



**Parental involvement in rural schools during the COVID-19  
pandemic: Experiences of school principals in selected public  
schools in KwaZulu-Natal**

by

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the discipline of Educational Leadership, Management and Policy, School of  
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**Date Submitted: November 2022**

## **Student's Declaration**

I, Muziwenele Cyprian Radebe declare that:

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This dissertation is submitted with my approval.



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**Supervisor:** Professor I. Naicker

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*Impela okuhle nomusa kuyakungilandela imihla yonke yokuphila kwami; ngiyakuhlala endlini kaJehova kuze kube phakade.* These are the words of gratitude and honour to my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, for the strength and favour He has granted me throughout this journey. This was not an easy journey, but God's power kept me going. I would also like to extend my words of gratitude to the following people for their immense support in this study:

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my lovely daughter, **Oyintando Radebe**. For the time I should have spent with you but I could not because I was busy working on this study. I trust that you will grow up and read this one day.

## ABSTRACT

Parental involvement in rural schools is one of the major concerns when one considers education of rural learners. The sudden outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic made it difficult for learners to go to schools in a normal way, and this meant that home learning was one of the possible options available for teaching and learning to take place. Thus, parental involvement proved to be the solution in ensuring that learners continued learning at home. This study presents the storied narratives of three rural school principals in KwaZulu-Natal based on parental involvement in learners' learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study aimed to examine, *What are school principals' experiences of parental involvement in schools located in rural settings during the COVID-19 pandemic?* Two sub-questions were then used to unpack this broader question namely, *How are the rural parents participating in their children's learning process during the COVID-19 pandemic?* and *What do school principals do to promote parental involvement in schools located in rural settings during the COVID-19 pandemic?* This study was guided by Epstein's model of Parental Involvement and Empowerment theory. Narrative inquiry was used as a methodology. In-depth narrative interviews were used to generate field texts (data). Data analysis occurred at two levels: narrative analysis and analysis of narratives. The first level involved the construction of the stories. The second level involved the deconstruction of the narratives in order to answer the two sub-questions. The findings of the study revealed that low socioeconomic and educational statuses of most of rural parents had a huge influence on their lack of involvement in their children's learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. During home learning, most rural parents could not provide required learning resources like laptops, smartphones, internet connection, textbooks, and other helpful material for their children due to lack of money. Also due to their low educational level, parents could not help their children with regards to their school work. The school principals in the study revealed that since they understood the conditions of parents in their schools they devised convenient strategies to encourage parental involvement. However, the response was not positive from some of the parents due to socioeconomic and educational factors. One of the important recommendations that stem from this study is that during the times of crisis, school principals should ensure that they always adapt to new programmes that will fully and adequately encompass the leadership skills, practices and actions suited to the current crisis, and should always strive to engage parents in all the programmes that are made to enhance learners' academic development.

## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS/ACRONYMS**

BEd	Bachelor of Education
COVID	Corona Virus Disease
DoE	Department of Education
PTA	Parent-Teacher Association
SACE	South African Council for Educators
SA-SAMS	South African Schools Administration and Management System
SBST	School-Based Support Team
SGB	School Governing Body
QLTC	Quality Learning and Teaching Campaign

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# **CHAPTER 1**

## **AN OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

### **1.1 Introduction**

This study focuses on the role that rural parents played in their children's education during the COVID-19 pandemic based on principals' experiences. The chapter provides a description of the background of the study. Thereafter, it discusses the problem statement, rationale, significance and the definition of key terms that are necessary for this study. Furthermore, the two main research questions that the research study is aims to answer are stated in this chapter. The chapter then gives an outline of all the chapters in this dissertation. Chapter one will be concluded by giving a brief summary about the key issues covered.

### **1.2 Background of the study**

An unexpected outbreak of a deadly disease called COVID-19 made it difficult for students to attend schools in a normal way (Dhawan, 2020). This meant that parental involvement should be one of the most fundamental strategies in helping learning to continue at home with the absence of teachers (Harris & Robinson, 2016).

The disease spread throughout the world in 2020 (Panjarianto, Kadir, Galugu, Sari & Februanti, 2020). We are only beginning to understand the economic effects of COVID-19, but many other concerns have emerged and need to be urgently addressed, like the closure of schools and its impact on learning and the burden of education on students, parents and teachers (Bhamani, Makhdoom, Bharuchi, Ali, Kaleem & Ahmed, 2020). Governments of different countries around the world have tried to control the spread of the virus through the closure of educational institutions and other places where people meet in numbers, for certain periods of time. As the learning mode changed from physical attendance at a school building to home learning, little is known about how parents have been involved in their children's learning at home (Dhawan, 2020).

Parents have been dealing with their own challenges like not going to work as per normal, and some lost their jobs. On the side of learners, the stress they have been experiencing is very high (Bhamani et al., 2020). Many tasks given online by different teachers in different subjects require

more time to complete at home; as a result, tasks accumulate and learners become very exhausted (Panjarianto et al., 2020). For rural parents, this has been a very challenging time since most parents in South African rural areas are not used to getting involved in their children's learning at home (Matshe, 2014; Mncube, 2010; Msila, 2012; Myende & Nhlumayo, 2020). Therefore, it is very important to research and understand the effects that the Corona virus has imposed on parental involvement, specifically in rural areas. This is because parents in these areas have long been lacking participation when it comes to involving themselves with learners' learning (Myende & Nhlumayo, 2020). They always see teaching and learning as a process that is only about teachers giving learners information.

### **1.3 Problem statement**

Before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, different scholars have concurred (Boonk, Gijsselaers, Ritzen & Brand-Gruwel, 2018; Đurišić & Bunijevac, 2017; Harris & Robinson, 2016) that parental involvement in learners' learning process is one of the key factors that determines whether or not the school performance will improve. The process of teaching and learning requires a unified structure built upon teachers, parents and learners working cooperatively to achieve a common goal, which is learners' improvement in terms of academic performance. Parents who are cooperatively working with the school in their children's education are helping their children to develop not only academically, but also socially and emotionally (Boonk et al., 2018; Green et al., 2007). Thus, it is evident that a lack of parental involvement will contribute a lot in suppressing learners' growth academically, socially, emotionally, and otherwise (Boonk et al., 2018).

It is important to note that in most of the schools that are performing well there is a common key factor, and that is positive parental involvement (Hornby & Blackwell, 2018) and other academic related factors. However, it has been noted that the involvement of parents in rural schools is not the same with those in urban schools (Myende & Nhlumayo, 2020). Even though a lack of parental involvement in our education system, particularly in rural schools, is unquestionably problematic, it is one of the learning components that is not receiving much support from society due to different challenges (Singh, Mbokodi & Msila, 2004).

Since the beginning of the lockdown in South Africa it meant that learners couldn't go to school as they used to, but the critical part is that teaching and learning process had to continue taking place even if teachers and learners could not meet face to face (COVID-19 Data API, 2020). Inevitably, this means that parental involvement had to be the best option to be chosen even more than before because the teaching and learning process had to take place at home for safety purposes. Teachers and parents had to ensure that learners did not lose their academic year. Learners learning at home means that they are more dependent on their parents, not only to help them academically but to also give them enough time to focus on their studies without being given many chores that could take up their study time (Hornby & Blackwell, 2018). Additionally, parental involvement would mean that the parents have to buy data for their children since most of the learning is taking place online.

The problem I want to address is the issue of rural parents finding themselves having a huge role to play in learners' education during COVID-19 while it has not been something they have been mostly involved in. I chose to look at this from principals' experiences because they are the leaders in all activities taking place in the school. Principals have the duty to encourage their staff members (teachers) to cooperate with parents (Myende & Nhlumayo, 2020) and also have direct communication with parents through meetings. So, in the case of learning during the pandemic, I believe principals have a huge role to play in devising strategies together with their teachers on how to involve parents in rural areas in learners' learning during this time as it is notable that rural parents' involvement has long been lacking. Furthermore, the feedback that is received from parents through learners' work is reported to the principals by teachers. The principals know the communities that they work in because they communicate with all the stakeholders that are interested in educational matters within the community. It is evident that learning during this time has been challenging to principals and teachers in rural schools as they had to convince parents to adapt to the 'new normal', knowing the challenges that already exist when it comes to rural parents' involvement in learners' learning.

Given the research problem above, the focus of the study is on how rural parents have been involved in their learners' learning since the beginning of lockdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The purpose of the study is to find out how the rural school principals in the Margate

area have experienced involvement of parents in learners' learning since home learning has been the most preferable mode of learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The purpose of the study is also to focus on the strategies that have been used by the school principals to ensure that they encourage and involve parents in learners' learning, and the strategies that the principals have been using to overcome challenges that they experience concerning parental involvement.

#### **1.4 Rationale for the study**

As a teacher who is working in a rural area, and as a former rural school learner, I have observed lack of parental involvement in most of the schools situated in rural settings long before the COVID-19 pandemic. The level of understanding for most rural parents is that the teaching and learning process should only involve teachers and learners. They see it as a whole duty of a teacher to equip and guide their children, and that which is not a parent's responsibility at home. The academic level of most rural parents has been very low; thus they have distanced themselves from the teaching and learning process. Some rural parents are old and have not completed high school education. Therefore, their involvement in learning has not been optimal. It is interesting for me to find out whether rural parents could do the unusual and be hands-on in their children's learning since the pandemic forced a change in the mode of learning from full-time school attendance to home learning and partial physical school attendance.

I regard conducting the study about parental involvement in rural schools as one of the major efforts in understanding the school-parental partnership in the process of teaching and learning as a rural school teacher for Continuing Professional Teacher Development purposes. It is of paramount importance to get to understand different strategies that are used by principals in rural schools to ensure that parents are able to see the meaning of their involvement in learners' learning. It is necessary for me to engage in this study because dealing with learners at school requires one to, firstly, understand the kind of life that these learners are living at home with their families and society at large, and secondly, to understand the effects that are imposed by their parents' involvement in learners' learning.

There are several studies that have been conducted on parental involvement in education that specifically explore the rural setting (see Boyles, 2020; Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019; Hlalele, 2012;

Moletsane, 2012; Myende & Nhlumayo, 2020; Singh, Mbokodi & Msila, 2004). However, there have been only few studies that look at the parental involvement in rural schools during the COVID-19 pandemic (see Bhamani et al., 2020; Brom, Lukavský, Greger, Hannemann, Straková, & Švaříček, 2020; Dhawan, 2020; Garbe, Ogurlu, Logan & Cook, 2020; Pajariato et al., 2020). This is because the issue of this pandemic is still new. From the few studies that have been recently published about parental involvement in learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, not so much has been said about schools and parents in rural contexts. Therefore, my study is addressing that gap by looking at rural schools and how parents in rural areas have been involved in learning during this critical period imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **1.5 Significance of the study**

Conducting the study on parental involvement from principals' experiences is important for the school leadership because it has the focus on how principals, as leaders in schools, are engaging with parents in the process of improving learners' performance. This is important for school leadership practice as it will emphasise the continuing school-family partnership in ensuring that parents are kept involved and they realise the importance of their contribution to learners' learning. For school leadership policy, this study will help clarify the roles and responsibilities of principals concerning involvement of parents in their children's learning as one of the key issues in education policy. The study is also significant for school leadership theory as it will help emphasise the importance of school principals in influencing and sharing educational goals with parents so that they realise that their children's learning should always continue even when they are at home.

### **1.6 Research questions**

The following questions have been formulated in order to research the experiences of principals concerning parental involvement in learners' learning during the COVID-19 pandemic:

**Main Question:** What are school principals' experiences of parental involvement in schools located in rural settings during the COVID-19 pandemic?

#### **Sub-questions:**

1. How are the rural parents participating in their children's learning process during the COVID-19 pandemic?

This question focuses on the extent to which school principals have been experiencing the efforts of parents in helping their children learn at home and in school during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. I aim to gain a better sense of whether the parents have been able to realise their importance in learning during this critical time.

2. What do school principals do to promote parental involvement in schools located in rural settings during the COVID-19 pandemic?

The emphasis here is on how school principals have been trying their best to convince and encourage all parents, through different communication methods, to be part of their children's learning during this time where the COVID-19 pandemic has brought some changes to the mode of learning. Also to look at how the principals are dealing with the challenges associated with parental participation in learners' learning during this period.

## **1.7 Definition of key terms**

**1.7.1 Rural setting:** Rural implies areas that consist of the tribal lands controlled by traditional leaders and agricultural areas. While 'rural' usually refers to settings that are sporadically populated and where agriculture is the most important means of commercial activity, the concept also includes areas of dense communities established by colonial and apartheid land settlements (Basic Education Department, 2017). The concept of rurality is used in the study to reveal the setting and location of the schools where the parental involvement is being explored.

**1.7.2 Parental involvement:** According Sheldon (2021) parental involvement comprises a wide range of behaviours but normally refers to parents and family members' use and investment of resources in the education of their children. These investments can take place in or outside of school, with the aim of bettering children's learning. Parental involvement include home-based activities such as assisting with homework, discussing school proceedings or courses and school-based activities such as volunteering at school and coming to school events (Sandler, 1997; Sheldon, 2021). The term 'parental involvement' is used in the study to point out the responsibilities of parents in learners' learning.

**1.7.3 Home learning:** This is an activity that a child is required to complete outside of the school day, either on their own or with an adult. Home learning encourages the children to work together

with their families or parents because the home becomes a powerful learning environment (Malmesbury, 2019). The term ‘home learning’ is used in this study to point out the importance of parental presence in learners’ learning in the absence of teachers.

**1.7.4 COVID-19 pandemic:** This is a disease caused by a new strain of coronavirus. ‘CO’ stands for corona, ‘VI’ for virus, and ‘D’ for disease. Formerly this disease was referred to as ‘2019 novel coronavirus’ or ‘2019-nCoV’. The COVID-19 virus is a new virus linked to the same family of viruses as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and some types of common cold (Bender, 2020, p. 2). The term COVID-19 pandemic is used in the study to clarify the severity of the condition that has forced the learning mode to change to home learning, and thus requiring more effort from parents in helping learners continue to learn at home.

## **1.8 Outline of the chapters**

This dissertation is organised into the following six chapters:

**Chapter 1 – Introduction.** This chapter focuses on capturing the purpose of this narrative inquiry and research problem. The chapter discusses the main aim which is to give readers a clear picture of how the study was conducted. It reveals the concern of the researcher about experiences of principals on parental involvement in rural schools. The rationale, purpose of the study, specific objectives, research questions and key concepts’ definitions are provided.

**Chapter 2 – Literature review and theoretical framework.** In responding to the research problem and questions raised from chapter one, chapter two focuses on finding out about what other scholars have said on the issue of learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, looking at the parents’ responsibilities during this critical and severe time that has changed the mode of teaching to be more home-based. Different strategies used by principals, parents, teachers and learners to cooperate in teaching and learning during the times of the pandemic will be evaluated in this chapter. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the theoretical framework which guided this study.

**Chapter 3 – Research design and methodology.** This chapter presents in detail the empirical process of this study. The selected research methodology for this study is also provided. In this chapter, the researcher outlines the research design, population, sampling procedure, data collection instruments, data processing and analysis procedure, ethical considerations and issues of validity and trustworthiness. In addition, the limitations of this study are also included.

**Chapter 4 – Narrative analysis.** This chapter focuses on the three narratives (narrative analysis) of the rural school principals during the COVID-19 pandemic, built from two narrative interview phases; narration phase (unstructured interview) and conversation phase (semi-structured interview).

**Chapter 5 – Analysis of narratives.** This chapter presents the analysis of the narratives in response to the two sub-questions of the research study. For each of the research sub-question I present the findings that emerged and discuss the findings using appropriate literature.

**Chapter 6 – Summary of findings, conclusion and recommendations.** This chapter closes the dissertation by providing a summary of the findings of this research study. The summary gives a clear picture about the main points that were discussed during the study. Thereafter, the conclusions based on the findings of the study will be presented in this final chapter. Recommendations for school leadership practice, policy and theory will also be given.

## **1.9 Conclusion**

This chapter has covered the background to the study and clarified the research problem which drove the researcher into deciding to conduct this study. The focus and purpose of the study were determined from observing that the COVID-19 pandemic has changed how teaching and learning needs to be done, and in bringing about that change, it has put more responsibility on parents since most learning has to be home based with a view to avoiding the spread of the virus. Focusing on rural setting is due to an observation that most rural parents have not been fully committed to their children's learning. The significance of the study has also been presented in chapter one in terms of how significant the study will be to school leadership, policy and theory. Chapter two will then give a thorough discussion of the relevant literature to my research interest.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN RURAL SCHOOLS AND LEARNING DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: A REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of rural school principals on parental involvement in their children's learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. This chapter provides an overview of studies carried out by several national and international scholars on parental involvement in learners' learning, learning in rural schools and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The literature reviewed in this chapter commences with giving a short summary of COVID-19 pandemic in South Africa and its impact on school education. This is followed by a discussion on the concept of rurality and learning process in rural schools. Thereafter, a discussion on parental involvement and its effects on learners' learning is given. Here, I also explore the barriers on parental involvement specifically in rural schools. Furthermore, the chapter discusses the process of learning during the COVID-19 pandemic and how the learning mode has changed as a result of the pandemic. It then discusses the roles of principals in promoting parental involvement and strategies they use to overcome the challenges that occur during the process of parental involvement. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the theoretical framework which guided this study.

#### **2.2 COVID-19 pandemic in South Africa and its impact on school education**

The eruption of corona virus has brought a lot of changes in the education system in many countries, and South Africa was not left out. In South Africa the first COVID-19 case was recorded on the 5th of March 2020 and the nationwide lockdown began on the 27th of March 2020 to minimise the spread of the virus (Kenway & Epstein, 2021). Due to nationwide lockdown, the Department of Basic Education was forced to close all schools, calling for schools to move from traditional face-to-face teaching to online learning settings (Chirinda, Ndlovu, & Spangenberg, 2021). When schools were closed, many people became worried about the loss of teaching and learning time (Sayed, Singh & Mort, 2020). The South African government announced that teachers should make sure that learners were continuing to learn during lockdown and the closure of schools so that the school calendar would not be lost (Kenway & Epstein, 2021).

It should however be noted that, the majority of public school teachers had not carried out online teaching before the COVID-19 pandemic, so it came as a challenge and brought huge pressure on them (Chirinda, Ndlovu & Spangenberg, 2021). On the other hand, according to Pillay (2021) it was very easy for previously white and private schools to use online learning platform, whereby learners used computers, tablets and smartphones connected to the internet because they had access to this technology. “The same cannot be said for the millions of children in disadvantaged communities that can barely afford to educate their children in physical schools. They do not have the access or funds to facilitate virtual learning” (Pillay, 2021, p. 4-5). In trying to close the gap between learners in disadvantaged and advantaged communities, the department of basic education came up with a programme of presenting virtual lessons to all learners during the lockdown using television and radio stations (Mhlanga & Moloi, 2020).

Global organisations cried for the end of school closures around April 2020, and countries like South Africa to re-open rather quickly due to the new understanding that, children hardly suffer critical illness from Corona virus, and that they are very weak transmitters of the virus (Gustafsson & Deliwe, 2020). Hence, the department of education in South Africa enforced that schools re-open, not only based on the new understanding about the transmission of the virus, but also based on the fact that some learners have no access to online learning at home as mentioned earlier about underprivileged learners who didn’t have suitable resources for virtual learning (Gustafsson & Deliwe, 2020). The government of South Africa announced in the Government Gazette (29 May 2020) that the reopening of schools was going to be in June 2020, and the agreement was that, each school should ensure the safety of learners by carrying out social distancing practices and applying sanitation practices (Sayed, Singh & Mort, 2021). The provincial and local government, together with school management teams were given an obligation to make sure that all necessary personal protective equipment, sanitisers, and clean water were available in schools, and to ensure the required distance of 1.5 metres during school hours to separate learners (Sayed, Singh & Mort, 2021). To ensure a low number of learners attending the school, the Government Gazette noted that “there would be a phased-in return of learners” (Department of Basic Education, 2020, p. 8). Schools in South Africa have been following this criteria even in 2021 since the pandemic is still available (Sayed, Singh & Mort, 2021).

## **2.3 Rurality and education in rural schools**

This section focuses on defining the concept of rurality from different perspectives. The literature reviewed clarifies the definition and features of rurality and rural areas. This will help contextualise how rural parents are involved in learners' learning as compared to urban parents. The literature also explores the education process in rural schools, in order to shed light on how teaching and learning is linked to the conditions of living in rural areas. This will also clarify the differences that exist between urban parents' involvement and rural parents' involvement in their children's learning as one of the most important keys to improve learners' performance (Garbe, Ogurlu, Logan & Cook, 2020). All this information will give a clear understanding and background about how rural schools are experiencing parental involvement during this time of COVID-19 pandemic.

### **2.3.1 *Rurality***

There is no common definition of rurality. Rurality has been defined in numerous ways, most of which can be classified into either descriptive definitions or socio-cultural definitions (Nelson, Nguyen, Brownstein, Garcia, Walker, Watson & Xin, 2021). Certain people identify and describe rurality and rural schools based on the location of the area, by looking at its closeness to the town, whereas others take into account the population factors such as an amount of income for each family, size of population, and the distance travelled by community members to get into community services (Myende & Nhlumayo, 2020). According to Marrion (2016), rurality includes crop farming and the keeping of livestock in the regions that are mountainous, remote and sparsely populated. Beyond the primary features associated with the natural resources and population density, "rural areas can be characterized in various ways, such as places where most people spend their working time on farms as well as the abundance and comparative cheapness of land and association with long distance and poor infrastructure" (Seotsanyana & Maiketso, 2019, p. 48). When defining rurality we take into account the contextual, historical and socio-economic developments which are more related to civilisation, race and class (Leibowitz, 2017). It should be noted however, that as much as there may be diverse definitions of rurality, various scholars come to an understanding that, poverty, adults with low level of education, low level of learner achievement, and economic powerlessness are the main characteristics of rural areas especially in South African context (Myende & Nhlumayo, 2020). Rurality in South Africa is absolutely

connected to apartheid and the colonial standards of deprivation, relocation and a systematic elimination from opportunities (DoE, 2005; Hlalele, 2012).

It is important also to note that rural inhabitants do not certainly remain the same over time, especially where commercial circumstances influence movement (Cicchinelli & Beesley, 2017; Leibowitz, 2017). Conditions in South African rural areas have worsened – people may possibly be more educated, but they tend to be more dependent on government grants, are less independent when it comes to the production of food and are more likely to move to the cities for better opportunities (Leibowitz, 2017). As much as rurality is seen to be constituting a form of disadvantage, however some authors argue that there are advantages to rural life, for instance, parents in rural areas have more control over what their children are exposed to (Stokes, Stafford, & Holdsworth, n.d.). “People living in rural areas are also resilient and determined, despite the constraints, to pursue a better life” (Leibowitz, 2017, p. 6).

In most cases rurality is understood in its relation to and in comparison with urbanity and urban settings, overlooking the fact that rurality is dynamic, and that it has significance and strength independent of urbanity (Moletsane, 2012). Rural communities tend to be compared and measured against their urban counterparts in terms of insufficiency, disadvantage and inactiveness (Masaiti, Banda, Kalinde & Bwalya, 2020). Once again, there are problems with generalising rurality since not all rural situations are the same (Masaiti et al., 2020; Roberts & Green, 2013). Gallent and Gkartzios (2019) concur with this when they assert that, although a rural pathology normally prevails in popular imagination, rural areas are very diverse and complex. In other words, studies on rurality and the interventions proposed to attend to many deficits identified, tend to neglect the uniqueness of the local and fail to develop specific awareness of the place and context-specific strategies for addressing the educational and social needs of these communities (see Masaiti et al., 2020; Nelson et al., 2021). These studies also overlook the agency of rural communities and people, as well as the resources that are available therein and that can be utilised in fostering and implementing appropriate and effective interventions (Leibowitz, 2017). Identifying that rural areas face unique challenges, rural-specific improvement and policy proposals that offer support to rural society should be promoted (Nelson et al., 2021).

### 2.3.2 *Education in rural schools*

Education in rural schools is influenced by different characteristics that define rurality. Leibowitz (2017) asserts that the common issues that prevail concerning rural education around the globe are; access to technology, internet connectivity, the alignment of student population, the conditions of facilities and the strength of the local populations. In conjunction with this, Sierk (2017) maintains that education in rural areas is complicated not only by matters of defining rural, but also the dissimilarity in those schools that are categorised as being rural. These differences are revealed by elements such as inaccessibility, learner poverty rates, average school size, enrolment of cultural and ethnic minorities, and increase or decrease in district enrolments (Sierk, 2017). Issues like poverty, economic weakness, low levels of adult education, and low levels of learner achievement affect rural communities similarly in countries like USA, Australia, South Africa and China (Hlalele, 2012). According to Leibowitz (2017), population in rural areas might contribute a huge percentage of the whole population, however in higher education there is only few number of rural students. She further argues that many rural young people are forced to restructure their belonging and counterfeit new identities in urban places during the transition from rural secondary school to further and higher education due to the shortage of local educational institutions and employment opportunities.

Hlalele (2012) contends that the government's pledge to equality and fairness has sadly delivered inadequate transformation for rural schools. This is supported by Chirinda, Ndlovu and Spangenberg (2021), when they say that South Africa remains one of the most unequal societies in the world. They further argue that, learners in South Africa went into the COVID-19 lockdown phase in unequal economic conditions with key differences still prevailing concerning learners' access to technology resources. In disadvantaged communities learners do not have adequate information technology resources needed for online learning in school and at home (Chirinda, Ndlovu, & Spangenberg, 2021). Due to economic constraints, provincial governments are not capable of fully providing rural schools with the needed financial support to contribute to the provision of quality education to learners (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019). Hlalele (2012) further argues that the long distances travelled by learners to school, scarcity of basic services (water and sanitation) and poor infrastructure in schools affect access to quality of education. These issues raise a big concern about rural learners' learning during the difficult conditions that are currently

imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, because as much as learners do attend school, they are not attending in a normal way where they all used to go to school every day. Now most learners, as it was announced by the Department of Basic Education, attend in different days except for grade 12 learners who attend every day (Department of Basic Education, 2020). So this means that while learners are at home, there should be learning taking place and different resources are needed for this process to be effective (Pillay, 2021).

Challenges found in rural areas do not only affect learners, it also affects teachers and in turn that has a negative effect on the school's performance. The features of rurality that have a negative impact on the quality of education include multi-grade teaching, excessive teacher-learner ratios, inapplicable core curriculum, and conflicting priorities between accessing education and household chores, at the same time as the teaching staff seem to be infused with poor morale and inspiration (Hlalele, 2012). Kenway and Epstein (2021) concur with this as they argue that in the majority of rural schools, the learner-teacher ratio is extremely higher than in urban schools. "Travelling to see a doctor, collect one's salary or attend in-service training may involve long journeys, which result in a teacher being absent from school and learning time being wasted" (du Plessis & Mestry, 2019, p. 2). One of the elements mentioned concerning rurality in the United States of America was the obstructions to teachers taking up professional development opportunities due to time to travel (Nugent et al., 2017; Leibowitz, 2017). According to Du Plessis and Mestry (2019) rural school teachers deal with several challenges, for example, the majority of learners are not encouraged at home to attend schools, as a result the level of absenteeism becomes very high; learners find the curriculum to be irrelevant in their real lives and there is no support at home for their learning. Kenway and Epstein (2021) also emphasise the issue of irrelevant curricula by arguing that, currently fewer electives like art and computers are less offered in rural schools.

In many cases, rural school teachers are exposed to multi-grade teaching where they are supposed to teach different grades and a variety of subjects in one class (du Plessis & Mestry, 2019). Certainly, this has crucial effects for teachers in terms of lesson preparation, balancing time to teach different grades and subjects, organising learners' assessment tasks, and maintaining discipline (du Plessis & Mestry, 2019). This may also portray a negative image about rural teachers

and makes them appear as if they teach less than those in urban schools. Apparently, teachers may be reluctant to move to rural schools because they are scared of many negative factors attached to rural areas. Even when teachers are eager to work in rural areas, working circumstances are probably making them unwilling to stay there for a long period of time (du Plessis & Mestry, 2019). Teachers opt to work in urban schools, as a result some of the rural schools are left with numerous unfilled posts or experience delays in the filling of vacant posts (du Plessis & Mestry, 2019). Also, teachers are reluctant to work in rural areas because the access to professional opportunities is lacking and most teachers are taking on various duties without proper financial recompense (Kenway & Epstein, 2021). Attempts to provide collaborative staff development initiatives for teachers working in rural schools may be negatively affected due to long distances travelled and therefore, transportation costs, (Hlalele, 2012). Kenway and Epstein (2021) support this by claiming that, the provincial education departments provide less in-service training or support to rural school teachers.

As much as there are negative conditions affecting rural education, it is also important to discuss what is positive about rural areas. According to Hlalele (2012), communities in rural areas possess unique and relative characteristics. Rural communities have always survived regardless of the shortage of resources and opportunities, proving rural communities' resilience and strength of mind to make it with what they have (Leibowitz, 2017). Rural community members have a solid connection that exists among them which promotes a strong commitment to protect and support children (Hlalele, 2012). "Rural education should regard lack as an opportunity to review old principles, stimulate new knowledge and establish new relations" (Leibowitz, 2017, p. 9). Government, policymakers and all educational stakeholders have to come up with the strategies to develop teachers' working conditions and the teaching process in rural schools in order to improve learner achievement within the South African rural setting (du Plessis & Mestry, 2019). Rural education will continue to face a variety of challenges until rural people have a sensation of ownership of the curriculum and up until the curriculum is enabled to consider characteristics of what rural people believe in (Leibowitz, 2017). Thus, it is very important that all learners are able to benefit from quality education, regardless of their location, to promote faster development in South African rural areas (du Plessis & Mestry, 2019).

## **2.4 Parental involvement**

The engagement of parents in their children's learning process can be defined in many ways, and based on different activities, but the main idea is how parents engage themselves in helping their children learn. Parental involvement refers to the participation of parents in learning process of their children, with the aim of enhancing their educational and social well-being (Zong, Zhang & Yao, 2018). Parental involvement commonly implicates parents' actions in home and school contexts with the aim to support educational development of their children (Duma, 2019). This according to Gubba and Chisale (2018) speaks about parents being able to communicate with teachers regularly and participate in school events. Therefore, parent participation connects home and school settings as two fundamental structures in the early development of children (Duma, 2019). In general, parental involvement involves three key features, which are: educational socialization, family-based engagement and school based engagement (Anastasiou & Papagianni, 2020). Academic socialization involves parents' belief in and expectations for their children's education; home-based involvement includes parents participating in learning activities at home, such as discussing school, assisting with, and checking homework; on the other hand, school-based involvement, involves taking part in activities implemented by school, like attending class meetings and meeting with teachers (Anastasiou & Papagianni, 2020). Involvement of parents in the learning process of children starts at home as parents provide a healthy and safe environment, supportive and inspiring approach towards school (Đurišić & Bunijevac, 2017). Parental involvement incorporates the communication between a parent and a child, family guidelines with consequences, parental support of teachers, communication between a parent and the school as well as parents checking on homework (Erdener & Knoepfel, 2018).

Parental involvement according to Duma (2019), means the support that children are receiving from their parents so that they may reach out to their learning aspirations more effectively. Likewise, parental involvement can be described as an influential, interactive approach in which parents draw on various skills and resources that identify their relations with schools and their children concerning school work (Duma, 2019). Pajariato, Kadir, Galugu, Sari and Februant (2020) maintain that parental involvement comprises of broad methods of participation in learners' activities at home (e.g. assisting with homework and other school tasks) and learners' activities that are school-based. They further contend that support from parents can be very helpful in

reducing stress on children. Tan, Lyu and Peng (2020) proclaim that parents can get involved in their learners' learning process at home through the discussion of school-related matters, reading together, overseeing the completion of homework and all other learning activities. They further argue that parents should ensure that they engage teachers to discuss their children's learning and partake in school activities for school improvement.

#### 2.4.1 *Importance of parental involvement*

Teachers alone cannot be able to accomplish educational goals if parents are not part of educational process. Parents are regarded as the first teachers of children whose responsibility is particularly important in developing values, interests, beliefs and the identity of the child (Duma, 2019). Parental involvement is regarded as a key aspect for the academic achievement of learners in a normal school setting (Garbe et al., 2020). During the learning process, learners will certainly acquire some form of stress caused by a load of schoolwork and other unknown problems that arise along the process and impose hardships and heavy burden upon learners' shoulders. Eruption of the COVID-19 pandemic is one of those situations that have caused learners to encounter a lot of hardships during their learning. In conjunction with this, Pajariato et al. (2020) state that the academic stress acquired by learners mostly result from learners' perceptions of the volume of knowledge that should be grasped within a certain period. They further argue that this academic stress have negative physical and emotional effects on learners, and therefore their behaviour also changes in response to stress. Therefore, parental involvement can be regarded as an important element for the solution for many educational problems and it has positive effects on learners' academic achievements (Erdener & Knoepfel, 2018). Wang and Sheikh-Khalil (2014) report that Chinese parents in Hong Kong are supporting the tradition of homework as a significant learning tactic that contains drilling exercises. They further assert that learners mainly depend on their parents for emotional and everyday support. "At this stage of learners' education, parental involvement becomes more effective particularly in developing learners' passion, effectiveness and values which play an essential role in positively influencing educational outcomes" (Duma, 2019, p. 15). The most primary role model in a child's immediate surrounding is considered to be their parents (Tekin, 2011). Ensuring the academic success of their children in school, is one of the most important ambitions of every parent in various societies (Tekin, 2011). Parents are regarded as socialising agents, therefore they play a fundamental role in developing children's

achievement enthusiasm (Zong et al., 2018). Parental involvement is a resourceful shared investment with a pay-out far bigger than its costs and it gives learners fairness and equal educational opportunity (Erdener & Knoepfel, 2018). Parental involvement is shown in the manner through which parents communicate with their children, get involved in schools to discuss for more provisions to accommodate the learning needs of their children, and manage their children's life to get the most out of their learning (Tan, Lyu & Peng, 2020). When there is collaboration between the school leaders and parents, learners' achievement is sustained, since more resources are leveraged (Wright & Johnson 2020).

Myende and Nhlumayo (2020) assert that parents' involvement should be in activities taking place both in school and home with the aim of making the educational goals of children achievable within the school and outside. Culturally diverse studies reveal that when there is cooperation between home and school, there will be a development of a connection that is significant not only for the improvement of school programmes and the family, but also the child (Lau & Ng, 2019; Lau & Power, 2018). Duma (2019) states that researchers have long regarded the involvement of parents in their children's learning as an essential aspect that has impacted children's academic success positively. When children receive assistance from their parents with regards to their learning activities, the bond between them increases as they have much time spent together (Bhamani et al., 2020). The increased bond between children and their parents helps children to consider their parents as a powerful source of comfort during times of pain and anxiety and engage in discussions that help in uplifting emotions (Bhamani et al., 2020).

Studies have shown that parental involvement has more significance to the academic success of learners than the socioeconomic status, culture, or educational background of their families (Đurišić & Bunijevac, 2017). Duma (2019) concurs with this by regarding parental involvement in a learner's learning as a strong predictor of learner achievement. Parental involvement can be regarded as a key element in successfully promoting the transition of youth with disabilities, and it does not only influence learners' enthusiasm but also teacher's preparedness to improve their performance (Erdener & Knoepfel, 2018). Đurišić and Bunijevac (2017) also maintain that, the improved teacher optimism, more support from families and higher learner academic success are some of the greatest benefits that the school acquires from parental engagement. In addition, schools perform to their optimal level when parents and the community are actively participating and have a feeling of ownership of the school (Clarke, 2007; Đurišić & Bunijevac, 2017). If parents

secure a quiet place for their children to study at home, go through children's homework and have talks about what happens at school, children will value the significance of education and as a result they will be good learners (Duma, 2019).

#### 2.4.2 *Rural parental involvement*

The level of rural parental involvement in learners' learning is not the same in different rural communities. In South Africa, like in many other countries there is poor parental involvement in learners' learning from communities with a poverty rate that is very high, which unfortunately appears to be largely rural communities (Matshe, 2014; Myende & Nhlumayo, 2020). However, it must be noted that cooperation with parents seems to be a strong point for rural schools in various other international contexts (Byun, Meece, Irvin, & Hutchins, 2012; Ma et al., 2014; Manzo, 2016; Myende & Nhlumayo, 2020; Robinson & Volpe, 2015; Semke & Sheridan, 2012; Stelmach, 2011). Manzo (2016) conducted a study in California among rural Latino parents on how they are involved in their children's learning. Her study sought to bring the views of rural farm-working parents to the centre of the discussions about involvement of parents. The study contributed to the existing literature that challenges the deficit claims that rural low-income Latino parents are not involved in their children's education (Chavez-Reyes, 2010; LeFevre & Shaw, 2011; Manzo, 2016). The findings indicate what is contradicting to the dominant dialogue about rural parents. In this study, it appeared that rural parents in Latino cooperated with teachers in urging children to go to school, assisting them with home works and helping other parents when they come across struggles (Manzo, 2016).

The level of parental engagement in learners' learning is determined by many factors in rural communities. Myende and Nhlumayo (2020) argue that, while the rural community in some countries is actively involved in learners' learning, there is still a challenge in rural areas where parents are from a lower socioeconomic status. The relationship between parental involvement and socioeconomic status appears to be inseparable (Tan, Lyu & Peng, 2020). Parents with high socioeconomic status are financially able to get educational resources in order to support their children's learning (Tan, Lyu & Peng, 2020). Studies that have been conducted in black schools, particularly in rural areas, reveal that illiteracy, changes in the curriculum, lack of time, school environment, health problems, financial circumstances, parents' mind-set and the approach of

teachers, including school management are the main contextual issues that hinder parents' involvement in their children's learning (Brown, 2007; Duma, 2019). These contextual factors are most common issues in our South African rural context. Myende and Nhlumayo (2020) aver that, other than low socioeconomic status, parents' lack of knowledge and relevant skills has also been largely linked with the lack of parental involvement in rural schools in South Africa. It is important on the other hand to note that, some limitations to parental involvement and parent-teacher partnership originate from schools, because certain schools possess cultures that reveal teachers and school principals as being superior than rural parents, and that causes them to undermine the influence of parents in contributing towards improved learner performance in schools (Myende, 2019). For example, rural schools in China were found not to be offering parents appropriate formal opportunities to partake in learning (Xie & Postiglione, 2016). This remark correlates with what Shim (2013) discovered in a research carried out among rural parents living in the Western State of Nigeria. Shim's study revealed that, although rural parents were willing to participate in learning process of their children, they were uncertain about doing so due to teachers' negative attitudes, parents' lack of ability to affect teachers' decision-making and fear of negative consequences against speaking up (Shim, 2013). This means that, parents are more prepared and able to participate in learners' learning only if teachers show the feeling to care about the wellbeing of learners, show respect for parents, and develop operational means of communicating with families (Đurišić & Bunijevac, 2017; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997).

#### 2.4.3 *Barriers to parental involvement*

Even though the involvement of parents is regarded as being crucial in learners' education, there remains various challenges concerning parental involvement. At times, it is very critical for schools to realise that, the lack of involvement by parents does not automatically mean they are disregarding their responsibilities (Duma, 2019). There are factors causing lack of parental involvement that are beyond schools' control (Đurišić & Bunijevac, 2017). Parents these days are regularly preoccupied with the anxieties and demands of daily life (Đurišić & Bunijevac, 2017). Some parents are being troubled by low-income, nonflexible work hours and language barriers, as a result they cannot always be able to attend school activities or take part in their children's education as they are expected to (Đurišić & Bunijevac, 2017). Parents with lower socio-economic status are mostly working longer hours, have many jobs, and lead single-parent households

(Savage, 2017). These factors lead to parents not being able to participate in events and activities that occur during the school day or during times when parents with more traditional work schedules are usually available to partake (He, 2016; Savage, 2017).

The lack of interaction between schools and parents is among the factors hindering the engagement of parents in their children's learning. Wright and Johnson (2020) found out that many teachers are failing to effectively use parents in order to facilitate their children's learning. Also, parents are not sure how to be involved in their children's education (Wright & Johnson, 2020). They argue that, ongoing communication between parents and teachers can build trust. Furthermore, there is a link between the educational level of parents and learners' academic achievement, and learners with educated parents have less social problems in the school (Erdener & Knoepfel, 2018). Parents who have attained tertiary education have a positive impact on their children's interest in learning activities, and these parents are able to inspire their children's self-perception development (Erdener & Knoepfel, 2018). Some of the African parents in South African rural areas are illiterate, and this means that, for some time it will remain a problem to help children in formal education (Duma, 2019; Eddy & Holborn, 2011). Some parents find out that the teaching methods that are being used to teach subjects nowadays are not the same as the ones that were used when they were still learners; as a result they may sometimes have a feeling that they will confuse their children, and therefore they just decide to stay away (Duma, 2019). Seeing parents not attending school meetings, not cooperating in school activities and not helping learners with school work at home makes most teachers to experience frustration of trying to engage parents and receive less response (Duma, 2019). Consequently, this makes some teachers to come to a conclusion that, parents do not care about the education of their children (Duma, 2019). At the end of the day, schools should also acknowledge that parents are sometimes facing different challenges that cause the lack of involvement in their children's learning.

## **2.5 Home learning during the COVID-19 pandemic**

This section focuses on home learning that has been taking place since the eruption of the COVID-19 pandemic. The literature reviewed in this section will help clarify different processes and techniques concerning home learning. This simply talks about learning that is taking place at home which consist of learning online using technology-related resources. This can be done with or

without a teacher's presence since we know that there are platforms like WhatsApp video, zoom meetings and other helpful online communication methods. Home learning in this section will talk more about the work done by parents or any other family member in collaboration with teachers to help learners when they are learning at home.

### *2.5.1 Teaching and learning in the midst of COVID-19 pandemic*

Due to the eruption of the Corona virus in many countries, governments announced lockdown strategies which did not allow for the normal attendance in many academic institutions with the aim of trying to control the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic (Dhawan, 2020). Bhamani et al. (2020) emphasise that the massive speed of COVID-19 pandemic has troubled the educational sector and parents in the same way. The closure of schools causes many children to miss out on social interaction which is vital for their learning and development process (Bhamani et al., 2020; Union, 2020). The closure of schools due to the pandemic meant that the learning process had to be transferred from school to home setting. Pajarianto et al. (2020) argue that the procedure of transmitting learning activities from school to home changes the learning mode, from face-to-face to online.

Learning online means that there must be different electronic devices available for learners to use at home. "Online communication apps like, WhatsApp, radio, television, cell phones, computer and network hardware, satellite systems, as well as other facilities available with them such as video conferencing and distance learning are being used to facilitate communication between students and teachers" (Bhamani et al., 2020, p. 11). The actual purpose of learning from home is to run daily learning activities for learners to be familiar with learning and sustaining consistency, and working on virtual classroom is not much different from the actual classroom (Pajarianto et al., 2020). Bhamani et al. (2020) contend that collaborative online programmes are also able to offer social communication opportunities and facilitate the consistency of learning for all through remote learning. Brom, Lukavský, Greger, Hannemann, Straková and Švaříček (2020) maintain that, although the COVID-19 pandemic has placed harsh constraints on human activities, including the ruling out of normal attendance of learners to schools, nonetheless the school learning programme continued. Through the means of electronic communication, the learning of learners and higher education students has carried on since then at home and in collaboration with educational institutions (Brom et al., 2020). During the online teaching and learning process,

teachers make use of applications such as Google Classroom, Zoom, and other services to ensure the success of learning process while learners are at home (Pajariato et al., 2020). Parental cooperation has proven to be very significant for the success of learners in an online home learning setting (Borup et al., 2014; Garbe et al., 2020; Makrooni, 2019; Woofter, 2019). Online mode of learning according to Dhawan (2020) is assumed to be easily accessible and can even get to rural and isolated localities. Nowadays, many new communicating technologies develop, making it simpler to create an environment where learners can learn by doing, receive feedback, and continue to enhance their understanding, as well as acquire new knowledge from wide learning resources (Pajariato et al., 2020). “Online learning method is believed to be a fairly cheaper method of learning in terms of the lower cost of transportation, accommodation, and the overall cost of institution-based learning” (Dhawan, 2020, p. 6).

In some reports, online learning has quite a lot of benefits, consisting of flexibility, which enables students to adjust to the hindrances experienced during online learning both in terms of time and place (Pajariato et al., 2020). Flexibility is a very exciting feature of online learning mode, because learners are able to arrange or work out their own time for completing the tasks presented online (Dhawan, 2020). In addition, learners can also decide on learning experiences that are applicable to their characteristics (Pajariato et al., 2020). The online learning process has served as a great solution in time of crisis which has been brought by the severe explosion of the Corona Virus disease (Dhawan, 2020, p. 15). A study conducted by Pajariato et al. (2020) in Republic of Indonesia, on parental support against academic stress on learners during the pandemic, reveals that many parents had adequate resources, and more than 60% of parents indicated that they spent more than sixty minutes in a day assisting their children learn at home. These results show that parents were mindful of the significance of devoting certain time to their children’s learning. It is meaningful also to emphasise that the parents who participated in the study pointed out that the quality of dedicated time is more important than the quantity of time (Pajariato et al., 2020).

### *2.5.2 Challenges of home learning during the COVID-19 pandemic*

Home learning during this pandemic also has its challenges and complications. Brom et al. (2020) argue that, this unexpected home learning process has put a notable burden on all learners’ parents. Teachers also have been carrying a heavy load on their shoulders, because some of them were not even familiar with teaching learners through remote learning. Garbe et al. (2020) reveal that

schools, parents, and learners were not prepared for this rapid change, causing a lot of difficulties and issues of increased parental engagement, as parents have been struggling and making an effort to support their children in various levels of home learning during this time of crisis. In their study, Pajariato et al. (2020) state that, the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) got numerous complaints from the parents saying that there are too many tasks from the teachers during the home study program and that it puts a lot of stress on learners. Apparently, most teachers know that home learning process is by means of giving assignments online, and the collection is online (Pajariato et al., 2020). Brom et al. (2020) conducted a survey of parents for grade 1 to grade 9 learners on home learning in Czech Republic during the COVID-19 pandemic, and most of the parents who were involved mentioned that they would prefer a smaller number of allocated tasks given by teachers, and focus only on key subjects. During the online home learning, some teachers give learners tasks that need more than an hour to complete. As a result, these tasks pile up, and learners become drained (Pajariato et al., 2020). Bhamani et al. (2020) assert that, while these home learning programmes are considered to be applicable in addressing the need of the time of crisis, it must be noted however, that it has also brought a strenuous programme to parents who are working from home and at the same time having a duty to ensure that the learning of their children continues without fault during the times of COVID-19.

The process of home learning puts a lot of pressure on parents, while dealing with the COVID-19 itself has its own challenges. Garbe et al. (2020) state that the results from the U.S. Bureau of Labour Statistics reveals that, in communities where more than 60 percent of families have two adults working outside the home, the majority of families do not have someone to take on the permanent responsibility to support learners during remote learning. It is not surprising that bearing additional duties during the home learning due to COVID-19 restrictions directly resulted in struggles for parents (Garbe et al., 2020). In their study, Brom et al. (2020) posit that most of the parents suggested that they would prefer the teachers to have a more direct presence during home learning process. For instance, teachers should not just send electronically homework activities and expect learners with the help of their parents to figure out all the proceedings of the tasks, but rather should lead online lessons more often, talk directly to the children, assign activities to them, and explain all the task guidelines (Brom et al., 2020). From these findings it appears that the amount of load is unbearable to some of the parents because they also have their work duties plus family responsibilities, not forgetting also the stress of surviving the Corona virus on its own.

It can be said that during this pandemic, concentrating on the health of students and the staff, and at the same time trying to support students to continue learning affected the quality of education and as a result some parents were concerned about this (Garbe et al., 2020).

Different conditions that parents are facing make them to respond differently to home learning during this time of crisis. Moreover, differences among learners in support from parents who can provide for them educational opportunities directly at home, differences in the size of various types of schools to support the learning of their learners remotely, and differences among learners in their flexibility, inspiration and skills to learn independently and online, are likely to worsen the already existing opportunity inequalities (Reimers & Schleicher, 2020). In their study, Garbe et al. (2020) found out that some parents had a concern about the issue of socio-emotional development of their children while learning at home. These parents mentioned concerns about the loss of personal connection with teachers, social engagement with peers, and learning that normally takes place with same-age peers in social settings (Garbe et al., 2020). Another issue of concern during the home learning process is the socio-economic status of different communities. Pajarianto et al. (2020) maintain that one of the challenges of home learning through online mode is how the model is passed on to families with low socio-economic status. There are various challenges that come with home learning which may influence parental involvement, like the availability of economic resources, and the lack of interest in technology usage (Garbe et al., 2020; Hohlfeld et al., 2010). Thus, Dhawan (2020) argues that we cannot overlook the fact that there are students who do not have access to suitable online learning platforms. What counts perhaps most in this crisis is access and readiness of effective online platforms for learning (Reimers & Schleicher, 2020). “The learners who cannot access online learning services are underprivileged and belong to less tech-savvy families with restricted financial resources; as a result, they may lose out when classes occur online” (Dhawan, 2020).

The issue of inequality appears to be a hindrance to the disadvantaged students, while all is well with those who have all the requirements for online learning during the time of crisis caused by the COVID-19. There must be no deceptions about the effect of both the economic suffering and school closures on the children that are living in the poorest communities (Reimers & Schleicher, 2020). These children may fail to benefit from the online learning mode because of the heavy costs related to electronic devices and internet data procedures. Consequently, the gaps of educational

inequality may be prolonged (Dhawan, 2020). Some of the parents specifically in rural areas, are very struggling economically, hence they are not able to buy the required digital devices and internet data for their children to use during online learning. Internet exposure and availability of electronic devices like smartphones and computers are fundamental requirements for remote learning, and therefore the absence of dependable infrastructure and devices has increased struggles in parents to deal with online home learning during the pandemic (Garbe et al., 2020). Reimers & Schleicher (2020) found in their study that, almost all learners from 15 years old, in socio-economically advantaged schools in the United States have computers to work in their homes, but in disadvantaged schools only three out of four learners have one. “The difference in access to high-speed internet between rural and urban areas and among socio-economic classes often referred to as the Digital Divide, has been greatly recognised” (Garbe et al., 2020, p. 59). More than 90% of 15-year-old children from advantaged backgrounds in Mexico, have an internet connection in their homes, but just less than 30% of those from disadvantaged conditions communities (Reimers & Schleicher, 2020). All these results reveal that the differences between advantaged and disadvantaged areas which mostly happen to be rural areas, will always have an effect in educational development.

## **2.6 School principals promoting parental involvement**

This section focuses on school principals as school leaders, working with other stakeholders in promoting parental engagement in learners learning. The literature reviewed in this section will clarify responsibilities of school principals in ensuring that parents are always involved in their children’s learning before and after an eruption of the COVID-19 pandemic. This will also look at the different challenges that school leaders have to overcome during this process. Thereafter it will examine the school leaders’ efforts in promoting rural parental engagement specifically.

### *2.6.1 School principals leading parental engagement initiatives*

The school principal is the main leader in promoting the involvement of parents in learning process, because they are leading the school vision and should be able to get buy-in from the parents and the community at large. School principals have to understand that, every parent wants the best education for their children, whether that parent is educated or not (Department of Education, 2004). School principals and educators are two key agents to foster parental involvement within the school organisation (Yulianti, Denessen, Droop & Veerman, 2020). The

school leader's responsibility cannot, and should not be limited to only what is taking place within the walls of the school, but should extend to the learning that occurs at home (Savage, 2017). To promote the dynamic participation of parents in their children's learning is a growing trend and lies upon the school principal (Department of Education, 2007; Shezi, 2012). This wide-ranging responsibility accords with an understanding of the child as being a part of a complex and shared set of relationships (Savage, 2017). First, school principals and teachers should have a desire to acknowledge and encourage parental participation (Jeynes, 2018). The South African Council for Educators [SACE] (RSA, 2000) specifies in its Code of Conduct that, school principals and all educators should acknowledge parents as associates in education and stimulate harmonious relations between stakeholders for school academic efficiency. School is regarded as a structure that possesses a framework that is very important in building the channel which connects community, families and private sectors by means of collaborative programmes (Keetanjaly, Kadir, Luan & Abdullah, 2019).

One of the elements of successful school leadership with positive outcomes for stakeholders like teachers and learners is to encourage and support parental involvement in learners' education (Anastasiou & Papagianni, 2020). Therefore, it is clear that the promotion of parental involvement initiatives is largely placed upon the shoulders of school principals, but they cannot do it alone, therefore they need to maintain a good relationship in working with their staff members. In conjunction to this, Keetanjaly et al. (2011) maintain that, the principal in the school is the central mediator to empower cooperation and relationships between various stakeholders at a school level. The school leaders should empower parents as change agents (Wright & Johnson, 2020). Among other things that school leaders can do to help initiate high and practical expectations among parents is to display those expectations of their learners themselves (Jeynes, 2018). When educational leaders maintain these high expectations, this level of expectation becomes transmissible (Jeynes, 2018). Parents who come into contact and network with these school leaders and teachers also raise their hopes for their children in school (Atuhurra 2016; Jeynes, 2018).

School principals can organise the involvement of parents by directly reaching out to parents themselves and indirectly by means of teacher invitations for parental engagement (Yulianti et al., 2020). School principals according to Wright and Johnson (2020) should build dual capacity of parents and teachers when working collectively to support learners' learning. Anastasiou &

Papagianni (2020) emphasise that, the input of school principals can decide on the level and quality of interaction between school management and teachers and also between parents and school, influencing the nature of teachers' actions and advancing parental involvement in the school. School leaders should ensure that they build potential of parents through teaching them about different systems of education, how schools make decisions, and how to speak-up for themselves (Wright & Johnson, 2020). School leadership is considered to be the second most instrumental element to guide and inspire increase in learners' learning, second only to operational classroom teaching (Varela & Fedynich, 2020). Therefore, it is very important that the school leaders are able to recognise the prominence of school-based parental involvement so that learners will succeed in their learning process (Jeynes, 2018). On the other hand, it is also very important for the school leaders to be mindful of the fact that there is only so much that can be done by teachers and other school stakeholders (Goodall & Montgomery 2014; Jeynes, 2018). Principals should know how to maintain an open-door method, allowing parents to be more involved in organizing and facilitating parent-teacher partnership (Anastasiou & Papagianni, 2020). When parents feel that they are empowered and allowed to challenge educational traditions and campaign for transformation, the political system of schools may change (Wright & Johnson, 2020). Moreover, leaders in schools must regard parents as specialists of their children's language, culture and learning needs (Wright & Johnson, 2020).

It is also very important to note that, the leadership style of an individual principal is one of determining factors of whether the parental involvement in the school is going to be promoted successfully or not. Jeynes (2018) contends that, school leaders are in an excellent position to encourage and stimulate increased parental involvement and engagement. The leadership approaches used by school principals are believed to be playing a vital role in how schools engage parents and sustain strong relationships (Junes 2018; Mahirshall & Shah 2016; Yulianti et al., 2020). School leaders who desire to build a collaborative culture between parents and the school must communicate this expectation with their teachers and support staff over and over again (Savage, 2017). Ishimaru (2019) asserts that, in order for parental involvement to be improved, school leaders should move away from power over parents to shared power with parents. School principals have to prepare parents and teachers to have balanced high expectations, for instance, an expectation that each person in the family has to give it their very best effort in educational attempts and frequently in life as a whole (Ginsburg, Ginsburg, & Ginsburg 2015; Jeynes, 2018).

Gu, Day, Walker and Leithwood (2018) maintain that the measure of the effectiveness of school leadership is demonstrated by how school leaders respond to the context. The COVID-19 pandemic set that platform where the school principals have a core duty to respond effectively and maintain a quality teaching and learning process in the midst of the pandemic (Varela & Fedynich, 2020). School leaders must proactively seek to understand the cultures, the experiences, and the lives of the families that they serve, and then put those central to their encouragement, so that their support and involvement corresponds with the actual needs of parents (Savage, 2017). In occasions where there is a crisis affecting teaching and learning, each aspect of the school leadership role is enlarged and just as easily examined (Direen, 2017). This is due to the fact that within a crisis, a school leader is still expected to make thoughtful and effective choices about how to appropriately assist the society, promote trust and share skills and work, but the type of crisis demands leaders like the principals to come to the forefront and operate as a reliable and sound voice for their society (Netolicky, 2020; Varela & Fedynich, 2020). Successful school leaders will be able to tap into the indigenous resources in their community and regard the various ways in which parents are involved in their learners' education (Savage, 2017).

#### *2.6.2 School leadership in rural schools*

In many South African rural schools, there are lots of challenges that obstruct the success of various initiatives intended to build an effective parent-teacher collaboration (Boyles, 2020). "For example, bad socioeconomic conditions are creating a distance between rural parents and teachers, causing the failure of such initiatives" (Myende & Nhlumayo, 2020, p. 2). However, in spite of all the possible challenges, school principals and teachers are required to devise strategies to be used in persuading rural parents to take part in their learners' learning. Keetanjaly et al. (2019) highlight that, the different educational leadership methods applied by the school principals have to be able to mobilise parents to work together with the school, in spite of parents' social background and the school environment. Concerning the role of rural school principals in developing relationships, Gordon and Louis (2009) indicate that principals and teachers have to ensure that shared leadership and accountability are highly promoted in order to improve the engagement of parents in schools. School principals should make sure that they try to ask questions, explore and get more understanding about families and the community they are serving so that they can provide the best

service to their learners, having the understanding of their environment (Boyles, 2020). This means that school principals must have a good interaction with parents and the community at large.

Creating flexibility in communication with parents, is regarded as one of the basic elements of a successful rural principal links (Latham, Smith, & Wright, 2014; Preston & Barnes, 2017). Dedicated rural school principals always strive to encourage people-focused relationships with teachers, learners, parents, and all community members (Preston & Barnes, 2017). Parents must be supported and guided by the school led by the principal, on how to rightly help children succeed in learning and how to understand and utilise the learning resources given to them in schools (Boyles, 2020). Numerous studies have shown that functioning rural school leadership is mainly based on embracing, listening, and responding to parental groups related to school development efforts and advisory boards (Boyles, 2020; Preston & Barnes, 2017). A study conducted by Myende (2019) reveals that schools may sometimes encounter various problems concerning improved parental engagement in learning. His study reveals that schools have beliefs and standards that display rural parents as being inferior to teachers and principals, which makes schools to undermine what rural parents can contribute in learners' education (Myende & Nhlumayo, 2020). This signifies that the challenge is not only with rural parents, but some of the school principals are failing to include parents in learning, and that causes these parents not to see the need to participate in educational activities. Moreover, successful rural principals are often active citizens within the rural community, itself (Preston & Barnes, 2017). This means that, rural principals have to be viewed as active community members in the community, and often times, the boundary between the rural school and its community is concealed, at best for these school principals (Preston & Barnes, 2017).

## **2.7 Theoretical framework**

This study is guided by Epstein's model of Parental Involvement and the Empowerment theory. These two theories illuminate my understanding of parental involvement in their children's learning, and it will also give a clear picture to the reader about different aspects pertaining to parental involvement. These theories are relevant in describing what parental involvement entails, and how the school principals are expected to work towards improving parental involvement in their schools. Although these theories have largely been used in research specifically related to parental involvement (Jeynes, 2018; Pourrajab, Ghani, & Panahi, 2018), their principles have been

applied in this study creatively in a manner that provides deeper insights in understanding parental involvement particularly in rural schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. Policy makers, principals, school staff, teachers, parents, and each member of school society involved with the learning of learners have acknowledged this reality that parents have positive influence on learners' academic achievement (Pourrajab, Ghani, & Panahi, 2018).

### **2.7.1 Epstein's model of parental involvement**

Parents get involved in learning process for numerous reasons, because they believe that they should engage themselves in their children's learning process to make an enormous and positive difference (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Pourrajab, Ghani, & Panahi, 2018). Teachers will meet children's parents and some other members of the family from their first day in a school up to the last day of their careers (Epstein, 2018). The community, too, is present in learners' life, therefore it cannot be separated from their learning process (Epstein, 2018).

Epstein (1995, 1997) presented a model for parental involvement with six types of involvement including: parenting, learning at home, communication, volunteering, decision making and community involvement. Parenting is the parents' main duty which includes taking care of the children's health and safety together with developing good parenting skills and providing a quiet situation at home wherein the children can focus on their learning activities and completing their homework (Pourrajab, Ghani, & Panahi, 2018). Parents and other family members should become knowledgeable about children's developmental process, and be able to offer resources to create home environments that can improve learner learning (Griffin & Steen, 2010). Learning at home has to do with the relationship between teachers and parents to help learners learn better at home. Learning at home entails schools keeping parents and families informed about school procedures like, homework expectations, in order to help them boost up their children's academic activities (Griffin & Steen, 2010). On the other hand, communication refers to keeping contact between parents and school through sending messages or letters, phone calls, visiting school by parents, sending news by teachers. Communication has more benefits for children like; realisation of personal development, understanding school policies, and developing communication skills (Epstein et al., 2002; Tekin, 2011). The participation of parents in school and classroom activities to encourage student learning is related to the volunteering item. "Assisting in school maintenance through volunteering for safety and operations of schools, supporting educators and assisting other

parents are examples of this type of involvement” (Tekin, 2011, p. 7). Decision making involvement is related to parents’ participation in the school’s decision making and operation to increase learners’ academic achievement. The parents’ presence in the Parents Teachers Association (PTA) meeting is one of the examples for this item (Pourrajab, Ghani, & Panahi, 2018). The last term is community involvement which refers to the networks and relations among parents, teachers, school community, officials, and other groups that share accountability for student learning. Collaborating with the community is based on recognising and putting together resources, facilities, and other sources available in the community to help meet up the needs of school staffs, learners, and their families (Griffin & Steen, 2010). Epstein’s model of parental involvement shows that parents, school, and community have interrelated domains of influence on learners’ learning development (Pourrajab, Ghani, & Panahi, 2018).

The six types of involvement interactions function as a structure for establishing behaviours, occupations, and actions executed by school employees and family and community members functioning cooperatively to strengthen participation and learner achievement (Epstein, 1995; Epstein et al., 2002; Griffin & Steen, 2010). Epstein’s model relates to my research study as it emphasises the idea of parental involvement as being valuable in helping learners to continue to learn even if they are at home, this helps even during the times of crises like the COVID-19 Pandemic as it has caused the learning process to largely take place at home than the school setting. The six types of involvement help put together and arrange activities to gain all the needed support from parents. Hence, schools should correctly identify the partnership activities that will effectively work in order to meet their needs (Griffin & Steen, 2010; Sheldon & Epstein, 2005). School, family, and community cooperation is a more inclusive term, incorporating participation, commitment, autonomous involvement, shared leadership, and other features of the collective efforts of school, home, and community in learners’ learning and progress from preschool all the way through high school (Epstein, 2018). Just as parental engagement is a fundamental practice for teachers’ individual experience, a broad and purpose-driven programme of school, family, and community collaborations is at the centre of good school organisation (Bryk et al., 2010, 2015; Epstein, Galindo, & Sheldon 2011; Epstein & Sheldon 2006; Epstein, 2018). Applying Epstein’s model in researching about rural parental involvement in learners’ learning during the COVID-19 helps to clarify what is expected from the parents or families, schools and the community as a whole as they work together to help learners continue with learning while they are at home.

### **2.7.2 Empowerment theory**

Parental involvement in learners' learning needs to be the responsibility of both the school and the parents at home to ensure that the cooperative engagement helps learners to improve academically. Empowerment theory is concerned with the distribution of power and authority to each and every member in an organisation (Fetterman, 2017). Using empowerment theory in the study about parental involvement supports the idea that, school principals and teachers should ensure that they value parents' ability to contribute to their children's learning. Empowerment theory is associated with the concepts of encouragement, collaboration, self-esteem, effectiveness, and potential (Baruth, 2013; Zimmerman, 2000). This means that, when school principals and teachers ensure that they engage parents in the education process, parents become motivated and feel valued as they can see that they also are needed to help learners develop academically and therefore, they cooperate in the process. Empowerment theory develops inspiration and positive influence so that people in an organisation may discharge their duties effectively (Lawrence-Jacobson & Kaplan, 2011). Talking about parental involvement in learners' learning, this means that when parents feel empowered by the school they feel motivated to assist their children at home with school work without fail. Hence, it is clear that when parents are not encouraged and empowered by the school, they will always hold back when they are needed to help in their children's learning and they will never think that they possess valuable skills and knowledge that can contribute effectively to the learning process of their children. Empowerment suggests that, working together with others to achieve goals, efforts to obtain access to resources and some key understandings of the socio-political environment serve as an important mechanism in an operational organisation (Fetterman, 2017). This supports the notion of parents being involved in the process of their learners' learning, especially during the critical times like the one imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic where parental involvement has to be the most influential system used to push learners' education forward, working cooperatively with the schools.

### **2.8 Conclusion**

The literature reviewed in this study explicates a lot about the parental involvement in learners' education in rural schools. Also, there are different studies that have been conducted on the issue of parental involvement during the COVID-19 pandemic (Bhamani et al., 2020; Brom et al., 2020; Chirinda, Ndlovu & Spangenberg, 2021; Daniel, 2020; Dhawan, 2020; Garbe et al., 2020; Kenway

& Epstein, 2021; Lawrence & Fakuade, 2021; Pajariato et al., 2020; Pillay, 2021; Reimers & Schleicher, 2020), but only few of these focuses on the involvement of rural parents in South African context (Chirinda, Ndlovu & Spangenberg; Dhawan, 2020; Lawrence & Fakuade, 2021; Reimers & Schleicher, 2020). This is because the rural parents' participation may not exactly be the same in different countries, although the common motion is that the level of involvement is low, but some rural parents can be found to be very participative in learners' learning. For instance, a study conducted by Manzo (2016) conducted a study in California among rural Latino parents showed that these rural parents were very involved in their children's education. Thus, my study aimed to focus on rural areas in South African context and specifically in KwaZulu-Natal as this is one of the provinces with a lot of rural areas.

In this chapter, I discussed literature related to parental involvement in rural schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. I started by looking at the meaning of rurality by different scholars and looked at rural education. I then went on to look at the meaning of parental involvement, considering the effects and challenges to parental involvement. From this, I learnt that different scholars agree on one fact that, if parents are involved in their children's learning, learners are more likely to succeed academically and also are able to be developed socially and emotionally. Thereafter, I looked at the process of learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The literature stresses one point that, the collaboration between the school and learners' parents is of utmost importance during this crisis as the mode of learning has changed into more online and home-based. I also looked at how the school principals are expected to encourage parental involvement. The different strategies that they use and the challenges they encounter during the process, and how they could overcome those challenges in order to work collaboratively with parents. Among the challenges that appeared in the literature concerning parental involvement are: socio-economic status of parents (i.e. parents with low socio-economic status are not able to provide their children with adequate resources to learn at home), parents' level of education (parents with low level of education find it difficult to help their children with their school work); and schools' failure to recognise and acknowledge parents' importance (i.e. some schools don't value parents as an asset in education process, and therefore parents feel unneeded and insignificant).

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter presented the literature reviewed and the theoretical framework which guided the study. This chapter explains the in-depth process and methods undertaken to generate, organise, and analyse data generated through narrative interviews. The use of data generation processes is extremely significant in realising the purpose and objectives of the study (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). For the reader to be acquainted with the layout of this chapter, I outlined briefly the research paradigm, design and methodology. I thereafter explained and justified techniques for selecting participants, generating and analysing data for this study. Furthermore, the ethical consideration, trustworthiness and possible limitations of my research study are provided in this chapter.

#### **3.2 Research paradigm**

A paradigm can help researchers define their own perspectives and build their own understanding of how things are related. The research paradigm emphasises the construction of theoretical interpretations and the development of new concepts (Neuman, 2006). It is the theoretic lens through which researchers study the practical characteristics of their research project to determine the research methods to be applied and how the data analysis process will take place (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). For my research study, the paradigm used has made it possible to determine suitable methods for data generation and analysis. A paradigm can be viewed as “a set of philosophical assumptions about the nature of the world (ontology) and how we can understand it (epistemology), assumptions that are shared by researchers working in a specific field and specific methodological strategies linked to these assumptions” (Kekeya, 2019, p. 26). In conjunction to this, Perera (2018) asserts that a research paradigm also refers to the way researchers respond to three fundamental questions of ontology, epistemology and methodological questions. Researchers use paradigms to express their own perceptions and put together their own understanding of how things are connected. Research paradigms according to Kumatongo and Muzata (2021) are a set of common views and understandings shared by scientists on how to understand and address various problems. Kekeya (2019) maintains that, a number of research

paradigms have been proposed by researchers, but the most dominant paradigms within the educational research are: positivism, post-positivism, interpretivism and critical paradigm.

I approached my research study from an interpretivist paradigm. Using interpretivism paradigm enabled me to construct a descriptive analysis that brings forth a deep, interpretive understanding of a research phenomenon. Interpretivist paradigm is also known as constructivism, because it stresses an individual's power to generate meaning (Maree, 2016, p. 60). According to Bertram and Christiansen (2014), interpretivism paradigm suggests that there is no single reality about the societal world, but there are many realities. Therefore, the purpose of research according to interpretivists, is to understand the meaning which informs human behaviour (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). This paradigm suggests that the whole truth can be said or seen through an extensive description of a phenomenon with all its variables that are well identified, interpreted and clarified (Kumatongo & Muzata, 2021). The interpretive paradigm is aimed at explaining and interpreting the feelings, views and experiences of people in human terms rather than through quantification and measurement (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 2004). The research paradigm used in this study enabled me to put together and interpret data generated from the participants in a coherent and cohesive manner without changing their views and experiences.

I opted to use the interpretivism paradigm because I wanted to gain an in-depth insight into the experiences of rural school principals and understand their reactions concerning parental involvement in learners' learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Kumatongo and Muzata (2021) emphasise that, researchers operating under the interpretivist paradigm believe in reality established on people's subjective experiences of the external world. Kivunja and Kuyini (2017) maintain that when applying the interpretivist paradigm, the focus is in understanding the individual and their interpretation of the world around them. Using interpretivism paradigm in this study allowed me to have a close interaction with the school principals as the participants, getting to know their relationship with parents and the different strategies they have been using to ensure that parents are engaged in the process of learning and other school activities, for the benefit of learners, and also getting to know about the challenges that came with the changes imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic and how those challenges have been addressed.

### **3.3 Research Design**

A research design is a pattern or a framework that is used by a researcher to provide answers to research questions (Kasonde-Ng'andu, 2013; Kumatongo & Muzata, 2021). It is regarded as an outline containing the strategies and techniques used by a researcher for the purpose of solving a research problem (Kumatongo & Muzata, 2021). Research design is a key structure that articulately and coherently connects the research questions to the research conclusions by means of the steps undertaken throughout the process of data collection and analysis (Baskarada, 2014). The purpose/objectives of a research study are inextricably tied to the research design (Nayak & Singh, 2021). Furthermore, a research design is frequently connected with research paradigm and approach (Kumatongo & Muzata, 2021). “Hence, research design, which is regarded as a blueprint for the research study, must address the research questions, appropriate propositions, the component of analysis, the logic linking of the data to the propositions, and the criteria for interpreting the findings” (Baskarada, 2014, p. 3). A research design can be classified as a qualitative research or quantitative research approach, but the researcher also can choose to use both quantitative and qualitative approaches, and that research design will be called a “mixed method approach” (Kumatongo & Muzata, 2021).

For the purpose of this study, qualitative research was the suitable approach to be used in order to generate data that was needed to address research questions appropriately. According to Mohajan (2018) qualitative research is a social action approach that focuses on how individuals make sense of their experiences and interpret their social reality. Qualitative research aims to explore persons' perception and interpretation of a social phenomenon (Kumatongo & Muzata, 2021). Using qualitative research in this study enabled me to have an in-depth understanding of the experiences of rural school principals concerning parental involvement in learners' learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Qualitative research design does not depend on numerical data, but it depends on linguistic data and it uses meaning-based rather than statistical procedures of analysing data (Polkinghorne, 1989; Maree, 2016). Qualitative research is mainly based on exploratory processes where researchers progressively make sense of a social phenomenon through comparing, assessing, replicating, and organising the research object (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The main aim of conducting qualitative research is to thoroughly attain a complex and detailed view of the issue (Creswell & Poth, 2016). To establish this detail requires the researcher to directly talk with

participants, get to their residences or workplaces, and let them discuss their perceptions and experiences unobstructed by what we expect or what we already know from the literature (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Using qualitative design in this study allowed me to create openness to my participants, thus obtaining deep understanding about how rural parents get involved in learning and all the strategies used by the school principals to promote parental involvement and to overcome the already existing challenges. Butina (2015) argues that, qualitative research approach allows the researcher to explore research problem in depth with data collection frequently happening by means of open-ended questions allowing the researcher to understand and review the perceptions and ideas of other people without predetermining those ideas through the use of questionnaire classifications. Qualitative research produces a wealth of comprehensive information about a small number of people and as a result, increasing the deepness of understanding of the selected people and their social standpoint (Butina, 2015).

### **3.4 Research Methodology**

Research methodology is considered to be a systematic technique that is used to solve a research problem (Pillai, & Kaushal, 2020). Basically, this talks about a guide to research study and how it is conducted (Igwenagu, 2016). It entails the procedures taken by a researcher in the process of describing and predicting research phenomenon (Pillai, & Kaushal, 2020). Igwenagu (2016) further asserts that, the research methodology is the overall research strategy that shapes the way in which a research study is to be carried out, as well as identifying the methods to be applied in it (Igwenagu, 2016). Pillai and Kaushal (2020, p. 4) give a similar summary by maintaining that the research methodology speaks of the approaches and perspectives to the research process overall with the concern in “why, what, where and how data is collected and analysed”. There is a variety of methodologies with differing epistemological viewpoints under the qualitative research umbrella. The five commonly used methodologies in qualitative research according to Petty, Thomson and Stew (2012) are; grounded theory, case study, phenomenology, narrative research and ethnography.

#### **3.4.1 Narrative inquiry**

Narrative inquiry was used in this particular study. The intent of a narrative inquiry is to create a space for my participants to tell their stories about their experiences on parental involvement in

learners' learning. Narrative inquiry is a way to understand human experiences and a way to study human experiences, (Clandinin, 2013; Haydon, Browne & van der Riet, 2017). The reason I decided to use narrative inquiry is because I wanted to understand lived experiences of rural school principals on how they have experienced parental involvement in learners' learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. I also wanted to explore how the school principals have been encouraging and motivating rural parents to be part of their learners' learning at home and in school during this critical period. According to Maree (2016) people usually have storied lives and tell stories about them. The stories themselves become the raw data in narrative inquiry, which is a type of qualitative research (Butina, 2015). It is centred on the ordered life experiences or stories of a particular event or a sequence of events for only few individuals (Creswell, 2007; Petty, Thomson & Stew, 2012).

Many disciplines such as politics, medicine, education and art, have used narrative inquiry to learn more about the narrator's culture, historical experiences, identity, and way of life (Butina, 2015). The researcher then retells the narrated stories and experiences into a chronological narrative (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Narrative research is ideal for recording the comprehensive stories or life experiences of a single person or a small group of people (Creswell, 2007). In my research study, I wanted to engage in deep discussions with only few rural school principals, since narrative enquiry doesn't allow many participants in research because of its lengthiness (Maree, 2016). When conducting narrative research, the researcher must deduce meaning from the sequence of events as they develop (Maharaj, 2018). Finally, in a joint narrative, the participants and researcher's perspectives and experiences are combined (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Inquiries that provide narrative data include the following; interviews seeking stories or oral histories, as well as memoirs and biographies in writing (Butina, 2015).

### **3.5 Research sampling**

Choosing which persons, settings, events, or behaviours to include in the study is referred to as sampling (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). Researchers must decide on the number of people, groups or objects that will be observed (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). A sample is a subset of the population that is thought to be suitable for study participation (Maharaj, 2018). The sample is representative of a small section of population and is representative of the full set of objectives or

individuals who together comprise the focus of the study (Maharaj, 2018). The number of participants chosen is determined by the research questions, the research design, the researcher's expertise and experience, as well as the time and resources available to conduct the study (Maree, 2016). When the researcher chooses study participants, he or she looks specifically for people who are knowledgeable and informative about the phenomena being studied (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Ndlovu, 2019). In qualitative research, sample sizes should normally not be so large that extracting dense, rich data becomes impossible (Maree, 2016).

In this study I used purposive and convenience sampling as the criteria for selecting participants because the research was not focused at making broad generalisations about the population. I wanted to ensure that the chosen participants have a knowledge and experience of the key topic being investigated (Creswell, Clark & Plano, 2018). According to Maree, (2016) purposive sampling is applied in situations where the sampling is done with a specific purpose in mind. I chose purposive sampling because the aim was to purposefully select only the principals who are in schools located in rural areas around Margate. The school principals are the ones in charge in the functioning of the school and the connection the school has with the whole community is mostly implemented and nurtured by the school principal. Hence, the involvement of parents in learners' learning is best understood and empowered by the principals. This study was based on the experiences of principals on rural schools' parental involvement during the COVID-19 pandemic. Convenience sampling on the other hand, is based on selecting participants who are readily and easily available (Taherdoost, 2016). Using convenience sampling helped not to engage in an expensive study where I would have to travel a lot and using a lot of resources. The selected participants were only public school principals around the same area as mine, and getting to their schools did not require me to drive long distances. This helped to reduce the travelling costs and saved time. Taherdoost (2016) maintains that, convenience sampling helps to overcome some of the limitations associated with research, because this method is least time-consuming, least expensive and most convenient.

The sample size comprised only three school principals. There are usually only a few participants in narrative inquiry research (Haydon, Browne & van der Riet, 2018). The main aim of this study was to collect thick, rich data based on experiences of participants which could be more time consuming if a large number of participants was chosen. If the goal is to gather life stories, the

sample size of participants will be smaller, and the interviewing procedure will likely be longer (Kim, 2015). The number of participants is limited because narrative inquiry requires close collaboration between the researcher and the participant throughout data collection and processing (Ely, 2007; Haydon, Browne & van der Riet, 2018).

### **3.6 Geographic and social contexts of the schools and participants**

This study was conducted in public schools at Margate ward in Sayidi circuit, which is located in Ugu district. Margate is rich in tourism and farming. The place has got both urban and rural areas. The rural areas are controlled by traditional leaders which involve Izinduna and amaKhosi. Rural people mostly work in farms, restaurants, hotels, stores and others are domestic workers for white people. This means that most parents are occupied with work while they also need to make some time to be involved in their children's education. Schools in rural areas mostly accommodate learners from low socio-economic background, as those parents with high socio-economic status take their children to urban schools. Most learners in these schools are IsiZulu speakers and only few of them are IsiXhosa speakers. This means that the schools have a responsibility to cater for ethnic and cultural diversity where possible. The school principals who participated in this study serve most learners and parents with similar characteristics since the rural areas in the place of Margate almost have similar features. Learner-dropout, drug abuse and teenage pregnancy are some of the common features in these rural areas, and these act as barriers to the developmental level of the society educationally and economically. Principals and teachers have to deal with poor parental involvement to school programmes due to job related circumstances, low educational level and unwillingness to participate due to other personal reasons. Thus, the cooperation between parents and schools always have some challenges and hindrances. COVID-19 pandemic has then brought a lot more challenges to the already existing ones, pertaining to how parents cooperate with the schools in ensuring that learners improve academically. The COVID-19 brought a lot of stress to the society, life became unusual. It was a huge challenge for schools and more specially school principals as they had to ensure that their schools continue to function even in the midst of the pandemic using new strategies that involved remote teaching. This was even worse for rural schools because there is a challenge of the availability of learning resources in most rural families. Therefore, the rural school principals, teachers, parents and the whole society had a huge burden to come up with a way forward on how they had to make it possible that learners continued to

learn during this challenging time. It was a huge dilemma, because remote learning was something new to most of these rural areas (Chirinda, Ndlovu & Spangenberg, 2021).

### **3.7 Data generation methods**

Data generation can be viewed as a sequence of activities carried out by the researcher from searching for the data, observing it, and encapsulating it (Butina, 2015). Data for this study was generated through the use of the field texts. Clandinin and Caine (2008) use the term field text in referring to what is normally called data in the field of qualitative research. Journal records, autobiographical writing, oral history, family stories, letter writing, dialogues, or field notes, research interviews, photographs or personal artefacts are examples of field texts used in the narrative inquiry (Maree, 2016). Narrative inquirers approach these field texts with the understanding that they are socially created and shaped by the perceptions of people who put them together (Clandinin & Caine, 2008). During data generation phase of narrative inquiry, there must be trust and honesty in research relationship, high levels of moral and critical engagement, mutual and truthful cooperation, the participant as a storyteller should have full voice over time, but both voices must be heard, and there must be tolerance of ambiguity and observation of symbols, signs, images (Etherington, 2013).

For the purpose of this research study I used an in-depth narrative interview. Interviews between researcher and participant are the foundation of most narrative studies (Maree, 2016). Individual interviews are the most common data collection method in qualitative research, and the most common method particularly in narrative inquiry, because we expect that interviewees will tell stories based on their narrative schema, which reflects personal knowledge and experiences organised by cognitive strategies (Kim, 2015). The narrative interview for my research study had two distinct phases, which were; narration phase and the conversation phase. The narration phase occurred through an unstructured interview, where I allowed the interviewee to give full narration of their experiences with a minimal interruption from myself as an interviewer (Kim, 2015). In an unstructured interview, the researcher may just bring forward the topic or main research question and then allow the interviewee to respond in their own way (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). According to Kim (2015), in unstructured, open-ended interviews, also known as narrative interviews, the researcher usually has no defined objective other than to listen to anything the interviewee wants to say. The researcher may ask some questions as the respondent speaks, but

the respondent is primarily free to speak on the subject (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). Using this kind of data generation tool allowed my participants to openly tell a lot about their experiences concerning the parental engagement and contribution in learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The second phase of the narrative interview was a conversation phase. The conversation phase is a period of semi-structured, in-depth questioning or interchange when the interviewer wants some clarifications on the issues presented in the first narration (Kim, 2015). During the conversation phase I engaged in a deep conversations with my participants with the aim of creating a dialogic interchange.

The study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, during the two interview phases of data generation, I ensured that the protocols were followed. During the interviews, the face masks were worn and the adequate distance was kept between the researcher and the participant. This came with some challenges however, because there would be times when the participant would ask me to repeat the question due to the fact that my face masks would not always enable them to hear clearly what I was saying. Also the participants had to speak aloud so that the recording device could clearly record their voices.

### **3.8 Data analysis**

This study drew on Polkinghorne's narrative analysis and analysis of narratives. Polkinghorne (1995) proposes that narrative inquiry has two types of analysis, one of which is *narrative analysis* that relies on narrative cognition and the other of which is *analysis of narratives* that depends on paradigmatic perception, based on his interpretation of Bruner's two modes of thought, the paradigmatic mode and narrative mode.

Narrative analysis or narrative mode of analysis is the process through which the researcher organises features of data into a logical developmental story (Kim, 2015). It is a data-plotting strategy in which we examine narrative data that consist of activities, events, and occurrences in order to generate coherent stories as a result of the analysis. Rather than separating the data into constituent parts, this method is in fact synthesizing it, as it connects events and activities by arranging them as contributors to the development of a plot (Polkinghorne, 1995). Analysis of narratives or paradigmatic type of analysis on the other hand, is based on the examination of data to single out particulars as instances of general ideas or concepts (Kim, 2015). By stressing the similar features that recur over and over, paradigmatic cognition creates cognitive networks of

concepts that allow people to construct events as familiar (Kim, 2015). It aims to find common themes or conceptual representations among the stories that have been generated as data (Polkinghorne, 1995).

My initial step in the analysis was to read all of the field texts for each school principal multiple times (narrative analysis) to get a sense of the overall picture and familiarise myself with the data, with the goal of creating a thorough, low-inference narrative that preserved each participant's voice. This means that I retold the participants' experiences while maintaining the characteristics of narrative: links between events, the passage of time, and individual intents without my interpretation getting involved (McAlpine, 2016). After the narrative mode of analysis, I moved on to a second phase of analysis (analysis of narratives). My own interpretation of the participants' experiences was put into action at this point. The goal was to find commonalities, and also particularities among the multiple data and generate general knowledge from a collection of stories (Kim, 2015). This phase of analysis is divided into two sections. Section A (pages 75-100) focuses on answering the first sub-question: ***How are rural parents participating in their children's learning during the COVID-19 pandemic?***

Section B (see pages 100-109) attempts to answer the second sub-question: ***What do school principals do to promote parental involvement in schools located in rural settings during the COVID-19 pandemic?***

The analysis of narratives in both these two sections was guided by the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter two, namely; Epstein's Model of Parental Involvement and the Empowerment theory.

**Section A** provides an insight into how rural parents are getting involved in their children's learning at home and at school in the three rural schools selected. In analysing the narratives of the school principals on how rural parents participate in their children's learning, I draw on the Epstein's Model of Parental Involvement to provide a framework for analysing and interpreting the storied narratives. Using Epstein's Model with its six types of involvement which are: parenting, learning at home, communication, volunteering, decision making and community involvement, helped me to understand what is expected from the parents, schools (led by the principals) and the community as a whole as they work together to help learners learn effectively during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic.

These six types of involvement were used as the main themes in this section. I read all three narratives and picked out evidence from each of the narratives that spoke to each of the six types of Epstein's Model of Parental Involvement.

**Parenting:** I looked for the data that talks about how parents perform their duties in taking care of learners' safety and health, and to ensure a conducive learning environment at home. Under this theme I created sub-themes; Parental availability in children's developmental process during the pandemic and Parents' understanding of educational matters. In order for the parents to ensure a conducive environment for their children, it calls for them to have an understanding about the developmental process of their children (Griffin & Steen, 2010). For the first sub-theme I analysed how rural parents had been available during the changes caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in their children's developmental process. For the second sub-theme I analysed how parents' educational level affected their involvement in their children's learning during the pandemic.

**Learning at home:** I looked for the data that talked about how teachers and parents cooperate with the aim of helping learners learn better at home. The COVID-19 pandemic raised the need of home learning as one of effective strategies during the times of crisis. I went through the participants' narratives and looked for the evidence that speaks to parents' understanding of educational matters, the availability of learning time at home and how schools keep track of learners' activities done at home. The sub-themes that emerged under this theme are; Availability of learning resources, and Motivation and availability of time. The first sub-theme helped me to analyse how the issue of availability of learning resources at home made it easy or difficult for learners to learn during the COVID-19 pandemic. The second sub-theme aimed at analysing the level of motivation in parents and learners, and also the availability of time at home for learning during the COVID-19 pandemic (Griffin & Steen, 2010).

**Communication:** Going through the narratives, I looked for the data that spoke to communication between parents and their children, communication between parents and schools. Communication has more benefits for children like; realisation of personal development, understanding school policies, and developing communication skills (Epstein et al., 2002; Tekin, 2011). Here, I formulated two sub-themes, which are; Methods of communication between school and parents, and Parents' feedback to teachers. From the data generated, I explored the different methods of communication that have been used by the schools involved in the study in order to ensure proper

communication between parents, teachers, and learners during the COVID-19 pandemic. Also, I explored how then the parents themselves send feedback to teachers concerning the learning of their children during the COVID-19 pandemic, as children had to do most of their learning at home under the supervision of their parents.

**Volunteering:** Going through the process of analysing the narratives, I searched for the data that explains how parents volunteer in maintaining safety and operations of schools, supporting teachers in ensuring that the learning process takes place effectively (Tekin, 2011). The sub-themes that emerged are; Parents' self-motivation in learning activities and functioning of the school, and Parental support to educators. Here I analysed how parents have been motivating themselves to always participate in all educational activities that are of benefit to their children, and looked at how they supported the functioning of the school during the COVID-19 pandemic. Also, I looked at how parents ensured that they support educators emotionally and socially so they could teach effectively throughout the period of the pandemic, and this could be a direct or indirect support.

**Decision making:** I looked at the data that talks about how parents are getting involved in school meetings as a way of their participation in the making of different decisions concerning the learning of their children. Involvement of parents in making decisions helps to increase learners' academic achievement (Pourrajab, Ghani, & Panahi, 2018). The two sub-themes that emerge under this theme are; Discussion and approval of decisions in parent-school meetings and Acknowledgement of parental significance in every decision made. The first sub-theme emerged as a way of evaluating how schools met with parents to discuss decisions taken during the COVID-19 pandemic to help propel learners' learning. The second sub-theme explores how the parents are aware of their significance in the process of decision making and the value of their ideas in the process.

**Community involvement:** As I went through the narratives, I looked for the data that speak about the interactions and associations among the school, parents and the community as a whole. I explored how the school principals experience the involvement of the community structures in their schools in order to ensure smooth teaching and learning process in terms of safety, availability of community resources, and physical and emotional support given to learners during the time of learning under the COVID-19 pandemic. The sub-themes that emerged are; Community support for effective learning and Community's social and environmental effects in teaching and learning.

The first sub-theme evaluates the different activities done by community structures in helping learners learn effectively during the COVID-19 pandemic. The second sub-theme is driven by the idea that social factors taking place in the community affect how learners and parents participate in learning, and this is directed to learning taking place during the pandemic.

**Section B** provides an overview of what the school principals with the school as a whole do to ensure that they keep parents engaged with the learning of their children. In analysing the narratives of the school principals on what they do to promote parental involvement in their schools, I drew on the Empowerment theory to provide a framework for analysing and interpreting the storied narratives in this section. I did this by selecting key concepts or principles from this theory. I selected Encouragement and Collaboration as the two key concepts that served as themes when I was analysing the narratives for the purpose of answering the second sub-question of the study. I selected these concepts, because empowerment theory emphasises that schools should value the ability of parents into being able to contribute to their children's learning throughout the whole process of education. This talks about the strategies used in the schools to invite parents to be part of the school activities, the techniques used to encourage learning of learners in the school and at home with the help of parents. The sub-themes that emerged under the concept of Encouragement are; Principals' attitudes towards parental involvement and Sharing of accountability. I looked for the data that reveal how the school principals involved in my research study work together with their schools to encourage parental engagement, and looked at how the attitude of principals concerning parental involvement affects the process. The sub-themes that emerged under the concept of Collaboration are; Coordination of collaborative activities and Nurturing parents' aspirations and level of comfort with the school and staff. Here, I looked for the data talking about different activities organised by the schools that involves the parents. These are educational activities that are organised in such a way that parents become part of it at home and other activities that are helpful in stimulating learning like, school trips, award-giving ceremonies, and other activities where parents are also invited. This talks about what it has been even before the COVID-19 pandemic, and how it has been after the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **3.9 Ethical considerations**

Ethics is concerned with the moral ideals that guide our actions as humans (Kim, 2015). The ethical guidelines are very important in educational research since the project involves human beings (Maree, 2016; McMillan and Schumacher, 2001). From the very beginning of the research design, it is vital that all researchers follow ethical practices at every level of the research (Kim, 2015). Ethical criteria move beyond institutional standards of privacy, confidentiality, and informed consent (Clandinin & Caine, 2013). Negotiations of entry, exit, and representations of experience are essential ethical concerns when attending to how participation in a narrative study influences each participant's life (Clandinin & Caine, 2013).

Ethical issues applicable to research in general and those that affected the nature of this study in particular have been considered. I have obtained ethical clearance from the University of KwaZulu-Natal (See appendix A, page 134) and sought permission from other relevant authorities including the KwaZulu-Natal department of education (See appendix B, page 135) and the participants (See appendix D, page 138-140). The method used was to make sure that the participants were treated with respect and that their confidentiality was protected (See appendix D, page 138). During the research, no ethical concerns were compromised. The principals of the schools received letters requesting permission to conduct research (See appendix C, page 136), as school leaders and also as the research participants. All the participants filled out the consent forms (See appendix D, page 140) and I assured them that confidentiality and anonymity would be maintained throughout the whole process. The participants were simply informed that their involvement in the study was entirely voluntary (See appendix C, page 136). I also made it clear to the participants that they are allowed to withdraw from the study at any time if they want to (See appendix C, page 136). It was critical that I develop trust and confidence with my participants. Building trust, according to Young and Barret (2001), requires assuring confidentiality of all information and anonymity for participants. By negotiating access with the participants and pledging confidentiality around the participants' identities, I had gained their trust. The individual interviews conducted with the participants were audio recorded and later transcribed for data analysis. The participants were informed prior to the commencement of the interviews about the use of a voice recorder and that all interviews had to be recorded (See appendix D, page 139). I requested permission for the voice recording, and all participants agreed. As a researcher I had to

distance myself from emotion and bias. I achieved this by using the participants' language and verifying my interpretations of data with the participants to find out whether what I have interpreted represents their beliefs, experiences and views, and did not take what they said further. Sarniak (2015) emphasises that researchers should constantly re-evaluate participants' impressions and challenge pre-existing assumptions and hypotheses to reduce bias.

### **3.10 Trustworthiness**

In qualitative research, trustworthiness relates to the systematic precision of the research design, the researcher's credibility, the believability of the findings, and the relevance of research methods (Rose & Johnson 2020). Trustworthiness relates to an inquirer making their research processes accessible and hence auditable, allowing others to acquire a better understanding of how their findings were generated (Gill, Gill, & Roulet, 2018). According to Loh (2013) a narrative study subscribes to the criteria of Verisimilitude and Utility. Verisimilitude talks about the study being sounding or seeming alive and real, while utility means the usefulness of the study (Creswell, 2007; Loh, 2013). Both verisimilitude and utility can be achieved through the use of trustworthiness technique of member checking (Loh, 2013). For this study, the process of storying the stories required that during the data analysis phase, I often returned to my participants to check with them if my interpretation of their experiences was according to the way they understood their narratives. This helped me to avoid adding my own ideas that could possibly be emerging from misinterpreting the participant's stories that would make the findings not sounding alive and real. In conjunction with this, Maree (2016) emphasises that trustworthiness of qualitative designs is the state to which participants and the researcher share the same understanding of interpretations and concepts concerning the data generated. Member checking was applied through this process of "back and forth" with participants (Creswell, 2006; Long, 2016). This allowed the participants to clarify their recorded words even more clearly and ensured that the possible errors were corrected from my interpretation. The repeated re-drafting of the participants' experiences guaranteed that I captured the genuine substance of the experience as recounted by the participant.

### **3.11 Limitations of the study**

Only a limited number of experiences are captured in participant narratives, which we then use as researchers to approximate a coherent account (McAlpine, 2016). The researcher must to be aware

of what is missing from an individual's accounts in order to accomplish this (McAlpine, 2016). According to Creswell and Creswell (2017), one of the most notable challenges with narrative inquiry is that it does not allow a researcher to deal with a large number of participants due to time commitment required, and it also necessitates close collaboration with the participant. My small in-depth study was limited to rural schools in the Margate area only and therefore the findings will not be generalised to other rural areas within the KwaZulu-Natal province and South Africa as a whole. However, it can still raise important issues and act as a platform for the implementation of parental engagement initiatives in rural schools. Also, the instruments that were used in the study had limitations because the participants could have been reluctant to divulge certain information about their experiences or about themselves. Purposive sampling and convenient sampling were very satisfying to me as the researcher but it could not represent the wider population. However, I was more concerned about obtaining an in-depth data from the selected participants.

### **3.12 Conclusion**

In this chapter, the research paradigm, design and methodology used in the study in order to explore the lived experiences of school principals on parental involvement in rural schools during the COVID-19 pandemic were discussed. I have also discussed the sampling methods and the research tools that were suitable for this study. Finally, there was a discussion on ethical considerations, the trustworthiness of the study, and the limitations of the study. In the next chapter I present the reconstructed stories of my three participants.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **STORIED NARRATIVES OF THE SCHOOL PRINCIPALS**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

The research design and methodology of this study were presented in the previous chapter. The interpretivism paradigm was highlighted as the paradigm within which this study is situated. Furthermore, the qualitative design, the narrative inquiry methodology and the sampling techniques used in this study were brought to the foreground. I also described how the field texts generated using an in-depth narrative interview with two phases were analysed. This analysis occurred in two levels, the first one being the narrative analysis or narrative mode of analysis (re-telling of narratives) which is presented in this chapter and the second level is the analysis of narratives or paradigmatic type of analysis (see Chapter 5, pages 75-110).

This chapter, as stated above, presents the first level of analysis. The chapter unpacks the different experiences of rural school principals, through retold stories on parental involvement in learners' learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. I constructed the re-storied narratives by putting together field texts generated from the two phases of narrative interview (narration phase and conversation phase). Each participant's story was organised in a chronological order, linking all the events and happenings logically. This was done through emplotment, meaning that, the events and experiences were structured into a simple story by use of a plot and narrative configuration (Polkinghorne, 1995). To link up events and develop explanations that are logical meant that I had to do retroactive movement, looking for data elements that fit in each participant's narrative (Polkinghorne, 1995). I focused on the three commonplaces of narrative inquiry: temporality, sociality, and place. In terms of temporality, participants' history, present, and future were all considered. Concerning sociality, I paid attention to participants' personal circumstances like their feelings and aspirations, and also social circumstances like the existential conditions, the environment and surrounding factors under which their experiences are taking place (Clandinin, Pushor, & Orr, 2007). With regards to place, participants were given the flexibility to choose where they felt most comfortable during the data generation process. The field texts were generated from three rural school principals, who are; Mr Zidane of Ubuntu primary school, Mr Qinisela of Khanyisa high school and Mrs Lubanzi of Bekezela secondary – which are pseudonyms to ensure

confidentially. I ensured that the storied narratives are presented in the first person. Presenting the principals' narratives in the first person format allowed me to tell their narratives as the main character (Chiororo, 2020). The narratives of the school principals are presented below.

## **4.2 Narrative of Mr Zidane**

### **I am familiar with the community I am serving**

I was born in Port Shepstone, KwaZulu-Natal. I grew up in the same area where my school is located. This makes me to be familiar with the community that I am serving as the school principal. My qualifications are; Senior Primary Teachers' Diploma (SPTD), Advanced Certificate (ACE) in Management, Higher Certificate in Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET), and Bachelor of Education Honours (B Ed Hons) in management, law and policy. I have been the principal of the school for 11 years. Being the school principal in my home area has always given me a desire to see our young generation prospering academically, socially and otherwise. All these years being the principal I ensure that the learning culture in our young kids is being instilled and developed. However, there are numerous challenges one faces due to social, economic and environmental conditions. Hence, we strive for better skills and strategies each and every day. Outside the school, I am a married man with children. I am also active in various structures in the society. I am serving in the committee of COSATU in my local ward. I am a member of Quality Learning and Teaching Campaign (QLTC) committee, a member of the school governing body, and many other structures.

### **Socio-economic conditions affect parental engagement**

Most of our learners' parents are unemployed, and that makes it difficult at times for them to help with some learning resources needed for their children. Especially now that there is COVID-19, learners sometimes need to learn while at home using resources like smart phones, laptops, computers, internet or data bundles, and other equipment. The lack of learning resources due to financial constraints hinders even those parents who are willing to help their learners. For instance, a subject like life skills requires a learner to have a dictionary which is not provided by the school. Also a subject like social sciences requires a learner to have an atlas book which we also do not have here as the school, we just ask parents to get these resources for their kids. However, it is not easy for some of them financially. Yes others are able to buy these equipment, but at the same time we always have to understand the situation hindering others. So, we are struggling because even

as the school we don't have enough resources. However, we are coping because we are teachers, we even download some information from the internet to help learners, and we also encourage the parents to try and go to the internet café, even though we don't have one around school. It is far away from here, but we tell parents that if they get an opportunity to be in a place with the internet and computers they should try by all means to get information for their kids, because we are in the 4th industrial revolution so we must be used to those things. So to be specific about parental involvement in our school, I must say that the issue of low socio-economic status causes some hindrances.

### **Parental engagement in rural schools as compared to urban schools**

I have always been concerned with the poor parental involvement that we experience in our rural area compared to those who are in urban areas surrounding Margate and nearby areas like Port Shepstone. The way parents participate in the education of their children in these urban schools is outstanding. What I have observed is that in these urban schools parents have positive attitude towards the school and the education process as a whole. Parents attend meetings on a regular basis. Also the parents in urban schools always make sure that they assist their children with home works, assignments and projects. Another thing that I have noticed with the parents of urban school learners is that, they have been consistent in ensuring that their children learn at home during the pandemic, and they have ensured that they adhere to all the requirements prescribed by the schools. You find that these parents always encourage their children to do their work each and every day. So the difference is very huge compared to our rural schools.

However, I think the factors causing these differences are very clear and well known. For instance, most learners in urban schools have parents who are well educated, some are doctors, lawyers, etc. So these parents are well knowledgeable about the process of learning. Thus, these parents are role models to their children. Also the facilities that are needed for learning are available in urban schools. Learners in those schools are exposed to libraries, internet, and Wi-Fi at school and at home. So it makes it easier for them to get information, whereas for our learners it is very challenging because the resources are not always there. Even on the DSTV there are learning channels, where learners get help at home. However, for some of our learners here in rural areas it is not possible to access those channels because parents do not afford DSTV. Even for some of those families that have DSTV, you find that parents don't even know about these learning

channels and so is their children, or even if they see those learning programmes they don't bother about it that much and they don't push their children into it.

### **Parental availability has always challenged us**

There are challenges concerning parental availability in the school's activities and learners' learning. Even before the COVID-19 there had always been challenges on the issue of parental involvement. It is even worse now because since schools were allowed to open in 2020 after the first lockdown, learners are not attending school every day, they have been alternatively attending school, and this requires parents to be more participative than ever before. One of the challenges also, is the issue of parental non-attendance in the school meetings and other activities, before and after the COVID-19 pandemic. As I have mentioned the issue of unemployment, I think it contributes a lot to the lack of attendance because parents are mostly worried about taking care of their families financially, so they sometimes do not even bother about being part of anything in the school. Some parents do not even have time due to their family duties to check their children's work. So now, for the fact that there are parents who are not able to assist their children in terms of school work, it imposes challenges on us because most of children are lagging behind and teachers have to start afresh in order to help those who cannot get help at home with the homework and other activities.

### **Home learning could not be effective during the first COVID-19 lockdown**

The schools were closed in March 2020, and then few days after that, the country went into Lockdown for the first time. Learners were expected to continue with learning while they were at home. Schools were required to make means that learners were learning. I must be honest on this one and say that it was not easy here in our school to do that effectively, because in that first phase we were at lockdown level 5. It was something new to all of us, but the subject teachers were able to communicate with some parents through WhatsApp so that they could send some work to parents' phones, but the response was not that good. Some parents' cell phone numbers which they had provided us with and we saved on our South African Schools Administration and Management System (SA-SAMS) were no longer the ones they used at that time. So, it was not easy, and remember that this is a primary school. In primary school it's better to have a learner next to you. When the learner has to learn at home it is very difficult because the environment is not conducive here, there are no internet cafes around so the learner only relies on the parent's phone of which

some of the parents do not have smart phones. So yea, it was difficult for our learners to learn during the first lockdown at home.

### **Learning under the new normal brought us few changes and challenges**

I should start by mentioning that, on the issue of safety I think we are covered as the school. There is not much, except that last year (2020) when we had to resume after the first lockdown there was too much fear, anxiety and frustration from the sides of both the parents and us as teachers. However, now parents feel comfortable about their children coming to school, because we make sure that the COVID-19 protocols are all observed and we are very consistent, not only to learners but to everyone coming to our school. Thus, safety is good and parents are not stressed about it.

Then, on the issue of work load given to learners, there are challenges. There are those parents who are complaining that there is a lot of work given to their children. They also complain about the grammar and some work that seem to be difficult for them as they are supposed to help their children at home. However, I must say that some parents are fine with the work given to their kids, while others are complaining to an extent that they would ask that, what the teachers are doing now if so much work is given to be done at home with them helping their kids. Then, we tell them that we give a lot of work because we are trying to cover all the topics having too little time, and it's very difficult for teachers since learners are coming to school on alternating days. We tell the parents to bear with us when we give learners home works, assignments and projects; they must help them. Other than that, their kids are not going to make it.

Now, when I look at the performance of our learners during this time of the COVID-19 pandemic, I have noticed that there are changes. This issue of coming to school on different days alternating has got a negative impact, because as learners become absent for some days you find that some of them did not even properly do the work that they were given to do at home during those days in which it was not their turn to attend. So, that alone hampers their performance academically. Now even when we analyse the results we are having a target of 70%, but currently we are somewhere around 50% to 55%, and I say that if there was no COVID-19 pandemic we could have reached our target. It's even worse with those learners who are in the foundation phase, because if nobody helps them at home they come back blank, and the teacher needs to go back to what was taught and redo it.

### **Parents' educational level is not a big concern for us**

When it comes to the educational level of parents, most of them do not have matric (Grade 12). If you look at the data that is captured in our SA-SAMS system, even those who have got matric are very few, most of them have got something like grade 7, grade 8 and grade 9 on average. As we continue working under the COVID-19 pandemic, we are making sure that we try to understand parents with their different circumstances, and we try to meet them halfway as we know that most of them have low educational level, so we cannot expect more academic contribution from them to our learners. Some time ago before the pandemic, we have even tried different strategies to help them improve their academic level because at the end of the day it is much better for a learner to be assisted at home when the parent is educated. We have tried as the school to recruit them to join adult basic education, unfortunately they don't get time because they are working. That would be more beneficial now that learners are required to do more of their work at home with the help of parents.

However, some of the parents, even if they are not that much educated, they do try to help their children concerning their learning. They do especially when we give them home works, assignments and projects. To be specific, when it comes to projects, there is an information that learners must access in their parents' smart phones using Google. For example in grade 6 recently they are doing project about one of the leaders who contributed to the freedom of South Africa. So the response is very positive from other parents, even though somewhere somehow they do struggle, but I always advise the learners because I am also teaching grades 4, 5 and 6, to get some more assistance from their older brothers and sisters who are in high schools or have completed grade 12 if possible. Mostly those are the people who are actively involved in helping our learners to cope with their homework and other tasks as home learning continues to be the best option during this time of the pandemic. So I must say that, the low level of parents' education causes some challenges during this critical time of the pandemic, because some parents lack experience to handle their children academically. However, as I have mentioned that other parents cooperate and they do cooperate fully with the arrangements of the school that have been made to continue with the learning during this time of the pandemic. Even if they are not educated enough but some of them always encourage their kids to do their school work at home as they continue to learn under the COVID-19 regulations, they ask for other people to help their kids at home, and have

attended as we have called them to come to the school. There is some positive engagement we have from other parents, they do play some part in their children's learning during this critical time, but even before the pandemic. So I would say that, for us the educational level is not a major concern when we are looking at the parental involvement during this time of the pandemic. Because there are many ways in which parents can be engaged in their children's learning process without them having to know the content or the subject matter. Before the COVID-19 pandemic surfaced, we used to have field trips and educational excursions. We would invite learners' parents to accompany us, and it was another effective way of making them realise that they are very important in all the activities taking place in the school regardless of their educational level, just their presence was all that mattered.

### **I believe in having meetings with learners' parents more often**

As the school we try to invite parents to come meet with us. In these meetings we are updating parents about their children's performance academically, and we are also encouraging parents about the COVID-19 protocols that they should also insist to their children at home and when they come to school. So far we have not been using one venue when conducting these meetings to ensure COVID-19 protocols. We split them into different sections, but at least we don't have many learners in our school, they are about 350. So, we don't deal with many parents. We just use four to five classes to conduct these meetings, because not all parents do attend also. We are making sure that we call parents quarterly. I think so far this year (2021) we have called about three parents meetings, focusing on the gaps that we have identified after we have assessed learners each and every term since we are still working under the pandemic. Apart from these meetings, we have SBST in our school. SBST stands for School Based Support Team. With this team we are assisting learners who are having learning barriers. We try to interact with parents and the struggling learners on one-on-one sessions to see what can be done to help the learner. We identify a learner's problem and then call a parent, and if we see that the child has a problem that needs attention of social workers we do contact them, but with the permission of parents. The parent has to sign the consent form. This continues even more now that we are working under the COVID-19 pandemic, as learners are facing different challenges with learning at home. Mostly these days we call those parents whose children have got learning barriers, so that they won't be left behind while we are also facing some challenges due to learning under the COVID-19 situation. Also we still ensure

that we issue reports at the end of every term, so that parents can see how their children have performed for each term and see if they have improved or not.

### **Community partnership is one of our key tactics**

In our school we have been trying by all means to work in partnership with a variety of structures available in our community, so that the learning of learners continues during this time of the pandemic. By doing this, we are trying to bring parents closer to us, so that we can have a positive relation that will make them to be involved in learners' educational activities, and thus, improving learners' academic success even in the midst of the crisis. Among these structures I can mention; Community Policing Forum, and the Traditional Authority Committee. The latter is under the leadership of our Chief. These structures have been very much active during this time of the pandemic in ensuring that the COVID-19 protocols are adhered to by the whole community, so that what we tell learners to do here in school is the same as what is being encouraged by the parents at home.

There are also other activities that I am involved in as the school principal that enhance our connection with the community in order to ensure that the learning culture in our young kids is being instilled and developed. I participate in the war-room. War-room involves all departments (education, health, social development, etc.) working together to deal with social ills that affect our young generation in this area. However, there are numerous challenges one faces due to social, economic and environmental conditions. It has become clear now during this time of the COVID-19 pandemic that, the lack of learning culture in our rural parents and learners makes it difficult for home learning to effectively take place. Hence, we strive for better skills and strategies each and every day as learning continues under the COVID-19 pandemic.

As the school principal I even ensure that as the school we fully support small kids from the pre-schools (crèches). We try by all means to provide any support in terms of resources like teaching aids that we have so that those young kids and their parents can see the importance of education right where they are. Now that there is a pandemic, we have somehow been distracted, because it has limited the attendance of these kids in pre-schools.

### **4.3 Narrative of Mr Qinisela**

#### **My brief academic journey**

I was born in the South Coast of KwaZulu-Natal, in 1971. Growing up in rural areas meant that I also attended rural-school education, and I made it with that rural-school education. I take it as a motivation that, the environment and conditions in rural schools do not necessarily mean that rural learners cannot make it in the academic and economic world. Hence, we have produced a lot of graduates from our school. As much as the issue of the availability of resources is a big challenge in our rural schools compared to urban schools, it does not mean that rural learners cannot be successful in education. As one of the rural learners who strived for better life, I was able to enrol at the University of Zululand in 1989, and completed my Senior Secondary Teacher's Diploma in 1991 and Bachelor of Paedagogics (B Paed) Degree in 1992. I started teaching in 1993. While working as a teacher, I continued with my studies and attained Bachelor of Education degree (B Ed) in 1996. I went on to graduate for Post Graduate Diploma in Education Management which is part of Master's programme in Education. Thereafter, I studied for Diploma in Human Resources Management and graduated in 2006, and lastly I pursued Diploma in Local and Provincial Law, and graduated in 2011. I have been the principal of this school from 2012, and it has been a great experience for me. Other than being a school principal, I am a family man. I am married and I have one boy and two girls. I love my family and always ensure that I am a good example to my children and above all, I always influence them with positive ideas about life. Education is a priority to my family. My first born has just obtained his Honour's degree qualification. I am also a dedicated church member. I am serving in the Free Methodist Church as the delegate and member of the Bishops Council. Serving in the church helps me to also be able to help learners emotionally and spiritually other than focusing on the academic side of life only.

#### **The pandemic made things worse for us**

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to the non-participation of parents which was also not that good even before the pandemic. Some children do not get educational help at home, because their parents are not educated. Other learners live with their grandparents, which makes it more difficult for them to get any help with their learning at home. Most of the parents are not employed. Furthermore they are not educated. In this way, some of them do not value the education of their children. So, they cannot help them with their school work. Again, since most parents are

unemployed, it makes it hard for them to buy some required learning resources for their children, especially those resources that are not provided by the department of education.

Now, due to the COVID-19 pandemic our learners have not been attending school every day, but using a rotation system, where they come on different days according to their grades. This rotation system that has been brought to place in order to reduce crowding of learners during school attendance, on its own has brought some problems because in other families parents cannot even make time for their children's school work. So it just becomes worse because if these learners were attending every day, at least they would spend a lot of time doing their school work here in school with their teachers. Some parents do not even check the work of their children. After 5 days being away from school because of rotation system, you find that some parents do not sign learners' work just to acknowledge that they saw it. Under the new normal, as we are learning through the rotation system, other parents do not even bother themselves with knowing on which days their children attend and do not encourage them to attend during their turn.

Some learners do not stay in their parents' places, they live in lodging places near the school because of the long distances they have to travel from home to school. As a result some of them use that opportunity negatively, by not attending school regularly even now during the rotation system, because their parents are not there to see them. When you try to contact the parent on matters like this, you sometimes find that the parent doesn't have an idea of what is happening in school. The cooperation of parents has long been lacking in our school and in the area at large. Sometimes when you invite the parent to come to school, they would tell you that they are very busy and working. However, one should mention that, there are some parents who are cooperating. They try to avail themselves in matters concerning their children's learning. So, I would say that, despite the fact that most of the parents are not participating well in learners' learning, but there are those who show some positive engagement.

When I am analysing the learners' performance, I notice that there is change. The academic performance before the COVID-19 was far better than the current one. However, I believe that this has got nothing to do with the level of parental involvement. I think this system of rotation is causing a decline in learners' academic performance, because you find that after having been away for a week, the learner has forgotten some of the work done previously. In this way the teacher at

times has to start afresh. Even in preparation for the examination, now this new system affects academic performance because there is not enough time to work with all the learners in school.

### **The gap between urban and rural schools has enlarged**

Unfortunately, I cannot talk about parental involvement in our rural schools without having a quick look at how it is compared to that of schools in the urban areas near us. There is a huge difference on parental involvement in urban schools compared to our rural schools during this time of the COVID-19 pandemic. I don't know whether it is the mentality of parents that the urban schools are better. The reason I am saying this, is because I have noticed that there are rural parents who afford to send their children to urban schools, and their involvement during this critical time of the pandemic is total different from other rural parents who have their children in our school. Since the COVID-19 restrictions have been adjusted, we now invite parents to meetings, and they don't attend properly in numbers, they would just make excuses. We hold our meetings during the day and in urban schools they have also arranged their meetings with parents and they hold theirs in the evening, but the parents there will go an extra mile to hire a transport and go to the meeting. If a parent, for instance, has got two children, one is in the urban school and the other one is in the rural school you find that the parent focuses more on the one in urban school. The parents of learners in urban schools even try to get someone who can help their learners with the school work during the home learning. However, for their rural school children, they would just ignore. Sometimes I even think that, maybe parents get more involved in urban school because they pay some fees there, whereas in our schools nothing is paid. So maybe, that also contributes to that difference we see.

### **We try to maintain a good communication and relationship with parents**

Before the COVID-19, we used to invite parents to accompany us whenever we had sports trips. By doing this we were ensuring that parents are part of all our school activities, and this helped even in terms of learner-discipline. Because learners would always have fear of misbehaving if there are parents around. It is our mandate that we do not engage in any discussion and approval of decisions, and any school activity or event without making parents aware of it. However, the pandemic has somehow affected our relation with the parents and has limited us in the manner in which we used to engage with them in our discussions and other activities.

Lately we have been trying to invite parents on one to one talks. The method has somehow been successfully working a little bit. We try to find means to keep our communication with the parents by making calls in order to update them and invite them to participate in learners' learning, but some of them cannot be found. Some change their phone numbers and never update us in school, and so we lose their contact. We even write circulars or letters to the parents inviting them to come and have some one on one talks, but the response is not always positive. I should mention however, that in some cases you find that parents are discouraged from participating in their children's learning, because we as principals and teachers at times tend to think that, rural parents know nothing about the curriculum and then we ignore them in some matters that should involve them. However, learning under the COVID-19 has taught many of us about the importance of having a positive attitude towards the parents, as they are the ones who are very important during home learning. I always try to inform other principals and also teachers in my school, especially the young ones who are still new to the field of teaching that they should not think that parents know nothing about the curriculum, instead they should engage them more in the curriculum matters so that the parents will feel valued, and now that we are working under the critical time of the pandemic it is very important to acknowledge this.

### **School's efforts in meeting learners' needs during home learning**

We are trying by all means to ask parents to play a huge role in helping learners learn at home since the attendance is no longer the normal one. Learners now attend few days rotating, except for grade 12. In our school grade 8 and 10 attend together in a week period, and then the following week is for grade 9 and 11. So this system requires parents to be hands-on. I have also been encouraging teachers to form WhatsApp groups with their classes. Some are successful and some are not. For instance grade 12A (Science class) has got an active WhatsApp group, where there is an effective communication between learners and their teacher. One of the problems that cause some of these groups not to function well is the issue of learners lacking data for internet connection and then they end up not being part of these groups. Now that learners do not come to school in a normal way as it used to be before the pandemic, we ensure that they are given enough work to do at home during the days where they are not attending. We have also asked the parents to sign learners' work just to acknowledge that they see it. This is for us as the school to know that the parent has checked learner's work at home. Even though some of the work come back not

signed, we sometimes understand that it might relate to the issue of illiteracy for some parents, and also other learners do not live with parents as I have mentioned before.

During the first level of lockdown in the country around April 2020, teachers used to send school work to learners through WhatsApp, even though some of the learners could not access it due to lack of cell phones and data. There were days where teachers would invite some learners who could not access school work through WhatsApp to come and collect their work in school. Those learners with WhatsApp were asked by the teachers to tell those who were not on WhatsApp to come to school and meet teachers to take some learning material to go and work at home. This was possible because most of learners live in the same area, and they could get into contact with each other without having to travel a long distance. So, in this way we tried as the school as from the first lockdown in the country to ensure that we connect with our learners with the aim of keeping them going.

### **Our cooperation with various community structures**

I think it's very important to mention that, as much as the parental involvement in learners' learning is lacking, but the engagement of some of the parents or community members based on the issues of school safety and welfare of our learners and everyone in the school is very good. Thus, it also contributes to a good atmosphere for teaching and learning. The cooperation between our school and the structures around the school is very good. Our tribal chief is very cooperative when it comes to educational matters. Local (community) structures have also helped us a lot, especially now during the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, we have a clinic near by the school, and the nurses from the clinic would sometimes come to our school to make awareness campaign about the COVID-19. Above that, some parents locally are very dedicated when it comes to the safety of the school. For instance, when there was a looting, it came to our ears that the government institutions were targeted. Then, some parents stood up and tried to be watchful for that kind of instance not to take place in our school. There is one businessman who was once a learner in our school, who just donated masks for our learners as we are facing the pandemic and have to always follow the safety precautions like the wearing of masks. Hence, I can say some community members are willing to work with us in terms of safety and welfare. However, in terms of parental involvement in learners' learning specifically we are still facing challenges due to many factors I have mentioned like socio-economic and educational level issues.

### **Parents' complaints and challenges concerning home learning**

I have received numerous complaints from our learners' parents concerning what they feel are the challenges they face with regards to the work given to their children to be done at home. They complain that it is very difficult for some of them to help their children with school work, especially on the subjects that they do not know. As I have mentioned that the level of education for these parents is low and others are completely illiterate. To some parents, it is a matter of subjects that are learnt by their children. For instance, you can imagine a parent who learnt general studies during their school days now having to help his/her child doing physical sciences or mathematics. Other parents are saying that, they have always been willing to help their children, but only to find out that some learners themselves are running away from doing their work at home. Other parents have indicated that during the first lockdown, their children took those days as holidays, and didn't want to do their school work. These complaints from parents show that the process of learning at home is not yet going to be an easy one. The culture of learning outside the school is not yet effective in our community. Even some of our learners are the ones who are running away from learning while at home.

### **We are trying to implement new strategies**

As the school we have to always find a way to ensure that learners perform better in their studies even if there are different challenges like the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, there are strategies that we are trying to implement. Previously we used to invite all the parents to come to school and have a discussion about the academic performance of their children. However, now we are inviting them only per grade to encourage their engagement, because we always want them to feel that they are very important in the process of teaching and learning. Recently (on the 22nd of September 2021), we invited one delegate from our district's education office to come and address grade 12 learners together with their parents, in order to encourage grade 12 learners to put more effort in their studies and for parents to give more support to their children by all means possible. We also have now decided that each grade should meet quarterly to have discussions after analysing the learners' results and try to come up with strategies together with the parents as to how do we improve the academic performance in our school. We believe that what we are trying to do will help improve the engagement of parents in our school.

#### **4.4 Narrative of Mrs Lubanzi**

##### **My relationship with the community**

I was born in Izingolweni area, KwaZulu-Natal. My parents relocated to this place in the year I was born. I am married and blessed with three daughters, and one grandchild. I have obtained Bachelor of Arts (BA) in 1992, Higher Diploma in Education (HDE) in 1993, and B Ed degree in 2000. I have been serving in the position of the principal for 9 years overall, but three years in this particular school. Apart from being the school principal, I am an active church member, serving in the executive committee as the secretary. I also help in the church with the identification of needy families to be given food parcels, and visitation of orphans for prayer and emotional support. This makes me to be well familiar with working in cooperation with rural families.

##### **My experiences on Black Women in leadership**

Black women in leadership experience discrimination on the basis of gender. There are instances where as a woman you have to do five times what a man would do to prove your competency as a leader.

Women struggles are real. As we see the issues of women abuse on daily basis, it shows that our society is more patriarchal. As female school principals we are facing numerous challenges. The first challenge is that our department has not yet fully recognised that females should occupy more leadership positions. As much as I do not have an accurate statistics, but my understanding is that, in most cases female principals are found in primary schools, and then secondary schools are mostly dominated by the male principals. This is one thing that makes women to be undermined, because for too long our society has not trusted that the female principals can head the secondary schools. Thus, female principals are seen as being incapable. However, the truth of the matter is that, women are able to show their skills and capabilities when given an opportunity in leadership role.

In my school there was once a project of water and sanitation, and then the national education department delegates came for site evaluation. I observed that, there were decisions that were then taken without my involvement. Then I had to stand up and challenge that situation, because I knew the policy, and I was able to dispute other decisions because I knew the protocol. So, what I can say is that, if a female school principal is experiencing such challenges as the one I have mentioned

in my case they should show that they know the principles aligned with the policy, they should believe in themselves. Once that is done, as a female leader you earn respect and dignity.

In my former school where I was a principal before coming to this school, there were around 8 secondary schools in that area, and I was the only female principal. When I came to Margate, I also found out that there were still few female principals in secondary schools, but it's better than where I started. Then, as I try to communicate with these few female principals I find that they are experiencing some of the discriminatory issues at times. The community also is not yet exposed to the issue of gender equality. They just know that if the school is a secondary, therefore it requires a male principal so that it will function well. However, if as a principal you continually prove to the community that you know your story, you slowly start to get massive support and credit from the community. So, for me I will say that, it's not bad on the side of the community, they do have trust in me as I continually serve with integrity and boldness in the school.

### **Collaboration with parents has always been poor in my school**

Our school serves learners from poor family background, even though there are families who have a good financial status but the community is mostly poor. Most of the parents in this area are domestic workers, and some work as gardeners and others work on the farms. In other families parents have to leave their children alone and stay in town where they are trying to make a living. Some learners are coming from the child-headed families, and others live with grandparents. This means that even those who are working they are not earning sufficient income to provide all required learning resources for their children. Another issue is that, most of the parents' educational level is very low. Some of the parents did not even complete grade 12. Even those who completed grade 12 most of them do not have any higher education qualification. So, it becomes difficult for most of the parents to be able to help their children with school work as most of the learning takes place at home now that there is COVID-19 pandemic. At times they would even feel ashamed that they cannot even understand what is learnt by their children. As a result, some of them just decide to ignore academic work of their children at home.

When I look at how parents participate in their children's learning in urban schools around our area, I find that, it's very much better compared to ours. I think this is because the educational level of parents who are sending their children to these schools is better compared to the parents in rural schools. Also, the issue of the facility and resource availability makes things easier in urban

schools. So, the issue of contextual factors affect how parents participate in their children's learning process. Another notable point is that, in urban schools here around our area they usually conduct their parents' meetings in the evening. It is working for them, because most of the parents in urban schools are well-off economically. They have cars, it is easy for them to travel to attend meetings in the evenings. However, I must say that, as much as we are seeing poor engagement from parents in our school during this time of the pandemic, not all parents distance themselves from their children's learning matters. Some parents even as uneducated and financially-struggling as they are, do support us and their children by always monitoring them during home learning. They try to encourage their children to work hard during this time of the crisis and become something better, and not allowing the crisis caused by the pandemic to discourage them. These parents want their children to have a better future because they themselves were not able to achieve that.

Now the COVID-19 just brought more problems. The parents themselves have been affected by the COVID-19 in different ways. Some of them have lost their jobs, and that has made the situation worse socio-economically. Now, the way in which they participate in their children's learning is very limited. Some parents don't even have time to spend with their children and discuss school matters, as I have mentioned that some of the parents live in towns for work purposes. Thus, you find that the parent only comes home on a weekend and they will just be busy with their family duties not recognising that they need some time for their children's school matters too. During the first lockdown level 5 which started in 2020, learners were required to learn at home online through the use of smart phones, computers, and other electronic devices. Here it was not possible because the needed resources are limited, and some parents are not able to buy their children all the required resources due to their low socio-economic status. Even if learners have cell phones or their parent's cell phones, the main problem would be money to buy internet bundles for online learning. During this time of COVID-19 pandemic the school is set up to allow for COVID-19 regulations. The school adopted a rotation attending approach to teaching. Since grade 10 is the last grade in our school, we treat them as our grade 12. Thus they come to school every day. Then grade 8 and 9 attend 2 or 3 days per week alternatively. This approach demands that learners do their work at home during the days when they are not at school, so this requires that parents supervise and help them at home. However, due to the reasons I have mentioned above, most of the parents are not

participating in their children's learning effectively and that has a huge impact in learners' lack of motivation.

### **Our school meetings are not always convenient to all parents**

I think from our side as the school I can mention that, calling parents to come to meet us during the days of the week might have influenced lack of their participation. Because, as I have mentioned that most of these parents are domestic workers, and farm workers, they do not have benefits of leave. As a result, they end up not being part of the school activities. However, we also try to hold other meetings on the weekends, and then you find that for parents who are working hard during the week, they prefer to do their family responsibilities during the weekends. Another issue that makes it difficult for some parents to attend those weekend meetings is that of community ceremonies or social gatherings. If the school-parents meeting coincides with the social gathering in the community, the attendance becomes very poor. Holding parents meetings in the evening is also not possible for us here because, most of the parents come home from work in the afternoon very tired. Also, the issue of transport is a challenge for them as most of them don't have cars.

I think also the issue of parents' low educational level causes them to feel as if their discussions will not be effective in the meetings. Thus, they just leave it to the school to take any decision concerning learning matters. For instance, we usually conduct grade 9 meetings, where we orientate learners and parents about the subject packages that can be chosen by learners in grade 10. So, you find that parents mostly would just listen but not interact with us, and they would just accept whatever that is chosen by their children. This trend continues even now during this time of the COVID-19 pandemic as we try to let parents be part of the discussions concerning decisions made. Another challenge that we have concerning the attendance of parents to school meetings is that, as some of the learners are being taken care of by their grandparents, it becomes difficult for these grandparents to attend school activities in most cases, due to different physical challenges caused by aging.

### **Learning through social media and internet platforms is still a challenge**

Since the pandemic has put a high demand in the usage of internet and electronic devices for teaching and learning process as from the first phase of lockdown, I communicated with my

educators, emphasizing to them that they must try to form WhatsApp groups with learners. On those WhatsApp groups it's either a parent's phone number or a learner's one would be used. However, I must say that there were challenges on this one as of the beginning, because of the issue of data bundles for WhatsApp and internet usage. You would find that the work/information that the teacher had sent to learners via WhatsApp not all learners would be able to access it. Others would access it later, when it's long overdue. So what I can say is that, this thing of learning through socials and internet for now in our school is not working effectively for all. This is because parents cannot provide required resources like cell phone data, and others do not even have smartphones and laptops. You find that only few learners are able to access the learning material and tasks electronically. However, we tried to save some lessons on USBs and laptops during the lockdown, and we made sure that when learners were back at school, especially those who could not be able to access work through socials and internet could be able to catch up. Even after the first lockdown, as learners were allowed to resume attending, we didn't stop these WhatsApp groups, they still exist even now because we are trying to encourage learners to continue to learn at home since they are not all attending every day.

### **COVID-19 pandemic has caused a high rate of learner-dropout in my school**

One of the negative results of the COVID-19 in our school is the issue of learner-dropout. This issue has mostly affected girls, especially those who have fallen pregnant during this time of the pandemic. The reason is that, when these girls give birth they feel that they can take some time and bond with their new born babies just because they already have some days off from school due to the new attending system imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. They then think that even if they take some few months, they would still catch-up the work that has been done just because the learning speed and covering up of the curriculum is not as fast as it used to be. Only to find out that when they think about coming back to school the work is too much and they just decide to stay at home for whole year. This has happened since 2020 after the first lockdown. It is even worse because even if they are in the WhatsApp groups, they are not able to make enough time due to their new parental responsibilities they have on their new born babies.

Also, what I think has caused learner-dropout, was the fear of the pandemic. Some learners have seen their family members losing their lives especially in December 2020 and January 2021 during the second wave. So some learners just decided to stay at home and never came back to school

when the school opened in February. Another reason for this learner-dropout problem in our school is the fact that some learners only live with their grandparents, and these grandparents have comorbidities. So they feared that they might be the carriers of the virus and affect their grannies, who happen to be their only financial providers at times. Thus, I would say that some learners have been encouraged by their parents to stay at home, but also some learners had just decided on their own. I must say that some of these learners have control over their parents.

### **We have kept parents updated**

As the school we are trying to keep parents informed about their children's learning. We called parents' meetings in November 2020 and March 2021, where we were looking at the challenges that I have mentioned about learners' learning during this critical time of the COVID-19 pandemic. Some parents made promises that they will try by all means to at least get smart phones and data bundles for their children to be able to learn even at home. However, we emphasised that our stronghold as the school for now is that if learners do come to school during their assigned days, we will always ensure that we thoroughly teach them. So we asked the parents in our meetings that, what we greatly need from them for now is for them to encourage their children to come to school. This is because we have also noticed the high rate of learner-dropout during this time of COVID-19.

We have assured the parents that they should not have any fear concerning their children's lives when they are at school, because we always ensure to follow all the safety measures (sanitising, social distancing and wearing of masks). We have also agreed as the school together with parents that we conduct some extra classes for the learners who are lacking, especially those who are not on WhatsApp groups. Because for those who are on WhatsApp groups it's easy for them to communicate with their teachers electronically while they are at home. As for now there is a positive response, because some learners have also indicated that their parents have now provided them with cell phones for learning, and for some parents it's clear that they are still struggling financially as I have explained about their socio-economic status. However, there is no pressure on the parents as I have just mentioned that we try to help with extra classes for all learners to catch-up. So eventually we will get there.

### **We do not give learners lot of work to do at home**

We have developed a strategy of implementing a homework register. This register indicates, especially during the days where learners are not attending at school, that which subject teachers should give them the work to do while at home. We do not want to burden them with a lot of work to do at home, so we have decided that the subjects should alternate. The maximum is five activities/ subjects per week. The departmental heads then have got a responsibility to monitor if teachers are following the principles, and also to see if learners do work at home and their work is marked. By this we know that parents do play their part at home by giving their children some time for their studies, even if they cannot help with the subject matter. Once a month, I then look at the departmental heads' reports and indicate if there are some gaps. One of the reasons that we ensure not to give learners a lot of work to do at home during this time of the COVID-19 pandemic is that some parents have sent some complaints before, saying that the work given to their children is too much and not easy for them as parents when they are helping children. As I have mentioned earlier about their low educational level. So, what we have decided to do as we continue teaching and learning under the COVID-19 pandemic is that, teachers must explain thoroughly to the learners what is expected from that work, and how to do it. Also if learners come across problems while working at home and the parent or anyone at home is not able to assist, they should use the WhatsApp groups (those who are on WhatsApp) to ask their teachers and get some guidance so that they will not overburden their parents. This is because the parent at times will feel embarrassed if they cannot help their children with school work.

### **We are always trying our best to involve parents in different ways**

The issue of working with parents is not an easy one in our school. Even before the COVID-19, as I have mentioned that it has been challenging to get parents into participating in their children's learning due to different factors I mentioned and due to lack of interest to some parents. However, as the school we haven't given up especially during this critical time. We are trying our best to get parents involved in learners' learning. Since we are using the rotation system, we have now encouraged the parents or any one at home living with the child to make sure that they sign their children's work at home just to acknowledge that they have checked the work that learners are given to do. We have also developed a strategy of doing a newsletter, whereby we inform parents about learners' academic performance. Furthermore, we have decided to develop the issue of

giving awards to high performing learners in front of their parents before the pandemic. We used to invite a large number of parents, but now we organise the event in such a way that we only invite few parents – for learners who have obtained positions 1, 2 and 3. We do this in order to follow COVID-19 protocols where large number of people meeting in one place is not allowed. So in our case it means that we only invite 9 parents because we have 3 grades. This is done quarterly after we have finalised learners’ results for each and every term. By all these strategies we are trying to involve parents in whatever that concerns learning of their children so that we ensure the improvement in learners’ academic performance together.

We also have been trying as the school to have a good working relationship with the structures in the community long before even the COVID-19 pandemic came. There is a QLTC committee that we are working in cooperation with, in order to ensure that teaching and learning is not affected. For instance, they help us in terms of learners who try to bunk classes and go home using exits that are not allowed (dodging school). So this committee ensures that they watch-out for those instances not to happen. This committee is made up of the School Governing Body (SGB) members and other community members. We also have School Safety and Security Committee. Our school in the past has been targeted with burglary and theft, and we have now been working with this committee a lot. The committee comprises of South African Police (SAPS) officer, members of Community Policing Forum (CPF), security officer, one representative from our tribal authority (Induna), and parents component. These parents were co-opted by looking at their interest in school safety. Some of them don’t even have children in our school, but they are concerned about the safety of the school. The committee is very much active in ensuring safety in our school.

### **Academic performance improvement during this time is not the result of improved parental engagement**

Before the pandemic there was this tendency of thinking that parents in this area do not engage themselves in learner’s learning that much. We had even accepted that as a norm that parents do not see the need to fully participate in their children’s school work. I think after the COVID-19 pandemic most of the parents were forced to engage themselves in learner’s learning in one way or the other. So, I would say that, overall their involvement has improved. They have noticed mostly that they have got a role to play in learners’ academic life. Despite of all the challenges I have mentioned earlier, I would say that the parental involvement is much better compared to what

it was before the pandemic. Even though it is still not good, but I am saying it has improved just because before the pandemic, it was very poor.

Now when I am looking at our learners' academic performance, firstly I should mention that I don't think it would be fair and justifiable to compare the academic performance before the pandemic and now when there is a pandemic. This is because, after the COVID-19 pandemic the annual teaching plans for different subjects were trimmed. This means that the learners now are learning little compared to what was learned before the pandemic. So yes, learners' performance has improved, but not because of parental involvement. I believe that it has improved just because the work done now is not as much as the work that was done before. For instance, in term 2 this year (2021) learners did not write examination, they only wrote other formal tasks like assignments, investigation, etc. even if they are given tests, it's only short tests because they haven't learnt much. As a result, most of them pass those tests here in our school.

#### **4.5 Conclusion**

This chapter presented the three storied narratives from the participants of this study. The storied narratives present experiences of the principals, on how they have been experiencing the involvement of parents in learners' learning during the COVID-19 pandemic in their schools. These narratives reveal how is the communication between different parents and these schools, and how does that communication determine the level of parental engagement in learning of learners. The principals have revealed a lot of similar experiences, since these schools are in rural areas with similar characteristics. However, there are some differences in their experiences.

The next chapter presents analysis of narratives. This is where I have analysed the storied narratives where similar categories and also particularities were then put together into few and manageable main narratives. These categories include; principals' experiences of the level of parental involvement during the COVID-19, factors that contribute to the lack of parents' involvement in these rural schools and strategies used by the principals to encourage parental involvement, and overcome some of the challenges. These categories enabled me to successfully identify the main themes present in the data.

## CHAPTER 5

### ANALYSIS OF NARRATIVES

#### 5.1 Introduction

My first level of analysis, narrative analysis, was presented in the preceding Chapter 4. In this preceding chapter, I presented the storied narratives of Mr Zidane, Mr Qinisela and Mrs Lubanzi (all pseudonyms), the three rural school principals. My participants and I collaborated on the reconstruction of the stories. The reconstructed stories are narrated in the first person and they portray the lived experiences of the school principals. Their personal and professional experiences as school leaders fostering school-parent cooperation in promoting successful learning of learners in Margate rural schools were shared in their storied narratives.

This Chapter presents the analysis of narratives (deconstruction of the narratives) of my participants in order to answer the two sub-questions presented in the first Chapter. In this chapter I made an effort to obtain insights into the experiences of the school principals pertaining to rural parental involvement in the learning of learners during the COVID-19 pandemic by analysing their narratives to find similarities and differences in their experiences. The Chapter is divided into two sections. Section A focuses on answering the first sub-question: *How are rural parents participating in their children's learning during the COVID-19 pandemic?*

Section B attempts to answer the second sub-question: *What do school principals do to promote parental involvement in schools located in rural settings during the COVID-19 pandemic?*

#### 5.2 SECTION A

##### **How are rural parents participating in their children's learning during the COVID-19 pandemic?**

My analysis for this question was informed by the Epstein's Model of Parental Involvement presented in chapter two. Epstein's Model is based on six types of involvement (See Chapter two, page 30), and these were used as a priori themes for analysing the first sub-question, and then the sub-themes were created under these priori themes. I re-read the narratives from the participants several times and selected evidence that spoke to each of six types of parental involvement outlined by Epstein's Model and the sub-themes thereof.

### 5.2.1 Parenting

Parenting is the primary responsibility of parents, and it entails ensuring the health and safety of their children, as well as creating strong parenting skills and providing a quiet environment at home in which the children can concentrate on their learning activities and homework completion (Pourrajab, Ghani, & Panahi, 2018). I present my findings on this theme under two sub-themes namely, Parental availability in children's developmental process and Parents' understanding of educational matters.

#### 5.2.1.1 Parental availability in children's developmental process during the pandemic

Parents should have a basic awareness of their children's development process in order to provide a conducive atmosphere for their children (Griffin & Steen, 2010). Learning under the COVID-19 pandemic is one of the situations that brought a lot of changes in children's developmental process, as they had to adapt to new ways of doing things (Bhamani et al., 2020). This had an effect on their emotional, psychological and thus, academic functioning which affect their entire developmental process.

From the narratives of the participants, it appeared that most of the parents were not available in their children's developmental process during the changes brought by the COVID-19 due to different reasons such as, parents staying far from their homes due to work purposes, and also some children living away from home to be closer to school and thus, lacking parental availability. From the narratives of Mr Qinisela it appears that, some learners live away from home due to long distances between the school and their homes. He explained:

*Some learners do not stay in their parents' places, they live in lodging places near the school because of the long distances they have to travel from home to school. As a result some of them use that opportunity negatively, by not attending school regularly even now during the rotation system, because their parents are not there to see them. When you try to contact the parent on matters like this, you sometimes find that the parent doesn't have an idea of what is happening in school.*

From the evidence above it appears that some of the parents were not even aware of what was happening in their children's life as learning continued under the COVID-19 changes. Children will recognise the importance of education and, as a result, will be successful learners if their

parents provide a quiet location for them to study and complete homework, review their schoolwork, and chat about what happened at school (Duma, 2019). Mrs Lubanzi also had something to say concerning the lack of availability of parents in their children as learning continued under the pandemic. She said:

*In other families parents have to leave their children alone and stay in town where they are trying to make a living. Some learners are coming from the child-headed families, and others live with grandparents. This makes it difficult for the parents to be available for their children as they learn during this critical time of the COVID-19.*

Emerging from the evidence then is that, parental availability is lacking in some of the learners in rural schools, and this is surely one of the reasons that causes rural learners to lack some of the basic skills and needs that could have been acquired from getting sufficient time to spend with the parents. Parenting entails all of the tasks carried out by the parents with the aim of creating happy and healthy children who will develop into capable learners. Therefore, if parents are not available this will not be achieved. Parents can learn about their children's growth, health, safety, and household conditions through activities that foster this type of involvement (Đurišić & Bunijevac, 2017). This means that if parents avail themselves and make time for their children they develop skills and more knowledge about how their children's needs for development. It is crucial to highlight, however, from the above extracts that the rural parents in the study did not necessarily have a choice (Đurišić & Bunijevac, 2017). It appeared in the narratives that, they were unable to devote time to their children's academic and social life during this critical time of the pandemic since they were trying to make a life away from home and be able to feed their families. The socio-economic conditions did not allow them to be at home and make time for their children (Savage, 2017). Thus, schools should acknowledge that there are factors forcing parents to be unavailable for their children's learning (Myende & Nhlumayo, 2020).

#### **5.2.1.2 Parents' understanding of educational matters**

All the three participants revealed that the level of education of parents in rural schools is usually very low. This obviously has a negative effect in how parents help learners at home when doing homework and other learning related matters. Parents who are uneducated may lack the skills or motivation to provide tutoring for their children's academic success. This could lead to children's academic difficulties developing over time (Chen, Kong, Gao & Mo, 2018). Even though Mr

Zidane revealed that for him the level of education for parents has not been a major concern, but he stated that it was still a challenge when parents were not knowledgeable enough about educational matters in order for them to help their children when learning at home during the COVID-19 pandemic doing homework. He explained:

*..... I always advise the learners because I am also teaching grades 4, 5 and 6, to get some more assistance from their older brothers and sisters who are in high schools or have completed grade 12 if possible. Mostly those are the people who are actively involved in helping our learners to cope with their homework and other tasks as home learning continues to be the best option during this time of the pandemic. So I must say that, the low level of parents' education causes some challenges during this critical time of the pandemic, because some parents lack experience to handle their children academically.*

Both Mr Qinisela and Mrs Lubanzi strongly believe that parental involvement during the COVID-19 pandemic could not be effective when learners had to spend most of their time learning at home because most of the parents are not well educated, and that made it difficult for them to help their children with school work. This is what Mr Qinisela said:

*Most of the parents are not employed. Furthermore they are not educated. In this way, some of them do not value the education of their children. So, they cannot help them with their school work.*

This shows that according to his experiences, many learners cannot get help at home with their school work if parents are not well educated. He went on to say:

*As I have mentioned that the level of education for these parents is low and others are completely illiterate. To some parents, it is a matter of subjects that are learnt by their children. For instance, you can imagine a parent who learnt general studies (e.g. history, biblical studies, and geography) during their school days now having to help his/her child doing physical sciences or mathematics.*

From the evidence above it appears that, according to Mr Qinisela if parents were well educated they would have helped their children with a lot of school work when learning at home during the COVID-19 pandemic. Mrs Lubanzi is in agreement with the experiences of Mr Qinisela. She is concerned that the low level of education in parents causes some of these parents to even ignore

all academic related matters because they feel ashamed for not being able to help their children when doing homework. She explained:

*Another issue is that, most of the parents' educational level is very low. Some of the parents did not even complete grade 12. Even those who completed grade 12 most of them do not have any higher education qualification. So, it becomes difficult for most of the parents to be able to help their children with school work as most of the learning takes place at home now that there is COVID-19 pandemic. At times they would even feel ashamed that they cannot even understand what is learnt by their children. As a result, some of them just decide to ignore academic work of their children at home.*

Many parents who are illiterate or unable to communicate in English believe that they are unable to help or provide anything that is academically helpful to their children (Duma, 2019). From the above evidence it is clear that the communication between parent and child concerning school work is therefore disrupted, and this means that there was a great challenge in some families when learning had to continue at home during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In their research Idris, Hussain and Ahmad (2020) reveal that learners' appropriate sustenance and development is dependent on their home environment; educated parents work hard to provide a supporting education environment for their children at home so that they can benefit from it, however uneducated parents frequently fail to provide learning environment that is conducive for their children at home. The evidence found from the narratives of all my three participants appears to be inspired by this idea that learners with educated parents at home during the COVID-19 pandemic were at a great advantage compared to those with uneducated parents. According to Idris, Hussain and Ahmad (2020) it is believed that, educated parents persuade their children to work hard for personal development by viewing education as the creator of morals and custodian of the soul. Parents and children's education are so tightly linked, therefore children's education can be enlightened by their parents' education (Idris, Hussain & Ahmad, 2020). It is clear that parents' academic success is more inspiring to their children, and it serves as a force that propels children to be willing to achieve more, to be confident and to be disciplined throughout their learning.

Even though the low educational level of parents is a challenge in their involvement, but there was a lot that parents could do to get involved in their children academic activities during the COVID-

19 pandemic. Parents could monitor their children while doing school work at home, their presence alone could motivate children even if parents do not understand the subject matter (Duma, 2019). Parents can also ask other people in the household to help children with school work (Bhamani et al., 2020). This is exactly what Mr Zidane said when he argued that he is not that much concerned about the educational level of parents, because most of the learners have older siblings and other family members who are educated and those are the people who had to ensure that they help learners at home with their school works during the pandemic. He explained:

*However, as I have mentioned that other parents cooperate and they do cooperate fully with the arrangements of the school. Even if they are not educated enough but some of them always encourage their kids to do their school work at home as they continue to learn under the COVID-19 regulations, they ask for other people to help their kids, and they attend when we call them, as uneducated as they are. There is some positive engagement we have from other parents, they do play some part in their children's learning. So I would say that, for us the educational level is not a major concern when we are looking at the parental involvement during this time of the pandemic. This is because there are many ways in which parents can be engaged in their children's learning process without them having to know the content or the subject matter.*

Involvement of parents is also determined by their responsibility at home that is by monitoring the learning of children regardless of educational level (Đurišić & Bunijevac, 2017). This means that even if the parent does not know the subject content, but their presence is very important when their children do their school work at home just to observe if the child is doing their work or not. This was more imperative as home learning was the main option during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **5.2.2 Learning at home**

The COVID-19 pandemic has been one of the greatest reasons for the encouragement of home learning. As a result, around March 2020 the South African government vowed to save the school year and pushed teachers, learners and parents to engage in some type of emergency remote learning (Chirinda, Ndlovu & Spangenberg, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic was a new occurrence, and most rural schools had never done any remote learning before the outbreak (Lawrence & Fakuade, 2021). I present my findings on this theme under two sub-themes namely, Availability of learning resources, and Motivation and availability of time.

### 5.2.2.1 Availability of learning resources

The process of learning at home requires the availability of learning resources that could help learners. The COVID-19 pandemic is the one factor that revealed the importance of effective home learning, where learners could not be at school every day due to the spread of the pandemic. Dube (2020) found that there was an urgent need for online learning in the setting of the COVID-19 pandemic in South Africa in his study on rural online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. It means that parents have been required to provide some learning resources at home for their children, which has not always been possible especially for rural parents who are living under low socio-economic conditions. Due to a lack of internet connectivity, low-tech software and hardware, and a poor learning management system, many rural students were unable to learn at home through online learning system (Lawrence & Fakuade, 2021). All the three participants were emphatic about the idea that, the socio-economic status of rural parents makes it hard for the process of home learning to take place effectively, because in most cases they are lacking financially. In terms of finances, low-income families may be unable to afford essential living items such as a home, a study place, or a computer, as well as additional supplements for children such as extracurricular books, newspapers, and magazines (Chen et al., 2018).

Mr Zidane stated that the lack of learning resources due to high level of unemployment in many families hinders even the parents who really like to help their children with their home learning process. He explained:

*Most of our learners' parents are unemployed, and that makes it difficult at times for them to help with some learning resources needed for their children. Especially now that there is COVID-19, learners sometimes need to learn while at home using resources like smart phones, laptops, computers, internet or data bundles, and other equipment. The lack of learning resources due to financial constraints hinders even those parents who are willing to help their learners.*

Mr Zidane revealed however, that there are some parents who are able to provide learning resources for their children, but it does not help much for the school as a whole and they just have to understand the situation because they know the causing factors. He explained:

*Yes others are able to buy these equipment, but at the same time we always have to understand the situation hindering others.*

Poverty has a negative impact on parental participation because poor families do not have enough time and money to provide their children with intellectually stimulating resources (Erdoğan & Demirkasımoğlu, 2010; Erdener & Knoeppel, 2018). Mrs Lubanzi revealed that even those parents who are working do not get enough money to provide all the required home learning resources for their children. She said:

*Most of the parents in this area are domestic workers, and some work as gardeners and others work on the farms..... This means that even those who are working they are not earning sufficient income to provide all required learning resources for their children.*

Mr Qinisela also highlighted that, most of their learners' parents are unemployed. This makes it difficult for learners to learn effectively at home, especially during the first and the second waves of the COVID-19 pandemic as most of the learning had to take place at home. He explained:

*.....since most parents are unemployed, it makes it hard for them to buy some required learning resources for their children, especially those resources that are not provided by the department of education.*

From the above evidence it also appears that the rural schools still have a shortage of learning resources. The department of education is still not providing these schools with all the necessary resources as Mr Qinisela has stated above. Mr Zidane also confirmed the shortage of learning resources in their school. He said:

*So, we are struggling because even as the school we don't have enough resources. However we are coping because we are teachers, we even download some information from the internet to help learners, and we also encourage the parents to try and go to the internet café, even though we don't have one around school.*

It means that these rural learners are suffering the shortage of learning resources at home and also in schools there is a crisis. So this is evidence that during the COVID-19 pandemic where learners had to do most of their learning at home, it was not easy for most of them. Without adequate resources, knowledge, or support, rural teachers, learners and parents were required to embark on

the unusual journey (Chirinda, Ndlovu & Spangenberg, 2021). Even after the schools had been allowed by the department of education to allow learners to return in alternating system, they still needed to do a lot of learning at home. On alternate days, one group of learners would attend face-to-face classes while the other stayed at home and received information via social media and internet platforms such as WhatsApp (Chirinda, Ndlovu & Spangenberg, 2021).

#### **5.2.2.2 Motivation and availability of time**

Learning at home during the COVID-19 pandemic did not make things easy for both parents and learners. It caused a lack of motivation to some learners as they had to adapt to a new system. Most learners were concerned about their daily lives after a quick transition from traditional learning in the classroom to home learning involving online learning (Garbe et al., 2020). COVID-19 pandemic brought anxiety to parents and learners due to uncertainty of when life would return to normal (Daniel, 2020). As a result, learners' motivation for home learning may have been affected by uncertainty about the future (Garbe et al., 2020). Parents have been very worried about making a living during this time of the pandemic. Mr Zidane revealed that since some parents did not have time to motivate and monitor their children when doing school work at home during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic it caused them some challenges as learners would lag behind with their work that was supposed to be done at home. He explained:

*Some parents do not even have time due to their family duties to check their children's work. So now, for the fact that there are parents who are not able to assist their children in terms of school work, it imposes challenges on us because since the learners are attending in rotating system we give them work to be done at home and most of these children come back with some of their work not done. Thus, they are lagging behind and teachers have to start afresh in order to help those who cannot get help at home with the home works and other activities.*

As the learners were expected to do a lot of work as the attendance was in alternating system after the first lockdown due to the pandemic, it appears from the evidence above that their lack of motivation caused problems in the classroom, because teachers had to do the work that was supposed to be done at home during the days when the learner was not attending. It is understandable that moving to a home learning setting with a parent as a teacher has an impact on learners' motivation. Aside from the usual family regulations, learning structures at home had to

be built during the time of the pandemic, and collaboration in this duty might have not been appealing (Bhamani et al., 2020). Apart from the fact that parents did not have time, there were many duties that children had to carry out at home that also took away their learning time.

In most homes, there are more non-educational distractions (Bhamani et al., 2020). Also, for some rural learners, they had never been exposed to so much of home learning even before the pandemic, so the lack of motivation had already been there for some of them. Thus, it was not easy for them to have any motivation to make enough time for learning at home during the pandemic, especially during the first lockdown when the physical attendance was not allowed at all. Learners who are motivated always make means to prioritise their school work. This means that learners themselves if they are not motivated they would run away or have different excuses making them not to be committed to their school work at home. It also appeared from Mr Qinisela's narrative that some of the learners when told by their parents to do their school work at home, do not want to use that opportunity. He revealed that some of these learners during the lockdown when schools were closed they just took that as their resting time and never wanted to engage in school activities that were supposed to be done at home. He explained:

*Other parents are saying that, they have always been willing to help their children, but only to find out that some learners themselves are running away from doing their work at home. Other parents have indicated that during the first lockdown, their children took those days as holidays, and didn't want to do their school work. These complaints from parents show that the process of learning at home is not yet going to be an easy one. The culture of learning outside the school is not yet effective in our community. Even some of our learners are the ones who are running away from learning while at home.*

Parents become very concerned about the academic progress and accomplishment of their children when they lack positive motivation (Garbe et al., 2020). What makes things worse is that most of these parents, especially in rural schools lack the proper skills and techniques to motivate their children. While parents are concerned about their children's future, supporting their education can be difficult if there is a lack of motivation from children (Daniel, 2020). This was not different even during the home-learning caused by the COVID-19. Parents were still concerned about their children's lack of motivation when learning at home. Parents were apprehensive that remote

learning during the time of the pandemic could not be able to establish the discipline and seriousness that a physical presence of a teacher can instil in their children (Bhamani et al., 2020).

Mrs Lubanzi revealed that, during 2020 and early 2021 when the COVID-19 pandemic was still new and there were lot of theories that were circulating and caused fear about it, some of the learners in her school lacked motivation to an extent that they dropped out of school. She said:

*One of the negative results of the COVID-19 in our school is the issue of learner-dropout. ....Also, what I think has caused learner-dropout, was the fear of the pandemic. Some learners have seen their family members losing their lives especially in December 2020 and January 2021 during the second wave. So some learners just decided to stay at home and never came back to school when the school opened in February.*

Learners dropping out is a huge sign that these learners had already been lacking educational motivation. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, rural schools experience a number of learners who drop out of school. Almost 50% of learners in deprived rural areas drop out before grade 12 (Pillay, 2021; Weybright, 2017). This tells that the educational level and parental involvement in these our rural areas is still a challenge, because if the involvement of parents was good, there would be no learner-drop-out.

### **5.2.3 Communication**

During a crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, it is critical to strengthen communication between schools and learners' parents in order to hear concerns and feedback about learners' learning as well as myths and rumours about the pandemic (UNICEF, 2022). Parents and schools communicate by sending messages, making phone calls, having parents visit the school, and teacher announcements (Remind, 2022). I present my findings on this theme under two sub-themes namely, Methods of communication between school and parents, and Parents' feedback to teachers.

#### **5.2.3.1 Methods of communication between the school and parents**

There are different ways in which the communication can be effected between the school and learners' parents. These can include; phone calls, written letters, school visits and/or home visits, WhatsApp messages, emails and other methods. Circulars and notes in diaries are other common

ways of connecting with parents (Bhamani et al., 2020). The eruption of the COVID-19 pandemic increased the need for communication between the school and parents of learners. From the narratives it appeared that, the level of communication between parents and the school is not so well, and that is one of the reasons why home learning has not been effective during the COVID-19 pandemic and even before the pandemic. Mr Zidane revealed that in his school they tried to communicate with the parents through WhatsApp during the first lockdown in the country which started on the 27th of March 2020 (to minimise the spread of the virus), as the teaching and learning was required to continue at home (Kenway & Epstein, 2021). However, the communication has never been effective. He explained:

*It was something new to all of us, but the subject teachers were able to communicate with some parents through WhatsApp so that they could send some work to parents' phones, but the response was not that good. Some parents' cell phone numbers which they had provided us with and we saved on our South African Schools Administration and Management System (SA-SAMS) were no longer the ones they used at that time.*

From the above evidence it is clear that the communication between the school and parents was never good even before the pandemic, because if the communication was good the cell phone numbers of parents would have been updated regularly. If the communication is not good between parents and the school, it is clear that the engagement of parents is not good concerning their children's teaching (Bhamani et al., 2020).

Mr Qinisela on the other side revealed that in his school they have been trying to use different communication methods in order to keep parents involved in their children's learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, he also revealed what is similar to what was said by Mr Zidane that the communication is not good, as some parents have changed the cell phone numbers and never updated them to the school admin. Mr Qinisela said:

*Lately we have been trying to invite parents on one to one talks. The method has somehow been successfully working a little bit. We try to find means to keep our communication with the parents by making calls in order to update them and invite them to participate in learners' learning, but some of them cannot be found. Some change their phone numbers and never update us in school, and so we lose their contact. We even write circulars or*

*letters to the parents inviting them to come and have some one on one talks, but the response is not always positive.*

Communication has not been at an optimal level in these rural schools during the COVID-19, because some parents at times have not been positive according to the experiences of the principals above. Even if the school tries to apply different methods of communication it is still not getting the required engagement from parents. However, it can be understood looking at what has been mentioned by Mr Qinisela and Mrs Lubanzi that some of the parents do not even live at home with their children. They live far from home due to work conditions. So even if they would like to participate and respond to different ways of communication it wouldn't be easy (Garbe et al., 2020). The socio-economic factors of parents have affected their communication with the schools (Remind, 2022).

#### **5.2.3.2 Parents' feedback to teachers**

Learning under the COVID-19 pandemic required that homes became conducive places for learners to learn (Pillay, 2021). When learners learn at home, parents should observe, monitor and help through the process. Feedback should then be given to teachers on how learners cope with their school work at home (Lau & Ng, 2019). From all the three narratives it appeared that most of the parents find it difficult to help learners when doing their school work at home. The parents' feedback to teachers according to the narratives came with lot of complaints. Mr Qinisela revealed a lot of complaints that came as a feedback from parents in his school concerning home learning during the pandemic. He explained:

*I have received numerous complaints from our learners' parents concerning what they feel are the challenges they face with regards to the work given to their children to be done at home. They complain that it is very difficult for some of them to help their children with school work, especially on the subjects that they do not know.*

Similar to the above, Mr Zidane also revealed that in his school they have received complaints from parents about the amount of work given to learners to be done at home during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. He explained:

*There are those parents who are complaining that there is a lot of work given to their children. They also complain about the grammar and some work that seems to be difficult*

*for them as they are supposed to help their children at home. However, I must say that some parents are fine with the work given to their kids, while others are complaining to an extent that they would ask that, what the teachers are doing now if so much work is given to be done at home with them helping their kids.*

The above extracts show that rural parents really struggled to help their children with learning during the pandemic. However, the fact that some parents sent comments to teachers meant that they did make some time for their children's school work, even though they were not able to help that much. Mrs Lubanzi also revealed the similar evidence as feedback from learners' parents at home. Thus, in her school they decided to decrease the amount of work given to learners to be done at home. She explained:

*One of the reasons that we ensure not to give learners a lot of work to do at home during this time of the COVID-19 pandemic is that some parents have sent some complaints before, saying that the work given to their children is too much and not easy for them as parents when they are helping children.*

It is noticeable from the above evidence that the school understood the type of parents learners have, and therefore the principal and teachers have ensured that at least they try not to demand a lot of effort from parents when learners had to do their school work at home during the pandemic (Savage, 2017).

#### **5.2.4 Volunteering**

The eruption of COVID-19 pandemic posed a great need for parental volunteering in learning activities and other school functioning activities. However, the issues of inequality in South Africa has caused a huge difference between how rural and urban school parents engage themselves in helping learners during this critical time of the pandemic (Chirinda, Ndlovu & Spangenberg, 2021). In discussing the measures taken by the parents in volunteering in the school activities during the pandemic and even before, the participants compared the involvement of parents in rural schools and those in urban schools, and they gave the same views. Their views were that, parents who have learners in urban school have been very supportive to teachers and the school functioning as a whole ever since the pandemic erupted and interrupted the education system. I

present my findings on this theme under two sub-themes namely, Parents' self-motivation in learning activities and functioning of the school, and Parental support to educators.

#### **5.2.4.1 Parent's self-motivation in learning activities and school functioning**

If parents possess self-motivation, they always ensure that they back up the school in its functioning, and they are always determined to see success and improvement in their children's learning activities (Bhamani et al., 2020). The evidence found from the narratives is that, due to social and economic factors affecting rural areas, the parents of rural school learners have not shown much of self-motivation to support the rural schools and the learning of learners during the critical time of the pandemic (Pillay, 2021). On the other hand, parents of urban school learners have shown a lot of self-motivation because the social and economic factors have always been conducive for them to support home learning during the COVID-19 pandemic (Kenway & Epstein, 2021). Mr Zidane revealed in his narratives however, that even if these are rural parents, but if their children go to urban schools they really show a lot of motivation and support to their children's learning during the home learning. He stated that the parents of learners that go to urban schools have always been consistent with their motivation when helping their children learn during the COVID-19 pandemic. He explained:

*Another thing that I have noticed with the parents of urban school learners is that, they have been consistent in ensuring that their children learn at home during the pandemic, and they have ensured that they adhere to all the requirements prescribed by the schools. You find that these parents always encourage their children to do their work each and every day. So the difference is very huge compared to our rural schools.*

The above evidence also appeared from the narratives of Mr Qinisela. He mentioned that the mentality of parents is completely different when their kids are in urban schools, even if those parents are in rural areas. He explained:

*There is a huge difference in parental involvement in urban schools compared to our rural schools during this time of the COVID-19 pandemic. I don't know whether it is the mentality of parents that the urban schools are better. The reason I am saying this, is because I have noticed that the rural parents who have their children in urban schools, and their involvement during this critical time of the pandemic is totally different from*

*other rural parents who have their children in our school. Since the COVID-19 restrictions have been adjusted, we now invite parents to meetings, and they don't attend properly in numbers, they would just make excuses. We hold our meetings during the day and in urban schools they have also arranged their meetings with parents and they hold theirs in the evening, but the parents there will go an extra mile to hire a transport and go to the meeting. If a parent, for instance, has got two children, one is in the urban school and the other one is in the rural school you find that the parent focuses more on the one in urban school. The parents of learners in urban schools even try to get someone who can help their learners with the school work during the home learning.*

From the above extract, it remains clear that, there will always be a huge gap in the level of parental involvement between rural and urban schools, and the COVID-19 pandemic has made this clear (Chirinda, Ndlovu & Spangenberg, 2021). I believe that the underlying factors are clear concerning this issue. Firstly, most of the parents who take their kids to urban schools are well educated and are financially stable, whereas the ones who take their kids to rural schools seem to be suffering academically and financially. Therefore, it is not easy for the rural parents with rural learners to develop any motivation within themselves when the socio-economic and academic factors already go against them (Chirinda, Ndlovu & Spangenberg, 2021).

#### **5.2.4.2 Parental support to educators**

The participants revealed that the support they received from parents as the learning continued in rotation system due to the pandemic has been very limited due to most of the factors that have been mentioned such as, low socio-economic status and illiteracy. However, I believe that for parents to support teachers does not only rely on these factors. Parents can support teachers, regardless of financial status and literacy level (Pourrajab, Ghazi, & Panahi, 2018). One of the ways in which parents could support teachers and the school during the COVID-19 alternating system learning is that, they would always encourage their children to attend school during their assigned days according to the school programme, encourage them do their work at home when they were not attending, and follow all the regulations of the schools, like attending the meetings when invited (Lau & Ng, 2019). Thus, work would be made easy for the educators in the school. When talking about the parental support received by the school, Mrs Lubanzi continued to compare the way parents supported teachers and schools in urban areas with the ones in rural areas during

the COVID-19 pandemic. She then revealed that, as much as the response was not good in rural schools, but there were parents who were trying their best to support the teachers, learners and the functioning of the school during this critical time:

*However, I must say that, as much as we are seeing poor engagement from parents in our school during this time of the pandemic, not all parents distance themselves from their children's learning matters. Some parents even as uneducated and financially-struggling as they are, do support us and their children by always monitoring them during home learning. They try to encourage their children to work hard during this time of the crisis and become something better, and not allowing the crisis caused by the pandemic to discourage them. These parents want their children to have a better future because they themselves were not able to achieve that.*

Mr Zidane also revealed that there is some positive support that they have received from the parents of learners in their school. He mentioned that there are parents who have been well cooperating and fully supporting the functioning of the school during this time of the COVID-19 pandemic.

*However, as I have mentioned that other parents cooperate and they do cooperate fully with the arrangements of the school that have been made to continue with the learning during this time of the pandemic. Even if they are not educated enough but some of them always encourage their kids to do their school work....., they ask for other people to help their kids at home, and they have attended as we have called them to come to the school. There is some positive engagement we have from other parents, they do play some part in their children's learning during this critical time, but even before the pandemic.*

From the above evidence, it appears that not all rural schools failed to support the learning of their children during the pandemic. There was some positive effort from other parents. If there are rural parents with low educational and economic status who are dedicated in supporting the functioning of the school even during the critical times, it means that there is a lot that school principals and teachers need to do to ensure that they get maximum support (Myende & Nhlumayo, 2020). This raises the issue of how should the schools make sure that they open up their doors to parents, so that parents can put in their efforts in supporting the schools (Đurišić & Bunijevac, 2017).

### **5.2.5 Decision making**

Decision making is school's effort to effectively involve parents in taking decisions associated with the learning of learners (Josuharyadi, Padmadewi & Suputra, 2021). During the COVID-19 pandemic the learning of learners had to continue at home under the supervision of parents, and thereafter schools were allowed to reopen on a limited scale. This means that different decisions needed to be taken during this time involving schools and parents as they should fully participate in their children's learning (Tan, Lyu & Peng, 2020). I present my findings on this theme under two sub-themes namely, Parents' attendance in school meetings for discussion and approval of decisions and Principals' recognition of parental contribution in decision making.

#### **5.2.5.1 Parents' attendance in school meetings for discussion and approval of decisions**

The three participants mentioned that it is necessary for the operation of their schools that they call parents meetings. They have been doing this before the pandemic, and there had already been some challenges like, the poor attendance of parents. During these meetings, different decisions and views from the school are being discussed together with parents for the aim of their input and approval of these decisions that will prosper the learning of learners (Schneider & Arnot, 2018). Now, during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic they also made some means to meet with parents, even though the arrangements had to change. It is notable that the challenges increased after the pandemic. However, it was clear that meeting with the parents was their best option because some means of communication were not well effective for them due to communication challenges in most of rural families (Garbe et al., 2020).

Mr Zidane explained how they have conducted parents' meetings under the changes brought by the COVID-19 pandemic whenever they had to discuss some ideas and decisions concerning learning. He said:

*So far we have not been using one venue when conducting these meetings to ensure COVID-19 protocols. We split them into different sections, but at least we don't have many learners in our school, they are about 350. So, we don't deal with many parents. We just use four to five classes to conduct these meetings, because not all parents do attend also. We are making sure that we call parents quarterly.*

Mr Zidane however mentioned that they are facing the challenge of non-attendance not only when there was COVID-19, but even before that. This according to him is due to the low socio-economic conditions of parents, and this has been the challenge for a long time (Appiah-Kubi & Amoako, 2020). Mr Zidane explained:

*One of the challenges also, is the issue of parental non-attendance in the school meetings and other activities, before and after the COVID-19 pandemic. As I have mentioned the issue of unemployment, I think it contributes a lot to the lack of attendance because parents are mostly worried about taking care of their families financially, so they sometimes do not even bother about being part of anything in the school.*

Durišić and Bunijevac (2017) support the above sentiment as they reveal that, due to poor finances, inflexible work hours, and language changes, some rural parents are unable to be part of parent-teacher conferences where decisions are discussed. These factors were no different even during the COVID-19 pandemic as these rural communities continue to face challenges of trying to make a living under non-favourable conditions (Chirinda, Ndlovu & Spangenberg, 2021). Mr Qinisela on the other hand seemed to look at the issue at hand from a different perspective, as he just expressed his complaints about parents not attending meetings when they were invited to, with the aim of reviewing and approving discussions concerning the learning of learners during the critical time of the pandemic. He was concerned that they just make excuses not to come. He also was concerned about how parents with children that go to urban schools dedicate themselves to attend parents' meetings. He explained:

*Guided by the COVID-19 regulations we continue to invite parents to school meetings, and they don't attend properly, they would just make excuses. We hold our meetings during the day and in urban schools they hold theirs in the evening, but the parents there will go an extra mile to hire a transport and go to the meeting.*

Seeing parents not attending school meetings, where most of the decisions are presented and reviewed makes most school principals to experience frustration of trying to engage parents and receive less response (Duma, 2019). This is what appears from Mr Qinisela's input. He assumes that the rural parents do not put more effort as they should do. The above evidence can be linked to lack of interest and motivation from the side of parents. Making excuses for some parents is a symbol of not willing to take full responsibility of their children's learning (Du Plessis & Mestry,

2019). However, for some parents the reasons are valid due to socio-economic factors mentioned earlier.

Mrs Lubanzi mentioned that during the COVID-19 pandemic when meetings were allowed in small numbers they also arranged some meetings with parents in order to discuss different decisions and strategies. However, she mentioned the absenteeism of parents in these meetings, and believed that this is sometimes caused by the fact that some learners do not live with parents. She said:

*Another challenge that we have concerning the attendance of parents to school meetings is that, as some of the learners are being taken care of by their grandparents, it becomes difficult for these grandparents to attend school activities in most cases, due to different physical challenges caused by aging.*

What appears from the above extracts is that, the attendance of parents in these decision making meetings did not improve after the COVID-19 pandemic as it has always been the challenge even before the pandemic. This means that some of the parents have not been part of the decisions that are made in the school, because they cannot make it to the discussions taking place in the schools (Remind, 2022). This is a bad condition for the rural schools, because it really shows that some of the parents there did not even know about all the programmes and strategies used for the learning of their children during the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### **5.2.5.2 Principals' recognition of parental contribution in decision making**

In order to ensure that parents are aware of their important role in decisions made in the school, the school leaders have a major responsibility (Pushor & Amendt, 2018). Although a school leader and staff discuss and make many critical decisions concerning the learning of learners, those decisions must then be presented to parents and community members for their opinion and agreement (Pushor & Amendt, 2018). This is done in order to recognise the contribution of community members and parents for the success of the school. The eruption of the COVID-19 pandemic created a need for a lot of arrangements to be made in order to accommodate the academic needs of learners (Duku, Mavuso & Mkhomi, 2021). The decisions taken by the schools in this regard had to involve the parents of learners. It appeared from the narratives of Mrs Lubanzi that, when they organised meetings during the time of the pandemic some of the parents would be

quiet during the discussion of decisions because they felt as if their low educational level couldn't make them to contribute effective ideas. She explained:

*I think also the issue of parents' low educational level causes them to feel as if their discussions will not be effective in the meetings. Thus, they just leave it to the school to take any decision concerning learning matters. For instance, we usually conduct grade 9 meetings, where we orientate learners and parents about the subject packages that can be chosen by learners in grade 10. So, you find that parents mostly would just listen but not interact with us, and they would just accept whatever that is chosen by their children. This trend continues even now during this time of the COVID-19 pandemic as we try to let parents be part of the discussions concerning decisions made.*

The above evidence shows that even some of those parents who attend school meetings do not think that they can add any value to the discussions and decisions made in the school. This is not good because learning under the COVID-19 pandemic required that parents took more responsibility of their children's learning. So if they did not participate in decision discussions, it means they were not fully involved in the whole process as learning continued. This puts more challenge on school principals, because they have a duty to try and make parents understand their value and importance in all decisions made in the school concerning the education of their children. However, some schools are failing to make parents realise their importance in school's decision-making process, thus making parents not to engage even if they attend the school meetings (Wright & Johnson, 2020).

Mr Qinisela revealed that in his school they try by all means to engage parents when taking decisions about the activities taking place in school. However, he mentioned that the COVID-19 has affected the way they used to engage parents. He explained:

*It is our mandate that we do not engage in any discussion and approval of decisions and any school activity or event without making parents aware of it. However, the pandemic has somehow affected our relation with the parents and has limited us in the manner in which we used to engage with them in our discussions and other activities.*

The above extracts show that the schools in rural areas during the COVID-19 pandemic should have ensured that they devise different strategies to use in order to communicate with the learners'

parents with the aim of discussing decisions that were taken to help sustain the learning of learners during this critical time (Josuharyadi, Padmadewi & Suputra, 2021). However, the disadvantages associated with rural areas have hindered the rural schools from accessing different methods and tools to use in communicating decisions with the parents of learners (Pillay, 2021). One of the challenges appearing from the evidence above is that some parents do not feel comfortable about taking part or contributing to the discussion and approval of decisions as Mrs Lubanzi highlighted. Schools appear to be inhibiting parents from engaging and giving their views in discussions by failing to initiate or implement effective tactics that are truly inclusive, welcoming, or encouraging (Msila, 2012; Munje & Mncube, 2018). Most of the school principals and teachers will always complain about parents not putting any input during discussions, forgetting that, some of those parents need to be guided and encouraged to see that their views and ideas can be very powerful.

### **5.2.6 Community involvement**

Learning under the COVID-19 pandemic required the involvement of the entire community in order to make it possible for learners to learn whether at home with their parents or at school (Đurišić & Bunijevac, 2017). Working together with the community entails identifying and bringing together community resources, facilities, and other provisions to satisfy the needs of schools, students, and their families so that learning may continue even during the times of crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic (Pajariato et al., 2020). I present my findings on this theme under two sub-themes namely, Community support for effective learning and Community's social and environmental effects in the process of teaching and learning.

#### **5.2.6.1 Community support for effective learning**

The support received from the community is very important for effective learning, especially during the critical times like the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. The cooperation between parents in the community and schools assists in the creation of a conducive learning environment for learners, whether at school or at home, as it has been the case during the COVID-19 pandemic (Bhamani et al., 2020). From all the three narratives it appeared that, at least there is some positivity from the community in terms of support to the school. Mr Qinisela revealed that as much as the direct parental involvement towards learning is lacking, they are working together with some of the community members regarding the safety and welfare of the school, learners and teachers, and thus supporting effective learning during the pandemic, and even before that. He explained:

*I think it's very important to mention that, as much as the parental involvement in learners' learning is lacking, but the engagement of some of the parents or community members based on the issues of school safety and welfare of our learners and everyone in the school is very good. Thus, it also contributes to a good atmosphere for teaching and learning. The cooperation between our school and the structures around the school is very good. Our tribal chief is very cooperative when it comes to educational matters. Local (community) structures have also helped us a lot, especially now during the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, we have a clinic near by the school, and the nurses from the clinic would sometimes come to our school to make awareness campaign about the COVID-19.*

The above evidence shows that, there is a possibility of a well-managed school-parent-community partnership, as long as there will be many strategies developed to overcome the barriers and challenges. Cooperation between the school, parents, and the community is a broader word that encompasses commitment and other aspects of the school, parents, community's combined efforts in learners' learning (Pourrajab, Ghani, & Panahi, 2018). Mrs Lubanzi mentioned that even before the COVID-19 they have had a good relation with some of the community structures. She mentioned one committee that ensures that it monitors learners who run away from school during learning hours:

*We also have been trying as the school to have a good working relationship with the structures in the community long before even the COVID-19 pandemic came. There is a QLTC committee that we are working in cooperation with, in order to ensure that teaching and learning is not affected. For instance, they help us in terms of learners who try to bunk classes and go home using exits that are not allowed (dodging school). So this committee ensures that they watch-out for those instances not to happen. This committee is made up of the School Governing Body (SGB) members and other community members.*

From the above evidence however, it appears that there is one community structure that is effective in supporting the school. This must be an awareness to all other community structures and organisations that they can also contribute a lot in supporting teachers, learners, parents and the school at large especially during the critical times like the COVID-19 pandemic. Involving various community structures as educational partner significantly enhances the resources available to serve learners, families, teachers, and the school (Epstein, 2018). Mr Zidane mentioned few community

structures that work together with his school to ensure that the functioning of the school, the wellbeing of learners and the cooperation with parents has been well maintained during the COVID-19 pandemic and even before it. He explained:

*In our school we have been trying by all means to work in partnership with a variety of structures available in our community, so that the learning of learners continues during this time of the pandemic. By doing this, we are trying to bring parents closer to us, so that we can have a positive relation that will make them to be involved in learners' educational activities, and thus, improving learners' academic success even in the midst of the crisis. Among these structures I can mention; Community Policing Forum, and the Traditional Authority Committee. The latter under the leadership of our Chief. These structures have been very much active during this time of the pandemic in ensuring that the COVID-19 protocols are adhered to by the whole community, so that what we tell learners to do here in school is the same as what is being encouraged by the parents at home.*

As much as there are these committees mentioned above, the main issue is on how the school can use these committees to encourage parents to participate in learning of their children. It is not enough to have committees like these, but not being able to use them to invite more parental involvement. Existing relationships, particularly in impoverished communities, highlight the need for schools to develop and implement context-sensitive initiatives that take into account parental problems (Munje & Mncube, 2018). There should be more of community collaboration linked to the learning of learners and the involvement of parents in that learning. In rural areas, more emphasis should be placed on information about community activities and services that are linked to learning skills, alumni participation in school, and service integration through partnerships with community organisations (Tekin, 2011). From the narratives of the principals it appears that there is still a need for the development of programmes that involves parents, the community and the school in ensuring the success in learners' learning during critical times. However, the shortage of resources in the rural communities should be taken into consideration. As this is one of the key hindrances to successful parent-school-community partnership (Chirinda, Ndlovu & Spangenberg, 2021).

### 5.2.6.2 Community's social and environmental effects in teaching and learning

Social and environmental factors in the community have an impact on how parents get involved in learning, how learners are motivated about their learning, and how the school functions. The culture of learning can be affected by the community lifestyles, traditions, cultures and values (du Plessis & Mestry, 2019). Therefore, learning of learners in rural schools during the COVID-19 pandemic has been affected by the effects of the above-mentioned factors (Sierk, 2017). Mr Zidane stated that he is trying his best to engage himself in community developments and programmes that encourage the learning in young children. This would have a positive impact in learning of learners at home with the involvement of parents during the COVID-19 pandemic, because the learning culture would have been instilled in learners and parents alike, causing the process to be effective at home (Reimers & Schleicher, 2020). Mr Zidane explained:

*There are also other activities that I am involved in as the school principal that enhance our connection with the community in order to ensure that the learning culture in our young kids is being instilled and developed. I participate in war-room. War-room involves all departments (education, health, social development, etc.) working together to deal with social ills that affect our young generation in this area. However, there are numerous challenges one faces due to social, economic and environmental conditions. It has become clear now during this time of the COVID-19 pandemic that, the lack of learning culture in our rural parents and learners makes it difficult for home learning to effectively take place. Hence, we strive for better skills and strategies each and every day as learning continues under the COVID-19 pandemic.*

Schools in rural areas face a number of obstacles, including the fact that the majority of learners are not encouraged at home and community to attend school regularly, resulting in a high frequency of absenteeism (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019). This became a challenge also during the pandemic because rural communities could not execute home learning effectively.

It is very important however, to note that there are positive characteristics possessed by the rural communities. Hlalele (2012) maintains that, community members in rural areas have a deep bond that fosters a strong commitment to safeguard and assist children. Mr Qinisela revealed one instance that, when there was a looting in the province of KwaZulu-Natal in 2021 their school was also targeted by the looters in the community. This would have had a negative impact in the school

as the teaching and learning continued under the COVID-19 pandemic regulations. However, he gladly mentioned that some parents in the community stood up before that was even done, and they were successful to stop it not to happen. He explained:

*....when there was a looting, it came to our ears that the government institutions were targeted. Then, some parents stood up and tried to be watchful for that kind of instance not to take place in our school.*

The extract above shows that, the positive involvement of parents and the community helped during the times of the pandemic for the safety of the school, and therefore learning continued successfully. If the school was vandalised during this critical time, it would have further affected teaching and learning while the pandemic had already brought many challenges in the system. This is why Leibowitz (2017) maintains that, the rural communities traditionally have persevered despite a lack of resources and opportunity, demonstrating their endurance and mental fortitude to make do with what they have.

### **5.3 SECTION B**

#### **What do school principals do to promote parental involvement in schools located in rural settings during the COVID-19 pandemic?**

For this question, I present my findings with a focus on what the school principals have been doing to ensure that they keep parents engaged with their children's learning during the COVID 19 pandemic. My analysis for this question is informed by Empowerment Theory presented in chapter two (See page 31). According to the Empowerment Theory, schools should appreciate parents' abilities to contribute to learning processes throughout the educational process of their children (Lawrence-Jacobson & Kaplan, 2011). Encouragement, collaboration, efficacy, and potential are all notions linked with the Empowerment theory (Baruth, 2013). Thus, I selected the four key concepts as the main themes for analysing data for this question. The key concepts are; Encouragement, Collaboration, Efficacy and Potential.

### 5.3.1 Encouragement

The school, led by the principal, must encourage and guide parents on how to help children achieve in school and how to grasp and use the learning tools provided to them (Boyles, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic caused a lot of changes where most of the learning had to be done at home. This meant that schools had to devise new strategies to encourage and guide parents on how to help their children during home learning. Here I present my findings under the following sub-theme: Principals' attitudes towards parental involvement.

#### 5.3.1.1 Principals' attitudes towards parental involvement

The attitude of principals and other stakeholders in school plays a major role in encouraging and discouraging parents from being participative in learning of their children. Some schools have ideas and norms that portray rural parents as inferior to teachers and principals, causing schools to discount what these parents can contribute to their children's education (Myende & Nhlumayo, 2020). From the narratives it appeared that there is not much negative things that were done by the schools principals and teachers as the way of undermining parents' capabilities in the process of learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The school principals revealed that in their schools they have always been willing to cooperate and acknowledge the value of parents even before the pandemic. However, Mr Qinisela revealed that there are some principals who would look down upon parents, especially based on the basis on low educational level or illiteracy. He explained:

*I should mention however that, in some cases you find that parents are discouraged from participating in their children's learning, because we as principals and teachers at times tend to think that, rural parents know nothing about the curriculum and then we ignore them in some matters that should involve them. However, learning under the COVID-19 has taught many of us about the importance of having a positive attitude towards the parents, as they are the ones who are very important during home learning. I always try to inform other principals and also teachers in my school, especially the young ones who are still new to the field of teaching that they should not think that parents know nothing about the curriculum, instead they should engage them more in the curriculum matters so that*

*the parents will feel valued, and now that we are working under the critical time of the pandemic it is very important to acknowledge this.*

From the above evidence it appears that, some principals tend to think that rural parents do not have much to contribute concerning the curriculum whereas that is not the case. Parents can contribute a lot in developing learners' skills and experiences in learning matters which form the basis of the curriculum (Erdener & Knoepfel, 2018). Mr Zidane and Mrs Lubanzi revealed that in their schools they understand the low educational level of parents and they do not use that against the parents. Instead, they try to meet parents halfway and even try to encourage them to develop their academic knowledge. Mr Zidane explained:

*As we continue working under the COVID-19 pandemic, we are making sure that we try to understand parents with their different circumstances, and we try to meet them halfway as we know that most of them have low educational level, so we cannot expect more academically contribution from them to our learners. Some time ago before the pandemic, we have even tried different strategies to help them improve their academic level because at the end of the day it is much better for a learner to be assisted at home when the parent is educated. We have tried as the school to recruit them to join adult basic education, unfortunately they don't get time because they are working. That would be more beneficial now that learners are required to do more of their work at home with the help of parents.*

The above evidence shows that, the school has been trying to help parents develop themselves so that they can be knowledgeable about educational matters as they are then required to help their children at home. However, the response from parents has been negative.

Mrs Lubanzi revealed that, they understand their learners' parents, and therefore they did not want to put pressure on them when it comes to helping children learn at home during the COVID-19, because they already knew that some of them are not able to help. Thus, as the school they have ensured that those learners who couldn't get any help at home, got helped by their teachers even in the work that was supposed to be done at home. She explained:

*As I have mentioned earlier about their low educational level. So, what we have decided to do as we continue teaching and learning under the COVID-19 pandemic is that, teachers must explain thoroughly to the learners what is expected from that work, and how to do it.*

*Also if learners come across problems while working at home and the parent or anyone at home is not able to assist, they should use the WhatsApp groups (those who are on WhatsApp) to ask their teachers and get some guidance so that they will not overburden their parents. This is because the parent at times will feel embarrassed if they cannot help their children with school work.*

From the two schools above, it is evident that, the school principals have ensured that they do not undermine parents, nor do they allow other stakeholders in their schools to do so. Instead these principals understood the weaknesses and struggles of the parents, and tried to meet them halfway in order for the learning of learners to take place during this critical time of the pandemic (Wright & Johnson, 2020). All the principals believed in communicating and meeting with the parents and have discussions about the issues pertaining to the learning of learners during the time of the pandemic (Yulianti et al., 2020).

### **5.3.2 Collaboration**

Collaboration between schools and parents can help learners' emotional well-being as well as their academic abilities (Paccaud, Keller, Luder, Pastore & Kunz, 2021). This relationship has a good influence which helps to the application of a comprehensive, healthy learning. Here I present my findings under the following sub-theme: Coordination of collaborative activities.

#### **5.3.2.1 Coordination of collaborative activities**

Different activities organised by the schools should involve the parents of learners. In order for relationships to be built between parents and the school, parents should be encouraged to take part in a variety of school events (Gubba & Chisale, 2018). This does not only speak about learning activities, but it also talks about other activities taking place at school with the aim of stimulating the social-being and behaviour of learners (Ong, Zhang & Yao, 2018). From the narratives of participants it appeared that some of the activities where collaboration was coordinated were affected by COVID-19 pandemic. The principals revealed that in extra-curricular activities like school trips, they would invite parents to accompany learners and that would help a lot in terms of discipline. Since the pandemic forced schools to close, learners missed out on activities that are essential for their social and academic growth (Bhamani et al., 2020).

Mr Zidane revealed that, they used to invite parents to educational excursions and other trips with the purpose of making parents aware that they are valuable in activities taking place in school. He explained:

*Before the COVID-19 pandemic surfaced, we used to have field trips and educational excursions. We would invite learners' parents to accompany us, and it was another effective way of making them realise that they are very important in all the activities taking place in the school regardless of their educational level, just their presence was all that mattered.*

Mr Qinisela also shared the same experience as Mr Zidane. He emphasised that when they invited parents to sports trips it helped them a lot in terms of learner-discipline, and revealed that the COVID-19 pandemic negatively affected that collaboration, because many activities had to be paused. Mr Qinisela explained:

*Before the COVID-19, we used to invite parents to accompany us whenever we had sports' trips. By doing this we were ensuring that parents are part of all our school activities, and this helped even in terms of learner-discipline. Because learners would always have fear of misbehaving if there are parents around. However, the pandemic has somehow affected our relation with the parents and has limited us in the manner in which we used to engage with them in our activities.*

Extracurricular activities do not fall under the scope of the formal curriculum and require additional money and time, therefore learners' participation is reliant on their parents' financial, social and spiritual support (Xu, 2017). The presence of parents when learners participate in extracurricular activities is a greatest motivation and determines how learners conduct themselves during these activities and events. Extracurricular activities provide a platform for learners to acquire information and skills; therefore, parental supervision is essential (Metsäpelto & Pulkkinen, 2012; Xu, 2017). Other than encouraging learner-discipline, it also encourages learners to excel in whatever they do when the parents are available. Thus, the eruption of the COVID-19 pandemic has somehow affected this kind of motivation and determination in learners' performance and conduct.

### 5.3.3 Efficacy

If the school leaders acknowledge the ability of parents to produce the desired results in learners' education, parents always feel empowered and thus, they participate in their children's learning happily (South African Council for Educators, 2000). This corresponds to the idea that, parents who are empowered are able to empower their children (Hendrix, 2022). The learning of learners during the COVID-19 pandemic revealed the importance of the effectiveness of parents' contribution to education because it required a lot of effort from them in order to help their children learn at home. This meant that parents and the school shared the accountability in learners' learning. I present my findings in this section under the following sub-theme: Sharing of accountability.

#### 5.3.3.1 Sharing of accountability

School principals and teachers should always ensure that they share responsibility and accountability with learners' parents in all the educational matters (Boyles, 2020). From the three principals' narratives there is evidence that, parents were given the responsibility to be accountable for their children's learning at home during the COVID-19. The principle of shared responsibility and accountability is one form of empowerment, and during the pandemic, empowerment has emerged as a crucial element for many families, particularly those with rural learners (Hendrix, 2022). However, what is noticeable from the narratives is that as much as schools endeavoured to share accountability with parents, some parents failed to adhere to that responsibility due to different factors such as lack of time, lack of knowledge and lack of interest. Mrs Lubanzi said that, in her school they called meetings and informed parents that the best they need to do in order to play a part in their children's learning during the pandemic was to always monitor and encourage children to go to school during the days they were assigned to attend school. This was because during the lockdown in the country there were times when learners were not allowed to go to school every day, instead they were attending in rotation system. She explained:

*So we asked the parents in our meetings that, what we greatly need from them for now is for them to encourage their children to come to school. This is because we have also noticed the high rate of learner-dropout during this time of COVID-19.*

The above extract from Mrs Lubanzi aligns with the idea that, when it comes to monitoring and enhancing attendance of learners, all internal and external stakeholders- including parents and community partners are held accountable (Attendance works, 2020). Shared accountability should have made it possible for the school working together with parents to gather, track, and distribute information about the attendance of learners on the days that they were assigned to attend during the phases of the lockdown in the country (Attendance works, 2020). Mr Zidane mentioned that in his school when they are calling parents, they make sure that they engage with parents in discussions about the issues that they observe from learners at school. By this they are sharing the responsibility of taking care of learners' issues with their parents. They continued to do this even during the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure that parents could account for their children's learning during this time. He explained:

*We are making sure that we call parents quarterly. I think so far this year (2021) we have called about three parents meetings, focusing on the gaps that we have identified after we have assessed learners each and every term since we are still working under the pandemic. Apart from these meetings, we have SBST in our school. SBST stands for School Based Support Team. With this team we are assisting learners who are having learning barriers. We try to interact with parents and the struggling learners on one-on-one sessions to see what can be done to help the learner. We identify a learner's problem and then call a parent, and if we see that the child has a problem that needs attention of social workers we do contact them, but with the permission of parents. The parent has to sign the consent form. This continues even more now that we are working under the COVID-19 pandemic, as learners are facing different challenges with learning at home.*

The sharing of accountability is seen when both the parent and the school devise strategic plan that will be effective in meeting the learner's need. This empowers parents and schools benefit from this accountability, because parents who feel empowered can participate in their children's education as partners (Hendrix, 2022). Another method that was revealed by Mr Qinisela and Mrs Lubanzi as a way of holding parents accountable for their children's learning during the COVID-19 pandemic was that during the home learning, the parent, guardian or anyone at home should just sign the book of a learner. By that they would see that, at least the parent was there when the learner was doing their work. Even if the parent does not know what the learner is writing, but to

sign their work would mean a lot to their children and the school as well in terms of responsibility and accountability.

Mrs Lubanzi mentioned that as much as it is difficult to get parents' collaboration, but they never give up. They try different strategies. She explained:

*The issue of working with parents is not an easy one in our school. Even before the COVID-19, as I have mentioned that it has been challenging to get parents into participating in their children's learning due to different factors I mentioned and due to lack of interest in some parents. However, as the school we haven't given up especially during this critical time. We are trying our best to get parents involved in learners' learning. Since we are using the rotation system, we have now encouraged the parents or any one at home living with the child to make sure that they sign their children's work at home just to acknowledge that they have checked the work that learners are given to do.*

Mr Qinisela said the same as the above. However, he also mentioned that the response is not always positive. He explained:

*Now that learners do not come to school in a normal way as it used to be before the pandemic, we ensure that they are given enough work to do at home during the days where they are not attending. We have also asked the parents to sign learners' work just to acknowledge that they see it. This is for us as the school to know that the parent has checked learner's work at home. Even though some of the work come back not signed, we sometimes understand that it might relate to the issue of illiteracy for some parents, and also other learners do not live with parents as I have mentioned before.*

The above evidence shows that the plan of getting parents involved in the school work of learners with the aim of sharing accountability with some of the parents seem to be not possible as they are not living with their children to such an extent that when he calls them he sometimes finds out that the parent is not even aware of what is happening in their children's lives. "When you try to contact the parent on matters like this, you sometimes find that the parent doesn't have an idea of what is happening in school" Mr Qinisela said. This shows that there was indeed a challenge in some rural schools concerning the connection and sharing of accountability between parents and schools as learners were learning at home during the pandemic, because some parents could not work together

with schools which affect the distribution of responsibilities (Wits school of governance and bridge, 2016).

#### **5.3.4 Potential**

The empowerment of parents' potential in showing the capacity to help develop the learning of learners in rural schools is very important, especially when the school understands the aspirations and ambition of parents concerning the future of their children (Wright & Johnson, 2020). In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, parents needed to be encouraged to show their potential in ensuring that learning continued at home during this critical time. Developing the potential of parents creates an inspiration and a positive influence, enabling them to carry out their responsibilities successfully (Lawrence-Jacobson & Kaplan, 2011). I present my findings in this section under the following sub-theme: Nurturing parents' aspirations and level of comfort with the school and staff.

##### **5.3.4.1 Nurturing parents' aspirations and level of comfort with the school and staff**

Schools must go out of their way to learn about the cultures, experiences, and lifestyles of the families they serve, and then make those key to their encouragement so that their support and involvement corresponds to the actual needs of parents (Savage, 2017). Parents must see their hopes and desires concerning their children being fulfilled in schools even in the midst of the pandemic. Also, when parents realise that their aspirations are being nurtured well, they then become comfortable with the school. Mrs Lubanzi revealed that, as the way of giving hope to parents and thus nurturing their hopes and aspirations during the COVID-19 pandemic, as the school they continued to invite parents to attend award-giving ceremonies although they had to change the setting so that few parents could be invited to accommodate COVID-19 protocols. She stated that:

*Furthermore, we have decided to develop the issue of giving awards to high performing learners in front of their parents before the pandemic. We used to invite a large number of parents, but now we organise the event in such a way that we only invite few parents – for learners who have obtained positions 1, 2 and 3. We do this in order to follow COVID-19 protocols where large number of people meeting in one place is not allowed. So in our case*

*it means that we only invite 9 parents because we have 3 grades. This is done quarterly after we have finalised learners' results for each and every term.*

Mr Qinisela also mentioned that in his school they do invite parents to engage in academic performance discussions. This is where parents get to comfortably reveal their ambitions about the performance of their children. Mr Qinisela explained:

*Previously we used to invite all the parents to come to school and have a discussion about the academic performance of their children. However, now due to COVID-19 restrictions we are inviting them only per grade to encourage their engagement, because we always want them to feel that they are very important in the process of teaching and learning.*

Asking parents about the things that would enable them to advocate for their children is a good place for schools to start (Hendrix, 2022). Another way of nurturing the aspirations and make parents comfortable with the school is for the school to go out of its premises to provide some help in community development. This enables the school to contact community organisations that are a good fit and invite them to form relationship with parents (Hendrix, 2022). This is applicable when the school understands the values and desires of the society. As a way of understanding the society's experiences, values and lifestyles, Mr Zidane mentioned that he ensures that the school gives support to pre-schools around the area as to raise the hopes of parents concerning their kids as early as pre-school level. However, when the COVID-19 pandemic erupted it negatively affected these programmes, as schools had to close and these kids had to be kept at home under the supervision of parents with no adequate educational resources to help them continue with learning. He explained:

*As the school principal I even ensure that as the school we fully support small kids from the pre-schools (crèches). We try by all means to provide any support in terms of resources like teaching aids that we have so that those young kids and their parents can see the importance of education right where they are, and to raise parents' hopes as early as possible. Now that there is a pandemic, we have somehow been distracted, because it has limited the attendance of these kids in pre-schools.*

The above evidence shows that building connection between parents, schools, and community organisations in rural areas, empowers parents with the information and resources they need, in

order to assist their children during home learning, especially in times of crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic (Hendrix, 2022).

## **5.4 Conclusion**

This chapter focused on the analysis and interpretation of the narratives in responding to the two sub-questions under the main question of my study. Drawing from Epstein's Model and the Empowerment Theory, I was able to explore and understand the complex and multiple experiences of rural principals on parental involvement during the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the main aspects that had come to light during the interpretation and analysis of the narratives in answering the first sub-question was that, most of the rural parents were not able to be effectively involved in their children's learning during the COVID-19 pandemic due to socio-economic challenges and low educational levels. Hence, parents couldn't provide learning resources, they couldn't make time, and others couldn't understand their children's school work properly. When analysing the narratives to answer the second question it appeared that the school principals have tried to implement different strategies with the aim of involving parents in learners' learning. However, not all the strategies have proven to be successful, as these rural parents face many challenges in terms of resources, knowledge and availability of time. The next chapter gives a summary of the findings of the study. It will also present my reflections, conclusions and recommendations.

## CHAPTER 6

### SUMMARY OF THE STUDY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 6.1 Introduction

Responding to the two sub-questions derived from the main question of my study, the previous chapter focused on the analysis of the storied narratives of the three participants presented in chapter 4. In this chapter, I present the summary of the study. I thereafter, present the conclusions derived from each sub-question. Following this, I highlight the reflections of my experiences for the journey of the study. Finally, I present my recommendations to those involved in the fields of school leadership practice, school leadership policy and school leadership theory.

#### 6.2 Summary of the study

This section of the chapter gives a summary of the main points and the key learnings from each of the chapters of the study.

**Chapter one** - The background of the study and the problem statement were presented in chapter one. The rationale was presented as to outline my interest in the phenomenon of parental involvement in rural community schools, which was linked to my personal experience as a former rural school learner, and currently a rural school teacher. Thereafter the significance of the study was outlined. Chapter one also presented the main research question and two sub-questions thereof dealing with the experiences of rural school principals on parental involvement during the COVID-19 pandemic. The direction the study went in was determined by these questions. After that, there was a brief discussion of the key concepts that were present throughout the study, specifically: Rural setting, Parental involvement, Home learning, and COVID-19 pandemic.

**Chapter two** – In my quest to gain more understanding about my research topic, I consulted a vast body of literature that originated both within and outside of our national borders. Research on the phenomenon of parental involvement in rural schools is plentiful. However, there is little research on how rural parents participated in their children’s learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. This provided an opportunity for me to address a gap in research and at the same time, allowed me to explore the experiences of school principals pertaining to the way parents in rural schools engage with different school activities even before COVID-19 pandemic. The chapter also presented the

theoretical framework for the study. Epstein's Model of Parental Involvement and Empowerment theory, as a theoretical framework, served as theoretical lenses through which I viewed my study. This theoretical framework helped me to better understand how rural parents' involvement in school activities during the COVID-19 outbreak was perceived by school principals.

**Chapter three** - This chapter presented the selected research design and methodology. To better understand the experiences of rural school principals, a qualitative approach was chosen combined with the interpretive paradigm. I selected participants using purposive and convenience sampling. I conducted a narrative inquiry to best understand the experiences of the three principals. Narrative inquiry enabled me to take a very thorough and in-depth journey into the participants' lived experiences. Field texts generated during the study were produced using an in-depth two-phased interview which had a narration phase (unstructured interview) and the conversation phase (semi-structured interview). These two phases enabled me to have a deep connection with the participants as it allowed them to disclose their experiences freely given two different opportunities. The study went through the two steps of data analysis which are; narrative analysis and analysis of narratives. The trustworthiness and limitations of the study were also presented in the chapter.

**Chapter four** – This chapter was the most engaging and insightful section. I completely submerged myself in the lives of the school principals as a result of the retelling of their stories into a coherent story that aimed to convey their experiences. The three participants had certain common understandings and meanings due to their shared experiences as they all grew up in rural areas, their relations with the community structures and their love for rural education, and all this made it easy to weave the stories together. This chapter was interesting to me because it showed me that, as a teacher in rural school, my experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic were similar to those the principals had in their schools. Putting these experiences in the perspective of rural setting allowed me to better comprehend them.

**Chapter five** – This chapter involved interpreting and analysing the stories that were drawn from the field texts produced throughout the data generation phase. The two research sub-questions played a crucial role during the process of analysis of narratives, as the whole process was based on answering these two sub-questions from the main question. It was however, a very challenging process to incorporate the theoretical foundations into the analysis and to recognise the various themes because the narratives of participants were sometimes too broad with a variety of

experiences. A key finding of the analysis was that, rural parents' socioeconomic circumstances made it very difficult for them to participate in their children's education during the COVID-19 pandemic. This is because learners had to be provided with learning resources like laptop, cell phone, and internet which was not always possible for most of these rural parents due to their low socioeconomic condition. Even though, this situation has always been there before the pandemic, it became a huge obstacle during the pandemic because home learning became the only solution during this time as learners could not attend school regularly. Another significant finding was that although school principals tried a variety of tactics to include parents in their children's learning, some of them fell flat in these rural schools due to socioeconomic issues.

### **6.3 Conclusions**

This section presents the conclusions based on the findings of the study. The key research question that this study sought to address was: What are school principals' experiences of parental involvement in schools located in rural settings during the COVID-19 pandemic?

While the sub-research questions were as follows:

1. How are the rural parents participating in their children's learning process during the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. What do school principals do to promote parental involvement in schools located in rural settings during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Here I will draw my conclusions based on the two sub-questions of the study. Under each sub-question I will present different conclusions based on the themes derived during the analysis made in chapter 5 using the theoretical framework.

#### **6.3.1 How are rural parents participating in their children's learning during the COVID-19 pandemic?**

I have drawn on Epstein's Model of Parental Involvement because it serves as a perfect example of how parents should be involved in learning of their children. When attempting to answer the first sub-question, the following conclusions became apparent:

The socioeconomic position and educational level of parents proved to be the two factors that most strongly influenced rural parents' involvement in their children's education during the COVID-19

pandemic. These factors had already been a challenge even before the pandemic. However, it made the situation worse during the pandemic because the learning mode changed to be more based on home learning. Parents had to provide resources for their children to learn at home as the COVID-19 forced the learning method at first to change completely from physical classroom to learning from home. During this critical time, learners had to have resources like laptops, smartphones, internet connection, textbooks, and other helpful resources for learning. Most of the parents could not afford these resources. These findings are in line with those of some academics, including Chirinda, Ndlovu, and Spangenberg (2021) and Erdener and Knoeppel (2018), who suggested that poverty has a negative impact on parental involvement because poor families lack the time and resources to give their children access to resources that can stimulate their intellectual functioning. From these findings it is apparent that, most rural learners as they come from poor families, schools and communities, for some time, will continue to lack some basic educational skills due to the shortage of resources.

In some families parents could not be available in their children's lives during home learning because they live away from home as they work to make a living. This has affected their children's learning during the COVID-19 pandemic more than it has ever did before the pandemic, because parents' availability was needed the most during this time. There was a huge need for parents to spend time with their children and discuss academic issues, because there was not much time for these children to spend with their teachers at school. It also appeared that the communication between some parents and the school has also been impacted by the abovementioned factors. The school principals struggled to effectively engage with certain parents during the COVID-19 outbreak. Some of the parents had never been available. When meetings were allowed in small numbers, school principals organised some meetings with parents as a way to discuss critical matters during the pandemic. However, some parents found it challenging to attend school meetings during this time because they were living away from home and were too preoccupied with work-related responsibilities to see the value in scheduling time for the meetings. These elements showed that parents' socioeconomic circumstances had a highly detrimental impact on their lack of involvement as their kids learned under the new conditions brought on by the COVID-19 epidemic.

A continuous parental involvement throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and even before seems to be hampered, by the poor educational level of rural parents, as reported by the three participants. During the whole period of the pandemic, learners had to learn at home with a lot of assistance from their parents. However, what we are learning from the findings of the study is that, the majority of parents in these remote locations have very poor educational levels, making it sometimes difficult for them to assist their children with their school work. As a result, most parents sent a lot of complaints to schools during this time of the pandemic claiming that they were unable to assist their children with their school work because it was difficult for them to comprehend. These findings are consistent with those of researchers like Duma (2019) and Idris, Hussain, and Ahmad (2020), who all hold the view that parents' educational backgrounds have an impact on their children's educational outcomes. This is because educated parents are more likely to positively influence their children to perform better in their studies, whereas illiterate parents frequently believe that they are unable to provide their children with much academically beneficial knowledge. Here, I have learnt that the level of knowledge and information possessed by the parent concerning what the learner is doing at home highly determines the amount of help the learner will receive whenever in need of information at home. This also has a negative impact in rural school teachers because the amount of work they have to do to help these learners is too much, whereas it could be better if there is some positive contribution received from parents as far as learners' school work is concerned. This has taught me why in urban schools learners are excelling in their school work, and this is because their parents put on some effort in helping them with school work. It is not only the teachers who are teaching these learners, parents are teachers at home too.

However, it has also appeared from the findings that some rural parents have been quite enthusiastic about getting involved in their children's learning, and during the COVID-19 these parents made all means to assist their children with their school work at home. Even though they lack education and are struggling financially, they have always made an effort to encourage their children and have kept an eye on them as they did their schoolwork at home. Some of these parents would even request outside help from others to assist their children with schoolwork at home. Here we are learning that, the socioeconomic and educational conditions of rural parents should not always be excuses for poor parental involvement. Rural parents possess strength to utilise the little that they have in order to get involved in their children's education. Also, the engagement and support of the community structures is another advantageous scenario that resulted from the study.

During the pandemic, effective learning was encouraged by the community structures that supported the health and safety of the school and the students, according to the principals' experiences. This proves that rural communities have the potential to develop the education system in rural schools even though there is lack of resources.

### **6.3.2 What do school principals do to promote parental involvement in schools located in rural settings during the COVID-19 pandemic?**

In analysing the findings on this section, I drew from the empowerment theory. This is due to the fact that it provides a wonderful illustration of how school principals should encourage and equip parents of learners to be involved in their children's education. When attempting to respond to the second sub-question, the following conclusions emerged:

As they had to give their children their entire support when learning at home, it seemed that parents required a lot of encouragement. It is apparent that having a positive attitude towards parents among school principals is the first step in motivating parents, and it appeared from the findings of the study that the principals had that in their minds as they tried to encourage parents to fully participate in learning of their children. It has been noted from the findings that, the primary reason why rural parents are sometimes discouraged from participating in school activities is because the school principals and teachers treat them as inferior and don't give them the chance to contribute in a way that is commensurate with their abilities (Myende & Nhlumayo, 2020). The attitude of the school principals in the study appeared to be a very positive one towards working with parents even before the COVID-19 pandemic erupted. The majority of school activities taking place in the schools involved encouraging participation by parents. However, some of these activities –such as outing, sports, and other educationally based activities were disrupted by the pandemic. This means that COVID-19 interrupted many initiatives that were effective in encouraging parental involvement in these rural schools, and these activities were aimed at motivating students through the engagement of their parents. Here I have learnt that the school principal is the initiator of the relationship between parents and the school. Parents will only get involved in their children's learning once the school principal and the whole school demonstrate a positive attitude towards the parents.

The findings revealed that, working during the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated a significant necessity for the rural school principals to always encourage and support parents to cooperate constructively with the school in order to assist their children learn efficiently during critical times. During the pandemic, more learning activities had to be carried out at home, and parents had to be given the tools they needed to support their kids. However, it was never simple because cooperation wasn't always good and communication methods weren't always favourable even before the pandemic (Wright & Johnson, 2020). From the findings of the study we are learning that, the school principals in rural areas had to devise a variety of strategies in trying to empower the rural parents who mostly suffer from poor economic conditions and low educational level. Working with these kind of parents require the principals to adjust their expectations at times and not demand a lot of commitment from the parents as they understand their unfavourable conditions.

The findings revealed that the empowerment of parents goes a long way in ensuring that they participate to their full potential (Hendrix, 2022). In understanding that most of rural parents' level of education is very low was key for the school principals in devising convenient strategies that did not require a lot of educational skills from parents, but also be able to be part of their children's learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The best that most of these illiterate parents could be required to do was to monitor their children when doing their work at home and to ensure that they attended school during the days they were assigned to attend as the rotation system was in place. Other parents were only asked to just sign the workbooks of their children to acknowledge that they saw it. This has been an old strategy used by many school principals, but during the pandemic it proved to be very effective if used correctly as that would be an evidence that the home learning was taking place at home (Tan, Lyu & Peng, 2020). However, the findings revealed that the response from the parents regarding these initiatives was not always positive, and this was due to the known conditions related to socioeconomic factors affecting rural areas. Over and above these circumstances, we are learning that the principals in rural schools have not given up in devising different strategies for promoting parental involvement until it becomes the norm in rural schools, even though the conditions do not seem to be favourable in most cases.

## 6.4 Reflections

The COVID-19 pandemic was a tough period for everyone, thus I found it very interesting to research the perspectives of rural school principals regarding the engagement of parents in learning during this challenging time. This is because COVID-19 pandemic was a new phenomenon and it brought a lot of changes in education system, while the involvement of rural parents in learning has already been a huge concern even before the pandemic. I learnt that although the course of this study was rewarding, there were also many obstacles and stresses along the way. Even though I had a strong desire to succeed academically, I must acknowledge that there were obstacles in my path. The problem of time has been one of them. Time seemed insufficient to me because I was doing this study while also teaching grade 12 classes, which required me to conduct extra lessons on weekends, holidays, early morning classes, and afternoon classes. The busy work schedule did, however, teach me how to come up with a coping mechanism to make sure that my research project received the time and attention it required. My day had to begin at 3 am and sometimes 2 am in the mornings, and this would sometimes not happen as my body would be very exhausted from the extra classes with grade 12.

My participants, Mr Zidane, Mr Qinisela and Mrs Lubanzi, are the lifeblood of my study; without their contributions, there would be no study. It wasn't simple to collaborate with the principals of the schools. They are very busy people in schools. I remember that on some days we had to cancel our appointments because they had to attend to some emergencies in their schools. However, they ensured that they ended up making time for me in their tight schedule, and for that, I was very grateful to them. I learned a lot from their experiences concerning the involvement of parents during the time of the pandemic. What was interesting was that I would relate to most of their experiences because I am a rural school teacher myself. Although I am not in their position as principals, but being in the same environment made our experiences common.

I must once again admit that before starting this research study, I knew very little about narrative inquiry. I learned a lot of the dynamics involved with narrative inquiry through the help from my supervisor and extensive reading. Thus, using narrative inquiry allowed me to listen to the stories of rural school principals and be able to interact with them, which helped me generate and analyse more data, and derive new meaning from it. More than anything else, I came to understand how very complicated the process of doing research study is. It happens in stages, comprising a variety

of feelings and behaviours, and it becomes ingrained in your mind until it becomes a part of who you are. Sometimes I would have fear and want to give up, feeling that I am not capable of the task. However, the desire to see the end results of my work was greater than the fear and anxiety, and it kept me going.

## **6.5 Recommendations**

I have learnt a lot from this study about the factors affecting parental involvement in rural and schools, and how school principals deal with these factors working together with other stakeholders in ensuring that there is a smooth engagement of parents in learners learning during critical times like the COVID-19 pandemic, and even during normal times. Thus, I am presenting my recommendations from the findings as follows:

### **6.5.1 Recommendations for School Leadership Practice**

I have learnt a lot from this study about school leadership practices during critical times. School principals are at the core of the leadership of the school. Therefore, when the COVID-19 pandemic erupted it was upon the leadership of the schools to adjust accordingly. School leadership practices changed considerably because of the COVID-19. Hence, it is recommended that during the times of crisis school principals should ensure that they always adapt to new programmes that will fully and adequately encompass the leadership skills, practices and actions suited to the current crisis. When leading the school during difficult times the principal must be able to change direction and establish new methods to work during the difficulties. We are learning from the findings of the study that, it was crucial for principals to set an example by being composed and consistent during the disruption because the COVID-19 problem left teachers, learners, and parents feeling overburdened (Harris & Jones, 2020). For this reason, it is recommended that school principals always demonstrate tenacity, optimism, and an unwavering conviction that they will keep working tirelessly to protect the education of rural learners no matter what.

### **6.5.2 Recommendation for School Leadership Policy**

During COVID-19 pandemic, rural school leaders had to prioritise and balance constantly shifting government policy recommendations with the constraints of school facilities, the welfare of learners, teachers and parents, and the community needs (Fotheringham, Harriott, Healy, Arenge, & Wilson, 2022). One of the recommendations resulting from the findings of the study is that the leadership of rural schools should adopt policies that promote home learning as one of the primary requirements for the success of learners. This helps to prevent learners' learning loss during the difficult times where learners cannot be in school physically. It is also recommended that the school policies should be implemented in a way that attracts rural community interest so that the community will see the need to be part of school activities, and thus support learners' learning.

### **6.5.3 Recommendation for School Leadership Theory**

The COVID-19 pandemic has taught us that the leadership styles applied during the pandemic had to be different from the leadership styles that were applied during normal times. This means that during the times of crisis, school principals as leaders should strive to implement more brilliant leadership standards and models. From the findings of the study it appeared that these models involved; instructional leadership, participative leadership, and distributive leadership. The principal of the school must, above all, make sure that teaching and learning is maintained even in times of the crisis as this was the case during the COVID-19 pandemic, and this calls for instructional leadership to be in action as the main focus of the school leaders should be in maintaining learning as the core of school's functioning (McLeod & Dulsky, 2021). During the time of the pandemic there were many decisions that needed to be taken to adjust with the crisis, and these decisions had to involve all the stakeholders including the parents of the learners and other community members and organisations. Therefore participative leadership is another method that must be applied during the critical times, because it calls for the participation of all the stakeholders in the school. School principals also had to look out for their personal health during the COVID-19 pandemic. Distributive leadership is therefore more effective in this context since it requires the principals to learn how to divide up and assign tasks to other stakeholders rather than trying to handle everything themselves.

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## APPENDIX A ETHICAL CLEARANCE



16 July 2021

Mr Muziwenele Cyprian Radebe (220081518)  
School Of Education  
Edgewood Campus

Dear Mr Radebe,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00003021/2021

**Project title:** Parental involvement in rural schools during the COVID-19 pandemic: Experiences of school principals in selected public schools in KwaZulu-Natal

**Degree:** Masters

### Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 30 June 2021 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. **PLEASE NOTE:** Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

This approval is valid until 16 July 2022.

To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

**All research conducted during the COVID-19 period must adhere to the national and UKZN guidelines.**

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely,



Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/dd

### Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban, 4000, South Africa

Telephone: +27 (0)31 260 8350/4557/3587 Email: [hssrec@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:hssrec@ukzn.ac.za) Website: <http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics>

Founding Campuses: ■ Edgewood ■ Howard College ■ Medical School ■ Pietermaritzburg ■ Westville

**INSPIRING GREATNESS**



**KWAZULU-NATAL PROVINCE**  
EDUCATION  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

## OFFICE OF THE HEAD OF DEPARTMENT

Private Bag X9137, PIETERMARITZBURG, 3200  
Anton Lembede Building, 247 Burger Street, Pietermaritzburg, 3201  
Tel: 033 3921062 / 033-3921051

Email: Phindile.duma@kzndoe.gov.za  
Buyi.ntuli@kzndoe.gov.za

Enquiries: Phindile Duma/Buyi Ntuli

Ref.:2/4/8/7104


Mr Muziwele Cyprian Radebe  
Private Bag 2803  
**MARGATE**  
4275

Dear Mr Carries

**PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN DoE INSTITUTIONS**

Your application to conduct research entitled: **"PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN RURAL SCHOOLS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: EXPERIENCES OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN SELECTED PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN KWAZULU-NATAL"**; in the KwaZulu-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 the 20<sup>th</sup> of May 2021 to the 10<sup>th</sup> of October 2023.
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/Mrs Buyi Ntuli 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.

  
Dr. EV Nzama  
Head of Department: Education  
Date: 20<sup>th</sup> May 2021

GROWING KWAZULU-NATAL TOGETHER

## APPENDIX C PERMISSION LETTER (GATEKEEPERS)

Private Bag 2803  
Margate  
4275

The Principal  
Name of school

Dear Sir/Madam

### REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT YOUR SCHOOL

I am Mzwenele Cyprian Radebe and I am conducting a research as a requirement of the University of KwaZulu-Natal towards a Degree of Master of Education. The title of the research study is **“Parental involvement in rural schools during the COVID-19 pandemic: Experiences of school principals in selected public schools in KwaZulu-Natal”**.

I would like to use your school as one of the research sites, and this letter intends to request your permission. The focus of the study is on the **experiences of principals on parental involvement in rural schools (specifically in Margate area) in ensuring that learners could continue learning at home with the support of their parents**, therefore I would like to request you to participate in the study. Should permission be granted, the interviews with the principal will be scheduled for dates and times that are convenient for them. Care will be taken that no disruption is caused during such interviews. Please also note that the participation in this study is voluntary, and the participant has the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequence. In addition, you are assured that details of the school and the participant will be kept confidential, and your identity will never be disclosed to anyone.

For more information and questions about the study, you may contact the researcher or the research supervisor on the following details:

**Name of researcher:** MC Radebe; [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] **email:** bhunganemc@gmail.com

**Supervisor:** Prof I Naicker: Tel No.: (031) 260 3461; Email: Naickeri1@ukzn.ac.za

You may also contact the Research Office through:

P. Mohun  
HSSREC Research Office,  
Tel.: 031 260 4557 E-mail: mohunp@ukzn.ac.za

Thanking you in advance.  
Yours in Education

Mr. MC Radebe

School letterhead

Date

Dear MC Radebe

**PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT xxx SCHOOL**

Your letter titled “Request to conduct research...” has reference. Please be informed that you are granted a permission to conduct your research at the above mentioned school.

Yours sincerely

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Principal

School stamp

## APPENDIX D      PERMISSION LETTER (PARTICIPANTS)

Private Bag 2803

Margate

4275

19 February 2021

The Principal

### REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATION IN THE RESEARCH

I am Mzwenele Radebe and I am conducting a research as a requirement at the University of KwaZulu-Natal towards a Degree of Master of Education. The title of the research is “**Parental involvement in rural schools during the COVID-19 pandemic: Experiences of school principals in selected public schools in KwaZulu-Natal**”. The objectives of the study are:

- To find out how parents have been involved in learners’ learning during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- To explore strategies used by the principals in ensuring that parents are part of their learners’ learning.
- To understand the challenges concerning parental involvement during this period, and how the principals have tried to overcome those challenges or barriers.

The study will focus on experiences of principals on parental involvement in rural schools (specifically in Margate area) in ensuring that learners could continue learning at home with the support of their parents. This letter intends to elucidate the purpose of the study and to request your participation in the study.

Please note that:

- Your confidentiality is guaranteed as your inputs will not be attributed to you in person, but reported only as a population member opinion.
- The interview may last for about 1 hour and may be split into two parts depending on your preference.
- Any information given by you cannot be used against you, and the collected data will be used for purposes of this research only.
- Data will be stored in secure storage and destroyed after 5 years.
- You have a choice to participate, not participate or stop participating in the research. You will not be penalized for taking such an action.
- Your involvement is purely for academic purposes only, and there are no financial benefits involved.

- If you are willing to be interviewed, please indicate (by ticking as applicable) whether or not you are willing to allow the interview to be recorded by the following equipment:

	Willing	Not willing
Audio equipment		

I can be contacted at:

Email: bhunganemc@gmail.com

██████████

My supervisor is Prof I Naicker who is located at the School of Education, at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. He can be contacted at:

Email: Naickeri1@ukzn.ac.za

Phone: 031 260 3461

I hope this letter will find your positive consideration, thanking you in advance.

Yours Sincerely

\_\_\_\_\_

-----  
**PLEASE COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING SECTION FOR CONSENT OF PARTICIPATION:**  
-----

I \_\_\_\_\_ (Full names of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the nature and purpose of the study titled: **Parental involvement in rural schools during the COVID-19 pandemic: Experiences of school principals in selected public schools in KwaZulu-Natal**. I agree to participate in the study. I am also fully aware that I have the right to withdraw from the study at any point should I wish to do so, without any negative or undesirable consequence. I am also aware that there are neither any foreseeable direct benefits nor direct risks associated with my participation in this study. I therefore understand the contents of this letter fully and I do **GIVE CONSENT / DO NOT GIVE CONSENT** for the interviews to be digitally recorded.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

School stamp

## **APPENDIX E**

## **DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT**

### **Interview guide**

The following questions were used as a guide for understanding the experiences of rural school principals on parental involvement in learners' learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The questions were intended to be starting points for discussion and were used during the narration phase of the interviews and led to follow-up questions. The follow-up questions were asked during the second phase of the interview (Conversation phase). During the conversation phase the questions were created from the told experiences of the principals during the narration phase. This means that after the narration phase I developed different questions with the aim of getting clarity and a deep discussion of what was told by the participants in their stories.

**Main Question:** What are school principals' experiences of parental involvement in schools located in rural settings during the COVID-19 pandemic?

### **Sub-questions:**

1. How are the rural parents participating in their children's learning process during the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. What do school principals do to promote parental involvement in schools located in rural settings during the COVID-19 pandemic?

11/12/22, 11:42 AM

## Turnitin Originality Report



## Turnitin Originality Report

Mr by M Radebe

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Assignment: MEd  
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## ANNEXURE G      LANGUAGE EDITOR'S CERTIFICATE

---

25 Maple Crescent  
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Phone 031 – 7075912  
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### **Dr Saths Govender**

---

23 NOVEMBER 2022

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

### **LANGUAGE CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE**

This serves to inform that I have read the final version of the dissertation titled:

**Parental involvement in rural schools during the COVID-19 pandemic: Experiences of school principals in selected public schools in KwaZulu-Natal**, by MUZIWENELE CYPRIAN RADEBE, student no.220081518.

To the best of my knowledge, all the proposed amendments have been effected and the work is free of spelling and grammatical errors. I am of the view that the quality of language used meets generally accepted academic standards.

Yours faithfully



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**DR S. GOVENDER**  
B Paed. (Arts), B.A. (Hons), B Ed.  
Cambridge Certificate for English Medium Teachers  
MPA, D. Admin.