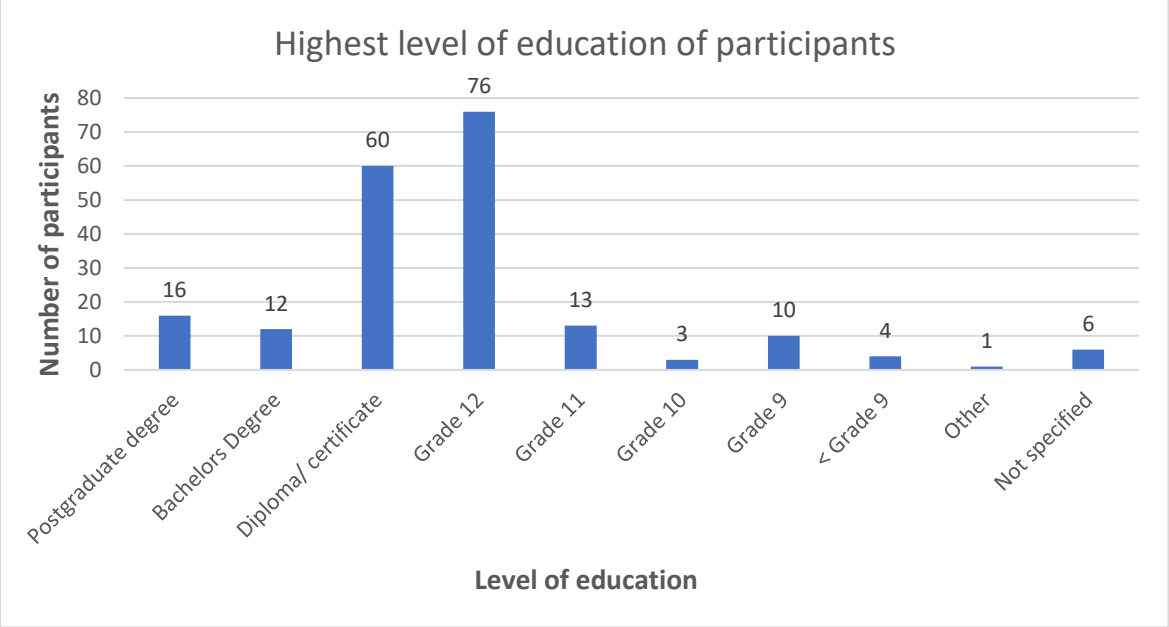

Figure 37: Highest level of education of 201 participants

As reflected above, the majority of the participants have at least completed their high school careers. Sixteen participants (8%) hold postgraduate degrees and 12 participants (6%) bachelor's degrees. Sixty participants (30%) have either a diploma or a certificate. There is the possibility that these certificates were achieved in their area of work and that they involved on-the-job training. Another 76 participants (38%) have completed Grade 12 but did not study further. Although many of the participants have not engaged in tertiary education, or achieved diplomas and certificates, almost all of the participants have, at minimum, completed Grade 9.

It can therefore be suggested that the participants in this study should be literate enough and capable of assisting their children with homework or other academic activities. As previously mentioned, however, many children spend more time with older siblings or with grandparents after school or during school holidays. Thus, even though parents are literate enough to support their children and engage in their learning, these children may not be spending the majority of their time with their parents. The level of education of the grandparents was not disclosed, but it was indicated by the principal and the SMT members that these grandparents are often illiterate and do not understand English.

Lastly, it may be possible that some of these parents attended school in their home language and were not adequately exposed to learning in English. Thus, even if parents are literate and attended secondary school, they may still have trouble assisting their children academically in a school where the language of teaching and learning is strictly English.

5.1.5 Home Language of Participants

The graph below depicts the language most spoken at home of all the participants. For some participants, this may not necessarily be their first language, but is the language they use to speak to their children at home.

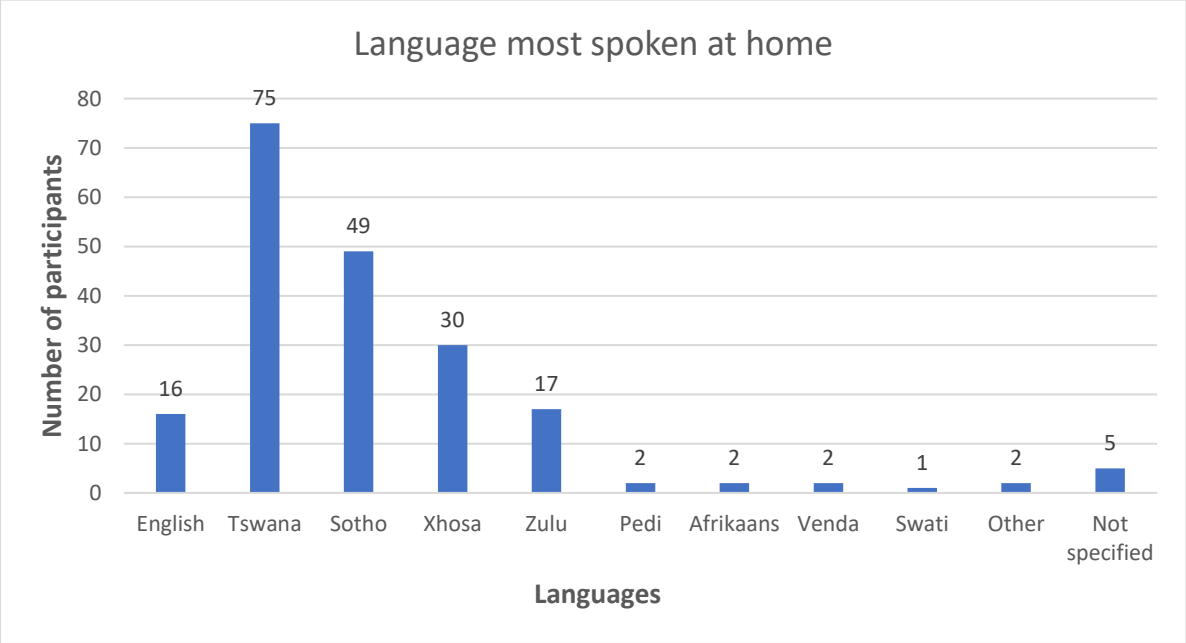

Figure 38: Home language of 201 participants

As depicted above, only 16 participants (8%) indicated that English is the language spoken most often at home. Most of the participants speak Tswana, Sotho or Xhosa. Although this is the language spoken most often at home, it does not imply that this is the only language spoken at home. Many of the participants and their children speak multiple languages. It, however, does suggest that many children are mostly exposed to English while they are at school, and not necessarily at home. Furthermore, Afrikaans is the first additional language at school, yet it is evident that only two participants speak Afrikaans at home. This may result in children receiving limited

exposure to Afrikaans and may pose a challenge when parents are expected to assist and support children with homework in Afrikaans.

5.1.6 Demographic Profile of the 16 Participants Involved in the Action Research

The graphs below depict the area of residence and the forms of transport used (to take children to school) of the 16 participants who were involved in the action research process:

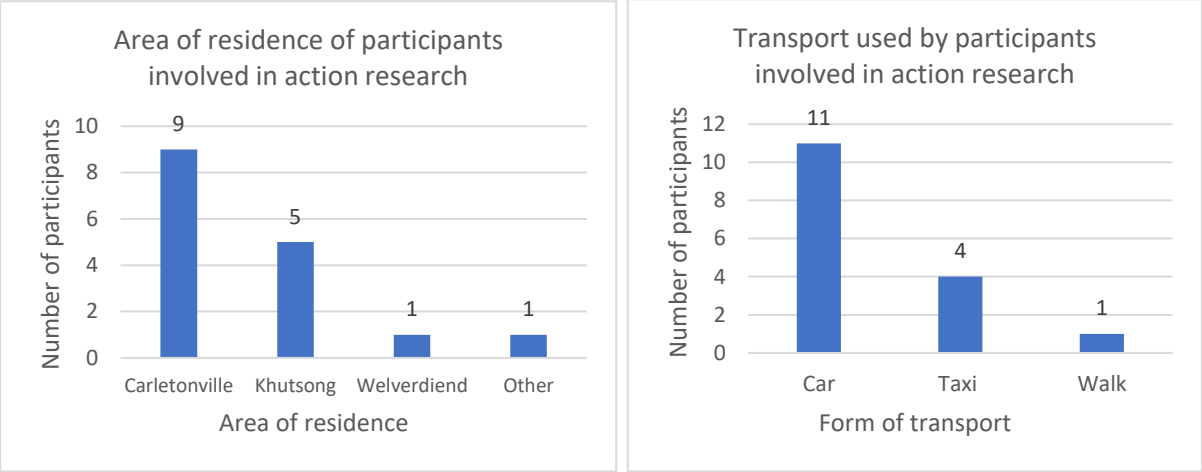

Figure 39: Area of residence and the forms of transport of action research participants

As reflected in the graphs above, the 16 participants involved in the action research process varied in area of residence. Of the 16 participants, only 9 participants live in town. This means that the children of 7 participants travel in and out of Carletonville every day to attend school in town. The majority of these participants have access to their own vehicles, and 4 participants use public transport to send their children to school. In addition, it is noteworthy that participating in this action research required these 7 participants to travel to town to attend the workshop and to participate in the interview process. This may be an indication of the interest of these parents to be engaged in the learning of their children, as they were willing to sacrifice their time and pay transport costs to participate.

The graph below depicts the type of housing of the 16 participants who were involved in the action research process:

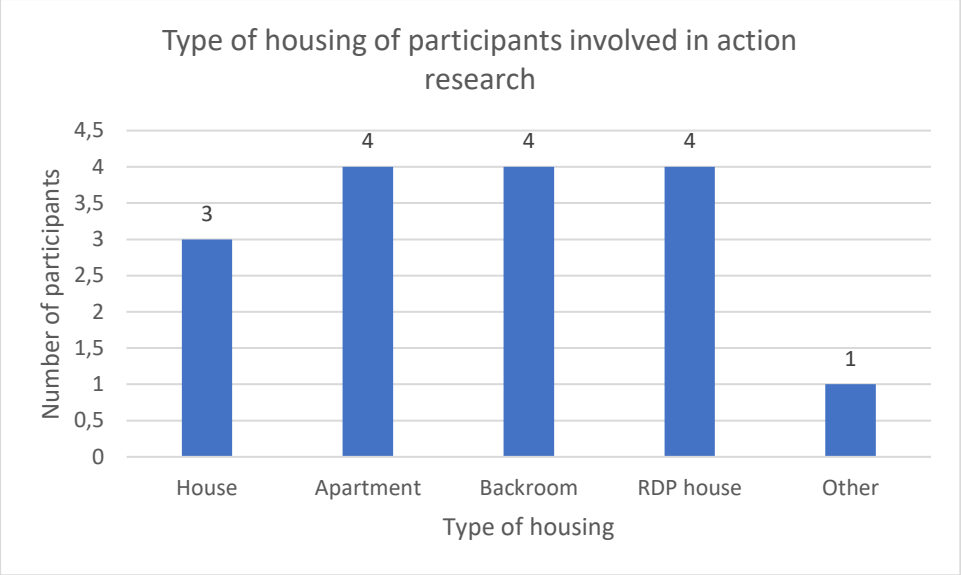

Figure 40: Type of housing of action research participants

It is evident that the participants involved in the action research process also varied in their type of housing, ranging from townhouses to RDP houses. This suggests that these participants also vary in their degree of financial stability. Only three of the 16 participants live in a house, while eight participants live in either an apartment or a backroom with their children. The fact that these participants live in such small spaces with their partners and children is indicative of a lower financial status. Lastly, four of the 16 participants live in RDP houses suggesting that these households are dependent on less than R3500,01 a month. It can thus be deduced that 12 of the participants who were involved in the action research process are likely to belong to a lower socio-economic status; hence, they were ideal participants for this process.

The graph below depicts the number of incomes per household and the type of employment of the 16 participants involved in the action research process:

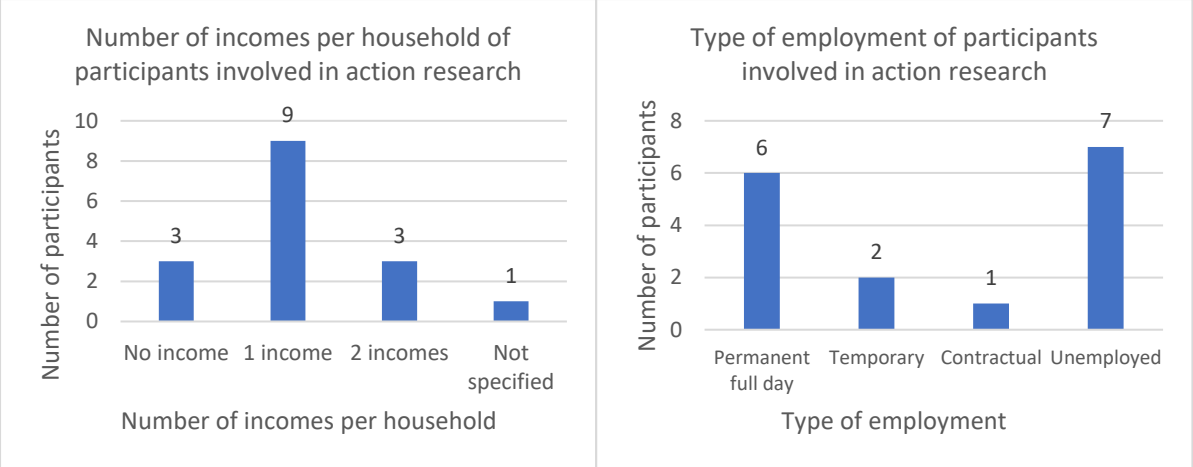

Figure 41: Number of incomes per household and the type of employment of action research participants

Although seven of the participants are unemployed, only three participants indicated that their household receives no income. This suggests that four of these unemployed participants either depend on the income of a partner/spouse or another family member, or perhaps that they are dependent on a grant as a source of income. Considering the small number of participants involved in the action research process, it is significant that three of these participants' households receive no income. It is also noteworthy that three of the participants who receive an income are employed contractually or temporarily, suggesting a precarious source of income.

Moreover, it is necessary to know the level of education of the participants to comprehend their probable socio-economic status. The graph below depicts the highest level of education of the 16 participants who were involved in the action research process:

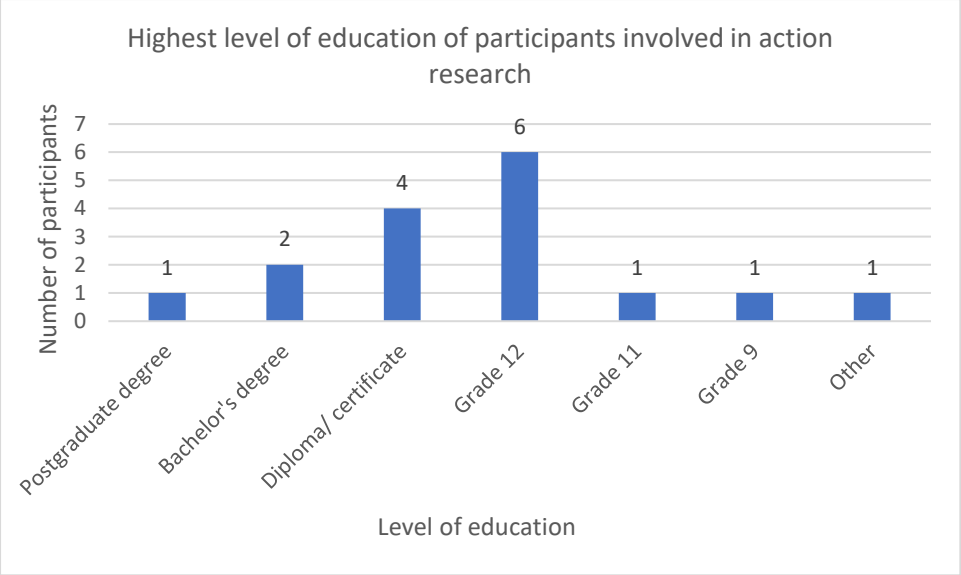

Figure 42: Highest level of education of action research participants

As reflected in the graph above, three participants hold degrees and another four participants a diploma or a certificate, while six participants have completed their high school careers. It is evident that all the participants have completed a minimum of Grade 9 and therefore should be adequately literate. As previously mentioned, it is possible that these participants attended school in other languages and therefore this should not necessarily be assumed as an indication of English literacy.

The graph below depicts the language most spoken at home by these 16 participants:

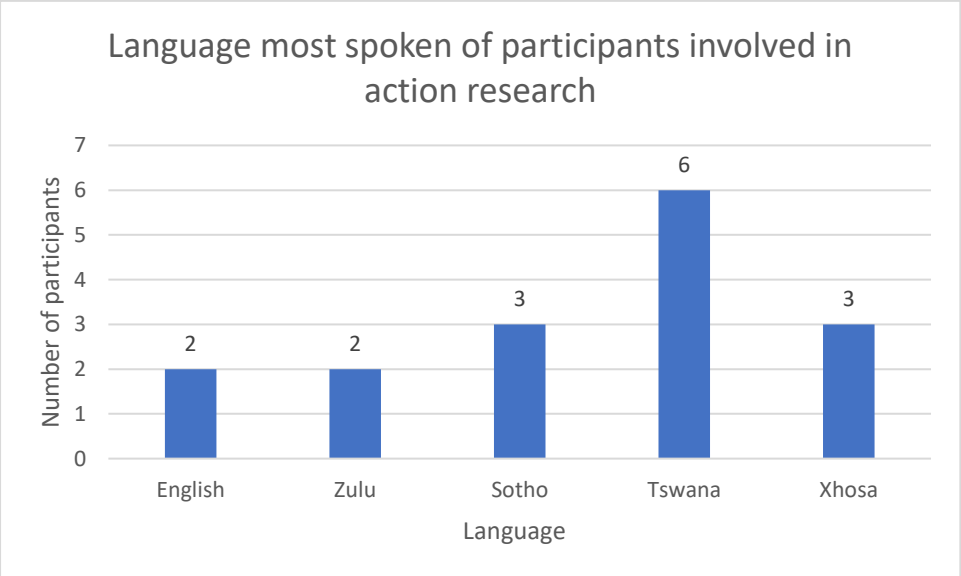

Figure 43: Home language of action research participants

The language most often spoken at home varied between the participants involved in the action research process. Again, however, this is not necessarily the only language spoken, as most of the participants speak multiple languages. All the participants who attended the workshop and who participated in the interview process can understand and speak English. Some participants, however, had limited English proficiency and took longer to understand what was being said and had trouble in fully expressing themselves. The language spoken most often at home is also an indication of the language that their children are exposed to the most. This suggests that only two children are English home language speakers.

Finally, the graph below shows the marital status of the 16 participants involved in the action research process:

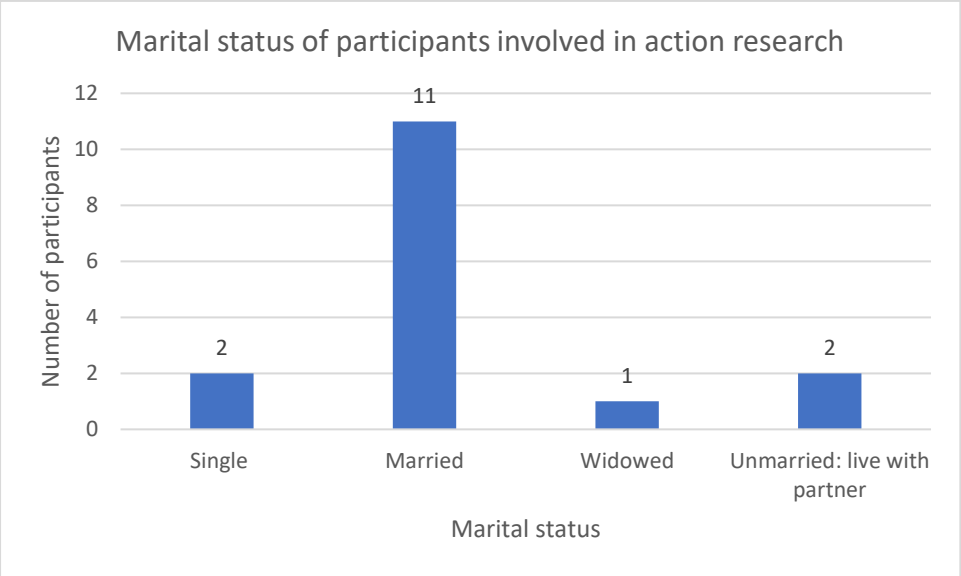

Figure 44: Marital status of action research participants

The majority of the participants who were involved in the action research process are married or live with a partner. It is necessary to mention here that some of the participants indicated that their spouses are not sufficiently involved in the upbringing of the children. Some participants, although married, still bear much of the responsibility regarding the upbringing and education of the children. Other participants, however, included their spouses/partners in the action research process at home, indicating a joint effort in the raising of the children. Three of the 16 participants indicated that they do not have partners (single/widowed), which is a

significant number considering the small number of participants involved in this part of the research.

Based on the above information, it is evident that the participants involved in the action research process varied in income, type of employment, level of education, language, and marital status. It can also be deduced that the majority of these participants are likely to fall within a lower income bracket and probably experience financial strain. The diversity amongst these participants, however, is valuable in that comparisons can be made between the participants to determine the success and viability of some of the engagement practices despite their socio-economic background, language and family dynamics.

5.1.7 Demographic Profile of Community of *School B*

As mentioned in the previous chapter, I initially planned to conduct my research at *School B*. However, due to a lack of access to parents, it was not a viable option. The data gathered from the interview with the principal of this school will still be used for comparative purposes.

School B is a Tswana public primary school situated approximately four kilometres outside Carletonville, next to an informal settlement. This school is fully subsidised by the government and thus is a no-fee paying school. The families who send their children to this school are mostly from the neighbouring informal settlement. However, it was noted by the principal that several families from other informal settlements send their children to this school, as there are no schools available in their own communities. This means that several children travel to school every day and their parents are rarely seen at school.

As the school caters for mostly poverty-stricken families, the school tends to experience financial strain. Although it is subsidised by the government, the money received is not sufficient for the successful functioning of the school. In addition, due to the environment and location of the school, it is exposed to crime from the community. As stated by the principal, it often happens that the community steals water and electricity from the school. Consequently, the subsidy received from the

government does not adequately cover the cost of water and electricity, and sometimes the school is left without electricity for long periods:

> *"[…] this zama-zamas are still members of this informal settlement […] They stole a transformer and then the school was without electricity for one year and six months. So, we were struggling as a school."* (Principal 2)

To exacerbate the financial strain experienced by the school, it was indicated that a number of learners (15 at minimum) do not have any legal documents and are therefore not subsidised by the government. The parents of these learners are illegal immigrants; thus, they are unable to provide the school with birth certificates or legal clinic cards for the children. The school has taken on the financial burden to provide an education to these children, but it does not receive a government subsidy for them.

The severe poverty of these communities is further evident in the fact that only five parents in the school community are able to send their children to school with lunch. Hence, the school is required to provide meals for the children so that they are able to learn and concentrate. Moreover, communication between the school and families is difficult, as many of them do not own cell phones. Consequently, communication with the parents requires face-to-face communication or letters that are sent home (at an additional cost to the school):

> *"So, our communication with parents is means of letters but at least at white schools they are better off, they use message and apart from that, here, even if I can implement technology, they don't have the gadgets like advanced cell phones, because they have got nothing. They are a poor community."* (Principal 2)

Due to the circumstances in these families, many of the parents within this school community are affected by alcoholism and generally are apathetic towards the concept of engagement in their children's learning. As stated by the principal, many of these parents receive grants for their children, but do not use the money to the benefit or nurturing of the children. Many of these children lack access to basic resources at home.

The findings in the following section refer to *School A,* which is the primary focus of the study.

5.2 The School's Approach to Parental Engagement

As discussed in Chapter 2, parental engagement focuses on the relationship between parents and the child's learning as opposed to the relationship between parents and the school. While parental involvement is primarily based on involvement at school and in school-based activities, parental engagement refers to parents' investment in factors that contribute to enhanced learning and not just support in learning itself.

Although parental engagement primarily focuses on the parent-child relationship, the school may play a crucial role in managing, encouraging and guiding parents in this kind of engagement. This section of analysis therefore discusses the school management's (the principal and SMT of the foundation phase) approach to engagement with regard to their perception of engagement, the existence of parental engagement policies, existing practices and challenges regarding engagement.

5.2.1 School Management's Perception of Engagement in *School A*

The perception of the school management regarding parental engagement is essential, as these principles are likely to trickle down to the rest of the school staff and the community. It influences the kind of expectations that are communicated and the measures that are put in place regarding engagement.

The principal and the foundation phase members of the SMT of *School A* primarily perceive parental engagement as instilling discipline, providing support in school-based activities, and communicating with the school. Although their understanding of parental engagement is not completely limited to school-based activities, it does still suggest a narrow perception of engagement.

As the school is restricted in the ways that they may instil discipline amongst the children, the principal and SMT members expressed that they need the support and involvement of the parents in this area:

> *"There's no measures and ways to discipline children so we need the support of the parents. […] and they do support the school when it comes to discipline."* (Principal 1)

> *"Discipline is really the parent's job. […] teachers' hands are really cut off with discipline. You can't even shout at them, then you are in the wrong, so, if you phone a parent to help you with discipline then I expect the parent to at least have a real discussion with the child and support you. […] It just makes your job at the end a lot easier."* (SMT Member 2)

SMT Member 1 explains that the parents are generally involved and that they take the education of their children seriously. This is reflected in the fact that parents support the school by disciplining their children:

> *"And then uh, to my experience, most of the parents, uhm, that I contact, they are involved, they really want their children to be educated. Uhm, when you tell them that their children is ill-behaved, they will try to discipline the child."* (SMT Member 1)

While discipline is essential in ensuring that children learn optimally at home and at school in a classroom setting and thus should not be undermined as a valuable means of engagement, it is noted that the focus is on ways in which parents can support the school. The teachers and school management feel restricted and perhaps helpless regarding discipline at school and depend on the parents to support them by instilling a sense of discipline at home. The focus therefore is not necessarily on the parent-child relationship, but rather on a parent-school partnership, which is better understood as parental involvement rather than parental engagement in children's learning.

Another form of engagement identified by the school management is parental assistance with homework and school-based activities. As stated by the principal, the parents are urged to expose their children to English at home, as it is the language of teaching and learning, and it will assist their children at school:

> *"I always tell the parents, just do the basics. Use SABC television channels just so that they can hear the language at home. We can't speak English to this child until*

> *1:30 and then the first time he hears English again is tomorrow morning. Or after a holiday of 36 days."* (Principal 1)

SMT Member 2 further explains that the parents are expected to spend time on revising the work done at school to ensure that their children perform well:

> *"You as the teacher cannot do anything alone, you need that support from the parent as well. […] you can't spend the whole day on sounds or on reading and that is the things that they are struggling with. […] You need them to do that at home. And when that doesn't happen, that is when the child is falling behind."* (SMT Member 2)

This suggests that the school management and teachers rely on the parents to fill the academic gap at home because of the dynamics of a large classroom, the immense workload, and limited teaching time. This is understandable and it is evident that the school values the contributions of the parents and encourages a sense of partnership with the school. It is, however, important to bear in mind that this form of involvement may not be possible or practical for many families in the school community. As previously mentioned, many parents in this school community are uneducated and others have limited time and energy available to assist their children academically. For this reason, it is important to make a shift in focus from parental involvement to parental engagement in learning.

The principal acknowledges that a shift has taken place from what was previously expected of the parents regarding involvement to the role they are currently expected to play. While previously they were primarily involved in fundraising events, the parents are now implored to support the school by assisting their children more academically:

> *"[…] there's quite a shift in education. Previously, […] we really expected from parents to be very involved with fundraising and that type of stuff. […] but we need the parents' involvement in the learning activities of the learner. That is very important for us."* (Principal 1)

Even though the parents are not expected to be involved in school events and fundraising, as they were before, the perception of engagement is still limited to

providing support to the school and assisting their children in school-related activities. SMT Member 1, however, seems to have a better understanding and perception of engagement as she encourages the parents to rather engage in incidental learning, play games, and spend quality time with their children:

> *"A parent is the primary caregiver, so they should absolutely spend time with the child […] play games, […] simple things like 'I spy with my little eye'[…] it's incidental learning that they can do with their children; reading at night before children go to bed, and then, one of the most important things is having a routine at home."* (SMT Member 1)

This suggests that SMT Member 1 does not limit engagement to assistance with homework and school-related activities, but rather gives recognition to a wider range of activities that may enhance the learning of the child, such as a positive child-parent relationship and a structured routine. On further discussion with this SMT member, it was revealed that the parents do not realise that these kinds of engagement activities are necessary and have an influence on the child's learning. This means that even though this SMT member has a broader understanding of what engagement in learning entails, it is not necessarily communicated to the parents.

Although the school expects the parents to be supportive and to assist in the academic activities of their children, they are considerate of the challenges experienced by families and aim to assist these families in their own capacity. SMT Member 1 mentions that she personally takes on the responsibility of assisting these children:

> *"If there's really no way that the child could be helped, […] I tell the parents, let your child just read to you at least or count to you at least. If you are in no way able to help your child with written homework or whatever, then I accept it. But then I make it my responsibility to help the child more at school during school hours."* (SMT Member 1)

In addition, SMT Member 2 and the principal explain that due to circumstances, some parents are unable to assist their children academically, and that it should not be interpreted as carelessness:

> *"Sometimes you will find that a parent is, it's not like they don't want to help, but it's parents with a job where it's not their time, they work shifts for example at the mine. […] their workload is very tough so, sometimes it's not because the parents don't want to help but they don't have the time."* (SMT Member 2)

> *"[…] parents struggle at home to help the children with homework. […] At one stage, we actually decided to give as little homework as possible, and rather to help the children at school because the parents do not have the ability."* (Principal 1)

Even though the school encourages parents to assist and support children in school-related activities, they are aware and considerate of the difficulties that may hinder parents from doing so. At the same time, however, the school seems to experience pressure from the Department of Education to complete the curriculum on time, despite the lack of support at home and the many challenges teachers experience. SMT Member 2 expresses a sense of frustration regarding the expectations of the Department of Education:

> *"There is not really time [for parents] to support that child. […] So, I rather send like normal homework home and at least that is being done the right way than to just send more work and more work. Just for the sake of saying, I have done my job and the department is happy. The department doesn't think ahead of time."* (SMT Member 2)

It appears that the school is placed in a predicament as it is expected to complete the curriculum on time, but teachers have too many children in a class to provide one-on-one attention and receive limited academic support from parents. They therefore need to meet departmental expectations while being considerate of the difficulties parents experience in assisting children at home.

The school management's perception of parental engagement is not solely limited to school-based activities, but it is still narrow and limiting. Parents are primarily expected to support the school through discipline and academic assistance. This may be a result of pressure from the Department of Education to meet expectations amidst the numerous challenges experienced by schools. Consequently, the school considers

the development of a partnership between parents and the school as a top priority, but the school is also aware of and takes into consideration the challenges experienced by many families. Thus, the understanding of parental engagement ultimately remains based on a parent-school relationship, rather than a parent-child relationship.

5.2.2 Policies Regarding Parental Engagement in *School A*

School-based policies are essential as they provide clarity on the values and expectations of the various school stakeholders. Hence, a policy on parental engagement would be important in clarifying the school's beliefs and values on parental engagement, as well as the expectations of the school and the parents.

However, the principal and SMT members of *School A* indicated that there are no policies governing the school's approach to parental engagement or parental empowerment. The principal explains that parental engagement should not be enforced; the parents should rather be engaged because they choose to be:

> *"No, we don't have a policy specifically for that. Because remember policy is an enforceable thing and you can't force a parent to take interest in his child."* (Principal 1)

Although this may be true, it does suggest that there is no policy or plan aimed at improving the level of parental engagement in the school. It is important to bear in mind that a lack of parental engagement does not necessarily imply a lack of interest in the child. The principal continues to explain that, even though one could have a policy for the teachers regarding parental engagement, that there are already national policies in place that force schools to be in constant communication with parents; thus, a school-based policy is not necessary:

> *"I mean you can have a parent involvement policy with the teachers but there's so many other policies at this school, like the new SIAS policy, where there's so much prescribed contact with parents. […] If there's a problem on the SIAS, then the parents must come to school and sign that there is problems. The parents are notified on a constant basis."* (Principal 1)

The above response suggests that policies regarding parental engagement (or even parental involvement) are reserved for parents whose children struggle academically or experience emotional and behavioural problems. The policy further only ensures that these parents are informed, but there seems to be no policy aimed at assisting these parents in ways so that they can support their children. This is reiterated by SMT Member 1 who explains that even though the school does not have a policy regarding parental engagement or parental empowerment, they discuss parental involvement when identifying learners who struggle:

> *"We always discuss parental involvement; we have SBST meetings, which are your school-based support team. In that meeting we discuss learners that have problems, […] learners that have problematic families, […] if the family has a problem in the structure or if there is violence in the family. […] So, yes, we do constantly talk about parents' involvement, learners that struggle, that kind of thing."* (SMT Member 1)

Although the school staff do discuss parental engagement (or involvement), and do communicate any issues to parents, efforts do not seem to go beyond communication. Moreover, there is no expected practice amongst school staff regarding encouraging parental engagement or even communication with parents, as teachers have the freedom to decide for themselves in this regard.

> *"I think since we are forced now from Covid to communicate more with the parents. In the past, it was like, if you don't want to give your number to the parents, you don't have to."* (SMT Member 2)

> *"I have an absolute open-door policy, which is not at all teachers. I must say, sadly, that there are teachers who feel that once they close the classroom door behind them that that's it for the day. They go home, they mark the books, but they don't really care for parents that try to contact them."* (SMT Member 1)

Communication between the teacher and the parent is thus largely dependent on the teacher's personal preference. Although it is evident that the school values communication with parents and prioritises informing them of any issues, there is no evidence of a plan to improve the level of parental engagement or parental

involvement in the school. In addition, even though the school is aware that families experience many challenges regarding parental involvement in school-based activities, there does not seem to be any plan to empower parents to become more involved. Finally, it was stated by SMT Member 2 that the level of parental involvement in the school has not improved in the last few years that she has worked there:

> *"Parental involvement is always an issue at school. There hasn't been a very big change. The parents that wants to be involved, is involved; the others that don't mind, they just don't mind. I haven't really seen an improvement in parent involvement. We all complain about it. […] It's always been an issue."* (SMT Member 1)

It seems as though the school, to certain extent, has accepted that parental involvement will always be a problem. This could possibly be the result of a lack of time and energy amongst school staff as they are overwhelmed with numerous national policies and administrative work. Although they have made efforts in their own capacity to assist children whose parents cannot be involved or who cannot assist academically at home, there does not appear to be any plan to improve this level of involvement or to empower parents to be engaged in the learning of their children.

5.2.3 Existing Practices Aimed at Parental Engagement in *School A*

Although the school does not have a policy aimed at parental engagement or parental empowerment to improve engagement, much effort has been made to communicate with parents and keep them informed. As previously mentioned, the school seems to prioritise communication with parents and aims to build positive relationships with them.

At the beginning of each year, parents are invited to a parent meeting where teachers communicate expectations to parents. This is explained by the principal and SMT Member 1:

> *"Expectations to parents, usually we communicate that on parents' evening […] We send the parents [to] the class of the learner with that specific teacher and then*

the teacher communicates the expectations to the parents; what they expect from the parents, what not […]" (Principal 1)

"Normally in the beginning of the year we have a meeting with the parents, […] where we set the ground rules for the class, we explain to the parents what we are going to do during the year, what we expect for lunch […]" (SMT Member 1)

In addition, the school makes use of Facebook and WhatsApp groups to communicate with parents on a weekly basis. The two SMT members further state that they make an additional effort to communicate with parents on a more personal level and keep parents informed about their children's progress:

"I like to communicate with my parents; I like to send a message or send a photo and say, 'Look at your child's work, it's beautiful' or 'Listen, I am struggling with this and this with your child.'" (SMT Member 2)

"I feel that the more communication the teacher has with the parents, the better the chances is that the child will perform better in school, whether academically or behaviourally. […] I'm available until 3 o'clock and then after 3, [parents] are welcome to send a message and I will reply when I have time." (SMT Member 1)

This suggests that the school generally makes an effort to keep parents informed and tries to involve them in the academic progress of their children. In addition, teachers make tutorial videos on various learning concepts and show parents how to teach these concepts to their children. Access to these videos do, however, rely on the parents having data available, but is an opportunity for the parents to become actively involved in the learning of their children:

"We try now with the WhatsApp groups to [provide] more support to the parents to help with the homework. We will make a little video about how to teach the child the sounds or how to teach the child the sight words because we noticed that parents don't know how to do it. It is not that they don't want to help them, they just help them in the wrong way […]" (SMT Member 2)

This could be considered as a form of parental empowerment in the sense that it enables the parents to teach their children. This allows all parents, even those who may not be educated, to participate in the learning of the children. These efforts are, however, again limited to school-based activities and may not be a practical option for all parents. It also requires time, as parents are taught the concepts themselves first and then they have to spend more time teaching their children. Although this may exclude several parents due to the availability of time and data, it is an initiative that has assisted many other families and the value of this initiative should not be underestimated.

However, there does seem to be a lack of empowerment and guidance amongst parents who are not able to assist their children academically due to limited time, a lack of money, or language barriers. In these cases, the school encourages parents to seek assistance by shifting the responsibility of learning to other family members or institutions:

> *"I will tell the parents, is there an uncle, or an aunty or a grandma, someone close by […] that can assist the child with homework. If it's yes, I advise them to take the child to that person. If there's no one nearby and […] if parents don't have money then they cannot really do anything. If it possible for them, they should take their child to a good aftercare where there is someone that can help the child with homework, and reading, […] or to take a child to maybe Cumon, or Maths at Excel here in our town where they help the children […]"* (SMT Member 1)

> *"But most of the parents are using aftercare now. That is making a big difference. […] Because if we ask, 'Can't you assist?', 'No, I can't assist, but what about aftercare?' 'Do you have the finances for aftercare?' 'Yes, we have.' Okay, then they put their child in aftercare. And we usually communicate with the aftercare teachers as well."* (SMT Member 2)

While this might ensure that children complete their homework and do not fall behind academically, it excludes the parent from the learning process of the child. This does not empower the parents to take ownership of and responsibility for the learning of the child, in some way or capacity. Again, the focus is primarily on guiding parents in ensuring that children meet the requirements of the school and that parents support

these school-based activities. It does not suggest an investment in the empowerment of the parents to be engaged continuously in the holistic learning and development of the child.

5.2.4 Challenges to Managing and Promoting Parental Engagement and Empowerment in *School A*

One of the biggest challenges that the school seems to face is a lack of communication from parents. This lack of communication is often synonymous with a lack of involvement at school or engagement in learning. One of the reasons for poor communication from parents is a lack of available data. As much of the communication between the school and the parents takes place via WhatsApp or on other social media platforms, data is required for effective and ongoing communication. Thus, when parents do not have access to data, it poses a challenge to the school:

> *"Of course, the biggest problem is the availability of data. […] I'm not talking about online teaching or whatever, but just for communication. […] So, that's usually the problem. The economic side is very tough, and currently in Carletonville I think it's getting tougher and tougher."* (Principal 1)

Apart from the lack of data, communication is impeded by the language barrier between the school and the parents/guardians. This problem is particularly evident amongst families where grandparents are the acting guardians of the children. SMT Member 2 explains that these grandparents are often illiterate and do not understand English:

> *"[…] there comes a problem in sometimes when the child is living with the grannies, because the grannies don't speak English really that well […] They don't understand even; sometimes the grannies can't even read. So, how are they going to support and help the child? […] Then we usually use our workers at school […] to translate for us […]"* (SMT Member 2)

Although the school makes use of staff members to translate communication between these grandparents and the school, it suggests that these guardians are likely to miss

much of the communication sent via WhatsApp, on social media platforms, and even in letters. These grandparents are also less likely to be involved at school or be engaged in the learning of the children. Thus, even if the school were to encourage engagement with these guardians, the language barrier poses a serious challenge.

Over and above the language barriers and poor access to data, the school experiences a lack of interest among some parents. Despite efforts made by the school to communicate with parents, some parents do not respond and appear to show little interest in the schooling of their children. This is a serious issue, which was referred to by the principal and both SMT members:

> *"We phone the parents and we offer help. I mean, you can just offer so much and if they still not interested then, well, you can bring the horse to the water but you can't make them drink."* (Principal 1)

> *"[…] because of the parent involvement that is so weak, I think that the school is doing everything that it can. You know you can take the horse to the water, but if he doesn't want to drink, it won't drink. It is the same with parents, if they want to be helped and assisted, they will be. But if they are not interested, then they won't."* (SMT Member 1)

> *"You get parents that you try to phone, they don't pick up, you try to send a WhatsApp message, they don't respond, you try to write a letter in the homework book, they don't respond. You get those parents that it's really tough to get a hold of them; that you are waiting since March or February to come and see you because the child failed Grade 1 or the first term and they don't come. Even if you write on the report card, 'Please come and see me', they still don't make an effort to come. So, you get your parents like that. […] in a class of 40, there is maybe five that is like that. So, it makes it difficult."* (SMT Member 2)

Approximately five out of 40 parents per class, who display a lack of interest, is a significant number. The reason for this lack of contact and seeming disinterest is unclear, but it does pose a challenge to the school. It is clear, however, that the school makes use of various means to contact these families.

It is also suggested that personal communication between the school and parents is often reserved for struggling or problematic learners. Consequently, communication from the school may have negative connotations amongst parents, as it is likely to involve 'bad news', which may possibly contribute to the poor response from some parents:

> *"[…] usually that works because our parents are very loyal towards the school, and if the principal calls them, they know it is serious and then they usually do something about the child."* (Principal 1)

> *"[…] they feel like they would rather not speak to the principal and go through the other channels before speaking to him. I don't know, but his door is always open and he never shows them away or anything like that. But I think it's their own personal feeling […]"* (SMT Member 2)

> *"And when you see a parents, it's often about, 'Listen your child is naughty', or 'Your child is struggling'. You don't see the learners that have good behaviour or good marks; you don't see their parents."* (SMT Member 1)

This does not necessarily imply that the school is not interested in communicating with other parents, but perhaps that they are so overwhelmed with the number of struggling learners that these families take priority. SMT Member 1 mentions that there are approximately 10 poor performing learners in each class at the beginning of the year:

> *"[…] in a normal class, you have about 10 failures at the beginning of the year…"* (SMT Member 1)

Moreover, the principal explains that their extra lessons cannot cater for all learners. There are so many learners who need additional individual assistance that they reserve these lessons for those who are in desperate need of it:

> *"[…] even though the child gets 90% for a subject, the parents will still prefer for the children to attend the additional class, but currently we can't cater for that…"* (Principal 1)

The large number of struggling learners thus results in the school spending more time and energy on communicating and engaging with these families. SMT Member 1 explains that often teachers are not concerned about speaking to parents whose children are performing and behaving well. They would rather spend their time on parents whose children are academically or behaviourally problematic:

> *"You are not focussed on having their parents there because you are happy with their behaviour, their schoolwork, they are performing well, […] as a teacher; it's not high priority for you to see these parents, it's a high priority to see the parents of the ill-behaved children and the struggling learners."* (SMT Member 1)

It is therefore evident that the school is overburdened with poor-performing learners and families who have trouble in supporting their children. Although the school values communication with all parents and encourages a sense of parent-school partnership, most efforts are reserved for struggling children and their families. In addition, communication among some of these struggling families is impeded by a lack of data, language barriers, and/or a poor response from parents.

5.2.5 Parental Engagement in *School B*

The lack of parental involvement at school and parental engagement in learning is much more severe in *School B* than in *School A*. As previously indicated, this school community is largely poverty-stricken, and parents are generally apathetic towards the concept of involvement. Thus, the principal's approach to engagement is significantly different to that of *School A,* and it has required much personal investment and sacrifice.

Principal 2 explains that when he was first appointed at this school, parents were not engaged at all, and he took it upon himself to improve the level of parental involvement. This required changing the understanding and mindset of parents, as they do not grasp the importance of their roles as parents in the learning of their children:

> *"[…] the parents were not engaged, […] they did not even take care of their own children; they abandoned them to the school […] I had to change their mindsets to engage them to show them how important parents are…"* (Principal 2)

One of the major challenges was that parents did not attend parent meetings. As many of the children in the school live in other communities, it would require parents to travel far distances to attend these meetings. Due to the severe poverty, families are not able to pay these transport costs. Consequently, the principal arranged transport for these parents to attend parent meetings once a term:

> *"[…] I used my intelligence to say, how best I can let parents to attend these meetings because they are imperatively important. I negotiated with the learner transport owners to say, can't they assist me because I am assisting them also by keeping their busses within the school [property] and meetings come once a term, […] So that is one thing that has alleviated me, that at least […] the bus takes them home safely."* (Principal 2)

In addition, the principal travels to these communities to speak to families and build relationship with parents. As previously mentioned, many of these parents do not have cell phones and therefore cannot communicate via WhatsApp, or make or receive phone calls. The principal therefore explains that he personally takes on the expenses involved, and travels to these parents; especially when a child is experiencing challenges and the parents need assistance:

> *"I use my own car to go to different communities, because it is one way to communicate with them because they cannot come to school; they cannot do anything at school. So, I go to them, tell them and assist them. I spend my own petrol out of my pocket. If any child has a challenge I go to parents."* (Principal 2)

Lack of communication poses a further challenge, as the school is unable to contact parents when there is an emergency. In these cases, the principal again accepts the liability of transporting these children to the hospital, or home. It, however, poses a legal risk to the principal:

> *"[…] if I say the parent must come and collect the child, what do you expect of that parent who is unemployed and who stays in the informal settlement. So, I take a risk by taking the child home but the risk that I am taking can impact negatively on me. Say supposedly a child die whilst I am transporting them, I am going to face*

> *the consequences and the same parent will take advantage of me and sue me… all those things, whilst am I am trying to assist. Some, to take a child home in the condition that they need a hospital, I just shoot straight to the hospital and then leave the child and then go and take the parent with my car. So it is a problem on my side."* (Principal 2)

Even though the principal is being considerate regarding the difficulties experienced by these families and is willing to assist them, it costs him personally, puts him in a legal predicament, and is perhaps not a sustainable solution to the poor level of parental engagement. Apart from these challenges, the principal is confronted with the parental perception that this is his responsibility as the manager of the school. There thus seems to be a lack of understanding amongst the parents of the personal investments and sacrifices he makes, and what his role as the school manager entails:

> *"They think it is my job to do that. […] So, when they come here, they think everything is manna from heaven. They can even bring kids without school uniform, shoes, nothing, and they say principal, can you provide?"* (Principal 2)

The principal further explains that he lacks the support of the Department of Education. He expresses a sense of frustration as the Department communicates expectations but does not support the school in meeting these expectations. This has resulted in serious financial implications, minimal staff, and the overburdening of existing staff. Every effort aimed at improving parental engagement has therefore required personal time and financial sacrifices from the principal and his staff:

> *"As a principal, I am engaged with office work, management work, I'm engaged again in class. We are few staff. We've got +- 400 learners that are faced with only nine permanent teachers and one who is an ECD teacher employed temporarily. So, to these teachers altogether, even to me, it is an overload. […] but the Department doesn't care […] They just give the instructions, do this, do this and they are unfair because their instructions are imbalanced."* (Principal 2)

Finally, in an effort to empower parents, the principal provided an opportunity for parents to use the school library, with the assistance of staff and learners, to learn to read and write. This, in itself, would enable the parents to engage more in the learning

of their children and perhaps assist the parents in finding basic employment. However, most parents did not respond to the opportunity:

> *"It is a challenge again on my side because we have got this ABET; the adult school centres around Khutsong and Khutsong is still far from my school. So, my parents here, they are unable to attend. […] I've encouraged parents to come to the library and library assistants assist them where possible. At least even the kids that are learned, they must come and assist their parents in the library. But they don't because they are not familiar with that. They don't altogether. Two. But most of the community don't."* (Principal 2)

Despite the numerous challenges experienced by this school and the severe lack of support from parents, the principal states that there has been some improvement in the interest and engagement of parents. Although parental engagement is still lacking, since he has made these efforts to build a relationship with the community and to assist where he can, some parents have become involved:

> *And then at least, some of the parents they start to see the importance of them to get involved […] at least better than before."* (Principal 2)

It is evident that parental engagement is a challenge in both *School A* and *School B*. It appears that most of the efforts regarding parental involvement are aimed at communication and encouraging support in school-based learning. Moreover, there seems to be a lack of policy regarding parental engagement and a general understanding of what is expected from the school in supporting parents and promoting engagement. Furthermore, the schools are also more focused on parental involvement at school and in school-based activities than parental engagement in the learning of the children. Thus, efforts are aimed at encouraging and assisting parents to better support the schools. It is also evident that there is a concern for the well-being of the children and the schools are generally considerate toward the challenges experienced by families.

5.3 Parental Perceptions of Engagement

As discussed in Chapter 3, according to Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's model (2007; 2005; 1997; 1995), parental perceptions are likely to have a significant influence on parents' decisions to become engaged in the learning of their children. This section of the analysis discusses the perceptions of the 201 parent participants regarding their motivational beliefs (role constructions and self-efficacy), perception of invitations from others, and their perceived life context. This section refers solely to the parent participants from *School A*.

5.3.1 Parents' Motivational Beliefs

Parents' motivational beliefs are influenced by their role construction; that is, what they believe about their roles and responsibilities as parents in the learning of their children, and by their self-efficacy, that is, their beliefs about their ability to make a difference in the learning of their children. Understanding parents' motivational beliefs is essential as it may provide insight into parents' approaches to engagement (or the lack thereof) and identify areas needing empowerment (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2007; 2005; 1997; 1995).

Based on the responses of the questionnaire, the participants generally want to play a role in the learning of their children. This is depicted in the diagram below:

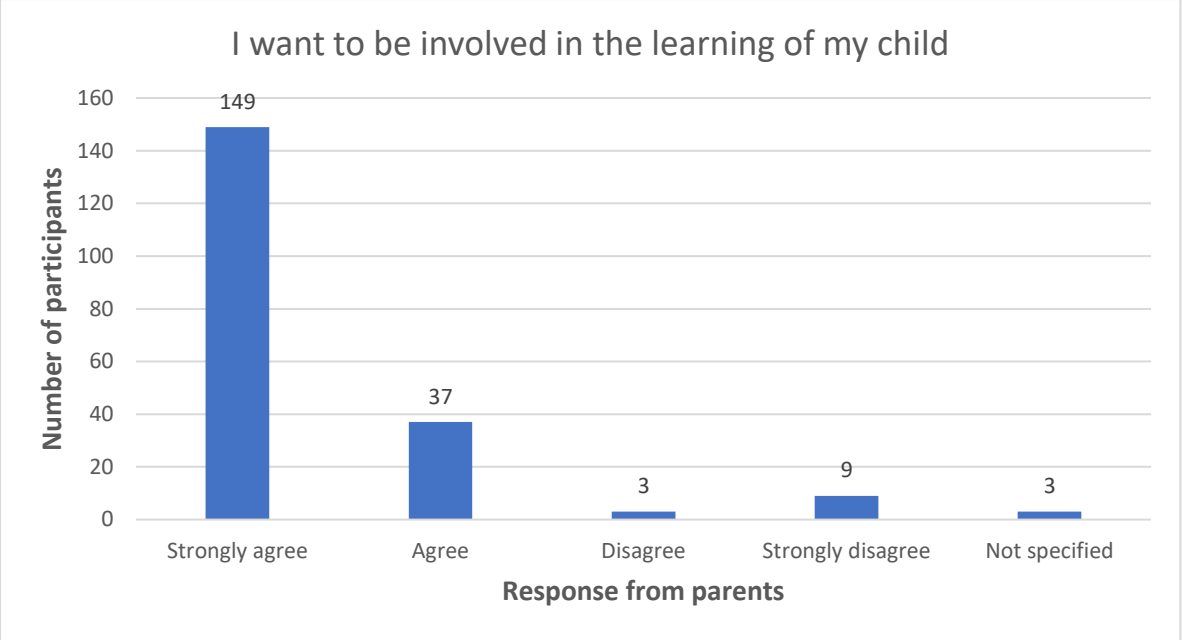

Figure 45: Parents' responses regarding the desire to be involved in the learning of their children

Of the 201 participants, only 12 (6%) indicated that they are not interested in being engaged in their children's learning. This suggests that, in general, the parents have a desire to be a part of their children's learning and to play an important role in this process. They further seem to acknowledge the importance of parental engagement, as they indicate that their children's learning is a priority to them. This is depicted in the graph below:

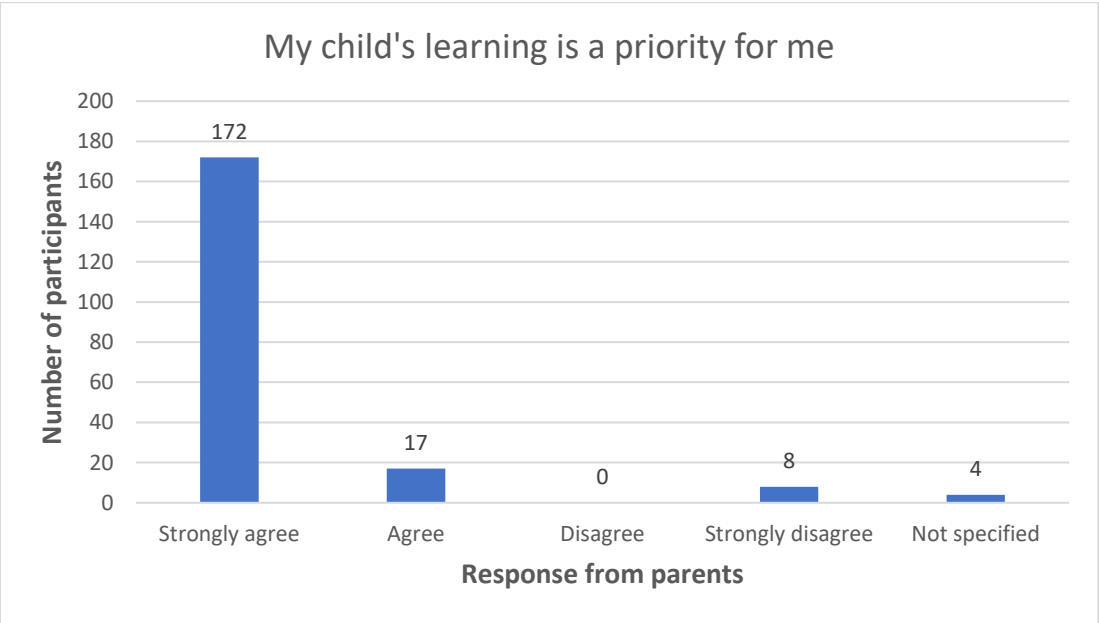

Figure 46: Parents' responses regarding their children's learning being a priority

Again, only eight of the 201 participants (4%) indicated that their children's learning is not a priority to them. The reason for this lack of interest is unclear, but for the most part, it is suggested that the parents do care and aim to prioritise their children's learning. Thus, if these parents are not actively engaged in the learning of their children, it can be implied that it is not because of a lack of concern or interest, but rather that they are affected by other factors.

It is also important to note that even though the parents may want to be part of their children's learning, it does not automatically imply that they take responsibility for it. When asking the parents whether they believe that the school is 100% responsible for the learning of their children, the responses varied:

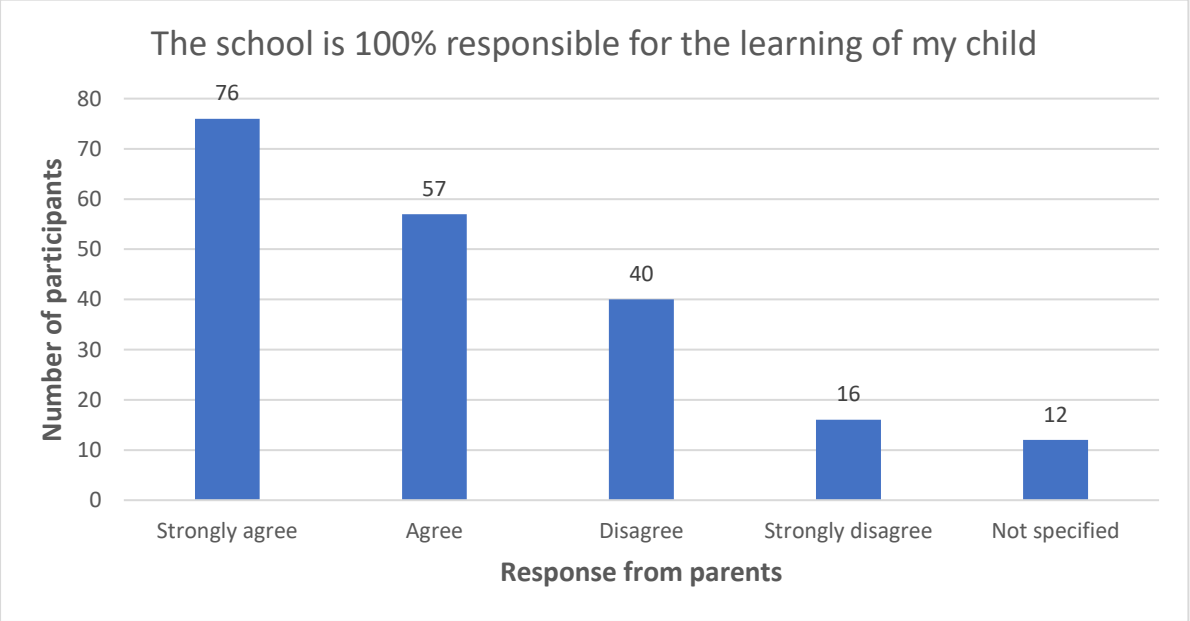

Figure 47: Parents' responses regarding the school's responsibility for their children's learning

Even though the parents want to play a role in the learning of their children, they place much of the responsibility on the school. This suggests that the parents are dependent on the school to ensure that their children are learning and performing well. Of the 201 participants, 56 (28%) indicated that they disagree with the statement, suggesting that they are more likely to believe in and accept the concept of a partnership with the school. It suggests that these parents acknowledge that they play an important role in the successful learning of their children and that they too should take responsibility for it. On the other hand, 133 participants (66%) agree that the school is solely responsible

for the child's learning. This may result from the amount of time parents have available to be engaged. The less time and energy they have available, the more likely they would be to depend on the school. The graph below depicts the type of employment of the 133 participants who agreed and strongly agreed that the school is 100% responsible for the learning of the children:

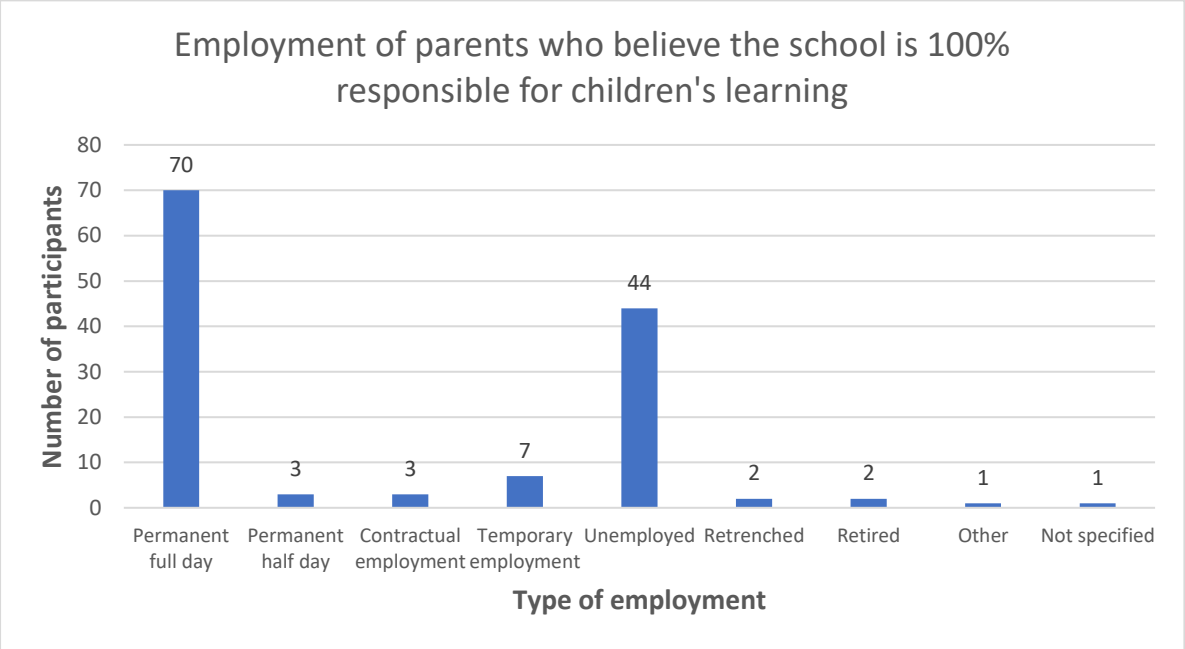

Figure 48: Employment of parents who believe that the school is responsible for their children's learning

The graph above suggests that the majority of the participants who place full responsibility on the school for the learning of their children are employed in full-day jobs or are unemployed. The 70 participants who work full-day jobs may feel tired and/ or have limited time available to participate in the learning of their children; thus, they rely more on the school to ensure that learning takes place. While it may be assumed that the 44 unemployed participants have more time available to invest in the learning of their children, it is possible that their unemployment causes anxiety, and seeking employment may require time and energy. The exact reason for placing full responsibility on the school is unclear; however, one parent participant explains that some parents believe that because they pay school fees, it is the school's responsibility to ensure that learning takes place:

> *"What I see is that parents they think […] it is the responsibility of the teachers to do everything and it's not like that. […] Because as teachers, they can't do*

> *everything; they have their own responsibilities also. […] So, it is very important for a parent to take part, to take responsibility when it comes to school things."* (Participant 7)

Even though this participant does not agree, she has been in contact with other parents who believe that they are paying the school to take on this responsibility. It is evident, however, that this participant understands the importance of working alongside the school and being equally invested in the learning of her children. The principal also states that previously many parents were under the impression that paying school fees meant that the school was solely responsible for the learning of the child. He, however, mentions that this perception is starting to change:

> *"[…] sometimes it is a challenge, they are very dependent on the school itself to help the children. At one stage […] they thought they pay school fees and for that reason the whole education is the responsibility of the school and not mine. And, the school, because I pay, must see that my child passes at the end of the year. But that has changed."* (Principal 1)

Another parent participant states that this perception might be the result of a lack of education, and/or a poor understanding of the development and schooling of children:

> *"[…] some parents are not educated and other parents they think that schools are the ones that are solely responsible for the education of the child. They don't know that a schooling system needs […] parents as well as teachers."* (Participant 9)

According to this participant, it is possible that some parents are not aware of the importance of their role in the learning of their children. On the other hand, one SMT member explains that she has never experienced a situation where a parent explicitly states that it is the school's responsibility to ensure that their children pass at the end of the year:

> *I have never found a parent that said to me, 'Teacher, it is your responsibility alone'. I've never found, until this year, I have never found a parent coming*

to me at the end of the year and said to me, 'Look, it's your fault that my child is failing'. (SMT Member 1)

Even though a number of parents believe that the responsibility of learning lies solely with the school, it does not imply that they are not engaged or that they do not want to be engaged. As indicated, most parents want to play a role in their children's learning and consider it a priority. It, however, suggests that even though they want to be engaged, they do not take responsibility for or ownership of this learning.

One area, which parents seem to take more responsibility for, is discipline. Most parents indicated that they believe it is their responsibility to discipline their children. This is indicated in the graph below:

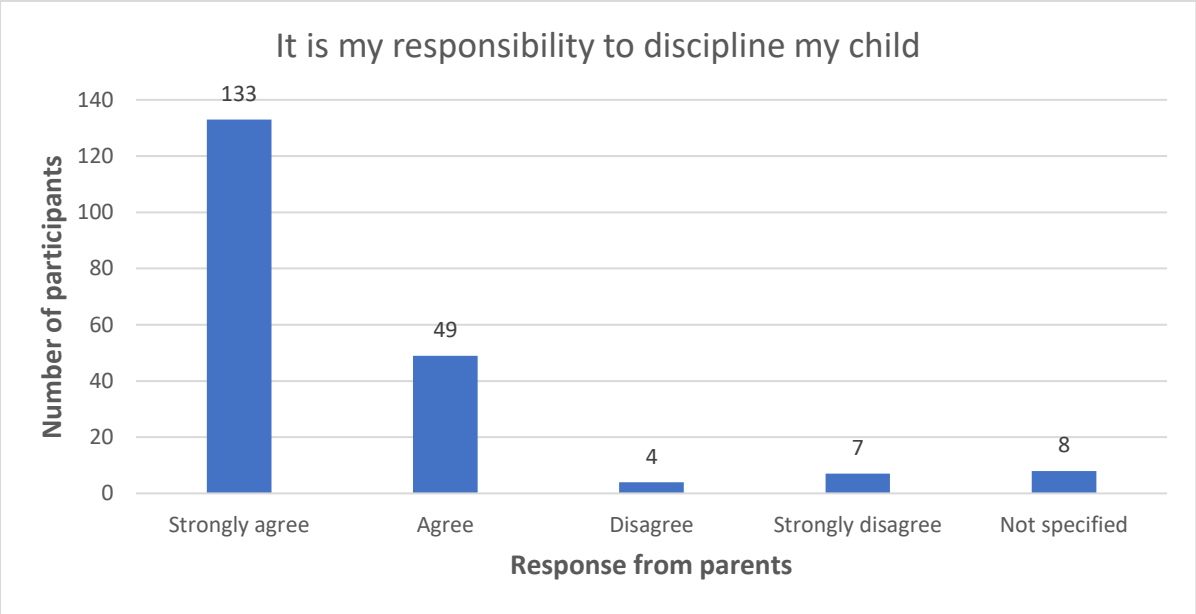

Figure 49: Parents' responses regarding responsibility for disciplining children

Of the 201 participants, 182 (91%) indicated that they are responsible for the discipline of their children. As previously discussed, one of the most important expectations that the school has of parents relates to discipline. This may have a bearing on the perception parents have of engagement, and what they believe is their responsibility.

Several participants explain that they discipline their children by beating them or taking away privileges:

"I just beat him because he makes me angry and then I have no choice and I will just take a stick on the legs…" (Participant 3)

"I would smack them; physically I would smack them. But, not out of anger but out of love to show them that this is what you should be doing, you understand, this is how things should be done. To correct them…" (Participant 5)

"Sometimes I will speak to her, maybe I will shout at her because she will do this and that. And then there is a point where you have to take a belt and beat her – that she must not spend the road this way; she must know that if I do this continually, I will be beaten." (Participant 6)

"Sometimes when I can see she forgot herself, sometimes I will beat her just to bring her back […] or I will just punish her, say okay, […] tomorrow when you go to school, just know, it's only bread and juice, no Simba, no stock sweet." (Participant 7)

Many parents use corporal punishment as a means of disciplining their children. It has been noted, however, that some parents ask teachers for guidance on how to discipline their children when this form of punishment is ineffective:

"… the parents are sometimes with their hands in the air. They don't know how to discipline the child anymore because they have beaten the child but it is not working. So, that's the only form of discipline they know. They don't know about taking away the privileges of the child." (SMT Member 1)

"I have also had parents that ask, 'How can I discipline my child better?'. […] We've had parents that will take away the food or the bed, so we tell them specifically, don't do that because that is not a privilege, that is their right. They must eat and they must sleep on a bed." (SMT Member 1)

The parents generally take on the responsibility of disciplining their children through corporal punishment, or by taking away the privileges of the child. The parents, to some degree, depend on teachers to provide guidance and advice on how to discipline their children, but ultimately they seem to take responsibility for this task.

Another task that the parents seem to take responsibility for is assisting with homework and making sure that the homework is completed every day. Again, this is a form of involvement that is encouraged and emphasised by the school, which may influence the degree to which the parents take ownership of this task:

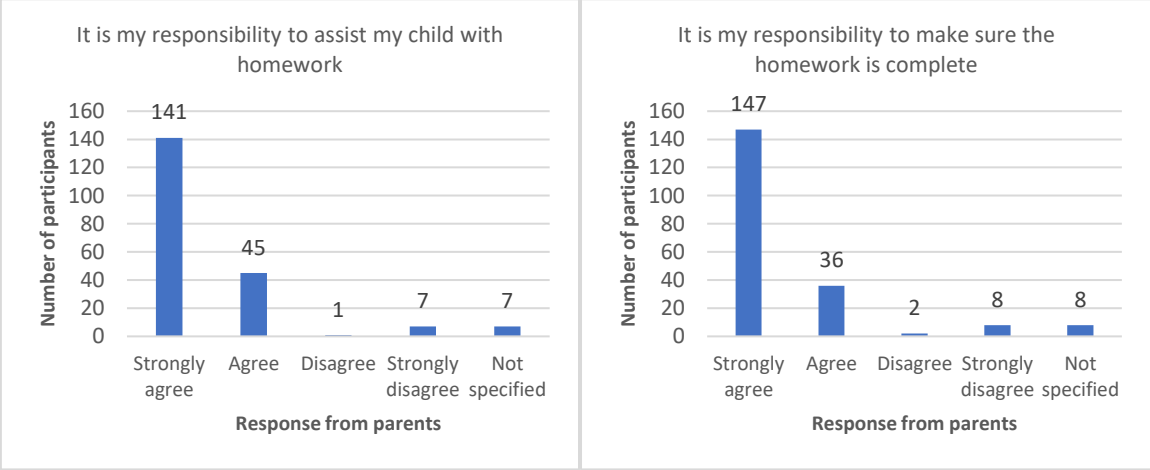

Figure 50: Parents' responses regarding responsibility for homework

Most of the parent participants believe that it is their responsibility to assist with homework and to ensure that it is completed. It is noteworthy that even though so many parents believe that the school is solely responsible for the learning of their children, they themselves also claim to be responsible for homework. It is unclear what the reasoning behind this is, but it does appear as though the parents simply follow the instructions given by the school, such as disciplining the child and assisting in homework, but do not necessarily take initiative or ownership of their children's learning. Learning at home may thus be confined to homework or school-based activities, recommended by the school; thus, making the school the responsible entity.

The parents' role construction regarding the learning of their children seems to consist primarily of discipline and assisting with homework. The parents therefore perceive the school to be largely (or solely) responsible for their children's learning and

development. Although the reason for this is not explicitly clear, it is suggested that parents' role construction is significantly influenced by the expectations of the school. As explained in Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's model (Green *et al*., 2007), parents' role construction may be significantly influenced by their interactions and experiences with other individuals or groups such as the principal, teachers or other parents (see Chapter 3). As the school emphasises parental involvement in discipline and homework, the parents acknowledge and accept responsibility in these areas. The school thus seems to play a crucial role in shaping the parents' understanding of engagement and their perceived roles in their children's learning.

The parents' self-efficacy is further likely to have an impact on the role they play in their children's learning. Even though the majority of the parents believe that they are responsible for homework, some of the parents feel that they do not have the necessary knowledge or skills to assist their children academically. This is reflected in the graph below:

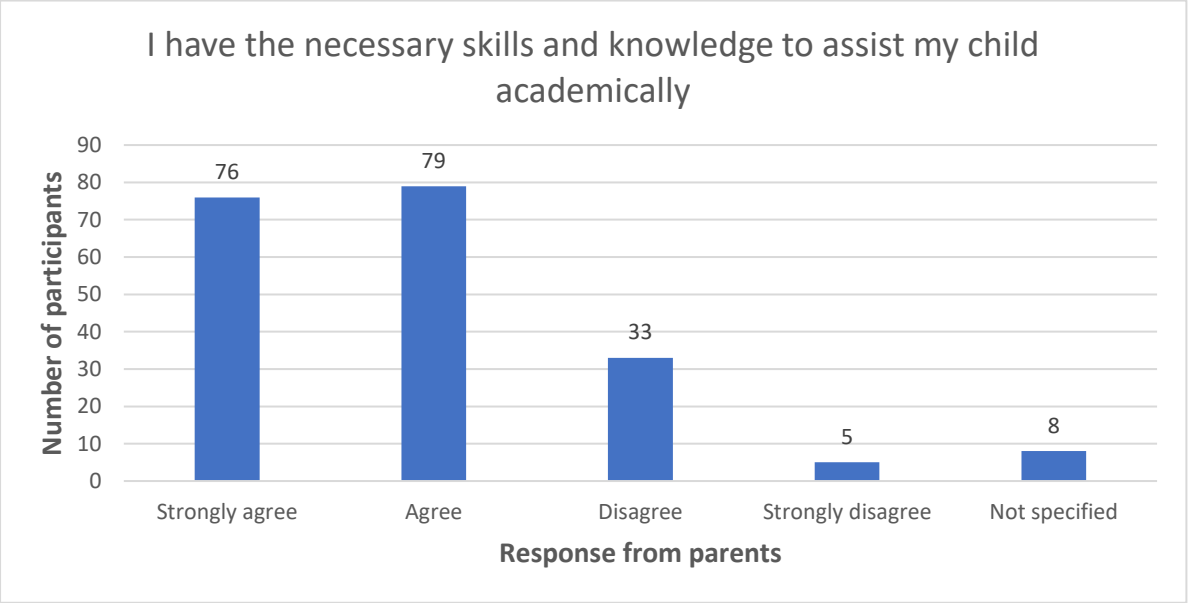

Figure 51: Parents' responses regarding their skills and knowledge to assist academically

Even though 155 of the 201 participants (77%) agree that they have the necessary knowledge and skills, 79 of these participants do not strongly agree. This may suggest a lack of confidence in their ability to assist their children academically. In addition, 38 participants (19%) believe that they do not have the necessary knowledge and skills

to assist their children. Thus, there is a gap between what the parents accept as their responsibility (i.e., assisting with homework) and having the skills required to meet this responsibility.

This lack of confidence in the parents' ability to assist their children academically may further explain why they often do not deviate from or go beyond what is recommended and encouraged by the school. If engagement in learning is understood primarily as assistance with homework, the parents may become discouraged when they struggle to meet these expectations. As explained in Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's model, parents with a low sense of self-efficacy do not believe that their efforts have the potential to bring about change. In addition, parents who have experienced negative interactions or who have not identified valuable outcomes as a result of their efforts (failing to meet school expectations), may be inclined to feel hopeless or believe that their engagement is inconsequential (Deslandes, 2019; Green *et al*., 2007; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997) (also see Chapter 3). One parent participant, for example, explains that he struggles to assist his daughter with homework and relies on other family members to assist her:

> *"…I am struggling, to be honest, I am struggling. I don't know why it's like that. […] But there is a sister and a mother that is helping her in terms of homework. […] The only thing I saw of late is they getting a lot of homework […] Because she came with it on Monday, the Tuesday they want that, so they have to read, all those things and it was not good. It was the whole paper. […] I don't know how they do it."* (Participant 6)

When parents do not understand the homework, or do not know how to assist their children academically, they may feel overwhelmed and become discouraged more easily.

Even though some of the parents may struggle to assist their children academically, they have high expectations of their children. In addition, most of the parents believe that the harder their children work, the better they will perform. This is reflected in the graph below:

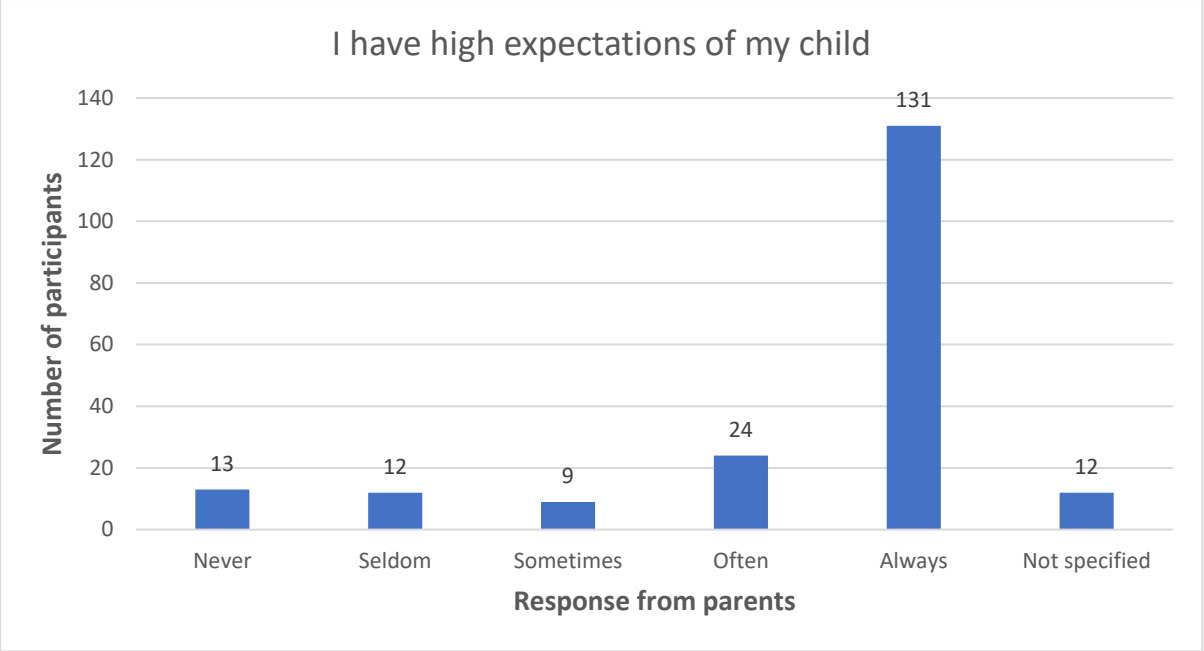

Figure 52: Parents' responses regarding their expectations of their children

The majority of the parents seem to have high expectations of their children even though they themselves may not always be able to assist them or provide the necessary support. This, in itself, suggests that most of the parents want their children to perform well at school. It is, however, evident that 25 parents (12%) do not expect much from their children. The reason for this is not explicitly indicated, but it may be a result of inadequate support from the parents, or that their children struggle academically or generally do not perform well. Most of the parents, however, believe that their children are capable of performing well if they work hard:

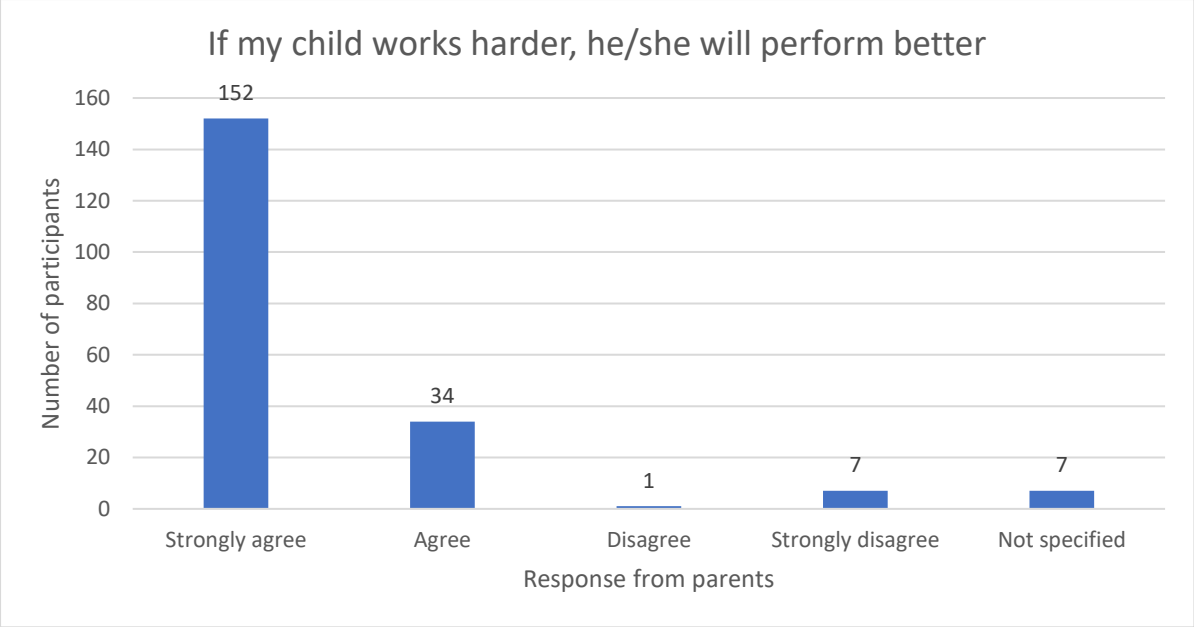

Figure 53: Parents' responses regarding the inherent ability of their children

This suggests that the parents believe that their children are capable of much if they put the effort in. Thus, their ability and performance are not limited by their inherent abilities and talents, but rather the level of commitment to their work. This may explain why the majority of the parents have high expectations of their children, as they believe that with effort, their children can perform well. However, eight participants have indicated that their children cannot perform better even if they work harder. Again, the reason for this is unclear, but it does suggest that these parents do not place as much value on effort and perseverance as the other parents do, or that their inherent abilities cannot be exceeded.

Finally, the parents generally believe that their actions and behaviour have an impact on the learning of their children:

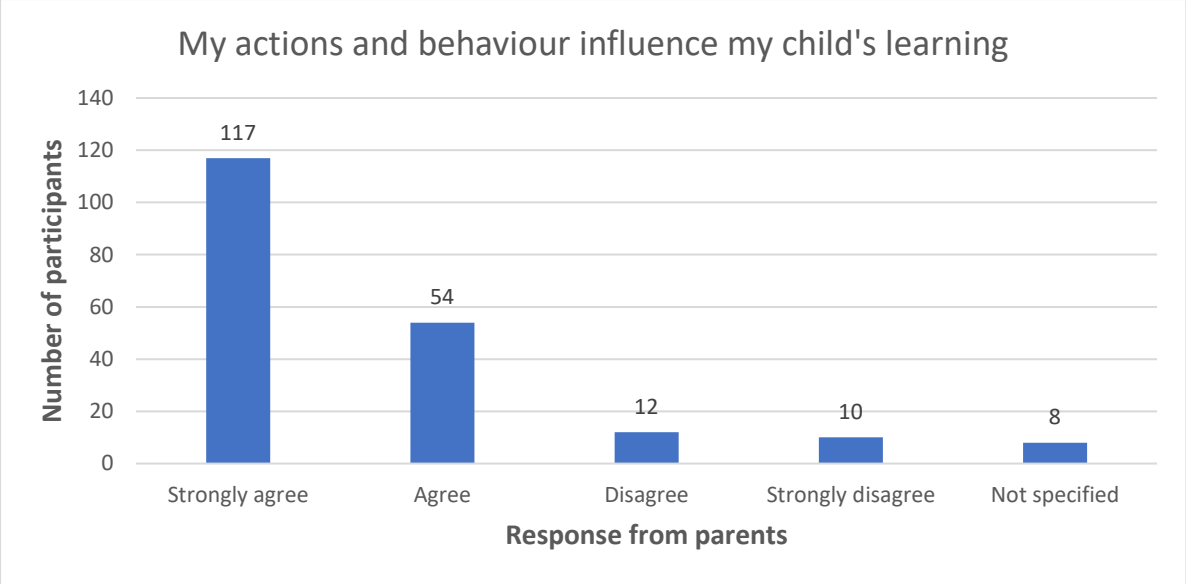

Figure 54: Parents' responses regarding the influence of their behaviour on their children's learning

The majority of the parents indicated that they believe that their actions and behaviour influence their children's learning. This influence may be positive or negative; however, it is evident that they place enough value on their own decisions and consider that these decisions may influence their children's ability to learn well. However, 22 parents (11%) indicated that their actions and behaviour do not have an impact on their children's learning. Again, the reason for this may vary, but it may suggest a lower sense of self-efficacy amongst these parents as they do not place much value on the effects of their decisions and behaviour, and perhaps do not believe that they have the ability to bring about much change in the learning and development of their children.

5.3.2 Parents' Perception of Invitations from Others

Parents may be encouraged and invited to engage in their children's learning by the school, the teacher and/or the child. As discussed in Chapter 3, the way in which parents perceive these invitations may have a bearing on their decisions to be involved or engaged.

The majority of the 201 parent participants indicated that they feel welcome at the school:

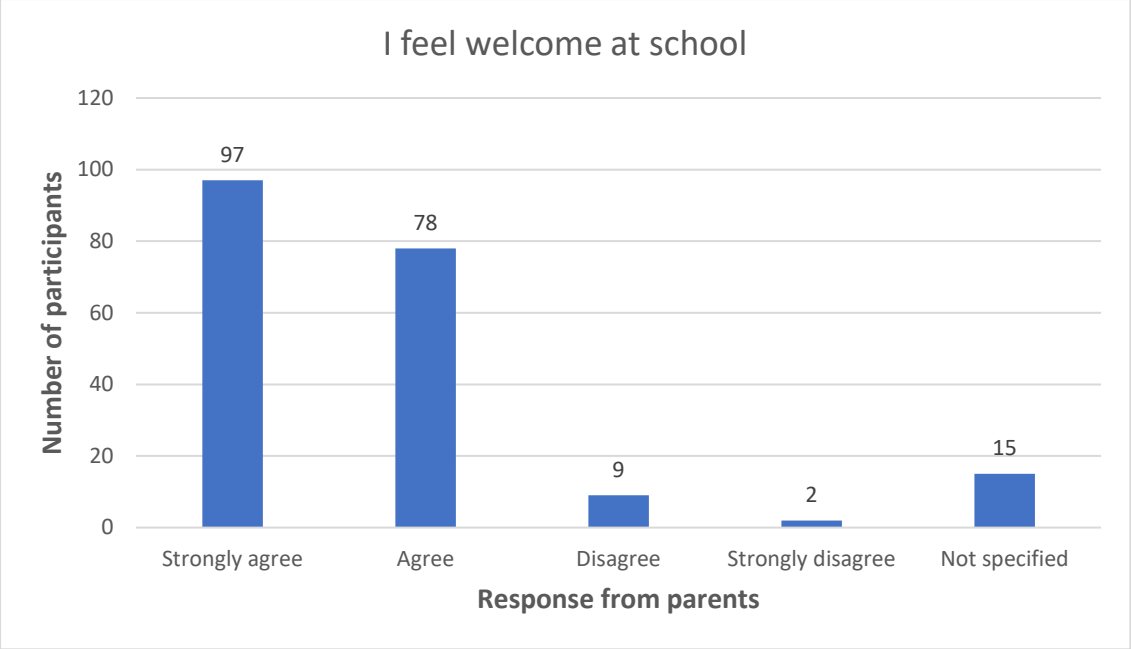

Figure 55: Parents' responses regarding how welcome they feel at school

This may suggest that the parents experience freedom in going to school and are treated well when they do. While most of the parents indicated that they feel welcome at school, only 97 participants (48%) strongly agreed with the statement. This may suggest that even though the parents feel welcome at school, there might still be some reservations. It is also interesting to note that 15 participants (7%) did not respond to this question. The reason for this is not known, but some participants may not have felt comfortable answering this question.

This is further reflected in the fact that few of the parents feel completely comfortable speaking to the principal about concerns or ideas they may have:

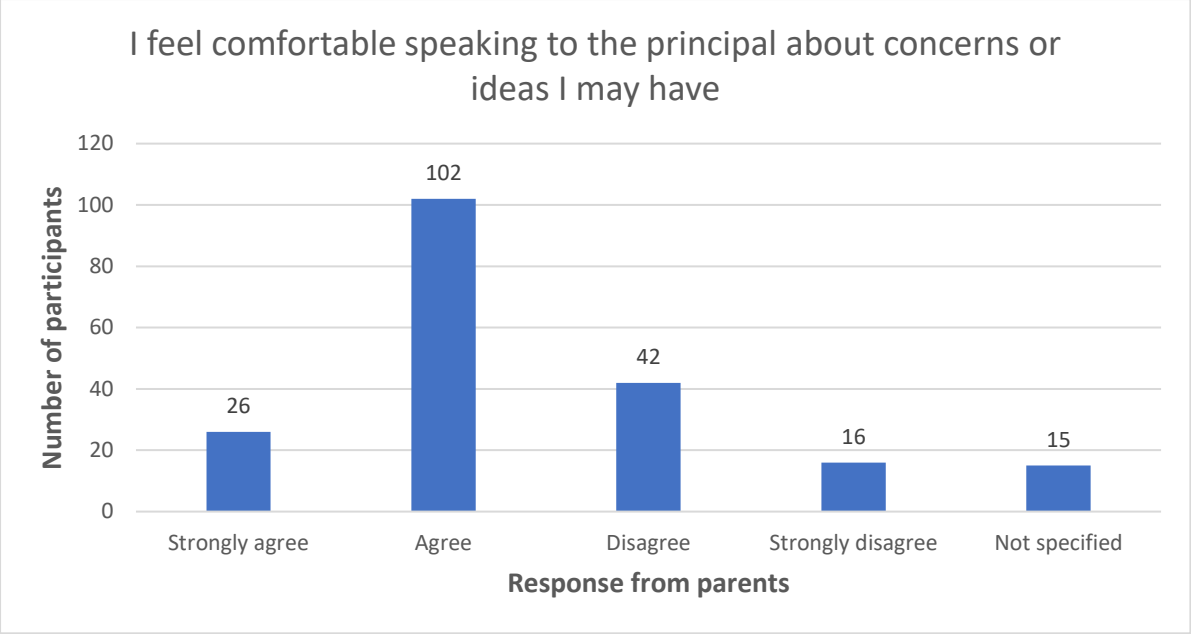

Figure 56: Parents' responses regarding how comfortable they feel to speak to the principal

The parents' responses varied in the degree to which they feel comfortable speaking to the principal. While the majority of the parents indicated that they feel comfortable, only 26 participants (13%) strongly agreed. Again, this may be an indication of some reservations. Furthermore, 58 participants (29%) indicated that they do not feel comfortable to do so, and another 15 participants (7%) did not respond to the question. The reason for this is not clear; however, one of the SMT members states that parents may feel intimidated by the principal:

> *"There is freedom. I think they are a bit intimidated, but I think it is because of their own perceptions because his door is always open for parents. If someone comes to the school and says that they want to see the principal, then he never shows them away or anything like that."* (SMT Member 2)

Even though some parents may not feel comfortable speaking to the principal, it does not suggest that the principal is unwelcoming towards parents. As mentioned by the SMT member, the principal is willing to speak to parents, but parents appear to be intimidated by him. As previously discussed, communication with the principal is often reserved for problematic learners and this may have an impact on parents' perception of the principal and explain why they would feel intimidated.

It appears that the parents often feel more comfortable speaking to their children's teachers than to the principal. This is reflected in the graph below:

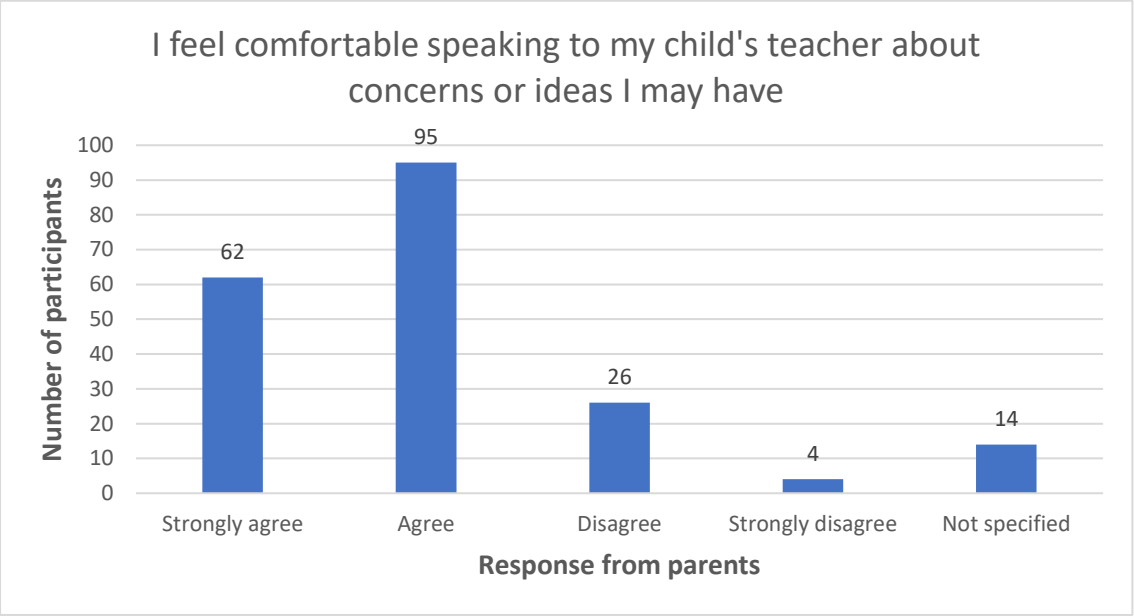

Figure 57: Parents' responses regarding how comfortable they feel speaking to the teacher

Even though some of the parents indicated that they do not feel comfortable speaking to the teacher, it seems the parents would rather approach their children's teachers than the principal. As previously mentioned, the degree to which teachers communicate with parents is largely left to the discretion of the individual teacher and therefore, responses may vary depending on particular teachers. Some teachers may be more approachable than other teachers are. One of the SMT members, however, says that the principal implores the teachers to make an effort to communicate with the parents:

> *"This school does expect educators to assist the parent but also in the teaching environment, parents can be very persistent. […] So, but generally, our principal, just the other day, he said, 'Don't ignore the parents' – that was his words."* (SMT Member 1)

While teachers use their own discretion in the amount and frequency of their communication with parents, the principal encourages teachers to make an effort and to support parents as needed. It, however, seems that all parents do not have the

opportunity to share their ideas with the school, and if they do have such opportunities, parents may not be fully aware of it. This is reflected in the graph below:

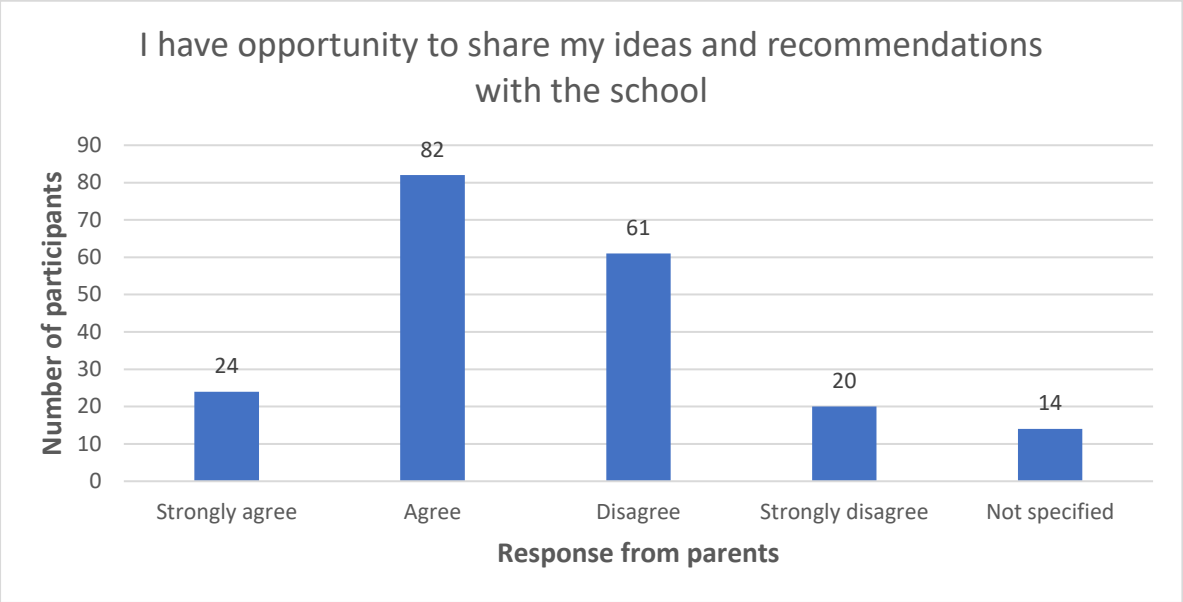

Figure 58: Parents' responses regarding their opportunities to make recommendations

Eighty-one of the participants (40%) indicated that they do not have any opportunities to share their ideas and recommendations with the school. It is important to note that although they believe that they do not have these opportunities, they may also not have a desire to share ideas with the school or have the confidence to do so. It therefore does not suggest that all these parents tried to share ideas and that they were not received well by the school. Furthermore, there seems to be a correlation between the parents who do not feel comfortable speaking to the principal and those who have indicated a lack of opportunity to share ideas and recommendations. The graph below only reflects the responses of the 58 participants who indicated that they do not feel comfortable speaking to the principal about concerns that they may have:

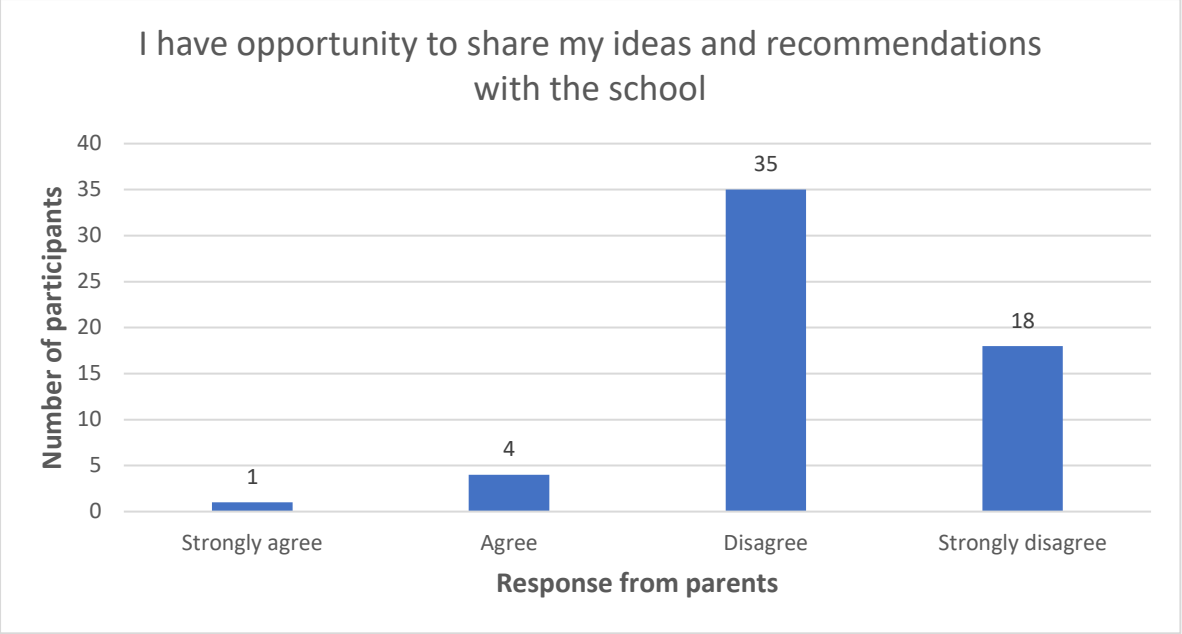

Figure 59: Response of 58 participants who do not feel comfortable speaking to the principal

The graph above suggests that for the most part, the same participants who do not feel comfortable speaking to the principal about their concerns believe that they do not have the opportunity to share their ideas and recommendations with the school. There thus seems to be a lack of a relationship between these parents and the school, as the opposite applies. The parents who feel comfortable approaching the principal generally feel that they have opportunities to share their ideas and recommendations. It can thus be implied that the kind of relationship the parents have with the school influences their perceptions about the school and the degree to which they feel heard by the school. This is supported by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's model, which suggests that parents who feel welcome at school, supported by the school, and experience freedom to enquire and make suggestions, are more likely to be engaged in the learning and schooling of their children. Thus, the school climate is conducive to parental participation when parents believe that their contributions are valued (Green *et al*., 2007; Walker *et al*., 2005). Hence, the management of the school plays an important role in creating an inviting and inclusive school environment where all parents feel welcome to make valuable contributions.

The participants who have indicated that they do not have these kinds of opportunities may further be restricted by their access to the school regarding time and/or transportation. The graph below only reflects the responses of the 81 participants who

indicated that they do not have opportunities to share their ideas and recommendations with the school:

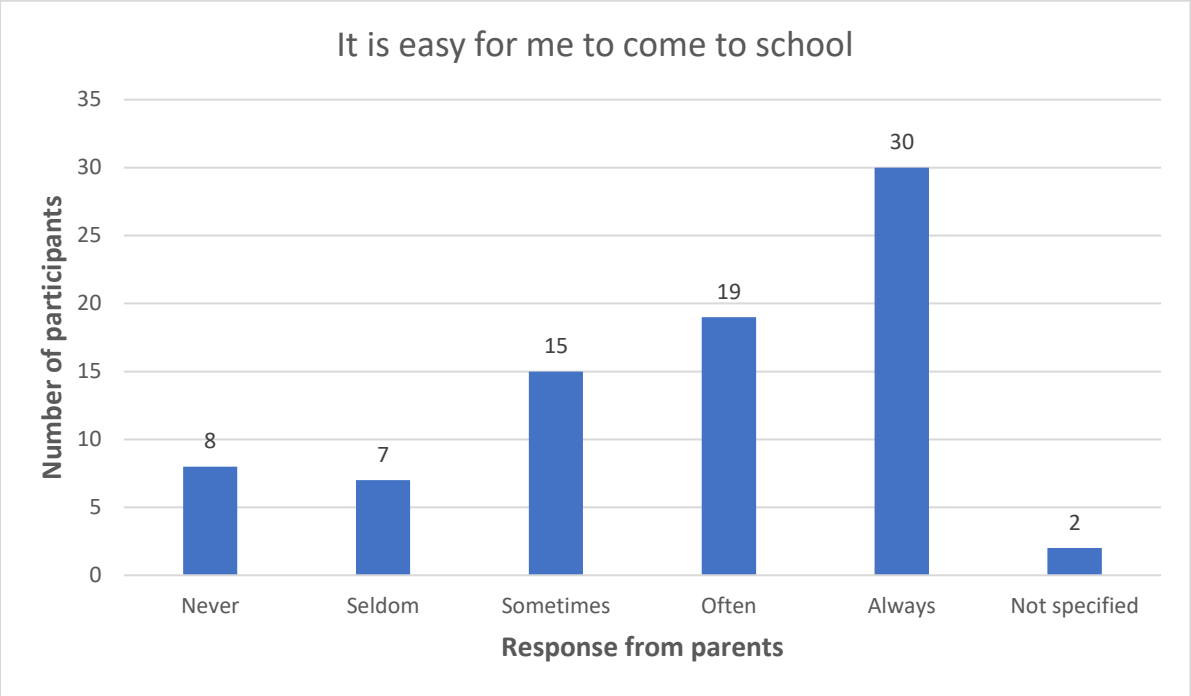

Figure 60: Parents' responses regarding their access to the school

Of the 81 participants who indicated that they do not have the opportunity to share ideas and recommendations with the school, 15 indicated that it is seldom or never easy to go to the school, and another 15 indicated that it is only sometimes easy to go to the school. This means that between 15 and 30 of these participants experience challenges regarding access to the school, which may contribute to the lack of opportunity they have to share their ideas and recommendations. Thus, it may not necessarily be a reflection of their perception of the school but rather indicative of their difficulties in accessing the school. It is also important to note that 49 of the participants can often go to the school with ease and seldom experience challenges regarding access to the school. Despite their easy access to the school, these participants feel that they do not have the opportunity to share their ideas and recommendations.

In addition, some of the parents may feel that they are not skilled or knowledgeable enough to share their ideas with the school. The graph below only reflects the responses of the 38 participants who indicated that they do not have the necessary skills and knowledge to assist their children academically:

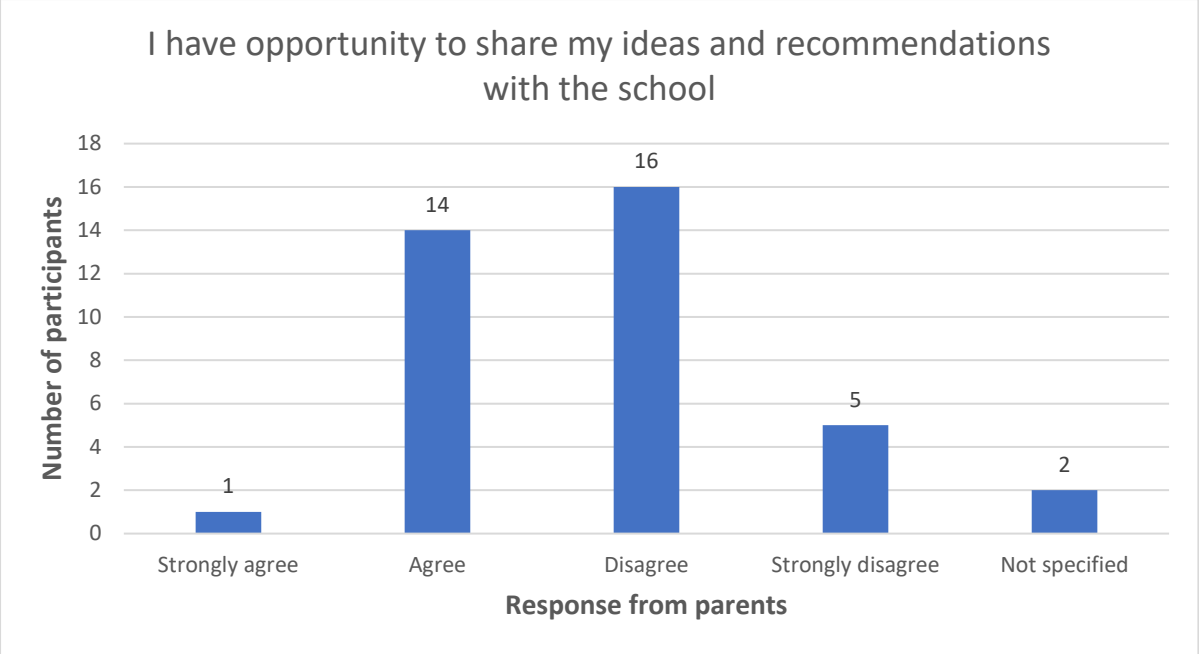

Figure 61: Responses of the 38 participants who indicated that they do not have the necessary skills and knowledge to assist their children academically

Of the 38 participants who lack confidence in their ability to assist their children academically, 21 indicated that they do not have opportunity to share their ideas and recommendations with the school. This may suggest a lack of confidence in their own ideas and recommendations, which prevents them from sharing it with the school. Fifteen participants indicated that, despite their lack of knowledge and skills, they still have an opportunity to share their ideas and recommendations with the school. This may further suggest that they do not feel alienated by the school because of their lack of knowledge, but that they feel supported and heard by the school. Only one participant, who lacks confidence in his/her skills and knowledge, agreed strongly with the statement that he/she has the opportunity to share his/her ideas. This may suggest that the other 14 participants have reservations in sharing their ideas with the school, which may be influenced by the confidence they have in their own knowledge and abilities.

Even though the teachers are encouraged by school management to communicate with the parents, it may be that parent-teacher communication rarely goes beyond academic support for the child. The graph below depicts the degree to which the parents regularly speak to their child's teacher:

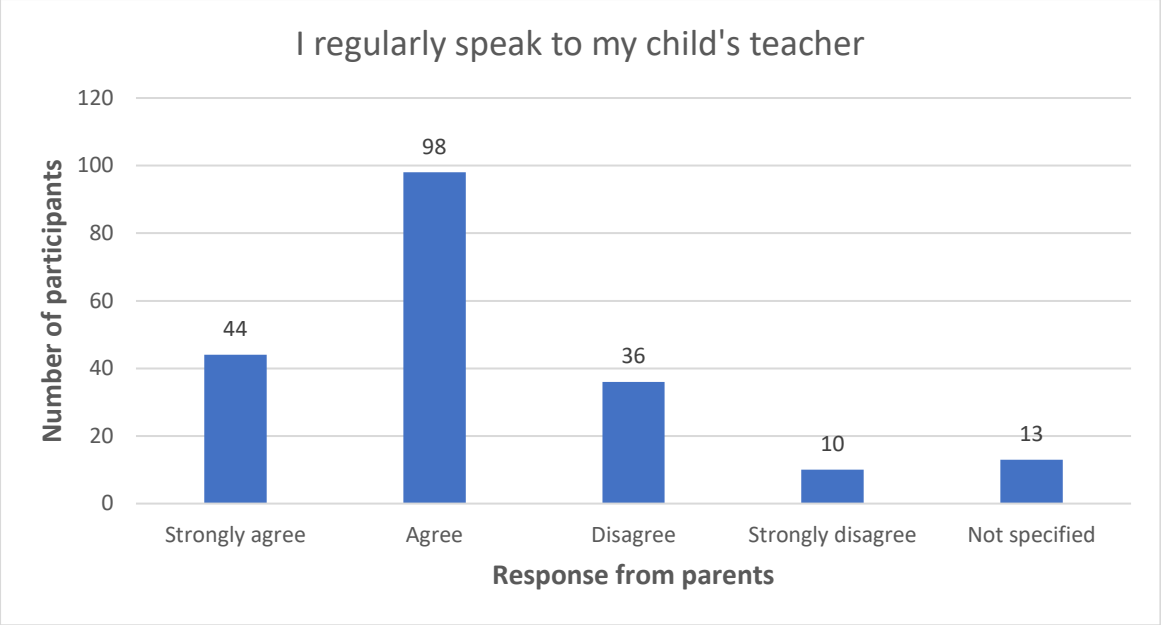

Figure 62: Parents' responses regarding their communication with the teacher

The graph above does not refer to the school's communication with all parents, but rather of the one-on-one communication, which takes place between the teacher and the parent. Most of the parents indicated that they regularly speak to their children's teachers, and it is unclear why the other 46 parents do not. There is a possibility that they do not see the need to communicate with the teacher. As previously discussed, teachers often focus on communication with problematic children, suggesting that no communication is a good indication of the child's behaviour and progress at school. Some of the participants explained that they often communicate with their children's teachers about their progress at school:

> *"I would always ask her what's happening with my child in the class, how is she behaving; like, if there are some things that she is struggling, she must just tell me."* (Participant 1)

> *"Maybe I ask her how is my child now at school, how is she doing now at school? She sometimes responds – you have to teach her more, maybe reading, sometimes you have to teach her more of the times tables, multiply or division. She always has those common things that she says to me…"* (Participant 4)

"Even if she improved, she is telling me no, just keep it up. If she drops, please focus on this. We are communicating with the teacher." (Participant 8)

Even though most of the parents speak to the teachers on a regular basis, this communication does not necessarily provide enough time or opportunity for the parents to share their ideas or make recommendations. The graph below only depicts the responses of the 81 participants who indicated that they do not have the opportunity to share ideas and recommendations with the school:

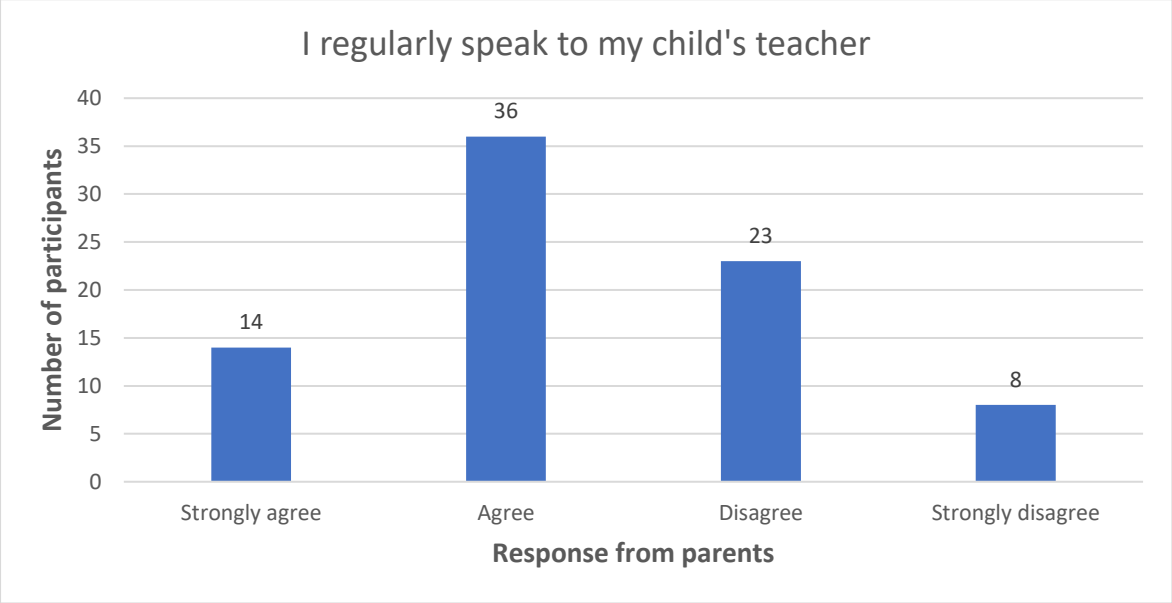

Figure 63: Responses of the 81 participants who indicated that they do not have the opportunity to share ideas and recommendations with the school

Of the 81 participants who do not have the opportunity to share their ideas, 50 frequently speak to the teacher. This suggests that parent-teacher communication does not necessarily present an opportunity for sharing ideas, but rather that it may be limited to academic support for the child. However, 31 participants do not speak to the teacher and believe that they do not have an opportunity to share ideas. Even if access to the school is limited, it was noted that many of the teachers have made their numbers available to the parents. It is therefore unclear why these participants do not speak to the teacher or make an effort to share ideas. One parent participant explains that some parents are simply not interested in speaking to the teacher despite having the opportunity and being invited to do so:

> *"But unfortunately, parents are not keen; not all parents are interested. There are parents who are invited; they will not honour the invite. They will rather stay at home and not attend the parents evening, which is unfortunate really because that's the opportunity you have to grab with both hands as a parent. You know, let me just go and see what the teacher is complaining about with regards to the performance of my child but unfortunately we're different as parents."* (Participant 5)

The above response reiterates that often when parents are invited to speak to teachers, it is because a child is experiencing a behavioural or academic problem. This may explain why some parents avoid contact with the school or have adopted a culture of 'no news is good news'.

On the other hand, the parents generally seem to be well informed by the school regarding the expectations of the school and the academic progress of the child. This is depicted in the graphs below:

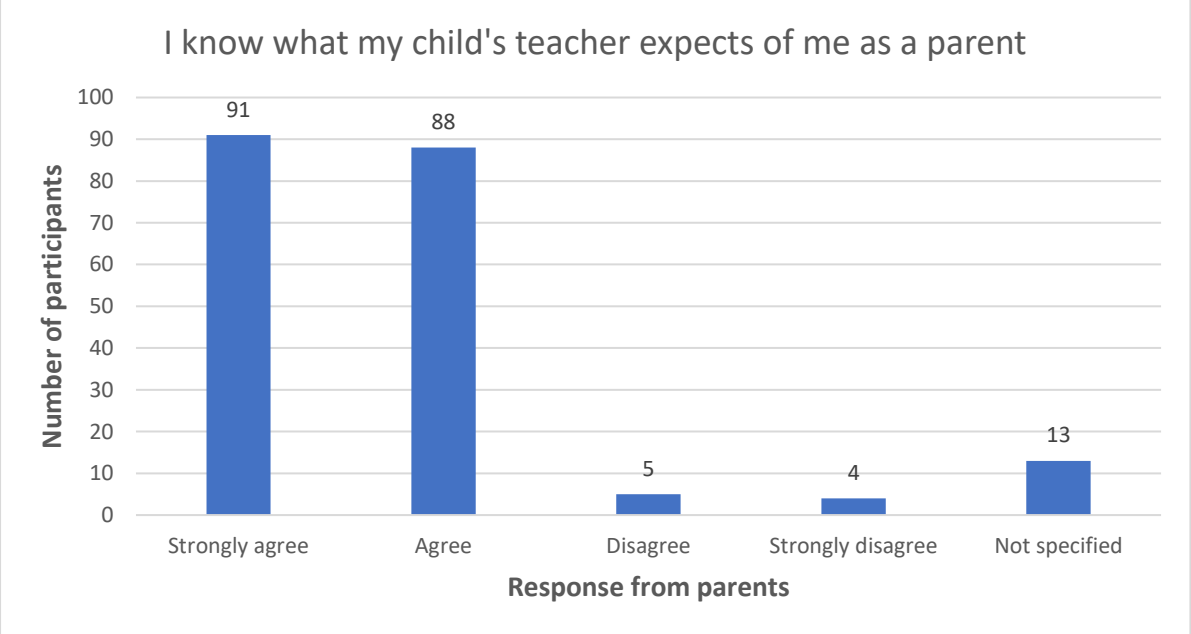

Figure 64: Parents' responses regarding their knowledge of the teachers' expectations

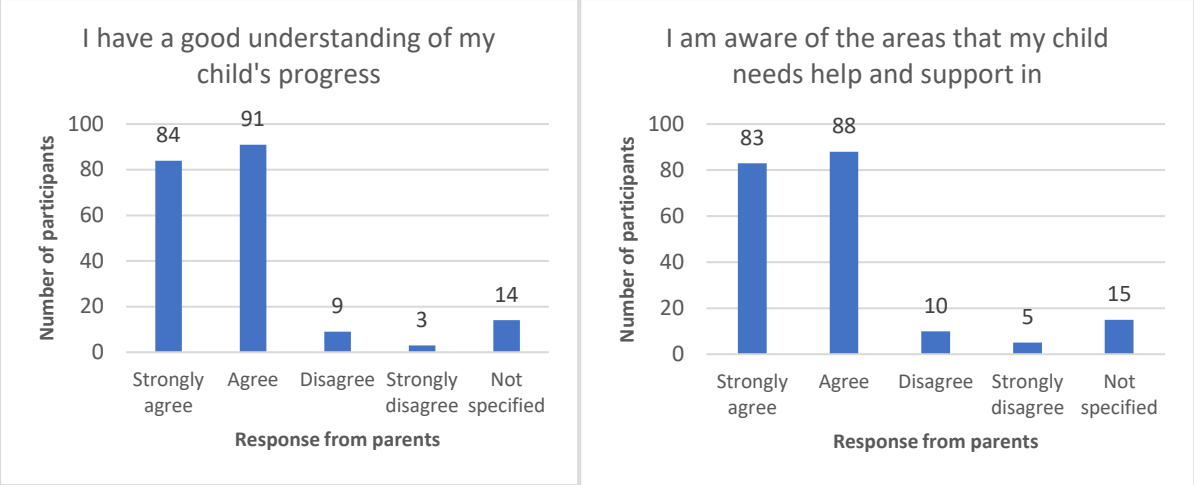

Figure 65: Parents' responses regarding their knowledge of their children's progress and areas needing support

The above graphs suggest that for the most part, communication between the school and the parents has ensured that parents are aware of the school's expectations regarding their involvement; they are updated on the progress of their children; and they have been informed of the areas needing additional support. This is confirmed by one of the parent participants who explains that the teachers feel free to inform him regularly on the progress of his child:

> *"… be it discipline or her performance in class, teachers would just feel free to let me know maybe what she is struggling with."* (Participant 5)

It is, however, evident that much of the communication between teachers and parents is based on the behavioural and academic progress of the child. Even though the parents are aware of expectations and the areas needing support, many have indicated that teachers are unaware of the challenges they experience in providing the necessary support to their children. This is depicted in the graph below:

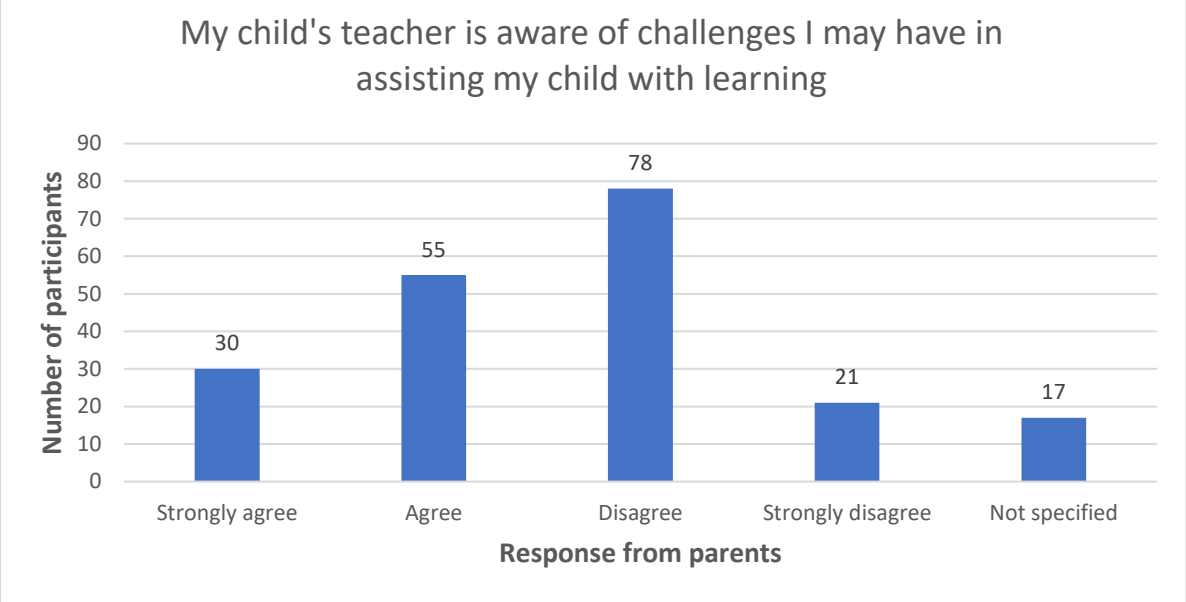

Figure 66: Parents' responses regarding teachers' awareness of their challenges

This may suggest either that communication between the teacher and the parent does not often allow the opportunity for expressing these challenges, or perhaps that parents do not feel comfortable sharing these challenges with the teachers. In addition, there seems to be a lack of guidance provided to parents on ways in which their children could be supported. Even though the parents know which areas their children need assistance in, they may not know how to assist their children in these particular areas:

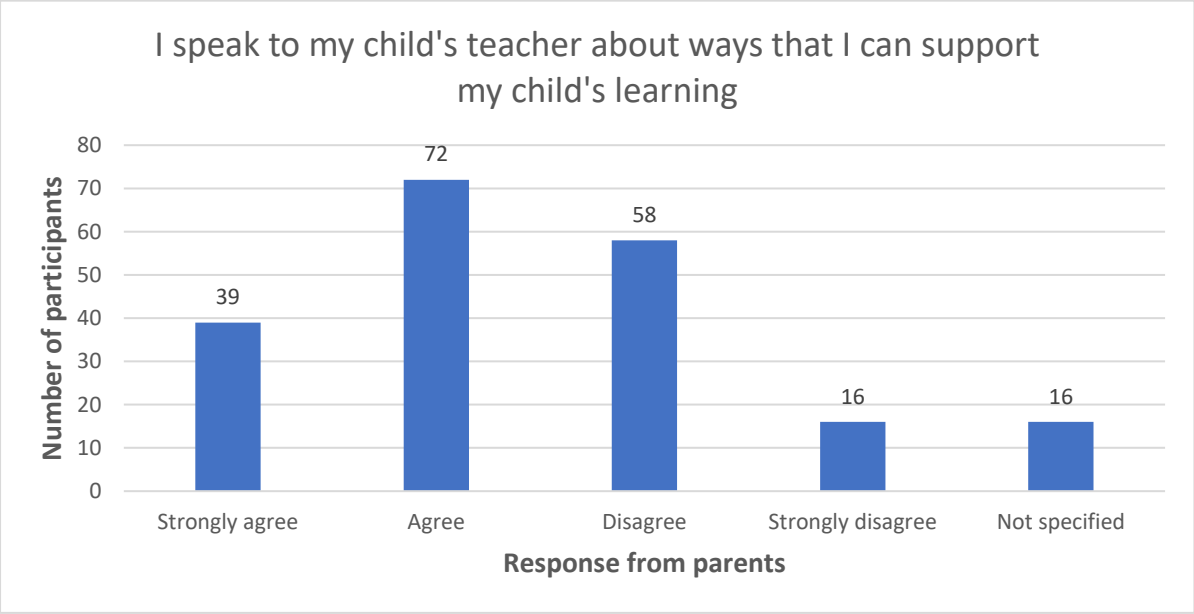

Figure 67: Parents' responses regarding communication with the teacher about areas needing support

This does not imply that teachers do not care or are unwilling to assist parents. It is important to remember that teachers are generally overburdened with their workload, and they have more of less 40 learners in a class. There may not always be sufficient time for teachers to engage with families on a more personal level even though they perhaps want to do so. This level of communication and relationship that exists between parents and teachers may again differ from one teacher to the next based on their decision regarding communication with parents. It does, however, appear that parents' perceptions of the school are largely influenced by the decisions of the teacher, which is not strictly regulated by the school or by school policy. Thus, not all parents tend to have the same experiences regarding their children's teachers and the school. As explained by Epstein (1994), parents tend to be more positive about school and more engaged when the child's teacher actively creates opportunities for involvement among parents and encourages participation in the learning process of the child. These invitations may include regular contact with the parents, inviting parents to the classroom, or assigning homework that requires the involvement of the parent (see Chapter 3).

The school and the teachers seem to be open and willing to speak to parents on a one-on-one basis. This communication from the school and the school's invitation for involvement from parents seems to involve primarily the academic and behavioural progress of the child. There seems to be limited freedom for the parents to express their challenges to the teachers regarding the support provided to children; hence, the parents believe that the teachers are unaware of these challenges. Therefore, even though parents may be invited by the school to engage in the learning of their children, this invitation again seems limited to discipline and assistance with schoolwork. It is also important to note that this is based on the perceptions of parents and does not necessarily mean that this is the intention of teachers or common practice of the school.

5.3.3 Parents Perceived Life Context

Parents' perceived life context refers to the available time and energy parents believe they have to engage in the learning of their children. Although the parents have a limited amount of time, especially when both the parents work full-day jobs, the

participants indicated that, for the most part, they have time to assist their children with homework:

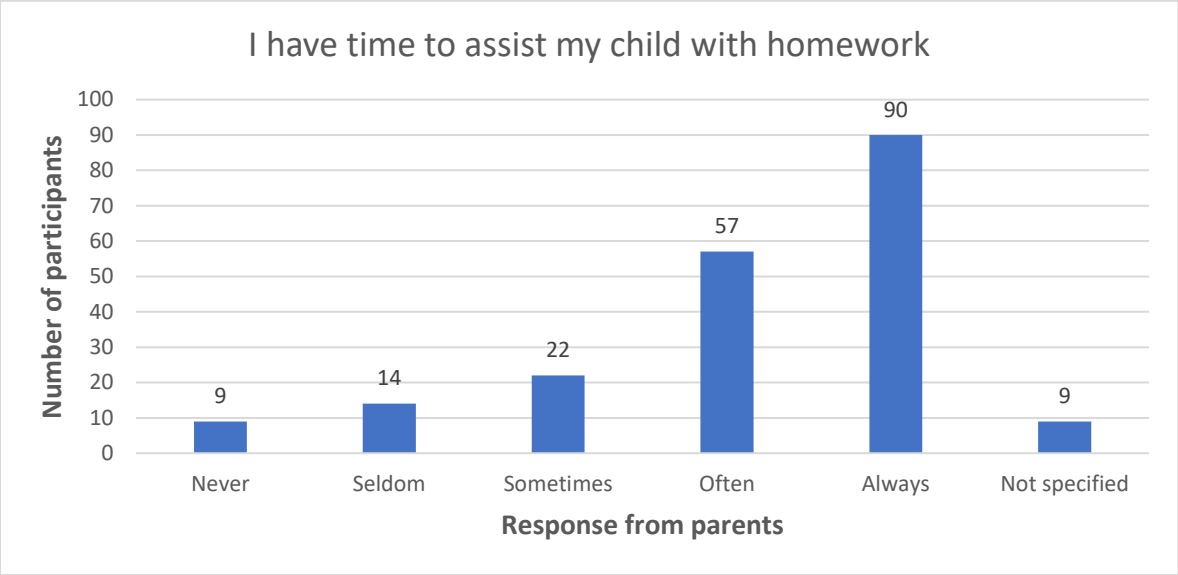

Figure 68: Parents' responses regarding their time to assist with homework

This does not necessarily mean that the parents have enough free time, but rather that they seem to prioritise their children's homework and therefore make time to assist them. As stated by one participant, even though she assists her child with homework, it causes much frustration, as she is tired:

> *"Because it is difficult when I am tired. I say, ah homework, why a lot of homework like this because I am tired now."* (Participant 10)

In addition, when both the parents are present, it may be that one parent has more time available than the other does and therefore takes responsibility for the homework. Two participants explain that their spouses are very busy and consequently are not engaged in the learning of their children:

> *"… He doesn't have time for children […] and I feel bad. But he is a caring dad, he is a caring husband but time, he doesn't even have time for me. […] and when he gets time, he wants to do his things also."* (Participant 3)

"So, right now I have to go back home to help him with homework. […] The father is there but he is not there." (Participant 11)

Even though the parents make time to assist with homework (because it is considered very important), they lack the time and energy to engage in other ways, such as having discussions and playing games with their children:

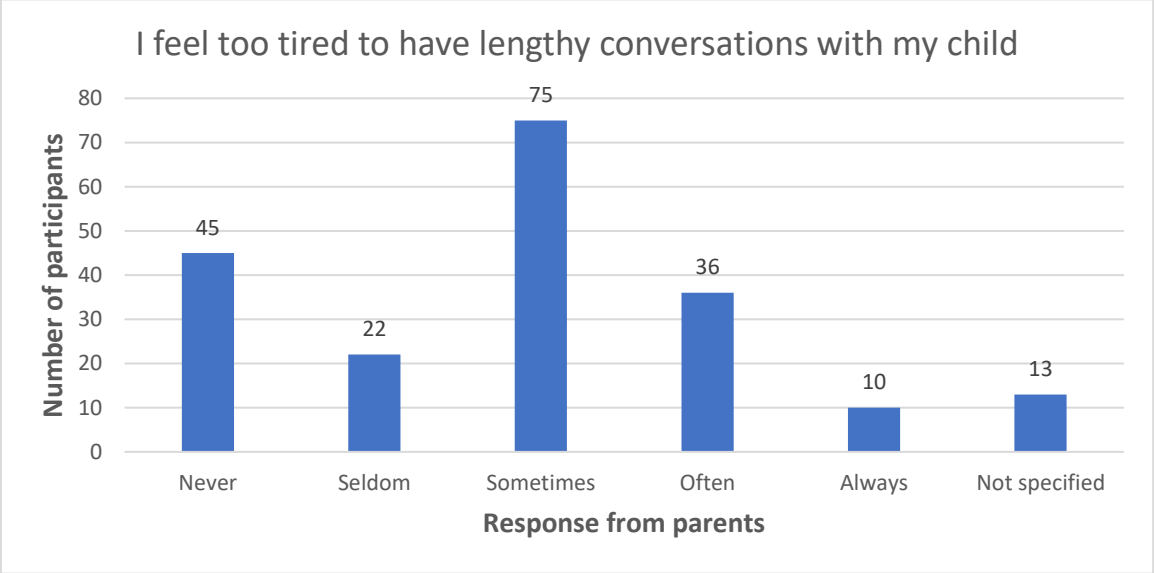

Figure 69: Parents' responses regarding their energy to have conversations with their children

The above suggests that many parents (some more than others) feel too tired to engage in conversations with their children. While they may assist their children with school-related activities, they are too tired to spend quality time with their children, which may strain the parent-child relationship. Two participants explain that they just do not have the energy to engage in conversations, or are not in the mood to do so, after a long day at work:

"… she was asking a lot of questions and I was like no, no I am not in the mood for you." (Participant 8)

"…because every time I see there is a visitor at our house, she would rather talk to that person about the things that she don't like, but sometimes she will just say, 'Yoh, Mommy is very grumpy; Mommy don't want to play with us'." (Participant 4)

Based on the above responses, it is evident that children want to spend time with their parents and appreciate their company. The parents might not respond favourably toward the children when they are tired. One parent participant explains that even though parents are tired and have many responsibilities, it is important that they engage intentionally with their children:

> *"I understand that as parents we have certain responsibilities; sometimes you come from work tired, but you must make time for your kids; don't be just absent. That thing is not good at all, it is not acceptable."* (Participant 9)

The parents' perceptions regarding available time and energy seem to have an impact on recreational activities or spending quality time with their children. Their lack of energy impacts the parent-child relationship, as the parents do not always want to engage in conversations or play games with their children. Despite having limited time and energy, most of the parents seem to make time to assist their children with homework. As explained in Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's model, parents' perceptions of the amount of time and energy they have available, as well as their priorities, significantly influence their decisions regarding involvement (Green *et al*., 2007). This might again be a result of the school emphasising the importance of this and placing this expectation on the parents. It is further possible that this perception of available time and energy could differ from one person to another, depending on what they prioritise and the importance they place on these activities. As mentioned by the participant above, he believes that it is his responsibility to be present for his children at all times despite having a full day job and limited personal time.

5.4 Parental Engagement in Learning

As discussed previously, parental engagement goes beyond parental assistance with homework and school-based activities. Parental engagement refers to parents' investment in factors that contribute to enhanced learning at school and at home. This section of analysis focuses on the parents' existing engagement practices. Irrespective of whether the parents know that these engagement practices have an impact on learning or not, this section discusses the extent to which the parents are currently engaging in these practices. As discussed in Chapter 3, focus is placed on the

following three areas, based on Epstein's typology of parental involvement: parenting, learning at home, and communication with the school.

For the most part, a positive parent-children relationship seems to exist as the children willingly talk to their parents about their day at school. As explained by one of the parent participants, the children who are eager to tell their parents about their days are usually happy at home and have a positive relationship with their parents:

> *"… the moment the child is happy at home, you will find that when he or she arrives at home they will show what they have done at school. And, by so doing, you as a parent, you may go to the extent of saying, look, can you just briefly explain to me, what was this all about. And then you find that the child by so doing is actually enhancing his or her understanding on a specific concept you know."* (Participant 9)

As suggested above, speaking to their children about their day at school not only builds a positive parent-child relationship, but can also be used as an opportunity to consolidate the learning that takes place at school. The graph below shows the parents responses regarding the degree to which their children speak to them about school:

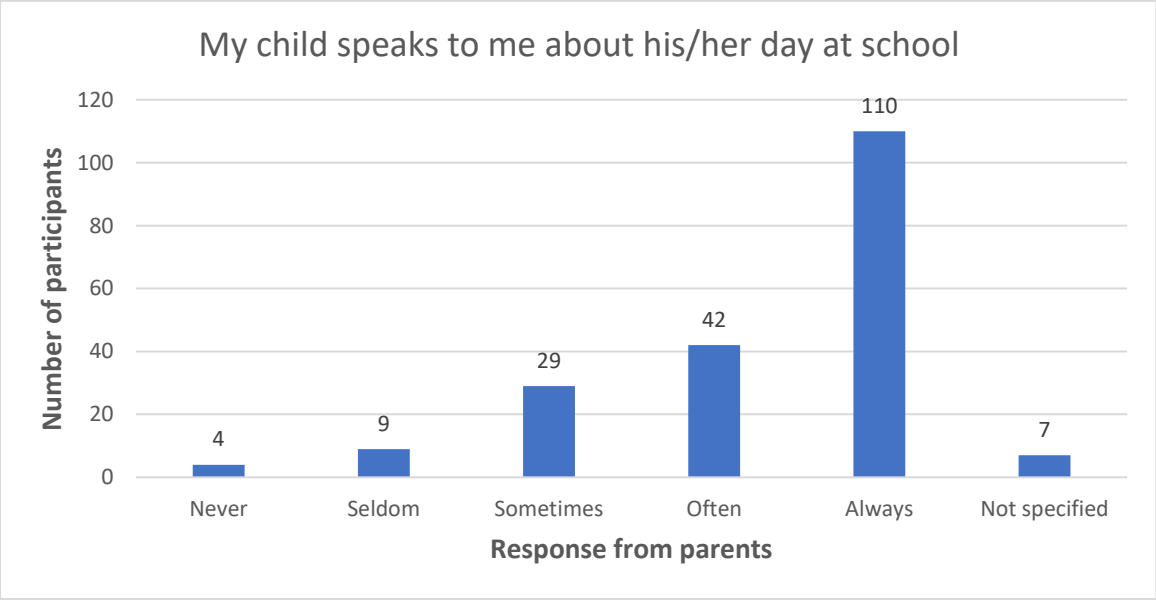

Figure 70: Parents' responses regarding the degree to which their children speak to them

Of the 201 participants, 152 indicated that their children often or always speak to them about their day at school. Some participants further expressed that their children are generally open and enjoy sharing details about their day with them:

> *"The relationship that I have with my child, it's very good. She can open up […] When things are not going well, whatever is happening at school, what the teacher said, she always shares with me…"* (Participant 1)

> *"We share a lot. She is an open child; she talks about everything. She will tell you, the person said this, at school we are doing this, see and we were laughing, do you know what the teacher said and did… like we talk about everything."* (Participant 7)

This suggests that these children feel comfortable enough to open up to their parents about anything and everything that affected them throughout the day. This might further be influenced by the parents' reactions to the children when they talk to them and the degree to which the parents take an interest in what they are saying.

A further 42 parents indicated that their children sometimes or seldom speak to them about their day at school. As children spend so much time at school in a day, it is expected that most of their daily activities take place during this time. Some parent participants explain that their children are not as open with them as they should be:

> *"Sometimes he is still lying to me; he doesn't tell me the truth. […] Yesterday, he was just tired, and I asked him what happened at school. He didn't say that teacher gave us a lot of work; he just said that 'I am tired'. So sometimes he will speak and sometimes he will lie."* (Participant 3)

> *"… she is not as free as she has to be. […] it's different because with this other two, even when they were her age, we had this open relationship; but with her, I don't know what's wrong. […] At times she will just give a one-liner answer and then I have to probe. When she is with her friends, she talks; even with her cousin you know she talks a lot. So, I don't know what might be the problem."* (Participant 5)

> *"… sometimes when I try to speak to her, 'How is school? What is happening at school? Is there anyone who is bullying you?' […] sometimes she will say no, but when she talks to her grandmother […] then I see okay, she is not happy, but sometimes she is not open."* (Participant 4)

This suggests that these children are not fully comfortable speaking to their parents and that they would rather speak to other people, such as friends and/or other family members. The reason for this is not clear and it is likely to differ from one family to the next; however, there seems to be a lack of freedom amongst these children to speak honestly and openly with their parents.

Dinnertime is another opportunity where many families could spend time together. The graph below depicts the number of participants who indicated that they eat dinner together as a family:

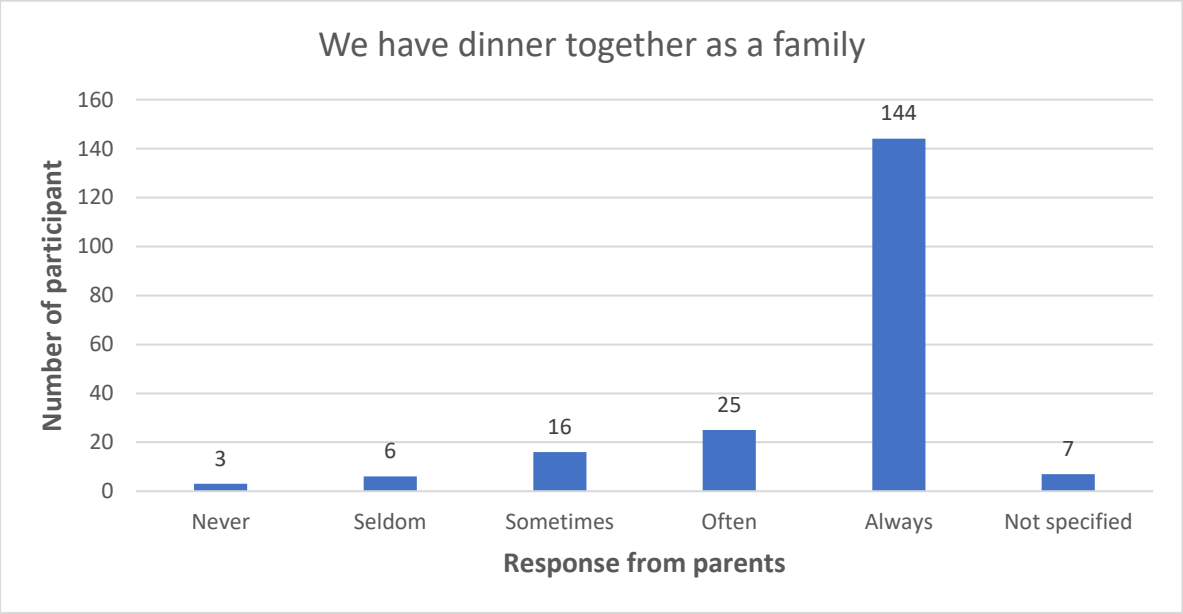

Figure 71: Parents' responses regarding their dinner times

The graph above suggests that the majority of the families eat dinner together. Several participants, however, indicated that they do not spend this time speaking to one another, but rather watch television while eating together:

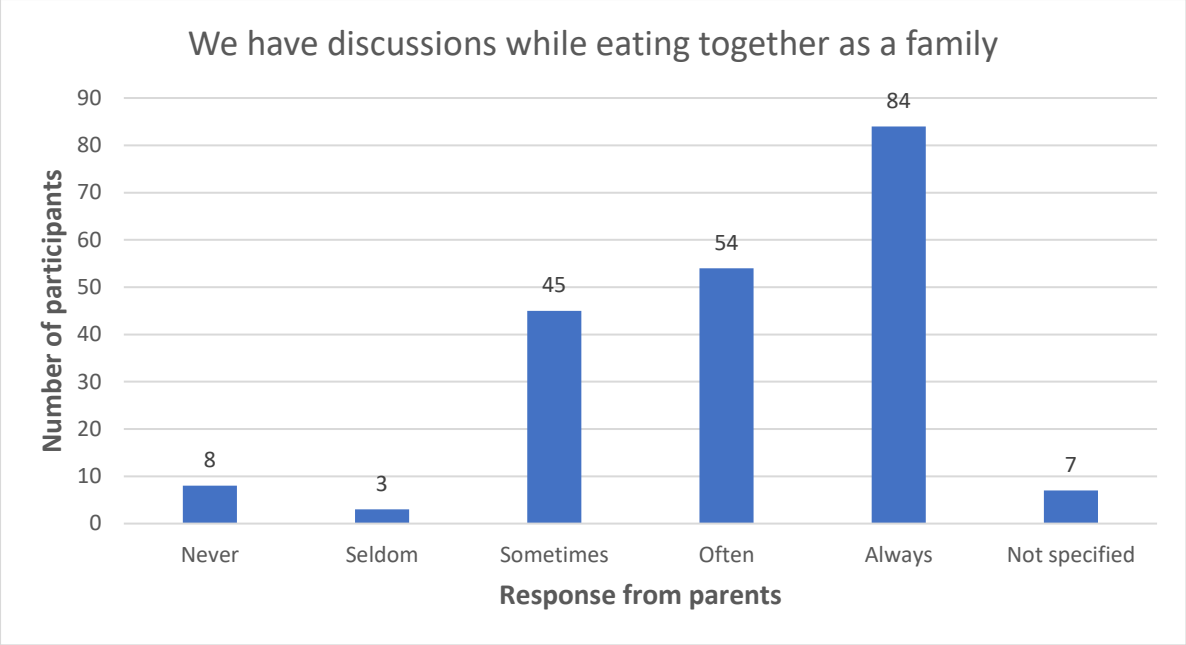

Figure 72: Parents' responses regarding eating dinner together as a family

Of the families who eat together, many consistently do not spend this time speaking to one another. As explained by one participant, dinnertime in the family does not look the same every day. Some days they watch television together; other times they sit at the dinner table:

> *"Dinner time we normally sit in the dinner table; sometimes we will eat in front of the TV; it will depend. And sometimes my husband is at work and sometimes he is at home. So, it will depend on the situation."* (Participant 11)

This might also be affected by the amount of energy the parents have. Some parents might be too exhausted to engage in conversation and choose to eat dinner in front of the television, while other parents use this time to catch up with the family. It might also be that parents who have more time during the day to speak to their children do not necessarily need dinnertime to catch up with their children; whereas families with limited time might use this opportunity to speak to their children.

Reading books to children and engaging in shared reading is another valuable way in which parents can spend quality time with their children. The graph below depicts the parents' responses regarding the importance they attach to reading with children:

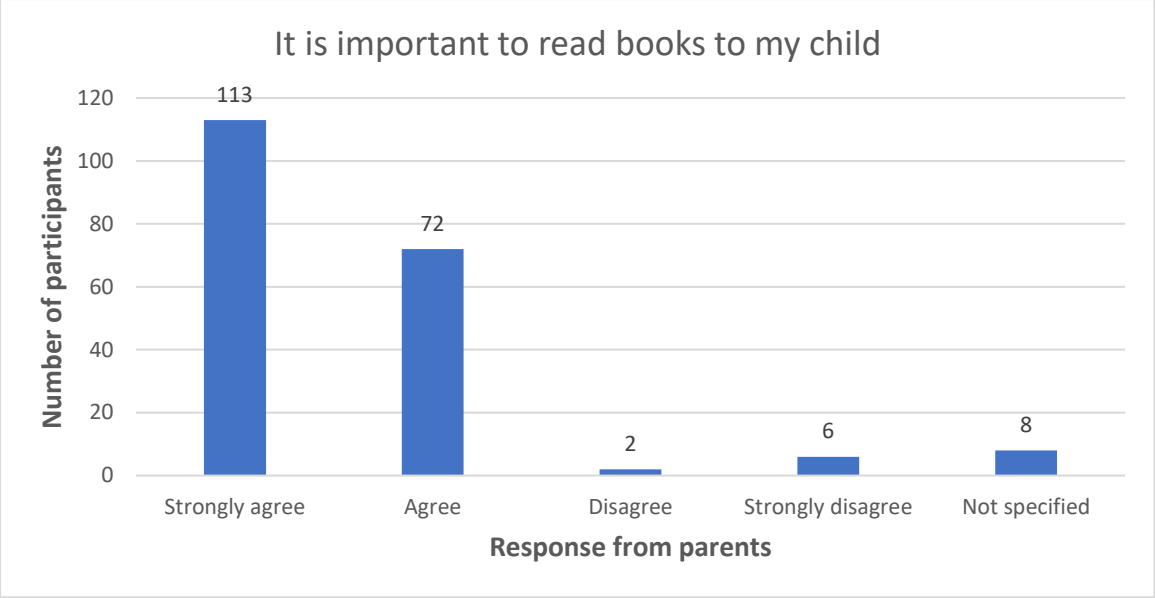

Figure 73: Parents' responses regarding the importance they attribute to reading

As reflected above, almost all the parents believe that it is important and valuable to read books to their children. Despite this perception, few of the parents consistently read books to or with their children:

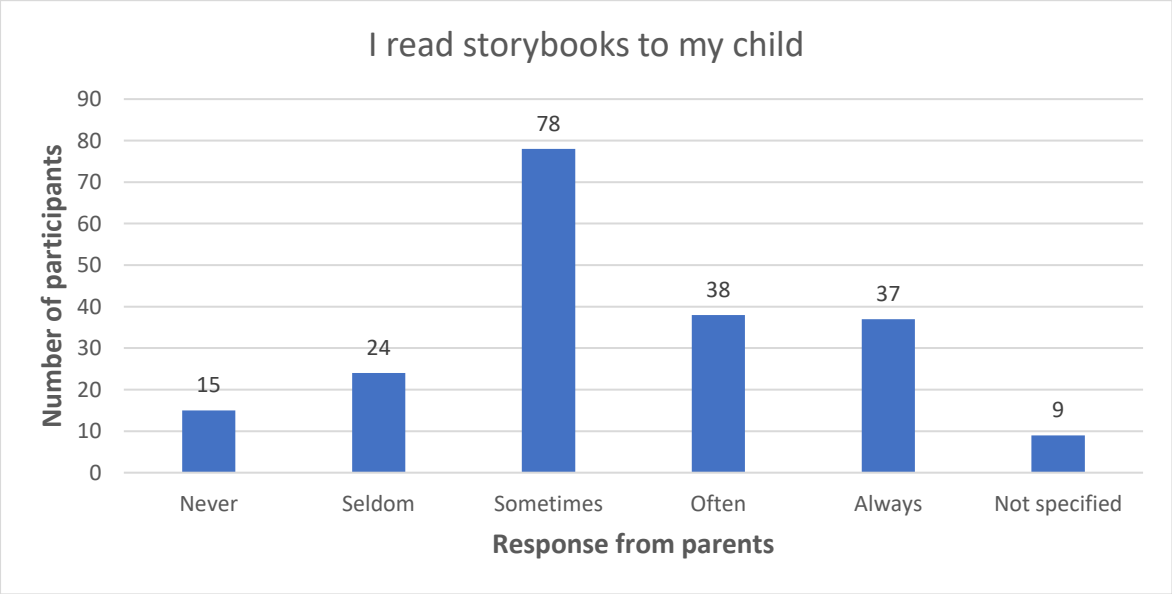

Figure 74: Parents' responses regarding reading to their children

Even though reading is something that is done from time to time, it does not seem to be part of the routine or common practice for many of the families. This might again be influenced by the amount of time and energy available and possibly access to

reading material. The graph below depicts the degree to which books are readily available at home:

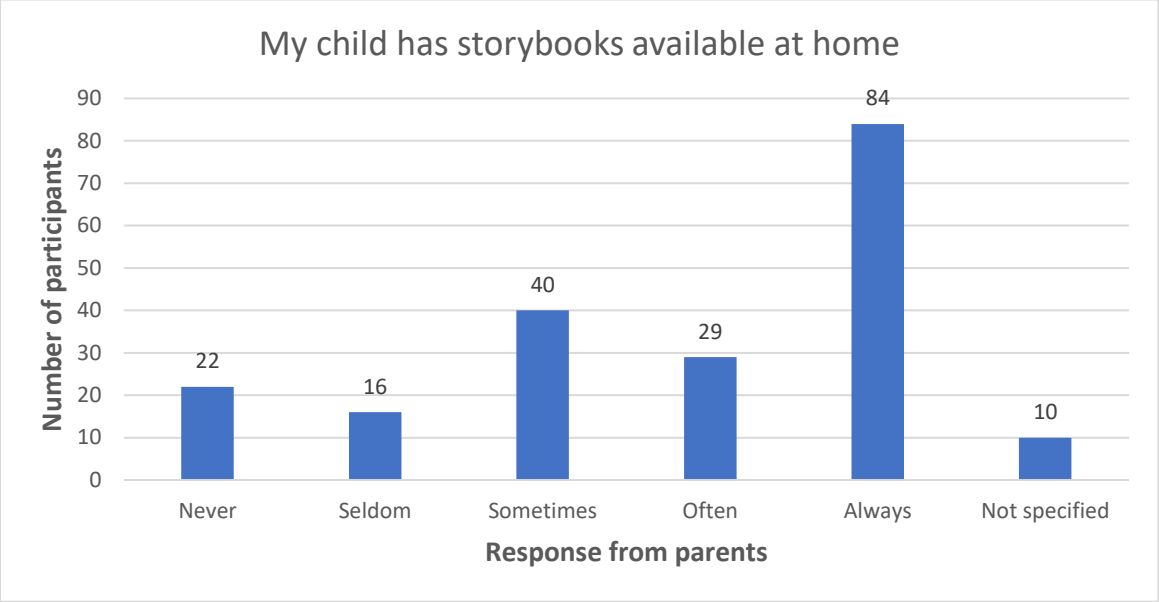

Figure 75: Parents' responses regarding the availability of storybooks

Of the 201 participants, 84 (42%) always have storybooks available at home. This number is greater than the participants who frequently read to their children. Although availability and access to reading material might be a challenge for several families, it suggests that even those who have access to storybooks do not often read to their children. One participant explains that because access to books is limited, it would require her either to buy books or to visit the local library:

> *"… [The school] they don't give out the storybooks so they can read. So, I saw it's important, it's better for me to go and buy one or two, bit by bit, or I was even thinking of sometime take her to the library."* (Participant 7)

While visiting the local library is a possibility, it would again require time and energy from the parent to do so. Another parent indicates that even though his daughter is interested in books, he does not have the skills needed to read to her:

> *"The book… nah. […] She does sometimes, because she will say story, story, this and this. […] Actually, she is the one that says the story to us. Meaning she is interested but I think she needs someone who is willing to help her in those stories.*

I think she likes stories because she will say, 'Pappa, let me tell you this story'. […] For me, it's like… uh, maybe I must train myself to do that." (Participant 6)

Moreover, other participants indicated that their children are not particularly interested in having their parents read to them:

"He usually comes with a book he is interested in from friends; then, he will ask me to read for him. But when I just take any book, if I want to read to him, he is not interested. I don't know why." (Participant 3)

"The challenge is that he likes to play when he is supposed to read and doesn't concentrate." (Participant 2)

There are various reasons why the parents are not reading to or with their children. It is another activity that would require time and energy from the parents. In addition, even though the parents do not have to be educated to read to their children, it is likely that the children will not enjoy this activity if their parents are not fluent readers. As an alternative, some parents may prefer telling stories to their children as opposed to reading a book. This is reflected in the graph below:

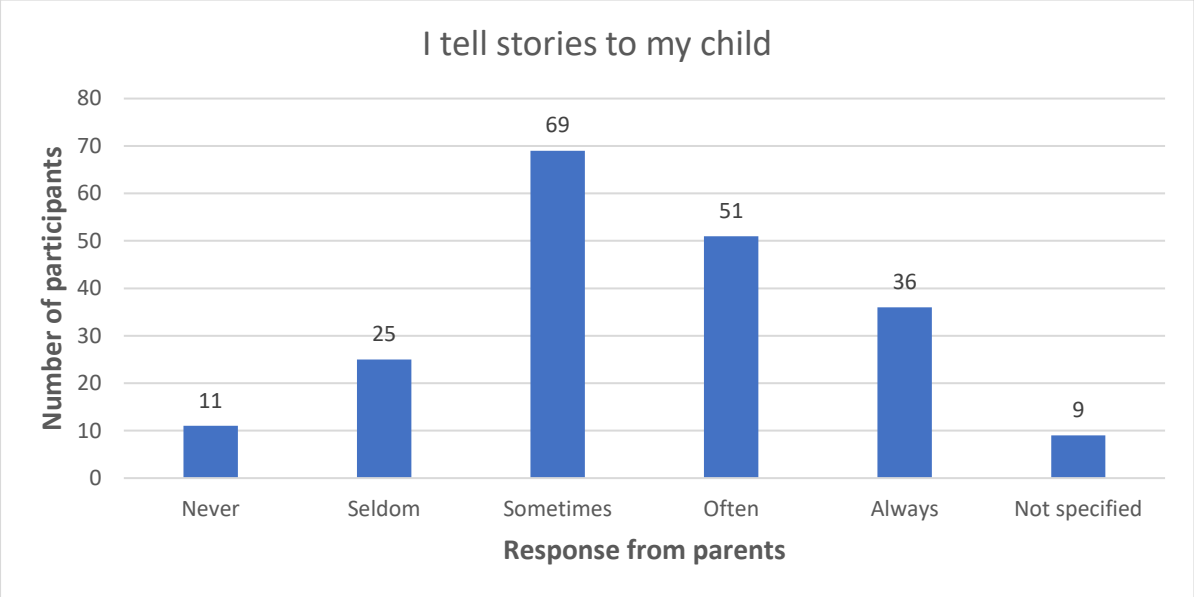

Figure 76: Parents' responses regarding storytelling

There appears to be more parents who tell stories to their children than those who read to them. One of the reasons for this might be that resources are not required to tell stories, and the parents do not need to be fluent readers in order to make it enjoyable for the children. Families who are more traditional might further value and enjoy passing down stories from generation to generation.

Instilling a routine at home is another way in which parents can be engaged. This could allow children to experience a sense of security through consistency and enable them to know what is expected of them. Some parents have explained what their child's routine looks like during the week:

> *"… before she does her homework, […] TV because she likes to watch Popeyes. […] I will give her time to do her homework, I will help her and then after that she will go to bath and then eat and go to bed."* (Participant 1)

> *"After school, usually I would take her to her aunt, then there's a cousin of hers, she is doing Grade 1. […] then they will read a storybook. I just leave them to be, then after maybe 45 minutes or an hour, we go home. […] she does what she has to do, polishes her shoes, then after that she goes to play but after playing, in early evening, before she goes to bed, then we read again. That's the routine I am trying to get her in."* (Participant 5)

> *"… she has got some chores that she has to do before everybody can go to bed because she is not washing dishes yet because she is young, but we have got some smaller tasks for her. We have got small tasks and then we are going to increase the volume of the task as she grows. […] like everybody is having some nice responsibilities at home."* (Participant 9)

The children's routines mostly seem to involve daily chores around the house. This suggests that parents value the importance of teaching children to take responsibility at a young age and to ensure that everyone in the family has a role to play. Homework also seems to take priority in these routines, as the parents make sure their children complete their homework daily.

Bedtime is an important part of routine for children; however, less than half the participants indicated that their children have a consistent bedtime throughout the week:

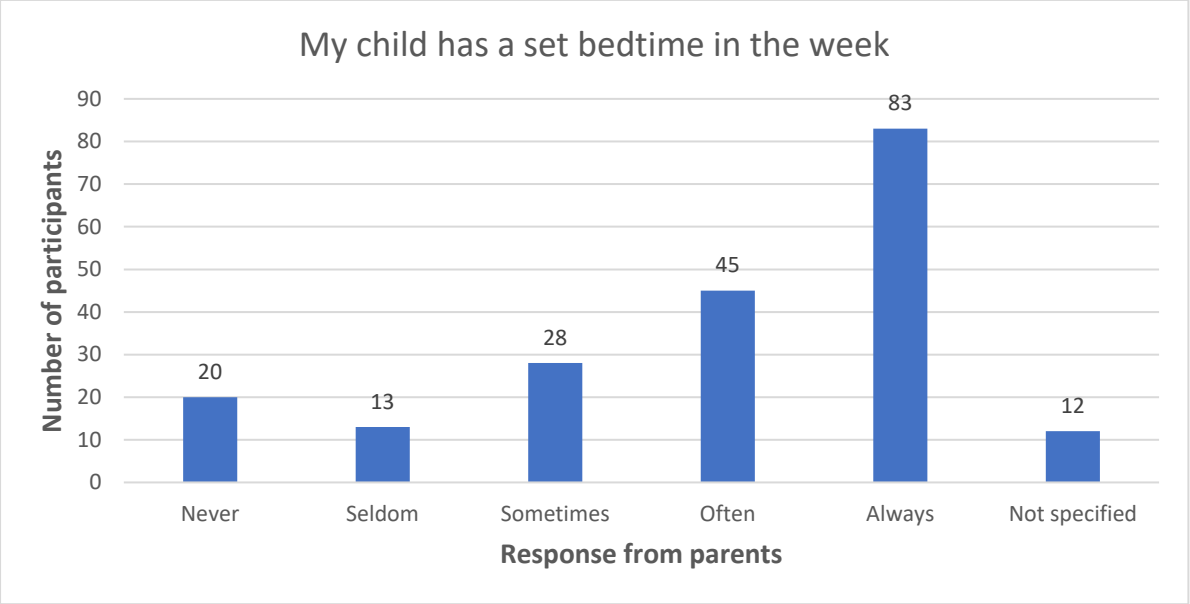

Figure 77: Parents' responses regarding their children's bedtime routine

Although not all the children have a consistent bedtime, many of the parents indicated that they instil strict rules at home:

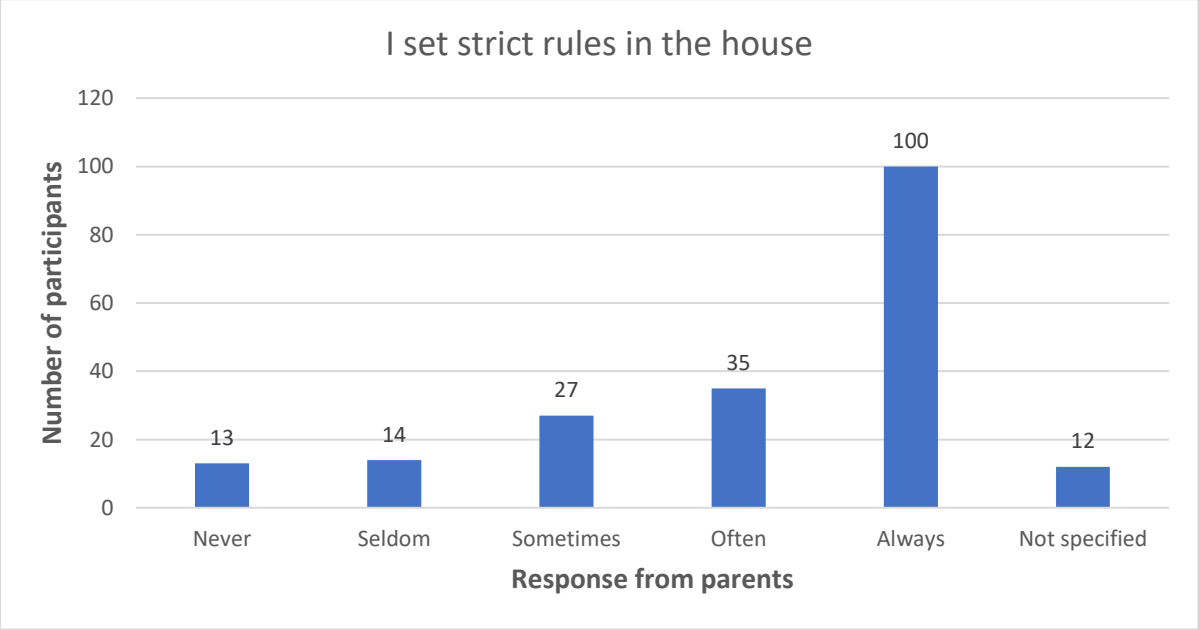

Figure 78: Parents' responses regarding house rules

The parents' responses above might be influenced by the fact that the school requires the parents to discipline their children; thus, they tend to prioritise rules in the home. However, 54 participants (27%) indicated that they do not consistently instil strict rules at home. Again, the reason for this is unknown, but it might be that some children require less rules than others do or that the parents lack the time and energy to ensure consistency in maintaining these rules. As mentioned previously, some of the parents might also not know how best to discipline their children as they tend to look to the teachers for guidance.

Goalsetting is an easy and manageable way of encouraging children to show commitment toward their schoolwork and thus is a form of engagement. It could also be used to encourage children in other areas such as co-curricular activities, behaviour and habits. Many of the participants indicated that they assist their children in setting goals:

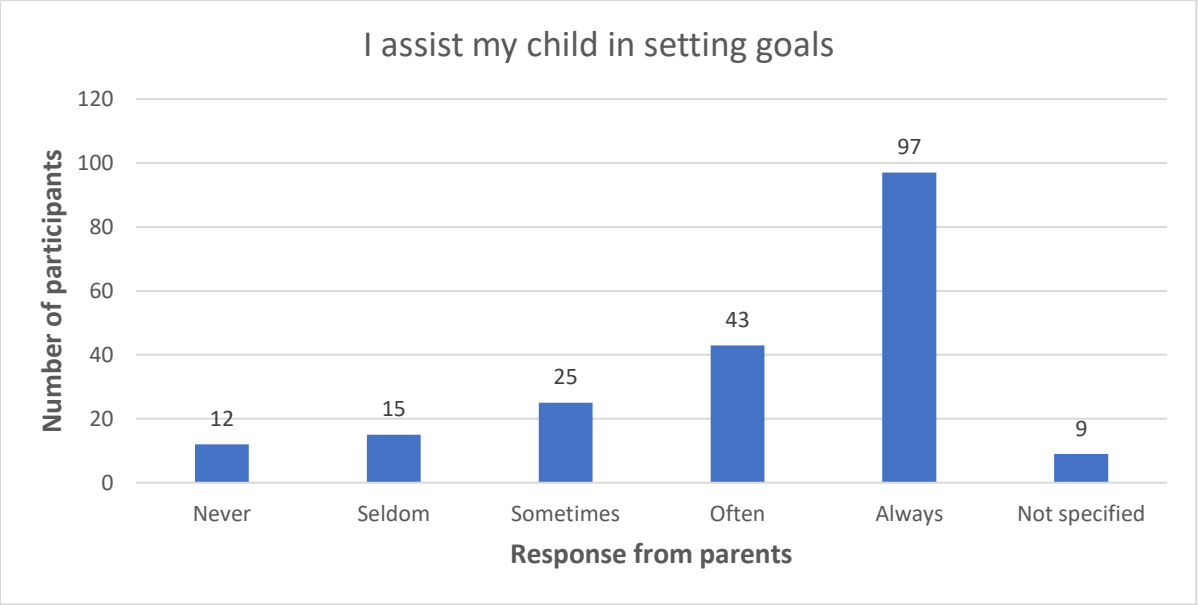

Figure 79: Parents' responses regarding goalsetting

Of the 201 participants, 140 (70%) indicated that they often or always assist their children in goal setting. Even though it is unclear whether these children are consistently encouraged to work towards these goals or held accountable for them, it is suggested that the children know what is expected of them and what they should

work towards. This is further reflected in the fact that the majority of the parents indicated that their children know what is expected of them academically:

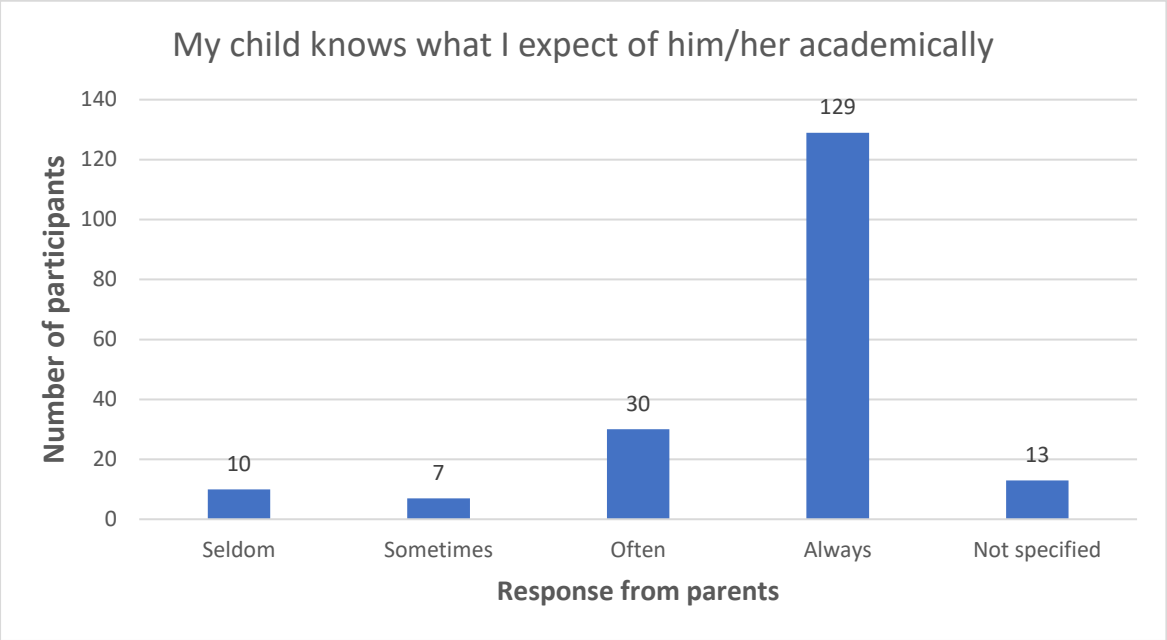

Figure 80: Parents' responses regarding their children's knowledge of expectations

Finally, it is important to encourage and praise children when they meet certain requirement, achieve a goal, behave well, or perform well in a particular task. This is a valuable and easy form of engagement, which could have a significant impact on a child. Almost all the parents indicated that they praise their children for work well done:

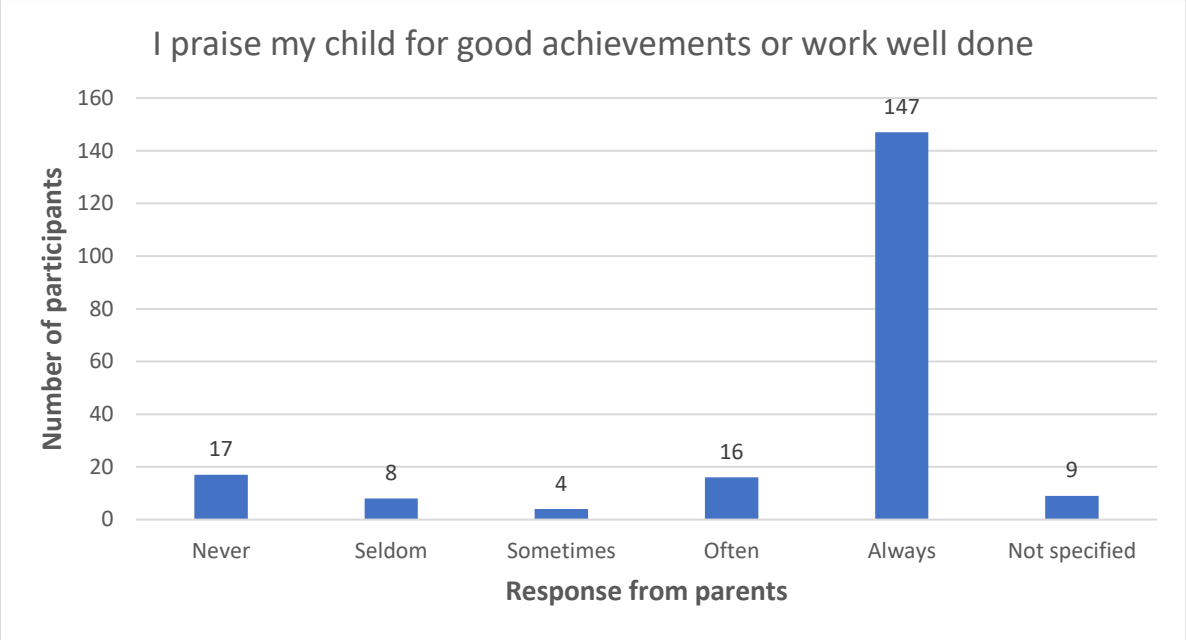

Figure 81: Parents' responses regarding praising their children

The parents seem to vary in the ways and degrees to which they engage in the learning of their children. It is unclear why the parents do or do not participate in these engagement activities. There might be a variety of reasons and it is likely to differ from one family to the next. It is important to note that this analysis is only based on a few selected engagement practices and is not necessarily a direct indication of how engaged the parents are.

It is also necessary to bear in mind that only 201 foundation phase parents participated in this study, and it can therefore not be considered as a reflection of the whole foundation phase. It is likely that the parents who are generally more involved at school and who are often engaged in the learning of their children are the ones who participated in this study. As mentioned previously, there are several parents within the foundation phase of the school who are unreachable and who hardly ever contact the school or the teachers. It is also likely that the parents who did not participate in the study experience more severe challenges regarding engagement in the learning of their children. This analysis does, however, provide an idea of what parents understand as engagement (i.e., primarily assistance with homework) and which activities are prioritised over others. Although the details and the parents' reasoning

regarding these practices are not provided in this analysis, more information was provided by the 16 participants who engaged in the action research process.

5.5 The Action Research Process

As discussed in Chapter 4, a workshop was held with the 16 participants who agreed to engage in the action research process. An action plan was collaboratively decided upon by the participants and me. The action plan was guided by and based on the three broad areas of engagement as identified in the conceptual framework, namely, parenting, learning at home, and communication with the school. The ideas and discussions shared by the participants at the workshop were documented and used to develop an action plan. These discussions allowed the participants to reflect on and share their current circumstances, challenges, available time, resources, and abilities. The participants willingly engaged in these discussions and made valuable contributions. The action plan took into consideration the fact that the parents have limited time available at home and limited resources, and that some of the parents are not adequately literate. The action plan, therefore, consisted of easy and time-efficient activities that could be applied by parents of various socioeconomic backgrounds. The participants applied the agreed upon practices over a period and then provided feedback on their experiences. The action plan and its aims are presented in the diagram below:

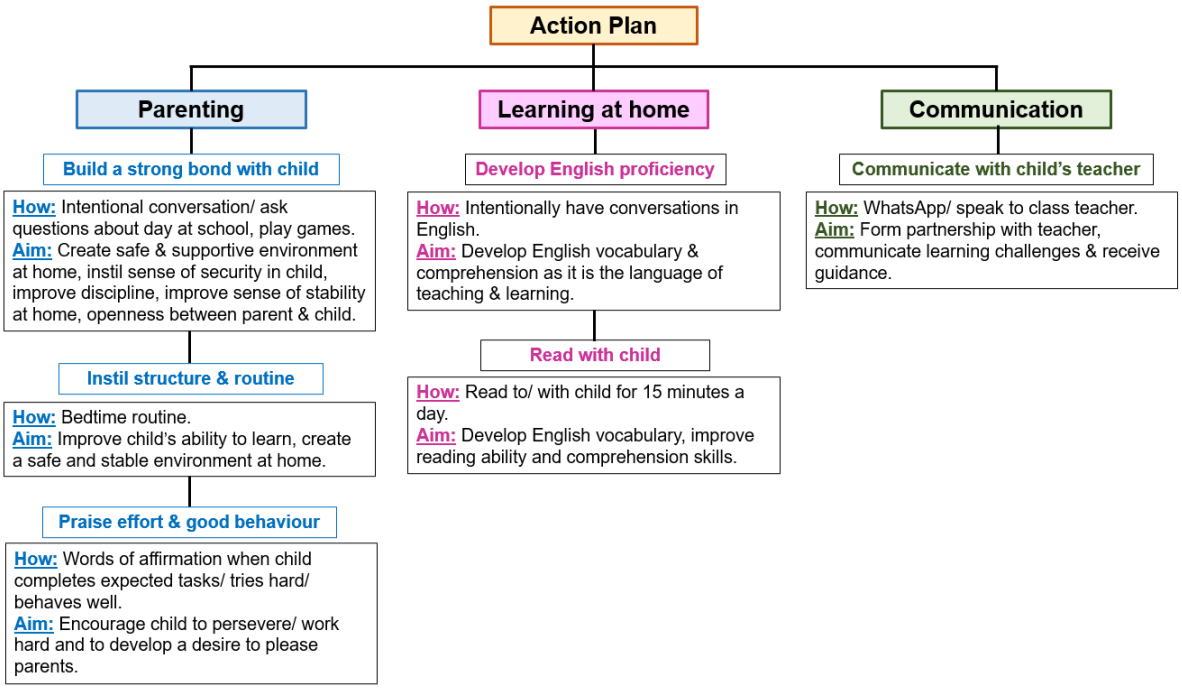

Figure 82: Action plan and its aims

This section of analysis discusses the outcome of the action plan regarding the impact of the workshop on the participants' motivational beliefs, the implementation of practices, the challenges to implementation, and the practicality of the action plan.

5.5.1 The Impact of the Workshop on Participants' Motivational Beliefs

As discussed in Chapter 3, according to Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's model, parents' motivational beliefs constitute parents' role construction and their self-efficacy. Role construction refers to parents' beliefs and perceptions about their roles and responsibilities as parents in relation to their children's learning. These perceptions are significantly influenced by parents' understanding of child development and child rearing. Thus, if parents fully comprehend the impact of parenting and parental engagement on the learning of a child, their role construction would include and prioritise this engagement. In addition, parents' self-efficacy refers to parents' beliefs about the influence and substance of their actions and efforts. It is the perceptions they hold of their ability to make a difference in or impact the learning of their children. Therefore, if parents have a stronger sense of self-efficacy, they are likely to believe that their actions have the potential to positively impact their children's

learning and development (Hoover-Dempsey *et al*., 2007; Walker *et al*., 2005; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; 1995).

Several participants explained that the content discussed at the workshop had a significant impact on their role construction and self-efficacy. Before the workshop and their participation in the action research process, some of the participants were unaware of the importance of their role as parents in their children's learning. They believed that the school is responsible for all learning and development and that they did not have to play a part in this:

> *"Even me, before, sometimes I would complain, teachers are not doing things. But that workshop helped me to know that I am responsible for my son. […] I would always blame teachers […] No, you [as parent] must be on the forefront […] so I never knew that the foundation is from us as parents […] my eyes are open that I have to be there…"* (Participant 3)

> *"So, it is very important for a parent to take part, to take responsibility when it comes to school things. It is not only the responsibility of the teacher. Me as a parent also, I am supposed to take part there."* (Participant 7)

> *"… I was angry when they told me she is not doing this at school. I said 'No, it is not my job'. I give them the child to teach her, I am not a teacher […] I am not educated […] But at the workshop when you teach us to help the child; okay, it changed…"* (Participant 10)

There seems to be shift in their role construction as they realise that, as parents, they play a crucial role in the fundamental development and learning of their children. There also seems to be the perception, as indicated by Participant 10, that she did not have a role to play in her child's learning because she is not educated. The discussions that took place at the workshop, however, seems to have impacted the parents as they became more convinced of the importance of their role in the learning of their children, whether they are educated or not.

Perseverance was also briefly discussed at the workshop and the life of Thomas Edison was used as a source of inspiration. Even though this was not a main topic at

the workshop, some parents seemed to have been deeply affected and encouraged by it as they still referred to it several weeks later.

> *"… I really learned a lot from that story as it has encouraged me that, in life, even how many times you fail, like it is not because of failing, it's about your attitude […] In life you don't have to give up, it doesn't matter what the circumstances are."* (Participant 1)

> *"… I wasn't taking care of her, maybe I was so busy to help her, but I found out later that I have to fight to help her […] I still have a hope."* (Participant 10)

This story thus encouraged the parents to keep trying despite the many challenges they encounter and gave them a sense of hope. The parents gained confidence in their ability to make a difference in the learning of their children, despite low levels of education and minimal time available, which seemed to increase their level of perseverance:

> *"It doesn't matter if you are educated or if you are not, it doesn't matter if you are working or if you are not working […] That 30 minutes or 15 minutes that you have […] that is very important."* (Participant 4)

> *"… everything that you did for us on that day because if it wasn't for it, most of our kids would fail or we would have gave up on our child because to teach your child is not an easy thing. Grade 1…"* (Participant 1)

Once the parents understood more about the development of a child and the importance of providing a good foundation, they seemed to be encouraged that they too have a role to play in their children's learning. It is evident that the parents who were not engaged previously were unaware that they should be, and their lack of engagement was not a result of a lack of concern or interest.

5.5.2 Implementation of Practices

As discussed in Section 5.5, the action plan consisted of six practices, categorised under three broad areas of engagement, namely, parenting, learning at home, and

communication with the school (as identified in Epstein's typology of parental involvement). These practices are summarised in the diagram below:

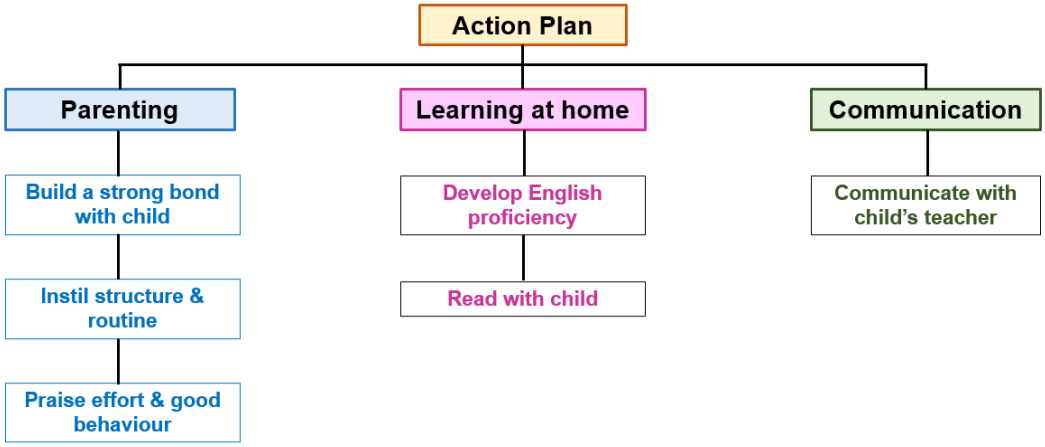

Figure 83: Summary of action plan

5.5.2.1 Developing a Bond with the Child

When the parents were asked what they learnt in the action research process, one of the main findings was that they should spend more time with their children. While the parents often take up a disciplinary role at home, building a meaningful relationship with their children was a new concept to some of the parents. In response, the children seem to be more open with their parents.

> *"Spend time with them […] They get to express themselves; they open up to say what is happening at school. Like my daughter – she always says what is happening at school and those things, so I think that is a good thing. I learned that part because sometimes we don't spend time with them…"* (Participant 6)

> *"When it comes to my daughter, since the workshop, I try to communicate with her…"* (Participant 4)

> *"What I learnt from the workshop is that we as parents, we have to engage with our kids; we have to give them attention […] We have to give them time…"* (Participant 1)

> *"… I learned a lot about how to treat a child; how to take care – the child must be free at home, I learned that. She must be open to talk to the parent."* (Participant 10)

Because of an improved parent-child relationship, the children seemed to be more willing to listen to their parents. Homework seemed to be affected the most. Previously, some of the parents would struggle to get their children to complete their homework; however, since the parents made more efforts to build a relationship with their children, the children seemed to be more willing to comply:

> *"…I was like, I will do this homework; if he doesn't want then I will leave, if he cries, I get angry and leave him like that. But now because the relationship is good, we don't fight anymore and it's only maybe one hour, 4 to 5; sometimes before one hour we are done because we don't fight. There's no fighting, there's nothing…"* (Participant 3)

> *"I don't have to fight, he is willing to do homework […] he says, 'No, Mommy can you come and please help me, I want to do homework'…"* (Participant 11)

One parent stated that the improved relationship between her and her child has led to a better bond between the siblings:

> *"So, when you talk to them nicely, don't always shout. […] They understand, they change completely. […] and now he has love for his sister, and before, he didn't have love for his sister, so from the workshop I learned, even me, to make them be close, to love each other."* (Participant 3)

When parents are more intentional with their children, it seems to influence the children's attitude towards their parents; their willingness to be open and less stringent regarding discipline is necessary, as then the children are more inclined to behave. One parent, however, mentioned that building a relationship with her child is an area that needs attention. Since she did not have a healthy relationship with her parents, she finds it challenging to connect with her child:

> *"The thing I'm struggling with is the communication between me and my child, […] we don't have that good communication, […] but I think the problem is me, […] maybe my previous life affected me a lot. […] I don't give them attention, sometimes I'm becoming very short tempered; maybe sometimes she wants to play with me and I feel like crying. […] So, I think that is affecting her too […] but every time I try to control my temper. […] I don't want them to experience the life that I had before; so, every time I try."* (Participant 4)

The way in which the participants were brought up might have an impact on the way they relate to their own children. For the most part, however, the parents seem to make an effort to be more intentional with their children; this has yielded positive results.

5.5.2.2 Structure and Routine

One of the major practical changes that the parents implemented at home was a bedtime routine. Several of the parents indicated that they never had a bedtime for their children and that they did not realise how important it is. However, since a bedtime routine was implemented the children seem to be in a better mood and have more energy for the day ahead.

> *"But since I attend that workshop, I told her you must sleep at 8 o' clock every day now so that you have enough time to sleep […] and I noticed that when she sleeps earlier, in the morning, she wakes up earlier and she wakes up happy. She wakes up better."* (Participant 4)

> *"… now at least he knows the time to go to bed, […] We used to leave him in the sitting room; he will come to bed, maybe 11, 10, anytime he wants, […] but now it's 8 and it's stable. […] And before we used to fight in the mornings to wake up…"* (Participant 3)

> *"She goes to bed at around 7:30 to 7:45. Just before 8, I make sure. […] I tried to drill it in after the workshop. Before, it wasn't the routine; she would just go to bed when she feels like it. […] She doesn't fight, sometimes she just goes without us telling her it's bedtime. […] and even in the morning, we don't struggle when she has to wake up."* (Participant 5)

For the most part, the children seem to have adjusted well to the routine, as they are willing to go to bed at the set bedtime. Some children even go to bed on their own without their parent having to tell them. This suggests that their bodies have adjusted to the routine. As a result, children wake up in a better mood and seem to have more energy for the day ahead.

Some of the parents have struggled to implement the bedtime routine, as their children have not adjusted well to the new rules. Despite this, the parents seem positive and continue trying to do so.

> *"… sometimes we will have an argument, she will want to sleep my time with me, and I will tell her, you are going to school tomorrow. […] She will want to wait for me until I sleep. So, you see it becomes a little bit difficult but I am managing."* (Participant 7)

> *"… he's trying to sleep early and trying to do that routine […] It's difficult because he used to watch the cartoons and go to bed but […] sometimes I have to be strict and say "No, go to bed, tomorrow is a school day' and then he will sneak out maybe when I'm sleeping, then he will go and watch the cartoons. […] sometimes when he goes to bed late, he is tired in the morning and then he told me that he can't go to school; he has to sleep at school because he is tired."* (Participant 11)

Even though implementing routine as one of the practices was not restricted to bedtime, it was the most practical option for parents, as the majority of them did not have a bedtime routine in place. One mother explains that she bought her son a watch and told him what to do as certain times of the day, such as bedtime and homework. This way, her child knows what to expect and what is expected of him and this approach seemed to work well:

> *"The homework we were doing any time that time, but since now it's 4 o'clock. […] He knows that 4 o'clock I must go do homework. Now at least he knows the time also. I bought a watch so now he knows, this is 4 o'clock, I am teaching him. Before we used to fight."* (Participant 3)

Having a more structured routine seems to have had a significant impact on both the children and their parents. There seems to be fewer arguments about waking up and doing homework, as children know what is expected of them, and they have adjusted well to the routines.

5.5.2.3 Praise and Encouragement

Almost all of the participants experienced success and positive results when implementing the practice of praise and encouragement. The participants were pleasantly surprised to see how impactful words of praise and encouragement can be, as their children are more motivated and seem to want to please their parents:

> *"… I even told her about that story […] of the man that was trying to create the light. She was very happy, so each and every time, she says, 'Today I didn't pass my test but one day I will be like that man, Mommy that you told me about.' She is better now."* (Participant 4)

> *"I do praise my child, I will give her high 5s, […] even if maybe she didn't get the total, I will encourage her to work more harder. Yes, and after I praise her, she will be smiling and be active and want to help me with something."* (Participant 1)

> *"… When he listens to those praises, he knows that, oh, my mum trusts me so let me make her happy also."* (Participant 3)

> *"She becomes very much happy because when I say, 'Well done my daughter, you are so beautiful' and just pat her or maybe give her a hug or something, she feels very, very great. You can see her jumping to show that you know that she feels good; she feels very much happy."* (Participant 9)

All the children seem to respond well to words of affirmation from their parents. The participants indicated that their children light up and seem to gain energy when they receive praise. The praise and encouragement further seem to have an impact on the children's confidence as they feel more capable of completing their homework and are motivated to perform well:

"Yes, more especially this thing of the patterns. […] she will be like, 'No, I cannot do this', and then I tell her, 'There is nothing that is impossible. You can't say that you cannot do it. Try until you get it right, just keep on trying'. […] now, she will just take the book and do the pattern; I no longer teach her how to do the pattern and everything." (Participant 7)

"… He doesn't say 'This is hard' anymore. He used to say, 'No, this is hard. I am not going to do that'. […] He tries to make me a proud mom." (Participant 3)

"Now she is more confident because I taught her that now you have to trust yourself every time, […] you have to tell yourself that I am a go-getter. So, every time even when we do homework, we don't fight anymore, because before we used to fight until maybe I give up…" (Participant 4)

"I say high 5, everything, when she does something right, in that moment, you say 'High 5, very good girl'. She feels happy, every time. Even when she is doing the math, she enjoys it. Maybe I am cooking, she is busy, and she comes to show me, 'See how I do it'. I say 'Well done'." (Participant 10)

"He becomes happy because every now and then when we praise him, he enjoys to do work. It is encouraging a lot." (Participant 11)

When the parents praise their children's effort, they seem to gain confidence in their own abilities and are more willing to push through challenging tasks. In addition, the more the parents seem to praise their children, the more the children want to please their parents and make them proud. Again, this has resulted in children being more willing to do what is expected of them, and there is less of a need for strict discipline measures.

Among some of the parents, there seemed to be a misunderstanding of the praise that was meant to be implemented. While the parents were encouraged to praise their children through words of affirmation, some of the parents thought that it involved rewards. For this reason, one parent felt that he did not want to "bribe" his children:

"… if they have to do something, they have to do it, there shouldn't have to be any bribery; do this and I will give you this, because that's not how we were brought up

you know […] Though you know, it's something that doesn't come naturally. You just have to learn that as you go along…" (Participant 5)

"I always say, 'You've worked hard my boy,'. Always. He's so happy and […] he promised that this term he is going to get from 80 to 90 and he said that in return we must buy him a bicycle and we promised that. […] He knows that we are impressed with him, and when he's watching TV, he's trying to read. He thinks that we don't like him that he doesn't know how to read yet." (Participant 3)

While rewarding children may be a good incentive and encourage them to work towards something, it is not what was expected for the action research process. In addition, another parent mentions that praising his child is something that he does not like to do; again, this seems to be something that does not come naturally to him:

"I just say, 'You have done it well, but you must do more'. […] I don't like to praise them too much…" (Participant 6)

As reflected above, this parent does not seem to be fully convinced of the benefits and importance of praising children. The reason for this is not clear. For the most part, however, the parents made an effort to identify the good in their children and to praise them for work done well. This has resulted in motivated and more confident children.

5.5.2.4 Language Development

The parents were encouraged to speak some English to their children every day to improve their vocabulary. The practice was not fully implemented among the participants and thus it seemed to be less impactful. However, some parents made an effort to do so, and they saw positive results. One parent mentions that her daughter has gained confidence to understand and speak to her peers and teachers, and another participant explains that he has encouraged the whole family to develop their vocabulary:

"When it comes to communication, she didn't communicate well, but now, since I try to talk to her like how you showed us, I repeat everything I say to her, allow her to ask questions, now she is very better. […] Even her teacher told me that now

she tries to communicate with her and other assistant teachers and other kids." (Participant 4)

"I suggested to the family, [that] we need to check a number of words a day because I want them to expand their vocabulary. And then when you check a word that you don't know, you do the syllables of the word and then you check how do we use the word in a sentence because that assists you to expand your knowledge and then you will be fluent at the end of the day ..." (Participant 5)

In addition, one participant switches between English and their home languages to assist her child in understanding English words better:

"… I will just pronounce it in Tswana or Xhosa, I will say 'What is this word in English?'; then she will say 'Door, yes, it is a door'. So, sometimes I make it easier for her instead of just telling her everything; I'm even testing her knowledge by saying it with her language and saying to her 'What does it mean in English?'…" (Participant 7)

A few participants did not implement this practice at home. Some parents are not fluent English speakers; therefore, they find it challenging to develop their children's vocabulary:

"Sometimes you see, I am from the rural areas; it's difficult even to speak the English. Even to help the child for the homework, it was difficult." (Participant 10)

"… like my school was in a very, very rural area, so we didn't have the opportunity to speak English. […] I taught myself English when I get here in Johannesburg when I speak to other people; when I go to Wescol, that's when I start to know the better words of English because before I was lost when someone speaks English. So, we have to try our best for our kids…" (Participant 4)

As reflected above, one parent is motivated to assist her child in English despite the fact that she struggles with English herself because she does not want her children to struggle the way she did. Another participant explains that this practice was difficult to implement because she has limited time with her daughter at home and the person

who looks after her in the afternoon does not speak English. Consequently, the daughter mostly develops her English vocabulary at school:

> *"… last time you said we must speak English more often. So, the thing is, I was having little time with her, so I can't. The people who are taking care of her during the day, they are not doing the same thing. […] I can hear she is improving, because each and every day she spends a lot of time at school, she speaks English every day."* (Participant 8)

Although some of the parents did manage to speak English to their children and made a point of developing their vocabulary, compared to the other practices, the participants did not seem to invest as much time and energy into this practice.

5.5.2.5 Reading

The participants were encouraged to read with their children for 15 minutes a day. The parents reiterated that they did not realise how important it was for them to read with their children. They were also relieved to know that only 15 minutes a day would be enough to make a difference. As they invested this time, the children seemed to have responded well and even reminded their parents to read with them when they forgot:

> *"She enjoys it too much. Even when I am forgetting, 'Mummy, you are forgetting the storybook', I have to wake up, 'Okay, let's do it for 15 minutes'. Serious, I don't know. I wasn't doing it before, and I was never knowing how it is important like this. […] Even if we go to the shop, she gets stuck there in the books. The books. She's enjoying it a lot and she likes reading. Even says, 'Look, mom, read it for me, what do they say?' […] I am trying."* (Participant 10)

> *"But on that day, I think I learned so much, especially when it came to the amount of time you have to spend reading for the child because we have this misconception of maybe we have to spend something like an hour forgetting that their concentration span is short to go over a long period of time."* (Participant 5)

One of the parents states that she has worked it into the bedtime routine, which her child seems to enjoy:

> *"That's his sleeping time that one; every time he says, 'I want to go to bed. Can you please read for me, because I want to sleep'."* (Participant 11)

Reading with their children is another way for the parents to spend time with their children, even if it is only for 15 minutes. It is time devoted to the children when they know that they have their parents' undivided attention. Some of the parents went beyond simply reading with their children and encouraged their children to ask questions, or they tested their children's understanding of the story:

> *"I've been doing some readings with her – read the story and then ask her some questions. She enjoys that a lot because at the moment I could see that there are some words for her grade which are kind of bigger for her and also the manner in which she pronounces the words; I assist in that as well."* (Participant 9)

> *"… at the school they used to give them the short stories, then I read with her, then she says, 'Mommy stop, I want to read also'. Then she reads exactly like me and then when I go back I say, 'Just show me the word like'; maybe she will show me the word like, show me the words 'Jim likes to eat jam', maybe she will show me those words."* (Participant 4)

Similar to language development, one parent explains that he uses his home language to test whether his daughter understands what is being read:

> *"I think after the workshop, […] that very same week I put it into practice. […] told her to get the storybook, she reads and then after she reads that, she will explain it to me in our vernacular language so that I will see if she really understood. […] She enjoys that, you know…"* (Participant 5)

Overall, the children seem to enjoy reading with their parents. The participants have used this as an opportunity to spend time with their children and to develop their children's vocabulary and language proficiency through shared reading. The children seem to be actively engaged in this activity and encourage their parents to continue doing this.

Some participants indicated that they did not implement this practice at home. The reasons are unclear but there seems to be more focus on reading the spelling words for the week than on reading a story:

> *"… most of reading we will be doing the preparing her for spelling test and then on the homework they will tell us which part should we read for them; they must know how to read, that's the only reading that we are doing."* (Participant 8)

Although the reasons for not implementing reading are unclear, available time and energy might be a factor influencing this.

5.5.2.6 Communicating with the Teacher

Communicating with the teacher was a practice where change was not indicated. The participants were encouraged to contact their children's teachers from time to time to monitor their children's progress. They were also encouraged to ask the teachers for guidance and advice, when needed. Based on the feedback, it seems as though the parents who were already speaking to teachers, continued to do so, and those who did not, did not make an additional effort to do so. Again, it is important to remember that some teachers are more approachable and proactive regarding communication with parents than others.

One parent indicated that the teacher takes a long time to respond to messages, and consequently she has simply stopped trying:

> *"… it was regarding the dropping of the marks, that's when I spoke to her. Normally we don't have that communication because if I can be honest with you, she is that person; when you can send a message now, she will respond after two days or three days; so, that is why I don't even bother myself to communicate with her anymore…"* (Participant 7)

Another factor that affected easy communication with teachers was the COVID-19 regulations. The parents were not able to meet with the teachers as easily as before

and the parents did not attend parent meetings as frequently as in previous years. This seems to have had a bearing on the parent-teacher relationship as well:

> *"The teacher, for now because of Coronavirus, we are not like close, have close relationship because of Covid, but last year, for Grade 1 we do have a nice relationship with teacher."* (Participant 11)

> *"No, since I met her the first day, January, when I brought her stuff for school. I think that was the only time I met the teacher."* (Participant 6)

Some of the participants regularly communicate with the teacher via WhatsApp; however, this was already taking place before the action research. Thus, the workshop and the action plan did not seem to have much bearing on this.

5.5.3 Challenges to Implementation

Even though the action plan consisted of practices that were easy to implement and not time consuming, it still required the parents to be intentional about implementing these practices and to be willing to adapt to change in the home. Some of the parents managed to implement many of the practices despite having a full-time job and/or low levels of education. On the other hand, other parents, who seemed to have more time, struggled to implement the practices. It might be a reflection of their priorities or the degree of importance they attribute to these practices. It might not be possible to pinpoint the exact reason for this; however, the findings suggest that the parents who intentionally implemented the practices yielded multiple benefits and positive results.

For example, both Participant 8 and Participant 1 have full-time jobs, pressure from work, limited time, and limited energy:

> *"… my challenge it's sometimes, I got home very late because of work. Sometimes I feel like I do not give her too much time because I come being exhausted from work. So, I just try my best, but it's my challenge also […] the mining industry it's like, the pressure is too much as I'm working in the HR department; it's very, very challenging..."* (Participant 1)

> *"The workshop, most of the things that we talked at workshop it was the right thing, but to implement it, it's not easy. Shame, because I even tried to follow the steps; sometimes you are tired, she wants the attention, eish, you don't have the time. It was a good thing, but to implement it is not easy."* (Participant 8)

Participant 1 managed to implement most of the practices whereas Participant 8 did not. It is evident that Participant 1 experienced challenges in the process as she has limited time and feels exhausted when she arrives at home; however, she still managed to make time for her child and to engage in her child's learning, whereas Participant 8 struggled to do so. This might be indicative of their priorities, or their level of perseverance and their approach to challenges. This does not necessarily mean that Participant 8 cares less or is not interested in engaging with her child, but she does not seem to be as invested as Participant 1. Since many of the participants experience financial strain, low levels of education and limited time, but still implemented many of the practices, it is suggested that this action plan is possible for a variety of parents. It, however, requires commitment and consistency from parents.

Another challenge experienced by some of the participants is their English language proficiency. Participant 6, for example, mentioned that he did not remember anything from the workshop because he did not fully comprehend what was being said. Although he can speak and understand the language, he did not manage to keep up with the pace and the amount of content that was discussed. Consequently, he did not implement many of the practices, even though the practices were sent to him via WhatsApp after the workshop:

> *"Mmm, to be honest I even forgot what we did."* (Participant 6)

Even though he might have understood the practices that were sent via WhatsApp, he might not have fully grasped why these practices were necessary or what they entailed, as discussed at the workshop.

Language further seemed to cause some misunderstandings about what was expected of the participants in each of the practices. For example, as mentioned previously, the participants were encouraged to praise their children through words of

affirmation and not by giving them rewards; however, there was a clear misunderstanding among some parents at the workshop. Even though these participants were all able to speak and understand English, their proficiency might not have been at the required level to grasp all the concepts that were discussed.

Finally, even though the action plan aimed to incorporate activities outside of school-related work, the parents seemed to gravitate to homework. In most of the practices that were implemented, the parents would determine the success of the practice by examining its effect on the child's homework or his/her willingness to do homework. For example, praise encouraged children to work hard on their homework and to perform well; an improved parent-child relationship meant that children were more willing to complete their homework; and a set bedtime resulted in children being less emotional and resistant when it came to completing homework.

Even though these are all good and beneficial results, the parents still seemed to limit engagement to homework and school-based activities. Thus, the question arises: Would parents regard these practices important if it did not have a direct bearing on homework? Again, the goal is not to move parents away from homework, but rather to broaden their understanding of their role as parents in the learning of their children.

5.5.4 Workshop as a Viable Option for Managing Parental Engagement

This section of analysis discusses whether a workshop with parents is a viable option for managing parental engagement by considering parents' attitude towards the concept of a workshop, the academic and behavioural impact, and establishing support structures and its ripple effect.

5.5.4.1 Parents' Attitude Towards the Concept of a Workshop

As discussed in Chapter 4, many parents were invited to attend the workshop and to participate in the action research process. However, only 16 participants arrived on the day. While the reason for the poor response is unclear, it might suggest that some parents simply were not interested in a workshop, some might not fully understand

what a workshop is, some might not have had the means or energy to attend, and others might not have considered it important.

However, all the participants who attended the workshop responded positively and were generally appreciative of the opportunity. None of the parents felt undermined because they were being taught something, but rather indicated that they felt valued because someone took the time to invest in them. Many of the participants requested another workshop similar to this one:

> *"The workshop was very helpful because it was eye-opening because some of the things, we were not aware. […] It really helped so many people a lot and I also believe that it is not only me that is seeing this as a helpful thing because of, most of the things that you guys mentioned, most of other parents were not aware."* (Participant 1)

> *"You know, if we come up with such initiatives, and parents come and tell you their challenges then you heard them out at least, even if it benefits one or two parents, it is a benefit after all. You know, it makes a difference. Now, I will really recommend that maybe in the future, if you have time and whatever resources and organise such a workshop and invite those parents then, so that they can come you know."* (Participant 5)

> *"Definitely that workshop was so nice; I was thinking maybe it is going to be happen maybe again, I was thinking like that because I learned a lot about how to treat a child."* (Participant 10)

> *"I came because I saw it is a workshop; I like learning things. I like meeting new people, you learn a lot, you learn new things."* (Participant 3)

> *"I just want to say thank you for making time for us as parents, for […] attending to us because you saw how important for us to have this workshop, to help us as parents."* (Participant 7)

This suggests that the parents might generally be open to the idea of a workshop; they want to be helped and guided so that they could better engage with their children. As

mentioned by Participant 5, it was an opportunity for the parents to share their ideas and their struggles; an opportunity to be heard.

It is important to remember that the parents in the school do not know me. There is a possibility that if the workshop was held by the school, more parents would have responded favourably.

5.5.4.2 Academic and Behavioural Impact

As indicated by the participants, implementing some of the practices discussed at the workshop had an academic and behavioural impact on their children. Even though it was only one workshop session and only a few parents attended, it seems to have been effective among the families who fully engaged with the action plan:

> *"And the performance for this term is just perfect. […] He is more serious than before. Before I used to call the teacher, like to shout at him because he is giving me problems, and then the teacher will talk to him. He will listen, but now since that time, it's better, it helped a lot."* (Participant 3)

> *"… because March and June she didn't pass. So, September she passed English very well because even her teacher told us before that if she doesn't improve, she will repeat Grade 2. But, after I come from that workshop, I try hard, but now she is better. […] even now I am worried, but I have a little hope that maybe she must pass Grade 2."* (Participant 4)

> *"It did help me because when I check the marks for Term 2 and Term 3, I could see the difference. I tried to do all those things that we were taught. […] all the marks went up. […] step by step, at the end of the day, she made it and I was able to be there for her."* (Participant 7)

Because the parents could see the impact that their actions had on their children, they will be encouraged to continue with these practices. These parents made changes in their homes, which are likely to be long lasting, and they are excited to be a part of and contribute to their children's success.

5.5.4.3 Establishing a Support System

The workshop provided an opportunity for the parents to meet and connect with other parents as they discussed topics in small groups. It was here where the parents realised that they are not alone in their challenges, but that there are many other parents experiencing the same difficulties. This provided the parents with a sense of comfort and hope, as they were able to establish a small support system by sharing their contact details:

> *"But since that day, I see okay I am not the only one that has this problem. Every parent has different problems because I see when they share their views; okay I am not the only one…"* (Participant 4)

> *"I thought I am the one with my child who is struggling at school, especially speaking English, understanding the teacher, those kinds of stuff. […] I was so surprised, wow, I thought my child is the only one […] and I was so stressful."* (Participant 8)

Connecting with other parents also allowed them to bounce ideas off one another, to assist, and to confide in one another:

> *"There is a lady who, we were at the same table, we exchanged numbers. We will talk from time to time you know, just us. […] Then we will just text and say I am struggling with this, how do I go about this; then share ideas."* (Participant 5)

> *"We meet at school and chat a lot. When we know something, we don't understand, then we will ask each other maybe, 'What can I do about this; I don't understand the homework of this one'."* (Participant 11)

A workshop is an ideal opportunity for parents to meet other parents and to establish a support system among parents. As a result, parents feel less isolated and find comfort in being able to contact other parents who experience similar challenges. This could allow parents to learn from one another, to encourage one another, and hold each other accountable. As teachers might not always be approachable or available, it might be valuable for parents to establish this kind of support system.

5.5.4.4 A Ripple Effect

Even though only a few parents attended the workshop, they are now able to share what they have learned and experienced with other parents. The workshop therefore does not only impact the parents who attend the workshop, but also affects those who come into contact with these parents. Furthermore, if there were to be another workshop, there is a good chance that there would be a better turnout, as these parents would promote the advantages of attending such a workshop. Several participants mentioned that they have already discussed the workshop with other parents and family members:

> *"… I would tell parents that it also helps us, not only the kids but even the parents. You will learn more and then you will know that this, I am going to handle it like this, and this, I am going to handle it like this. They mustn't be lazy or think that this is useless or something. They mustn't think that it is not their job. […] I was also like that, as I have said, so I would encourage parents when there are workshops; please attend because you will learn more even you."* (Participant 3)

> *"… I also want other parents to get help like I get help that day. Because even also, my husband was not there that day but when I tell him everything that you said there, everything that you taught us that day, he was just surprised that, wow, I didn't even know all these things."* (Participant 4)

> *"I would recommend it to other parents because for me it helped me a lot."* (Participant 7)

Not only would these participants encourage other parents to attend the workshop, they could also use the knowledge and experience they gained to advise and assist other struggling parents:

> *"I also spoke to other people about this workshop. […] you will be challenged but you will also gain knowledge; you will also help other people that are struggling, you know."* (Participant 1)

> *"… There's this other parent, […] I recommended some of the things that you told us to him and what he should do because his daughter; it seems as if she is hyperactive…"* (Participant 5)

A workshop could therefore be a viable option to managing parental engagement as it provides an opportunity for parents to be heard, to connect with other parents and to form a support system, and then to further assist and guide other parents. Hence, it is suggested that a workshop has a ripple effect, in that a small group of affected parents could go and assist other parents, and so forth.

5.6 Conclusion

Based on the findings, it is evident that there is a need for a broader understanding of parental engagement among the school management and the parents as the focus is primarily on discipline, homework, and school-related activities. Moreover, the school management clearly plays a crucial role in shaping parents' perceptions of their roles and responsibilities in their children's learning.

Furthermore, there is a need for school policy regarding engagement to ensure all the stakeholders maintain an equal understanding of engagement and that they are aware of expectations regarding the promotion of parental engagement. Unfortunately, due to the excessive workload of the educators and school management, much of the parent-school communication and intervention is reserved for learners who present academic or behavioural challenges.

The findings further indicate that parents generally want to be engaged in their children's learning and development, and a lack of engagement is unlikely to reflect a lack of interest. Much of the responsibility of learning, however, is placed on the school and the parents seem to play a supportive role.

Finally, the workshop and the action research process seemed to have presented positive results as the participants noted academic and behavioural improvements in their children. There also seemed to be an improvement in the parent-child relationship and an overall increase in motivation among parents and children. A workshop could

be a viable option for managing parental engagement as the parents are able to share ideas, learn from one another, establish support systems, and in turn, assist and guide other parents.

This chapter presented and analysed the findings of the study. The next chapter provides a discussion on the analysis and findings presented in this chapter.

Chapter 6

Discussion of Findings

This chapter provides a discussion on the analysis and findings presented in the previous chapter. This discussion considers the principal and SMT's approach in managing parental engagement among parents with a lower socio-economic status by addressing the following: need for policy; existing school practice; negative perceptions of the school; the need for teacher training; parents as supporters of the school; a broader understanding of engagement; the need for parent education; and, workshops as a means of managing engagement.

6.1 The Need for School-Specific Policy

Even though national policies regarding engagement exist, school-specific policies are required to provide clear and feasible guidelines on how to implement these policies within the setting and environment of the school (Kimu & Steyn, 2013). While these national policies provide guidance on the expectations of school regarding engagement, it does not take into consideration the different contexts present in South Africa (Dichaba & Mohapi, 2018). It is therefore necessary that school-specific policies are drawn up to map out the implementation of these policies within the specific context of the school. *School A*, for example, has a combination of poor and affluent families, educated and uneducated parents, and different family dynamics; while *School B* has poverty-stricken families who are largely illiterate and do not understand nor speak English. School-specific policies are necessary to develop engagement strategies that are culturally and linguistically appropriate for the parent body of the school, which consider the unique challenges and inequalities that exist within the school (Myende & Nhlumayo, 2020).

It is therefore necessary that the management of the school be well informed on the unique challenges experienced by the parent body of the school regarding engagement. This does not only refer to challenges of a socio-economic nature but may include misinterpretations of the school's expectations and deficit perceptions

regarding their roles and responsibilities as parents. Efforts and approaches regarding engagement will be more effective if they are embedded in a strategy that is aimed specifically at the parents within the school (Jung & Sheldon, 2020). Being fully informed allows the management of the school to develop and establish school-specific policies that directly target the needs of the families within the school.

The principal of *School A* explained that he does not see a need for creating school-specific policies as SIAS (Screening, Identification, Assessment & Support), a national policy, monitors and manages school communication with parents. This statement is problematic on three points: firstly, the SIAS policy manages school communication with parents regarding barriers to learning and required support. This statement thus implies that keeping parents informed regarding the progress of their children is a sufficient approach to engagement; suggesting that informed parents are engaged parents. This communication, however, does not seem to go beyond informing parents; there is no indication that parents are further empowered to combat or address the challenges or barriers experienced by their children. Even though parents are informed about their children's progress, they are not necessary engaged or empowered to be engaged in the learning of their children. Secondly, the focus here is solely on communication with parents whose children experience academic or behavioural difficulties. Thus, it is not inclusive of all parents within the parent body and presents a negative perception of engagement; that is, that it is only necessary for families who experience challenges. Thirdly, the primary purpose and function of the SIAS policy is not to promote parental engagement in the learning of the children, and therefore cannot be considered a sufficient approach to engagement by the school (Department of Basic Education, 2014).

Furthermore, school-specific policies regarding parental engagement are essential as they emphasise the importance of engagement and hold the school management and educators accountable (Robinson, 2017). It thus provides clarity on the roles, expectations and responsibilities of the various stakeholders within the school regarding the promotion of engagement and the empowering of parents. These stakeholders can then be held accountable for meeting these expectations and responsibilities, ensuring the proactivity of all members of the school community.

The principal and SMT members of *School A* indicated that there are no school-specific policies regarding engagement. Thus, there is no indication that the management or educators are held accountable for their efforts in encouraging engagement among parents. As expressed by the SMT members, even though communication is highly encouraged between parents and educators, educators generally have freedom regarding their means and frequency of communication with parents. There are no specific guidelines or expectations regulating educators' interactions with parents; this has resulted in families experiencing different levels of interest and investment from educators and the school.

Principal 1 further explains that he is reluctant to establish a school-specific policy regarding engagement because he does not want parents to be forced into engagement. Parental engagement is something that parents should aspire to and have a personal desire for. While this may be true, his perception of policy is that it is rigid and that it strictly monitors the practices of educators and parents. Rather, policy should be a guiding tool, whereby the intentions and vision of the school are actualised. He also assumes that school-specific policies would govern parents' actions, but rather, school-specific policies should primarily be established to govern educators' actions and efforts with the intention of encouraging engagement among parents and empowering them to be engaged.

Finally, there appears to be a sense of hopelessness among the principal and SMT members regarding parental engagement. It has been accepted that parental engagement will always be a challenge; thus, limited effort is invested in correcting it. As indicated by one of the SMT members, parental engagement in the school has not improved over the past few years. At the same time, there is also no indication of a plan, initiative or policy aimed at rectifying or improving this issue. As explained by Nkosi and Adebayo (2020), school policies must be developed which outlines the expectations that the school has of parents, and the roles parents are to play with regard to the learning of the child. These policies may be used to ensure cooperation between the school, the parents and the community with the ultimate intention of creating suitable and conducive academic environments for children at school and at home (Zenda 2020).

6.2 Existing Engagement Practices Centred on Communication

Although the school does not have a school-specific policy aimed at parental engagement or parental empowerment to improve engagement, much effort is made to communicate with the parents and to keep them informed. The school seems to prioritise communication with the parents and aims to build positive relationships with them.

As stated by Myende and Nhlumayo (2020), it is the responsibility of the school to ensure that parents are continuously informed and reminded of the school's expectations. *Principal 1* strongly encourages all educators to communicate continuously with the parents and to keep them up to date with their children's progress. At the beginning of the year, all the parents are invited to a parents' meeting where educators communicate their expectations to the parents. In addition, the school makes use of Facebook and WhatsApp to communicate with the parents on a weekly basis. Thus, there is constant communication from the school to the parents. Educators also make their personal cell phone numbers available to the parents to create a medium through which the parents can initiate conversation with the educator. This provides an opportunity for the parents to ask questions regarding homework or to inform the educator of any possible challenges being experienced at home, which may affect their children's schooling. This is in line with Nkosi and Adebayo (2020) who suggest that schools should invite parents to meetings every term to provide continuous feedback on the progress and development of the child. It is furthermore importance to make use of communication mediums which are convenient and accessible to parents within a particular community. For this reason, Myende and Nhlumayo (2022) question the effectiveness of modern forms of communication in South African schools and suggest the use of other mediums in schools with limited communication infrastructure.

Communication between the parents and the school has been made easy and convenient for parents as they have direct access to the educators. However, it is evident that much of this communication is centred solely on the academic and behavioural progress of the children. While the parents indicated that they are well informed regarding the progress of their children and the areas needing support, they

also mentioned that they doubt that the school is aware of the challenges they experience at home. This suggests that communication between the educators and the parents rarely goes beyond academic matters. This does not necessary suggest that a poor relationship exists between the parents and educators, as the parents indicated that they frequently communicate with the class educators and that they have an open relationship with them. It might be indicative of the fact that the educators and parents have limited time available to engage in such conversations and prioritise the academic progress of the children. A study conducted by Nkosi and Adebayo (2020) in KwaZulu Natal, South Africa, mentions of the possibility of educators making home visits as a means of building and strengthening parent-teacher relationships. This would further allow educators to better understand the families and the children whom they teach outside of academic matters. While this would be ideal, one still needs to consider the time constraints experienced by teachers in South Africa and the number of learners in each class, and thus the unlikely feasibility of such home visits.

This is further reflected in the fact that the educators and the principal spend more time communicating with the parents whose children are problematic. As explained by SMT Member 1, the educators are rarely concerned about communicating with parents whose children perform and behave well; they would rather spend their time engaging with parents who have trouble supporting their children. This results in negative associations with school communication as the parents begin to assume that no communication is a good indication of the child's behaviour and progress at school. Thus, the school has adopted a culture of "No news is good news".

However, this does not suggest that the educators and the principal do not want to communicate with other parents, but rather that they are overwhelmed by the number of struggling learners who need additional support. While this is understandable, it is concerning that the school's only approach to encouraging parental engagement is communication. As much of this communication is reserved for problematic children, it again creates the perception that engagement is ultimately for families experiencing challenges; thus, it excludes a large percentage of parents. This is in line with a study conducted by Wolf (2020) in Ghana, where educators indicated that communication with parents were limited to the concerns they had about the children and rarely

engaged with parents about positive aspects or good progress. Consequently, parents have developed negative associations with school communication and have become unresponsive.

Jung and Sheldon (2020) explain that teachers are in the best position to communicate and build trusting relationships with parents. Even though the educators spend more time on struggling learners, the majority of the parents indicated that they frequently communicate with the class educator and generally feel welcomed at the school. This suggests that the educators still interact with all parents, even though more time is allocated to struggling families. The parents further indicated that they feel more comfortable speaking to their children's class educators, rather than confronting the principal directly. While the reason for this is not explicitly known, one of the SMT members explain that often parents feel intimidated by the principal.

This does not necessarily suggest that the principal is unwelcoming towards parents, as he has an open-door policy and does not show any parents away. It, however, may be a result of the fact that communication between the principal and a parent is often regarding poor performance or behaviour, causing parents to avoid such communication. Although many parents may feel intimidated and prefer speaking to the class educator, this does not appear to be the case with all parents. Several parents stated that they feel comfortable speaking to the principal and to have the opportunity to share their ideas and suggestions with him. Thus, there is a divide between parents who feel comfortable speaking to the principal and those who do not, and the reason for this is not made clear. As reflected in the findings, however, this may be influenced by the parents' confidence in their ability to make suggestions and share ideas. In addition, the lack of an opportunity to share ideas and suggestions may also be indicative of their access to the school and personal circumstances that impede their ability to do so. Based on the responses of some of the parents, it appears that the principal is generally welcoming towards parents and willing to listen to their recommendations.

Even though *School B* might communicate differently with parents, it is evident that, like *School A*, the primary approach to parental engagement is centred on communication. Due to the nature of the school community, *Principal 2* tries to provide

transport for parents to attend school meetings, and visits parents in their communities in cases of emergencies, or when families need support. While this is admirable and goes beyond what is expected of a school principal, it may not be a sustainable approach to encouraging engagement among parents as it involves personal financial sacrifices and legal risks for the principal.

As explained in Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's model (Chapter 3), school management plays an important role in establishing a school environment that is inviting, open, and inclusive of all parents. When parents feel welcomed and supported by the school, they are more inclined to be engaged in the learning of their children (Green *et al*., 2007; Walker *et al*., 2005). This is further supported by Jung and Sheldon (2020) who explain that school management plays a crucial role in determining whether schools are welcoming places for parents and they are responsible for establishing strong connections between educators and parents. While this may be true and evident in *School A*, approaches and strategies aimed at parental engagement need to go beyond simply communicating and informing parents about the progress of their children. This communication is certainly necessary, but it does not in itself mobilise or empower parents to engage in the learning of their children. Even if parents are aware of their children's progress and the expectations of the school, it does not automatically imply that they are actively engaged in the process; thus, informed parents are not always engaged parents.

It is evident that the school and the teachers are concerned about the learning and well-being of the children, and that they make every effort to communicate with parents. There is, however, no indication that the school manages or provides guidance on ways in which parents can be engaged in the learning of the children, despite parents' limited time and finances. Moreover, there is no evidence that the school informs parents of basic practices that are likely to influence a child's ability to learn or what contributes to the optimal development and learning of a child. The school may be concerned about the involvement of parents in school-based activities and have discussions surrounding this with parents, but there is limited focus on parental engagement, and there seems to be a limited understanding of parental engagement. This does not imply that the school disregards the importance of parental

engagement or parental empowerment, but it might again be the result of limited time and energy.

6.3 Parents' Priorities and Perceptions are Shaped by the School's Expectations

When asked about the school's expectations of parents regarding parental engagement, the principal and both SMT members made mention of three areas of involvement, namely, communication, discipline, and assistance with homework. These areas of involvement are emphasised and considered the most important areas for parental participation by the school.

This understanding of parental engagement appears to have trickled down from the management of the school to the educators and to the parents. As explained by Jung and Sheldon (2020), the principal plays a key role in shaping the school's goals and influencing the actions of other school stakeholders, such as the educators and parents. Because these are the primary principles, which are encouraged by the principal and the SMT, the expectations the educators communicate to the parents are based on these principles. The parents are thus ultimately expected to communicate with the school, discipline their children, and assist their children with school-based activities.

The emphasis placed on these areas of parental participation has had a significant impact on the parents' role construction. As suggested by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's model (see Chapter 3), parents' role construction not only refers to parents' beliefs about their roles and responsibilities, but also includes parents' perceptions and interpretations of the expectations placed on them by the school (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Even though a large percentage of the parents consider the school primarily responsible for the learning of their children, almost all the parents accept responsibility for homework and discipline. Thus, even though the parents have limited time and energy available, they expressed that they would make time to assist their children with homework or at least make sure that it has been completed. Homework is a high priority for the parents. Some of the parents even indicated that

they neglect other areas of parenting, such as having conversations or building meaningful relationships with their children, as they have prioritised homework above these activities. The parents' role construction regarding engagement is based on assisting their children with school-based activities and ensuring discipline because this is what has been communicated by the school. This suggests that the school management plays an important role in shaping the parents' understanding of engagement and their roles and responsibilities in their children's learning. This is in line with the study conducted by Nkosi and Adebayo (2020) which revealed that parents considered their role to include general parenting (i.e., the provision of basic needs), discipline and assistance with homework.

This is also evident in the parents' responses to the action research process. While one of the aims of the workshop and action research process was to participate in engagement activities other than homework and discipline, the parents had a tendency to gravitate back to these areas of participation. For example, the parents who implemented the bedtime routine considered the outcome beneficial because their children were more willing to do their homework after a good night's sleep. Similarly, the parents explained that building relationships and spending more time talking to their children had positive consequences because it resulted in less arguments and fighting when completing homework. Finally, the parents who intentionally praised their children said that it was valuable as it made their children more motivated and excited about their homework, and they behaved better because they wanted to please their parents. Thus, in most activities implemented in the action plan, the parents measured the value of the outcomes according to its impact on homework and discipline. These perceptions of engagement have been ingrained in the parents and it will take time to encourage a broader perspective of parental participation.

This does not suggest that communication, homework and discipline is not important. Of course, these are all necessary areas of parental participation, but it appears that the parents have adopted a narrow understanding of engagement based solely on these three areas. It is therefore evident that the way in which the school is managed and the values that are promoted by the principal, cultivates the culture and condition for engagement (Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014). The principal's understanding of parental

engagement seems to have a significant impact on the rest of the school's approach to parental engagement and shapes the parents' role construction.

6.4 Challenging Negative Perceptions of the School

Schools are often blamed for low levels of parent participation and considered passive in their attempts to encourage engagement among families of a lower socio-economic status. While this might be true of many schools, it is necessary to consider the numerous challenges schools experience in trying to engage with families and to encourage adequate involvement.

According to Munje and Mncube (2018), although educators understand the reasons for low levels of parental engagement, there seems to be a passivity among schools, as they do not take appropriate action to overcome these challenges and to ensure sustainable parent participation. Even when schools do promote parental engagement, these efforts are often impeded by factors such as poverty, unemployment, low levels of education, and single-parent households (also Myende & Maifala, 2020). This is evident in both *School A* and *School B*. Even though the principal encourages communication with parents and makes multiple avenues of communication available to parents, issues such as a lack of data and language barriers hinder this communication. *Principal 1* expresses that often communication is made difficult as children live with their grandparents who are illiterate and who do not speak nor understand English. Similarly, *Principal 2* explains that he cannot even phone parents in cases of emergencies because many parents do not own cell phones. Despite these challenges, schools are expected to encourage parental engagement in the learning of their children. This is a mammoth task when communication in itself is often difficult.

This complicates the kind of engagement schools can encourage among the parents. One of the SMT members explains that they make tutorial videos and send it to parents via WhatsApp to teach them how to teach their children. While this may be beneficial for many parents, the success of this initiative requires parents to have data and to have enough time to teach themselves before teaching their children. Even though the school tries to assist families and to support them, contextual issues experienced by

families hamper the success of these initiatives. This reinforces what Munje and Mncube (2018) have said that, even though schools are aware of these challenges, they are not taking appropriate action to encourage sustainable parental engagement. This does not suggest that schools are not doing anything, but that their efforts are not effective in targeting families who experience these socio-economic challenges.

Myende and Nhlumayo (2020) further suggest that schools, especially in rural areas, may hinder parental engagement, as they do not invest enough time and resources into engagement initiatives among poorer families. Schools may need support to be able to assist these families. The authors (2020) further explain that schools may be preventing parental engagement, even among parents who are interested in being engaged. The schools alone are not to blame for this, as they need support and assistance from other school stakeholders. Both *School A* and *School B* express frustration, as they do not receive sufficient support from the Department of Education. *School B* (a no-fee paying school), for example, does not even receive enough support from the Department to maintain basic facilities at the school, such as electricity, let alone resources aimed at engaging parents. Both schools stated that the Department is out of touch with the reality of school conditions. *School B*, for example, is expected to vote for an SGB using an online app when many parents in the school do not even have cell phones, let alone enough data to participate in such a process. In the same way, one of the SMT members of *School A* explains that the curriculum expectations of the Department are unrealistic considering the overcrowded classrooms, which are not conducive for optimal learning. As explained by Myende and Maifala (2020), the support schools receive from the Department of Education is often not enough to assist principals in dealing with the myriad challenges they are confronted with. Thus, the lack of initiatives aimed at engagement may not reflect the intentions of the school or suggest that the school is unaware of the challenges experienced by families. Rather, the lack of engagement initiatives may be indicative of the lack of support schools receive in making these initiatives a success.

Myende and Nhlumayo (2020) further suggest that due to the illiteracy of many parents in rural areas, schools tend to possess cultures that present parents as inferior to educators and school leaders. Thus, even though parents want to engage and be involved at school, they are reluctant to do so because of the critical attitudes of the

educators, fear of possible consequences for speaking up, and their lack of ability to influence the school's decision-making. This may be true of many schools, but it does not accurately reflect the attitudes of the principals and SMT members of *School A* and *School B*. The parents of *School A* indicated that they, for the most part, feel welcome at school and have a good relationship with the educators. The educators may not be fully equipped to encourage engagement among parents and may have a narrow perception of engagement, affecting their expectations of parents, but they do try to support families and to encourage participation. Furthermore, *Principal 2* from *School B* offers many opportunities for parents to be engaged by providing transport to attend school meetings and visiting them in their communities, which is indicative of the value he places on their participation. While there is an obvious need for a broader understanding of engagement and more effective approaches to improving engagement, these schools are generally trying to support as many families as possible with the time and means they have available.

Schools, therefore, need to accept a broader understanding of engagement and explore ways in which engagement can be made possible among all parents irrespective of socio-economic background. As expressed by Robinson (2017), all parents, regardless of their background or socio-economic status, should be given a platform and opportunity to be involved in a meaningful way and it is up to the principal to establish these platforms. One should also be aware that principals and school management are not receiving the much-needed support in order to make this possible and are expected to do so despite the numerous challenges experienced by the parent body and the school itself. Issues of poor parental engagement are thus multifaceted and often involve complex contextual factors, which the school has little control over. It should thus not turn into a blaming game of who is responsible for these low levels of engagement, as all stakeholders within the school community, including the Department of Education, have a role to play in promoting equal and feasible parent participation.

6.5 Parents as Supporters

As suggested by Oyebade (2013), all parents fundamentally want their children to succeed and perform well academically. This statement is supported by the findings

of this study as the parents indicated that they want their children to perform well and that they want to play a role in the learning of their children. This is further reflected in the fact that these parents participated in the study and thus showed interest in their children's schooling. These parents indicated that they understand that it is important for them to be engaged and that their actions as parents significantly affect the well-being of their children.

These same parents, however, also indicated that the school is solely responsible for the learning of their children. In a study conducted by Munje and Mncube (2018), teachers expressed that for some parents, involvement is genuinely challenging because of poor or no education; whereas, other parents tend to use this as a convenient excuse to avoid taking responsibility for their children's learning. Similarly, in this study, some parents explained that because they pay school fees, it is the school's responsibility to ensure that learning takes place. Another parent stated that because she is uneducated, she could not be held responsible for the learning of her child. This suggests that even though parents want to be a part of the learning process, they are reluctant to take responsibility for it. Even though parents want a part to play, they are ultimately dependent on the school to ensure that their children are learning and performing well.

This might be a result of the limited time parents have available to be engaged. The less time and energy parents have available, the more likely they might be to depend on the school. However, it could also be a result of the kind of involvement expected from parents as communicated by the school; that is, assistance with homework. Thus, when parents are uneducated, they believe that they cannot rightfully be held responsible for assisting their children academically.

Many of the expectations for parent participation communicated by the school are centred on parental involvement as opposed to engagement. As previously mentioned, the parents are expected to participate by means of communication, discipline, and assistance with homework. Even though the parents are not expected to be involved on the school premises in the form of school events and fundraising, they are ultimately expected to participate by supporting the school and assisting their children in school-related activities. Through these expectations, the school has

positioned the parents as supporters or helpers of school-based activities, and thus they are subsidiaries to the school (McIntosh & Hayden, 2022).

This is reflected in the school's expectation of parents to instil discipline. Since the educators and school management are restricted in their ability to discipline children at school, they depend on the parents to support them by instilling a sense of discipline at home. While discipline is necessary to ensure that children learn optimally at home and at school, the parents are implored to do so as a means of supporting the school. In the same way, when the parents are requested to assist children with homework, they are encouraged to support school-based learning. These forms of parental participation are good and beneficial; however, it does also encourage parents to assume a supportive role rather than to take ownership and responsibility for the holistic learning of their children.

When parents are supporters of school-based activities, they rely on schools to inform them regarding the expectations of their involvement (Myende & Nhlumayo, 2020). This implies that parents are unlikely to engage in activities beyond what is expected and encouraged by the school. They do not deviate from what is communicated and instructed by the school. McIntosh and Hayden (2022) further suggest that when parents are supporters of school-based activities and take on an assisting role, they are limited to and restricted by the activities posed by the school and are consequently "subordinates" to the school. These parents do not operate in freedom and initiative, but are unintentionally confined by the expectations and recommendations of the school.

6.6 The Need for Teacher Training

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's model (Chapter 3) suggests that parents' decisions to participate in the learning of their children are significantly influenced by the encouragement and interest of the child's teacher (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). This is supported by Epstein (1994) who explains that parents are more likely to be engaged in their children's learning when teachers actively create opportunities for involvement and encourage parent participation. Although educators understand the importance of parental involvement or engagement and try to encourage parents to participate in the learning of their children, they have not been adequately trained to engage families who experience barriers to learning (Luet, 2017; Oyebade, 2013).

Munje and Mncube (2018) suggest that teachers need training on sustainable approaches to parental engagement that will keep parents actively engaged throughout the academic year. This has proven to be true as the school primarily encourages parental engagement in the form of discipline, homework, and communication. While these are all necessary areas of involvement, it does not cater for families who may not be able to assist with homework or regularly attend meetings at the school. There is thus a need for teacher training to identify alternative ways in which the parents can be engaged irrespective of their socio-economic status to ensure the inclusion of all parents.

Mohapi and Netshitangani (2018) further suggest that teachers need to be taught how to identify the skills, knowledge and potential of parents and to use them for the benefit of the school. Not only do teachers need to be taught to identify parental resources, but also they need to be trained to do so in unfavourable schooling environments. For example, schools in more affluent areas may experience easier communication with parents as parents have access to the school and identifying skills among the parent body may be a manageable task. Schools in more rural areas, however, such as *School B*, where communication and access to parents are difficult and parents are generally unemployed and illiterate, the task is likely to be more challenging. In these cases, teachers need to be trained in alternative methods of engagement and to identify parent resources that do not necessarily involve literacy or professional expertise. Thus, there is a need for teachers to be trained to make a space and avenue

for all parents, irrespective of socio-economic status, to be equally engaged – even if the engagement looks different.

The need for such training is evident among the educators in *School A*. Since parental engagement is primarily encouraged through discipline and homework, a large percentage of the parents struggle to meet these expectations. This is particularly evident among families where parents are not sufficiently educated to assist with homework or where parents work long or odd hours and are not available to assist. In these cases, the SMT members explain that the educators generally encourage the parents to reach out to other family members or friends to assist with their children. They are also encouraged to send their children to aftercare or private lessons where they can receive the academic support they need. This is problematic as both aftercare and private lessons require additional costs, which many of the parents in this school cannot afford. In addition, it removes the parent from the learning process of the child. These parents then do not have a role to play in the learning of their children because they cannot be engaged according to the expectations of the school. By shifting this responsibility to other people or institutions, the parents are not empowered to participate in the learning of their children or to take ownership of their roles as parents.

In doing so, the school is not necessarily intentionally side-lining these families, as it might appear. Rather it is indicative of the lack of resources and skills required to encourage engagement in ways that are relevant and feasible for these families. Jeynes (2018) attributes this to the possibility that schools are sometimes so focussed on meeting curriculum requirements that they do not stay updated with the latest research regarding engagement practices. Hence, these educators are uninformed and consequently do not implement these engagement practices. This might also be a result of a lack of school-specific policies aimed at improving engagement within the environment of the school. If school-specific policies were established based on the needs of the parents within the school, the teachers may be more aware of alternative ways in which the parents could be engaged. Ultimately, it does suggest a need for teacher training regarding parental engagement.

Bearing the numerous challenges in mind, Mncube (2009) poses the question of whether parent-school partnerships are a feasible option in South Africa and more

especially among families with a lower socio-economic status. While it has been proven to yield many benefits, it might not be practical for many families in the country. This might be true when the focus is on parental involvement; that is, parental participation in school-based activities whether at school or at home. For this reason, it is necessary to make a shift in focus from parental involvement to parental engagement, which allows all parents to participate in the learning of their children and gives recognition to a wider range of parent activities and efforts.

6.7 A Need for a Broader Understanding of Engagement

As previously mentioned, there is a need to shift the focus from parental involvement to parental engagement. While parental involvement requires parent participation in school-based activities at school or at home, parental engagement encourages parents to take ownership of the holistic learning and development of the child. Recognition is thus given to a wider range of activities based on their influence on the child's ability to learn.

Based on the findings and previous discussions, it is evident that the school's focus is primarily on parental involvement, as they require the parents to support the school through discipline, homework, and communication.

When the focus is solely on homework, there is an immediate divide between the educated and uneducated, the parents who can assist and those who cannot. Consequently, the parents who do not have the necessary skills and knowledge to assist their children academically become discouraged and assume that they do not have a role to play in their children's learning. This consequently influences parents' self-efficacy. As reflected in Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's model (Chapter 3), parents with a lower self-efficacy do not believe that their efforts have the potential to bring about change. When parents frequently lack the knowledge and skills needed to meet school expectations, their self-efficacy may progressively become lower as they lose confidence in their abilities (Deslandes, 2019; Green *et al*., 2007; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Several of the parents indicated that they do not have the skills needed to assist their children with homework, suggesting a gap between what

is expected and having the necessary skills to meet these expectations. By doing so, the school unintentionally causes more harm than good.

It is thus necessary for the school to shift its focus from parental involvement to parental engagement in learning. This does not mean that the parents operate completely independently of the school. Parental engagement involves a parent-school alignment, a shared vision and goal regarding the learning and progress of the child; however, parents are not limited to school-based activities (McIntosh & Hayden, 2022). Parents thus participate in a variety of activities, which contribute to or enhance the learning of the child and thus indirectly support the learning that takes place at school. Thus, recognition is not only given to parents who are able to meet school expectations, but also to parents who contribute to the overall well-being of the child and his/her ability to learn optimally.

One parent, for example, explains that he develops his child's understanding of English by using his home language to translate. This child is thus encouraged to explain English words in her own language so that the parent can determine whether the child really understands the vocabulary. Similarly, another parent explains that when her child reads something, she asks the child to explain the story in her own language. Again, the child is encouraged to make sense of what was read by explaining and expressing the message of the story in her own words and language. This activity was not encouraged or required by the school. It, however, does contribute to the language development of the children, which in turn will affect their overall learning. This is an example of parental engagement as the parents have used their creativity and initiative to develop skills in their children, which will impact their ability to learn. This is also an example of a parent activity that does not require education or much devoted time. All parents, regardless of socio-economic status, can participate in such an activity and thus make a meaningful contribution to their children's learning.

There is a need to give recognition to these activities and consider them to be as valuable as assisting a child with homework. By doing so, more parents are included in the learning process of children and the individual skills and knowledge of parents can be utilised irrespective of socio-economic status.

6.8 The Need for Parent Education

While parents are frequently informed about the school's expectations and how they should be involved in their children's schooling, there is a need for them to be educated on the importance of their contributions and ways in which they can be engaged.

Munje and Mncube (2018) state that there is an urgent need to change parents' understanding of their contributions and participation in their children's learning. This is supported by Myende and Nhlumayo (2020) who suggest that educating parents on the importance of their role in their children's learning is a crucial part of empowering parents to be engaged. While there are negative perceptions associated with the concept of educating parents and the risk of portraying them as inadequate or inferior (Myende & Nhlumayo, 2020; Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014), the need to inform parents is evident.

The need for such an education is not only identified by education specialists, but parents themselves also recognise and acknowledge that they need to be informed and guided in their parental roles. In a study conducted by Myende and Nhlumayo (2020), parents communicated a need to be educated on the necessity of their engagement and on ways in which they could make valuable contributions. Similarly, parents in this study explained that they were not aware of the importance of their participation prior to the workshop, and that being informed has changed their understanding of their value as parents.

Schools are responsible for educating parents and keeping them informed about the importance of their engagement. By informing parents and improving their understanding of child development and how parental contributions enhance learning, parents will be more encouraged to engage and act as true partners in their children's learning (McIntosh & Hayden, 2020). Even though Robinson (2017) suggests that parents are aware of their responsibilities as parents in the education and learning of their children, other studies, including the findings of this study, contradict this. Many parents are oblivious to the important role they are meant to play or are unaware of how they can contribute to their children's learning (Myende & Nhlumayo, 2020;

Madaio *et al*., 2019). Thus, even though parents may be informed about their roles as far as school expectations of them are communicated, this does not imply that they understand the value and necessity of these contributions.

Educating parents does not imply that they are inferior or that they lack the knowledge and skills to contribute to their children's learning. Rather, such an education should involve guiding parents on how to use their existing knowledge and skills optimally to enhance the learning of their children. It consequently creates a more valuable perception of all parents irrespective of education and socio-economic status. An understanding exists among parents that because they are uneducated or illiterate, they are unable to make worthy contributions to their children's learning (Myende & Nhlumayo, 2020). In the same way, a parent in this study expressed that she was under the impression that she did not have a role to play in her child's learning because she is uneducated. Her perception, however, changed once she was informed about alternative ways in which she could be engaged despite her lack of education and her sense of self-efficacy became stronger. As explained by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, parents with a stronger perceived self-efficacy tend to be more resilient and are more persistent in overcoming challenges because they believe that their actions will result in change. It is thus suggested by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's model that, even though parents may have a low socio-economic status and experience related difficulties, when they have a strong sense of self-efficacy, they are likely to set goals and persevere through these difficulties (Deslandes, 2019; Green *et al*., 2007; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997).

The goal is not to solve illiteracy or assist uneducated parents in becoming more educated in general; rather the goal is to inform all parents of the importance of their engagement and to empower them to be engaged. These parental education and initiatives aimed at empowering parents to be engaged should not be reserved for the poor and uneducated; thus, contributing to the deficit perceptions regarding parent education. Even educated and more affluent parents may not fully understand the value of their contributions and may need to be educated on ways in which they can be engaged despite their busy lifestyles. Although this study was initially aimed at parents with a lower socio-economic status, the sample included educated and financially stable parents. These parents also participated in the workshop and action

research process and they were empowered to be engaged once they better understood their parental value and identified various ways in which they could be engaged. Hence, parental empowerment should not be reserved for parents of a lower socio-economic status.

Thus, it is not a matter of superiority when educators aim to inform and educate parents. Educators are expected to be knowledgeable professionals regarding the development and learning of children; this explains why parents seek the guidance and advice of educators. Parents expect educators to be well informed and to have a superior knowledge in this area, and do not seem to feel undermined or offended when this guidance is offered. As expressed by several parents in this study, they were grateful for the opportunity to have participated in the workshop and they even requested follow-up workshops.

If parents want to be informed and empowered regarding their contributions as parents in the learning of their children, it is the duty of the school to educate them. Educators are in the ideal position to guide and advise parents on the importance of their engagement and on ways in which they could be engaged despite the challenges they encounter. This kind of parental empowerment should be offered to all parents irrespective of socio-economic status to counter the assumption that educated or literate parents are informed and engaged parents.

6.9 Workshops as a Means of Managing Engagement

The workshop was largely successful in changing the parents' perceptions regarding their roles in their children's learning and guiding them in ways that they could be engaged. The workshop allowed the parents to develop support systems, express their ideas and concerns regarding engagement, improve their sense of self-efficacy, and to guide and assist other parents.

As reflected in the findings, the workshop provided the parents with the opportunity to connect with other parents. Due to the participatory nature of the workshop, which involved group activities and discussions, the parents were able to form connections with other parents. These discussions and connections caused the parents to realise

that there were others who experienced similar challenges to them. As indicated by one of the parents, it was comforting to know that she was not the only one who struggled to be engaged and that she no longer felt isolated and alone. These parents were able to share contact details and to form support systems among themselves. They were also able to share ideas, assist each other, and learn from one another. Thus, these parents did not only receive help for themselves, but were empowered to provide support to one another.

The nature of this workshop further allowed the parents to share their ideas and express their concerns with me and with other parents. The workshop did not involve one person simply instructing and informing the parents but encouraged them to develop ideas for engagement among themselves. Thus, the parents were able to think collaboratively of engagement activities, which were considerate of their challenges and lifestyles. This opportunity to have something to say and to be heard was a valuable experience for the parents as they gained confidence in their own ideas, knowledge and skills.

Not only did the workshop provide an opportunity for the parents to connect with other parents, it was also an opportunity for me to connect with the parents. As the parents participated in discussions and shared their ideas, it was possible to quickly gain insight into their perceptions regarding engagement and their general attitude towards the school and their children's learning. For example, through these discussions, I was able to realise that the school's expectation of parents to assist with homework placed a lot of pressure on them, especially those who did not understand the homework. I also learned that the parents' understanding of engagement was largely based on their ability to participate in these homework activities. A workshop is therefore also an opportunity to familiarise oneself with the perceptions parents have and the kind of challenges they experience. Thus, if school managers were to conduct these workshops, it could provide a platform for parents to express themselves and for managers to understand the perceptions and attitudes of parents better.

The content discussed at the workshop was also instrumental in changing the parents' role construction and improving their level of self-efficacy. As explained by Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2007), parents' role construction is

significantly influenced by their understanding of child development and child rearing. Some of the content discussed at the workshop included ways in which parenting impacts the development and learning of children and how parents play a fundamental role in this development. This seemed to have had an impact on the parents as they explained how they previously believed that the school was solely responsible for their children's education and learning, but since the workshop, they understood that they have an irreplaceable responsibility towards their children's development. This further impacted the parents' confidence as they understood that they were able to make valuable contributions to their children's development despite their level of education or ability to participate in homework. Consequently, the parents' level of self-efficacy improved as they believed that they were able to make a difference. This confidence further increased when the parents saw the impact of their engagement activities during the implementation period of the action plan. One parent, for example, said that after some time, her child's stutter improved so much that the teacher was able to notice the improvement at school as well. The impact that the parent's engagement had on the child further motivated the parent to be engaged in other ways, as she believed in the value of her contributions. These parents still experienced the same educational and financial challenges as before, but because their perception and understanding of child development and child rearing changed, they were empowered to be engaged despite these challenges.

Although only a small number of parents attended the workshop, the impact of the workshop was far-reaching. The parents indicated that after the workshop they shared what they experienced and learned with their family members and with other parents of the school. One parent mentioned that he was able to share what he learned and to advise another parent who was struggling to engage in his child's learning. Even though this parent who received advice and was guided in ways to engage did not attend the workshop himself, he still benefitted from the workshop. Parents who were intrinsically impacted and changed by the workshop could become agents of change among other parents and communities, causing the workshop to have a ripple effect.

The fact that the workshop was optional for parents to attend might also have impacted their willingness and attitude to learn from the workshop. It is necessary to consider the fact that if parents were forced to attend the workshop and thus forced to learn and

be taught, their potential negative attitude might have affected their ability to receive and be changed by such an initiative. Therefore, even if such a workshop is optional and only a few parents attend and are impacted, over time more people might become interested in the initiative through positive word of mouth. One parent, for example, asked if there would be another workshop similar to this one because she would like to encourage other parents to attend. It would therefore be necessary that these kinds of workshops take place more than once to allow them to gain momentum over time.

Finally, it is also necessary to mention that not all parents were equally impacted and changed by the workshop. Of the 16 participants who attended the workshop, only 11 participated to the end of the implementation period. In addition, three parents who participated in the implementation process did not seem to be as impacted or yield as many benefits as the others. This means that of the 16 parents who attended the workshop, eight parents were significantly changed by the workshop and the implementation of these engagement activities, and noted academic and behavioural changes in their children. The success of these workshops is therefore largely dependent on the response and commitment of the parent. Of the three parents who participated in the implementation process but did not seem particularly impacted by it, two parents experienced language barriers and did not fully understand all the content discussed at the workshop, and the third parent did not implement many of the engagement practices. Consequently, the workshop was not as successful among these parents as among the others. The reasons why the other parents attended the workshop but did not participate in the implementation process is not clear, but it is evident that not all parents respond the same to these initiatives.

A workshop aimed at informing parents of the importance of their roles and empowering them to be engaged might therefore be a valuable way of managing parental engagement in a school. It allows parents to express themselves, to connect with other parents, to become agents of change, and it might give the management of the school insight into the attitudes and perceptions of parents regarding engagement. Although it might not equally impact all parents, it does seem to yield benefits for most parents.

6.10 Theoretical Lens: Managing Parental Engagement

The diagram below represents the conceptual framework developed in Chapter 3. As discussed previously, parents' motivational beliefs, perceptions of invitations from others, and perceived life context influence their decisions to be involved (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2007; 2005; 1997; 1995). Based on the findings and above discussion, it is suggested that the principal and the SMT could empower parents to be engaged by shaping or influencing these three areas:

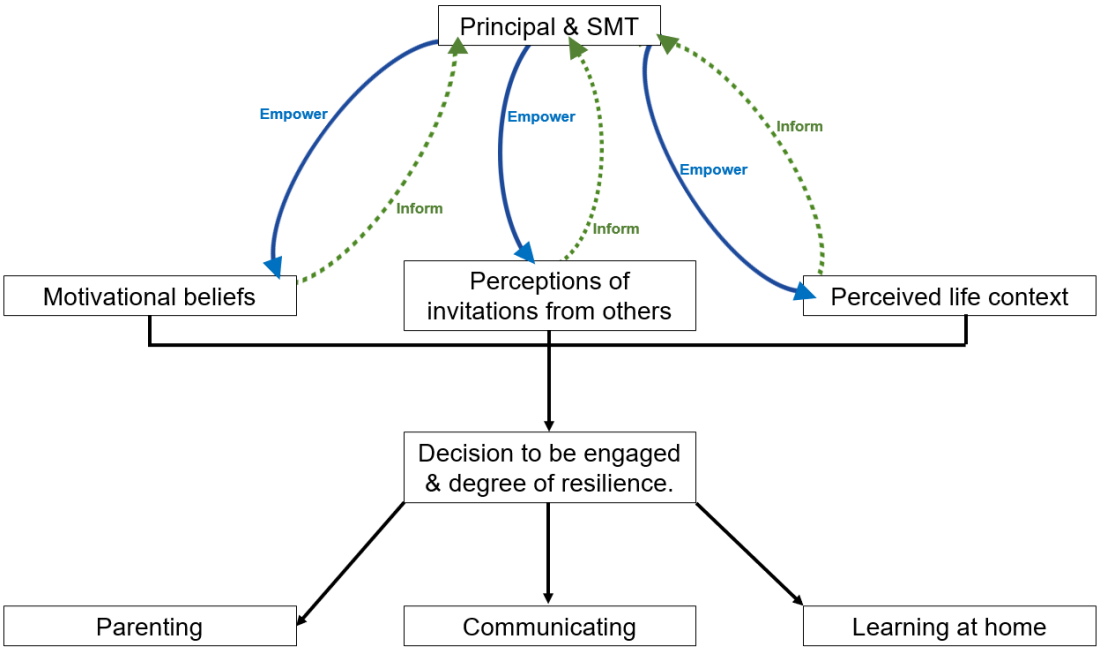

Figure 84: Conceptual framework

Parents' motivational beliefs (i.e., role construction and self-efficacy) could be shaped by educating parents on the importance of their roles and ways in which they could be engaged. Once parents understand the necessity of their contributions and are able to find ways in which to be engaged despite their lower socio-economic status, they might be more willing and encouraged to engaged in the learning of their children.

The way in which parents perceive invitations for engagement also has a bearing on their willingness to engage. If the school limits opportunities for engagement to discipline, homework and communication, fewer parents will feel capable of being engaged. This limits engagement to parents who are literate and able to assist children

with homework and unintentionally marginalises parents who not able to. The focus of parent participation has primarily involved ways in which parents can support school-based activities, and there is a need to broaden the perspective and understanding of what constitutes parental engagement. When engagement is understood as a variety of parent activities, which positively influence children's ability to learn, a wider range of parent contributions are recognised, and more parents are included in the process. Parents might respond more easily to invitations for engagement when the engagement activities involve something they can manage and participate in. For this to happen, however, there is a need for principals and SMTs to shift their perspectives and understanding regarding engagement so that these principles can accurately trickle down to educators and parents.

Parents perceive that life contexts, that is, the amount of time and energy available, also affect their decision to be involved. Many parents are overwhelmed with working hours and pressure to make ends meet and consequently have limited time and energy to engage in their children's learning. This study, however, suggests that if parental engagement involves a wider range of parent activities (and not primarily homework) then perhaps more parents would be able to engage despite limited time and energy.

If the principal and the SMT could influence parents' motivational beliefs and include more parents by adopting a broader understanding of engagement, more parents might be empowered to become engaged. In doing so, it would be important for the management of the school to have insight into parents' existing perceptions and attitudes regarding engagement and invitations from school and the existing challenges parents encounter in their daily lives. The more they are informed about these perceptions and challenges, the better they might be able to assist and guide parents in engagement. As discussed above, a workshop might be a valuable means to manage engagement as it presents an opportunity for the management to familiarise themselves with parental attitudes and challenges, while simultaneously impacting their perceptions and empowering them to be engaged. Thus, it is a cycle of learning from parents and then using this information to guide and empower them towards improved engagement.

Once parents have made the decision to be engaged and buy into the concept and necessity of their contributions, they might be more willing to persevere through challenges. This does not suggest that their challenges are minimised or that their life circumstances have changed, but rather that intrinsic motivation might cause parents to rearrange their priorities and to persevere through challenges because they understand the purpose and the end goal of their engagement.

Finally, parental engagement for the sake of this study focussed on three main areas namely, parenting, learning at home, and communication. Parenting involved implementing bedtimes, structure and routine and building meaningful relationships with children through intentional conversations. Learning at home involved reading or listening to their children read, storytelling and developing their English vocabulary, and communication involved communicating with the class educator about the child's progress and challenges. These are the activities that the parents were encouraged to implement at home during the implementation period of the action plan to show them that small consistent changes might have a significant impact, as reflected in the findings. Parental engagement, however, is not limited to these activities but could encompass a wider range of parent contributions to the overall well-being and learning of their children.

6.11 Conclusion

As reflected throughout the study, it is important for schools and parents to shift their focus from parental involvement to parental engagement. This allows all parents, irrespective of socio-economic background, to participate equally in their children's learning. Hence, there is a need for the school management to change its perspective regarding the role and responsibilities of parents, and how parents might be able to participate in their children's learning by utilising their available skills, knowledge and abilities. There is a further need for educators to be trained on how to guide and advise parents to be engaged despite the numerous challenges they experience and not to "outsource" their responsibilities to other family members or institutions. The school plays a crucial role in shaping parents' perceptions regarding their roles and responsibilities in their children's learning and in creating platforms for parents to participate equally. It is also necessary to acknowledge that it is not only poor and

uneducated parents who need to be empowered to become engaged, but all parents irrespective of socio-economic status can be taught how to be optimally engaged. The school management has an important duty to the school community to encourage engagement among all parents and to recognise a wider range of parent efforts and contributions.

This chapter provided a discussion on the analysis and findings presenting in Chapter 5. The next chapter discusses the ways in which the research questions have been addressed and provides recommendations for practice and further research.

Chapter 7

Recommendations and Conclusions

This study aimed at exploring ways in which feasible parental engagement activities could be implemented and managed by the principal and SMT of the school under study amid the challenges experienced by vulnerable families. This chapter discusses the ways in which each research question has been addressed and what the concluding findings are. It also provides suggestions for practice and for further research.

7.1 Addressing the Research Questions

1. *What strategies are being implemented by the school to encourage parental engagement?*

As indicated, the school's primary approach to parental engagement is communication with parents. The school communicates with parents on a weekly basis via WhatsApp and Facebook, and parents have direct contact with the educators via WhatsApp. This provides parents with a platform to communicate with educators as needed. It was revealed that due to the large number of struggling learners, the school tends to invest more time in these families with the goal of keeping them informed about their children's progress.

It was identified that the school does not have any school-specific policies regarding engagement, as the principal believes that the national SIAS policy is sufficient. This again reinforces the school's approach to engagement, which is solely based on communication with parents. Although there is not much evidence of initiatives aimed at improving engagement, it is evident that the school is informed on the challenges experienced by parents and aims to assist where possible.

2. *What school-based initiatives contribute to the empowerment of vulnerable parents?*

Although the school prioritises keeping parents informed regarding the academic and behavioural progress of their children, there is not much evidence that parents are empowered to engage actively in their children's learning. The school's understanding and expectations of parents regarding engagement are limited to homework, discipline, and communication. This approach to engagement causes parents who are unable to assist children with homework to be excluded from the learning process. As indicated, the school encourages these parents to outsource their responsibilities to other family members or institutions who can support the children academically. While the children may receive the academic support they need, these parents are side-lined from their children's learning. Although the school tries to support families where possible, there is no evidence of initiatives or policies aimed at empowering these parents to be engaged in their children's learning despite and amid these challenges.

As reflected in the findings, however, the school is instrumental in shaping parents' perceptions of engagement and their role in their children's learning. School management could then develop initiatives aimed at shaping and influencing parents' understanding of their parental roles by giving recognition to a wider range of engagement activities, which is inclusive of all parents. One way in which this could be achieved is through a workshop, giving recognition to parents' ideas and advising them in possible engagement practices. It is therefore necessary that educators are trained in ways to encourage parental engagement among all parents irrespective of their socio-economic background.

3. *What perceptions do parents have of their roles in the learning of their children?*

Parents' perceptions regarding their roles and responsibilities in their children's learning was significantly shaped by the expectations communicated by the school. This means that parents accepted their responsibility in assisting children with homework and ensuring that their children were disciplined. It is evident that parents, for the most part, have assumed a supportive role as they follow the instructions and guidelines provided by the school. Although the parents mentioned that they wanted to play a role in their children's learning, they also indicated that they do not take responsibility for the learning of their children. They place this responsibility on the

school and depend on the school to ensure that their children perform well. As parents, they are willing to support this learning by ensuring that their children are well behaved and that they complete their homework.

This perception of the parents' roles and responsibilities, however, seemed to have changed after the workshop and the implementation period of the action research. The parents indicated that their perception of the importance of their contributions changed, and they understood that they play a pivotal role in the development of their children. The parents were encouraged to engage despite their challenges, low levels of education, and other socio-economic challenges because they believed that their contributions were valuable and necessary.

4. *What engagement practices can parents implement despite prevailing socio-economic challenges?*

Although parental engagement may include a wide variety of parental activities, this study focussed on three areas: parenting, learning at home, and communication. Concerning parenting, the parents were encouraged to institute bedtimes, spend time talking to their children and building meaningful relationships, and praising their children for good behaviour and for hard work. The parents indicated that the bedtime routine significantly impacted the family as their children were generally in a better mood, more willing to complete their homework, and quickly adjusted to the routine by sometimes putting themselves to sleep. The parents who praised their children through words of affirmation also indicated that their children were motivated and encouraged by this. The children made more effort to please their parents and were more excited about their homework. Although the parents indicated that they spent time talking to their children, it was not as easy to measure the success of this practice as the others were. The bedtime routine and praise, however, seemed to have a positive impact on the parent-child relationship in general.

Concerning learning at home, the parents were encouraged to participate in shared reading with their children or if the parents could not read, to allow their children to read to them or to participate in storytelling. The parents were encouraged to do this for only 15 minutes a day. The parents who put this to practice indicated that this was

an activity that the children particularly enjoyed, and it was an opportunity for them to spend quality time with their children. Although the direct impact of this activity could not easily be measured, some of the parents noted an improvement in their children's academic results.

Finally, the parents were encouraged to communicate with the class educators. This practice, however, did not seem to improve or worsen during the implementation process. The parents who already were frequently in contact with the educator, continued to do so, and those who were not, did not seem to improve in this area. The reason for this is not clear, but it might also be dependent on the educators and their responses to parents as some of the parents explained that the educators were slow to respond to them.

As mentioned, these are only a few examples of parental engagement activities, but the goal was to focus on practices that did not require literacy or much time. For the most part, the implementation of these practices was successful and yielded positive results for the parents and their children.

7.2 Recommendations for Practice

As discussed, the principal and SMT are instrumental in determining the school's approach to engagement. For this reason, it is necessary that the school management make a shift in their approach from parental involvement to parental engagement. Parental involvement in school-based activities limits parents' opportunities to participate and marginalises a percentage of the parents who are illiterate or lack access to the school and other resources. For this reason, the management of the school should make a shift towards parental engagement and give recognition to a wider range of parent activities. This will encourage and empower more parents to participate and engage in the learning of their children. If the principal and the management of the school change their perspective and approach to engagement, these principles are likely to trickle down to the educators, and then to the parents. The school's expectations of parents should thus not be limited to parents' participation in school-based activities, but rather parents should be encouraged to

take responsibility and ownership of their children's learning through a variety of activities.

Furthermore, there is a need for schools to develop school-specific policies aimed at improving parental engagement through parental empowerment. These policies should consider the unique challenges and dynamics of the parent body of the school and reflect the school's goals and approach regarding engagement. It should provide clarity on the school's expectations and the roles and responsibilities of the various school stakeholders in promoting parental engagement. This will provide a guideline to educators when advising parents and encouraging their participation.

There is also a need for teacher training in parental engagement. Educators should be trained on how to identify parents' strengths, skills, knowledge and abilities, and to guide parents effectively in using these strengths to engage in their children's learning. In addition, educators should be trained to do so for a variety of parents from different socio-economic backgrounds to ensure the inclusion of all parents.

7.3 Suggestions for Further Research

As previously mentioned, the parents who were impacted by the workshop took it upon themselves to share what they had learnt with other parents. Research could explore the possibility of raising parent leaders who are trained to provide guidance and to empower parents in various communities. Perhaps more parents could be reached and impacted if they were influenced by parent leaders of the same community. Further research could explore the possibility of empowering parents to empower other parents, especially in rural areas where access is challenging.

This study was primarily conducted in one public primary school. Further research could explore the impact that principals' perceptions of engagement have on the parents of several schools. This could also be done across different types of schools, from no-fee paying schools to private schools.

More research should also be conducted on ways in which parents in rural areas who experience severe poverty (such as *School B*) can be engaged. As access to parents in the school under study was problematic, research should explore alternative ways

to engage these parents and to guide them in ways that they too could be engaged in their children's learning.

7.4 Conclusion

This study explored ways in which parental engagement could be encouraged and managed among parents of a lower socio-economic status. This study revealed that a shift in focus is needed from parental involvement to parental engagement to ensure the inclusion of all parents irrespective of socio-economic background. Since the principal and the management team are instrumental in shaping educators' and parents' perceptions regarding engagement and their roles in their children's learning, it is necessary for the school management to rethink their expectations and approach to engagement. School-specific policies are necessary to target the unique needs of the parent body within the school and to promote effective engagement in the school environment. Workshops might be an effective way in which the school could connect with the parents and empower them to be engaged by shaping their understanding of their roles as parents and the importance of their contributions.

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Appendix A: Principal Participation Letter and Consent Form

Dear Headmaster,

I am currently enrolled as a PhD student in the Faculty of Education at the University of Pretoria. In order to complete this degree, I am expected to conduct research in the field of Education and to present my findings in the form of a thesis. The purpose of this letter is to inform you of the nature and purpose of my study, and to enquire about your willingness to allow me to conduct my research in your school community.

My research topic is: **Management of parental engagement amongst lower income families in a primary school in Gauteng**. The purpose of this study is to investigate ways in which parental engagement can be achieved and managed despite the challenges experienced by vulnerable families. It aims to explore various engagement practices that can practically be implemented and managed by the principal, school management teams (SMTs) and parents.

The participants in this study would therefore include the principal (or vice principal if you are not available), two members of the school's management team (preferably from within the foundation phase), and the foundation phase parents (Grade 1 – 3). Should you agree to participate in the study, I would request that you, as the principal of the school, participate in one individual interview conducted by me. This interview should take approximately one hour to complete. The two members of the school management team would also each participate in one individual interview conducted by me, of appromiately one hour long. A questionnaire in a hard copy format will then be sent out to all foundation phase parents to complete at home and should not take longer than 30 minutes to complete. If possible, I would send these questionnaires home with the children. They can then return these questionnaires in the sealed envelope to be provided to the school where I will collect it.

Based on the responses of the questionnaire, I will then invite approximately 20 parents to participate in an action research study with me. This action research study will take place over a period of four to six months. These parents will be asked to

participate in a workshop where the action plan will be discussed and adapted according to their needs. The parents will then implement this action plan in their homes over a period of approximately two months. The actions/practices to be implemented in their homes will not require much of their time but will rather form part of their daily routine and may include activities such as dinner discussions with their children, providing structure for school related activities, goal setting, and monitoring of children's progress. These parents will then be asked to engage in a group interview where feedback will be given through discussions and brainstorming with myself as the researcher and some other parents also implementing the plan. This feedback will be used to amend the action plan, which will then be implemented again for approximately two more months. Parents will then provide feedback of their experience of the amended action plan through an evaluation questionnaire that should not take longer than 10 minutes to complete. Finally, parents will be invited to participate in an individual interview with me where personal experiences, insights and recommendations regarding the implemented practices will be discussed. This interview should not take longer than an hour to complete.

The interviews conducted with the staff members, as well as the action research conducted with the 20 selected parents, will take place after school hours and will not impose on any teaching time. The information collected from all participants will be kept confidential and your school, and all the participants involved in this study, will also remain anonymous. The information received from participants will, therefore, under no circumstances, be discussed with other teachers or other parents of the school to ensue the protection of all participants involved. Participants will participate solely on a voluntary basis and will have the freedom to withdraw from the study at any time. The findings of this research study will be made available to you as well as the other participants involved on request.

I would also like to request your permission to use your data, confidentially and anonymously, for further research purposes, as the data sets are the intellectual property of the University of Pretoria. Further research may include secondary data analysis and using the data for teaching purposes. The confidentiality and privacy applicable to this study will be binding on future research studies.

It will be a privilege to conduct this research in your school. If you are willing and agree to allow me to conduct this study with the above-mentioned participants, please complete the attached consent form. If you have any further questions or concerns, do not hesitate to contact me using the details below.

Yours sincerely,

Tanya Greenhalgh
tanyaleegreenhalgh@gmail.com

Dr T. Calitz
Research Supervisor
talita.calitz@up.ac.za

Appendix B: SMT Participation Letter and Consent Form

Dear teacher/school staff member,

I am currently a postgraduate student at the University of Pretoria and will be doing research in this school. The purpose of this letter is to give you information about my study, and to find out whether you would be willing to be a part of this study.

The purpose of this study is to investigate ways in which parental engagement can be achieved and managed despite the challenges experienced by vulnerable families. It aims to explore various engagement practices that can practically be implemented and managed by the principal, school management teams (SMTs) and parents.

If you agree to participate in this study, you would be asked to participate in one individual interview of approximately one hour long. If possible, this interview will take place in person, otherwise it may be conducted online if this suits you better.

The information you provide in the interview will **not be discussed with other teachers, the principal or any parents of the school** to respect your privacy and to ensure your protection. The school's name and your name will also remain anonymous throughout the research process.

Your participation in this study is completely optional and you will under no circumstances be pressured to participate. You will also have the freedom to withdraw from the study at any point if you wish to do so. The final report and findings of the study will be made available to you on request.

I would also like to request your permission to use your data, confidentially and anonymously, for further research purposes, as the data sets are the intellectual property of the University of Pretoria. Further research may include secondary data analysis and using the data for teaching purposes. The confidentiality and privacy applicable to this study will be binding on future research studies.

It will be a privilege to have your participation in this study. If you are willing and agree to participate in this study, please complete the attached consent form. If you have any further questions or concerns, do not hesitate to contact me using the details below.

Yours sincerely,

Tanya Greenhalgh
tanyaleegreenhalgh@gmail.com

Dr T. Calitz
Research Supervisor
talita.calitz@up.ac.za

Consent form

I, _____(your name), member of the school's management team, agree to participate in this study with Tanya Greenhalgh. The topic of the research is: **Management of parental engagement amongst lower income families in a primary school in Gauteng**.

- I understand that I will participate in one individual interview which may take place in person or online.
- I understand that this interview will take place after school hours to ensure that no teaching time is disrupted.

I understand that the researcher subscribes to the principles of:

- *Voluntary participation* in research, implying that the participants might withdraw from the research at any time.
- *Informed consent*, meaning that research participants must at all times be fully informed about the research process and purposes, and must give consent to their participation in the research.

- *Safety in participation*; put differently, that the human respondents should not be placed at risk or harm of any kind, for example, research with young children.
- *Privacy*, meaning that the *confidentiality* and *anonymity* of human respondents should be protected at all times.
- *Trust*, which implies that human respondents will not be respondent to any acts of deception or betrayal in the research process or its published outcomes.

Signature:_____ Date:_____

Appendix C: Parent Participation in Questionnaire Letter and Consent Form

Motsoali/mohlokomeli ea ratehang,

(Dear parent/guardian,)

Hajoale ke moithuti oa morao-rao Univesithing ea Pretoria mme ke ntse ke etsa joalo etsa lipatlisiso sekolong sena. Morero oa lengolo lena ke ho u fa leseli ka my ithute, le ho fumana hore na u ka ikemisetsa ho ba karolo ea thuto ena.

(I am a postgraduate student at the University of Pretoria and will be doing research in this school. The purpose of this letter is to give you information about my study, and to find out whether you would be willing to be a part of this study.)

Morero oa phuputso ena ke ho batlisisa mekhoa eo boitlamo ba batsoali bo ka fihlelloang le e laoloa ho sa natsoe mathata a hlahelang malapa a tlokotsing. E ikemiselitse ho hlahloba tse fapaneng mekhoa ea boitlamo e ka sebelisoang le ho tsamaisoa ke mosuoe-hlooho, sekolo lihlopha tsa taolo le batsoali.

(The purpose of this study is to look for ways in which parents can be engaged in the learning of their children even though they may experience many challenges. It aims to find practices that can be applied and managed by the principals, the school management team and the parents.)

Haeba u lumela ho nka karolo phuputsong ena u tla kopuoa ho tlatsa lenane la lipotso. U ka khona tlatsa lipotso tsa lipotso u le mong lapeng ‘me u li khutlisetse sekolong le ngoana oa hao ka enfelopo e tiisitsoeng feela. Lenane lena la lipotso ha lea lokela ho nka nako e telele ho qeta metsotso e 30. Haeba u ikemiselitse ebile u thahasella, u tla ba le khetho ea ho nka karolo kopanong ea boitlamo ba batsoali.

(If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to fill in the attached questionnaire. You can complete this questionnaire at home and send it back to school with your child in the sealed envelope provided. This questionnaire should not take longer than 30 minutes to complete. If you are willing and would like to be part of the rest of the study, you may also take part in a workshop on parental engagement.)

Tlhahisoleseling eo u fanang ka eona lenaneong la lipotso e ke ke ea tsohloa le matichere, mosuoe-hlooho kapa batsoali ba bang ba sekolo ho hlompha boinotsing

ba hau le ho netefatsa ts'ireletso ea hau. Lebitso la sekolo 'me lebitso la hau le lona le tla lula le sa tsejoe nakong eohle ea lipatlisiso.

(Your answers in the questionnaire and the information you give will not be spoken about or shared with teachers, the principal or other parents of the school to respect your privacy and to ensure your protection. The school's name and your name will stay anonymous throughout the research process.)

Ho nka karolo ha hao thutong ena ke taba ea boikhethelo ka botlalo 'me ho hang u ke ke ua be teng hatelloa ho nka karolo. Hape o tla ba le bolokolohi ba ho ikhula ho thuto neng kapa neng haeba u lakatsa ho etsa joalo. U tla fuoa tlaleho ea hoqetela le lintho tse fumanoeng thutong ka kopo ea hau.

(Your participation in this study is optional and you will not be pressured to participate. You may stop participating in the study at any time if you would like to do so, The final report and findings of the study will be made available to you on request.)

Ke kopa hape ho kopa tumello ea hau ea ho sebelisa data ea hau, ka lekunutu le ka ho sa tsejoe, bakeng sa merero e meng ea lipatlisiso, joalo ka ha lisebelisoa tsa data e le thepe ea mahlale ea Universithi ea Pretoria. Liphuputso tse ling li ka kenyelletsa tlhahlobo ea data ea bobeli le ho e sebelisa molemong oa ho ruta. The lekunutu le boinotsing tse sebetsang thutong ena li tla tlama lithutong tsa lipatlisiso tsa nako e tlang.

(I would also like to request your permission to use your data, confidentially and anonymously, for further research purposes, as the data sets are the intellectual property of the University of Pretoria. Further research may include secondary data analysis and using the data for teaching purposes. The confidentiality and privacy applicable to this study will be binding on future research studies.)

E ka ba tokelo ho ba le seabo thutong ena. Haeba u ikemiselitse ebile u lumela ho nka karolo thutong ena, ka pop tlatsa 'me u tekene foromo ea tumello. Haeba u na le lipotso tse ling hape kapa dingongoreho, ka kopo ikopanye le nna o sebelisa lintlha tse ka tlase.

(It will be a privilege to have your participation in this study. If you are willing and agree to participate in this study, please fill in and sign the attached consent form. If you have any further questions or concerns, please contact me using the details below.)

Oa hau ka hlompho

Yours sincerely,

Tanya Greenhalgh

tanyaleegreenhalgh@gmail.com

Dr T. Calitz

Research Supervisor

talita.calitz@up.ac.za

Foromo ea tumello *(Consent form)*

Ke *(I)*, _____ (lebitso la hau) *(your name)*, Motsoali oa *(parent of)* _____ (lebitso la ngoana) *(child's name)* ka sehlopheng *(in grade)* _____ lumellana ho nka karolo thutong ena le Tanya Greenhalgh (*agree to participate in this study with Tanya Greenhalgh.)*. Sehlooho sa lipatlisiso ke: **Tsamaiso ea boitlamo ba batsoali har'a malapa a nang le moputso o tlase sekolong sa mathoma ho la Gauteng.** (*The topic of the research is: **Management of parental engagement amongst lower income families in a primary school in Gauteng**.)*

- Ke utlwisisa hore ke tla nka karolo lenaneong la dipotso le le leng (le hokantsweng lengolong).
- Kea utloisisa hore nka tlatsa lenane lena la lipotso lapeng ebe ke le khutlisetsa sekolong le ngoana oa ka ka enfelopong e tiisitsoeng e fanoeng.
- Ke utoisisa hore nka kopa thuso ho mofuputsi ho tlatsa lenane la lipotso ka sefahleho kapa ka mohala.

- *I understand that I will participate in one questionnaire (attached to this letter).*
- *I understand that I can complete this questionnaire at home and send it back to school with my child in the sealed envelope provided.*
- *I understand that I can request assistance from the researcher in filling in the questionnaire on a face-to-face or telephonic/online basis.*

Ke utloisisa hore mofuputsi o latela melao-motheo ea:

- Ho nka karolo ka boithtelo lipatlisisong, ho bolelang hore bankakarolo ba ka tsoa lipatlisisong neng kapa neng.
- Tumello e tsebisitsoeng, ho bolelang hore bankakarolo ba lipatlisiso ba tlameha ho tsebisoa ka botlalo ka linako tsohle ka ts'ebetso le sepheo, mme ba tlameha ho fana ka tumello ea ho nka karolo ha bona lipatlisisong.

- Polokeho ka ho nka karolo, ka mantsoe a mang, hore batho ba arabelitsoeng ha baa lokela ho beha kotsing kapa kotsi ea mofuta ofe kapa ofe. Mohlala, etsa lipatlisiso le bana ba banyenyane.
- Lekunutu, ho bolelang hore lekunutu le ho se tsejoe ha batho ba arabelitsoeng li lokela ho sireletsoa ka linako tsohle.
- Trust, e bolelang hore batho ba arabelitsoeng ba ke ke ba pepesetsoa liketso tsa ho qhekella kapa ho eka ka har'a ts'ebetso ea lipatlisiso.

I understand that the researcher subscribes to the principles of:

- *Voluntary participation in research, implying that the participants might withdraw from the research at any time.*
- *Informed consent, meaning that research participants must at all times be fully informed about the research process and purposes, and must give consent to their participation in the research.*
- *Safety in participation; put differently, that the human respondents should not be placed at risk or harm of any kind, for example, research with young children.*
- *Privacy, meaning that the confidentiality and anonymity of human respondents should be protected at all times.*
- *Trust, which implies that human respondents will not be respondent to any acts of deception or betrayal in the research process or its published outcomes.*

Saena *(Signature)*:_____ Letsatsi *(Date)*:_____

Appendix D: Parent Participation in Action Research Letter

Dear parent,

Thank you for completing the questionnaire and for showing interest in participating in the workshop and further study. As previously explained, I am currently a postgraduate student at the University of Pretoria and I am doing research in this school. The purpose of this letter is to find out whether you would be willing to further participate in the study, and to explain what your participation would entail.

The purpose of this study is to investigate ways in which parental engagement can be achieved and managed despite the challenges experienced by vulnerable families. It aims to explore various engagement practices that can practically be implemented and managed by the principal, school management teams (SMTs) and parents.

If you agree to continue participating in this study, you would be asked to participate in the action research process. This means that you will implement a few easy engagement practices in your home over a period of four to six months. You will be asked to participate in one workshop where the action plan/engagement practices will be discussed and adapted according to their needs. You will then implement these agreed upon practices in your home over a period of approximately two months. The practices to be implemented in your home will not require much of your time but will rather form part of your daily routine and may include activities such as dinner discussions with your children, providing structure for school related activities, goal setting, and monitoring of your child's progress. You will then be asked to engage in a group interview where you will have the opportunity to provide feedback of your experiences in these practicies. This will take place through discussions and brainstorming with myself as the researcher and some other parents also implementing the plan. This feedback will be used to amend the action plan, which will then be implemented again for approximately two more months. You will then be asked to provide feedback of your experience of the amended action plan through an evaluation questionnaire that should not take longer than 10 minutes to complete. Finally, you will be invited to participate in an individual interview with me where

personal experiences, insights and recommendations regarding the implemented practices will be discussed. This interview should not take longer than an hour to complete.

The information you provide throughout this process will **not be discussed with teachers, the principal, or any other parents of the school** to respect your privacy and to ensure your protection. The school's name and your name will also remain anonymous throughout the research process.

Your participation in this study is completely optional and you will under no circumstances be pressured to participate. You will also have the freedom to withdraw from the study at any point if you wish to do so. The final report and findings of the study will be made available to you on request.

I would also like to request your permission to use your data, confidentially and anonymously, for further research purposes, as the data sets are the intellectual property of the University of Pretoria. Further research may include secondary data analysis and using the data for teaching purposes. The confidentiality and privacy applicable to this study will be binding on future research studies.

It will be a privilege to have your participation in this study. If you are willing and agree to participate in this study, please complete the attached consent form. If you have any further questions or concerns, do not hesitate to contact me using the details below.

Yours sincerely,

Tanya Greenhalgh
tanyaleegreenhalgh@gmail.com

Dr T. Calitz
Research Supervisor
talita.calitz@up.ac.za

Consent form

I, _____(your name), parent of _____ in grade _____ agree to participate in this study with Tanya Greenhalgh, the topic of the research is: **Management of parental engagement amongst lower income families in a primary school in Gauteng**.

- I understand that I will participate in a workshop about parental engagement.
- I understand that I will be asked to implement approximately five different practices in my home over a period of approximately four to six months.
- I understand that I will provide feedback of my experiences through one group interview, a short questionnaire, and one individual interview.

I understand that the researcher subscribes to the principles of:

- *Voluntary participation* in research, implying that the participants might withdraw from the research at any time.
- *Informed consent*, meaning that research participants must at all times be fully informed about the research process and purposes, and must give consent to their participation in the research.
- *Safety in participation*; put differently, that the human respondents should not be placed at risk or harm of any kind, for example, research with young children.
- *Privacy*, meaning that the *confidentiality* and *anonymity* of human respondents should be protected at all times.
- *Trust*, which implies that human respondents will not be respondent to any acts of deception or betrayal in the research process or its published outcomes.

Signature:_____ Date:_____

Appendix E: Facilitator Participation Letter

Dear Facilitator,

Your assistance in this research process would be very much appreciated. In order for you to assist in facilitating at the workshop, it is also important that you take note of the relevant ethical requirements and agree to conform to these requirements.

The topic of my research is: **Management of parental engagement amongst lower income families in a primary school in Gauteng**. The purpose of this study is to investigate ways in which parental engagement can be achieved and managed despite the challenges experienced by vulnerable families. It aims to explore various engagement practices that can practically be implemented and managed by the principal, school management teams (SMTs) and parents.

The participants of this study would therefore be parents of children in the foundation phase of the school. These parents would have been asked to complete a hard copy questionnaire. Once the questionnaire has been completed, approximately 20 parents will be selected to engage in the action research process entailing a workshop and an individual interview. **Assisting in facilitating may be needed during the workshop.**

The information collected from these parents in the questionnaire and the interviews must be kept confidential and may **under no circumstances be discussed with the teachers or other parents of the school.** The school, as well as all the parents involved in this study, must remain anonymous. All parents will participate solely on a voluntary basis and will have the freedom to withdraw from the study at any time.

If you are willing and agree to assist with facilitating during the workshop, please complete the attached consent form. If you have any further questions or concerns, do not hesitate to contact me using the details below.

Yours sincerely,

Tanya Greenhalgh
tanyaleegreenhalgh@gmail.com

Consent form

I, _____(your name), will be a facilitator in the workshop in the study conducted by Tanya Greenhalgh. The topic of the research is: **Management of parental engagement amongst lower income families in a primary school in Gauteng**.

- I understand that I may be asked to assist with facilitating during the workshop.
- I understand that I may not manipulate or pressure any participant, and should respect their freedom to withdraw from the study at any point.
- I understand that I may not, under any circumstances, discuss this information provided through the questionnaires and interviews with teachers, parents or any other person.
- I understand that I may not mention the name of the school nor the name of any of the participants and that they should remain anonymous at all times.
- I understand that I must respect the perspectives and opinions of all participants, and may under no circumstances, engage in an argument or show disapproval of participants' responses.

Signature:_____ Date:_____

Appendix F: Principal Interview Schedule

Management of parental engagement amongst lower income families in a primary school in Gauteng.

Date of interview:	
Place of interview:	
Gender:	
Name of school:	
Name of participant:	
Pseudonym:	

Questions:

1. Can you tell me a little bit about your experience as a principal at this school?
   - *How long have you been a prinicipal for?*

2. What is your highest qualification?

3. Can you tell me a bit about the demographics of the school?

4. How would you describe the parent body of the school?
   - *Tell me a bit about the socio-economic status of the families in the school.*
   - *Tell me about the literacy levels of the parents in the school.*
   - *Tell me about the English language proficiency of the parents in the school.*

5. What can you tell me about the parental engagement in this school and particularly within the foundation phase?

6. How do you understand parental engagement?
   - *How important do you believe parental engagement is?*
   - *What are some of the expectations you have of the parents?*
   - *How are these expectations communicated with the parents?*

- *To what extent are these expectations being met?*

7. How often do you as the principal speak directly to the parents?
   - *What are some of the reasons for this communication?*
   - *How and by whom is this communication initiated?*

8. Have you noticed any changes in the degree of parental engagement in the past few years?
   - *What do you think are some of the reasons for these changes?*

9. Have you noticed a difference in the level of engagement between families of differing socio-economic statuses?

10. What are some of the challenges you or the school has experienced regarding parental engagement?
    - *How did you deal with these challenges?*

11. In what ways do you or the school encourage parental engagement?

12. What expectations do you have of teachers in encouraging parental engagement?

13. Does the school have any policies, initiatives or frameworks aimed at engaging parents?

14. In what ways have your approaches to parental engagement been successful?

15. How do you/the school encourage parental engagement amongst families with a lower socio-economic status?
    - *How do you and the school communicate with parents who may be illiterate or who are not proficient in the English language?*

16. In what ways do you think parents who experience illiteracy, long working hours, minimal flexibility and free time and limited access to resources can be engaged in the learning of their children in a way that is valuable?
    - Do you think these parents are aware of this?

17. Are there any school-based initiatives aimed at empowering vulnerable parents to be engaged in the learning of their children?

18. What else can you tell me about parental engagement in this school?

Appendix G: SMT Interview Schedule

Management of parental engagement amongst lower income families in a primary school in Gauteng.

Date of interview:	
Place of interview:	
Gender:	
Name of participant:	
Position of employment:	
Pseudonym:	

Questions:

1. Can you tell me a little bit about your experience as a staff member at this school?
   - *How long have you worked at this school for?*
   - *Where did you study?*
   - *What grade are you teaching?*
   - *Are you part of the SMT?*
   - *Which foundation phase teachers are part of the SMT?*

2. Can you tell me a bit about the demographic of the school?
   - What grades does this school cater for?
   - How many classes per grade?
   - How many learners in the school?
   - Boy-to-girl ratio?
   - What are the learners like? Discipline? Background? Families?

3. How would you describe the parent body of the school?
   - *What do you know about the employment/incomes of the parents?*
   - *What do you know about the literacy levels of the parents in the school?*

- What do you know about the marriage status of parents? Divorce?

-What do you know about the families' households? Number of people? Living with parents or grandparents?

- Tell me about the English language proficiency of the parents in the school.

4. What can you tell me about the parental engagement in this school and particularly within the foundation phase?
   - In what ways do parents make an effort to engage with the school?
   - In what ways do the parents neglect their responsibilities as parents?
   - What do you believe is the role of parents in the education of their children?

5. How do you understand parental engagement?
   - *How important do you believe parental engagement is?*
   - *What are some of the expectations you have of the parents?*
   - *How are these expectations communicated with the parents?*
   - *To what extent are these expectations being met?*

6. How often do you speak directly to the parents?
   - *What are some of the reasons for this communication?*
   - *How and by whom is this communication initiated?*

7. Have you noticed any changes in the degree of parental engagement in the past few years?
   - *What do you think are some of the reasons for these changes?*

8. Have you noticed a difference in the level of engagement between families of differing socio-economic statuses?
   - *Have you noticed a difference between the families who are engaged and those who are not? What are these differences?*

9. What are some of the challenges you or the school has experienced regarding parental engagement?

- How did you deal with these challenges?

10. In what ways does the school encourage parental engagement?

11. In what ways do you personally encourage parental engagement?

12. What expectations does the school or the principal have of you regarding parental engagement?

13. Does the school have any policies, initiatives or frameworks aimed at engaging parents?
    - *What do you know about these policies?*
    - *Have you, as staff, discussed any plans/strategies on how to engage parents?*

14. In what ways have your approaches to parental engagement been successful?

15. How do you/the school encourage parental engagement amongst families with a lower socio-economic status?
    - How do you and the school communicate with parents who may be illiterate or who are not be proficient in the English language?

16. In what ways do you think parents who experience illiteracy, long working hours, minimal flexibility and free time and limited access to resources can be engaged in the learning of their children in a way that is valuable?
    - Do you think these parents are aware of this?

17. Are there any school-based initiatives aimed at empowering vulnerable parents to be engaged in the learning of their children?

18. In what ways do you think the parental engagement can be improved in this school?

- Have you communicated these ideas with other teachers or the principal?

19. What else can you tell me about parental engagement in this school?

Appendix H: Parent Questionnaire

Thank you for being willing to complete this questionnaire. The purpose of this questionnaire to get an understanding of how your family circumstances, time available, energy and opinions about schooling may influence your engagement with your child's learning.

It is important that you answer ALL the questions as honestly as possible. There is no right or wrong answer.

Your answers to the questionnaire will be treated confidentially.

Section 1: Demographic information

Please answer each question by circling the correct answer.

Kapa le etse sediko ho Karabo eo e nepahetseng.

1. Gender:

Male	1
Female	2

2. Race:

African	1	Coloured	4
Indian	2	White	5
Asian	3	Other. Specify: _____	6

3. Language spoken most at home:

English	1	Swati	7
Afrikaans	2	Venda	8
Zulu	3	Tsonga	9
Pedi	4	Ndebele	10
Sotho	5	Xhosa	11
Tswana	6	Other. Specify: _____	12

4. Marital Status:

Single	1	Widowed	4
Married	2	Unmarried: live with partner	5
Divorced	3	Other. Specify: _____	6

5. Condition of employment:

Permanent full day employment	1	Unemployed	5
Permanent half day employment	2	Retrenched	6
Temporary employment	3	Retired	7
Contractual employment	4	Other. Specify: _____	8

6. Condition of employment of spouse/ partner (if applicable):

Permanent full day employment	1	Unemployed	5
Permanent half day employment	2	Retrenched	6
Temporary employment	3	Retired	7
Contractual employment	4	Other. Specify: _____	8
Not applicable			9

7. Number of incomes in your household:

No income	1	2 incomes	3
1 income	2	More than 2 incomes	4

8. How many hours do you work in a day?

Less than 7 hours a day	1	9 to 10 hours a day	3
7 to 8 hours a day	2	More than 10 hours a day	4

9. Highest level of education:

Postgraduate degree	1	Grade 12	4
Degree	2	Grade 9	5

Diploma/certificate	3	Less than Grade 9	6
Other. Specify: _____			7

10. Highest level of education of spouse/partner (If applicable):

Postgraduate degree	1	Grade 9	5
Degree	2	Less than Grade 9	6
Diploma/certificate	3	Other. Specify: _____	7
Grade 12	4	Not applicable	8

11. How many children do you have?

1 child	1	4 children	4
2 children	2	5 children	5
3 children	3	More than 5 children	6

12. Where do you live?

Carletonville	1	Blyvoor Uitsig	4
Khutsong	2	Velverdiend	5
Fochville	3	Other. Specify: _____	6

13. What is your current form of housing?

Town House	1	RDP house	4
Apartment/flat	2	Informal housing	5
Backroom flat	3	Other. Specify: _____	6

14. What is your relation to the child in foundation phase (Grade 1 to grade 3)?

Parent	1	Guardian: Sibling	4
Guardian: Grandparent	2	Other. Specify: _____	5
Guardian: Aunt/uncle	3		

15. What grade is your child in?

Grade 1	1
Grade 2	2
Grade 3	3

16. How does your child get to school?

Car	1	Bicycle	4
Taxi	2	Walk	5
Bus	3	Other. Specify: _____	6

Section 2: Parent perspective

Please answer each question by circling the answer that best describes how you feel about the statement, e.g., whether you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with the statement.

Kapa le etse sediko ho Karabo eo e nepahetseng.

	Strongly agree (ka dumela haholo)	**Agree** (kadumela)	**Disagree** (hake dumellane)	**Strongly disagree** (Nkase kgone le hanyane)
I want to be involved in the learning of my child.	1	2	3	4
It is important that my child performs well at school.	1	2	3	4
My child's learning is a priority for me.	1	2	3	4
The school is 100% responsible for the learning of my child.	1	2	3	4
It is my responsibility to discipline my child.	1	2	3	4
It is my responsibility to make sure my child completes his/her homework.	1	2	3	4
It is my responsibility to assist my child with homework.	1	2	3	4

I have the necessary skills and knowledge to assist my child academically.	1	2	3	4
It is important to read books to my child.	1	2	3	4
I play an important role in my child's schoolwork and academic achievements.	1	2	3	4
If my child works harder, he/she will perform better.	1	2	3	4
It is the teacher's responsibility to discipline my child as she/he spends more time with him/her.	1	2	3	4
It is important for me to speak to my child's teacher about my child's progress.	1	2	3	4
My actions and behaviour influence my child's learning.	1	2	3	4

Section 3: Parental engagement in learning

Please answer each question by circling the answer that best describes how often these practices take place at home, e.g. whether it happens never, rarely, sometimes, often, or always.

Kapa le etse sediko ho Karabo eo e nepahetseng.

	Never (lekgale)	**Seldom/ rarely** (Mohlomong)	**Some-times** (hara nako)	**Often** (hangata pela)	**Always** (kamehla)
My child speaks to me about his/her day at school.	1	2	3	4	5

We have dinner together as a family.	1	2	3	4	5
We have discussions while eating together as a family.	1	2	3	4	5
I check that my child has completed his/her homework.	1	2	3	4	5
I help my child with his/her homework.	1	2	3	4	5
My child has a specific time for completing his/her homework.	1	2	3	4	5
I read storybooks to my child.	1	2	3	4	5
I tell stories to my child.	1	2	3	4	5
I understand my child's homework.	1	2	3	4	5
I have time to assist my child with homework and other learning.	1	2	3	4	5
I praise my child for good achievements or work well done.	1	2	3	4	5
I assist my child in setting goals.	1	2	3	4	5
My child asks for help when he/she does not understand the homework.	1	2	3	4	5
My child has paper and stationery available at home.	1	2	3	4	5

My child has storybooks available at home.	1	2	3	4	5
My child has a desk/table to work on at home.	1	2	3	4	5
My child has access to the internet at home.	1	2	3	4	5
I spend time answering any questions my child has that is not related to schoolwork.	1	2	3	4	5
I feel too tired to have lengthy conversations with my child.	1	2	3	4	5
I have high expectations for my child to perform well at school.	1	2	3	4	5
My child knows what I expect of him/her academically.	1	2	3	4	5
My child understands that school and learning is important.	1	2	3	4	5
I set strict rules in the house.	1	2	3	4	5
My child performs below the class average.	1	2	3	4	5
My child has a set bedtime in the week.	1	2	3	4	5
It is easy for me to come to the school.	1	2	3	4	5

Section 4: Relationship with the school

Please answer each question by circling the answer that best describes how you feel about the statement, e.g., whether you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with the statement.

Kapa le etse sediko ho Karabo eo e nepahetseng.

	Strongly agree (ka dumela haholo)	**Agree** (kadumela)	**Disagree** (hake dumellane)	**Strongly disagree** (Nkase kgone le hanyane)
I speak to my child's teacher regularly.	1	2	3	4
I have an open relationship with my child's teacher.	1	2	3	4
I feel comfortable to speak to my child's teacher about concerns or ideas I may have.	1	2	3	4
I feel comfortable to speak to the principal about concerns or ideas I may have.	1	2	3	4
I have opportunity to share my ideas and recommendations with the school.	1	2	3	4
I feel welcome at school.	1	2	3	4
The school values my ideas, input, and recommendations.	1	2	3	4
I know what the school expects of me as a parent.	1	2	3	4
I know what my child's teacher expects of me as a parent.	1	2	3	4
I am able to meet the school's expectations.	1	2	3	4

My child's teacher is aware of challenges I may be experiencing at home.	1	2	3	4
My child's teacher is aware of challenges I may have in assisting my child with learning.	1	2	3	4
I have a good understanding of my child's progress.	1	2	3	4
I am aware of areas that my child needs help and support in.	1	2	3	4
I know how to support and encourage my child's learning.	1	2	3	4
I speak to my child's teacher about ways that I can support my child's learning.	1	2	3	4
It would be helpful to have training on how to support my child's learning.	1	2	3	4

Section 5: Details

Please answer each question by circling the correct answer and filling in the details below.

1. Who completed this questionnaire?

I completed the questionnaire by myself.	1
I had help to complete the questionnaire because I do not fully understand English.	2
I had help to complete the questionnaire because I cannot read.	3
Other. Specify: _____	4

2. I am interested in participating in a workshop about being engaged in my child's learning:

Yes	1
No	2

3. Name: _____
4. Cell phone number: _____
5. Email address (if you have one): _____

***Important*: Please put the questionnaire in the sealed envelope provided to ensure confidentiality.**

Thank you for taking the time to complete the questionnaire.

Ka leboha

Appendix I: Parent Interview Schedule

Management of parental engagement amongst lower income families in a primary school in Gauteng.

Date of interview:	
Place of interview:	
Names of participant:	
Pseudonym of participant:	

Questions:

1. Can you share a little bit about your experience from the beginning of the implementation up until now?

2. In what ways do you think the plan has influenced your relationship with your child?

3. In what ways has the plan changed the routine in your home?

4. Which parts of the plan do you think have been most beneficial in your home? Why do you say so?

5. How practical do you feel the plan has been in your home?

6. Which parts of the plan did you find challenging to implement? What are some of the challenges you encountered?

7. How has your understanding of your role in your child's learning changed since the beginning of the implementation?

8. How capable/empowered do you feel to contribute to the learning of your child?

9. In what ways do you think you will/will not continue to implement the plan?

10. How has your understanding of parental engagement changed since the beginning of the project?

11. How do you think the school understands and approaches engagement?

12. In what ways do you think the school encourages engagement?

13. What recommendations can you make to improve the plan further?

14. What else can you tell me?

Appendix J: Parents' Invitation to Attend Workshop