

**Experiences of school principals regarding parental engagement: A case
study of six principals in primary schools of KwaZulu-Natal**

by

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DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I declare that this research dissertation, titled “*Experiences of school principals regarding parental engagement: A case study of six principals in primary schools of KwaZulu -Natal* ” is my own work. The dissertation is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the MEd (Education Management) degree in the College of Education at the University of South Africa. I further declare that I obtained the required authorisation and consent to carry out this research.



Student Signature

DATE 29/10/2025



Supervisor Signature

DATE 29/10/2025

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DEDICATION

Firstly, I dedicate this dissertation to every student out there who are considering giving up as a testament that anything is possible, regardless of one's circumstances, background, poverty, or lack of role models.

This work is also dedicated to the younger version of me, who once doubted her ability to succeed and struggled to feel worthy. May this achievement serve as a reminder that perseverance, faith, and self-belief can turn even the most uncertain beginnings into extraordinary accomplishments.

Finally, I dedicate this to my children, as a source of motivation and proof that their dreams are within reach. May they always believe in their potential and strive fearlessly for the successes that await them.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore school principals' experiences of how they understand and promote parental engagement in their schools. The intention of the study was to find out what principals believe parental engagement means, the role that principals and parents play in it, and the factors that promote or hinder parents from being involved in their children's education. The study used a qualitative research approach within an interpretivist paradigm to understand principals' real experiences in their school settings. A case study design was used, and six principals from public primary schools in KwaZulu-Natal took part in the research. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which allowed principals to share their views and experiences in detail. The findings of this study showed that principals perceive parental engagement as an active and on-going partnership between schools and families. The principals believed parents contribute not only by attending meetings but also by supporting learning at home, guiding behaviour, and helping with school activities. Principals viewed their role as leaders who build communication, trust, and cooperation between parents and teachers. The study also found that good communication, mutual respect, and a welcoming school environment encourage parental involvement, while poverty, low education levels, negative attitudes, and language barriers make it more difficult for parents' engagement. The study recommends that schools create more inclusive and flexible ways for parents to be involved, and that principals receive training on building strong home-school partnerships. Encouraging collaboration between parents, teachers, and principals can help improve learners' success and strengthen the sense of community within schools.

Keywords: Parental engagement, school principals, home-school partnership, qualitative study, KwaZulu-Natal

LIST OF ACRONYMS/ABBREVIATIONS

Acronym/Abbreviation	Full Meaning
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DoE	Department of Education
KZN	KwaZulu-Natal
SGB	School Governing Body
SMT	School Management Team
HOD	Head of Department
CAPS	Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement
ECD	Early Childhood Development
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
IQMS	Integrated Quality Management System
SASA	South African Schools Act
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

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CHAPTER 1

ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The concept parental engagement encompasses attitude of parents towards the school activities, parent behaviour towards learner performance and behaviour (Abdul-Adil & Farmer, 2006). Parental engagement also denotes ‘parent involvement’ and ‘parent participation’ (Daniel, 2005). A study in Italy by Daniel (2005) highlights that for learner performance to improve, there is a need for parents to support the academic performance of the learners and make a positive change in the academic performance. The study (Daniel, 2005) further indicated that parents who connect with the teachers and supports activities done in school do encourage their children to perform better in school. Such encouragement contributes to improving the performance of the learners in academics as well as learner behaviour. The contribution of parents that facilitates educational improvement of the learners includes attending school meetings and being part of the policy making team in which the parents are expected to make sure that the school obtain adequate learning resources. In addition, the interaction between the school and the parents also plays a key role in parental involvement in school activities. Gentili and others (2020) are of the opinion that two-way communication between teachers and parents enables collaboration besides provides opportunity for joint problem solving. The principal being a school leader has the responsibility of ensuring that parents form part of the school and are visible in the activities of the school. When all the stakeholders work together with the school management and the teachers, a strong base is set for improving the behaviour of the learners as well as building their social and academic skills (Reinke, Smith, & Herman, 2019). Castillo, Lynch and Parachinar (2020) also report that when parents are engaged in school matters there are high chances of improving the academic standard of learners in primary schools. Castillo, Lynch and Parachinar (2020) in a study done in the University of St Andrews UK, showed that when learners become aware of their parental commitment to their studies, they strive to improve their academic performance in standardised tests. Daniel Wang and Berthelsen, (2016) argues that learners do benefit from the collaborative work and commitment between the teachers and their parents. Averbach, (2009) is also of the opinion that principals have the delegated power which gives them the authority to urge parents to be committed in taking part to support learners in doing school activities through policy development, commonly shared

objectives and a school culture that encourages the collaboration among all school stakeholders.

School principals can increase parental engagement by creating a welcoming environment. Literature reports that principals are capable of creating opportunities for parental engagement (Leithwood, 2012). Such opportunities may include educational packages that aim at developing the capacity of the parents such that they become active participants in school meetings. The principal should also find ways of exploring the knowledge and skills of the parents that can be used to improve learner performance. The connection between the school and parents could create a sense of ownership among the stakeholders.

A study done in Canada by Webber and Nickel (2020) reported that school-home partnership needs to be grounded on values such as mutual respect as well as positive inter and intrapersonal relationships. Canadian jurisdictions stipulate that the role played by school leaders is fundamental in building up teachers- parental engagement efforts by encouraging teacher professional development as well as strengthening the policies that supports parental engagement (Jeynes, 2018). The study by (Jeynes, 2018) also highlighted that parents have a lot to contribute to the school in terms of their time (voluntary work) their knowledge, academic background and special skills. In some schools, teachers reside in areas far from the school and have little knowledge about the community in which the school is situated. In such cases, it is the responsibility of the parents to help the school in managing day to day challenges that they experience which relates to the school environment.

During the COVID 19 pandemic, there was lock-down in many countries. Schools were closed creating a gap in the education system. Parents and teachers internationally, were to find ways of restoring teaching and learning (UNESCO, 2020). The break from the usual schooling activities as a result of COVID 19 had negative influence on the academic achievement and psychological behaviour of some learners. Some learners were psychologically affected by social isolation on their mental health which also created a challenging situation at home (Reimers & Schleicher, 2020). Some learners experienced social loneliness as a result of being away from their social networks with their peers at school, disconnecting the learners emotionally. Kumar and Salinas (2021) assert that stress, anxiety, depression which an isolated learner could experience may result in mental illness. Apart from the academic, emotional and social problems experienced by the learners during COVID 19 school closure, had to be creative in supporting the learners at home.

South Africa is a country which is highly divided along racial, socio-economic status and geographic location. The schools were ranked and given status that was determined by the race of the school population, socio-economic status of the school stakeholders as well as the geographic location in which the schools are located. The population which are considered as previously disadvantaged groups of people, schools and learners are the majority (Yamauchi, 2011). Home teaching and learning became a reality in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the fact that children were to stay at home during the lock-down period, the role of the parents shifted from providing care and nourishment to overseeing home-based learning. The responsibility of the teachers and the principals was to facilitate the learning activities done at home (Abuhammad, 2020). In the period that followed COVID-19 pandemic recovery, World Bank initiated a 'build back together' move to encourage learning support at home and the normal school function to continue (Azevedo et. al., 2020). COVID-19 interference in education enforced parental engagement and care as well as working collaboratively with teachers for quality teaching and learning to continue (Bubb & Jones, 2020). The role played by the parents during the COVID 19 lockdown period may be used by the school principals to gauge the capacity and willingness of the parents to be engrossed in school activities. From COVID 19 experience, the next steps that the principals could take may include setting clear communication channels, clearly defining roles and responsibilities, outlining tasks and expectations for parents. Principals can provide resources and training to develop skills and utilise the knowledge and skills of the parents. Principals can foster positive relationships between all stakeholders which include participation in decision making. Lastly continuously evaluate and refine parental engagement strategies to ensure long-term commitment and involvement.

This research aimed at investigating the experiences of school principals regarding the factors that promote parental engagement in primary schools.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Ideally, children need guidance and support from home and in school for their holistic development. Jeynes (2018) states that parental engagement in school matters yield multiple results such as being involved in the wellbeing of the academic achievement as well as increasing the morale of teachers. The reality regarding engaging parents in school programmes is that there are multiple encounters that schools experience when implementing

parental engagement initiatives. Parents who are described as low-income earners tend to work long hours which consumes the time that they are expected to attend school meetings and events (Cooper, 2010). Apart from unavailability of parents to work closely with the teachers in teaching and learning matters, there is also a need for effective leadership. Khalifa, Gooden and Davis (2016) are of the opinion that parental engagement could be increased by effective leadership in the school. Such leadership should aim at promoting a healthy learning climate and teachers who understand the need to accommodate parents as their partners. It seems that parental appointment to support learners in an inclusive school could be more challenges to manage due to the varied needs of the learners (Michael, Wolhuter & Van Wyk, 2012). The other point of concern is that the socioeconomic status (SES) of the parents stands as a factor that blocks parents from supporting their children at school (Malone, 2017). Consequently, these challenges may discourage parents from being visible in working together with principals, teachers and other stakeholders in the school. The literature on parental engagement focuses on the challenges that parents experience in fulfilling their expected parental role of supporting learning. The gap in literature that this study intended to contribute to, is generating knowledge about the leadership of the principal in parental engagement process and its effects on SES of the parents to take part in school activities and motivated the learners. This proposed study explored the experiences of school principals regarding the factors that encourage parental engagement in primary schools. The study provided understandings on how the principals perceive parental participation as well as the factors that promote parental engagement as well as what limits the engagement.

1.3 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

In my opinion and experience, principals as leaders in the school, can provide parents with loads of information regarding what is expected of the parents in being part of school activities. I find it crucial for the school, home, and community to collaborate to support learners in academic performance and maintain acceptable behaviour. In my experience and from my observations as a Departmental Head in a primary school, it seems that learners who do not have active parental support do tend to struggle academically, emotionally, and socially. The absence of a parent figure in caring for the academic needs of the learner could be one of the causes of learner absenteeism as well as unacceptable behaviour of the learner. Such learners at times are socially isolated and struggle with academic work. I have also observed that the learners who are academically able but lack parental support tends to be

‘people pleasers’, such learners regularly search for acknowledgement and praise and take criticism harshly. Since the school principal is the head of the school, I am puzzled as to what the principals perceive as parental involvement as well as the factors that encourage or inhibit parental engagement.

Ankrum (2016) shows that parental involvement increases the academic performance of the learners and learner school attendance. Park and Holloway (2017) stated that parental engagement boosted student achievements in mathematics and reading achievement. Caridade, Sousa and Dinis, (2020) reports that schools with an effective for teaching and learning culture and interpersonal relationships that encourages collaboration are likely to motivate parents to be engaged in ensuring that learners attend school regularly and behaving accordingly.

South African history before 1994 highlights the racial division in school which resulted in having schools with similar cultural setting that required certain leadership and management skills from the principal to be able to get parental engagement (Evans & Cleghorn, 2014). After 1994, schools in South Africa reformed becoming inclusive in terms of learner background, race. Socio-economic activities and other factors. The gap that possibly exists in literature is information regarding how school principals experience and identify what encourages or limits the engagement in different school contexts. In South African there are many school principals who do not have background training in leading and managing schools which also include issues regarding parental engagement (DBE, 2015). The proposed study may identify what is actually happening in school regarding the potential of the principal to identify enabling factors for parental engagement as well as the barriers that hinder parental engagement in education. The study suggested policy formation and intervention strategies aimed at promoting parental engagement in primary schools.

1.4 PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this study was to explore the role of the school principals in encouraging parental engagement and the factors that encourages parental encouragement. The objectives of this study are as follows

- To explore how principals understand the concept parental engagement.

- To establish the role parents, play in parental engagement.
- To establish the role played by principals in parental engagement.
- To establish the factors that hinder parental engagement.
- To identify the factors that promotes parental engagement.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What are the experiences of the school principals regarding the factor that promote parental engagement?

Sub-questions

- How do the school principals describe the concept parental engagement?
- What role do parents play in parental engagement
- What role do the principals play in parental engagement?
- What are the factors that hinder parental engagement?
- What are the factors that promote parental engagement?

1.6 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

The Model of parental involvement developed Joyce Epstein (2002) be the theoretical framework of this study. This model outlines the complex nature of parental engagement in supporting educating their children. Epstein et al (2002) presents six facets of the model which includes parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making and collaborating with the community. The facets represent a distinct dimension through which parents' participation in uplifting the education of their children can be realised. Epstein's model highlights that in order for parents are capable of working jointly with teachers if there is collective sharing of obligations with the school and the general community. Epstein Model is widely reported in literature as a framework for exploring issues related to parental involvement.

I have used this model to identify the various adaptations of ways in which parent strengthen the schooling of their children (Epstein et al, 2002). This study further explored how the school principals identify and describe the factors that encourage parental engagement in selected primary schools in KwaZulu-Natal by taking into consideration the experiences of school principals using the six facets of Epstein's model as a guideline.

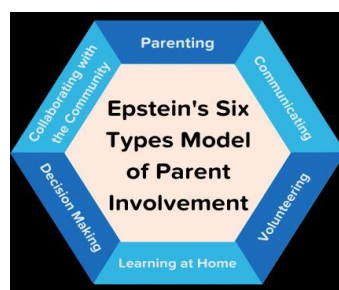


Figure 1.1 Epstein's Six Type Model of Parental Engagement

The Six facets of Epstein Model of parental engagement is explained in this section starting with the concept parenting which is explained as providing an enabling environment that gives parents a voice to express themselves in supporting the teachers in dealing with learner related issues. When parents collaborate with other school stakeholders the care given to the learners in the home environment is assured. Issues concerning growth and developmental stages of the child as well as providing good nutrition and a safe home environment are better understood by parents when the parents work meticulously with the teachers in monitoring progress of the learners (Epstein, 2002).

The Model (Epstein, 2002) emphasises the significance of communication in the association between home and school. Communication that is considered healthy is a reciprocal conversation between teachers and parents that is done in order to fill the learning gaps at home and in the school premises. Communication is one of the factors that I explored in this study and its influence on parental engagement.

Volunteering is the will of the parents to part-take in aiding teaching and learning activities. The various talents that the parents portray, skills and knowledge can be utilised in different aspects of the school to alleviate the load carried by teachers. Principals can ensure that the potential of the parents are fully utilised by identifying parents who can offer their time and skills in part-taking in school activities. In this study, the first sub-question intends to explore the existence of voluntary activities in the principals' understanding of parental engagement. Although teachers are responsible for implementing the syllabus, the role played by parents should be helping learners in doing homework and different curriculum activities done beyond the teaching hours. Parents who are familiar with school curriculum can perform these duties with ease while the parent who is not knowledgeable about the curriculum may struggle to assist learners in doing their homework (Bakker & Denessen, 2007). In this study, I explored the views of the principals that participated in this study regarding parental role in doing homework.

This Model expects parents to play a role in decision-making as a team of stakeholders by providing their say in the structuring and execution of school policies, the procedures followed in the school and the practices within the school. Ayeni, (2021) asserts that the voices of parents must be heard during the decision making in different teams, parental committees as well as other collaborative spaces. For this study, I explored the decision-making factor and its ability to promote or inhibit parental engagement as identified by the principals in sub-question three and four.

Collaboration is part of parental engagement, and it is associated with working together and the acquiring as well as the use of resources that promotes teaching and learning (Epstein et al, 2002). The third sub-question of this study investigated the views of the principals regarding collaboration that they have experienced exist between teachers and parents. The discussed facets of Epstein's parental engagement Model form the basis of this study.

1.7 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research methodology is the procedures that the researchers follow in theory of how and why researchers obtaining knowledge (Briggs, 2011). According to MacMillan and Schumacher (2014), research is a systematic and controlled structure of data collection and analysis.

1.7.1 Research Paradigm

Research paradigm can be described as a central belief about the research approach including the underlying assumptions that relates to reality of the phenomenon (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). There are many different research paradigms in literature such as positivist, interpretivist and critical theory paradigms and others (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). From the questions that I have asked in this study, I have worked within an interpretivist paradigm which is often with how the participants behave their attitude and reason as well as their viewpoint and insights (Willis, 2007). Interpretivists focus on exploring how the participant and the researcher understand the phenomenon understudy (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). Doing this study under the interpretivist paradigm, assisted me in exploring and identifying how the principals involved in this study experience the factors that promote or inhibit parental engagement. The participants whom researchers approach to be involved in interpretive research are often engaged in their natural settings (Mc Millan & Schumacher, 2010). The participants in this study were principals who were interviewed at their schools, which is their natural setting.

1.7.2 Research approach

The research approach in this study was qualitative. Qualitative approach is aligned with the studies that seek to explore the perceptions and experiences of participants in their natural setting (Bacon-Shone, 2022). A qualitative researcher asks research questions about their experiences and allows the participants to give in-depth responses (Mc Millan & Schumacher, 2014). Qualitative research approach focuses on generating non-numerical data such as the experience's attitudes and beliefs of the participants with the aim of providing the understanding of the social reality of the phenomenon. My reason for following a qualitative approach was to get the nuances of the experiences of the principals on the factors that promote or discourages parents from being engaged in school activities.

The advantages of qualitative research approach are that the researcher can generate comprehensive data from the participants grounded on their experiences, opinions and interpretations (Chalhoub-Deville & Deville, 2008). Creswell (2013) indicates that the capacity of qualitative study to yield rich information is based on the use of different data collection methods. The researcher following qualitative approach is able to determine how the participant has experienced a phenomenon and made sense of the experience (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In qualitative research the researcher interacts with the participants directly, while collecting data through interview method (Ramsey, et. al., 2016). One of the characteristics of qualitative approach in exploring human experience in a holistic manner (Denzin & Lincoln, 2002). Qualitative research is deemed as a suitable research approach for studying an individual case or event bringing out the voices of the participants and how they interpret of their experience (Richardson, Abraham & Bond, 2012). Qualitative research approach has a flexible structure in data generation and probing for meaning in which the participant and the researcher constructed and reconstructed the meaning of the research findings (Maxwell, 2012).

The limitations of using qualitative approach are that at times the researcher may focus on interpreting the findings without relating it to the context of the study which may have influence on the research findings (Silverman, 2010). This means that when doing a qualitative study, the researcher must be considerate of the research context and how it may influence the experiences of the participants. Smaller sample sizes used in qualitative studies may limit the researcher's ability to take a broad view the findings of the study beyond the researched participants and context (Henry & Lipsky, 2014). During qualitative research process, data collection and analysis takes considerable amount of time (Flick, 2011).

1.7.3 Research Design

McMillan and Schumacher, (2014) describes a research design as a narrative of the measures and procedures followed in doing research. Case study design was used in this study because it embraces the production of in-depth data by exploration the case being studied within the everyday context (Merriam, 2009). The case explored in this study was the experiences of the principals regarding the factors that they identify as promoting or inhibiting parental engagement in their schools. The site of data collection in this study was the schools from which the principals participating in this study was selected. Case study was a suitable research design for gaining detailed insights about the phenomenon. This case study involved a small group of principals from various schools in Kwa Zulu Natal to gain detailed insights in and the experiences of principals regarding factors that promote parental engagement (Creswell, 2013). I took into consideration the unique context in which the case is situated including social, cultural, and historical factors that may influence the study in the Uthukela District in KZN. The holistic perspective of this study aimed to understand the complexities and interconnections within the case (O'Hara et. al., 2011).

In this study, I was able to generate detailed data through multiple sources which provided me with a comprehensive view of the case as indicated by Mc Millan and Schumacher (2014). Case study design also assisted by contributing to the development of new theories or outline existing ones (Yin, 2003). One of the limitations of a case study was that the findings are often generalised within the context of the study and not further to the general population (Yin, 2003). This means that I only generalised the finding within the context of this study. Researchers also needed to be cautious the possibility of the influence of subjective interpretation which may question the honesty of the findings (Creswell, 2013). To address the issue of objectivity, my supervisor guided me in ensuring that I am not subjective in my reporting of the findings and my interpretation. Conducting a thorough case study can be time consuming and may require substantial resources (Yin, 2003).

1.7.4 Population and sampling

The population from which this study was drawn was school principals from UThukela district in KwaZulu-Natal. Purposive sampling was used to select the participants because it enabled me to interact with participants with the potential of providing relevant information. Purposive sampling is described by Cohen and others (2007) as the process of choosing participants who can best provide information on the phenomenon. By making use of purposive sampling and convenience sampling, I intended to choose participants who are principals of primary schools and are likely to share with me their leadership experiences of parental engagement. I interviewed six principals from public primary schools in the

UThukela district of KwaZulu-Natal. Purposive sampling was used to choose the schools on the basis of years of leadership experiences of the principals well as their willingness to be involved in the study. Convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling technique in which participants are selected based on their accessibility and willingness to participate in a study. This approach is commonly used in qualitative research when researchers seek participants who are readily available and possess relevant knowledge or experience related to the phenomenon under investigation. In this study, convenience sampling was used to select school principals who were accessible and willing to share their experiences of understanding and promoting parental engagement in their schools (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

1.7.5 Data collection methods

I generated data from six schools using semi-structured interviews. Mack and others (2005) assert that, when a researcher uses semi-structures, the data obtained provides a clear understanding of how the participants perceives the problem or issue that is being researched. I prepared the questions to use during the interview in advance. I focused on generating information about the experiences of the principal during individual interviews with the participants. During the interviews, the participants narrated their experiences, views and beliefs (Cohen et al, 2007) about their experiences of parental engagement. The predetermined questions were limited to brief answers but allowed in-depth explanation, description and interpretation of the phenomenon as perceived by the participants (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). I ensured that an in-depth interview is done using the selected principals to explore their perceptions and experiences that encourage parental engagement in their schools. I also observed the participants during the interview session took note of their expression, pitch of their voice and other verbal and nonverbal expressions. I made appointments to visit all the six schools telephonically through the principal, thereafter, written confirmation letters was sent to schools so that the participants gave consent to participate in the study.

Using semi-structured interviews to generate data, allowed the researcher to paraphrase questions when there is need for the purpose of clarity and also ask follow-up questions during the interview. De Vos and Fouche, (2005) states that through semi-structured interviews, a researcher is able to generate detailed information to gain a comprehensive picture of the experiences of the participants. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews provide an opportunity for the researcher and the participants to develop a rapport that leads to a trusting relationship and generation of rich data (Marie, 2007). The limitations of semi-

structured interviews include possible language barriers which can be a barrier to probing during the interview (Marshall & White, 1994). Another limitation of interviews would be poor or limited responses from the participants which could yield insufficient data (Small, 2008). This could be caused by language barriers resulting in loss of data and often cause issues in trustworthiness of the interview data (Small, 2008).

1.7.6 Data analysis

Cohen and others (2018) explain that the process of data analysis entails making sense of the data produced by the participants. There are many types of data analysis methods such as narrative, grounded theory and thematic analysis among others (MacMillan & Schumacher, 2010). A thematic analysis procedure will be followed in the data analysis process. Braun and Clark (2006) explain that thematic analysis process involves identifying codes and categories, analysing them and reporting patterns that are identified in the finding to be able to write a narrative of the findings.

I used the following steps to analyse data:

Step 1: Getting familiarises with the data.

The data collected using qualitative approach and data collection methods are in narratives (Gall, Gall & Bory, 2003). I started the data analysis process by listening to the recorded interviews at least one before I began to transcribe the recording. I studied the patterns in the data and create codes for each pattern; I organised my list of codes. First, I read the transcript many times and wrote down a few notes. MacMillan and Schumacher (2010) states that transcription involves converting the audio data to written text. I then read the interview transcripts at least three times to be able to start identifying patterns in the text.

Step 2: Assigning initial codes.

Gibbs (2007) describes a code as ideas, viewpoints activities and others which the researcher applies to the text that expresses the idea presented in the interview. After reading the transcripts several times, I started generating ideas from the participants' responses by assigning initial codes to the text (Braun & Clark). Maree (2018), states that coding led to recognizing patterns in the data. I then classified the codes and organised the information to form categories.

Step 3: Search for themes.

Harper and Thompson (2011) explain that a theme in data analysis is a particular pattern of meaning found by arranging codes in the data. In the process of searching for themes, I followed the thematic data analysis process. Thematic analysis as a process in which a researcher identifies themes and patterns in the transcripts (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017).

Step 4: Review themes.

At this stage I reviewed the themes and connected them to recognise the emerging patterns in the data and rename the themes. I then started writing a narrative report.

Step 5: Define and name themes.

After arranging themes, I wrote the narrative that presents the findings of the study. I categorised the stories in each theme then compared the findings with literature.

Step 6: Produce the report.

In this step I explained the story generated through thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I aligned my findings with the theoretical framework of this study and the research questions (MacMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

1.8 TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE STUDY

Trustworthiness is concerned with measures that assess the quality of a qualitative study (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Guba and Lincoln (1994) further identify the quality measures to include the credibility, conformability, dependability, and transferability.

Credibility

Credibility involves determining the authenticity of the finding or if the findings are believable (Trochim & Donnelly, 2007). Assuring the credibility of the study is the responsibility of the participants (Kumar, 2011). In this study, I did member checking, meaning that I took the transcripts to the participants to affirm the accuracy of the data. This was done by requesting the participants to read the transcripts and check if their experiences have been recorded correctly (Mc Millan & Schumacher, 2014). I further triangulated the data from the different participants. I prolonged my research site visits by doing follow-up interviews as well as doing member checking.

Transferability

Transferability is a term used in gauging if the findings of the study may be generalised. It is the check done to establish if the findings of the study can be application to other context or geographical locations (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). For this study I gave an elaborative description of the research site and sample to create a picture that the reader of this dissertation may decide if the findings of the study are relevant to other contexts.

Dependability

Trochim and Donnelly (2007) states that dependability is about yielding similar findings should the same research be done elsewhere. To determine if the findings of the study is dependability, the researcher needs to give a compressive description of the context of the study. In this study, I ensured dependability by recording all the data that I have collected. I conducted a pilot study to ensure all relevant data was obtained

Conformability

Anney (2014) states that conformability is the level to which the findings and interpretation of the study can be approved or verified by other researchers. To ensure conformability of this study, I checked and described negative instances and the contradictions on the findings.

1.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Arifin (2018) states that research participants must be protected in a research study by adhering to specific ethical principles. Research ethics focuses on what is regarded as right or wrong, acceptable or not acceptable as well as something that is good or bad in the process of doing research (MacMillan and Schumacher, 2001). Research ethics concerns making sure that permission is obtained from the relevant authorities before the research commence (Cohen et al, 2007). In this study, I obtained permission to do study from the Ethics Committee of University of South Africa (UNISA). To get access to the schools, I requested for permission from the Department of Education, UThukela District in Kwa- Zulu Natal. After obtaining permission from the different schools, I requested permission from the principals as well as their consent to be interviewed. I arranged for an introductory meeting with the participants in which I explained the details of my study.

The following are the ethical principles that I adhered to in this study.

Informed consent and voluntary participation

The research participants in this study were school principals. My initial visit to the school was to inform the principal of the purpose of the study, the research questions, what were to be expected from the participant as well as the significance of the study. I had a briefing session with the participants in whom I gave them the background of the study and the opportunity to give me their informed consent. Arifin (2018) affirms that research participants need to be well informed about the study before they give consent to be part of the study. Verbal and written communications were used in seeking consent and voluntary participation. I further informed the participants that they are free to withdraw from the study without any penalty. Each participant was given a consent form to sign before making the appointment to do the interviews. The signing of the consent form meant that there was a mutual agreement to proceed with data collection.

Privacy

Cohen and others (2018) clarify that privacy concerns safeguarding the information that the researcher obtains from the participants. Privacy issues cover interference during data generation process as well as protecting sensitive data. In this study, I conducted individual interviews to ensure that the privacy of the participants is protected. To safeguard the data, I saved them in a folder that is password protected.

Confidentiality and anonymity

McMillan and Schumacher (2001) describe confidentiality as the process of restricting access to the generated data generated. To observe confidentiality in this study, it was only I and my supervisor who had access to the research data. The identity of the participants was also protected by using name codes such as Principal A, Principal B and so on. The names of the schools that will be the research site were also given code names such as “School A”: “School B” and so on.

1.10 DEFINITIONS OF KEY CONCEPTS

- The concept parent in this study refers to the biological or adoptive parent who is the caregiver of the learner. The term parent includes the caregivers legally given custody of the learner (SASA NO.84 of 1996).
- Parental engagement is all about the input of the parents in the effort of supporting the schooling of the learners. Ntekane (2018), states that parental engagement is the situation in which parents are deeply immersed in supporting schooling. Parental engagement was used in this study as a situation in which parents are obliged to help the learners with their schoolwork.
- Barriers are difficulties or problems that reduce the ability of parents to be supportive in the education of their children. Barriers are the obstacles to learning and development that do exist in the school and the education system as a whole (Lomofsky & Lazarus, 2001). Barriers in this study denoted circumstances that hindered parental engagement.

1.11 PLANNING OF THE STUDY

Chapter One – Introduction

Chapter one included the introduction and background to the study to capture the reader's attention. I also included the problem statement, rationale, purpose, aims and objectives. I further presented the research questions, the theoretical framework of the study and a brief explanation of the methodology.

Chapter Two – Literature Review

In chapter two, I conducted critically literature review on what had been written on parental engagement/involvement. The literature review covered international as well as South African-based studies on parental engagement. The chapter provided insights into previous work.

Chapter Three – Research methodology

Chapter three described the methodology procedures to be used in the study that included the research paradigm, approach and design. The chapter also described the research site, population and sampling style, data collection methods, trustworthiness of the study as well as ethical considerations.

Chapter Four – Findings of the study and discussion

The findings of the study were presented in this chapter. This chapter discussed the findings of the study and aligned them with the research questions and compared the findings with literature on the research topic.

Chapter Five – Summary, conclusions and recommendations

This was the last chapter of the study. I highlighted the findings of the study, drew conclusion, and made recommendations based on the findings of the study.

1.12 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

The experiences of the principal regarding the factors that encourage parental engagement were the focus of this study. Principals are leaders in the school; it was therefore crucial to explore their perceptions and understanding of what parental engagement entails. This study allowed me to further investigate the factors that discouraged or hindered parental engagement. These finding of this study provided recommendations that enhanced the ability of the principals to encourage parental engagement in the future. Parents are also likely to benefit from the findings of this study by being informed about the enabling and inhibiting factors.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW ON SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1 introduced the research topic, explained the research problem, and stated the research questions. It also justified the study, revealed the theoretical framework and briefly outlined the research methodology. This chapter primarily focuses on exploring the literature pertaining to principals' experiences concerning parental engagement in primary schools in KwaZulu-Natal. This chapter includes a comprehensive review of relevant literature and establishes the conceptual framework. The term 'literature review' denotes a systematic and methodical approach to identifying, analysing, and synthesizing previously published works by scholars, researchers, and practitioners (Masha, 2017). The primary aim of the literature review is to provide insight into existing knowledge and information within the research area, enabling the researcher to understand what is known. According to Creswell (2014), the literature review bridges gaps and extends previous research by situating the researcher's study within the broader scholarly discourse. Additionally, reviewing the literature is crucial as it aids in preparing for the presentation of research findings and organises relevant topics and sub-topics (Selolo, 2018).

Parental engagement has been extensively researched, with numerous studies defining it as the active participation of parents in their children's education (Jaiswal, 2017; Kalayci & Ergul, 2020; Otani, 2019). This concept has long been a part of education programmes in industrialised nations and is not a new phenomenon (Chekol & Ayane, 2019). Recent studies have shown a correlation between parental engagement and children's academic success (Anthony & Ogg, 2019; Connel, 2018; Massucco, 2020; Tus, 2021). However, teachers still find it challenging to engage parents in their children's education, as many schools struggle to establish relationships with parents (Orange, 2020). This research aimed at investigating principals' experiences with factors that encourage parental engagement in primary schools in KwaZulu-Natal. This literature review identifies gaps between this study and previous research, addresses the research questions, and supports the study's conclusions. It begins by

defining leadership, outlining the role of principals as leaders, exploring different types of leadership, discussing the concept and benefits of parental engagement, identifying challenges related to parental engagement, and providing the context of the study. The theoretical framework, based on Epstein's six types of parental involvement and the overlapping spheres of influence, is also elaborated (Epstein, 2017).

2.2 LEADERSHIP OF THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

Leadership is the act of motivating, influencing, and directing individuals or groups toward a shared vision or objective (Northouse, 2021). The term leadership includes the capability to empower, motivate, and inspire others to pursue a common goal, while fostering an environment that encourages innovation, collaboration, and growth (Yuki & Gardner, 2020). In the realm of education, leadership involves directing and managing educational institutions, programmes, and activities to attain academic excellence, promote innovation, and meet social responsibilities (Bush, Bell & Middlewood, 2019). School principals are pivotal leaders who influence the culture, climate, and academic success of their schools. This study aimed at exploring the experiences of school principals on parental engagement in primary schools in KwaZulu-Natal.

International research shows that there is an increase in the responsibilities of school principals across various countries due to the decentralisation of functions (Bush, 2018). This shift on the responsibilities of school principals has resulted in principals taking on many core duties. For instance, a survey by Weinstein, Marfán and Horn (2016) focusing on 26 new principals in Chile found that most of the principals (81%) found their roles to be challenging or very challenging. The main issues identified were the high amount of time spent on administrative tasks, the numerous responsibilities, as well as general lack of preparedness for the role.

In North American, European, African, and Australian schools Adams and Muthiah (2020) explored the challenges faced by principals. Their study highlighted that principal leadership significantly impacts both school and student performance. They found that personal issues, inadequate school resources and facilities, financial constraints, and stakeholder challenges often hindered principals' effectiveness. These findings suggest that similar challenges might also affect principals in South Africa. Additionally, negative attitudes from parents and interventions from the Ministry of Education were found to contribute to ineffective teaching and learning. The study also revealed that principals often lack the necessary knowledge and

skills for effective organisation, and that they do not receive sufficient professional leadership training, given that the government only requires a bachelor's degree in education (B.Ed.) rather than a specialised leadership degree.

Regionally, in Africa, Ampofo, Onyango, & Ogola, (2019) investigated how school leaders' direct supervision impacts teacher performance in public senior high schools in Ghana. Their study found that principals spent minimal time supervising lesson planning and teaching. They concluded that effective supervision of lesson planning and delivery by school leaders had a significant impact on teacher performance. Ampofo et al. (2019) suggested that educational authorities should allocate more resources to support and promote the role of school principals to ensure better direct supervision of teachers. Witten (2017) highlights that poor leadership is detrimental to students in disadvantaged South African schools, he emphasised that a principal's leadership style is a crucial factor, among others, that school leaders must consider to enhance academic performance in rural areas where student outcomes are often unsatisfactory. Currently, the principal's leadership style is regarded as one of the most significant and influential variables affecting the overall functioning of a school (Abu-Hussain, 2014). School leadership plays a vital role in student achievement (Tatlah, Iqbal, Amin, & Quraishi, 2014). Education leaders are continually challenged with the task of improving the academic performance of all students (Dahie, Mahamud, & Hoshaw, 2015). This underscores the urgent need for effective leadership styles in disadvantaged schools, particularly those located in impoverished rural communities.

In South Africa, school leadership practices frequently utilised a top-down managerial approach, which had traditionally been the preferred model within the country's education system (Bush, 2007). This method emphasised centralised control and decision-making, reflecting longstanding trends in educational leadership. However, this approach often proved ineffective in addressing the evolving needs of schools and did not facilitate the flexibility required for modern educational challenges. Gunter, Hall, and Bragg (2013) observed that effective leadership involves sharing responsibilities and empowering others. When implemented properly, distributed leadership can enhance student achievement (Botha, 2016). This approach can lead to better professional recognition and more effective management changes (Choi & Schnurr, 2014), and it can also improve teachers' roles in the classroom. Research indicates that in schools where distributed leadership is effectively practiced, teachers feel motivated and empowered to make decisions about teaching, learning, and assessments, which in turn boosts student performance (Szeto & Cheng, 2017). Consequently,

such schools often foster a positive work environment that keeps teachers engaged and motivated to support their students.

2.2.1 Types of leadership

School leadership plays a pivotal role in influencing and shaping parental engagement in several ways. School leadership can significantly enhance the level and quality of parental engagement, which in turn can lead to improved student outcomes and a stronger school community. According to McDonald (2021), the school principals may exhibit a variety of leadership styles depending on the personality of the principal and the context of the school. In the following section I present different leadership styles that could be effective or ineffective in influencing parental involvement in school activities.

- **Transactional Leadership**

Transactional leaders establish clear structures and expectations. This leadership style emphasises rewards and punishments, which are clearly communicated from the outset. The principal assigns tasks, and teachers are solely responsible for their completion (Northouse, 2018). Failures lead to punishment, while successes are rewarded. In my view, this approach may cause staff to fear punishment rather than prioritise the school's best interests. I find this leadership style relevant to this study because transactional leaders establish well-defined expectations for staff, which can extend to expectations for parental engagement. By clearly communicating what is expected of parents, such as attendance at meetings or involvement in school activities, this leadership style can provide a clear framework within which parents understand their roles (Northouse, 2018). However, if not handled carefully, this approach may also lead to a transactional relationship with parents, where their involvement is seen as a duty rather than a meaningful engagement.

- **Transformational Leadership**

Transformational leaders aim to rejuvenate an organisation through enthusiasm, energy, and a strong vision for the future. They care about their employees and are invested in their success. From my work experience and observations, this leadership style involves the principal developing a vision for the school and then effectively communicating and promoting this vision to the educators and stakeholders (Collins, 2014). Transformational leadership is highly relevant to parental engagement as it can foster a shared vision, build strong relationships, empowers parents, and creates a positive school culture, all of which contribute to enhance parental engagement and support for the school community.

- **Authoritarian Leadership**

In educational settings, a principal who adopts an authoritarian leadership style typically exercise strict control over the school environment and makes decisions independently. While this approach may be suitable in scenarios demanding rapid decisions or precise directives (Yukl, 2013), its sustained effectiveness is often constrained by its adverse effects on employee engagement, creativity, and organisational culture. Effective leadership in schools frequently embraces a collaborative and empowering approach that emphasises team member input and cultivates a nurturing, inclusive work atmosphere. Principals who adopt an authoritarian leadership style may inadvertently limit parental engagement by centralising decision-making and minimising opportunities for parental input. This top-down approach can discourage parents from actively participating in school activities or sharing their perspectives, as they may feel their involvement is neither valued nor necessary (Yukl, 2013). When parents perceive that their input is unwelcome or irrelevant, they are less likely to engage meaningfully with the school.

- **Democratic Leadership**

The democratic leadership style, which involves staff in the decision-making process, is highly relevant to parental engagement in schools. By fostering a collaborative environment, a democratic principal not only enhances staff morale and engagement but also creates a school culture where parents feel valued and included. When parents see that their opinions are welcomed and considered in school decisions, they are more likely to participate actively in their children's education. This inclusive approach strengthens the partnership between the school and families, ultimately leading to more effective parental involvement (Yukl, 2013).

- **Servant leadership**

The servant leadership style, where the leader prioritises serving others and supporting their growth, is highly relevant to parental engagement. A principal who practices servant leadership focuses on empowering staff and addressing their needs, which fosters a supportive and inclusive school environment. By sharing power and encouraging collaboration, this leadership approach not only boosts staff morale but also positively impacts how parents interact with the school. When parents observe a principal who is genuinely supportive and committed to their staff's success, they are more likely to feel valued and encouraged to engage more actively in their children's education (Yukl, 2013). This collaborative and supportive atmosphere promotes stronger partnerships between the school and families.

- **Laissez-Faire Leadership**

The laissez-faire leadership style, characterised by minimal principal involvement in decision-making and allowing staff autonomy, has mixed implications for parental engagement. While this approach can empower staff by giving them freedom, it may be ineffective if staff lack motivation or integrity. In such cases, the absence of clear guidance and accountability might lead to inconsistencies and reduced engagement with parents. Without strong leadership direction, the school's efforts to involve and communicate with parents may suffer, potentially weakening the partnership between the school and families (Northouse, 2018). Thus, while laissez-faire leadership can offer autonomy, it may not always support the effective engagement of parents if not balanced with adequate support and accountability.

2.2.2 Common Leadership Traits of Influential School Leaders

The leadership traits of school principals play a crucial role in shaping the level and quality of parental engagement. Effective school leadership is fundamental in fostering an environment where parental involvement is encouraged and valued. Principals who exhibit traits such as high expectations, continuous improvement, data analysis, effective communication, and a collaborative approach are more likely to create a supportive atmosphere that actively involves parents in the educational process. McDonald (2021) identified some common leadership traits of influential school leaders, including:

High Expectations: In parental engagement school principals are expected have high expectation of support from all the stakeholders. Effective school leaders who maintain high expectations for all students and staff, despite challenges like economic hardship or disabilities, significantly enhance parental engagement. By setting and communicating high standards, these leaders demonstrate a commitment to excellence that resonates with parents, motivating them to support their children's educational journey. Additionally, by actively working to overcome barriers to success, principals create an inclusive and equitable environment where parents feel valued and encouraged to participate (Sheldon & Epstein, 2005). This commitment to overcoming obstacles and fostering a supportive school culture strengthens the partnership between the school and families, ultimately leading to more robust parental engagement (Leithwood et al., 2020).

Continuous Improvement: Great school leaders, who are committed to continuous improvement for themselves, their staff, and their students, foster a climate that positively impacts parental engagement. By modelling a growth mind set and striving for excellence,

these leaders inspire parents to become more involved, as they see the school's dedication to progress and success. This proactive approach encourages parents to partner with the school in supporting their children's education, as they recognise the shared commitment to achieving high standards and overcoming challenges (Fullan, 2014). This alignment between school leadership and parental engagement enhances the overall educational experience and strengthens the school-community relationship.

Data Analysis Expertise: Effective school leaders, who act as data interpreters and continuously seek new methods to help students succeed, significantly enhance parental engagement. By using data to identify areas for improvement and implementing evidence-based strategies, these leaders demonstrate a commitment to student success that parents can see and appreciate. This proactive approach encourages parents to engage more deeply with the school, as they recognise the principal's dedication to addressing student needs and achieving positive outcomes (Hattie, 2009). When parents observe a leader's active efforts to use data for improving educational practices, they are more likely to feel confident in supporting the school's initiatives and collaborating in their children's education.

Collaboration: Effective school leaders who understand the power of teamwork and collaborate with teachers to develop solutions enhance parental engagement by creating a unified approach to student success. When principals work closely with teachers to address challenges and implement effective strategies, they foster a collaborative environment that extends to parents. This teamwork approach ensures that parents see a cohesive and proactive effort to support their children, encouraging them to become more involved in school activities and decision-making processes. Such collaboration demonstrates a commitment to shared goals and student achievement, which strengthens the partnership between the school and families (Leithwood & Sun, 2012; Robinson, 2011).

The literature on school leadership styles highlights the importance of choosing the right approach to enhance parental engagement. Different leadership styles—transactional, transformational, authoritarian, and democratic, servant, and laissez-faire—each have unique characteristics that impact how principals interact with parents. Effective leadership involves maintaining high expectations, pursuing continuous improvement, utilising data effectively, and fostering collaboration. Principals who select the most appropriate style and embody these key traits can create a supportive and inclusive environment, thereby improving parental engagement. By aligning their leadership approach with the needs of their school community,

principals can build stronger partnerships with parents, ultimately contributing to a more successful educational experience for students (Leithwood & Sun, 2012; Yukl, 2013).

2.2.3 The role and responsibilities of the school principal

School principals face new demands, more complex decisions, and additional responsibilities than ever before. Their day typically involves a variety of administrative and management tasks such as procuring resources, managing student discipline, resolving conflicts with parents, and handling unexpected teacher and student crises. Despite these challenges, it is crucial for principals to focus on their role as leaders by promoting effective teaching practices and keeping their schools centred on curriculum, teaching, and assessment to meet student needs and improve student achievement (Hallinger, 2011).

Kellerman (2015) states that school leadership is a difficult balancing act that only the most skilled can perform successfully. A principal's day is typically packed with various administrative and management tasks, such as scheduling, reporting, managing relationships with parents and the community, and dealing with unexpected crises involving students and teachers (Bottery, 2016). One of the main responsibilities of principals is to improve student achievement and ensure teacher satisfaction (Rigby, 2014). Many educators believe that principals can improve the teaching and learning environment by creating conditions that support better curriculum management (Kiat, Tan, Heng, & Lim-Ratnam, 2017). Principals are responsible for fostering a positive school climate, motivating teachers and students, and managing resources effectively to promote best instructional practices. Therefore, principals play a crucial role in developing and maintaining academic standards, which include the knowledge and skills students are expected to learn in each subject and grade (Shelton, 2011). According to section 84 of the South African Schools Act (1996), the term 'parent' includes a learner's biological or adoptive parents, legal guardian, or anyone legally given custody of the learner. This term also encompasses individuals who agree to oversee the learner's education at school, or any combination of these roles. The Department of Basic Education (2016) defines a parent as any caregiver responsible for looking after and assisting a student. In the South African context, besides biological parents, other family members often take on the role of parenthood when the biological parents are not present (Dick, 2019). Parents have a significant impact on their children's lives, playing a crucial role in helping them develop and improve their learning techniques, expectations, and beliefs (Schoeman, 2018). For parents to effectively support their children, it is vital that they engage with the curriculum to understand

any updates and stay informed. This involvement is particularly important because many parents will struggle to understand the curriculum if they do not participate (Selolo, 2018).

School leadership plays a crucial role in fostering cooperation with parents, largely due to the proactive efforts of principals. Education involves a network of three key players: parents, teachers, and students, all working together. Parents are essential contributors to the learning process, and the school principal acts as a vital link within this network. High-performing schools often have administrators who maintain strong connections with parents (Jeynes, 2018). Principals can significantly enhance family-school relations and must recognise the importance of parental engagement for the social, emotional, and intellectual development of children (Magwa & Mugari, 2017). As the school's leader, the principal has the authority and influence to motivate parents to actively participate in the school community. While most parents aim for their children's academic success and want to be effective partners in their education, principals are responsible for encouraging and facilitating parental engagement (de Oliveira & Kuusisto, 2019). As indicated by the above findings it is ultimately the responsibility of the school principal to promote parental engagement in schools.

2.3 THE CONCEPT PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT AND PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

In this section Parental engagement has been extensively studied, with a growing body of literature on the topic. Numerous studies define parental engagement as the active involvement of parents in their children's education (Jaiswell, 2017). Kalayci and Ergul (2017) describe it as parents' participation in educational activities, such as attending parent-teacher conferences, volunteering in the classroom, and assisting with homework. Otani (2019) emphasised that parental engagement is crucial for students' academic success and is linked to higher academic aspirations and better attitudes toward learning.

Researchers have various definitions of parental engagement. Barr and Saltmarsh (2014) note it as a collaborative process where teachers and parents share responsibility for children's education. Rudo & Dimock, (2017) describe parental engagement as parents volunteering, attending school events, and interacting with teachers. Additionally, it includes parents actively and willingly participating in both educational and non-educational activities at school and at home to boost their children's academic performance. Parental engagement thus supports and fosters a child's physical, social, and intellectual development from infancy through adulthood. Elsewhere in literature parental involvement is used as a concept.

Wherever a child is, there should be adult involvement in some capacity. Lowe and Dotterer (2018) define parental involvement as a comprehensive understanding of parents' engagement with their children, as seen through their interactions. Essentially, parental involvement means actively engaging in every aspect of a child's emotional, social, and academic development (Castro et al., 2015). This involves participating in their children's education. Barr and Saltmarsh (2014) and Madzinga (2021) note that parental involvement is a collaborative process where teachers and parents share responsibility for their children's education. Omary, Salum, and Mapunda (2021) add that parental involvement extends beyond the school environment to include active participation in their children's education both inside and outside the classroom.

What distinguishes parental involvement from parental engagement? According to a study conducted in the United States of America, Casey (2023), stated that an involved parent participates in activities that the school has already established, while an engaged parent goes further by becoming part of the school's decision-making process. Casey (2023) emphasised that parental involvement can include classroom volunteering, chaperoning school events, attending parent-teacher conferences, and other forms of communication with teachers. These activities are mainly controlled by the school, which invites parents to participate. Engagement, on the other hand, involves schools actively providing opportunities for parents to offer their input, develop their abilities, and take ownership of ideas (de Oliveira & Kuusisto, 2019). Effective engagement might include training for parents of children with special needs and involving parents in significant school-wide decisions. This approach is primarily driven by the needs of parents as their children's main caregivers (Casey, 2023). Consider the two concepts as complementary actions, like yin and yang, working together to create better outcomes for students.

Another terminology that can be used to describe the above concepts is parental participation. Freund, Schaedel, Azaiza, Boehm, and Lazarowitz (2018) describe parental participation as a range of activities, including discussing schoolwork, helping with homework, monitoring progress, participating in educational initiatives, attending events, and serving on school boards. Before South Africa's landmark democratic elections in 1994, parents were generally less involved in their children's education. Following the establishment of democracy in 1994, the South African government took steps to significantly involve parents in school affairs (Harber & Mncube, 2012). The South African Constitution Act (No. 108 of 1996) aimed to promote democratic values and human rights, encouraging schools to work collaboratively

with all stakeholders, including parents. This led to the development of several government documents, such as the National Curriculum Statements (NCS), White Paper 2 (1996), and the South African Schools Act (SASA) (1996), which emphasised parental engagement. Section 24 (1) of SASA mandates that parents must serve on the governing body of a school (Du Plessis, 2013), ensuring that the number of parent representatives is one more than the total number of other voting representatives (Clause 23(1):18). This Act requires parents to participate in educational practices, promoting participatory democracy and giving parents a significant role in their children's education (Muzvidziwa, 2012). The South African government underscores the importance of parental awareness in their children's schooling to drive change in classrooms. The White Paper on Schooling and Preparation (Education Department, 1995) outlines parents' responsibility to support their children's education. The establishment of school governing bodies was intended to enhance democracy and representation (De Waal & Serfontein, 2015). The South African Schools Act emphasises collaboration among the administration, learners, parents, and educators, fostering accountability and governance of public schools (Muzvidziwa, 2012). This approach signifies a shift from the traditional role of parents in parent-teacher associations to active participation. Parents are now empowered to determine the best educational interests for their children. The South African constitution ensures the implementation of these policies.

The section highlighted key points about parental engagement, noting its extensive study and various definitions. Parental engagement involves active involvement in children's education, including attending conferences, volunteering, and assisting with homework. It is crucial for academic success, linked to higher aspirations and better attitudes. Definitions of parental engagement vary, with some viewing it as a collaborative process between teachers and parents. Parental involvement extends beyond school to home activities, supporting children's development. Casey (2023) distinguishes between parental involvement and engagement, where the former is participating in school-established activities, and the latter involves decision-making and providing input. Effective engagement includes training for parents and involvement in significant school decisions. These concepts are complementary, working together for better student outcomes. In South Africa, before 1994, parents were less involved in education. Post-democracy, the government promoted parental involvement through legislation like the South African Schools Act (1996), requiring parents on school governing bodies. This act aimed to enhance democracy, representation, and collaboration among school stakeholders. Parents' involvement is crucial for driving change in education, ensuring better outcomes for students.

In this study I chose to use the concept parent engagement because it represents a more comprehensive and active involvement of parents in their children's education, extending beyond simple participation in school-related activities. Parental engagement involves a cooperative effort where parents actively support their children's learning both in the classroom and at home. This includes roles in decision-making, school governance, and contributing to academic progress through home-based support. Casey (2023) highlights the distinction between parental involvement—primarily centered on participation in school-organised functions—and parental engagement, which focuses on meaningful collaboration and input, further validating this choice. In South Africa, after 1994, the focus on parental engagement was reinforced through laws such as the South African Schools Act (1996), emphasising its significance in fostering democracy, representation, and collaboration among school stakeholders. My focus on parental engagement underscores the crucial role that parents play in enhancing educational outcomes and driving positive changes within schools.

2.4 BENEFITS OF PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT

Parental engagement is essential for students' academic success and general well-being. Studies show that when parents actively engage both at home and in school, it enhances academic performance, boosts motivation, and supports socio-emotional growth (Utami, 2022). One of the most significant influences on children's lives is their parents, who are the primary caregivers and play a crucial role in helping children develop and enhance their learning techniques, expectations, and beliefs (Shoeman, 2018). To achieve this, parents need to be involved in the curriculum to stay informed about their children's educational needs. According to Section 18 of the South African Schools Act of 1996, parents are required to engage in discussions about curriculum matters. This means that parents should support their children by creating a conducive learning environment and showing interest in their education (Newchurch, 2017).

Parental engagement plays a crucial role in student success for several key reasons. Firstly, it significantly boosts academic achievement, as research by Epstein (2018) highlights. Additionally, parental involvement enhances student behaviour and reduces absenteeism. The Centre for Child Well-being (2010) found that when parents engage in learning activities, it not only improves their child's morale, attitude, and performance across subjects but also fosters better behaviour and social adjustment. Engaged parents also experience increased confidence in their ability to contribute to their children's success, and they have the

opportunity to participate in decision-making processes when invited by the school (Whitaker & Hoover-Dempsey, 2013; Jaiswal, 2017). Furthermore, effective communication between parents and the school is essential. Patton (2019) emphasises that understanding the perspectives of both parents and teachers is critical, as it facilitates the use of various communication methods to enhance student performance.

Epstein (2001) outlines several key roles that parents should play in their children's education:

Academic Performance: Parental involvement enhances academic performance. The positive impact on academic achievement grows with increased parental participation.

Classroom Behaviour: Greater parental involvement leads to improved classroom behaviour. In addition to raising academic achievement, parental participation positively affects students' attitudes and behaviour. A parent's interest and support in their child's education can influence classroom behaviour, absenteeism, attitudes toward school, self-esteem, and ambition.

Parent-Teacher Communication: When parents and teachers communicate effectively, teachers can better understand their students and provide more effective instruction.

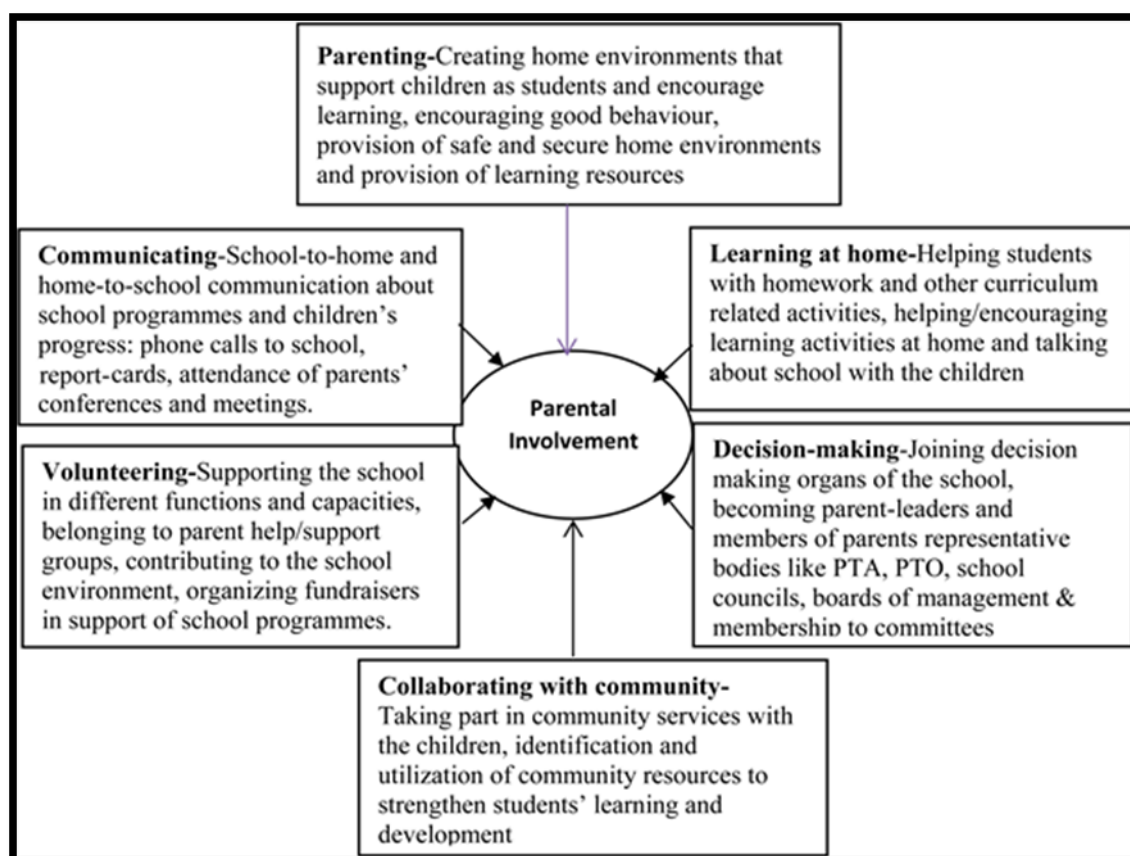
Reading Aloud: Reading aloud at home helps children become better readers. Time spent reading together with parents significantly boosts overall reading skills. Reading aloud to a child has a substantial impact on their reading development.

Lifelong Involvement: Parents must remain engaged in their children's education from preschool through high school. Parental participation has a positive impact at all age levels, although it tends to be higher with younger children and may decrease as they grow older.

2.5 TYPES OF PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT

Epstein (2011) highlights several reasons for forming partnerships between schools, families, and the broader community. The primary motivations include improving students' academic performance, enhancing school programmes and climate, fostering leadership and parenting skills, and facilitating connections among parents, families, and the school community.

Figure 2.1: Diagrammatic summary of parental involvement components as postulated by Epstein (2017).



According to Epstein (2017), parental engagement in education should include various activities such as volunteering, supporting home-based learning, communicating with the school, participating in school decision-making, and creating safe home environments that promote learning, model good behaviour, and provide learning resources (see Figure 1). Volunteering involves helping at school events, joining parent support groups, contributing to the school environment, and organising fundraisers. Communication encompasses both school-to-home and home-to-school interactions, such as discussing school programmes and children's progress, making phone calls, sending report cards, attending parent conferences and meetings, and talking with children about school. Epstein (2011) also recommends that parents become involved in the decision-making processes of schools by taking on leadership roles and joining parents' representative bodies, such as parent-teacher associations (PTAs), school councils, committees, and boards of management. Moreover, the author encourages parents to engage in community collaboration by participating in community services with their children and using community resources to support students' learning and development. This framework can help educators foster and improve school-parent partnerships, thereby increasing parental engagement in their children's education at school, family, and community

levels. Epstein's framework aims to unite schools, parents, and communities positively and serves as a guide for educating and supporting parents to boost their engagement in their children's education. It provides strategies for enhancing parental involvement and can inform the creation of parent education programmes that clarify their role in their children's learning. Additionally, Epstein's framework is comprehensive and addresses nearly all aspects of education.

Casey (2023) recommends various strategies to boost parental engagement in education, such as participating in school events, talking with their children about school activities, helping with homework, and reading together at home. These efforts create a nurturing learning environment that supports children's academic development and reinforces the bond between home and school. Such actions are essential aspects of parental engagement, enabling parents to play a more active and significant role in their children's educational journey.

Schools can foster parental engagement by implementing several strategies. These include involving parents in decision-making processes that affect the entire school, such as instructional methods or nutrition policies. Schools can also create programmes that offer parents training in key areas like digital literacy. Additionally, inviting parents to learn more about school operations and how they can support their children's education is crucial. Establishing "parent academies," which are organised and led by parents to address their specific concerns, can further enhance engagement. Finally, encouraging parents to view the school as a vital part of the community helps strengthen the connection between families and the school (Epstein, 2018; Casey, 2023).

According to Hornby & Blackwell (2018) activities used to encourage parental involvement at school can include the following:

Schools employ a variety of strategies to foster parental involvement. These include regular communication through newsletters, leaflets, information sheets, and letters sent home, ensuring parents are informed about school activities and policies. School websites play a crucial role in providing continuous updates and information accessible to parents. Teacher-parent meetings provide opportunities for direct communication and collaboration on students' progress and educational goals. Active participation in the Parents, Teachers & Friends Association (PTFA) strengthens community ties and supports school initiatives. Open days and evenings, along with new parents' evenings, invite families to engage with the

school environment and its educational programmes. School performances, celebration events, assemblies, and exhibitions of students' work showcase achievements and build a sense of pride within the school community. Events like school fairs, class or family braais, and sports days further promote community involvement and a vibrant school culture. These activities collectively aim to create a welcoming and inclusive environment where parents feel valued and involved in their children's education.

To enhance parental engagement, many schools offer parent education classes covering essential topics such as math, IT/computing basics, literacy, and strategies for managing children's behaviour. These classes aim to equip parents with the skills and knowledge to support their children's academic and personal development effectively. Schools also use modern communication channels such as email and texting to maintain regular contact between teachers and parents, facilitating updates on student progress and school activities. Social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter serve as additional avenues for sharing information and fostering community dialogue. Moreover, some schools extend their operational hours to include breakfast clubs and longer school days, providing opportunities for informal interactions between teaching staff and parents. These initiatives collectively aim to strengthen partnerships between home and school, ultimately supporting students' educational journey and overall well-being.

In conclusion, parental engagement is vital for enhancing students' academic performance and overall well-being. Active involvement from parents, both at home and in school, supports better academic results, motivation, and socio-emotional growth. By fostering a strong connection between home and school through participation in activities and decision-making, parents can greatly contribute to their children's success. Schools play a key role in encouraging this engagement by creating opportunities for collaboration and offering resources that support both parents and students.

2.6 THE ROLE PARENTS PLAY IN PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT

Parents play a central role in supporting their children's educational, social, and emotional development. Parental engagement encompasses a range of activities through which parents contribute to their children's learning both at home and at school. These activities include creating a supportive home environment, monitoring academic progress, communicating with teachers, supporting learning at home, participating in school activities, and contributing to decisions that affect their children's education (Epstein, 2018). Research has consistently

shown that when parents are actively engaged in their children's education, learners demonstrate higher academic achievement, improved attendance, greater motivation, and more positive attitudes towards learning (Wilder, 2014; Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014).

Within the South African context, the role of parents in education often extends beyond biological parents to include grandparents, siblings, relatives, and other caregivers who contribute to children's upbringing and educational support. This broader understanding reflects the communal and collectivist nature of many African societies, where child-rearing responsibilities are frequently shared among extended family members and community networks (Bojuwoye & Sylvester, 2014; Myende & Nhlumayo, 2020). Consequently, parental engagement should be understood as involving all significant caregivers who provide emotional, social, and educational support to learners.

Effective parental engagement also depends on strong communication and collaboration between families and schools. Parents who maintain regular contact with educators are better positioned to monitor their children's progress, address learning challenges, and reinforce educational expectations at home (Epstein, 2018). Furthermore, parents support learning outside the classroom by assisting with homework, encouraging reading, establishing study routines, and fostering positive attitudes towards education. Such involvement contributes significantly to learners' academic success and overall development (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014; Park & Holloway, 2017).

Although parental engagement is often measured through visible school-based activities such as attending meetings and volunteering, these traditional indicators do not fully capture the diverse ways in which families support education. Scholars argue that many families, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, may face barriers to participating in school activities while nevertheless providing valuable support through encouragement, guidance, and educational aspirations at home (Goodall, 2018; Mbhiza & Nkambule, 2023). Therefore, parental engagement should be viewed as a multidimensional concept that recognises both school-based and home-based forms of participation. By acknowledging and valuing these diverse contributions, schools can foster stronger partnerships with families and create more inclusive approaches to supporting learner achievement (Epstein, 2018; Willemse, Lunenberg, & Korthagen, 2018).

The literature further suggests that parents are more likely to engage when they feel welcomed, respected, and valued by the school. Positive relationships between parents and educators foster trust and create opportunities for meaningful collaboration in support of learners (Hornby & Blackwell, 2018). When schools acknowledge parents as partners rather than merely recipients of information, parents are more willing to participate in school activities and contribute to their children's learning. This highlights the importance of creating inclusive school environments where parents feel that their knowledge, experiences, and contributions are recognised and appreciated.

School leadership also plays an important role in encouraging parents to fulfil their responsibilities within the educational process. Principals influence the extent of parental engagement by establishing a school culture that promotes open communication, mutual respect, and shared responsibility for learner success (Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014). Through their leadership practices, principals can create structures and opportunities that encourage parents to become active participants in school life. These may include regular communication channels, parent workshops, community outreach programmes, and collaborative decision-making processes. Such initiatives help strengthen partnerships between families and schools and contribute to sustained parental engagement.

Research indicates that parents are more likely to become involved when they understand the value of their participation and when schools provide clear guidance on how they can support learning at home and at school (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). This suggests that parental engagement is not solely dependent on parents' willingness to participate but is also influenced by the efforts made by schools and school leaders to facilitate and encourage such involvement. Consequently, successful parental engagement requires a reciprocal relationship in which both parents and schools work collaboratively towards improving learner outcomes.

In the context of this study, understanding the role of parents is important because principals' experiences of promoting parental engagement are closely linked to how parents respond to opportunities for involvement and collaboration. While parents are key stakeholders in their children's education, their level of engagement is often shaped by the quality of relationships they establish with schools, the support they receive from school leaders, and the contextual factors that influence their participation. Therefore, parents should be viewed not only as supporters of education but as essential partners whose active involvement contributes significantly to learner achievement and school improvement. The literature suggests that

meaningful parental engagement is most likely to occur when schools, under the leadership of effective principals, create inclusive and supportive environments that encourage parents to participate in their children's educational journey.

2.7 CHALLENGES RELATED TO PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT

Parental engagement in education faces a range of challenges, as highlighted by the literature. Key barriers include poverty, where low-income families struggle to participate due to financial limitations and demanding work schedules (Newchurch, 2017; Selolo, 2018). Uneducated parents often feel ill-equipped to assist with schoolwork, further hindering their involvement (Hornby & Blackwell, 2018). Additionally, single-parent households and stepfamilies may experience reduced engagement due to time constraints and role ambiguity (Oswald et al., 2018). Time, transportation, and language barriers also limit parents' ability to actively participate, while negative past experiences and cultural differences can shape attitudes toward involvement (Schoeman, 2018; Fenton et al., 2017). Lastly, insufficient staff training on engaging parents contributes to the disconnect between schools and families (Hornby & Witte, 2010). Addressing these challenges is critical to fostering a supportive environment for parental engagement in education.

Poverty

Living in poverty presents challenges not only for children but also for their parents. Newchurch (2017) and Bullock (2019) found that parental participation is significantly higher in affluent neighbourhoods compared to low-income areas. Parents with lower socio-economic statuses often struggle to assist their children with schoolwork due to demanding work schedules and limited family income (Patton, 2019). Low-income families find it difficult to finance their children's education, which leads to a limited perspective on education (Selolo, 2018). Selolo (2018) also noted that the poorer the household, the less capable parents are of supporting educational needs at home, whereas wealthier families have a greater ability to help their children, resulting in more academic progress. Derry-Chaffin (2020) reported that many low-income families juggle multiple low-paying jobs or care for elderly relatives, making it hard to access the resources needed to engage in their children's education. Research by Berkowitz, Astor, Pineda, DePedro, Weiss, & Benbenishty, (2021) shows that low-income parents often prioritise immediate household and financial needs over attending school events. Madzinga (2021), Maluleka (2014), highlighted that lower-class families often feel inadequate and unable to assist with schoolwork, disadvantaging their children. Berkowitz et al. (2021) argue that most parents, regardless of socio-economic status,

want to be involved in their children's education. However, their lack of involvement is sometimes mistakenly seen as a lack of interest due to the barriers they face (Lechuga-Peña & Brisson, 2018). Chekol and Ayane (2019) found that parents' occupations and income levels pose significant barriers to their involvement, with lower socio-economic status parents being less active in their children's education compared to those with higher socio-economic status.

Uneducated parents

According to Rispoli, Hawley, & Clinton, (2018), parents who have not completed high school are significantly less likely to engage in parental involvement at home compared to those who have graduated. Many parents feel they cannot participate in their children's education due to a lack of information and skills (Van Diermen, 2019). Hornby and Blackwell (2018) found that some parents are hesitant to be involved in their children's schooling because of their own literacy levels. A parent's difficult educational experiences can negatively impact their child. Chekol and Ayane (2019) and Maples (2018) revealed that parents with low education levels struggle to help their children with homework and feel they lack the necessary knowledge to support their children's academic progress, making them less willing to engage in school activities (Naicker, 2020). While parents may participate in various extracurricular activities, they often avoid decision-making roles because they feel they have nothing to contribute.

Parent's marital status

Ngure, Paul, and Amollo's (2017) study found that marital status affects children's academic performance, with those from nuclear families (with both parents living together) performing significantly better than children from single-parent, adoptive, extended, or polygamous families. Ngure et al. (2017) suggest that on-going parental absence and conflict negatively impact children's psychological health, as parental involvement in education varies with family structure (Orange, 2020). Single-parent families are generally less involved in their children's education at home compared to co-parenting or married parents, believing that their children receive sufficient attention at school (Rispoli, Hawley, & Clinton, 2018). Oswald Zaidi, Cheatham, & Brody, (2018) agree, noting that separated and single-parent families typically show lower levels of parental participation. Single parents often struggle to find the time for their children's educational needs due to competing demands. Additionally, Oswald et al (2018) found that stepparents tend to be less engaged in their stepchildren's education because they are unsure of their role and are often seen as friends rather than parents by the step-children, leading to a more passive role in their education.

Time constraints

Time constraints pose another challenge for teachers when communicating with various parents, as some teachers find it difficult to meet or interact with them (Ellis, 2017). Lower-income parents often work long hours, leaving them with little time to engage in their children's academic activities (Chekol & Ayane, 2019; Maples, 2018). A study by Makamani (2017) found that most parents did not participate in their children's education due to arriving home late from work and feeling exhausted. Weekend shifts further reduce the time parents have to check on their children's school progress and participate in school activities (Naicker, 2020). Additionally, some parents have long, unpredictable working hours, and most school functions are scheduled at times convenient for the school, without considering the parents' circumstances (Masha, 2017).

Transportation issues

Mobility is often taken for granted, but transportation issues affect many South African parents. Even when parents have time to get their children to school, they may face difficulties due to factors such as not owning a car, lacking money for transportation (e.g., taxi, bus), or not having secure transportation options (Schoeman, 2018).

Language barriers

Language plays a critical role in either facilitating or limiting parental engagement with schools. Parents who do not confidently speak the school's language may feel excluded from participating in their children's education, a phenomenon described as being "frozen out" (Kavanagh & Hickey, 2013). Despite the significant language barriers experienced by parents, these challenges are often overlooked or not explicitly addressed. There is a notable gap in understanding how schools effectively communicate with linguistically diverse parents. Addressing this gap is crucial, given the educational disadvantages faced by linguistically diverse children and the pivotal role of parental involvement in enhancing educational outcomes (Piller, Bruzon, & Torsh, 2021).

Conflict between parents and school staff

The attitudes of teachers and school staff towards families can also hinder high levels of involvement (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Parents are more likely to be motivated to participate when they believe they have some control and influence over their child's learning (Hoover-Dempsey, 2011). When school personnel display positive attitudes towards families and their involvement, parents tend to feel more welcomed at the school (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011).

Parent's attitude towards education

According to Hornby & Blackwell (2018), parents often assume that their child's school experience mirrors their own. Some parents fail to recognise the connection between their child's success in primary school and future opportunities in life. Additionally, there is a segment of parents who harbour apprehensions about school settings due to negative experiences they themselves had during their own education. The educational backgrounds and experiences of parents significantly influence their attitudes towards and involvement in their children's education. Addressing these challenges can be particularly daunting when dealing with parents who approach the school with initial hostility, stemming from past negative encounters. Some parents resist seeking help, partly because of their own negative school experiences and partly due to reluctance to acknowledge their need for assistance.

Cultural or socioeconomic differences

Fenton, Ocasio-Stoutenburg, and Harry (2017) argue that despite the considerable focus on transforming classroom dynamics related to race, culture, language, and socioeconomic status, an equal emphasis should be placed on involving parents in these domains. Principals and educators bring valuable professional knowledge, but parents also possess expertise that should be respected and integrated into efforts aimed at achieving educational equity and excellence (Reynolds, 2010). To foster educational success, educators must redefine how they involve parents, ensuring genuine collaboration. This necessitates not only valuing parental expertise differently but also addressing longstanding socio-cultural barriers that parents frequently encounter (Fenton, Ocasio-Stoutenburg, and Harry, 2017).

Lack of training of staff in working with parents

Professional development for school leaders and teachers is essential to equip them with the skills needed to implement various aspects of parental involvement (Hornby & Witte, 2010). LaRocque, Kleiman, and Darling (2011) suggest that teachers should undergo professional development to enhance their communication skills, which are crucial for effective collaboration with families.

Age of students

Lastly, it has been suggested that the age of the students might act as a barrier, as older children may be less receptive to parental engagement in school activities (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011).

In conclusion, parental engagement in education is hindered by various challenges, including poverty, low education levels, time constraints, and cultural differences. These barriers prevent many parents from fully supporting their children's education. Addressing these obstacles through better communication, support systems, and staff training is essential for creating an inclusive environment that promotes active parental engagement and improves student outcomes.

2.8 THE ROLE OF PRINCIPALS IN PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT

A growing body of research indicates that a positive school climate and effective principal leadership are crucial for establishing parent-school partnerships and fostering parent engagement in children's learning. The school climate is shaped by the relationships and interactions among all members of the school community, including students, teachers, parents, and school leaders. However, individuals in leadership roles, particularly the school principal, play a significant role in influencing the school's climate regarding parent engagement.

School leaders, as noted by Marschall and Shah (2016), could design and implement school policies that shape norms, expectations, and the overall school culture. Research shows that leaders who foster an atmosphere of care and trust, consistently communicate the importance of parent-school partnerships, and support parental involvement are more successful in engaging parents in their children's education (Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014). Effective school leaders recognise the necessity of collaboration between parents and schools to enhance student success (Jeynes, 2018). They can promote parental involvement directly by reaching out to parents and indirectly by encouraging teachers to invite parents to participate. For instance, through events like "Coffee with the Principal," school leaders can convey a unified message about the value of parent-teacher collaboration (Heinrichs, 2018). To further support this, leaders can facilitate professional development for teachers and staff, aimed at addressing beliefs and assumptions about students and families and overcoming cultural and other barriers to parental involvement (Heinrichs, 2018; Jeynes, 2018).

School principals play a central role in shaping school climate and promoting parent engagement in children's learning through their leadership style, communication, attitudes, and expectations (Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014). Principals directly influence school climate with their personal vision, which then cascades down to other staff in a top-down manner (Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014). In United Kingdom schools with high proportions of disadvantaged

students and above-average learning outcomes, successful principals employed two-way communication and incorporated ideas from parents and staff to foster inclusion. Additionally, principals influence school climate related to parent engagement by either facilitating or restricting parents' access to teachers (Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014). Principals who value parent engagement are more likely to provide training opportunities for teaching staff to enhance their skills in working with parents.

The South African Standard for Principalship of the School Principal (2015) outlines that one of the principal's duties is to manage the school by establishing systems and processes to address discipline. Another significant responsibility is maintaining collaboration between the school and the community. This includes building effective collaborative relationships and partnerships with stakeholders concerned with the well-being of learners. Bosire, Kiumi, & Sang, (2009) agree with this policy, noting that principals who involve teachers and parents in disciplinary measures are more likely to succeed.

Before the enactment of the South African Schools Act Section 20 (1) No 84 of 1996, parents were not actively involved in their children's education. However, post-1994, the Department of Basic Education began including parents in educational matters. The South African Schools Act Section 24 (1) (No 84 of 1996) mandates that parents have a role in their children's education, such as serving on the School Governing Body (SGB). The SGB is responsible for approving the code of conduct for learners and supporting the principal and other school stakeholders in performing their professional duties. Consequently, parents collaborate and contribute to the guidelines for managing learner indiscipline. Positive outcomes from parental engagement in addressing learner behaviour require parental commitment. Mwilima (2021) agrees that responsible parental involvement ensures progressively better conduct from learners, highlighting the benefits of parental engagement when addressing learner indiscipline.

Principals should engage parents by influencing, encouraging, and collaborating with them to address school challenges, such as indiscipline. In South Africa, principals are expected to create strategies that make parents feel welcome, thereby involving them actively in managing learner indiscipline (Shezi, 2012). In Mauritius, principals have been cautious about disciplining learners due to education ministry policies. However, Jinot (2018) recommends that principals and the ministry should reconsider and implement effective strategies for addressing learner indiscipline.

2.8.1 The role of the principal in school leadership

The critical role of school leadership in fostering cooperation with parents is largely attributed to the proactive efforts of principals, and this process is conceptualised in two fundamental ways (Wallace Foundation, 2013). The first component involves 'educational leadership,' which encompasses specific skills such as a thorough understanding of educational programmes to effectively guide teachers in curriculum implementation and the ability to assess teaching quality to select and retain excellent staff. According to the Wallace Foundation (2013), school principals have five distinct leadership roles:

Vision: Principals must articulate a strong and positive vision for school improvement, demonstrating the ability to identify problems and create solutions.

Planning and Goal Setting: Principals need to set clear and achievable goals and communicate them to stakeholders.

Sharing the Decision-Making Process: Principals should collaborate with staff, students, parents, and others, allowing for flexibility in plans as needed.

Empowering and Taking Initiative: Successful leaders keep the reform process active and encourage teachers and staff to contribute their ideas and initiatives, fostering a sense of ownership.

Development of Staff: Effective leadership includes mentoring and providing professional development opportunities, particularly for new teachers. Principals should regularly visit and observe classes, offering positive feedback to assess and support students and staff.

2.8.2 The role of the principal in parental engagement

Education functions as a network involving three layers: parents, teachers, and learners working together. Parents play a crucial role in the learning process, and effective school principals act as a vital link, with high-performing schools often having administrators who maintain strong connections with parents (Jeynes, 2018). Principals can significantly enhance family relations with schools, recognising the importance of parental engagement for children's social, emotional, and intellectual development (Magwa & Mugari, 2017). As the leading figure in a school, principals have the power to motivate and encourage parents to actively participate in their children's education. Most parents aim for their children's success in school and desire to be effective partners in their education. On the other hand, principals bear the responsibility of fostering parental involvement in schools (de Oliveira & Kuusisto, 2019).

Principals Creating and Sharing Educational Goals with Parents

Principals should establish and communicate educational objectives with parents to foster a sense of parental involvement in learning and teaching (Krasnoff, 2015). This approach helps create a supportive home environment for children and fosters a positive relationship between parents and teachers. Establishing goals, setting expectations, and determining shared values strengthen the bonds among these stakeholders (Mendels, 2012).

Improving the Teacher-Parent Relationship

Principals can enhance parental engagement by strengthening the relationship between teachers and parents. Teachers serve as the crucial link between school and home (Gubbins & Otero, 2020), and their partnership is essential for the educational process, particularly regarding student progress. Principals should provide teachers with appropriate training to enable effective interaction with parents about children's educational concerns (Fischer, Barnes, & Kilpatrick, 2019).

Establishing a Close Relationship with Parents

Forming close relationships with parents at the start of the year helps in understanding progress on various issues, thereby enhancing parental involvement (CDC, 2015). This foundation strengthens future relationships between parents and the school. Creating a supportive atmosphere for parents within the school makes them feel valued as part of the educational system. This encourages parents to offer their services willingly, fostering trust between parents and the school (Đurišić & Bunijevac, 2017). Principals can identify proactive, enthusiastic, and educationally committed parents to volunteer on school boards and committees, which not only provides broader opportunities for parental involvement but also strengthens parental engagement (Adams, 2019).

Creating a Climate of Trust and Collaboration

Principals can build a climate of trust and collaboration by engaging parents in year-round planning and involving them in various programmes. Parents need to understand that their participation is crucial to the success of the school and their children's education (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). Each school has its unique culture, work environment, and priorities that need to be communicated to parents to align expectations, practices, and procedures (Jeynes, 2018). Principals must share the school's values, traditions, and environment with parents to keep them informed and involved, thereby reducing misunderstandings and fostering a collaborative spirit (Mayer, Kalil, Oreopoulos, & Gallego, 2019).

2.9 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

This chapter reviewed the literature on the role of leadership in the school and the principal's experiences of parental engagement in primary schools in KZN. The role of school leaders is of utmost importance, especially when everything concentrates on leadership and management. Leadership influences the success of learners, and therefore, the success of the school meeting their educational goals. Parents as stakeholders, also play an important role in promoting the success of educational goals and success at school. The next chapter will describe the methodology employed in this study.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter two focused on the literature review and the theoretical framework underpinning this study, laying the groundwork for understanding the context and relevance of this research. This chapter builds on the summary provided in Chapter one, delving into the methodological aspects essential for addressing the research questions. This chapter outlines the research paradigm that frames the study, the chosen approach and design, as well as the processes that will be used for sampling, data collection, and data analysis. Furthermore, the chapter discusses measures to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, detailing strategies to enhance credibility, dependability, and conformability. Ethical considerations are also highlighted, emphasising the importance of informed consent, confidentiality, and respect for participants. This comprehensive methodological chapter provides a clear blueprint of how the study will be conducted, ensuring rigor and alignment with the research objectives.

Research methodology is a systematic and theory-based framework for gathering and analysing data. It involves evaluating and selecting methods for data collection that align with the research objectives. According to Crotty (2020), a research methodology is shaped by a strategy or plan of action that guides the research process. It determines the type of data needed and the most effective techniques for obtaining it. Additionally, it encourages researchers to reflect on the most appropriate ways to investigate the subject of their study. Macmillan and Schumacher (2014) define research as an organised and systematic way of collecting and analysing data to achieve specific goals. This definition highlights key elements of research: it is planned, data-driven, and purpose-oriented.

A systematic approach ensures that research follows a clear process, which includes identifying a problem, designing research questions, choosing methods, collecting data, and analysing findings. These steps help minimise errors and bias, ensuring the results are trustworthy. Moreover, research is not just about gathering information but interpreting it to draw meaningful conclusions. These conclusions help address the research questions and contribute to existing knowledge or solve practical issues. By staying focused on its objectives, research ensures its findings are relevant and useful.

3.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM

A research paradigm refers to a set of beliefs about the nature of reality that leads to the development of a particular worldview (Maree, 2016). Creswell (2014) defines a paradigm as a philosophical worldview, or a fundamental set of beliefs that guide actions. While Rehman and Alharthi (2016) discuss the foundational elements of research paradigms by examining ontology, epistemology, and methodology as interrelated components that guide the research process. Ontology deals with the nature of reality and heights that what can be understood about the world, varies depending on the paradigm. Epistemology, which concerns the nature and validation of knowledge, also differs across paradigms. The methodology, which refers to the techniques and processes used for data collection and analysis, aligns with the ontological and epistemological assumptions of each paradigm. Rehman and Alharthi (2016) highlight that ontology, epistemology, and methodology is interconnected elements that define a researcher's approach to exploring a phenomenon. They argue that maintaining consistency among these components within a chosen paradigm is crucial for ensuring the research process's coherence and validity. Additionally, reflexivity is vital when selecting a paradigm, as it shapes how research questions are formulated, results are interpreted, and knowledge is advanced in the field.

Furthermore, Rehman and Alharthi (2016) point out that there are three main educational research paradigms: positivist, interpretivist, and critical theory paradigms. In positivism, ontology assumes a singular, objective reality that exists independently of human perception, with researchers striving to uncover universal truths through empirical observation. Conversely, interpretivism embraces a relativist perspective, recognising multiple realities shaped by individual experiences and social contexts, making reality subjective and dependent on context. Critical theory, however, views reality as being shaped by historical, social, and political forces, emphasising the need to critique power dynamics and drive social transformation. Positivism emphasises objectivity and empiricism, deriving knowledge from observable phenomena and measurable evidence using scientific methods. Interpretivism focuses on the subjective meanings people attribute to their experiences, with knowledge being co-created through the interaction of researchers and participants. In contrast, critical theory emphasises reflexivity and the relationship between power and knowledge, aiming to generate insights that challenge dominant ideologies and empower marginalised communities. Positivist research predominantly employs quantitative methods, such as experiments, surveys, and statistical analyses, to maintain objectivity and replicability. Interpretivist research utilises qualitative approaches, including interviews, observations, and case studies,

to investigate complex and context-specific phenomena. Critical theory research often adopts participatory and emancipatory methods, combining qualitative and quantitative strategies to address inequities and promote societal change.

This study adopted an interpretivist paradigm. The interpretative paradigm focuses on understanding the world from a subjective perspective of the participants by interpreting the meanings derived from collected data. In this approach, the researcher seeks to understand the participants' experiences within a particular social context. Ryan (2018) argues that interpretivists believe that truth and knowledge are subjective, shaped by individuals' experiences, and influenced by cultural and historical factors. According to Kivunja and Kuyuni (2017), interpretivism asserts that researchers cannot fully detach themselves from their own values and beliefs during a study, as human perspectives can influence what is considered truth or reality. Interpretivism acknowledges that reality is not merely a collection of objective facts awaiting discovery; rather, it is a construct shaped by individuals' unique interpretations and social contexts. This perspective emphasises that human experiences and social interactions play a crucial role in constructing reality, making it subjective and context-dependent (Mc Leod, 2019).

The choice of research paradigm influences the selection of research methods, data collection techniques, and instruments for the study (Cohen et al., 2018). Unlike positivist research, interpretivist research does not aim to discover universal truths or values but instead seeks to understand how individuals interpret and make sense of the social phenomena they encounter (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). Since this study is qualitative, I was able to engage with participants throughout interviews to explore how they create meaning in their specific contexts. According to Mc Leod (2019), in interpretivism, the focus is on understanding human experiences and social phenomena through qualitative data, such as interviews, observations, and textual analysis, rather than relying on numerical or statistical data. This approach emphasises capturing the perspectives and meanings that individuals assign to their experiences, allowing researchers to explore the depth of human interactions and contexts. Interpretivist research often uses verbal data because it provides a richer, more nuanced understanding of complex social realities. By focusing on language and communication, researchers can explore subjective interpretations and uncover underlying meanings that might not be accessible through quantitative methods. This method is particularly useful for capturing the diverse and personal experiences of individuals, which are essential for understanding social phenomena in context.

This study adopted the interpretivist paradigm as it aligns with the goal of understanding principals' subjective experiences and perspectives on parental engagement in education. Interpretivism views reality as socially constructed and context-dependent, making it ideal for examining how principals perceive and manage factors that support or hinder parental engagement. This approach fits well with the study's research questions. To explore the factors that encourage parental engagement, the interpretivist paradigm allows for an in-depth understanding of how principals interpret practices, policies, and cultural influences within their unique school settings. Similarly, it helps identify barriers to engagement, such as socioeconomic challenges, communication issues, or lack of parental confidence, by focusing on the principals' perspectives and the specific contexts in which they operate. Using this paradigm, the study captures the meanings principals attribute to their experiences and the strategies they use to overcome challenges. It supports qualitative methods like interviews and observations, enabling detailed data collection that highlights the complexities of their roles and reflects the real-world dynamics of their schools.

The interpretivist paradigm is well-suited to this research as it provides a framework for exploring the subjective and context-specific realities of principals' experiences, directly addressing the research questions on the factors that promote and hinder parental engagement.

3.3 RESEARCH APPROACH

Creswell and Creswell (2018) identify three main research approaches: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. Bryman (2016) and Hammersley (2013) emphasise that qualitative research relies on verbal rather than statistical methods, highlighting subjectivity and focusing on diverse, naturally occurring cases. Unlike quantitative approaches that utilise numerical data, qualitative research focuses on understanding meanings, actions, attitudes, intentions, and behaviours within natural settings. This approach emphasises exploring phenomena in their real-world context to gain deeper insights into human experiences (Bhandari, 2020). Cleland (2017) explains that qualitative research focuses on studying phenomena in real-world settings, highlighting genuine and real-life situations. It is especially useful for exploring questions related to different social contexts and understanding individuals' experiences within those environments. Creswell and Creswell (2018) describe the mixed-method research approach as a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods within a single study to provide a deeper understanding of a research problem. By integrating these methods, researchers can leverage the strengths of both—quantitative data offers measurable trends, while qualitative data provides detailed insights. This approach is

particularly useful when a single method is insufficient to address complex research questions. Mixed methods allow researchers to validate findings, compare different types of data, or use one method to expand on the results of the other. For instance, qualitative data can clarify trends found in quantitative results, while quantitative data can add generalizability to qualitative insights.

Creswell and Creswell outline key mixed-method designs, such as the convergent design, where qualitative and quantitative data are collected simultaneously and then combined; the explanatory sequential design, where quantitative data is collected first and qualitative data follows to elaborate on the findings; and the exploratory sequential design, where qualitative data is gathered first to guide subsequent quantitative research. This flexibility makes mixed-method research ideal for tackling complex questions, enhancing both the depth and practical relevance of findings. In this study, a qualitative research approach will be adopted to gain first-hand insights into principals' perceptions of their experiences with parental engagement. This approach is particularly effective for exploring complex social phenomena, as it allows for an in-depth understanding of participants' perspectives within their natural settings (Walden University 2017). This approach was suitable because it explored principals' experiences, which could not be quantified as in quantitative research approach that rely on numerical data. Qualitative methods provided a deep understanding of the issue by using detailed descriptions and interpretations to answer the research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The study collected data by engaging directly with principals in their workplace, allowing them to freely share their experiences in their natural setting.

In this study, the school itself served as the natural setting for this study. According to Creswell (2018), a natural setting is where a qualitative researcher gathers data from participants who are directly experiencing the issue under investigation. Cohen et al. (2018) explain that this approach gives participants a voice and enables the researcher to explore underlying issues beneath their observable behaviours and activities. Qualitative as a research approach has advantages and limitations which are discussed in the next paragraph.

One of the advantages of qualitative research is that the researcher does not need to bring participants into a laboratory or rely on surveys. Instead, information from the participants is collected through close interaction with the participants as well as observing their behaviours and actions in their real-world context (Creswell 2018). In this study I had face-to-face interaction with the participants which allowed me to engage directly with participants in their

natural environment. Other advantages of qualitative approach included the use of open-ended questions and probes that allowed participants to express themselves freely in their own words, rather than selecting from predetermined options as in quantitative research. This approach often leads to rich, detailed responses that may reveal insights the researcher had not anticipated and are often culturally relevant to the participants. As Cleland (2017) points out, qualitative methods involve asking open-ended questions that may vary from one respondent to another. This method also allows researchers the flexibility to explore responses in more depth by asking "how" and "why" questions. Researchers engage closely with participants, adapting to their communication styles and probing for further clarification (Soratto, Pires, & Friese, 2019). Participant responses guide the direction of subsequent questions, and the study design is iterative, meaning that the research questions and data collection methods evolve based on what is discovered (Cleland, 2017). Additionally, qualitative research allows for the observation of non-verbal cues, which, when combined with verbal responses, provide a more comprehensive understanding and interpretation of the phenomenon under study (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Qualitative research often favours smaller sample sizes, which allows for studies to be conducted with fewer financial resources compared to quantitative research that requires larger samples. Smaller sample size makes it possible to address research problems with minimal costs. Several of the qualitative studies reviewed used small sample sizes to achieve their research objectives.

For example, Eberle and Elberle (2019) conducted their study with just two respondents, while Bunuyenah (2021) used a sample size of four respondents. While the use of qualitative approach has many advantages, there are some limitations which are discussed as follows. The use of small sample sizes in qualitative research has led to some scepticism. Qualitative researchers often acknowledge this as a study limitation, noting that it may pose challenges to the generalisability of findings (Vasileiou, Barnett, Thorpe, & Young, 2018). Cleland (2017) explains that qualitative research focuses on understanding people's experiences in a straightforward and analytical manner by answering research questions through systematic procedures. This approach is particularly useful for exploring behaviours, opinions, and social contexts within specific populations. A key strength of qualitative research is its ability to provide detailed and in-depth descriptions of why and how individuals experience certain phenomena. Additionally, it is effective in identifying less obvious factors such as socio-economic status, social norms, gender roles, ethnicity, and religion, which may significantly influence the research.

Another limitation of qualitative research is that this research approach can make data collection challenging and harder to manage, often producing a vast amount of data from methods like focus group discussions, in-depth interviews, open-ended questionnaires, and document reviews. Such methods generate extensive information that requires meticulous examination, leaving researchers to filter out relevant insights from the data. Hern, McKay and Brown (2019), illustrated this challenge in their qualitative study, reporting that the collection of 219 pages totalling over 82,000 words, made the data analysis process in their study both complex and time-consuming (Mwita, 2022). The challenge experienced in qualitative research regarding managing large volume, this study will implement several strategies. First, a manageable sample size of six principals will be used. This ensures the data is detailed enough to meet the study's objectives while remaining a practical manageable size to analyse. Interviews will be transcribed and analysed progressively, rather than waiting until all data is collected. This step-by-step approach allows for early identification of key themes, helping to guide and focus subsequent data collection and analysis.

A structured coding framework in the form of tables was developed to maintain consistency and clarity, as recommended by Creswell and Creswell (2018). These measures aimed to streamline the data management process, ensuring relevant insights are effectively extracted while addressing the challenges of handling extensive qualitative data.

Qualitative studies typically involve identifying themes that rely on researchers' interpretations, contrasting with quantitative studies, where research variables and sub-variables are predetermined before data collection begins (Bloomberg, (2017). People's interpretations can vary widely due to factors like emotional state, social and cultural backgrounds, and other external influences, underscoring the interpretive nature of qualitative research (Creswell, 2018). Furthermore, researchers in qualitative studies are tasked with interpreting sensory experiences—what they hear, see, taste, touch, or smell—highlighting the potential for subjectivity, as individuals may perceive the same experiences differently based on personal perspectives.

Qualitative research is often criticised for being time-intensive, as the data collection and analysis process can take weeks or even months to complete (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Additionally, the findings are subject to interpretation, which may be influenced by the researcher's personal experiences and prior knowledge, potentially introducing bias (Patton, 2015). Since qualitative methods rely heavily on direct interactions with participants,

conversations may sometimes shift away from the primary research focus, making it challenging to maintain consistency and relevance in data collection (Flick, 2022). Qualitative research allows participants to shape the data collected, making it harder for researchers to verify responses objectively (Creswell & Poth, 2018). These views are influenced by personal preferences and experiences, making it difficult to draw conclusions that apply to a wider audience (Patton, 2015).

3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

This study employed a case study research design, which is a method that uses detailed descriptions of significant events or issues to gain a deeper understanding of a phenomenon (Maples, 2018). According to MacMillan and Schumacher (2014), a case study involves qualitative research that examines a system in detail over time, using multiple data sources from the environment. In case studies and ethnographic research, interpretivist scholars primarily gather qualitative data over extended periods (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). A case study is a thorough and in-depth analysis of a specific event, person, or situation over time, within its real-world context (Zamawe, 2015). Case study research conducts a thorough scientific examination of a real-life phenomenon within its contextual environment. This phenomenon can be an individual, a group, an organisation, an event, a problem, or an anomaly (Yin, 2014). In this study the case is the experiences of principals in selected primary schools in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, regarding the factors that encourage parental engagement. This case study explored the specific challenges and strategies these principals encounter in fostering parental engagement within their schools. By examining these experiences in-depth, the study aimed to uncover insights into the factors that influence parental engagement in this particular context.

Researchers using the case study method often employ data triangulation as a strategy for collecting information, leading to a comprehensive description of the case (Ridder, 2016). Unlike abstract theories, case studies provide real-life examples, helping readers grasp concepts more clearly (Cohen et al., 2018). Cohen et al. (2018) emphasise that case studies are rooted in reality as they explore a phenomenon within its real-life context, using various types of data (Yin, 2018). To align the case study method with the interpretivist paradigm, it is important to note that case studies are useful for exploring individual experiences and the social contexts that shape them (Yin, 2018). The interpretivist approach emphasises understanding how people perceive and construct their own realities, and case studies allow researchers to examine these personal, context-dependent experiences in depth (Cohen &

Crabtree, 2019). In this paradigm, reality is not viewed as an objective truth, but as something that can vary based on individual perspectives and the specific settings in which people interact (Cohen et al., 2018). Case studies enable researchers to explore these multiple realities, providing rich insights into the phenomena being studied. Data triangulation, which combines different data sources, is a key feature of case study research (Flick, 2018). By using multiple methods such as interviews, observations, and documents, researchers can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the case, which is crucial for interpretivist research. This method allows for a detailed, context-bound description of human experiences and supports the goal of understanding the complexities of individual realities. Case studies are also well-suited to the interpretivist paradigm because they allow for an in-depth examination of social issues within their real-life contexts. They provide valuable insights into how individuals experience and make sense of events or situations in their own environments, highlighting the subjective nature of reality (Ridder, 2016).

Case study research design is commonly categorised based on two criteria: purpose and type (Asimiran & Njie, 2014). Yin, (2018) identifies three main purposes of case study research: explanatory, exploratory, and descriptive. Explanatory case studies aim to uncover causal relationships in real-life situations. Exploratory case studies are used when the outcomes related to a phenomenon are unclear, and descriptive case studies focus on providing detailed accounts of the phenomenon under investigation. In the context of studying principals' experiences with factors that encourage parental engagement, the case study method is particularly suitable for exploring and describing the various factors influencing parental involvement. The exploratory nature of case study research aligns well with this study, as it allows the researcher to investigate the unclear or under explored aspects of parental engagement in schools. The descriptive aspect of case studies also helps to provide a detailed understanding of how principals perceive and manage the factors that either support or hinder parental engagement. By aligning the study's approach with Yin's purposes, the research can effectively address the complexities of the factors affecting parental engagement in education. There are several advantages and limitations of case studies as a research design. Schoeman (2018) states that case study design provides valuable data in relation to a larger context, define specific problems within a particular context, generate theoretical knowledge, explain similar cases, and are useful for educational purposes. In this study, the case examined principals' experiences of factors that encourage parental engagement in selected primary schools in KwaZulu-Natal. As Bacon-Shone (2020) notes, case studies focus on a small number of cases in great detail, offering insights into the processes involved. In comparing

the advantages and limitations of case study research with my own study, the points made by Schoeman (2018) are especially relevant. Case studies provide valuable insights within a specific context, making them ideal for examining principals' experiences with parental engagement in selected primary schools in KwaZulu-Natal. My study, which includes a small sample of six participants, aligns with Schoeman's view that case studies are effective for generating in-depth theoretical knowledge and explaining specific cases.

By focusing on a small number of principals, my study aimed to explore the complex factors that influence parental engagement, offering rich, contextual data that can contribute to broader educational theory and practice. Bacon-Shone (2020) also highlights that case studies focus on a small number of cases in detail, which suits my study design. With six participants, this research allowed for an in-depth exploration of each principal's experiences and provides insights into the specific processes and challenges of fostering parental engagement. However, Bacon-Shone notes that the findings from a small sample may not be easily generalised to a larger population. Despite this limitation, the case study approach offers rich, context-specific findings that enhance the understanding of the topic, making it particularly valuable for educational purposes. By focusing on six principals, the study can provide detailed, context-bound insights into parental engagement, while acknowledging that the findings may not be generalisable beyond this small sample.

In case study design, by concentrating on a particular instance or event, researchers reveal intricate details and deeper insights that other research methods, particularly large-scale surveys, may overlook. Lee and Saunders (2017) argue that case studies allow researchers to study a specific event in detail, helping to identify its unique characteristics. This in-depth analysis provides valuable insights into the key factors and dynamics of the phenomenon under study. Unlike fixed-question methods, such as surveys, case studies offer flexibility, enabling researchers to explore various perspectives, angles, and contextual factors related to the case. Furthermore, Lee and Saunders (2017) emphasise that case studies provide a deep, holistic understanding of a phenomenon, aiming to gain a comprehensive insight into the subject. They also note that case studies are particularly effective in amplifying the voices of individuals whose perspectives are often overlooked. Case study design enables researchers to thoroughly engage with a specific environment, often integrating methods like ethnography or direct observation to observe how phenomena manifest in real-world situations (Yin, 2014). In this study, I employed a case study design to gain a deep understanding of the experiences of principals regarding factors that encourage parental engagement in selected primary

schools in KwaZulu-Natal. This approach allowed me to explore the phenomenon within its real-life context, focusing on how these factors manifest in the specific school environments. I planned to integrate methods such as interviews with the principals to observe their experiences and perspectives directly. By using case study design, I aimed to capture rich, contextual data that provided a comprehensive insight into the complexities of parental engagement in schools.

Case study research design has several limitations. Yang (2022) argues that case studies cannot be considered representative due to their focus on specific instances of a phenomenon. These studies examine the context, nuances, and situational factors surrounding a particular case. While this design is useful for uncovering important, new, and unexpected insights, it is generally less effective at producing data that can be generalised beyond the particular case under investigation. Although case study research has limited generalizability, I chose this approach for its ability to provide deep insights into specific situations within their real-world context. As Yang (2022) highlights, case studies focus on the details of a particular instance, revealing new and unexpected insights that other methods may miss. This method helped to better understand the factors influencing parental engagement in schools, which is central to my study. By examining a small number of cases, I explored the issue in-depth, offering valuable insights that contribute to educational practices. While the findings may not apply broadly, the detailed data provided meaningful insights into the experiences of principals in their unique settings.

Qualitative data in case studies is significantly dependent on the interpretation of the researcher. Although researchers may receive training and employ strategies like triangulation to reduce subjectivity, this interpretation often remains present—some might even suggest it is unavoidable in qualitative research. Consequently, a common critique of case studies is their susceptibility to subjectivity, necessitating that researchers actively implement measures to mitigate this issue in their work (Yin, 2018). In this study, to minimise the impact of subjectivity, I implemented several measures. First, I ensured that I was well versed on qualitative research techniques to ensure a consistent and objective approach to data collection and analysis. Second, I employed data triangulation by using multiple data sources, such as interviews, observations, and document analysis, to verify findings and reduce the risk of bias. Additionally, I kept detailed notes on the research process and decisions made during data collection and analysis, ensuring transparency. Lastly, I sought feedback from peers or colleagues to ensure that interpretations are grounded in the data and not influenced

by personal biases. These measures are designed to strengthen the trustworthiness of the findings while addressing concerns related to subjectivity in qualitative research (Yin, 2018).

According to Yin (2018), when revisiting a setting to repeat or replicate a study, researchers frequently encounter significant changes in variables that make replication challenging. Additionally, new researchers, with their fresh perspectives, may observe details that previous investigators missed. This difficulty is further compounded when attempting to replicate a case study design in a different context or with different participants. To address the challenges of replicating a case study, I took several steps. First, I recognised that exact replication may not be possible due to differences in context and variables. Instead, I focused on understanding specific phenomena in this unique setting. I carefully documented all variables, contextual factors, and research processes so that future researchers can understand the conditions under which the study was conducted. To account for changes in variables, I designed the study to remain flexible while maintaining focus on the core research questions. Finally, I compared my findings with previous research, highlighting new insights from this particular context and group of participants. This approach helped to overcome replication challenges and contribute to the field (Yin, 2018).

3.5 SITE, POPULATION AND SAMPLING

3.5.1 Site

The site of the study was District X. District X is home to a diverse population characterised by a mix of urban and rural communities. The population is predominantly Zulu speaking, reflecting the cultural heritage of the region. The district has a high percentage of young people, with many families and children forming a significant part of the community. However, the area also faces challenges such as high rates of unemployment and poverty, which impact the social dynamics and overall well-being of the population (Statistics South Africa, 2020).

District X is located in the province of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. It is one of the eleven district municipalities in KwaZulu-Natal and includes several local municipalities. District X will be the code name used for the purpose of this study due to ethical reasons.

Health: The district faces health challenges, including high rates of HIV/AIDS and other communicable diseases. Access to healthcare services is limited in many rural areas (KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health, 2019).

Infrastructure: The state of infrastructure, including roads, water supply, and sanitation, varies widely across the district. Rural areas often suffer from inadequate infrastructure, affecting the quality of life and access to essential services (District X Municipality, 2020).

Cultural Practices: The strong cultural heritage of the Zulu people influences social dynamics, including family structures, community relationships, and educational practices (Zulu Cultural Heritage, 2015).

In this section, population sampling and sample size are discussed.

3.5.2 Population

The term "population" refers to a group of individuals, items, or events that meet specific criteria and to which research findings are intended to be generalised (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019). Creswell and Creswell (2018) emphasise that the population comprises all individuals or cases that fit specific criteria and to which the research seeks to generalise. Sekaran and Bougie (2016) elaborate that a population includes a broad set of individuals, events, or objects of interest that researchers aim to study, providing the foundation for drawing meaningful conclusions. The sampling process is a crucial part of research methodology, as it ensures the accuracy and trustworthiness of the study's findings. This process begins by identifying the target population, which includes all individuals or entities relevant to the research question. Clearly defining the population is essential to ensure the sample accurately represents the group being studied. The definition of the population should include key attributes such as demographic characteristics, geographic location, and other features important to the research (Babbie, 2020).

The population from which this study will be drawn is school principals from KwaZulu-Natal. Purposive sampling was used to select the participants because it enabled me to interact with participants with the potential of providing relevant information. By making use of purposive sampling, I chose participants who are principals of primary schools and are likely to share with me their leadership experiences of parental engagement. I involved six principals from public primary schools in the UThukela District of KwaZulu-Natal. Purposive

sampling was used to choose the schools on the basis of years of leadership experiences of the principals well as their willingness to be involved in the study.

3.5.3 Sampling

The term "sample" in research refers to a small group taken from a larger population, which serves as the basis for the study. Sampling involves selecting individuals from the target population to make inferences about the larger group. It is a method used to choose a subset of the population that has specific characteristics relevant to the study. Jager, Putnick, and Bornstein (2017) categorise sampling techniques into two main types: probability sampling, which involves random selection methods, and non-probability sampling, which does not rely on random selection. After defining the population, researchers must select an appropriate sampling method that aligns with their research goals, available resources, and the need for generalisation. For studies aiming to make population inferences, probability sampling methods such as simple random sampling, stratified sampling, cluster sampling, and systematic sampling are commonly used. In contrast, non-probability sampling methods, including convenience sampling, purposive sampling, and snowball sampling, are typically employed in exploratory research or when the population is challenging to access (Babbie, 2020).

Purposive sampling, also called judgmental or expert sampling, involves selecting participants based on the researcher's judgment about who would provide the most relevant data. This approach is often used when specific characteristics or expertise are needed in participants. While it can offer valuable and detailed insights, it also poses a significant risk of researcher bias and may not accurately represent the broader population (Babbie, 2020).

Convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling technique in which participants are selected based on their accessibility and willingness to participate in a study. This approach is commonly used in qualitative research when researchers seek participants who are readily available and possess relevant knowledge or experience related to the phenomenon under investigation. In this study, convenience sampling was used to select school principals who were accessible and willing to share their experiences of understanding and promoting parental engagement in their schools. Although convenience sampling may limit the generalisability of findings, it enables researchers to obtain rich, detailed data from participants who can provide valuable insights into the research topic (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

This study utilised both purposive and convenience sampling, which are non-probability sampling methods. Purposive sampling was used to deliberately select information-rich cases relevant to the phenomenon under investigation, while convenience sampling was applied by selecting schools that were geographically close to the researcher and easily accessible for data collection. This combined approach allowed the researcher to balance relevance and practicality in participant selection.

Principals were selected based on specific criteria, including their professional roles, experience, and involvement in parental engagement practices within their schools. They were considered key respondents due to their leadership positions and in-depth knowledge of strategies used to understand and promote parental engagement (Cohen et al., 2018). In addition, their accessibility within nearby schools facilitated efficient data collection within the limitations of time and resources. As school leaders, principals were deemed well positioned to provide rich insights into parental engagement within the school context.

3.5.4 Sample Size

According to Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, (2016) sample size refers to the number of participants or units selected from the larger population for a study. It is crucial for ensuring the study's findings are representative and statistically reliable. I chose participants who are principals of primary schools and were likely to share with me their leadership experiences of parental engagement. I involved six principals from public primary schools in KwaZulu-Natal. Participants were sampled based on their teaching experience, professional qualifications and willingness to participate. The fact that participation in this study was voluntary was made clear to participants.

3.6 DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Data collection methods involve creating suitable and precise tools to gather and measure information. In qualitative research, various techniques are available for collecting data, such as observations, interviews, document analysis, and audio-visual digital content (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; MacMillan & Schumacher, 2014; Pacho, 2015). This study utilised interviews and document analysis to gather the necessary data.

3.6.1 Interviews

Interviews are a primary data collection method that facilitates flexible and interactive exchanges between researchers and participants. This approach enables the collection of verbal, nonverbal, and auditory cues (MacMillan & Schumacher, 2014; Cohen et al., 2018). Interviews are defined as two-way interactions where questions are used to gather insights and understand participants' behaviours and perspectives (Cohen et al., 2018). They are particularly effective for generating rich qualitative data (Bacon-Shone, 2020). Interviews can be structured, semi-structured, or unstructured (Jamshed, 2014). This study used semi-structured in-depth interviews, which aimed to explore participants' experiences, knowledge, feelings, and values in detail. Open-ended questions were employed to gather participants' perspectives and interpretations of key phenomena (MacMillan & Schumacher, 2014). These interviews were chosen for their ability to provide a deep understanding of participants' views on the research topic. Creswell (2018) highlights that one-on-one interviews are most suitable for participants who feel comfortable expressing their thoughts. In this study, I acted as the facilitator, guiding conversations with open-ended questions to elicit participants' ideas and opinions. A total of 10 open-ended questions will be designed, encouraging participants to share detailed responses (Cohen et al., 2018). The interviews were conducted face-to-face in private, distraction-free spaces at the participants' schools to ensure confidentiality and comfort. The sessions were audio-recorded and supplemented with handwritten notes to capture all relevant information, including participants' tone and contextual details (Bacon-Shone, 2020). Audio recordings provided raw data for thorough analysis and safeguarded against potential equipment failure (Creswell, 2018). This interview method created an environment conducive to honest and detailed responses, contributing valuable qualitative insights to the research.

3.6.2 Document analysis

Documents serve as supplementary data sources, enhancing the reliability of research findings through document analysis (Madzinga, 2021). Commonly available in schools, documents provide valuable insights into the personal and professional lives of school personnel. Personal documents offer first-hand accounts of beliefs and experiences, while professional documents reflect organisational values and functions (MacMillan & Schumacher, 2014). This study focused on analysing professional documents from schools. Key documents reviewed will include school policies, school year plans, meeting minutes from the School Governing Body (SGB) and School Management Team (SMT), newsletters, and records of parent-teacher interactions. These documents verified and complemented interview data,

ensuring trustworthiness (MacMillan & Schumacher, 2014; Madzinga, 2021; Masha, 2017). Document analysis offers several advantages. It captures participants' language and provides written data prioritised by them, saving time and transcription costs (Creswell, 2018). The method is efficient, less time-consuming, and cost-effective, as it involves selecting and analysing existing data rather than collecting new information. Additionally, documents are typically accessible at little or no cost, making the process manageable and practical (Cardno, 2018). However, document analysis also has limitations. Documents may lack the detail needed to fully address research questions as they were not created for research purposes (Cardno, 2018). Retrieval can be challenging, with some documents being difficult to locate or deliberately restricted to protect confidentiality (Cardno, 2018). Despite these challenges, document analysis provides valuable insights and enhances the depth and credibility of the findings. It offers context about events or organisational goals that occur prior to the study, enriching the understanding of the research problem. By complementing interview data, document analysis serves as a critical method for achieving the objectives of this study (Cardno, 2018).

3.7 DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis in qualitative research involves organising and preparing data for interpretation. This process includes reducing data into meaningful themes through coding and condensation, followed by presenting the results in figures, tables, or discussions (Creswell, 2018). It is a systematic approach to classify, categorise, and interpret data to understand a specific phenomenon (MacMillan & Schumacher, 2014). A distinctive feature of qualitative research is that data analysis occurs both during and after data collection, making it an iterative process (Maree, 2016). Creswell (2016) highlights that qualitative data analysis begins with broad, open-ended questions and focuses on interpreting participants' responses to produce insights. This study employed thematic data analysis, a method that systematically identifies, interprets, and reports patterns or themes within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Thematic analysis provides a rich, detailed understanding of the dataset, which is presented in an accessible format for readers (Madzinga, 2021). The process followed Clarke and Braun's (2019) structured phases of thematic analysis, which offer a clear framework for conducting qualitative data analysis.

Step 1: Familiarise yourself with data

Qualitative research data is primarily verbal, often captured using audio or video recordings to preserve events accurately for later analysis. Data analysis begins with listening to the

recorded interviews and transcribing them into a written format, as transcription simplifies further analysis (Ravindran, 2019). Transcription involves converting audio or video data into text, which is essential for conducting thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019). To understand participants' responses fully, interview transcripts were carefully reviewed multiple times. Immersing oneself in the data helps to grasp its depth and identify meaningful patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2019). This process includes actively and repeatedly reading the data for insights and recurring themes. I started the data analysis process by listening to the recorded interviews at least one before I began to transcribe the recording. I studied the patterns in the data and create codes for each pattern; I organised my list of codes. First, I read the transcript many times and wrote down a few notes. MacMillan and Schumacher (2014), states that transcription involves converting the audio data to written text. I then read the interview transcripts at least three times to be able to start identifying patterns in the text. For interview notes, summarising immediately after the interview is beneficial, allowing the researcher to fill in details and record participants' perspectives comprehensively (Kooverjee, 2018; Ravindran, 2019).

Step 2: Generating initial codes

After thoroughly familiarising myself with the data and identifying initial ideas, the next step involved generating initial codes (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Coding is a fundamental part of qualitative data analysis. It involves assigning a label, word, or phrase to segments of data to provide meaning and organisation (Cohen et al., 2018). A code can represent activities, relationships, perspectives, actions, processes, or other ideas, making it easier to identify patterns and themes. I was then able to classify the codes and organise the information to form categories. Gibbs (2018) explains that a code connects segments of text that share similar ideas or focus on the same topics. Similarly, Cohen et al. (2018) describe coding as dividing text into smaller units based on relevant criteria, then analysing, comparing, and categorising them. A single text segment can carry multiple codes, depending on its depth and content. This stage helped me establish the foundation for later thematic analysis by creating initial codes that reflect the data's key elements.

Step 3: Searching for Themes

This stage began after generating a list of distinct codes from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Before coding, I carefully read and re-read the text to fully understand its meaning, key ideas, and overall logic (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The terms and phrases used by participants inspired the naming of the codes, which then was highlighted to represent the

content effectively (Cohen et al., 2018). The focus at this stage shifted from individual codes to broader themes, grouping related codes into potential themes. Each coded data extract was reviewed to identify patterns and connections (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Coding helped identify and combine similar information, providing a clearer structure for understanding the data (Cohen et al., 2018). This phase concluded with a set of potential themes and sub-themes, supported by coded data extracts.

Step 4: Reviewing Themes

This phase began with identifying a set of sub-themes and refining them into distinct themes (Braun & Clarke, 2019). During this step, I assessed whether certain sub-themes qualify as themes. Some were excluded if the data is too sparse or inconsistent, while others were combined where overlap occurs. By examining coding patterns, I identified recurring themes (frequent codes) and relationships (codes appearing together) to group similar data under shared categories (Cohen et al., 2018). Themes represent clusters of related codes unified under a single concept (MacMillan & Schumacher, 2014). Ravindran (2019) describes themes as organising similar codes into coherent categories to connect related data effectively. The review and refinement process occurred on two levels. The first level involved evaluating coded data extracts to ensure they represent the main idea of each theme (Braun & Clarke, 2019). This step allowed for grouping similar codes and clarifying the broader meaning of the data. If the candidate themes demonstrate consistent patterns, the process advanced to the second level, which involved reviewing the entire dataset to confirm the validity and coherence of all themes across the study (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

Step 5: Defining and Naming Themes and Sub-Themes

After refining the themes, the next step was to analyse the data in detail (Braun & Clarke, 2019). This involved understanding the essence of each theme, the overarching topic, and the type of data captured by each theme. Each theme was examined to identify the specific narrative it conveyed, and a detailed analysis was conducted to ensure it aligns with the broader story I aim to tell through the research. The relationship between the themes and the research questions were carefully considered to ensure coherence and relevance (Braun & Clarke, 2019). At this stage, it is important to clearly distinguish which themes are central to the analysis and which were not. As noted by MacMillan and Schumacher (2014), the ultimate goal of qualitative research is to identify meaningful connections between themes. While working titles for themes were initially assigned, this phase also involved refining and finalising the names to be used in the final analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

Step 6: Producing the Report

The final phase involved completing the analysis and writing the report. This step required presenting a clear and coherent narrative of the data to demonstrate the value and accuracy of the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Writing the report, whether for a dissertation, research paper, or publication, will focus on effectively communicating the insights gained from the data. The identified themes aligned with the research's theoretical framework, serving as a guide to structure the findings and organise the report (MacMillan & Schumacher, 2014). This ensured that the report not only presents the results but also showed how the data will connect to the broader research objectives and framework.

3.8 TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE STUDY

According to MacMillan and Schumacher (2014), trustworthiness involves credibility, dependability, transferability and conformability, each of which is discussed below.

3.8.1 Credibility

Credibility in research refers to the extent to which participants' perspectives align with the researcher's interpretation of their accounts (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). It reflects the accuracy and trustworthiness of the findings, ensuring they are consistent with reality and appear plausible (Anney, 2014). Credibility involves maintaining a “fit” between participants' views and the way the researcher represents them (Gunawan, 2015). Importantly, credibility is linked more to the quality of data than its quantity. To achieve credible results, researchers must ensure accurate and truthful recording of phenomena under study, providing detailed findings and descriptions. In this study, credibility was supported by employing multiple data collection methods, including semi-structured interviews and document analysis. An interview schedule will be used to ask all participants the same set of questions, ensuring consistency. According to Moon, Brewer, Januchowski-Hartley, Adams, & Blackman, (2016), participants themselves were positioned to assess the reliability of findings. Direct quotes from participants were included to further strengthen credibility.

3.8.2 Dependability

Dependability refers to the consistency and reliability of research findings across researchers and conditions (Nowell et al., 2017). It ensures that if the study were repeated in a similar context, the results would be comparable. According to Korstjens and Moser (2018), dependability is established through transparent and well-documented research processes that are logical and reproducible. To achieve this, researchers must provide detailed descriptions

of the research setting, methods, and procedures. Using qualitative techniques like thorough documentation, consistency checks, and triangulation enhances dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, as cited in Moon et al., 2016). These methods ensure that the findings are credible and accurately represent the data collected. In this study, I ensured dependability by logically and consistently collecting data through multiple methods and documenting the entire process thoroughly. This included explaining how participants were selected, describing the data collection process, and detailing the analysis and interpretation of findings.

3.8.3 Transferability

In research, transferability refers to the extent to which the findings can be applied to similar contexts or situations (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). To enhance transferability, I provided a detailed description of the research context, participants, and procedures, along with the key assumptions underlying the study. This enabled readers to determine whether the findings are relevant to their own settings. Transferability is achieved through comprehensive documentation of the research process and its context, ensuring clarity for both participants and readers (Moon et al., 2016). Participants were given a thorough explanation of the study, including an opportunity to ask questions, ensuring they fully understand their role in the research. Additionally, I carefully described the environment in which the study was conducted to ensure that readers could evaluate the applicability of the methods and findings to other settings. The goal was to provide sufficient details to allow readers to assess whether similar practices can be implemented in their environments, as emphasised by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014). By doing so, the study was aimed to offer insights that could potentially be translated and adapted for use in different communities or contexts.

3.8.4 Conformability

Research conformability refers to the extent to which a study's findings can be independently validated and corroborated by others (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Confirmable findings are those clearly derived from the data, requiring the researcher to demonstrate how conclusions and interpretations were developed (Anney, 2014). This involves providing a clear audit trail to ensure the findings are grounded in the data. In this study, conformability was achieved by maintaining objectivity and neutrality during data analysis and interpretation. The focus was on accurately reflecting participants' voices without bias or preconceived notions. Conformability ensures the study captures participants' experiences authentically and is free from researcher influence. Furthermore, conformability is closely linked to other

trustworthiness criteria—credibility, transferability, and dependability—indicating that if these are met, conformability is likely achieved (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). In this research, steps were taken to ensure findings represent principals' experiences on factors that encourage parental engagement, providing evidence that conclusions were directly tied to the collected data.

3.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethics refers to the principles and guidelines that help safeguard what individual's value, while research ethics pertains to the moral principles that guide researchers' behaviour and ensure the ethical conduct of studies (Resnik, 2015).

3.9.1 Informed Consent

This study was conducted after obtaining the necessary consent from relevant parties. Ethical clearance, a crucial step before data collection, was obtained from the College of Education Ethics Committee at the University of South Africa (UNISA). Following this, a formal request was made to the KwaZulu-Natal Province Department of Education for permission to conduct research in the district x. Approval was then sought from the principals of the selected primary schools within the district to carry out the study at their schools. Participants were provided with an information sheet and asked to sign an informed consent form. An informed consent form ensured that individuals understand the implications of participating in a research study, allowing them to make an informed decision about their involvement (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2020). Clear communication of research details is essential to obtaining informed consent (Hennink et al., 2020). Participants were informed about the study's objectives, the researcher's identity, institutional affiliation, and the voluntary nature of participation. They were assured of confidentiality and anonymity, and the purpose and use of the data were explained thoroughly (Maree, 2020; Bryman, 2016). A supportive and non-judgmental interview environment was fostered to encourage openness while respecting participants' comfort levels. I avoided pressuring participants to disclose information they seem hesitant to share, ensuring their boundaries are respected.

These approaches adhere to ethical research standards, fostering trust and enabling participants to share their experiences freely while ensuring their privacy is upheld.

3.9.2 Privacy

Privacy impacts every part of the research process, including topic selection, design, data collection, analysis, and reporting (Cohen et al., 2018). Anonymity is essential for ensuring privacy and protection, as it involves removing any identifying details (Cohen et al., 2018).

To maintain confidentiality, I committed to not disclosing any information that could identify participants (Cohen et al., 2018). Secure storage methods were employed to safeguard data. Interview recordings and transcripts were stored in password-protected files or secured physical storage to prevent unauthorised access. To further protect privacy, Maree (2016) suggests deleting recorded data once it has been transcribed.

3.9.3 Anonymity

Anonymity means that participants' identities cannot be identified by the researcher or anyone else based on the information provided (Cohen et al., 2018). The key to anonymity is ensuring that no information reveals participants' identities (Cohen et al., 2018). If anonymity cannot be guaranteed, researchers should not proceed with the study. In this study, participants were assured of their confidentiality and anonymity. Their names and school names were not used in the report. Instead, each participant was assigned a number, and schools were represented by letters. Participants were informed that their identity and responses have remained confidential (Maree, 2016). Anonymity is a fundamental ethical principle in research, emphasising that informants should feel safe, and their identities protected to encourage open, honest responses. This principle helps participants feel secure that their responses are confidential, particularly when dealing with sensitive information, thereby protecting them from potential repercussions (Avidan, Ioannidis, & Mashour, 2019). Ensuring anonymity can be challenging in qualitative research, where researchers often have direct interaction with participants, possibly making some informants hesitant to share certain information. In contrast, quantitative research typically allows respondents to remain anonymous and respond independently, which can increase their comfort in providing data.

To ensure anonymity in this qualitative study, several strategies will be applied. First, pseudonyms will replace participants' real names during transcription and reporting and identifying details such as locations or organisational affiliations were excluded or altered to maintain confidentiality. Second, participants received detailed information about the measures in place to protect their anonymity before data collection begins. They were assured that their responses were used solely for research purposes and that only the researcher has access to raw data (Avidan et al, 2019).

3.9.4 Confidentiality

Confidentiality ensures that the researcher can identify the responses given by participants for research purposes, but cannot reveal their identities publicly, as it would violate the

agreement made with them (Pacho, 2015). This principle ensures that the data gathered is used solely for the research and is not shared with third parties. To protect confidentiality, I required participants to sign a statement agreeing not to disclose their information and sought their approval before any disclosure will be made (Copper & Schindler, 2014). Participants were given a consent form before the interview and were informed that they can withdraw from the study at any time (Cohen et al., 2018). No one was forced to participate, as participation was voluntary, and participants' right to withdraw was respected (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2019).

3.9.5 Voluntary Participation

Participating in a research study takes time, so no one should be forced to take part. Participants were informed about the study, including my name, the institution I am enrolled at, and the purpose and terms of participation, such as voluntary involvement. After receiving this information, participants were given enough details to decide whether to participate. They were assured that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time. I emphasised their right to refuse or withdraw from the study at any point, as explained by Fraenkel and Wallen (2019).

3.10 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

The methodology chapter outlined the research paradigm, design, and approach. Participants were selected through purposeful sampling. The researcher explained the data collection methods, which included face-to-face interviews and document analysis. Data analysis followed the six stages of thematic analysis, as outlined by Clarke and Braun (2019). The chapter also covered the four criteria used to ensure trustworthiness, as well as the ethical considerations that were implemented throughout the study. The next chapter will report on the findings of this study and the literature comparison of related studies.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, the research methodology was outlined, providing a detailed account of the research paradigm, approach, design, population and sampling, data collection methods, and data analysis procedures that guided this study. Chapter 3 also addressed ethical considerations and the strategies employed to ensure the credibility and integrity of the research process. Building on that foundation, this chapter presents the analysis and interpretation of the data collected from the interviews with school principals. Data findings are organised according to the main research questions and themes that aligns with the research questions, supported by direct quotations from the participants. This chapter aims to highlight key patterns, insights, and experiences of school principals regarding parental engagement.

4.2 BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION OF THE PARTICIPANTS

Table 4.3 Biographical Table

School	Participant	Gender	Age bracket	Principalship role (years)	Years of experience in Education	Highest Qualification
A	Principal A	M	60-65	10	30	BEd Hons
B	Principal B	M	50-55	4	20	BEd Hons
C	Principal C	F	50-55	10	30	BEd Hons
D	Principal D	F	50-55	4	30	B.Ed
E	Principal E	M	40-45	2	10	B.Ed
F	Principal F	M	60-65	20	36	B.Ed

4.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Table 4.4 Research questions and interview questions

Research Questions	Interview question
RQ 1 How does the school principals describe the concept parental engagement?	• In your view, what is parental engagement?
RQ 2 What role do parents play in parental engagement?	• What role do you think that parents should play in the education of their children? • How effective do you believe parental engagement is in supporting learners' success? • Based on your experience, in which areas are parents most likely to participate in their children's education?
RQ 3 What role do the principals play in parental engagement?	• As a principal, what is your role in parental engagement?
RQ4 What are the factors that promotes parental engagement?	• What factors contribute to parents being actively engaged in their children's education? • What strategies can be used to promote parental engagement in schools?
RQ 5 What are the factors that hinders parental engagement?	• What factors contribute to some parents not being actively involved in their children's education? • What challenges do teachers face when trying to engage parents in school activities?

4.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS, THEMES AND SUB-THEMES

TABLE 4.5: RESEARCH QUESTIONS, THEMES AND SUB-THEMES

RQ 1 How do the school principals describe the concept parental engagement?	Theme 1: School Principals perception of the concept parental engagement.
IQ 1.1 In your view, what is parental	<i>Sub-theme 1.1: Principals' conception of</i>

engagement?	<i>parental engagement</i>
RQ 2 What role do parents play in parental engagement? IQ 2.1 What role do you think that parents should play in the education of their children? IQ 2.2 How effective do you believe parental engagement is in supporting learners' success? IQ 2.3 Based on your experience, in which areas are parents most likely to participate in their children's education?	Theme 2: Parents as active partners in supporting learner success. <i>Sub-theme 2.1: Perceptions of principals regarding the role parents play in parental engagement.</i> <i>Sub-theme 2.2: Effectiveness of parental engagement in supporting learner success</i> <i>Sub-theme 2.3: Areas in which parents are most likely to be engaged in school activities</i>
RQ 3 What role do the principals play in parental engagement? IQ 3.1 As a principal, what is your role in parental engagement?	Theme: 3 Perceptions of principals regarding the role they as principals play in parental engagement. <i>Sub-theme 3.1: Principals role in facilitating parental engagement.</i>
RQ 4 What are the factors that promotes parental engagement? IQ 4.1 What factors contribute to parents being actively engaged in their children's education? IQ 4.2 What strategies can be used to promote parental engagement in schools?	Theme: 4 Factors that promote parental engagement. <i>Sub-theme 4.1: Conditions that encourage active parental engagement</i> <i>Sub-Theme 4.2: Strategies that can be used to promote parental engagement in</i>

	<i>schools.</i>
RQ 5 What are the factors that hinders parental engagement? IQ 5.1 What factors contribute to some parents not being actively involved in their children's education? IQ 5.2 What challenges do teachers face when trying to engage parents in school activities?	Theme 5: Factors that hinder parental engagement. <i>Sub-theme 5.1: Conditions that contribute to parents not being actively involved in their children's education.</i> <i>Sub-theme 5.2: Challenges that teachers face when trying to engage parents in school activities.</i>

4.5 RESEARCH FINDINGS

The first research question looked at how principals understand the idea of parental engagement, and Interview Question 1 asked for their views on what it means. The principals described parental engagement in different ways, but they all saw it as going beyond just attending meetings. The first theme presents the findings of the first research question.

4.5.1 Theme 1: School principals perception of the concept parental engagement.

This theme highlights how principals define and understand parental engagement. Their views show that it is not limited to attending meetings but includes different forms of involvement such as supporting learning at home, helping with school functions, guiding behaviour, and contributing emotionally, financially, and spiritually. Principals also stressed that parental engagement is about partnership—parents and educators working together to achieve learners' holistic success.

4.5.1.1 Sub-theme 1.1: Principals' conception of parental engagement

Under this sub-theme, principals described parental engagement as a broad and active process where parents participate in their children's education both at home and at school. They linked it to activities such as helping with homework, attending meetings, supporting school events, and maintaining open communication with educators. Some also pointed out that engagement involves parents providing emotional, financial, and moral support. Overall, principals see parental engagement as essential for learner success and as a shared responsibility between families and schools.

The following principals highlight that parental engagement is not only about attending school meetings but also about supporting learners in multiple ways. The principals said:

Parental engagement is all the aspects where parents are involved. This could be attending meetings, assisting with school functions, helping with homework, or taking part in any opportunity offered by the school (Principal D).

In my view as principal, parental engagement is the active, meaningful, and sustained involvement of parents in all aspects of their child's education, growth and development.....the active, meaningful, and sustained involvement of parents in all aspects of their child's education, growth and development (Principal F)

I see parental engagement as any activity that requires parents to be involved in education. It can be participation in school-related activities or supporting their child at home... it can be participation in school-related activities or supporting their child at home (Principal E).

... it also extends to emotional, financial, and even spiritual involvement (Principal C).

The above quotations illustrate that principals see parental engagement as a partnership where parents and educators work together to ensure learner success. These findings suggest that principals value parental engagement as a multidimensional and on-going process. Their descriptions imply that schools expect parents to contribute not only academically but also socially, emotionally, and morally. This highlights the belief that strong collaboration between parents and educators is critical for holistic learner development and improved school outcomes. Furthermore, Principals see parental engagement as a shared responsibility between families and schools. This conception emphasises that parents are not passive supporters but active partners in the educational journey. Such views highlight the need for schools to create inclusive strategies that encourage parents from diverse backgrounds to take part in ways that align with their capacities, resources, and cultural values.

4.5.1.2 Discussion of the findings of theme 1

These findings of how the participants in this study perceive the concept parental engagement are consistent with recent scholarship. Goodall and Montgomery (2017) emphasise that parental engagement goes beyond presence at school events and extends to learning at home; reinforcing the principals' view that engagement must be active and sustained. Hornby and Blackwell (2018) likewise argue that effective parental engagement includes both academic

support and wider social, emotional, and behavioural guidance, which aligns with principals' references to financial, emotional, and spiritual involvement. In the South African context, Mncube and Makole (2017) highlight that principals view parents as essential partners in school governance, discipline, and the promotion of values. This complements the findings that principals see engagement not only in administrative roles but also in shaping learners' holistic development. More recently, Naidoo and D'Anjou (2020) observed that successful parental engagement strategies in South African schools depend on recognising parents' diverse capacities and building inclusive approaches—an implication also drawn from the principals' emphasis on partnership and shared responsibility.

The findings also connect strongly to the theoretical framework. Epstein's (2018) updated theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence underscores that family, school, and community must collaborate to promote student achievement. The principals' views of engagement as participation in school functions, communication, and learning at home reflect Epstein's six types of involvement, while their emphasis on shared responsibility demonstrates the overlapping of these spheres. Similarly, the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model, applied in more recent work by Green et al. (2019), stresses that parents' role construction and invitations from schools drive their involvement. This aligns with principals' recognition that parents should see engagement as meaningful and continuous, rather than optional.

Overall, the findings affirm that principals conceive parental engagement as ongoing, multidimensional, and collaborative. This highlights the need for schools to design inclusive strategies that accommodate parents' diverse ways of contributing—whether through school activities, support at home, or providing emotional and moral guidance—to enhance learners' holistic success.

4.5.2 Theme 2: Perceptions of principals regarding the role parents play in parental engagement.

This theme highlights principals' perceptions of the role parents play in parental engagement. The findings show that parents are seen as active partners in their children's education, with responsibilities that go beyond paying fees or ensuring school attendance. Principals emphasised that parents should support academic needs (e.g., homework, reading, and projects), collaborate with teachers to promote learner success, and address learners' holistic needs by instilling discipline, values, and life skills. Educated parents were perceived as more involved, while challenges such as parental absence, reliance on grandparents, and lack of

awareness limited engagement for others. Overall, principals believe that meaningful parental involvement nurtures both academic achievement and character development.

4.5.2.1 Sub-theme 2.1 Parents as active partners in supporting learner success.

The findings revealed that principals view parents as essential partners in education, actively contributing to learners' academic progress, discipline, and holistic development by working alongside teachers and supporting learning both at home and in school. The principals said:

Educated parents are different — they support homework, projects, reading, and motivate their children to succeed... Educated parents... support homework, projects, reading, and motivate their children to succeed. Children with supportive parents excel academically, build self-worth, and stay motivated (Principal A).

Parents should support their children's education both at home and at school. They need to teach discipline, guide behaviour, and instil values (Principal B).

Educated parents, on the other hand, usually assist with homework and attend school functions, so they are more involved (Principal D).

Parents should provide resources, transportation, and support with homework.

Parents should also read to learners at night, develop routines that align with school (Principal E).

Parents should play a central role in their children's education beyond simply ensuring attendance at school (Principal F).

The above findings revealed that the principals distinguished the difference in the engagement of educated parents and the parents with low level of education or uneducated parents. The educated parents seem to be more actively involved, particularly in homework, projects, reading, and attending school functions. Parental engagement was perceived by the participants as contributing to academic success, self-worth, and motivation. Beyond academics, parents were also viewed as key in teaching discipline, guiding behaviour, and instilling values. Some principals highlighted the practical aspects of involvement, such as providing resources, transportation, reading to learners, and creating routines. Overall, in this study, parents were portrayed as playing a central and indispensable role in supporting and shaping their children's education.

Apart from the parental role in supporting academic needs of learners, this study also found that parents also play a role in partnership of the teachers in learning. The participants said the following:

They should work hand in hand with teachers to ensure that learners succeed (Principal B).

They should attend meetings, join the SGB, support fundraising events... maintaining open communication with the school...and show mutual respect (Principal E).

They should support consistent study habits and maintain open communication with teachers. Ultimately parents are parents in the academic journey. Nurturing not only academics success but also character, resilience and a lifelong love for learning (Principal F).

The principals viewed parents as essential partners in supporting learner success, stressing that this partnership goes beyond academics. They highlighted the importance of parents working closely with teachers, attending meetings, joining the SGB, and supporting school initiatives, all while maintaining open and respectful communication. Beyond practical involvement, parents were also seen as nurturing learners' holistic growth by instilling values, resilience, and a love for learning. This reflects a shared responsibility between home and school in shaping both academic achievement and character development.

In addition to the partnership role, this study reveals that parents also play a role in supporting holistic needs of learners. The participants explained this role in the following way:

For me, parental engagement is broader than academics it includes discipline, teaching values, building (Principal A).

They need to teach discipline, guide behaviour, and instil values (Principal B).

...create a stable and loving home environment. They are responsible for providing safety and security at home environment, encouraging social interactions... (Principal E).

As their child's first teachers, they should shape and instil values, discipline and attitudes towards learning (Principal F).

The principals collectively viewed parental engagement as extending beyond academics to encompass the holistic development of learners. They emphasised that parents are responsible

for shaping discipline, instilling values, and guiding behaviour, highlighting their role in building character and moral foundations. In addition, parents were seen as creating a stable and nurturing home environment that provides safety, love, and opportunities for social interaction. By positioning parents as their children's first teachers, the principals underscored their foundational influence on learners' attitudes toward education, resilience, and overall growth.

4.5.2.2 Sub-theme 2.2 Effectiveness of parental engagement in supporting learner success

The finding of this sub-theme highlights the crucial role of parental support in shaping learner success. They emphasized that supportive parents provide both academic guidance and emotional stability, while the absence of such involvement often leads to demotivation and poor performance. The study revealed that parental engagement plays a crucial role in enhancing learner motivation. The principals stated that:

It is very effective. I believe children's intelligence can be shaped positively through parental involvement or negatively if parents are absent. Strong parental engagement builds character, motivation, and academic achievement. Children with supportive parents excel academically, build self-worth, and stay motivated. Without parental support, learners struggle and lack motivation (Principal A).

Parental involvement fosters a love for learning, enhances motivation and helps learners develop a sense of responsibility and confidence in their abilities. When parents show interest, learners are more likely to exhibit good behaviour, respect school rules and maintain focus on their studies. To ensure parental (Principal F).

The findings highlight that principals perceive parental engagement as highly effective in shaping learners' overall development. The quotations in this section emphasised that strong parental involvement positively influences intelligence, character, motivation, and academic achievement, while the absence of support leads to struggles and lack of motivation. The findings further reinforce the need for parental engagement that fosters a love for learning, strengthens motivation, and nurtures responsibility and confidence. Parental engagement seemed to be expected to be parenting to improve learner behaviour, encourage learners to have respect for school rules, and sustained focus on studies, underscoring that active parental support as a key driver of learner success.

Apart from the crucial role parents play in enhancing learner motivation, this study also found that parental engagement is effective in parents contributing to learners' academic success.

The participants said the following:

Parental engagement is very effective. Some parents support learners by assisting with problem areas like reading. Reading at home, like bedtime reading, helps create family bonding and promotes engagement. Parents who are academics tend to be more involved than those with little or no education (Principal B).

Parental engagement is one of the most pivotal factors influencing a learner's success. Learners whose parents are actively engaged tend to perform better academically, as they receive consistent encouragement, guidance and support at home (Principal F).

The findings show that principals regard parental engagement as a pivotal factor in learner success. The quotations in this section emphasised that parents' engagement often includes direct academic support, such as helping with reading, which not only improves learning but also strengthens family bonds. However, the level of involvement was seen to vary depending on parents' educational background, with academically inclined parents participating more actively. The findings further highlighted that consistent parental encouragement, guidance, and support at home significantly enhance academic performance. Together, these views emphasise that both the quality and consistency of parental engagement directly shape learners' educational outcomes.

In addition to the crucial role parents play in enhancing learner motivation, this study reveals that parental engagement effective for accountability on learner performance. The participants explained this role in the following way:

Parents are role models for their children. When parents take responsibility and hold their children accountable, learners succeed academically. .. When parents take responsibility and hold their children accountable, learners succeed academically (Principal D).

The findings indicate that participants view parents as crucial role models whose sense of responsibility directly impacts learner achievement. The findings on effectiveness of parental engagement show that by holding their children accountable and setting standards, parents create conditions that promote academic success and encourages good learner behaviour. This perspective highlights the influential role of parental behaviour and example in shaping learners' attitudes and performance.

4.5.2.3 Sub-theme 2.3: Areas in which parents are most likely to be engaged in school activities

The finding of this sub-theme highlights the specific areas in which parents are most likely to engage in school activities. The findings reveal that parents generally show strong participation in social and cultural events such as sports days, concerts, fun days, awards ceremonies, and themed celebrations. Many also contribute by volunteering their time and services, assisting with fundraising initiatives, or participating in the School Governing Body (SGB). While these forms of engagement are often well-supported, meetings focused on academic progress and finances tend to attract lower attendance, particularly from parents whose involvement is most needed. This pattern suggests that parents are more inclined to engage in community-building and celebratory events than in academic or administrative activities. The principals stated that:

Parents usually attend sports days, awards functions, fun days (Principal A).

Parents mostly participate in concerts, sports events, fun days, open days (Principal B).

Sports are also a big draw.....Fun days, like those with inflatables, attract strong attendance (Principal D).

They also pay for school excursions and volunteer their services, whether in gardening or cake sales..., awards ceremonies, sports days, concerts, entrepreneurship days, and fundraising events.(Principal E).

Attending school events and functions such as open days, sports events, cultural events (Principal F).

The findings show that parents are most likely to engage in school activities that are social, cultural, or celebratory in nature. Events such as sports days, fun days, concerts, awards ceremonies, and open days consistently attract strong attendance and participation. In addition to attending these functions, some parents also contribute through volunteering their time and services, supporting fundraising initiatives, and assisting with school projects or excursions. Overall, the responses suggest that parental engagement is more visible and consistent in community-oriented and extracurricular activities than in formal academic settings.

Apart from the crucial role parents undertake with regards to sports, recreation and extracurricular activities, this study also found that parental engagement is effective for SGB related activities and financial related activities. The participants said the following:

They also volunteer after hours with cleaning or join the SGB... Financial meetings are poorly attended, mostly by fee-paying parents (Principal A).

SGB members are also very supportive and help raise funds.... SGB members are also very supportive and help raise funds (Principal B).

Parents get very involved in fundraisers and fun activities. They're eager to pay and also participate themselves (Principal D).

Parents get very involved in SGB meetings (Principal E).

The findings indicate that parents play an active role in supporting schools through voluntary contributions of time, resources, and participation in governance structures. Many parents engage in activities such as fundraising, volunteering for various tasks, and taking part in School Governing Body (SGB) initiatives, which provide both financial and organisational support to the school. However, attendance at financial or administrative meetings appears to be less consistent, with limited participation from certain groups of parents. Overall, the responses highlight that parents are more inclined to contribute through practical involvement and community-based initiatives than through formal financial or administrative forums.

In addition to the crucial role parents play in enhancing SGB activities and financial related activities, this study reveals that parental engagement effective for academic matters and learner performance. The participants explained this role in the following way:

However, the parents who most need to meet teachers about academic progress are usually the ones who don't attend meetings... and academic meetings (Principal B).

Parents often participate in open days for academic meetings, orientation days, and annual general meetings (Principal E).

Monitoring academic progress, checking homework, ensuring the child prepares for assessments (Principal F).

The findings suggest that while many parents do participate in academic-related activities such as open days, orientation sessions, annual general meetings, and monitoring their children's schoolwork at home, there remains a concern regarding inconsistent involvement.

Specifically, the parents who would benefit most from attending academic meetings and engaging with teachers are often the ones who are absent. These points to a gap between the school's efforts to facilitate academic engagement and the actual participation of parents, indicating that while some demonstrate strong commitment to supporting learning, others remain disengaged from critical academic discussions.

Lastly this study also found that parental engagement drastically increased during themed and community events. The participants said the following:

Themed events like Father's Day breakfasts, Mother's Day teas, concerts, and junior open days attract high attendance (Principal C).

...orientation days, annual general meetings (Principal E).

The findings show that themed and special events, such as Father's Day breakfasts, Mother's Day teas, concerts, and junior open days, tend to draw high levels of parental attendance. In addition, more formal gatherings like orientation days and annual general meetings also attract participation, though these may appeal to a different segment of parents. This suggests that both celebratory and formal school events provide important opportunities for fostering parental engagement at the same time gives parents an opportunity to relax and enjoy themselves.

4.5.2.4 Discussion of the findings of theme 2

This theme focused on the perceptions of principals regarding the role parents play in parental engagement underscores the critical role principals attribute to parents as active partners in their children's education. Principals perceive parental engagement as encompassing more than financial contributions or ensuring school attendance. They emphasize that parents should support academic needs, collaborate with teachers, and address learners' holistic development by instilling discipline, values, and life skills. Educated parents are seen as more involved, while challenges such as parental absence, reliance on grandparents, and lack of awareness limit engagement for others. Overall, principals believe that meaningful parental involvement nurtures both academic achievement and character development.

The literature supports the idea of parental involvement that suggests that when parents are active partners in supporting learner success and when parents and schools work collaboratively, learners perform better academically and socially (Hornby & Blackwell, 2018; Epstein, 2018). In the current study, the views of principals that stresses the need for parents to assist with homework, maintain routines, and instil discipline align with Epstein's

framework of overlapping spheres of influence, which highlights shared responsibility between home and school. Similarly, Goodall and Montgomery (2014) found that parents who actively engage in learning activities at home foster motivation and resilience in children, mirroring principals' observations that educated parents' involvement leads to higher academic achievement and improved learner behaviour.

Research consistently affirms that effectiveness of parental engagement in supporting learner success in parental engagement enhances learner motivation, self-esteem, and academic success (Jeynes, 2018; Wilder, 2014). The findings of this study that indicated that importance of principals' emotional support and accountability reflect the earlier findings by Desforges and Abouchaar (2017), who noted that parental engagement contributes to improved learner attitudes and discipline. The link between consistent parental encouragement and higher academic outcomes also resonates with Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (2015) model, which highlights the motivational and cognitive benefits of parental support.

The principals' observation on the areas in which parents are more involved namely social and cultural events as opposed academic meetings as revealed in this study aligns with studies showing that parents often prefer informal, community-oriented activities (Goodall & Vorhaus, 2011; Lemmer, 2019). While these events strengthen school-community relationships, limited attendance at academic meetings suggests a need for schools to develop more inclusive and flexible engagement strategies (Hill & Taylor, 2020). Literature thus confirms that parental engagement is often event-driven rather than academically focused, requiring targeted approaches to enhance consistent participation in learners' academic progress.

Overall, the discussion shows that principals' perceptions align closely with existing research, emphasising that active, consistent, and collaborative parental engagement academic, emotional, and social is fundamental to learner success and holistic development.

4.5.3 Theme 3: Perceptions of principals regarding the role they play in parental engagement.

This theme explores principals' perceptions of their role in fostering meaningful parental engagement within schools. The findings indicate that principals view themselves as key facilitators of parental engagement, creating a bridge between home and school to foster collaboration and shared responsibility. They maintain open communication, conduct home visits, organise workshops, and provide support to families to encourage active participation

in learners' academic and holistic development. Their role extends beyond administration to building trust, empowering parents, and cultivating a culture where engagement is continuous and meaningful. Overall, principals see parental involvement as essential for enhancing learner success and promoting a supportive school community.

4.5.3.1 Sub-theme 3.1: Principals' role in facilitating parental engagement.

The findings of this sub-theme show that principals play a key role in encouraging parental engagement. They do this by keeping open communication, building trust, supporting families, and creating opportunities for parents to be involved in school life. Principals act as bridges between the school, home, and community, ensuring parents feel included and valued as partners in their children's education. Principals also have a vital role of encouraging home-school collaborations and partnership. The principals stated that:

My role is to build collaboration between parents, teachers, and the community. I conduct home visits to understand learners' background (Principal B).

Principals play a pivotal role in shaping and sustaining meaningful parental engagement within a school community. As the institutional and administrative leaders, principals set the tone for collaboration between home and school. Their role goes beyond management; it is about creating an environment of trust, respect and shared responsibility..... They are a bridge-builder, strengthening the partnership between educators and parents. By promoting open communication, inclusivity and transparency.... ultimately, principals inspire and drive a collaborative ethos where parental engagement is not an occasional event but a continuous process, grounded in the belief that when schools and families unite, children thrive academically, socially and emotionally (Principal F).

The findings of this study highlight that principals view themselves as central to building strong partnerships between schools, parents, and communities. Both quotes show that principals go beyond administrative duties by fostering trust, collaboration, and shared responsibility. Their role is not only to manage but also to create supportive environments where parents feel included, respected, and empowered to contribute to their children's success.

Apart from the crucial role that principals play in home-school collaborations and partnership, they are also responsible for creating a welcoming environment where parents feel free to share concerns, seek support, and participate in school activities. By being accessible and

approachable, principals build trust and strengthen the partnership between home and school. The participants said the following:

I also keep an open-door policy, handle grievances immediately, and ensure all parents are treated equally regardless of background (Principal B).

My role is to encourage parents to take accountability and to maintain open channels of communication. We use written and telephonic communication, and in serious cases, we do home visits (Principal D).

My role is to create an open and welcoming environment where parents feel the school is part of their family (Principal E).

They establish platforms for dialogue where parents feel valued, heard and included in the decision-making processes that affect their children's education. (Principal F).

The findings of the study indicate that principals view open communication and accessibility as essential to parental engagement. By maintaining open-door policies, addressing concerns promptly, and treating all parents equally, they create a climate of trust and inclusivity. Principals also use various channels such as meetings, calls, and home visits to ensure effective communication. This openness helps parents feel welcomed, valued, and included in school life, reinforcing their role as active partners in their children's education.

In addition to the crucial role of encouraging open communication and an open-door policy, principals play an important role in supporting disadvantaged parents and families. This support helps parents feel included and encourages them to participate more actively in their children's education. The participants explained this role in the following way:

At the school, we provide support for poor families by giving uniforms and meals through a feeding scheme, where the management team samples meals daily (Principal B).

I also encourage parents to keep their children in school until the very last day of each term (Principal D).

I aim to build trust, offer support and advice, and assist families who lack basic needs (Principal E).

Equally, principals function as empowered, equipping parents with knowledge, strategies and confidence to actively support their children's learning at home. They cultivate a culture when parents are partners rather than spectators (Principal F).

The findings of this study suggest that principals actively support vulnerable parents and families to ensure sustained engagement in schooling. Their efforts include providing material assistance such as meals and uniforms, encouraging consistent learner attendance, and offering advice and guidance to parents in need. Beyond meeting basic needs, principals also empower parents with knowledge and strategies to support learning at home. This reflects a holistic approach where principals not only address challenges but also strengthen parents' confidence and role as active partners in education. This finding suggests principals' understanding of the nature of parents in the school is crucial for devising ways in which the parents can be engaged in school activities and support the academic achievement of the learners.

Lastly this study also found that principals can provide opportunities for parental engagement. The participants said the following:

I organise orientation sessions for every grade, encouraging parents to attend. Junior phase parents are usually most engaged. During these sessions, we cover communication methods, assessment requirements, and school uniform rules, code of conduct, arrival and departure times, and assignment deadlines.... I also engage with parents in rural areas and run a nutrition programme for children from poor households.... We also hold workshops for parents, organise fundraising events like carnivals and pyjama days, and involve parents in school life (Principal C).

By engaging parents through meetings, and fund raising, school events and volunteer opportunities principals affirm the education is not confined to the classroom but is a shared journey (Principal F).

The findings of this study show that principals use a variety of strategies to involve parents in school life, ranging from orientation sessions and workshops to fundraising events and community programmes. These efforts not only inform parents about school expectations but also create opportunities for active participation and shared responsibility. By promoting engagement through both formal meetings and informal activities, principals reinforce the idea that education extends beyond the classroom and is strengthened when parents and schools work together.

4.5.3.2 Discussion of the findings of theme 3

The findings for this theme on perceptions of principals regarding their role in parental engagement indicate that principals view themselves as central facilitators of parental engagement, acting as bridges between home, school, and community. Their role extends beyond administrative duties to fostering trust, open communication, and collaboration, creating a culture where parental involvement is continuous and meaningful. Principals actively engage parents through workshops, home visits, orientation sessions, and school events, reinforcing that education is a shared responsibility between families and schools. They also provide support for disadvantaged parents and empower them with knowledge and strategies to actively support learning at home. This holistic approach underscores principals' understanding that parental engagement is not a one-off activity but a sustained process that directly contributes to learner success and community cohesion.

The findings on this sub-theme on principals' role in facilitating parental engagement show that principals play a pivotal role in fostering meaningful parental engagement through communication, support, and partnership-building. They create welcoming and inclusive environments where parents feel valued, heard, and empowered to participate in school activities. This aligns with recent literature suggesting that effective school leaders actively bridge the home-school gap, promote collaboration, and empower parents as partners rather than passive participants in their children's education (Epstein et al., 2018; Hill & Tyson, 2016; Mncube, 2019). The study further indicates that principals' strategies ranging from home visits and open-door policies to workshops and community events reflect a proactive and holistic leadership approach that addresses both educational and socio-economic challenges faced by families. Research highlights that such principal-led engagement strategies strengthen parental self-efficacy and foster sustained involvement, which ultimately improves learner outcomes (Fan & Chen, 2017; Hill et al., 2020). Overall, the findings show that effective parental engagement depends mainly on the principal's leadership style and commitment to building relationships with parents. Principals who lead with empathy, openness, and a sense of shared responsibility create schools where parents feel welcome and confident to take part in their children's education. This shows that good school leadership is not only about managing tasks but also about building strong, trusting relationships.

4.5.4 Theme 4: Factors that promote parental engagement.

This theme highlights the various factors that encourage parents to become actively involved in their children's education. Some of the factors mentioned by the principals that promote parental engagement include effective communication, mutual respect, and creating a

welcoming school environment. The principals also pointed to out the influence of socio-economic status, parental education, and cultural background as factors that encourages parents to engage with the school as well as the different levels of engagement. In addition, collaboration with school structures such as the School Governing Body (SGB), the use of tools like WhatsApp groups, and opportunities for parents to contribute resources or time are factors that further promote meaningful parent engagement.

4.5.4.1 Sub-theme 4.1: Factors that encourage active parental engagement.

The findings of this sub-theme focus the factors that make parents want to or engage with the teachers in helping the education of their children.. The participants identified the factors that encourage parental engagement to be open communication, mutual respect, and trust as well as the schools' making parents feels valued in their engagement with the school. Other factors were flexible meeting times, using WhatsApp groups, providing translators, and offering financial or practical support help reduce barriers and strengthen the partnership between home and school. The participants stated that:

Short, focused meetings after business hours work best. Parents respond positively when schools communicate in their home language without jargon..... WhatsApp groups are a strategy I plan to implement for faster, clearer communication with parents (Principal A).

Open communication encourages engagement.... When language barriers exist, we arrange translators... WhatsApp groups to improve communication (Principal B).

Parents engage more when they are supported with tools like WhatsApp groups, attendance registers, and parent–teacher conferences. Transparency and trust are essential, so we ensure clear processes are followed (Principal C).

Parents are more actively engaged in their children's education when there is open communication.... opportunities for meaningful participation (Principal F).

The findings of this study on communication highlights that school leaders understand the importance of adapting their communication methods to suit parents' diverse socio-economic backgrounds and circumstances. Principals recognise that effective communication is a key factor that fosters trust and encourages parental engagement. By holding short, focused meetings after business hours, they accommodate working parents who may have limited time during the day. Communicating in parents' home languages and avoiding educational jargon ensures that information is accessible and inclusive, helping parents feel comfortable and

respected. The use of WhatsApp groups demonstrates creativity and practicality, as it taps into a tool that most parents already use, making communication faster, clearer, and more consistent. Arranging translators further removes language barriers, ensuring that all parents can participate meaningfully. These efforts show that principals are intentionally shaping communication to overcome barriers such as time constraints, limited resources, and language differences. Ultimately, they aim to build transparency, promote trust, and a sense of partnership with parents, key factors that lead to stronger and more meaningful parental engagement in their children's education.

Apart from the factors that encourage parental engagement, the principals make the parents feel at home by creating welcoming and supportive school environment that encourages parental engagement, they are also responsible for creating a climate and culture of trust. The findings of this study also affirms that when schools foster respect, openness, and clear communication, parents feel more confident and valued as partners in their children's education. The participants stated that:

Parents respond positively when schools create a welcoming environment, respect them (Principal A).

Meetings scheduled earlier in the day also encourage more parents to attend; while motivating and relevant agenda items keep them engaged (Principal C).

Welcoming school environment, respect and trust between school and home... (Principal F).

The findings of this study show that a welcoming and respectful school environment plays is one of the factors that encourages parental engagement. When parents feel valued and treated with respect, they are more willing to participate in school activities and discussions. Principals acknowledged that by creating a culture of trust between home and school strengthens relationships and promotes cooperation. This finding suggests that the school value and respect the role that parents play in the education of their children regardless of the socio-economic status of the parents. Scheduling meetings at convenient times and ensuring that agenda items are relevant and motivating also help increase attendance and sustain parents' interest in their children's education. This strategy may have been adopted by understanding the situation of the parents as well as the ability of the principal in having contextual intelligence.

In addition to the above factors that encourage parental engagement, the principals also seem to have recognised the importance of understanding and supporting parents' socio-economic status, educational background, and cultural context. By being sensitive to these factors, principals can address barriers that may limit parental participation and create inclusive strategies that make all parents feel valued and capable of contributing to their children's learning. The participants said the following:

Financial advice is also useful (Principal A).

Financial stability, political interests...We give fee concessions to reduce financial pressure (Principal B).

Educated parents usually understand their role better. Married parents living with their children provide more support, while cultural background and race also influence participation. Socio-economic status matters too—those with reliable transport attend more often than those relying on public transport. Parents who had good role models themselves also tend to be more engaged (Principal E).

Factors that contribute are the parents' level of standing in society, their educational level and socio-economic status (Principal F).

The finding of this study reveals that principals recognise how parents' socio-economic conditions and backgrounds significantly influence their level of engagement in school activities. Financial stability emerges as a key factor that encourage parental engagement, parents under financial strain often struggle to participate fully, prompting schools to offer fee concessions as a way of easing this burden and encouraging involvement. Principals also acknowledge that education level and family structure play important roles in parental engagement: educated parents are more likely to understand their responsibilities in supporting their children's learning, and married parents living with their children often provide more consistent support. Cultural background, race, and social standing further shape how parents relate to schools, affecting their comfort levels and confidence in participating. Additionally, barriers, such as lack of reliable transport, limit attendance at meetings or school events. Overall, the analysis shows that principals are aware that parental engagement is influenced by broader social and economic factors beyond the school's control. Their actions, such as offering financial assistance and being sensitive to parents' contexts, reflect an effort to create a more inclusive environment where all parents regardless of background, can participate meaningfully in their children's education.

Besides, another factor that encourages parental engagement is empowering parents to contribute their skills, resources, and time to school activities. By encouraging parents to volunteer, share expertise, or support school projects, principals not only empower parents but also strengthen the partnership between home and school. The participants said the following:

Teachers are reminded that parents are stakeholders, and parents often contribute skills, resources, and time (Principal B).

They also provide resources we can use. I remind parents to prioritise their children's education over luxuries. I also reach out to parents who are business owners to sponsor the school and improve infrastructure. Other parents volunteer their time to help maintain and improve school facilities (Principal D).

Opportunities for meaningful participation and when they clearly see the positive impact of their involvement on their child's success (Principal F).

The findings of this study show the ability of principals to actively encourage parents to participate meaningfully in school life by contributing their time, skills, and resources is a factor that encourages parental engagement. The extra mile that the principals talked about regarding the factors that encourages parental engagement implies that the principals view parents as important stakeholders who can contribute to the learning of their children in various ways not only in academic support. The diverse ways in which parents are encouraged to be engaged includes assist by volunteering or supporting maintenance and improvement projects, while others offer financial or material resources to enhance school facilities. These factors indirectly create an environment that enables learners to improve their performance. Motivation of the parents done by the principal is a factor that shows care and concern that the principals portray towards the parents an example that the participants share included advising parents to prioritise their children's education over non-essential expenses.

The last factor is encouraging parent participation which is essential for building strong partnerships between home and school. Principals promote parental engagement by creating inclusive spaces where parents feel welcomed, respected, and valued. *Sometimes, I hold a learner in the office until the parent comes for a meeting (Principal B).*

I work closely with the SGB. They are very supportive and help us encourage parental involvement (Principal D).

The findings of this study highlight that principals employ a combination of accountability and collaboration strategies to promote parental engagement. In some cases, principals use

firm yet purposeful accountability measures, such as keeping a learner in the office until a parent attends a meeting in order to stress the importance of active parental engagement and responsibility. This approach communicates that parent's play an essential role in addressing learners' behavioural or academic issues and that their participation is non-negotiable. At the same time, principals strengthen engagement through collaborative partnerships with the School Governing Body (SGB), which acts as a bridge between the school and the broader parent community. The SGB helps communicate expectations, mobilise resources, and encourage parents to take ownership of their children's learning. Together, these strategies illustrate that effective parental engagement stems from both accountability and partnership. By combining firm expectations with supportive structures, principals create a balanced environment where parents feel both responsible and empowered to contribute to school activities and their children's educational success.

4.5.4.2 Sub-theme 4.2: Strategies that can be used to promote parental engagement in schools.

The findings of this sub-theme focus on the strategies that principals can use to make parents want to engage with teachers in supporting their children's education. Participants identified several strategies that effectively promote parental engagement in schools. These include implementing effective meeting strategies and clear communication to keep parents informed and involved, and principals' engagement in home and community matters to strengthen relationships beyond the school environment. Schools also promote participation by creating attractive events that encourage collaboration and build a sense of belonging. Furthermore, establishing a positive school culture and strong relationships with parents helps create a welcoming atmosphere that motivates continued involvement. Lastly, offering workshops and learning opportunities for parents empowers them with the skills and confidence needed to actively support their children's learning journey. The participants stated that:

One-on-one meetings...regular communication in parents' languages. Adding attractive topics to meeting agendas also increases attendance (Principal A).

Involving parents in school projects and maintaining open communication are important strategies (Principal B).

We try to keep communication simple and effective (Principal D).

Meetings should be set during the day to ease transport issues, and they should be short and focused. Having translators for parents with language barriers is important, as is maintaining an approachable attitude (Principal E).

Open and transparent communication is essential regular updates shared through newsletters, WhatsApp groups, or school apps to ensure parents remain informed and connected..... Schools can also promote flexible engagement opportunities by offering meetings and events at varied times and in different formats to accommodate diverse schedules (Principal F).

The findings of this study with regards to scheduled meetings and communication channels indicate that principals promote parental engagement mainly through effective and inclusive communication. They use one-on-one meetings, simple language, and communication in parents' home languages to build trust and understanding. Flexible meeting times, short, focused sessions, and the use of translators help remove participation barriers. Principals also use digital tools like WhatsApp groups and newsletters to keep parents informed. By adding interesting topics to meetings and maintaining an approachable attitude, schools create a welcoming atmosphere that encourages consistent parental engagement.

Apart from the meetings and communication strategies that principals conduct, they also engage directly in home, and community matters to strengthen relationships with parents. This approach allows principals to understand families' circumstances, build trust beyond the school environment, and show genuine care for learners' wellbeing. By visiting homes, attending community events, and collaborating with local organisations, principals create meaningful connections that encourage parents to become active partners in their children's education. The participants said that:

... home visits, workshops (Principal A).

...home visits, creating a welcoming environment (Principal B).

The findings of the sub-theme show that principals strengthen parental engagement by extending their involvement beyond the school environment. Home visits are a key strategy, as they help principals understand families' living conditions and challenges, allowing for more personalised support. Such visits also build trust and demonstrate genuine care, which encourages parents to participate more actively in school activities. Additionally, creating a welcoming school environment complements these efforts by making parents feel valued and

respected. Together, these strategies foster stronger home–school relationships and promote meaningful collaboration between parents and educators.

In addition to the principals' engagement in home and community matters, they also create attractive participation events to promote parental engagement. These events are designed to draw parents into the school environment through activities that are both informative and enjoyable. By including relevant topics, cultural celebrations, and community drives, principals make school involvement appealing and meaningful. Such events not only strengthen relationships between parents and the school but also foster a sense of belonging and shared responsibility for learners' success. The participants stated that:

We use various strategies, such as hosting raffle events to draw parents into school activities.....I also organise community drives like cancer awareness campaigns, where parents contribute donations or pledges. This not only promotes engagement but also teaches learners the importance of contributing to society (Principal C).

...create opportunities for parents to get involved, like sports and extracurricular activities. The SGB is very useful in this regard. They support us in mobilizing parents and in using community resources to strengthen engagement (Principal D).

We can also use school nutrition programmes and gardens to involve or assist parents (Principal E).

Effective parental engagement can be fostered through several key strategies that strengthen collaboration between families and schools (Principal F).

Besides the factors already mentioned that promote parental engagement, the findings of this study reveal that principals use creative and inclusive events to attract and involve parents in school life. Activities such as raffles, community drives, and awareness campaigns not only encourage participation but also build a sense of shared purpose between the school and families. These initiatives promote social responsibility and strengthen community ties, as seen in efforts like cancer awareness campaigns and school garden projects. Principals also collaborate with the SGB to mobilise parents and utilise community resources effectively. By linking parental involvement to meaningful and enjoyable events, schools create a positive environment that encourages sustained engagement and partnership in learners' education.

Furthermore, to creating attractive participation events, principals also focus on establishing a positive school culture and building strong relationships with parents. By fostering an environment of trust, respect, and open communication, principals ensure that parents feel

valued and welcomed at the school. This positive atmosphere motivates parents to take an active role in their children's education and strengthens the partnership between home and school. The participants said:

Building trust and avoiding intimidating approaches help parents feel comfortable (Principal A).

Treating all parents with respect, regardless of status or background, also makes a difference (Principal B).

A welcoming school culture should be cultivated, where parents feel respected, valued, and comfortable when engaging with staff. Inclusive decision-making is equally important, involving parents in committees, governance structures, and school development plans to ensure their voices are heard.... Finally, recognition and appreciation of parents' contributions help build a strong sense of belonging and partnership, reinforcing their vital role in supporting learners' success (Principal F).

The findings on factors that promote parental engagement show that establishing a positive school culture and strong relationships with parents is essential for sustained involvement. Principals emphasised that trust, respect, and inclusivity form the foundation of effective parental engagement. By treating all parents equally and avoiding intimidating or judgmental attitudes, schools create a safe and welcoming environment where parents feel comfortable participating. Involving parents in decision-making processes, such as committees and school development plans, further strengthens their sense of ownership and partnership. Additionally, recognising and appreciating parents' contributions fosters belonging and mutual respect, reinforcing the collaborative relationship between home and school in supporting learner success.

Lastly, principals promote parental engagement by organising workshops and learning opportunities for parents. These initiatives aim to equip parents with the knowledge and skills needed to support their children's learning and development effectively. Through training sessions, information sharing, and collaborative discussions, parents gain confidence in engaging with teachers and participating in school activities. Such opportunities also strengthen the partnership between home and school, ensuring that parents feel empowered and involved in their children's educational journey. The participants stated that:

Agenda items should appeal to parents, and workshops on financial literacy, stress management, or child psychology can be helpful (Principal E).

Volunteer and mentorship programmes further encourage parents to contribute their time, skills, and expertise, enriching the school community (Principal F).

The findings for this sub-theme highlight that workshops and learning opportunities are effective tools for empowering parents and sustaining their involvement. Principals noted that offering workshops on topics such as financial literacy, stress management, and child psychology addresses parents' real-life needs while enhancing their capacity to support their children's education. Additionally, volunteer and mentorship programmes provide parents with meaningful ways to contribute their time and expertise, fostering a sense of ownership and belonging. These initiatives not only strengthen parents' confidence and skills but also create a supportive, collaborative school community focused on learners' success.

4.5.4.3 Discussion of the findings of theme 4

The findings of this study show that effective communication, mutual respect, and a welcoming school environment play a vital role in promoting parental engagement. Principals use strategies such as WhatsApp groups, translators, and flexible meeting times to build trust and ensure that all parents feel included. Creating a respectful and supportive atmosphere encourages parents to participate more confidently in school activities. Socio-economic background and education levels also influence the extent of parental involvement, highlighting the need for principals to be sensitive to parents' diverse circumstances. Overall, the findings suggest that empathetic, flexible, and inclusive leadership is key to strengthening collaboration between home and school and sustaining meaningful parental engagement.

The findings of this study on factors that encourage parental engagement and strategies that can be used to promote parental engagement in schools reveal that effective communication, mutual respect, and a welcoming school environment are central to encouraging active parental engagement. Principals emphasised that open, consistent, and inclusive communication helps build trust and strengthens collaboration between home and school. This supports Epstein (2018) research that identifies communication as a key component of successful school-family partnerships. Likewise, Hornby and Blackwell (2018) found that when schools use clear, accessible language and maintain regular communication, parents are more confident and willing to participate in their children's education. Similarly, the findings that highlight that principals in this study demonstrated strategies that can be used to promote parental engagement in schools, such as using WhatsApp groups, translators, and flexible meeting times to reach parents from diverse socio-economic and linguistic backgrounds. These findings align with Goodall and Montgomery (2017), who suggest that genuine

engagement happens when schools communicate through channels that fit parents' everyday realities. By scheduling short meetings after business hours and communicating in parents' home languages, principals show inclusivity and responsiveness, which reduce participation barriers and foster trust. The findings of the discussions on parental engagement show that communication is not just about sharing information but about building relationships. When principals use flexible ways to communicate, they help parents feel understood and supported, which encourages them to take part in their children's education. This shows that when school leaders understand and respond to parents' different needs, they show real commitment to inclusion and teamwork. Effective parental engagement comes from caring and empathetic leadership that values every parent's voice and contribution. A positive and respectful school climate also emerged as a significant factor in encouraging engagement. When parents feel valued and respected, they are more likely to attend meetings and support school activities. This finding resonates with Jeynes (2018), who emphasises that schools that cultivate mutual respect and partnership achieve stronger parental participation and improved learner outcomes.

Socio-economic status and parental education levels were also shown to influence engagement. The principals in this study acknowledged that financial constraints, limited education, or transport challenges often hinder participation. To address these barriers, schools offer practical support such as fee concessions or flexible arrangements. These findings are consistent with Mafora (2020), who highlights that socio-economic sensitivity and inclusiveness are essential for equitable participation in South African schools. Principals' awareness of parents' contexts reflects contextual intelligence (Bush & Glover, 2016), as they tailor their leadership strategies to the needs of their communities.

Overall, the findings show that principals who communicate effectively, build trust, and demonstrate empathy create the conditions necessary for parents to become active and confident partners in their children's learning. The findings highlight that strong, flexible, and contextually responsive leadership is crucial for fostering meaningful parental engagement.

4.5.5 Theme 5: Factors that hinder parental engagement.

This theme on factors that hinder parental engagement explores the various obstacles that prevent parents from actively participating in their children's education. The findings of this study indicate that parental engagement is often limited by a combination of socio-economic pressures, educational and knowledge gaps, psychological and relational challenges, communication barriers, and age- or health-related factors. These barriers can reduce parents'

capacity, confidence, or willingness to collaborate with schools, ultimately affecting the effectiveness of school–home partnerships.

4.5.5.1 Sub-theme 5.1: Conditions that contribute to parents not being actively involved in their childrens' education.

This sub-theme on conditions that contribute to parents not being actively involved in their children's education highlights how socio-economic barriers and a lack of interest from parents hinder active participation in their children's education. Factors such as work commitments, financial stress, transport challenges, unemployment, and child-headed households limit the time, resources, and capacity parents must engage with schools. These conditions often reduce parental involvement, affecting their ability to support learning at home and participate in school activities, which is critical for fostering effective school–home collaboration. The principals stated that:

...work commitments, transport issues, or short-notice meetings (Principal A).

Unemployment, poverty, ignorance, and a lack of interest are major issues. Some parents avoid school because of school fees (Principal B).

A range of challenges prevent parental involvement, including transport issues, poverty.....and time constraints. Some parents avoid accountability for school fees or behavioural issues (Principal C).

Some parents struggle with outstanding school fees, while others face transport issues or live out of town (Principal D).

Some parents work far from home or live in other cities.... Child-headed homes, transport challenges, and financial issues, such as outstanding fees, also play a role (Principal E).

Socio-economic pressures such as long working hours, financial stress, or a lack of resources reduce the time and capacity parents have to participate in school activities or support learning at home (Principal F).

The findings how socio-economic barriers and a lack of interest from parents hinder active participation in their children's education indicate that socio-economic barriers and a lack of parental interest significantly limit active engagement in children's education. Work commitments, long working hours, and employment in distant locations reduce the time parents can dedicate to school-related activities. Transport challenges and living far from

schools further hinder regular participation. Financial pressures, including poverty and outstanding school fees, create additional obstacles, with some parents avoiding accountability for fees or their children's behaviour. In some cases, child-headed households and other family circumstances increase these challenges. Collectively, these conditions diminish parents' capacity and willingness to support learning at home or attend school events, highlighting how socio-economic factors are closely linked to the level of parental engagement.

Apart from the conditions that limit parents' active involvement, low education levels also hinder meaningful parental engagement in their children's education. Parents with limited literacy or academic knowledge may feel unprepared to support learning at home or participate confidently in school activities, which can reduce their involvement and weaken the partnership between schools and families. The participants stated that:

Others face barriers such as low education levels (Principal A).

... and lack of education (Principal C).

Many learners live with grandparents who are uneducated, and the absence of fathers in households is common (Principal D).

...while others lack knowledge, education (Principal E).

In addition, parents with limited educational backgrounds may feel ill-equipped to assist their children academically, which can create a sense of inadequacy and discourage their involvement (Principal F).

The findings indicate that low parental education and limited knowledge are key barriers to parental engagement. Parents may feel ill-equipped to support their children academically, which can reduce their involvement. Family circumstances, such as uneducated caregivers or absent fathers, further limit the support available at home, making active parental participation in education more challenging.

In addition to the low education levels of parents, negative attitudes and lack of accountability emerged as a significant barrier to parental engagement. This study reflects how some parents' attitudes towards schooling, combined with a limited sense of responsibility for their children's learning, can hinder active participation and collaboration with the school. The participants said the following:

Many are afraid of accountability and responsibilities tied to SGB participation (Principal A).

...while others simply treat school as a day-care facility (Principal B).

Some parents hold high positions and can be arrogant (Principal D).

Others are grandparents or guardians who struggle with involvement... Some parents avoid accountability when their child misbehaves..... Mistrust of the school or intimidation by teachers also discourages involvement (Principal E).

Furthermore, parents who had negative schooling experiences in the past may carry feelings of discouragement or reluctance, which prevent them from fully participating in their child's education. Finally, perceptions of exclusion—where parents feel unwelcome, undervalued, or disrespected by the school—can further alienate them and hinder meaningful collaboration between families and educators (Principal F).

The findings of this sub-theme suggest that negative attitudes and a lack of accountability among some parents hinder meaningful engagement in their children's education. Fear of responsibility, past negative schooling experiences, mistrust of the school, or perceptions of exclusion can discourage parents from participating. Additionally, some parents may see the school merely as a day-care facility or struggle to be involved due to personal or relational factors, highlighting that engagement is influenced not only by capacity but also by attitudes and perceptions.

Besides negative attitudes and a lack of accountability among some parents, another factor that affects parental engagement is family and social needs challenges. This category highlights how parents' personal, social, and economic circumstances can limit their ability to participate fully in their children's education. The participants stated that:

Some parents prioritise non-academic benefits such as school meals or fun events over academics (Principal A).

Alcohol and substance abuse by parents or even children also play a role. The age of parents is another factor: young parents often show little interest, while older grandparents may struggle to cope with responsibilities (Principal C).

The findings of this study indicate that family and social challenges can significantly limit parental engagement. Some parents focus on non-academic aspects of schooling, such as meals or recreational activities, rather than their children's learning. Additionally, issues like

alcohol and substance abuse within families can further hinder involvement. Age-related factors also play a role: younger parents may show limited interest in school matters, while older grandparents or guardians may struggle to manage their responsibilities effectively. Overall, these social and familial circumstances create barriers that reduce parents' capacity to support their children's education.

The last factor that hinders parental engagement is communication and language barriers. This study highlights how difficulties in understanding, expressing, or accessing information between schools and parents can limit meaningful participation and collaboration in children's education. The participants said that:

...language barriers (Principal C).

Language and communication barriers also make things difficult (Principal D).

... or face language barriers (Principal E).

Communication barriers, including language differences, cultural misunderstandings, or ineffective channels of communication, also make it difficult for parents to remain actively engaged with schools (Principal F).

The findings this sub-theme shows that communication and language barriers are significant obstacles to parental engagement. Parents who face language differences or cultural misunderstandings may struggle to understand school expectations or communicate effectively with teachers. Ineffective communication channels further exacerbate these challenges, making it difficult for parents to stay informed, participate in school activities, or support their children's learning. Overall, these barriers limit meaningful collaboration between schools and families.

4.5.5.2 Sub-theme 5.2: Challenges that teachers face when trying to engage parents in school activities.

The findings of this sub-theme focus on the challenges that teachers face when trying to engage parents in school activities, particularly when parents lack a clear understanding of their role in supporting their children's education. Many parents may not recognise that engagement extends beyond attending meetings or paying school fees and may be unaware of the ways in which they can contribute to learning at home or collaborate with teachers. This lack of awareness can hinder meaningful partnerships between parents and schools, making it

difficult for teachers to foster consistent and effective parental engagement. The participants stated that:

Teachers often deal with parents who lack understanding of their role in education or who are reluctant to engage (Principal A).

Parents of older learners often stop attending functions, believing their child should be independent. Others see the school as merely a day-care service and do not see the need to attend activities.....insisting education is the school's responsibility (Principal E).

The findings of this study on the lack of parental understanding and awareness in their role of parental engagement reveal that teachers face considerable difficulty engaging parents who lack understanding of their role in supporting their children's education. Many parents view schooling as the sole responsibility of educators, which limits their participation in school activities. This perception reflects a disconnect between home and school, where parents fail to see the value of their involvement beyond basic attendance or financial contributions. Teachers also observe that parents of older learners tend to withdraw from engagement, believing their children no longer require parental involvement. Such attitudes create barriers to collaboration, reducing opportunities for shared responsibility and continuity in learners' academic and social development.

Apart from the fact that some parents lack understanding and awareness of their role in parental engagement, teachers also face challenges related to negative attitudes, intimidation, and conflict between parents and teachers.. The participants stated that:

Some parents have negative attitudes and refuse to accept their children's faults when problems are reported. This intimidates teachers and makes them reluctant to call parents again. As a result, learners lose respect for teachers, and discipline problems increase. Social media also spreads rumours, which worsens relationships between schools and parents (Principal B).

The findings of the study indicate that negative parental attitudes and conflicted interactions significantly hinder effective parental engagement. When parents refuse to acknowledge their children's behavioural or academic challenges, teachers often feel undermined and intimidated. This discourages further communication and leads to a breakdown in trust between home and school. The reluctance of teachers to contact parents subsequently weakens accountability, allowing learner misconduct to persist and declining classroom

discipline. Moreover, the spread of misinformation through social media further damages relationships, creating an environment of mistrust and hostility. These dynamics not only strain teacher–parent relationships but also negatively impact the school’s overall learning climate.

In addition to the above factors that hinder parental engagement, teachers also experience challenges related to low parental participation and commitment. Many parents show limited interest in attending meetings, school events, or collaborative activities, often citing work pressures, time constraints, or lack of motivation. The participants stated that:

Teachers face difficulties because many parents fail to attend meetings, avoid helping with homework, or don’t read to their children..... Teachers are encouraged to involve parents, and the PAM document specifically outlines their responsibility to do so. However, without consistent parental participation, these efforts often fall short (Principal C).

Teachers often face challenges such as poor attendance at parent meetings or school events, communication barriers... differing expectations between home and school, and at times a lack of parental confidence or interest in engaging with academic matters (Principal F).

The findings show that low parental participation and commitment remain major barriers to effective parental engagement. Teachers report that many parents fail to attend meetings, assist with homework, or take an active interest in their children’s learning. Despite teachers being encouraged and even mandated by policy documents such as the Personnel Administrative Measures (PAM) to involve parents, these efforts are often undermined by parents’ lack of responsiveness. Factors such as communication challenges, conflicting expectations between home and school, and limited parental confidence contribute to the problem. Consequently, the lack of consistent parental involvement weakens collaboration, reduces learner support, and limits the effectiveness of teachers’ initiatives aimed at fostering shared responsibility for educational outcomes.

Besides low parent participation and commitment, another factor that hinders parental engagement is the socio-economic and personal challenges faced by parents. Many families struggle with poverty, unemployment, or unstable living conditions, which limit their ability to participate actively in school activities. The participants stated that:

They need to conduct background checks, offer counselling, and communicate effectively... Teachers must also be trained to use sensitivity, guidance, and even cultural or biblical references to explain responsibilities to parents (Principal A).

Language barriers also make communication harder (Principal C).

We try to keep communication simple and effective and create opportunities for parents to get involved, like sports and extracurricular activities. The SGB is very useful in this regard. They support us in mobilizing parents and in using community resources to strengthen engagement (Principal D).

The findings reveal that socio-economic and personal challenges among parents significantly affect their ability to engage with schools. Teachers recognise the need for a more compassionate and supportive approach, including conducting background checks, offering counselling, and using culturally sensitive communication to build trust. Many parents face difficulties such as poverty, language barriers, and limited education, which hinder their participation and understanding of school expectations. Teachers therefore emphasize the importance of clear, accessible communication and inclusive opportunities, such as sports and community activities, to promote involvement. The School Governing Body (SGB) also plays a crucial role in mobilising parents and utilising community resources to strengthen engagement. Overall, the findings highlight those addressing parents' socio-economic and personal circumstances through empathy, support, and collaboration can foster more meaningful and sustainable parental participation.

4.5.5.3 Discussions of finding of theme 5

The findings of the theme factors that hinder parental engagement reveal that several interrelated factors hinder effective parental engagement in schools. A major challenge is that many parents lack a clear understanding of their role in supporting their children's education. Some parents perceive education as solely the school's responsibility and therefore show limited interest in participating in school-related activities or reinforcing learning at home. This lack of awareness reduces collaboration and weakens the shared responsibility necessary for learner success. Negative attitudes, intimidation, and conflict between parents and teachers further strain relationships. Teachers often encounter parents who are defensive or unwilling to accept their children's shortcomings, which discourage open communication and mutual trust. Such tensions can lead teachers to avoid contacting parents, resulting in reduced accountability and discipline problems among learners.

Low parental participation and commitment also emerged as a significant barrier. Many parents fail to attend meetings, assist with homework, or engage in school events due to time constraints, work pressures, or lack of motivation. Even though teachers are encouraged by policy to involve parents, these efforts often fall short when parents remain disengaged or indifferent. In addition, socio-economic and personal challenges such as poverty, unemployment, and language barriers make it difficult for parents to maintain active involvement. Some parents face stress, limited education, or cultural differences that affect their confidence and ability to interact with teachers. Schools that address these challenges through empathy, counselling, and community collaboration, including support from the School Governing Body (SGB), are better able to strengthen relationships and promote inclusion.

Overall, the findings suggest that meaningful parental engagement requires not only parent awareness and willingness but also supportive school practices that recognise and respond to the diverse challenges families face.

The findings of this study show that several underlying conditions contribute to parents' limited involvement in their children's education. Many parents lack awareness of their role and believe that education is solely the school's responsibility. This aligns with Hornby and Blackwell (2018), who note that parents often misunderstand what effective engagement entails, limiting their participation to financial or attendance-based support. Socio-economic challenges such as poverty, unemployment, and limited education also emerged as key barriers. According to Lemmer and Van Wyk (2015), parents from disadvantaged backgrounds often face structural and personal constraints that prevent meaningful engagement, including lack of time, resources, and confidence. Cultural and language differences further complicate communication between parents and schools, reinforcing feelings of exclusion and disengagement (Goodall & Montgomery, 2017). Collectively, these conditions create an environment in which parents are physically present but not actively involved, reducing the collaborative support essential for learner success. The fact that these findings are similar to previous studies shows that the barriers to parental engagement are long-standing and widespread. This means that the same issues continue to affect schools, especially those in disadvantaged communities. It suggests that principals and teachers need to find new and practical ways to help parents become more involved and to address these ongoing challenges in a sustainable way.

The findings of this study further reveal that teachers experience multiple challenges when attempting to engage parents. Teachers report that some parents display negative attitudes, reject feedback about their children's behaviour or performance, or avoid participating in school activities. This echoes findings by Jeynes (2018), who argues that teacher-parent relationships are often strained by mistrust and differing expectations about roles in education. Teachers also face communication barriers and intimidation, which discourage further attempts at engagement. Epstein (2018) similarly highlights that a lack of mutual respect and shared understanding between parents and educators' limits collaboration and accountability. Furthermore, the study findings show that while teachers are guided by policies such as the Personnel Administrative Measures (PAM) to promote parental engagement, their efforts are frequently undermined by poor attendance and low parental commitment. This supports Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (2017) assertion that successful engagement depends not only on school initiatives but also on parents' motivation, confidence, and belief in their ability to contribute.

Overall, both sub-themes suggest that parental disengagement and teacher challenges are interconnected. When parents face difficult socio-economic or personal circumstances, teachers struggle to build partnerships, which in turn weaken the overall culture of collaboration and shared responsibility necessary for learner achievement.

4.6 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

This chapter presented the findings of the study that explored views and experiences of principals on what promotes parental engagement in schools. The findings show that principals see parental engagement as a shared and on-going partnership between home and school. They regard parents as important partners whose support helps improve learner achievement and development. Good communication, respect, and inclusive practices were found to strengthen this relationship, while challenges such as poverty, language barriers, and lack of time still limit some parents' involvement. Overall, the chapter shows that strong parental engagement depends on caring and proactive leadership. The next chapter presents the summary of the findings, conclusions and recommendations from these findings.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, the findings of the study were presented and discussed, highlighting principals' perceptions and experiences of parental engagement in schools. Chapter 4 illustrates the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data, supported by direct quotations from participants and relevant literature. Building on that discussion, this chapter provides a summary of the findings, draws conclusions based on the insights gained, and offers recommendations aimed at enhancing parental engagement through effective school leadership. The chapter also reflects on the implications of the study and identifies areas for further research in the field of parental engagement in education. Recommendations from the findings of this study informs theory, practice and policy issues on parental engagement.

5.2 REFLECTIONS OF THE RESEARCH JOURNEY

Conducting this study has been a meaningful and eye-opening journey for me. At the start, defining the focus and research questions made me reflect deeply on what I wanted to explore and how it could make a difference in understanding parental engagement in schools. As a Departmental Head at a primary school, I face similar challenges daily, which motivated me to choose this topic. Planning the study and deciding how to collect and analyse data helped me appreciate the care and effort that research requires. The long hours spent immersed in interview data have also made me a better educator, giving me ideas and strategies to address issues in my own school.

Interviewing school principals was one of the most valuable experiences. Hearing their stories and perspectives gave me a real sense of the challenges and successes involved in engaging parents, particularly in diverse communities. Their honesty highlighted the human side of education and the importance of trust, communication, and support in building partnerships between schools and families. Many principals are clearly passionate about their careers, and their dedication inspired me to aspire to the same level of leadership.

Analysing the data and identifying key themes was both challenging and rewarding. It taught me to listen carefully, think critically, and present participants' experiences fairly and

meaningfully. I also realised how important empathy is in research understanding people's experiences is as essential as reporting findings.

This journey has strengthened my research skills and shaped how I view education. I have seen how principals' leadership, parents' involvement, and collaboration between home and school can significantly impact learners' success. Overall, this study has been both a personal and professional learning experience, helping me grow as a researcher while deepening my understanding of the value of connection, inclusion, and shared responsibility in education.

5.3 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

5.3.1 School Principals perception of the concept parental engagement

The findings on how principals conceive parental engagement show that principals understand parental engagement as a broad, multidimensional concept, and an active process. The participants descriptions of the concept parental engagement go beyond the narrow view of parents attending meetings, instead emphasising diverse forms of involvement such as supporting children's learning at home, helping with school functions, guiding behaviour, and contributing emotionally, financially, and morally. Importantly, principals highlighted that parental engagement is a partnership and shared responsibility between parents and educators, aimed at promoting learners' holistic success.

When compared to recent literature, these findings align with research that conceptualises parental engagement as more than event attendance, stressing its sustained and collaborative nature at both school and home. The theme also resonates with Epstein's theory of overlapping spheres of influence and the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model, both of which view parental engagement as an interactive, on-going process shaped by schools, families, and communities working together. Overall, theme one underscores that principals value parental engagement as a critical factor in learner achievement, requiring schools to adopt inclusive and supportive strategies that acknowledge parents' diverse capacities and contexts.

5.3.2 Perceptions of principals regarding the role parents play in parental engagement.

The findings on the perceptions of principals regarding the role of parental engagement shows that principals view parents as central partners in their children's education, with responsibilities that extend beyond financial contributions or ensuring attendance. Parents were perceived as playing a crucial role in supporting academic progress, nurturing discipline and values, and contributing to learners' overall development. Effective parental engagement was consistently linked to improved learner motivation, academic achievement, and positive

behaviour, while lack of involvement was associated with demotivation and weaker performance.

The findings of this study also highlighted that the level of engagement often varies, with educated or academically inclined parents participating more actively than others. Parents were found to be mostly involved in community-oriented activities such as sports days, concerts, fundraising events, and themed celebrations, while their participation in academic or financial meetings was less consistent, particularly in those parents who the teachers really need to meet with and strengthen parental engagement. Overall, principals emphasised that meaningful and consistent parental engagement is essential for both academic success and holistic learner development, reinforcing the shared responsibility between home and school.

5.3.3 Perceptions of principals regarding the role the principals play in parental engagement.

The findings of this theme show that principals perceive their role in parental engagement as multifaceted, combining communication, support, empowerment, trust-building, and the creation of participatory opportunities. The principals see themselves as key facilitators who sustain collaboration between families and schools. Importantly, their approach recognises the challenges many parents face, and they actively respond by providing both material support and emotional empowerment. This holistic view positions principals not simply as managers but as leaders who nurture partnerships that are essential for learner success and community cohesion.

5.3.4. Factors that promote parental engagement

The findings of this concerning the factors that promote parental engagement show that effective communication, mutual respect, and a welcoming school environment are key factors that promote parental engagement. Principals use strategies such as short meetings after business hours, WhatsApp groups, and communication in parents' home languages to build trust and inclusivity. They also recognise that socio-economic status, education level, and cultural background influence parents' participation. By offering financial support, flexible arrangements, and opportunities for parents to contribute time or skills, principals create an inclusive and supportive environment. Collaboration with the SGB and community structures further strengthens partnerships, while accountability measures encourage consistent involvement. Overall, strong, empathetic, and flexible leadership is essential in sustaining meaningful parental engagement.

5.3.5. Factors that hinder parental engagement

This study highlights the factors that hinder parental engagement in their children's education mentioning that the key barriers include socio-economic pressures, low education levels, negative attitudes, family and social challenges, and communication difficulties. Teachers also face challenges regarding engaging parents who lack awareness of their role, show low participation, or are constrained by personal and socio-economic circumstances. Overall, these obstacles reduce parents' capacity and willingness to be involved, emphasizing the need for supportive, inclusive, and flexible strategies to foster effective school-home partnerships.

5.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Limitations are challenges beyond the researcher's control that may affect the study (Cohen et al., 2018). One limitation is that qualitative studies are often context-specific and cannot be easily replicated (Wiersma, 2000). In this study, some participants were not available for interviews as planned, requiring rescheduling. The small sample size also limited the ability to generalise the findings to other schools, so the findings are interpreted only within the context of this study. I have provided details of the context researched to enable the reader to apply the finding of this study to similar context. Time constraints were another limitation, given the large amount of data to analyse. Strategies such as prioritising tasks and focusing on relevant information were used to manage this. Despite these limitations, this study offers important insights into how school leadership particularly the school principal can promote parental engagement.

5.5 DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

Delimitations were features of the study that the researcher had the power to control (Simon & Goes, 2013). They were the boundaries set by the researcher. This study was conducted in the Uthukela District of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The focus was specifically on public primary school principals, as they play a central role in promoting and sustaining parental engagement within schools. The findings of this study are therefore limited to the experiences and perceptions of principals in this specific district and may not be generalised to other educational contexts or levels, such as secondary schools or schools in other provinces. The sample size for this study consisted of six principals selected through purposive sampling. This sampling method allowed the researcher to select participants who possessed relevant knowledge and experience in school leadership and parental engagement. The study did not include parents, teachers, or learners, as the aim was to explore the phenomenon from the principals' perspective only. The research adopted a qualitative research approach within an

interpretivist paradigm, which focused on understanding the participants lived experiences and subjective meanings. The study employed a case study design to gain in-depth insights into the factors that promote or hinder parental engagement as experienced by school principals in their natural school settings. Data were generated through semi-structured interviews, which enabled the researcher to explore participants' perceptions, experiences, and attitudes in detail. The use of interviews allowed flexibility for probing and clarification of responses, ensuring that rich and meaningful data were collected. However, the study was delimited to interview data only and did not include additional methods such as questionnaires or observations beyond the interview context.

Overall, the delimitations of this study ensured that it remained focused, context-specific, and manageable within the available time and resources, while providing deep insights into the principals' perspectives on parental engagement.

5.6 CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore principals' perceptions and experiences of parental engagement in primary schools.. The findings showed that principals view parental engagement as a shared responsibility between home and school, supported by trust, open communication, and collaboration. However, socio-economic challenges, language barriers, and limited parental confidence continue to hinder active participation and engagement of parents in school activities. The study concludes that principals who lead with empathy and inclusivity are more effective in fostering meaningful parental engagement. The study highlights that strengthening school leadership by developing and adopting strategies that promote family–school partnerships can enhance parental engagement.

5.7 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE FINDINGS

5.7.1 Recommendations for school principals' perception of the concept parental engagement

Based on the findings of this study, I recommend that participating principals' and teachers strengthen their shared understanding of parental engagement as a multidimensional and on-going partnership rather than a once-off event or meeting attendance. Participating principals should continue to promote inclusive definitions of parental engagement that recognise parents' diverse capacities to support their children academically, emotionally, and socially, both at home and at school.

To strengthen their perceptions of parental engagement as a collaborative and inclusive process, participating principals should participate in professional development workshops and leadership training that enhance their ability to foster meaningful home–school partnerships and recognise parents as equal partners in their children's education.

5.7.2 Recommendations for principals understanding of the role parents play in parental engagement

From the findings of this study, I recommend that principals who participated in this study should deepen their understanding of parents as active contributors to learners' academic and personal development through attending workshop and reading on the topic of parental engagement. Participating principals should recognise that parental engagement extends beyond attendance at school events and includes meaningful involvement in learning, decision-making, and behavioural support. To strengthen this understanding, participating principals should promote structured opportunities for parents to participate in both academic and extracurricular activities that directly support learning.

Furthermore, participating principals should develop and implement programmes that build parents' confidence and skills to assist their children at home. Examples include homework support sessions, literacy and numeracy workshops, and regular two-way feedback meetings. By fostering an inclusive school culture those values parents' roles as co-educators; participating principals can enhance collaboration between home and school, ultimately improving learners' academic performance and overall well-being.

5.7.3 Recommendations for principals' perception of the role they as principals play in parental engagement.

Informed by the findings of this study, I recommend that participating principals seek opportunities to further strengthen their understanding of parental engagement and the leadership role required to promote effective home–school partnerships. Principals may consider requesting support from the Department of Basic Education or the provincial education department in the form of seminars, workshops, or professional development programmes focused on parental engagement. Such initiatives could enhance principals' knowledge of strategies such as open communication, relationship building, collaborative decision-making, and inclusive practices that encourage meaningful parental participation in their children's education.

5.7.4 Recommendations on the factors that promote parental engagement

Drawing on the experiences of the participating principals regarding factors that promote parental engagement, I recommend that the principals continue to adopt communication approaches that are open, accessible, and responsive to parents' diverse needs. This may include using multiple communication channels, such as WhatsApp groups, parent meetings scheduled at convenient times, and written communication in parents' home languages. Such practices may help parents feel valued, included, and respected within the school community.

The participating principals should also continue to foster welcoming and supportive school environments that encourage parents to visit the school and participate in school activities. In addition, principals should remain sensitive to the diverse cultural, educational, and socio-economic backgrounds of parents and seek to accommodate these differences in their engagement practices.

Furthermore, the participating principals, in collaboration with teachers, should continue to work closely with School Governing Bodies (SGBs) and members of the wider community to strengthen partnerships that support learner development through parental engagement. Based on the experiences of the participants, principals may also consider requesting support from the Department of Basic Education or the provincial education department in the form of seminars, workshops, or professional development opportunities focused on effective parental engagement practices. Such support could enhance principals' and teachers' capacity to involve parents in inclusive, practical, and supportive ways.

Based the findings of this study, I suggest that when schools adopt open, respectful, and flexible approaches to engaging parents, parents are more likely to participate in their children's education and contribute positively to learner development and educational outcomes. .

5.7.5 Recommendations on the factors that hinder parental engagement

Based on the experiences of the participating principals regarding barriers to parental engagement, I recommend that these principals continue to identify practical ways of supporting parents who experience challenges such as poverty, low levels of formal education, and language barriers. The participating principals should endeavour to ensure that communication with parents is clear, accessible, and available in languages that parents understand. They should also encourage the use of simple and easy-to-follow messages that promote effective communication between the school and home.

The participating principals should continue to foster supportive and non-judgemental school environments in which parents feel welcomed, respected, and confident to participate in their children's education. In collaboration with teachers, principals may facilitate opportunities for parents to gain a better understanding of how they can support learning at home, despite limitations related to educational background, time, or other socio-economic challenges.

Furthermore, the participating principals may consider strengthening partnerships with School Governing Bodies, community organisations, and other local stakeholders to identify forms of support that could assist families experiencing social or financial difficulties. Informed by the findings of this study, I suggest that flexible, inclusive, and understanding approaches to parental engagement may help reduce barriers to participation and create opportunities for more meaningful collaboration between parents and schools.

5.6.6 Recommendations for future research

- I recommend that further studies should use a bigger sample using quantitative research approach to explore the same study and be able to apply in another context.
- The same study can be research including teachers as well as parents as research participants to triangulate the findings from the different groups of participants

5.8 A FINAL WORD

This study has been a journey of understanding the vital role that school leader's play in connecting schools and families. I have seen how simple acts of communication, support, and inclusivity can make parents feel valued and involved in their children's learning. While challenges like poverty, time constraints, and limited parental knowledge exist, principals who lead with empathy and flexibility can truly make a difference. I hope that the insights from this study encourage schools and educators to work closely with parents, build stronger partnerships, and create supportive environments where every learner can thrive.

"Education is a shared commitment between dedicated teachers, motivated students, and enthusiastic parents with high expectations."

Bob Beauprez

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: ETHICAL CLEARANCE



College of Education _ERC

Date: 27/06/2025

Dear: Mrs Farnaaz Olla

**Decision: Ethics Approval from
27/06/2025 to 27/06/2028**

NHREC Registration # : (if applicable)
Ref #: 7727
Name: Mrs Farnaaz Olla
Student #: 44982542
Staff #:

Researcher: Mrs Farnaaz Olla

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Colenso

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Supervisor: Dr TERESA OGINA oginateresa8@gmail.com

Co-Supervisor:

Co-Researcher(s):

Email address:

Experiences of school principals regarding factors that promote parental engagement: a case study of six principals in primary schools of Kwa-Zulu Natal

Qualification: MED Education Management (98420)

Thank you for the application for research ethics approval by the College of Education _ERC Educational Leadership and Management for the above-mentioned research study. Ethics approval is granted for **three years**.

The **low risk application** was **reviewed** by the College of Education _ERC Educational Leadership and Management on **7 May 2025** in compliance with the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment.

The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:

1. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.
2. Any adverse circumstance arising during the undertaking of the research study that may affect the ethical integrity of the study, including those involving research participants, third parties, or juristic persons, must be reported in writing to the College of Education _ERC Educational Leadership and Management without delay.
3. The researcher(s) will conduct the study according to the methods and procedures set out in the approved application.
4. Any changes that may affect study-related risks to research participants, juristic or third persons, must be reported in writing to the College of Education _ERC Educational Leadership and Management, accompanied by a progress report.

5. The researcher will ensure that the research study complies with all applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines, and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study. Where applicable, adherence to the following South African legislation is essential: the Protection of Personal Information Act (No. 4 of 2013), the Children's Act (No. 38 of 2005), and the National Health Act (No. 61 of 2003)
6. Future use of this research data is permitted only in de-identified form and only for secondary research with objectives similar to those of the original study. Any secondary use involving identifiable human data will require additional ethics clearance.
7. No fieldwork activities may continue beyond the stated expiry date (**27/06/2028**). A completed Research Ethics Progress Report must be submitted as an application for renewal and is subject to approval by the Research Ethics Committee. A Close-Out Report must be submitted upon completion of the research study.
8. The College of Education _ERC Educational Leadership and Management may require the submission of regular progress reports on an **annual** basis, in alignment with Section 7.2 of the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics (2024).

Additional Conditions

1. Disclosure of data to third parties is prohibited without explicit consent from the research participants and Unisa.
2. Research data must be stored in compliance with the university's research data management policy for a period of up to 15 years.
3. When publishing the results, the researcher must take appropriate precautions to safeguard the confidentiality and privacy of the research participants, juristic persons, third parties, and the university, in accordance with institutional policies and ethical standards.
4. Adherence to the National Statement on Ethical Research and Publication Practices, specifically Principle 7 on Social Awareness, must be ensured. This principle states: 'Researchers and institutions must be sensitive to the potential impact of their research on society, marginal groups, or individuals, and must consider these when weighing the benefits of the research against any harmful effects, with a view to minimising or avoiding the latter where possible.' The University of South Africa (Unisa) accepts no liability for any failure to comply with this principle.

Note

The reference number 7727 should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication with the intended research participants, as well as with the Committee.

Kind regards,



Prof Justin Oswin August
Chair of College of Education _ERC
E-mail: augusjo@unisa.ac.za



APPENDIX B: RESEARCH APPROVAL FORM BY PROVINCE/DISTRICT



KWAZULU-NATAL PROVINCE

EDUCATION
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

OFFICE OF THE HEAD OF DEPARTMENT

Private Bag X 9137, PIETERMARITZBURG, 3200

Anton Lembede Building, 247 Burger Street, Pietermaritzburg, 3201

Enquiries : Ms Phindile Duma

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Ref: 2/4/8/569

Tel : 033 392 1063

Mrs. Farnaaz Olla
P.O Box 757
Ladysmith
3370

Dear Mrs. Olla

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN DOE INSTITUTIONS

Your application to conduct research entitled: **"EXPERIENCES OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS REGARDING FACTORS THAT PROMOTE PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT: A CASE STUDY OF SIX PRINCIPALS IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS OF KWA-ZULU NATAL."** Department of Education Institutions has been approved. The conditions of the approval are as follows:

1. The researcher will make all the arrangements concerning the research and interviews.
2. The researcher must ensure that Educator and learning programmes are not interrupted.
3. Interviews are not conducted during the time of writing examinations in schools.
4. Learners, Educators, Schools and Institutions are not identifiable in any way from the results of the research.
5. A copy of this letter is submitted to District Managers, Principals and Heads of Institutions where the Intended research and interviews are to be conducted.
6. The period of investigation is limited to the period from 07 July 2025 to 31 July 2027.
7. Your research and interviews will be limited to the schools you have proposed and approved by the Head of Department. Please note that Principals, Educators, Departmental Officials and Learners are under no obligation to participate or assist you in your investigation.
8. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey at the school(s), please contact Miss Phindile Duma at the contact numbers above.
9. Upon completion of the research, a brief summary of the findings, recommendations or a full report/dissertation/thesis must be submitted to the research office of the Department. Please address it to The Office of the HOD, Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200.
10. Please note that your research and interviews will be limited to schools and institutions in KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education.

UTHUKELA DISTRICT

Mr. GN Ngcobo

Head of Department: Education

Date: 09 July 2025

GROWING KWAZULU-NATAL TOGETHER

APPENDIX C: PROOF OF REGISTRATION



0944

OLLA F MRS
P O BOX 757
LADYSMITH
3370

STUDENT NUMBER : 44982542
ENQUIRIES TEL : 0800 001 870
eMAIL : mandd@unisa.ac.za
2025-03-13

Dear Student

I hereby confirm that you have been registered for the current academic year as follows:

Proposed Qualification: MED (EDUC MANAGEMENT) (98420)

CODE	PAPER	S NAME OF STUDY UNIT	NQF crdts	LANG.	EXAM DATE	PROVISIONAL EXAMINATION CENTRE(PLACE)
DLEDM95		Mini Dissertation: Education Management	84	E		

Study units registered without formal exams:

You are referred to the "MyRegistration" brochure regarding fees that are forfeited on cancellation of any study units.

Your attention is drawn to University rules and regulations (www.unisa.ac.za/register).

Please note the new requirements for reregistration and the number of credits per year which state that students registered for the first time from 2013, must complete 36 NQF credits in the first year of study, and thereafter must complete 48 NQF credits per year.

Students registered for the MBA, MBL and DBL degrees must visit the SBL's ESOnline for study material and other important information.

Readmission rules for Honours: Note that in terms of the Unisa Admission Policy academic activity must be demonstrated to the satisfaction of the University during each year of study. If you fail to meet this requirement in the first year of study, you will be admitted to another year of study. After a second year of not demonstrating academic activity to the satisfaction of the University, you will not be re-admitted, except with the express approval of the Executive Dean of the College in which you are registered. Note too, that this study programme must be completed within three years. Non-compliance will result in your academic exclusion, and you will therefore not be allowed to re-register for a qualification at the same level on the National Qualifications Framework in the same College for a period of five years after such exclusion, after which you will have to re-apply for admission to any such qualification.

Readmission rules for M&D: Note that in terms of the Unisa Admission Policy, a candidate must complete a Master's qualification within three years. Under exceptional circumstances and on recommendation of the Executive Dean, a candidate may be allowed an extra (fourth) year to complete the qualification. For a Doctoral degree, a candidate must complete the study programme within six years. Under exceptional circumstances, and on recommendation by the Executive Dean, a candidate may be allowed an extra (seventh) year to complete the qualification.

BALANCE ON STUDY ACCOUNT: 3995.00

Payable on or before:

Immediately: 0.00 2025/03/31: 0.00 2025/05/15: 297.00 2025/08/15: 3698.00
2025/11/15: 0.00 2026/03/15: 0.00

Yours faithfully,

Prof MM Sepota
Acting Registrar



University of South Africa
Preller Street, Muckleneuk Ridge, City of Tshwane
PO Box 392 UNISA 0003 South Africa
Telephone: +27 12 429 3111 Facsimile: +27 12 429 4150
www.unisa.ac.za

1/1

APPENDIX D: REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT YOUR SCHOOL

Education Management,
University of South Africa
Preller Street
Muckleneuk
Pretoria
South Africa
0002
Tel :012 429 3111

Dear Principal

APPLICATION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT YOUR SCHOOL

My name is Farnaaz Olla, a student currently doing a Masters of Education Management Degree in Education Management at the University of South Africa under the supervision of Dr TA Ogina. The title of the study is **Experiences of school principals regarding parental engagement: A case study of six principals in primary schools of KwaZulu-Natal**. This study aims to examine the role of school principals in fostering parental engagement and the factors that encourage parental involvement in schools. It seeks to understand how principals perceive and define parental engagement, highlighting their perspectives on the importance of parental participation in school activities. Additionally, the study will investigate the specific roles that principals play in promoting parental engagement; including the strategies and initiatives they implement to strengthen collaboration between parents and schools. Furthermore, it will identify key factors that contribute to successful parental engagement, such as effective communication, leadership support, and community involvement. Lastly, the study will explore the challenges and barriers that hinder parental engagement, including socio-economic constraints, time limitations, and lack of awareness. By addressing these objectives, the research aims to provide insights into how school leadership can enhance parental participation to improve learners' academic and social development. As part of the study I have to conduct interviews with school principals at selected primary schools. Each interview will last approximately 30 minutes and every effort will be made to ensure that lessons are not disrupted during this process. I would therefore, like to request permission to conduct this study at your school.

Your schools participation in this research project is entirely voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the research process at any time without any repercussions. I assure and guarantee you that information collected from your school will remain confidential and anonymous. The results from the interview will be treated confidentially and the interview recordings will only be heard by you (the participant), the researcher (F Olla), and my supervisor (Dr TA Ogina). To protect the institution and the participants in this study, names of the school will not be disclosed when information and the results obtained from the study are discussed. Your school will not receive payment or any incentive for participating in this study.

The summary of findings from this study will be made available on request should the school and you as the participant wish to know the researchers findings during the research process. If you agree to participate in this study kindly complete the consent form below. Your cooperation in this regard is greatly appreciated. For further information please contact the following people:
Researcher: F. Olla
email: naazolla@gmail.com
Supervisor: TA Ogina
email: oginateresa8@gmail.com

Permission for research:

I,principal of
.....school, hereby give permission to the
researcher F Olla to conduct interviews during her research, provided that the research does not
interfere with the schools teaching and learning programme.

Principal Signature

Date

School Stamp

APPENDIX E: CONSENT FORM

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

I, _____ (participant name), confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation. I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the study as explained in the information sheet. I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable). I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings, but that my participation will be kept confidential unless otherwise specified. I agree to the recording of the face-to-face interviews.

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Participant Name &

Surname.....
 (please print)

Participant Signature.....Date.....

Researcher's Name &

Surname.....
 (please print)

Researcher's signature.....Date.....

APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Research Questions	Interview question
Biographical questions	Please tell me about yourself How long have you been in this school as the school principal? How many years of experience do you have as a Principal? How many years of experience do you have in Education? What is your highest qualification
How do the school principals describe the concept parental engagement?	• In your view, what is parental engagement? • What does the concept parental engagement mean?
What role do parents play in parental engagement?	• What role do you think that parents should play in the education of their children? • How effective do you believe parental engagement is in supporting learners' success? • Based on your experience, in which areas are parents most likely to participate in their children's education?
What role do the principals play in parental engagement?	• As a principal, what is your role in parental engagement? • What do you do regarding parental engagement?
What are the factors that promotes parental engagement?	• What factors contribute to parents being actively engaged in their children's education? • What strategies can be used to promote parental engagement in schools?

What are the factors that hinders parental engagement?	• What factors contribute to some parents not being actively involved in their children's education? • What challenges do teachers face when trying to engage parents in school activities?
	• Is there any additional information regarding parental engagement that you believe is important and has not been covered?

APPENDIX G: DOCUMENT ANALYSIS CHECKLIST

DOCUMENTS	YES	NO
Parental involvement policy document		
Newsletters to parents		
Year Plan		
Minutes of parents meetings		
Parents workshops or programmess		
Code of Conduct		
Any other interaction between parents, teachers and principals		

APPENDIX H: PROOF OF EDITING



CAROL JANSEN LANGUAGE EDITING SERVICES

P.O.Box 428
BRONKHORSTSPRUIT
1020
November 2025

To whom it may concern

Certification of language editing done.

I hereby declare that I have edited the table of contents, language, grammar, structure, in-text citations, and referencing of the dissertation entitled “Experiences of school principals regarding factors that promote parental engagement: A case study of six principals in primary schools of Kwa-Zulu Natal” by Farnaaz Olla. Supervisor: Dr T.A. Ogini

I am an experienced language practitioner who has edited many theses and dissertations for Unisa, the Tshwane University of Technology (TUT), and the University of Pretoria.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Carol Jansen', with a stylized, cursive script.

Carol Jansen

Language practitioner

Cell no: 082 9200312

MA (Linguistics Stellenbosch University)

BEd (Unisa)

BBibl (Hons) (Unisa)

HEd (Unisa)

HDipl(Bibl) (Unisa)

BA (AfrIII & Eng111) (Unisa)

APPENDIX I: TURNITIN REPORT

Similarity Report		
● 19% Overall Similarity Top sources found in the following databases: • 10% Internet database • Crossref database • 14% Submitted Works database • 14% Publications database • Crossref Posted Content database		
TOP SOURCES The sources with the highest number of matches within the submission. Overlapping sources will not be displayed.		
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