

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24297/jssr.v17i.8608>**Parental involvement in raising Grade 12 achievement in South African rural secondary schools**<sup>1</sup> Paul Karel Triegaardt, <sup>2</sup>Veronica Mapaseka Monamoledi<sup>1</sup>Department of Education Leadership and Management, College of Education, University of South Africa, P.O. Box 392, Pretoria, 0003, South Africa,<sup>2</sup>Department of English, South West Gauteng TVET College, Technisa Campus, Bordeaux Complex, Randburg, 2194, South Africa<sup>1</sup>paul.triegaardt@gmail.com, <sup>2</sup>mapasekamuthumuni@gmail.com**Abstract**

The *South African Schools Act* No.84 of 1996 obliges parents to bring their children to school from the first day of their schooling. This means that the legislation gives parents the right to be fully involved in their children's education for better academic achievement. This study examined parental involvement in raising Grade 12 achievement in South African rural schools. A qualitative study was done at three secondary schools in the Mkhuhlu circuit in the Bohlabela region of the Mpumalanga Province. Data were collected in the form of interviews from the principal, teachers, parents and Grade 12 learners at each of the three schools. The study found that at all three schools, parents were not aware of their importance to motivate learners to learn, the need to attend school regularly and the development of their own literacy skills to raise the results in Grade 12. Therefore, the study recommends that parents must be empowered by both teachers and principals in order for them to be able to execute their roles effectively.

**Keywords:** Learners, Parents, Teachers, Parental Involvement, Rural Schools**Introduction**

Nyathi (2006:15) conducted a study in Mkhuhlu about factors that contribute towards poor learner achievement in the Mkhuhlu circuit. His study found that most learners from the Mkhuhlu area drop out of the school system prematurely and they end up becoming welfare system beneficiaries at an early stage. Few factors that Nyathi highlights are absenteeism, lack of motivation, illiterate parents and poor involvement of parents. According to Sander and Sheldom (2011:30), parents' role in children's education is to monitor their children's whereabouts, to discuss with their children their school experience and being fully involved in the school. This will minimise the level of absenteeism and poor academic performance (Sander & Sheldom, 2011:31). Furthermore, Selolo (2018:30) argues that the school management should encourage collaboration with illiterate parents to assist them in explaining some policies that oblige them to be involved in their children's education.

More studies from different researchers show that lack of parental involvement is caused by many factors. Dikgale (2012:21) and Katanga (2016:23) argue that poor parental involvement in rural schools is mostly due to parents who are illiterate. Their illiteracy is caused by their backgrounds such as poverty. That is the reason why they do not bother to be involved in their children's education. Therefore, Dikgale (2012:12) and Katanga (2016:23) emphasise that parents are obliged to fulfil their responsibility of being successfully involved in their children's education, without any exception. They further argue that if parents fail to carry out this obligation, it would have a negative impact on the child's learning. However, in rural areas where most parents are illiterate, it is extremely difficult for parents to meet these obligations. Moreover, they do not really have enough time to focus on their children's education, because they are poorly skilled and have to work hard as labourers on farms for long hours and for a low income (Dikgale, 2012:12).

In view of the above background, Maluleke (2014:11) states that when parents, learners and other stakeholders work in collaboration with one another towards building a positive relationship, it will help them to reach and achieve their goal of improving the Grade 12 academic achievement. Effective teaching and learning, improved learner attendance and good behaviour and, above all, improved parental involvement can all lead to better academic achievement. According to Maluleke (2014:11), parental involvement in schools assists parents in

being fully hands-on in terms of their children's progress. This is also highlighted in the *South African Schools Act (SASA) No 84 of 1996*, namely that parents are mandated to be represented in the school governing body. The involvement of parents in the SGB is not limited to governance and policy making, but also to encourage all parents to be involved in the school and the learners' education.

This study examined and established the effect of parental involvement in raising Grade 12 achievement in South African rural schools. The conclusions and recommendations can provide some insight into how parents can be involved in their children's education, regardless of any obstacles and also how the school and the principal can accommodate and involve parents in everything regarding learners.

Therefore, this study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How could parents and schoolwork together adequately to raise Grade 12 academic achievement in rural public secondary schools.
2. What strategies by parents will be required to improve the academic achievement.

After 1994, SASA No. 84 of 1996 was adopted to redress the poor involvement of parents in the running of schools. This resulted in the introduction of democratically elected School Governing Bodies (SGBs). This was to ensure that parents of the public schools in South Africa are involved in decision making (Gwija, 2016:19). It is, however, very important to note that the SASA requires parents not to be partially involved in their children's education, but also to play an important role in curriculum issues. Globally, parental involvement is essential in the education of learners. The literature on parental involvement in other countries reveals that in countries such as England, Finland, Denmark, Sweden, Russia, India, China, Australia, New Zealand, Madagascar and Singapore, parents are involved in different forms, such as SGBs or School Boards. Gayatri (2013:94), Country Report Denmark (2010:34), Country Report Russia (2018:91-100) and Austen (2012:73-81) are in agreement that the success of the school and the improvement of academic achievement is dependent on how parents are involved in their children's education. Furthermore, their SGBs and School Boards mainly consist of parents.

Despite parents being involved in schools in the form of SGBs, Ngcongco (2016:46) states that the child depends mostly on three stakeholders involved; that is, the teacher, learner and parent. Therefore, if any of the stakeholders are not properly involved, the learner may suffer. However, Lemmer (2012:83-96) contends that discipline for learners is important and mainly needs parental involvement. Therefore, collaboration between teachers and parents is very important (Ngcongco, 2016:46). This collaboration, according to Ngcongco (2016:47), will allow parents to know how to be involved productively in their children's education at each grade level. This kind of contact between parents and the school will make it possible for parents to reduce the characteristic isolation of their role and assure parents that the teachers share their concerns about children. In turn, Ngcongco (2016:47) claims that for teachers to know that parents recognise or realise the complexity of their role in the classroom is comforting to the teacher. The benefit of this collaboration and complement is that teachers' work can be done more easily and involved parents may have a more positive view of the teacher and the school. Involved parents might give more support to teachers (Ngcongco, 2016:47).

However, Lemmer (2012: 83-96) and Gwija (2013: 41) argue that parents play a huge role in helping how learners should be prepared for adult life, including the world of work. This is essential because, according to Gwija (2016:7), parents have a natural part to play in supporting their children in their schoolwork, such as building the self-esteem of their children, monitoring homework and schoolwork, and even doing school visits to check on their children's progress. In cases where a parent is an expert, a parent can use his or her expertise to help the school; this can be professionally related, where a parent can come to the school and motivate the learners (Gwija, 2016:7). Gwija (2016:41) claims that parents can also organise career guidance or exhibitions that will help learners in terms of programmes to choose concerning tertiary education (Gwija, 2016:41).

Furthermore, Lemmer (2012:83-96) and Gwija (2016:8) indicate that the balance between the parents' role and the school's role regarding the child's schoolwork should be in symmetry in order for a learner to perform academically well. However, parents should at least establish a conducive home environment for learners to learn. Gwija (2016:8) highlights some ways that parents should use to create a conducive environment for their

children, for example, to be primary teachers at home, caregivers and child protectors, counsellors and career advisors, be good listeners to adolescent thinking and to monitor progress

Furthermore, in addition to the above discussed ways of creating a good environment, Lemmer (2012: 83-96) argues that parental involvement can create a proactive school climate; thus improving parent and teacher instruction in elements of parental involvement. Therefore, the school have to encourage teachers and parents to improve their means of communication with learners especially at home. Parents must attend meetings concerning their children's progress and behaviour and they need to offer support to the school, teacher and the principal (Lemmer, 2012:83-96). In short, according to Sambo (2016:20), parents and the school should be in constant communication. This includes informing parents about school programmes and learners' progress, and parents should be able to contact the school about their children's lives. Furthermore, the school may use different types of media, which include newsletters, report cards, telephone calls or home visits (Sambo, 2016:20).

Gwija (2016:33) states that school performance is a part of the general improvement of the school. However, school improvement is about more than simply getting the best results, but it is not easy to determine how parents can contribute to the raising of standards when they do not actually teach learners. However, their engagement will contribute to improving the school performance (Gwija, 2016:42). This therefore means that the improvement of school performance is not exclusively the teachers or the schools' responsibility, but that of the parents' as well. That is why this research study aims at filling the gap by establishing the effect of parental involvement on raising Grade 12 achievement in South African rural schools. The findings can then be used to improve parental involvement, especially in South African rural schools.

## Materials and Methods

The research approach to this study was a qualitative one. The qualitative approach was considered suitable for this study, because it attempts to examine an incident in an unusual location where the focus is on understanding the social incident holistically (Cresswell, 2014:113). The study used face-to-face interviews that were open-ended and semi-structured, and revolved around central questions. These interviews provided direct evidence of the involvement, contribution and cooperation of the main stakeholders; that is, the principal, teachers, Grade 12 learners and parents, to ensure school effectiveness in terms of academic performance at rural schools in the Mkhuhlu circuit in the Mpumalanga Province.

## Population and Sampling

Tobias (2011:68) defines *population* as the target group one intends to study. Research population is the group of interest to the researcher; the group to which the results of the proposed study will be generalised (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2013:149). The target population for this study were the principals, teachers, SGB members, Grade 12 learners and parents at all three selected schools. This population group was considered appropriate for the study, because it constituted the key role players responsible for the daily routine of teaching and learning at the schools. Therefore, they were in the best position to supply the researcher with the information needed to give answers to the study's research question.

## Data collection

All participants were informed about everything the study is about and they were required to provide written consent. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the principal, the teacher, three Grade 12 learners and three parents at each of the three selected schools. This assisted the researcher in interacting effectively with principals, teachers, Grade 12 learners and parents. Each interview took about 30 minutes. Questions that were asked were unrestricted questions based on the role of parental involvement in rural secondary schools for better academic performance of Grade 12 learners. In those separate interviews with participants, participants were then able to respond in their own words. All participants in this study gave descriptive information, which contributed a lot towards answering the research questions. Their responses to probed questions were elaborated and fully explained for a better understanding.

## Analysis

The data collected through interviews were immediately transcribed verbatim. According to Creswell (2014: 343), patterns refer to the findings that are descriptive by nature, while themes refer to a categorical form that interpret the meaning of the pattern. Therefore, in this study, the researcher sorted responses of the interviews into broad patterns. These patterns were then divided into themes and further into sub-themes. To ensure credibility of the data, verbatim transcripts were read several times and compared with the audio record. The researcher made sure that the reliability of coding patterns was assessed by checking for contingency between different coding points. Pseudonyms were used to preserve anonymity of the participants. Not everything was coded during transcription. Repetition and filler words were excluded.

## Findings

In this paper, the findings are presented under the themes that emerged from responses of the respondents. The first finding revealed that motivation and having a good relationship with the school are the factors that might help to raise the academic performance of Grade 12. Secondly, the researchers found that parents should help schools to improve learners' attendance and their own literacy skills to support Grade 12 learners in their learning at home.

### Motivation and having a good relationship with the school

The findings of this study show that some parents do motivate their children by telling how important their education is. Furthermore, some teachers also motivate learners to work hard at school so that they have a brighter future. It was also noted that the motivation that they got from parents and teachers helped in achieving better results in Grade 12. Most participants agreed that motivation was what most learners got from the school and parents. *Their motivation helps us a lot because they make me to realise how important the school is.* (Learner A1) Learner A1 further commented that their parents rewarded them after they had performed well at school. *Sometimes they give us rewards, such as saying if you can do better in this subject, I will do something for you. That makes me to work harder to get that promised reward.* The SGB, working with other parents, can organise educational programmes for learners in order to boost their motivation and parents can give rewards for good performance for motivation (National Education Evaluation and Development Unit, 2018: 39). Learner A3 was in agreement with Learner A1 that their parents motivated them, although his parent did not give or promise any reward. However, she did motivate him. Learner A3 stated the following: *You got a chance that you might be something and a chance that I never got. If you are not studying hard, that will make you not to be something better in life. Look at how I am now without education, so you need to work hard to make things better.* Leepo (2015:45) concurs with the above findings that learners need to be given a purpose to learn by means of motivation. The parent of Learner B1 always motivates her about the importance of education. Learner B1 was in thus agreement with Learner A3. She commented: *My mother always tells me that you see I am not educated, you need to work hard because education is the only thing, I will leave you with when I die.* (Learner B1) Even Learner C1 agreed with Learner A3 that her parent motivated her *My parent encourages me that I must study because life outside is difficult when you not educated.* (Learner C1) According to the findings of the paper, teachers do motivate learners about the importance of education in life. Learner C1 commented that their teacher did motivate them. *Yes, our teachers tell us about their experiences as they are educated, so they encourage us to study hard so that we live good lives.* (Learner C1)

As much as most parents motivate their children, some parents do not care about the education of their children. Principal B commented: *Yes, some parents do motivate their children, some do not. After registering their children, they are gone; you will only force them to be involved.* Principal C was aware of the poor motivation by parents of their children, he always encourages his teachers to keep on pushing. He commented: *I normally tell my teachers to go an extra mile to assist learners, because if that is not done, the performance will drop.* SGBs also play a huge role in motivating learners about their studies. SGB B and Parent C3 were in collaboration about the SGB being involved in motivating learners: *We do motivate learners. We come in the morning and pray with them in the assembly. We then tell them to study regardless of situations that they might be facing, they must study.* (SGB B) *Sometimes the SGB talks to the learners to motivate them. They even organise pastors to motivate them.* (Parent C3) However, the SGB goes to the extent of encouraging the learner component in the SGB to motivate

their fellow learners. SGB A said: *We also tell the learner representatives to encourage their fellow learners about the importance of their education.* (SGB A) The findings of the paper suggest that most parents do motivate their children about the importance of education in their lives. Lemmer (2012:84) claims that the balance between the parents' role and the school's role regarding the child's schoolwork should be in symmetry in order for a learner to perform academically well. However, this denotes that the SGB, with the school, should design some measures to help parents in establishing favourable a home environment for learners to learn. The SGB need to advise parents to make homes conducive to learning, and this motivates learners a lot.

The findings of this study revealed that parents and the schools work together to motivate learners so that their academic achievement may be improved. Leepo (2017:45) supports the above findings as he explains that learning as a process demands motivation and the lack of motivation amongst learners may sometimes pose a challenge in improving academic achievement, regardless of good teachers and a good curriculum. He further argues that learners seldom learn without any purpose; it is only when they are motivated, especially by their parents and teachers on the importance of education in their lives, that they all realise the purpose of learning.

### **Absenteeism**

The study found that absenteeism in rural secondary schools might have a negative influence on academic performance in Grade 12. Some participants acknowledged that learner absenteeism was a problem at their schools. Principal A said: *There was an incident of a learner who happened to be absent for 10 days. For the school to know, the parent came to report her missing child and only to find the child has been with her boyfriend.* (Principal A) Teacher B agreed with Principal A, although her comment was about learner absenteeism due to family issues. She commented: *There is learner whom I realised that her performance dropped and her attendance was very poor. I could not trace her parents to communicate with them. I ended up calling her neighbour who was once the learner in this and now she is in university. She told me that the learner had no parents, she stays alone at her parents' home and her granny stays at her own home and that is the reason she is not attending regularly.* (Teacher B) Teacher B further highlighted the issue of schoolwork contributing towards absenteeism: *Some learners do come to school but you find them being not present in some classes, especially when they have not done homework for that particular period, and that has a negative impact in the academic achievement of the learner.* (Teacher B) However, despite of the above comments, Teacher C disagreed with Principal A and Teacher B to a certain extent. She mentioned that at her school, Grade 12 attendance was good. She commented: *When the child is absent, report the learner. But in this school, there are few absentees.* (Teacher C)

The above findings concur with assertions made by Simelane (2015:23) that schools are faced with a high learner absenteeism rate, which results in a high failure rate. In short, such behaviour compromises learners' school time, because it interferes with their schoolwork; hence, they are away from school for long periods whilst teaching and learning continue at school or in class and that affects their academic achievement. Therefore, Katanga (2016:28) and Gwija (2016:42) recommend that the contribution of parents towards the education of their children is very significant and crucial for learners to perform better academically. In short, parents should ensure that their children attend school regularly; they should maintain regular contact with the school and volunteer at the school, if necessary (Gwija, 2016:42). Attendance, according to Katanga (2016:23), is beneficial to learners in terms of academic achievement. This is because when learners are present in the class, they are able to complete and submit the assignments given to them, which may result in learner achievement and better performance in Grade 12.

### **Literacy skills of parents**

The study found that literacy skills of parents contributed to the poor results of Grade 12 learners. One principal commented about learners who stayed with illiterate grandparents. He mentioned that some grandparents did not even attend meetings and they did not help learners with their schoolwork. He made the following comment: *Think of grannies who are illiterate and they stay with these children and they can't even help them with any schoolwork; hence they are illiterate.* (Principal A.) Even some parents are illiterate. Learner B1 said: *When I am given homework, I just go around and ask people who might know. If they do not help me, I just write anything, as long as I wrote something* (Learner B1). Learner B2 shared the same sentiments with Learner B1 on the issue of their parents not being able to assist them in doing their schoolwork due to illiteracy. She said: *Aah, when I am*

stuck in doing my homework, I just leave it because my mom will tell me that she does not know. When the teacher asks, I tell him or her that I did not know how to do it (Learner B2). However, Parent A3 suggested that even if the parents were not educated, they had to check their children's schoolwork. She commented: *The fact that I am illiterate does not mean that I must not check my child's books, I do. I just ask his little brother to check his books with me and he will tell me the dates on the book and whether the task is marked or not.* (Parent A3) As discussed by Nyama (2010:20), most children who have parents who are illiterate are more likely to be illiterate themselves. These children are more likely to drop out of school than other children would. Illiteracy might cause a considerable problem for the support system of the learners, as most illiterate parents are dependent on others to function. For instance, illiterate parents might struggle to read and interpret letters from their children's schools and to assist their children with schoolwork. Illiterate parents sometimes feel that they cannot help their children and they feel embarrassed to contribute to their children's education, yet they can. Nyama (2010:20) further notes that even if some parents are illiterate and do not understand what their children learn at school, they can at least spend some time with their children each day, trying to motivate them. Therefore, parents can still play a vital and valuable role in their children's education, even if they are illiterate, by showing interest, listening and motivating them when they do their schoolwork. Therefore, when learners are motivated, especially by their parents, they are most likely to perform better academically.

## Discussion

### Motivation and having a good relationship with the school

The ineffective relationship of the parents was the significant finding in connection with the poor academic achievement of Grade 12 learners. According to the National Education Evaluation and Development Unit (2018:39), learners whose parents support and allow their children to attend extra classes would perform academically better than those who do not attend. Principal A and B shared the sentiments that the results dropped a lot when the SGB and parents did not support the school. Principal C agreed with Principal A and B and added that when parents stopped supporting the continuation of school camps as extra classes, the Grade 12 results declined drastically. Many teacher participants expressed similar sentiments.

The researcher found that most SGBs and parents try to work together in supporting the schools to raise the academic achievement of Grade 12 learners. It was revealed in the findings that all three schools used motivation to raise the academic achievement of Grade 12 learners. What was notable, was the motivation learners got from the school and parents. Parents were urged to work in cooperation with schools and they were encouraged to have dedicated time with their children to become good motivators (Selolo, 2018:33). All learner participants interviewed felt that the motivation they received from their parents gave them a purpose to study hard. Most parents who participated in this study were illiterate, and they used illiteracy to motivate their children and explains that poor results contribute to poverty. According to Learner A3, the fact that their parents are illiterate and they live a life of poverty, empower their parents to encourage them to study hard and change their parents' situations. Even teachers motivate learners about the importance of education. According to Selolo (2018:30), constant communication between teachers and parents can expose some challenges faced by teachers with their children. Therefore, if parents get involved, it will become healthier for them to address such challenges. In that way, learners, teachers and parents will be kept motivated. Learner C1 expressed appreciation for what their teachers always say about the importance of education, and this encourages them to study hard.

### Absenteeism

The researcher noted that learner absenteeism was also a factor that contributed towards a decline in Grade 12 academic achievement. However, participants mentioned few cases for Grade 12 absenteeism. Learner absenteeism affects not only the learner performance but the pass rate of the district, province and nation. Therefore, it is the duty of the parent, guardian and the school to ensure that learners attend school (Mafa, 2018:11). A teacher at School B (Teacher B) highlighted the issue of the community that the school serves, namely that some learners do not stay with their biological parents; they stay with guardians or grandparents. Therefore, they are the learners that are affected the most by absenteeism, according to School B (Mafa, 2018: 11). This causes a decline in learner performance and leads to poor academic achievement. Therefore, SGBs and

parents play a crucial role in making sure that learners attend school every day so that they excel academically (Mafa, 2018:11).

### **Literacy skills of parents**

The researchers noted that most parents are illiterate. This sometimes makes them unable to help where they are supposed to help. This includes the completion of homework. According to Duan and Guan (2018:1), parental involvement includes, amongst other things, making sure that homework is supervised, talking to children about school life, motivating children and communicating with the school. All the principals and teachers agreed that most parents are illiterate and cannot even help with any schoolwork. This has a negative impact on the academic achievement of the learner (Duan & Guan, 2018:1). A learner at School B (Learner B2) commented that when the school gave homework that was difficult and her parent could not help, she just wrote anything for the sake of writing. According to Spencer (2017:1), homework plays a crucial role in the performance of learner and school as it serves as a tool to improve a learner's general understanding of a subject. Furthermore, Spencer (2017:1) notes that completing homework and improved academic achievement are correlated and they both maintain the home-school involvement. This lack of education in parents, according to the findings of the study, therefore affects the academic achievement of learners.

The study revealed that most parents of children attending rural schools are old or illiterate. This makes it difficult for them to be fully involved in the education of their children. To address the issue of grandparents and illiterate parents, the principal should conduct parents' workshops once per term. At these workshops, parents should be reminded of what is expected from them pertaining to the education of their children. This includes the importance of completing schoolwork. During those workshops, parents can be advised to assist their children by organising people in the community who are literate to assist their children (National Education Evaluation and Development Unit, 2018:62). Some of the learner participants confirmed that they did consult such people on their own and some parents organised people to help their children with schoolwork. During the workshops, motivational speakers can be organised to motivate parents to involve themselves in the education of their children and the importance of education. Even former learners who have graduated or are working can be organised to motivate parents and their children (National Education Evaluation and Development Unit, 2018:62). The principals should include parents' workshop days in the year plan of the school. This might take place at least once every quarter, preferably before learners write their quarterly tests. These workshops would be of great significance in this regard, as Menheere and Hooge (2010:153) confirm that schools could provide skills to parents on how they could support their children's academic development during the parents' workshops. Therefore, for these workshops to be effective, learners and parents, especially illiterate parents, should be given the opportunity to participate in topics like motivation, perseverance, responsibility, cooperation and initiative. This would give both learners and parents full ownership and confidence in the education process.

### **Conclusions**

The main aim of this study was to establish parental involvement on raising Grade 12 academic achievement in Mpumalanga rural schools. It further investigated the strategies parents can implement to raise the academic achievement of Grade 12 learners at public rural schools. The study revealed the following solutions:

- Elderly and illiterate parents to be assisted in the learning of Grade 12 learners.
- Parents to support the school to improve the results of Grade 12 learners.

This study has spotlighted that much still needs to be done to enhance parental involvement in improving Grade 12 academic achievement. If the SGB is given sufficient training and proper support by principals, it is believed that parents would be effective enough to improve Grade 12 academic achievement, specifically at rural secondary schools.

### **Data Availability (excluding Review articles)**

The data may be accessed by contacting [mapasekamuthumuni@gmail.com](mailto:mapasekamuthumuni@gmail.com). The findings of this study are in PDF format.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors of this article declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding this submission.

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