

Research Paper

Family-School Partnerships in Improving Academic Performance of Grade 10 Learners in a Rural Public School

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Abstract

Family-school partnerships address academic difficulties and ensure the performance of learners, thus, they are crucial for the improvement of learners. However, these collaborative partnerships can occasionally be hampered by problems including inadequate communication, and limited parental involvement. Research acknowledges the significance of these partnerships, but their successful implementation is hampered by a variety of institutional and socioeconomic barriers, which lessens their impact on learner academic performance. This study examined how essential forming family-school partnerships are for enhancing the academic performance of Grade 10 learners in a rural public school in Limpopo, South Africa. The study aimed to better learner performance and provide support strategies to foster improvement. An interpretivism paradigm was adopted, employing semi-structured individual interviews and document analysis. Purposefully selected participants included four academically underperforming learners, their parents, and two teachers. The study was grounded in Epstein's model of school, family, and community partnership, advocating for parental collaboration with school personnel through six key guidelines, promoting mutual responsibility among stakeholders. Findings revealed that parents understood the value of family-school partnerships and their roles within these. However, challenges such as other obligations, transportation issues, and time constraints were identified as hindrances preventing them from fully supporting their children's academic integrity.

Keywords: family-school partnerships; academic performance; learners; support; improvement; collaboration

Introduction

Family-school partnerships engage school personnel, parents, and third-party family members, promoting mutual trust, respect, and communication to enhance the educational experience of learners. Moore (2023) highlights that these partnerships focus on collaborative initiatives between families and school staff. For instance, families are encouraged to seek feedback as actively as they participate in their child's academic journey, with the feedback provided by schools being regarded as a form of communicative feedback. Given that family-school partnerships are intended to be a collaborative process, it is essential to recognize that this collaboration entails shared responsibilities between both teachers and parents in supporting a learner's needs. According to Graham-Clay (2024), parents have a lifelong commitment to their children's development, while teachers fulfill a temporary instructional role. Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge the distinct roles that both teachers and parents play within the educational system. A study conducted by Chauke et al. (2022) in South Africa revealed that establishing family-school partnerships in Limpopo presents challenges due to a lack of sufficient knowledge and skills among principals and teachers regarding the effective development and implementation of these partnerships. These gaps exist because current teacher education programs in the

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country do not adequately address this important topic. As a result, school principals and teachers often attribute the lack of strong parental involvement to the parents themselves, overlooking their own responsibility to initiate and cultivate these partnerships for optimal educational outcomes. In a study conducted by Chauke et al. (2022) also highlight that parents may not view themselves as equal partners in collaboration with teachers, leading to limited engagement in school activities that support the educational interests of their children. The latter has been found to reveal that there is an amalgam of challenges particularly from Limpopo province especially ones related to the formation of family school partnerships.

Pestaner et al. (2024) indicate that the gap between parental expectations for acceptable behavior at home and teacher expectations for acceptable behavior at school has widened, leading to a greater divide between these two significant influences in children's lives. This misalignment may have contributed to some confusion among learners, leading to feelings of resentment and mistrust towards educators (Pestaner et al., 2024), this situation may hinder the development of positive engagement among families, schools, and ultimately, learners as well. Moreover, rural areas often report lower household incomes, which can hinder the formation of effective family-school partnerships designed to support learners with low academic performance. Many parents may struggle to meet the logistical demands required by schools, such as transportation costs to attend parent-teacher meetings. An international study conducted in Hong Kong by Cheung and Wong (2021) highlights that investment in children's development includes providing access to high-quality education, tutoring, improved nutrition, adequate medical care, and a stimulating environment with opportunities for extracurricular activities. In contrast, children from low-income families frequently lack essential resources—such as nutrition, medical care, and educational materials—thereby limiting their opportunities compared to peers from more affluent backgrounds.

Grade 10 learners in rural public schools are significantly impacted by the lack of collaboration between families and schools. Research conducted by Molaudzi et al. (2022) indicates a persistent disparity in the allocation of educational resources and learner achievements in public schools, particularly within marginalised rural communities such as those in Limpopo Province. National policies aimed at education and support advocate for a cooperative approach, encouraging parents and schools to work together to assist learners facing marginalization, disabilities, academic difficulties, or social support needs. Utami (2022) highlights that partnerships between families and schools can greatly enhance a learner's academic performance by providing a buffer against socioeconomic and familial issues, thereby promoting long-term academic development. Unfortunately, in the Sepitsi Circuit of Limpopo, both parents and schools struggle to advance this collaborative process and are not fully leveraging available resources. This lack of partnership adversely affects learners' academic success.

Moreover, rural public schools in Limpopo encounter numerous challenges. Problems including inadequate resources, insufficient infrastructure, and qualified educator shortages all contribute to academic difficulties. As a result, learners in these areas are staring down greater disadvantages than their urban peers. A study by Masuku et al. (2024) reinforces the notion of inadequacy, noting that the limited support and resources available to learners have led to a meaningful discrepancy in educational outcomes, ultimately influencing their future educational opportunities. Marginalised rural schools in South Africa are dealing with resource constraints, highlighting the need to explore family-school partnerships as a potential strategy to improve academic performance among Grade 10 learners. Shikalepo (2020) asserts that the inability to provide adequate support and learning materials in rural schools has led to unsatisfactory learning results. Observations suggest that family-school partnerships in these settings are often either ineffective or entirely absent. Therefore, it is essential to examine the viability of family-school collaboration as a constructive approach to enhancing the academic performance of Grade 10 learners.

Epstein's (2018) model for measuring parental participation in family-school partnerships offers a robust theoretical framework for examining the connection between such partnerships and enhanced academic performance in learners. This model categorises and evaluates various actions that parents can take to engage in their children's education, encompassing six key components: 1. Parenting: Activities and behaviors aimed at supporting a child's educational needs at home; 2. Communication: Establishing regular dialogue between parents and teachers; 3. Volunteering: Encouraging parents to participate in school activities. 4. Learning at Home: Promoting parental support for children's learning outside of school settings. 5. Decision-making: Involving parents in the decision-making processes of the school; 6. Community collaboration: Building partnerships with community organizations (Epstein, 2018).

Gu et al. (2024) contend that a family's socioeconomic status significantly influences children's academic achievement by impacting the level of parental involvement in education. Consequently, while schools can

implement methods and strategies aimed at fostering intervention programs and support structures for families, socioeconomic barriers may impede these efforts. Harpaz et al. (2024) emphasize the importance of understanding supportive relationships in Epstein's six types of parental involvement, highlighting that various forms of engagement can provide effective and proactive support for the child. Moreover, the critical role of parental involvement in their children's educational journey should not be underestimated. This study was inspired by my experience working in a school as a learner support specialist and English educator, where I observed various factors that negatively impact family-school partnerships and, consequently, learner academic performance. I noted that a lack of resources for both schools and families, particularly affecting learners from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, coupled with issues like absenteeism due to transportation hurdles, added to this problem. Additionally, these difficulties were highlighted by parents' absence from the meetings designed to provide them with information about their children's education. Upon reflection, I recognized that my perspective was somewhat narrow and required a broader approach, which motivated the undertaking of this study. Research conducted by Worthy (2024) indicates that parents often struggle to support their children with homework due to insufficient knowledge or skills in the subject matter. This situation is further complicated by inadequate teacher training and a lack of emphasis on shared responsibilities among all stakeholders. These factors offer insights into the difficulties surrounding the establishment of effective family-school partnerships.

Understanding parenting styles in family-school partnerships can provide valuable information on how to enhance support for improving learners' academic performance. According to Jorban et al. (2024), effective parenting practices include fostering nurturing family support systems and creating optimal home environments conducive to learning. However, the definition of family-school partnerships and strategies for involving parents in school activities that further promote their children's education and continue to be subjects of ongoing research. Culturally responsive education can improve academic outcomes for diverse learners by acknowledging and addressing their unique experiences and perspectives. Kosakowski (2024) highlights that cultural diversity is crucial in developing collaborative frameworks and nurturing a supportive culture for instructional coaching. This initiative encourages a culture of constructive feedback, allowing teachers to embrace suggestions and adapt their practices to better support culturally diverse learners. Moreover, because teachers have many obstacles to overcome and often become overwhelmed by administrative tasks, this may lead to neglecting learners whose parents are less involved or little interested in their education and improvement. Farmer (2020) notes that teachers encounter various difficulties, including classroom discipline issues and workplace expectations that may exceed their professional training. Furthermore, Chen et al. (2024) emphasise that research reveals teacher burnout as a significant predictor of psychological distress among educators. While supporting learners dealing with their own significant difficulties, many teachers burn out and "run out" of compassion.

The teaching profession is particularly vulnerable to work-related stressors and psychological distress compared to other occupations (Chen et al., 2024). Kifle-Thompson (2024) adds that when learners face social challenges, such as inadequate parental guidance or limited mentorship support, they may resort to criminal activities, which can adversely affect their academic potential. Therefore, it is essential for educators to actively promote parental and familial involvement in their child's education (Kifle-Thompson, 2024). By enhancing parents' understanding of the curriculum, homework, and examination requirements, they can play a more active role in supporting their child's educational journey. Furthermore, the South African Schools Act (SASA) (Republic of South Africa, 1996) mandates parental involvement in school processes and activities. This requirement inherently introduces dynamics that could lead to conflicts. Nevertheless, collaboration sessions among stakeholders can create an environment where parents and educators can come together to share and explore their perspectives on the essential elements of an effective partnership model (Kambouri et al., 2021). Such interactions can facilitate open dialogue, allowing for the resolution of differences and the reduction of potential conflicts. However, acknowledging the distinct challenges and dynamics present in rural educational settings, this study aims to explore and analyze the existing literature relevant to the research questions outlined below:

- i. What challenges do families and schools experience in enhancing academic performance of grade 10 learners in a rural public school?
- ii. How are families and schools understanding and forming partnerships to improve academic performance in supporting grade 10 learners in rural public schools?

- iii. What are the strategies that can be used to improve academic performance of grade 10 learners in rural public schools?

Table 1.1 below presents statistical data on academic achievement results, highlighting the importance of developing and implementing family-school partnerships, especially for grade 10 learners.

Table 1.1. Grade averages of 10th grade learners from 2024

GRADE 10 2020 AVG % per subject	GRADE 10 2021 AVG % per subject	GRADE 10 2022 AVG % per subject
English 42%	English 50%	English 48%
Math literacy 29%	Math literacy 37%	Math literacy 36%
Mathematics 41.22%	Mathematics 30.70%	Mathematics 23%

Source: South African School Administration and Management System (SAMS)-2024

Table 1.1 above indicated that learners in various subjects may also face challenges as statistics above do not account for a 100% pass rate (English pass rate=40%, Math and Math Literacy= 30%) in each subject for all subjects this further suggests that there is a minority that is still finding it challenging to sustain good academic performance. Although some learners can pass the aforementioned subjects this does not provide for the school a quality pass rate.

The Department of Education (1996) asserts that the primary policy governing schools in South Africa is the South African Schools Act (SASA), Act 84 of 1996. This legislation establishes a framework for democratic governance, ensuring equitable access to education for all learners, overseeing language policies, curricula, and assessments, regulating school finances and establishing the rights and responsibilities of parents within the educational system. In essence, SASA provides a comprehensive legislative foundation for promoting inclusive, high-quality education in the South African context. The establishment of School Governing Bodies (SGBs), as highlighted by the Department of Education (1996) in Section 20(1) of SASA, includes the election of parent representatives who participate in democratic decision-making within the school environment. This process allows parents to voice their opinions on various academic matters related to school operations, management, and policy. Pakade and Chilenga-Butao (2021) indicate that South African schools struggle with ongoing problems related to underperformance, and they suggest that the role of SGBs in governance is intended to promote a positive learning atmosphere. Their research emphasises the importance of parents playing an active role in contributing to the academic success of learners. This underscores the notion that parental involvement in schools, facilitated through SGBs, can enhance effective decision-making processes (Epstein, 2011). Consequently, this study aims to investigate strategies that families and schools can employ to enhance the academic performance of grade 10 learners in a rural public school.

Research design and Methods

The study adopted interpretivism as its research paradigm, aligning with its objectives to examine experiences, perspectives, and meanings associated with family-school partnerships. Matta (2022) notes that paradigmatic assumptions explain why specific qualitative approaches are adopted. Interpretivism allows for a nuanced exploration of participants' lived experiences, as it emphasises understanding human actions from their perspectives (Bezuidenhout, 2021). Dunwoodie et al. (2022) highlight the importance of providing a platform where participants can share their emotions, hopes, and perspectives within various organizational settings. Through this interpretivist lens, the study focuses on subjective interpretations, exploring the formation of family-school partnerships and their influence on academic performance, as experienced by parents, learners, and teachers).

Table 1.2. Steps of Approach and description in data analysis processing

Steps of approach in data analysis process		Description of step in data analysing
Step 1	Data management and organisation	To ascertain the essence and aid in comprehension, the gathered material was organized and thereafter further developed into textual components.
Step 2	Reading to identify potential emerging themes	Use margin notes, memoranda, and underlining participant replies that are important to developing themes when reading transcriptions to ensure completeness.
Step 3	Developing value meaning into interpretations	In order to identify acceptable codes and topics pertinent to the research study, the context of the replies was documented and categorized together.
Step 4	Adding significance and worth to interpretations.	In order to build importance and comprehension of the data classified in objectives to establish generalization in what was learnt, interpretations were generated from the acquired data with pertinent advocacy in evidence sources for support of interpretations.
Step 5	Displaying and illustrating the data	To promote thorough understanding of the visual representation of data, findings were provided in a variety of textual and tabular format

Purposive sampling is the technique I have employed, however; it is key to note that the results cannot be extrapolated to the general population since the chosen sample was not chosen using probability sampling. In hindsight, purposive sampling is a sampling technique that will help choose a sample size that will most likely yield the necessary quantity of pertinent information, according to Campbell et al. (2020). Andrade (2021) claims that it is relevant since it either creates a homogeneous sample or looks at the population of special interest. Furthermore, according to Staller (2021), purposive sampling is important in qualitative research since it enables a dynamic and flexible non-predetermined size which places emphasis on composing in-depth comprehensions using comprehensive data instead of making general assumptions. In retrospect, this study places a focal point on a selection of 10 sampled participants that can account for the vast population of the school amounting to 1000 learners only; this ultimately evokes the sample size of only 4 parents, 4 Grade 10 learners who were challenged with academic performance and 2 register class educators who teach the learners but also record reports of their challenges from other basic teachers that offer other subjects at a rural quintile 1 secondary school in the Limpopo province (Limpopo Department of Education, 2024). The reason for selecting the school is that, it is situated in a remote area with inadequate resources such as skilled instructors, parental engagement, and communication infrastructure. However, the school encounters obstacles such as a lack of family support, bad teaching attitudes, and communication issues, all of which lead to academic performance problems. In addition, the reason for selecting the strata of participants is due to the fact that Grade 10 is a critical transitional phase where learners experience increased academic demands, especially in subjects like English and Mathematics. Grade 10 in this case, has an estimated value of 214 learners each of these learners are categorized according to their subject skills which are: Grade 10A (Sciences stream), Grade 10B (Mixed Science Stream) and Grade 10C (General stream that involves Math literacy as a subject). With Grade 10C amounting to 80 learners (Lehlaga Secondary School, 2024) in one class, only 4 learner participants were sampled to comprise of the proposed sample size chosen in this study. The parents, learners and instructors were chosen based on their direct engagement in the difficulties being studied. They were chosen to give information about the impediments to family-school partnerships. Although the sample size in this study was relatively small, data saturation was achieved. Recurring themes and patterns emerged consistently across participants' responses, indicating that additional data collection was unlikely to yield new insights. This confirms the adequacy of the sample for addressing the research objectives.

Therefore, I have used interviews as a data collection method accompanied by an audio recording of the participants' responses, using a voice recorder on my cellular device. Creswell (2021) posits that as a researcher, when conducting data collection, one needs to know how to utilise audio/visual recording methods. I chose this method because it has offered me the scope to collect rich data and discover emerging concepts. Albeit semi structured interviews demand experienced conductors who can deliberate on when and how to pose inquiries regarding follow-up questions, this method has allowed for the acquisition of responses without missing any data (Taherdoost, 2022). This method has enabled the identification and analysis of patterns and themes, such as low parental involvement and complex teacher-family relationships, which impact learners' scholastic performance. However, this study employs a phenomenological research design, as highlighted by Thomas (2020), to explore the lived experiences of families and schools in enhancing Grade 10 learners' academic performance. This design collects data through dialogical, face-to-face interviews, capturing participants' narratives in-depth. According to Baker (2021), a well-crafted research question anchors the design, integrating

all its elements and providing a structural framework for the investigation. The data collection process of interviews took 20-45 minutes, this depended on whether the participants wanted to speak or not. Moreover, the interviews took place at the school during afterhours not to disturb any teaching and learning.

Results

Subsequently, 3 themes emerged from using the data collection methods as mentioned above namely, individual interviews. Participants will be regarded as i.e. for Parents-Parent 1, Learners-Learner 1 and Teachers-Teacher1:

1. Challenges families and schools experience in improving academic performance of Grade 10 learners in rural public schools.
Sub-theme: Communication barriers
2. Families and schools' understanding in forming partnerships to improve academic performance of Grade 10 learners in rural public schools.
Sub-theme: Understanding partnering as a collaborative initiative
3. Ways families and schools can improve academic performance of Grade 10 learners in rural public schools.
Sub-theme: Individualized attention for academic success

Theme 1: Challenges families and schools experience in improving academic performance of Grade 10 learners in rural public schools

Challenges faced by families and schools significantly hinder their ability to support learners in improving academic performance, especially in rural settings. Communication barriers play a major role in disrupting effective partnerships *parents are having difficulties, which is why they are not responding to the group chat or the letters you send them for feedback* (Teacher 1).

A similar explanation for why communication hurdles would be common, is that *learners typically live with their grandparents, and because most of them are illiterate, that presents a problem especially when they cannot read informative materials issued as a form of communication from the school* (Teacher 2).

Due to difficulties in addressing issues pertaining to learners' academic performance, communication obstacles are common in rural locations. Parents are more likely to speak candidly about issues pertaining to their children's behavior and learning within the context of schooling and the larger educational environment when they communicate with their children's teachers. This effectively creates a barrier because, even in the event that educators were encouraged to interact with parents, it seems as though parents of learners are unresponsive, which makes it difficult to build relationships and discourages them from enhancing learner academic performance.

Nonetheless, learners also offered answers that complemented the sub-themes, one stated that *communication is a challenge with my teachers, some just speak fast and I cannot understand anything some use different teaching styles which aren't efficient* (Learner 1). However, another learner shared similar sentiments by saying that *some teachers will give you attitude the very moment you tell them that you do not understand a topic and some to a greater extent will ever spit vulgar words, eh? So I get scared and keep quiet* (Learner 3). According to the learner comments above, learner attitudes on success in the subject matter are influenced by the instructor or teachers' demeanor and communication style. On the other hand, a teacher's numerous unfavorable behaviors prevent learners from succeeding academically in a classroom setting. Therefore, it is with this that teachers do not execute their duties well thus, spiking a toll on learner academic performance.

Theme 2: Families and schools' understanding in forming partnerships to improve academic performance of Grade 10 learners in rural public schools

Comprehending and establishing collaborations to enhance academic achievement requires taking into account the essential subtleties in order to demonstrate understanding. In order to explore the dimensions and dynamics involved in establishing and fostering partnerships with the sole goal of enhancing learner' academic performance, participants—parents, learners, and teachers—highlight their understanding and connection between collaborative efforts between families and schools. This central theme captures the essential essence of the qualitative research. Their idea of how to establish and comprehend family-school partnerships determined the sub-theme of understanding partnering as a collaborative initiative:

One parent had mentioned that *when [she is] considered to partner with the school to aid in helping my child it means that I must participate in whatever the school is requiring of me* (Parent 1). Furthermore, another parent reported that she thinks *it is a partnership between parent, teachers and lastly learners* (Parent 3). In addition, another parent mentions that *family school partnerships are a shared responsibility whereas erhhh, parents achieve together with the school and learners, a goal of helping learners pass, yaaaahhh* (Parent 4). With this, parents view active involvement in family-school partnerships as a cooperative effort, with educators and parents both contributing significantly to learners' academic development. Parent 1 emphasizes that in order to show their commitment to accountability and cooperation with school efforts, parents should participate in all activities that the school mandates. Parent 3 focuses on the importance of collaboration among all parties involved and sees the relationship as a team effort involving parents, learners, and teachers. Parent 4 reinforces this viewpoint even further by characterizing the collaboration as a shared duty in which parents and educators collaborate to improve student outcomes. To sum up what I understand, these answers collectively show a strong belief in teamwork and understanding for what accountability truly means in family-school partnerships. However, one teacher added *[breathing] ... parents should work as a team with teachers in unison and teacher in this case must acquire background information about the learner to utilize the partnering as a way to assist learners with their work where needed* (Teacher 1). In addition, another teacher shared an indirect notion saying that *family school partnerships mean working together ...of uhmm...learners who are attending at school...which means the principal, educators and learners are all involved...Oh! Also the community* (Teacher 2). This implies that educators believe parental participation is essential to better comprehending and meeting the requirements of each individual learner. In a similar perspective, Teacher 2 points out the idea of collaboration, but their answer is more comprehensive, encompassing not only parents but also the administrator, teachers, and the larger school community. This shows that the value of teamwork is acknowledged, with the entire school community working together with families to support learners' achievement. The collaboration is viewed by both educators as a means of coordinating efforts between the family and the school to promote social and intellectual growth.

The aforementioned comments highlight the significance of parental involvement in school functions in order to build connections that improve academic achievement. Parents who actively participated in the study report that school activities, meetings, and functions emphasized the importance of this type of engagement in building long-lasting connections with educators, learners, and other stakeholders.

Theme 3: Ways families and schools can improve academic performance of Grade 10 learners in rural public schools

The idea of individualized attention highlights the necessity for teachers to work with parents to obtain information about their children in order to directly support them. This is because every learner is different, and this can be achieved by giving each student individualized attention and support by attending to their particular needs and difficulties, one parent emphasized that *there are overcrowded classrooms in Grade 10 but surely, a system should be applied that can allow teachers to familiarize themselves with learners individually* (Parent 1). Furthermost, another parent highlighted that *there must be a way to get to know a learner from a personal basis that is able to take trust in sharing background information about the home setting and be proactive in allowing support screening and identification* (Parent 2). In hindsight, another parent maintained that *educators are not able to attend to their matters individually even if one calls no one picks up the phone* (Parent 3). In addition, a teacher added that *learners need individual attention to gain insights on what type of home environment they are from* (Teacher 1). However, a teacher asserted that *after-hours learners can do even more extra-curricular activities where when they do this under hours, they can have teachers also assist after their working day* (Teacher 2).

According to the data collection responses, participants are in agreement about giving learners individualized attention with the goal of working with parents to effectively gather background information about the student so that the school is aware of the type of academic performance issues the student faces. This would be individualized, actionable help in this situation. According to parents 1 and 3, learners can be overcrowded and not receive the individualized attention they require to meet their academic goals. Thus, as Teacher 1 and Teacher 2 have stated, the individualized method aids educators in comprehending and addressing certain academic and personal concerns. Parents possess invaluable insights to share on a learner's upbringing, conduct, and social interactions. These insights can help educators better support learners in meeting their academic requirements.

Discussion

A presentation of key findings from this study examining the impact of family-school partnerships on the academic performance of Grade 10 learners allows for the exploration of the challenges faced by parents and schools and suggests strategies to address these obstacles. Finnerty (2024) highlights that improving learners' mental health, academic, behavioral, and social skills require ongoing collaboration between families and educators. The findings reflect that while parents desire to be involved in their children's education, they struggle with barriers such as time constraints, socioeconomic challenges, and limited mobility, which hinder their active participation.

This section investigates how families and schools perceive their shared responsibility in improving academic performance. Both parents and teachers emphasized the importance of parental involvement in school activities, aligning with Epstein's (2016) model of six types of parental involvement, particularly activities like attending school meetings. However, barriers to forming partnerships include time limitations, complex homework, language barriers, socioeconomic challenges, communication difficulties, and teacher attitudes. A Parent's response highlighted that *"family-school partnerships are a shared responsibility where teachers work together with parents to achieve an intended goal"*. Nonetheless, many parents struggle with these partnerships due to external barriers. According to Barela (2024), effective communication and active participation are key components of a successful family-school partnership, but challenges like teacher attitudes and homework complexity hinder this process.

This section identifies the obstacles families and schools must overcome in improving learners' academic performance. Communication barriers, teacher attitudes, socioeconomic factors, and limited resources emerged as significant challenges. Effective communication, as outlined by Epstein (1987), is essential for fostering family-school partnerships, yet many parents find it difficult to maintain consistent communication due to factors like limited time and mobility. Teachers' negative attitudes toward learners, especially academically struggling ones, also diminish learners' confidence and impact academic performance. Parents, many from low socioeconomic backgrounds, often struggle with language and educational content, making it difficult to support their children at home. This is consistent with Epstein's (1987) model, which emphasizes parental involvement in "learning at home." However, the parents' limited education and difficulty understanding English hinder their ability to provide adequate academic support, as noted by Choudhury et al. (2022).

In exploring strategies for improving academic performance, the study found that both parents and teachers recommended personalized approaches to support learners. Another parent suggested that *"despite large class sizes, a system allowing teachers to get to know learners individually would help improve academic outcomes"*. This aligns with Epstein's (1987) concept of "volunteering," where parents support school programs designed to enhance academic success. Agustin et al. (2021) further highlight that individualized learning strategies can significantly improve academic achievement. While parents express a willingness to support their children, many face challenges, such as being unable to provide academic assistance due to limited education or time constraints. A parent mentioned *"struggling with difficult homework and limited time due to work commitments"*. Teachers recommended after-assessment consultations to provide additional support for learners, though the findings indicate that many learners feel their academic needs are not fully addressed by either their families or schools.

Conclusions

This study highlights the potential of family-school partnerships in addressing the underachievement of Grade 10 learners in rural public schools. It emphasizes the need for shared responsibility between parents and teachers, with both playing essential yet distinct roles in supporting learner development. The findings reveal that while some parents understand the importance of these partnerships, many learners feel unsupported by both their parents and the school. Academic underperformance is largely attributed to a lack of parental involvement when coming to family-school partnership needing to be formed, poor communication between schools and parents, and teachers' ineffective communication of content, which diminishes learner motivation. Additional factors such as limited time, socioeconomic challenges, and the complexities of homework further contribute to learners' struggles. The study also points to policies like the Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) policy, which offers frameworks for schools and parents to collaborate and support underperforming learners, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

In conclusion, the study stresses the need for continuous, flexible collaboration and communication between families and schools, ensuring that both parents and educators understand each other's constraints. It

suggests that workshops could be beneficial to educate both parents and teachers about effective family-school partnerships to enhance academic performance of grade 10 learners in a rural public school. Based on the study's results, it is suggested that: To enable comparison analysis, future research should cover a larger variety of schools, encompassing both urban and rural settings. As technology continues to play a crucial role in education, future research could examine the effects of digital tools like social media platforms, email, and mobile applications on family-school communication and parental engagement. Future studies could also track learner from primary to secondary school to examine how family-school partnerships change as learner progress through different educational stages. Furthermore, multiple studies should examine if digital communication improves accessibility for parents in underprivileged or rural settings and how well it supports successful learning outcomes.

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