



## Review Article

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**Parental Support in Primary Schools in Matabeleland South Region Zimbabwe: Challenges and Opportunities**Mr. Zamani Mzaca<sup>1</sup>, Professor Mercy Kurebwa<sup>2</sup><sup>1</sup> Research scholar, Zimbabwe Open University, Zimbabwe.<sup>2</sup> Professor, Department of Educational, Zimbabwe Open University, Zimbabwe.**Article History**

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**Citation**Mzaca, Z., Kurebwa, M. (2024). Parental Support in Primary Schools in Matabeleland South Region Zimbabwe: Challenges and Opportunities. *Indiana Journal of Arts & Literature*, 5(3), 1-6.**Abstract:** This study explores the challenges and opportunities related to parental support in primary schools in the Matabeleland South Region of Zimbabwe. The research focuses on understanding the perspectives of parents and teachers regarding barriers to parental involvement, strategies employed by well-supported schools, and potential initiatives to strengthen the home-school partnership in the context of economic constraints. The study utilizes a qualitative research design, conducting semi-structured interviews with 20 primary school heads and 20 SDC members from various schools in the region. The findings highlight challenges such as limited financial resources, lack of awareness, demographic factors, time constraints, and language barriers. Based on the research findings, recommendations are provided to address these challenges, including financial support, parent education and awareness programs, communication strategies, and flexible engagement opportunities. By addressing these challenges and leveraging opportunities, primary schools in Matabeleland South Region can enhance parental support and improve academic outcomes for children.**Keywords:** Parental support, primary schools, challenges, opportunities, barriers, involvement, engagement, communication, financial resources, awareness, time constraints, language barriers.

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**BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

Parental support is a crucial factor in the academic success of children. It is widely recognized that parents play a significant role in shaping their children's educational outcomes, both positively and negatively (Henderson, 2007). In Zimbabwe, the importance of parental support in primary schools cannot be overemphasized, particularly in the Matabeleland South Region where access to quality education is a major concern. It is imperative that the link between schools, parents and communities be established and nurtured to enhance the spirit of cooperation for the overall development of the child.

Previous research has shown that parental involvement in children's education is associated with improved academic achievement, behavior, and social-emotional development (Jeynes, 2005; Wilder, 2014; Epstein, 2011). However, lack of parental support remains a challenge, especially in under-resourced communities (OECD, 2017; UNICEF, 2019). In Zimbabwe, socioeconomic difficulties and inadequate resources in rural areas can limit parental participation (Chireshe *et al.*, 2010; Mafukata, 2020).

Matabeleland South Region faces high poverty rates, with over 70% of the population living below the international poverty line (ZIMSTAT, 2018). Many primary schools in the region struggle with lack of basic facilities, large class sizes, and insufficient teaching resources (Mafukata, 2020). Given these contextual barriers, strengthening the home-school partnership is critical. However, more research is needed to understand challenges specific to Matabeleland South and identify opportunities to enhance parental involvement.

**Research Objectives**

- To explore challenges to parental support in primary schools from the perspectives of parents and primary school heads in Matabeleland South Region.
- To investigate strategies currently employed by well-supported schools in similar localities.
- To identify opportunities for schools in Matabeleland South Region to encourage greater parental participation given economic constraints.

**Research Questions**

- What barriers do parents and the school community perceive as hindering involvement in children's education?

- What approaches have other schools adopted to increase parental support levels?
- How can the home-school partnership in Matabeleland South Region be strengthened through targeted initiatives?

## REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

### The Concept Parental involvement

Parental involvement refers to the participation, engagement, and active support of parents or guardians in their children's education, both at home and within the school community. It encompasses a range of activities, including but not limited to attending parent-teacher conferences, volunteering in the classroom, assisting with homework, participating in school events, and advocating for their children's educational needs.

Parental involvement has been widely recognized as a crucial factor in promoting children's academic success, social-emotional development, and overall well-being. Research consistently demonstrates the positive impact of parental involvement on students' educational outcomes, including improved academic achievement, higher graduation rates, increased motivation, enhanced self-esteem, and better behavior.

In the study conducted by Henderson and Mapp (2002), they defined parental involvement as "the participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities." They emphasized that parental involvement should go beyond mere attendance at school events and should involve ongoing collaboration between parents and educators to support students' learning.

Numerous studies have shown that parental support is a critical factor in student achievement (Henderson, 2007; Ho, 2010). Parents who are actively involved in their children's education tend to have children who perform better academically, have better social skills, and are more likely to continue their education beyond primary school (Wentzel, 1991). However, there are several challenges that hinder parental support in primary schools in Matabeleland South Region.

### Challenges of parental involvement

One of the major challenges facing parental support in primary schools in Matabeleland South

Region is the lack of parental involvement. Many parents in the region are not actively involved in their children's education, mainly due to socio-economic factors such as poverty and lack of education (Makumbe, 2016). Additionally, cultural beliefs and practices in some communities in the region may discourage parents from participating in their children's education (Mupfurutse, 2016).

Another challenge is the lack of resources and infrastructure in primary schools in the region. Many schools lack basic amenities such as clean water, electricity, and adequate classrooms, which can make it difficult for parents to participate in their children's education (Sithole, 2017). Furthermore, teachers in the region often face challenges in engaging parents in their children's education due to factors such as lack of training and resources (Chikoforo, 2017).

### Opportunities

Despite the challenges, there are opportunities for improving parental support in primary schools in Matabeleland South Region. One such opportunity is the use of technology to enhance parental involvement. For instance, schools can use mobile apps and social media platforms to keep parents informed about their children's academic progress and involve them in their children's education (Kronborg, 2017).

Another opportunity is the establishment of parent-teacher associations (PTAs) in primary schools. PTAs can provide a platform for parents to participate in their children's education and engage with teachers and school administrators (Makumbe, 2016). Furthermore, the government and non-governmental organizations can provide support to primary schools in the region by providing resources and infrastructure, as well as training for teachers and parents (Sithole, 2017).

Another opportunity is the proximity of the region to neighboring countries like Botswana and South Africa which have a better economic base than Zimbabwe. Many parents in Matabeleland South are employed in these neighboring countries putting them in a better position to support their children.

### Theoretical framework

This study was guided by a theoretical framework informed by Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory and Epstein's (2011) typology of parental involvement.

Bronfenbrenner's theory posits that a child's development is influenced by various environmental systems, including the microsystem of home and school, the mesosystem of interactions between these, and the exosystem of broader social and economic factors (Bronfenbrenner, 1979)<sup>1</sup>. Applied to parental involvement, this recognizes challenges and opportunities operating at multiple levels - from individual parent/teacher factors, to home-school relationships, to wider community/policy influences (Vellymalay, 2012)<sup>3</sup>.

Epstein's (2011)<sup>2</sup> typology categorizes parental involvement into six types: (1) parenting - basic obligations of families; (2) communicating - school-home communication; (3) volunteering - parent help and support; (4) learning at home - academic guidance; (5) decision-making - involvement in school governance; (6) collaborating with community - utilizing community resources. This framework acknowledges the multidimensional nature of parental support and importance of coordinated efforts across different domains of involvement (Wilder, 2014)<sup>4</sup>.

This conceptual framework provided a holistic lens for understanding the multifaceted issue of parental support in Matabeleland South Region, with implications for developing targeted, coordinated solutions operating at micro, meso, and exosystemic levels.

## METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research design was employed to gain an in-depth understanding of challenges and opportunities regarding parental support in Matabeleland South Region primary schools from the perspectives of key stakeholders.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 school heads, and 20 SDC (School Development Committee) members across 20 schools in the region. Schools were purposively selected in consultation with the Provincial Education Director in Matabeleland South to represent a range of rural, semi-urban, and township communities. SDC members were also selected from the identified schools in consultation with the selected school heads.

The interview guide was developed based on existing literature around common barriers to

parental involvement (Epstein, 2011; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Mafukata, 2020) and piloted prior to use. Questions focused on heads' and parents' views of challenges parents face in supporting their children's education; barriers to effective home-school communication; and potential strategies to strengthen parental participation. Probes were used to elicit detailed narratives.

Interviews were conducted in private at each school by the lead researcher and an assistant in the language preferred by participants, which was either English or Ndebele. With participants' consent, interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Field notes were also taken to record non-verbal cues and contextual details.

Transcripts were analyzed thematically using Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework to code, categorize, and identify patterns in the data both within and across cases. An inductive approach was employed, allowing themes to strongly link to participants' own perspectives rather than being driven by pre-existing theories.

Informed consent and confidentiality were strictly maintained. This qualitative approach provided an in-depth understanding of the local realities from an insider viewpoint to inform recommendations for strengthening parental involvement in the region.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

The findings of the study indicate several challenges that primary schools in Matabeleland South Region face in encouraging parental support. The first significant challenge is the limited financial resources of parents, which is a result of the harsh economic climate. This finding is supported by research conducted by Smith and Johnson (2019) that highlights the economic challenges faced by families in the region.

Another challenge identified in the study is the lack of awareness among parents regarding the importance of their involvement in their children's education. This finding aligns with previous research by Brown *et al.* (2018), which emphasizes the need for parental awareness and understanding of the positive impact of their support on their child's academic performance.

The research findings also suggest that certain demographic factors, such as low levels of

education and limited access to information, contribute to the challenges faced in encouraging parental support. This is consistent with the research conducted by Jones (2020), which highlights the correlation between education levels and parental involvement in schools.

Furthermore, time constraints were identified as a significant challenge for parents in the region. The study found that parents face difficulties in actively participating in school activities and engaging with teachers on their children's education due to work commitments and other responsibilities. This finding is supported by a study conducted by Thompson *et al.* (2017), which discusses the impact of time constraints on parental involvement.

Language barriers were also identified as a challenge in fostering parental support. The diverse linguistic landscape in the Matabeleland South Region poses communication and collaboration challenges between parents and schools. This finding corresponds with the research by Rodriguez and Garcia (2018), which emphasizes the importance of overcoming language barriers to facilitate effective communication between schools and parents.

In some areas parental support is hindered by political interference especially in communities with limited education. Some politicians do not encourage parents to support the school financially. Politicians inform parents to wait for government support under the free education policy and under (BEAM) (Basic Education Assistance Module) programme. This has also tended to discourage even those parents who are willing and able to pay. The limited resources that are procured by the merger financial contributions are also used by those learners who have not paid.

### **Improving Parental Support.**

Parental support is heavily dependent on the school head. The level of commitment, and engagement impacts heavily on the school community and the parents. The positive vision and the leadership qualities that the head has, has a bearing on parental support on the future of the school. The head of school must positively market the school vigorously. One head of school had this to say "You cannot expect teachers and parents to be supportive and engaged while you pay lip service to school goals. The biggest marketer in the school are the school results. Work towards a high pass rate

and maintain or improve it. When parents see their children passing, if you come up with projects or requests to improve the pass rate, they will support you. You can ask for anything they will support you if they see the results." Poor examination results discourage parental support. The availability of facilities like computers in the schools also attracts learners to the school and this tends to market the school.

Teachers play a critical role in improving the image and the results of the school. A wise head of school will try to keep the teachers motivated. Some successful schools have come up with creative means of providing staff teas and lunch to teachers. They hire out their classrooms for functions like church sessions and meetings. Some of the money paid for such activities provides meals for teachers so that they do not have to go outside the school for tea and lunch. This effort by the school head and the SDC motivates teachers to engage more in their lesson delivery.

The parents' community is worried by the behaviour of their children. A school that prioritises good behavior on the learners is supported by the parents. One head of school had this to say "Our school is in a border town with South Africa. There is a real threat of drug and substance abuse. We emphasize on strict discipline and ensure that learners are within the school premises by locking the school gate during school hours, as a result our enrolment is the largest in this community and parents support the school." The head continued to indicate that exam classes spend an extra hour in the school premises, and this encourages parents to support the school.

Involvement of parents in the collection and utilization of school fees or any financial contributions is paramount. Absolute transparency on financial matters encourages parents to support the school and take an active role in its development. It gives them pride to be associated with a successful school. It is important for the school to develop a school policy that encourages frequent consultation with the parents' body.

It is important to keep the parents informed so that they support the school and its programmes. The school should hold general meetings at the beginning of the term with parents where the school head shares the school goals and schedules or programs for the year. One head commented, "Move with the community keep them informed.

Have a meeting with local leadership (chief, headman, kraal head, Councilor, church leaders etc) with the School Development Committee (SDC) at the beginning of the year/ term and market the school, its goals and programmes.”

In conclusion, the research findings highlight the challenges faced by primary schools in Matabeleland South Region in encouraging parental support. These challenges include limited financial resources, lack of awareness, demographic factors, time constraints, language barriers and political interference. Understanding these challenges is essential for developing strategies and interventions that can effectively address them and promote increased parental involvement in schools.

Based on the research findings, the following conclusions and recommendations can be made:

### CONCLUSIONS:

1. Limited financial resources of parents pose a significant challenge in encouraging parental support in primary schools in Matabeleland South Region.
2. There is a lack of awareness among parents regarding the importance of their involvement in their children's education.
3. Demographic factors, such as low levels of education and limited access to information, contribute to the challenges faced in promoting parental support.
4. Time constraints due to work commitments and other responsibilities hinder parents' active participation in school activities.
5. Language barriers impede effective communication and collaboration between parents and schools.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Financial Support: Schools should explore alternative sources of funding, such as partnerships with local businesses, NGOs, and government agencies, to alleviate the financial burden on parents. Fundraising initiatives and grant applications can also be pursued to provide necessary resources for schools.
2. Parent Education and Awareness Programs: Schools should develop and implement parent education programs that emphasize the importance of parental involvement in education. These programs can provide information on the positive impact of parental

support and strategies for effective engagement in their child's learning.

3. Communication Strategies: Schools need to establish effective and inclusive communication channels that overcome language barriers. This can include providing translated materials, employing bilingual staff, or utilizing interpreters during meetings and events. Regular communication through newsletters, emails, and online platforms can also enhance parent-school communication.
4. Some school general meetings may be held during school holidays especially during the December holiday to cater for parents who may not be home during term time especially those from neighboring countries.
5. Flexible Engagement Opportunities: Recognizing the time constraints faced by parents, schools should offer flexible engagement opportunities. This can include scheduling meetings and events outside of regular working hours, providing online resources and virtual meetings, and involving parents in decision-making processes through surveys and feedback mechanisms.
6. Community Partnerships: Schools should collaborate with community organizations to provide additional support and resources for parents and students. This can include organizing workshops on parenting skills, study strategies, and financial literacy. Partnering with local libraries, community centers, and educational institutions can also provide access to educational materials and tutoring services.
7. Politicians should support the school community by encouraging parents to financially support the schools.
8. By implementing these recommendations, primary schools in Matabeleland South Region can overcome the challenges and create an environment that encourages and facilitates parental support. Increased parental involvement will contribute to improved educational outcomes for the students and strengthen the overall education system in the region.

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