

Rethinking Parental Involvement Interventions to Attain Sustainable Quality Education in South Africa

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Abstract

Parental involvement in the elite former Model C schools (Whites-only schools) in the Tshwane South District, South Africa, is a persistent challenge to attaining Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4, focusing on quality education. Research on parental involvement in South Africa has mainly focused on public schools, not former Model C schools. This knowledge gap on the challenges to parental involvement and possible solutions has practical and policy implications, which this study seeks to explore. Using a mixed methods approach, this study is underpinned by Epstein's model of parental involvement and Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's parental involvement model, triangulated to provide a stronger theoretical base. The findings identified parents' low attendance at parent-teacher meetings and insufficient support given to children in their schoolwork and homework as the main challenges to parental involvement. These findings are linked to the dominant one, namely parents' socioeconomic constraints, which undercut parents' meaningful involvement in their children's learning. The article recommends using virtual methods and holding hybrid parents' meetings to communicate with them and maximise their participation, mobilising parents and introducing incentives to promote parental involvement.

Keywords: Department of Education, learners, former Model C schools, parental involvement, participation.

Introduction

Parental Involvement (PI), which entails parents' meaningful participation, contribution, and input into their children's education, has gained research currency in recent decades. Educational development practitioners and researchers widely acknowledge the value of effective PI in generating positive academic, emotional, and social development outcomes for learners (De Bruyn & Mestry, 2020). PI involves volunteer services that parents provide at school, home, or both to improve the child's learning. Several studies have shown that learners with parents who are active in their

education often perform better (Hedenbro & Rydelius, 2019; Hornby & Blackwell, 2018). Some studies indicate that social, economic, political and contextual factors wield much potential to enhance or impede PI (De Bruyn & Mestry, 2020; Munje & Mncube, 2018). However, studies that link PI to achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in secondary education in South Africa are limited. Available studies mainly focus on SDGs in higher education and rarely on secondary schools (Mawonde & Togo, 2021; Nyika, 2024; Uleanya & Yassim, 2025). Therefore, this is a knowledge gap that this research sought to address.

The SDGs were ratified by the Heads of State and Government and High Representatives in September 2015 as a comprehensive, all-embracing set of universal and transformative goals and targets for eradicating all dimensions of poverty worldwide (United Nations, 2025). They are the guidelines for achieving integrated people-centred sustainable development in its three economic, social and environmental dimensions by 2030; hence, the SDGs are also called the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations, 2025). Among others, the SDGs seek to combat inequalities, build inclusive and just societies, protect human rights, promote gender equality and create conditions for sustainable economic growth and shared prosperity.

South Africa is one of the countries with historical and economic factors that have enormous implications for PI and the possibilities for ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all (SDG 4) (Munje & Mncube, 2018; Ostendorf, 2020). The colonial and apartheid systems excluded or circumscribed parents, especially Blacks, from involvement in school matters. Since many Black parents did not have adequate formal education (Reddy & Fadji, 2020), the colonial and apartheid administration systems viewed their participation in the education system as an unnecessary interference. Accordingly, even though South Africa attained political independence in 1994, there is still a lingering misunderstanding about the exact role that parents should play in their children's education (Botha, 2020; Mudzingwa, 2020; Venter, 2022).

Before 1994, South Africa had institutionalised racism or a racially discriminatory administration system in all sectors of society. Within the education sector, Model C schools were meant for White learners and referred to as 'Whites-only schools.' These schools received a superior quality of education compared to schools that served other races (Asmal & James, 2001). At independence, the new government dismantled apartheid to build a new system of equal opportunities, including educational access. This vision resonates with commitments to the SDGs implemented by the United Nations (UN) member states in January 2016 (United Nations, 2025). Given this context, the article adopts the term 'former' Model C schools, as these schools remain elite, though open to all races. The SDGs, or the Global Goals, are a universal call to action by the UN to tackle global challenges by 2030, focusing on various issues, including education. They are a set of 17 interconnected goals with 169 specific targets.

Since independence in 1994, South African society has widely endorsed the transformation of administration, including schools (Ostendorf, 2020). However, how this inclusivity can improve PI, particularly for Black parents whose participation was not recognised by the previous administrations, is not clear. There seems to be limited scholarly interest in how parents support their children's education in former 'Whites-only schools.' While public and private schools have received significant scientific investigation regarding PI (Christie, 2020; Hall et al., 2019), former Model C schools have not attracted the same attention. Therefore, little is known about PI in these

schools, leaving a policy and practical gap in the literature. Hence, this study seeks to close this knowledge gap by exploring PI in former Model C schools in Gauteng Province.

This article contributes to the ongoing debates on PI by (i) exploring the challenges of PI in former Model C schools, (ii) linking PI to the attainment of the SDGs, and (iii) proposing a model on how to enhance PI in a way that can improve student learning. The article highlights practical and policy interventions that can serve as the basis for PI in these schools that were once exclusively for Whites but are now dominated by Black learners. The following section, focusing on the literature review, covers the conceptualisation of PI, its theoretical framework, and international and local perspectives on PI.

Conceptualising Parental Involvement

Alimohammadi et al. (2017) define PI as a process involving parents' active participation in their children's educational activities, while Castro et al. (2015) view it as a process of involving parents in all aspects of their children's social, cognitive, emotional and academic development. Such activities range from occasional presence at school functions to being intensively involved in the child's learning process at home and school. For Antony-Newman (2019), PI entails the effective participation of a parent or guardian in the education process of their children, both within the school and mainly outside the school premises, to ensure that they enjoy the education process and eventually improve their performance. PI manifests in various activities, from supporting and upholding the school's ethos to supervising children's homework (Hornby & Blackwell, 2018).

There are two main types of PI, namely school-based and home-based PI (Amunga et al., 2020). School-based PI involves two types of involvement. The first is school communication, which relates to the regular contact between parents and school staff to ensure information sharing between parents and school staff (Amunga et al., 2020). The second type of school-based PI, school participation, involves parents offering services, labour, presence in school activities and functions or being part of school governance structures (Garbacz et al., 2018). It also entails payment of school fees, purchase of study materials, and contributions to the construction or maintenance of school infrastructure or furniture and fittings, among others (Højholt & Kousholt, 2019).

Unlike school-based PI, home-based PI involves the support given to learners within the home context. There are two types of home-based PI: home discussion and home supervision. The 'home discussion' PI entails parents regularly discussing with their juveniles the activities or events of particular interest to the child or when parents discuss the subjects or things the child studies in class (Solvason et al., 2019). Home supervision PI monitors the child's out-of-school activities (Hedenbro & Rydelius, 2019). Home supervision includes reading to and with the child, library visits, playing with numbers and letters, painting and drawing together, and teaching them the alphabet through play (Hornby & Blackwell, 2018).

Sustainable Development Goals in Education

One of the 17 SDGs, SDG 4, focuses explicitly on ensuring inclusive quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all. It recognises the important role of education in attaining other SDGs and empowering individuals and

communities for a more sustainable future (Chankseliani & McCowan, 2021; Škokić et al., 2025). It aims to provide accessible and quality education for everyone, from early childhood to higher education, and to promote lifelong learning (Serafini et al., 2022). The key aspects of SDG 4 include ensuring that all children and adults have access to quality education, irrespective of their background or circumstances, addressing inequalities in education and providing opportunities for all, including marginalised groups, promoting opportunities for individuals to learn and develop their skills throughout their lives, and ensuring that education is relevant to the local context needs and sustainable development challenges.

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is part of SDG target 4.7, seeking to empower learners with knowledge, skills, values and agency to make informed decisions and act responsibly to protect the environment and promote just and equitable societies (Cai & Wolff, 2023). It seeks to develop competencies that empower learners to reflect on their actions, considering their current and future social, cultural, economic and environmental impacts from local and global perspectives (Kioupi & Voulvoulis, 2019). The SDGs emphasise the importance of lifelong learning, promoting continuous skills development and adaptability to address evolving sustainability challenges (Hu et al., 2022). They provide opportunities for schools to engage with their local communities, including parents, and create partnerships that benefit students and the wider community (Gao et al., 2022). Implementing the SDGs in educational settings fosters a sense of social responsibility among learners, teachers and parents and encourages them to become active agents of teaching and learning (Maistry, 2022).

PI is linked to the SDGs as it significantly impacts children's development, learning and overall well-being, which are crucial for sustainable progress. Parents can contribute to achieving various SDGs, including education, health and social justice, by promoting supportive home environments and engaging with schools and communities. PI can optimise the chances of achieving the SDGs by fostering children's holistic development and preparing them to become responsible and engaged citizens for a sustainable future.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws from two theoretical models, Epstein's model of parental involvement and Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's PI model, triangulated to complement each other and provide a stronger theoretical base and better understanding of PI from different angles. Epstein (1995) identified six PI types: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making and collaborating with the community. In drawing upon this model, the current study explores how PI manifests in each type.

Parenting involves assisting all households to institute a caring home atmosphere for children as learners (Epstein, 1995). *Communicating* refers to establishing operational reciprocal communication related to school programmes and the learner's progress. It also covers parent-teacher consultations and clear school policy and programme information (Epstein et al., 2002; Lemmer, 2007). *Volunteering* entails enlisting parental assistance and support at school, home or other locations. It includes helping with school maintenance by offering to help teachers, cleaning and assisting other parents and the school in general (Epstein et al., 2002; Lemmer, 2007). *Learning at home* is about providing information and ideas to households on how to support their children with their learning at home, for instance, by providing information on homework guidelines and how to monitor children (Epstein et al., 2002). *Decision-*

making is when parents are enabled to be part of the people who make decisions on the programmes and operations of schools. The school management can facilitate this process by allowing parents to be part of school committees (Epstein et al., 2002). *Collaborating* with the community helps identify and acquire community resources and services to improve school programmes (Epstein et al., 2002; Lemmer, 2007).

Although Epstein's model of parental involvement is widely viewed as detailed and valuable, it is based on the teacher's side of the process. It underrates the vital role parents play in their children's education. For instance, most of the activities stated above are initiated by the school staff, mainly teachers, yet the focal actor is the parent. Hence, the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model of PI is used to counterbalance this. In this model, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005) describe parents' motivation to get involved in their children's education. These include parents' motivational beliefs, their perceptions of invitations from others, and parents' perceived life context. Parental role construction involves "parents' beliefs about what they are supposed to do about their children's education and pattern of parental behaviour that follow those beliefs" (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005, p. 107). The second aspect is parents' perceptions of other parents' invitations. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) observe that an indispensable factor in parents' motivation towards involvement in school activities and programmes is the invitations from stakeholders they view as important in their children's education. The concept of parents' life context includes self-perceived time and energy, as well as perceived skills and knowledge.

Parental Involvement: An International Perspective

The positive benefits of PI are documented worldwide. Oranga et al. (2022) note that in the U.S., the government recognises the critical role of parents as the children's first and most important teachers at home through the *Goals 2000: Educate America Act*. Through the Act, the U.S. government declared that by 2000, every school should have started plans to encourage school-parent partnerships to increase PI in schools. The Act encouraged schools to explore ways of enhancing parents' involvement in their children's education (Psacharopoulos & Patrinos, 2018). However, the level of PI in schools varies across regions and among various population categories in the U.S. (Barger et al., 2019). While some parents are more involved in their children's education at school, others are more involved within the household setting (Brown et al., 2020).

In Germany, more privileged parents tend to participate in their children's education (Dalimonte-Merckling & Williams, 2020). In Poland, teachers and parents often disagree over the school atmosphere, thus impeding PI (Butler et al., 2019). In Sweden, very high levels of PI often lead to teacher-parent conflict (Dereli & Türk-Kurtça, 2022). In the UK, despite economic difficulties, parents are more involved in education and actively engaged in their children's learning activities (Dodge, 2018). However, in South Korea and Japan, PI in schools remains a challenge (Wang et al., 2023), mainly because the school system is highly structured and standardised, thereby leaving very little room for PI (Wang et al., 2023). PI is challenging in South American countries such as Brazil, Argentina, Peru, Venezuela and Chile (Cheung, 2019). However, in Uruguay, Aruba and Guyana, parents are interested in getting involved if schools invite them (Brown et al., 2020). These studies conclude that the different levels of PI are not only associated with different ethnic groups but also with economic backgrounds.

Parental Involvement: A Regional Perspective

There are different realities regarding the status of PI in different African countries. For instance, in Angola and Ghana, schools that embrace learners from different socioeconomic backgrounds have more PI at school and home. In Nigeria, Darko-Asumadu and Sika-Bright (2021), Grobler (2022), and Ugwuegbulem (2018) found that parents actively monitored their children's activities outside school and had a good relationship with teachers. In Malawi and Uganda, parents assist their children with homework, discuss schoolwork, and follow their progress closely (Akellot & Bangirana, 2019; Ammerlaan, 2022). They also expect their children to acquire a university education and do their best to ensure they pass their school-leaving examinations well enough to be admitted to university. In Ethiopia, Jones et al. (2019) observed that wealthy parents were more involved in their children's education than low-income parents. By contrast, Amunga et al. (2020) found that in Kenya, parents were more involved in the education of their boy children than in their girl children, potentially due to cultural beliefs and practices.

In most African countries, studies reveal that single parents, particularly fathers, are less likely to be involved in their children's education than married parents (Akellot & Bangirana, 2019). In Ghana, Amadu et al. (2018) observed that single parents, particularly women, did not actively participate in their children's education, primarily due to economic constraints. Single parents do not have enough time to spend with their children and help them with schoolwork because they are usually busy trying to earn an income and grapple with their problems (Hillesland, 2019). In this context, it is evident that socioeconomic factors determine the nature and level of PI in many African countries (Ammerlaan, 2022; Darko-Asumadu & Sika-Bright, 2021; Ugwuegbulem, 2018).

Parental Involvement: A South African Perspective

In South Africa, the indicators of PI's challenges include the low attendance of parents at school meetings, poor quality of matric (Grade 12) results in high-stakes school-leaving examinations, and insufficient support given to children in their schoolwork and homework (Barron et al., 2018). However, South African parents do not simply abstain from getting involved in their children's education for no reason (Botha, 2020; Christie, 2020). Instead, several factors contribute to this non-involvement.

Socioeconomic constraints are the main factor contributing to low PI in underprivileged South African schools, particularly those in Black townships and rural areas (Barron et al., 2018). Worryingly, some low-income and underprivileged parents in South Africa are not motivated to participate in school-based activities (Hall et al., 2019) and are unlikely to prioritise their children's education (Ikhlas et al., 2022). As such, schools in underprivileged areas usually lack the required PI (Le Roux et al., 2022). Due to socioeconomic challenges and work commitments, some parents in South Africa are so busy that they do not even have time to check their children's schoolwork (Hall et al., 2019; Jacobs, 2024). Work also forces some parents not to attend parent meetings (Mansfield-Barry & Stwayi, 2017), particularly female parents working in areas where they cannot afford to come home daily (Jacobs, 2024; Mdlalose-Dyantyi, 2019). South African women are among the poorest sections of society and usually take up sleep-in jobs to fend for their families (Munje & Mncube, 2018). This results in households headed by grandparents, who are often too old and weak to assist children with their

school needs. This situation unavoidably affects children's education and undercuts the quality and sustainability of their education.

In some South African schools, particularly in rural areas, illiteracy and parents' low educational level contribute to their non-involvement in their children's education (Venter, 2022). Across rural South Africa, parents are not fully involved in their children's education because most are illiterate and unable to help them with schoolwork in any meaningful way (Khalid et al., 2021). Illiteracy causes some parents to lack confidence and not communicate or participate in school activities (Mdlalose-Dyantyi, 2019). Such parents often do not attend school meetings due to low self-esteem and fear that teachers would denigrate them (Botha, 2020). Parents do not help learners at home due to low literacy levels and stay away from school because they feel embarrassed (Mudzingwa, 2020). However, Ostendorf (2020) observes that although illiterate, some South African parents, even those in rural areas, demonstrate positive ambitions for their children, help them with homework and monitor out-of-school activities. This practice became particularly evident during the COVID-19 lockdowns. Despite this crisis-driven rise in involvement, research shows that PI remains one of the key challenges in South Africa (Hall et al., 2019; Mdlalose-Dyantyi, 2019).

Although some parents show no interest in taking part in the education process of their children, some schools also have no plans to involve them. They do not have PI policies, particularly in remote rural areas (Hall et al., 2019). In rural schools where most Black Africans live, PI is limited because most parents feel inferior in their interactions with school personnel, particularly teachers (Hlongwane, 2025; Ikhlas et al., 2022). Some school leaders also do not consider PI a significant contribution to the education of learners. As a result, such leaders do not try to engage parents in anything (Le Roux et al., 2022). Some principals consider it the government's responsibility to involve parents (Mdlalose-Dyantyi, 2019). During their initial teacher training, most teachers do not receive training on PI (Mudzingwa, 2020). If the state, in collaboration with teacher training institutions, could properly train teachers on PI, they would find it easy to design strategies encouraging parents to support their children academically to achieve sustainable quality education.

Overall, the literature shows that most parents in South Africa are not fully involved in their children's learning journey either at home or school (Jacobs, 2024; Lemmer, 2007) due to various reasons such as unemployment, economic hardships and complex family structures that go beyond biological parents. In underprivileged schools, PI remains one of the main challenges facing the South African education system.

Research Methodology

This study adopted a pragmatic paradigm that debunks using a single research paradigm and methodology. The pragmatic paradigm argues that it is impossible to reach scientific reality using a quantitative methodology alone, as the positivist paradigm advocates or determine social reality using a qualitative approach alone, as constructed under the interpretivist paradigm (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Instead, a pragmatic paradigm advocates using a practical and pluralistic approach that allows for multiple methods (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Consistent with this paradigm, a mixed methods research approach, which involves collecting, analysing and integrating quantitative and qualitative data, was employed in this study (Creswell, 2014; Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). The study was conducted in the Tshwane South District,

which had 205 public and 68 private schools in 2024. According to the 2024 headcount, the district had a population of about 180,000 learners. Of the 205 public schools, 76 were classified as Quintile 5 (former Model C schools).

The study utilised the embedded research design, which involved gathering quantitative data through a survey questionnaire from 100 parents/guardians of learners at five former Model C schools in the Tshwane South District, Gauteng. As Sharma et al. (2023) argue, an embedded design serves a supportive secondary role to the primary methodology and design adopted. It expands, supports, enriches, illustrates and elucidates the results from one method. It combines quantitative and qualitative data's strengths (Creswell, 2014). This study's qualitative strand was nested within the quantitative component to conduct in-depth interviews with 14 teachers, five principals and one deputy principal. A mixed methods approach was adopted, as a single methodology was considered insufficient to generate multiple perspectives on the problem of limited PI in schools. The schools, teachers, principals and one deputy principal were selected purposively, while convenience sampling was used to select parents attending the parents' meetings. The schools were labelled as School A, B, C, D and E to protect their identities. Similarly, the interview participants were assigned codes from 1 to 4, linked to their school codes.

Basic descriptive statistics involving frequencies and percentages are used to analyse quantitative data, while tables, charts and figures are used to summarise and visually display data. These tools made it easy to detect the patterns emerging from the data. They made it possible to identify various factors that determine PI, the emergent challenges and opportunities, and the exact impact of PI on learners. Qualitative data was analysed thematically, meaning that the analysis was based on the themes that emerged from the data. Data was reported using direct quotations, summaries and syntheses where appropriate. Data mixing was conducted concurrently, both in reporting and discussion.

The University of South Africa's College of Education Ethics Review Committee issued the ethics clearance certificate, Ref.: 2023/02/08/32474199/22/AM, after thoroughly reviewing the ethics application and ensuring that the researchers would protect the rights of participants. Afterwards, the Gauteng Department of Education authorised data collection in selected schools. Before data collection could commence, full disclosure about the purpose of the study was made to all the participants, including the right to privacy and to withdraw from the study without any repercussions. Eventually, they agreed to participate after signing the informed consent form.

Research Findings

The data presented here includes demographic data, the challenges and opportunities available for PI in the Tshwane South District.

Demographic Composition

The study had two categories of participants: parents and teachers (teachers, deputy principals, and principals). The key informants were teachers from all five selected schools. Purposive sampling ensured an even distribution of teacher participants and eliminated possible biases. However, this was not possible with parents as they were conveniently selected during parents' meetings, and their numbers and gender differed from school to school. The composition of participants

confirmed several issues raised in the literature reviewed; notably, only 21 males participated across all schools, compared to 79 females, as Table 1 reflects. With teachers, only eight participants were male, while 12 were female. This gender composition confirms that females are more inclined to engage in PI than males (Akellot & Bangirana, 2019). This situation presents a challenge, particularly since the collective participation of both parents is required to motivate the learner.

Table 1

Breakdown of Parents by Gender

School	Male	Female	Total
School A	3	17	20
School B	4	16	20
School C	5	15	20
School D	3	17	20
School E	6	14	20
Total	21	79	100

Challenges of Parental Involvement

The data revealed several challenges to PI: parents' low attendance of parent-teacher meetings, poor quality of matric (Grade 12) results, and insufficient support for children in their schoolwork and homework. The study identified several factors constraining parents' involvement in their children's education, grouped into political, school, community, economic, religious and other, as summarised in Table 2.

Economic factors were identified as the main challenge, as 65 participants indicated, followed by school factors, as confirmed by 62 participants. Additional challenges included community factors (47 participants), religious factors (26 participants), political factors (189 participants), and other factors (24 participants). Other factors included personal and other reasons that prevented an individual from PI, such as physical challenges.

Table 2

Challenges of Parental Involvement

No	Description	Very much	Very little	Neutral
1	Political factors	19	60	21
2	School factors	62	24	14
3	Community factors	47	37	16
4	Economic factors	65	24	8
5	Religious factors	26	54	24
6	Other factors	24	22	54

Teacher participants raised several issues that affected PI in schools, as reported below.

Some parents are uninterested or are too busy to make time for their children's education. Secondly, family structures and lifestyles also affect PI. Most of our learners come from broken families, where, in some situations,

parents are going through a divorce, and this affects their academic work. Some challenges include parents' perceptions and attitudes towards school. Some parents feel that teachers are not welcoming at school (SDT4).

Another participant mentioned parents' negative attitudes towards schools as a factor undermining PI, thus:

One of the challenges facing PI is the negative attitude of parents since, for some of them, this school is not their first choice. They wanted to take their kids somewhere else. However, because of the placement policy, they had to bring their children here. So, they are simply not interested in school affairs (SBT3).

Teachers also mentioned the language barrier as another challenge that undercut PI, in this way:

A language barrier also inhibits some parents' participation in their children's education (SDT3).

In the above scenario, the English language barrier prevents many parents from participating in their children's education. In South Africa, the inability to communicate in English is associated with a person's educational level, as it is a medium of instruction.

Some teacher participants identified economic factors as barriers to PI. One participant clarified this as follows:

There are also factors like social and economic conditions. Some learners come from disadvantaged backgrounds. So, even though their parents are willing to get involved in their education, they cannot because they lack money. Therefore, they cannot go the extra mile to help their children (SAT1).

Furthermore, some participants mentioned parents' education level as a significant determinant of how much parents could participate in their children's education. In this respect, one teacher explained:

There is also an issue of education, which is a barrier to PI. Since we give children homework, some of them will need help from their parents. However, the challenge is that some parents cannot help their kids with homework. Some parents are willing to assist but cannot do so due to their low level of education (SBT2).

Some teachers identified the distance from school as another barrier affecting PI in schools. They reported that some parents lived in faraway places, making it challenging to visit the school when needed.

Some teachers believed some children undermined their parents' participation in their learning because they did not give them the correct information to enable them to make informed interventions. One teacher disclosed:

Some children do not want their parents to know what is happening at school. Sometimes, we give students letters and messages to deliver to their parents. However, some do not deliver these to their parents, which compromises their participation in school (SBT4).

Across all the interviews, participants indicated that the parents of learners in lower grades tended to attend school activities more than those of learners in higher grades.

Opportunities for Parental Involvement

The study also found that although several challenges hampered the involvement of parents, there were ways of improving it. Table 3 summarises parents' perceptions of how stakeholders can improve PI in the case study schools.

Table 3

Opportunities for Parental Involvement

No	Description	Very much	Very little	Neutral
1	Political factors	32	45	23
2	School factors	84	9	7
3	Community factors	69	22	9
4	Economic factors	74	18	8
5	Religious factors	52	24	24
6	Other factors	32	8	60

Teachers proposed several strategies for promoting PI, which included encouraging parents to attend school activities. One teacher participant reported:

Sometimes, we invite parents to discuss school-related matters, including curriculum. When discussing these issues, the school management should ensure that most parents attend. The first step is to mobilise all the parents to come so that when issues are addressed, they can all be on board (SAT4).

The participants also believed that if teachers could include parents in school activities, they would be eager to participate in their children's education. In this regard, one teacher said:

Parents must be part of the school and constantly know what is happening. If this happens, they will see the need to be actively involved. The school should not only involve parents in giving them lousy news but should also involve them in sharing good news and success stories (SCT3).

Another participant added that PI opened various avenues for improving the child's academic performance and encouraged teachers to monitor learners consistently. This teacher participant stated:

Regarding opportunities, we stand a chance to improve if we can ensure parents get the necessary information at the right time. We must keep speaking to them. Schools can have some workshops where parents come. This way, we can achieve our goals of improving parents' participation in the learning process (SDT1).

One of the teachers also added that there was no one-size-fits-all approach to promoting PI in schools:

For parents to become more involved, several gaps must first be closed. In most cases, we might discover a gap between what the parent thinks about the school and what the teacher thinks. A gap in distance makes some parents fail to come to school regularly. There is also an economic gap where parents are financially incapacitated. Finally, there is an administrative gap where the school fails to involve parents (SAT2).

Another participant stated that parents' meetings and consultation sessions could improve PI in schools:

The opportunities that the school can use to promote the involvement of parents include encouraging them to consult. In such a scenario, parents are called to school to discuss the child's academic performance with the teacher. If the child is struggling, teachers could offer a strategy or develop ideas on how the parent can assist their child at home (SET4).

Discussion of Findings

The findings are discussed in two sub-sections covering the challenges and opportunities for PI.

Challenges of Parental Involvement

Parents and teachers in this study mentioned several challenges to PI that could be categorised as political, economic, school, community and religious factors. With parents as the centre of teaching and learning, these challenges compromise their capacity to contribute to children's education. Parents mentioned socioeconomic constraints as the primary cause of inadequate participation in their children's education. Socioeconomic constraints not only affect SDG 4 but also undercut the possibilities of meeting other goals that affect teaching and learning, such as SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), and SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being). An earlier study conducted in South Africa by Hall et al. (2019) confirmed that parents with low incomes often lack the motivation to get involved in school-based activities, thus not contributing enough to SDG 4. Mansfield-Barry and Stwayi (2017) corroborate that some parents in South Africa avoid visiting schools because they owe school fees, and do not like to be embarrassed in the presence of other parents at school meetings by being asked to pay. As Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1995) PI model notes, economic factors undermine the economic base of parents and PI to attain the SDGs, particularly SDG 4.

Economic ability determines how an individual plays a parental role, such as paying school fees, having the confidence to communicate with school staff, and having the determination to participate in school decision-making processes, as detailed by Epstein (1995) in the six types of PI and corroborated by Lemmer (2007). It determines how they can contribute towards quality education and promote lifelong learning (SDG 4). Parents who consider themselves economically and educationally low often avoid mingling with other parents, thus withdrawing their contribution towards children's education. In their study in South Africa, Ikhlās et al. (2022) confirmed that underprivileged parents are unlikely to prioritise their children's education because

they are preoccupied with providing basic needs such as food and clothing. While this effort is important, it often comes at the expense of children's education, thus affecting their future.

Economic factors also spill into time availability challenges since low socioeconomic status parents work hard to meet basic household needs. Unfortunately, this also affects parents' readiness to communicate or volunteer in the school (Epstein, 1995), thus reducing the chances of contributing to the SDGs meaningfully, particularly in attaining quality education (SDG 4). Hall et al. (2019) found that some parents were so busy across South Africa that they did not even have time to check their children's schoolwork. Similarly, Norling (2020) established that in South Africa, many women often take sleep-in jobs to fend for their families, keeping them far from home and children and unable to adequately contribute to their learning beyond buying basics. This phenomenon affects not only the parental aspect that Epstein (1995) mentions but also the parents' perceptions every time they receive an invitation from the school, as mentioned by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997).

The second highest challenge to PI was school-related factors, particularly teachers' attitudes. According to Epstein's PI model, these factors often cause teachers to believe parents are not interested in participating in school activities. In this study, parents and teachers blamed each other for school-related factors and their impact on PI. Teachers reported that most parents did not communicate with the schools regarding their children's academic progress or challenges. Teachers were often frustrated that parents continued to stay away from schools, even though they tried to bring them to school. Incontrovertibly, parental withdrawal undermines the prospects of achieving SDG 4. While this finding highlights the importance of clear and strong communication (Epstein, 1995), it also highlights that SDG 4 can only be achieved through collective stakeholder contribution, including parents, teachers and learners. Without clear communication, parents and teachers often blame each other for not finding solutions to alleviate the challenges.

In Zimbabwe, Mudzingwa (2020) found that due to unclear communication with parents, schools often had to reschedule parents' meetings to accommodate those who were absent. In a study investigating the influence of PI on academic performance in the intermediate phase in North West province, South Africa, Mekgwe et al. (2024) found that there was no collaboration between teachers and parents and that schools did not involve parents in developing policies, which weakened their application, particularly those related to PI, leading to low learners' achievement.

Furthermore, since some parents were often at work and failed to attend school meetings, teachers concluded that parents did not simply care about their children's education. In this way, teachers disqualified parents from almost all of Epstein's six PI types. Costa and Faria (2017) observed that although some parents loved to be involved in the academic affairs of their children, some teachers were unreceptive, discouraging parents from getting involved. This negativity undermines the possibilities of achieving SDG 4.

Parents are keen to be involved in their children's learning but lack the skills, while personal and work-related commitments hamstring others (Mekgwe et al., 2024). This situation portrays a continuous lack of cooperation between teachers and parents in educational matters. In addition, as teachers need parents to get involved in school-based activities, parents also need teachers to get involved in home-based school activities so that together, they can work towards a common goal of ensuring quality

education for children. Through collaboration, teachers and parents can significantly contribute towards attaining the SDGs, particularly quality education (SDG 4).

Good teacher-parent relations and effective communication can dispel mistrust and misunderstanding between teachers and parents, promote student learning (Ahmed et al., 2024), and facilitate the attainment of the SDGs. Unfortunately, some teachers give up easily in their attempts to engage parents in their children's academic work at home, eroding the chances of achieving SDG 4. Hall et al. (2019) found that in South Africa, some teachers had stopped giving homework to learners because parents did not assist them. Some teachers also assumed that since most South African schools were historically disadvantaged, they would not thrive due to parents' ignorance and non-involvement (Khalid et al., 2021). All these negative assumptions and attitudes compromise efforts toward achieving quality education and other SDGs.

Additional negative factors included some parents' belief that children's education should be left to teachers, as they were trained for the job. They reiterated that they did not want to interfere with the work of teachers and wanted them to do it freely. This excuse is common when parents lack self-efficacy, as Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1997) assert. While this excuse could be ascribed to parents' ignorance, they could have used it as an excuse for not adequately parenting, communicating, volunteering and collaborating in their children's education, as proposed by Epstein in the PI model. Hence, a lack of knowledge contributes significantly to weak SDG commitments.

Opportunities for Parental Involvement

The data revealed numerous opportunities to improve and sustain PI and promote the attainment of the SDGs in the Tshwane South District. Surprisingly, the same factors that emerged as challenges also appeared as opportunities, if the Department of Basic Education and schools could turn into positive forces. Most parents (84%) revealed that school factors should be improved, while others mentioned the need for the national government to support parents in improving the economic conditions. Once these key factors are improved, the SDGs could be achieved by improving PI across all the six types identified by Epstein in the PI model and the three levels of factors that determine parental motivation identified by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) in the PI model. Interestingly, both parents and teachers agreed that PI should be improved.

As Kantova (2024) argues, parental time spent with the child in meaningful learning is the best investment that enhances the child's academic success and human capital. Consequently, this is also the best approach to attain the SDGs. Parents' engagement in their children's schooling significantly affects their learning and success (Utami, 2022). Parents suggested that teachers change their negative attitudes towards parents to enhance their engagement and promote PI. Teachers' positive behaviour and attitudes can encourage parents to visit or phone schools or teachers about educational issues that need attention, thus contributing to the achievement of the SDGs. Parents are likely to remain cooperative when teachers respond to queries more positively. Two-way communication occurs when home-school cooperation is characterised by a collaborative working relationship between parents and teachers, where both parties take equal responsibility for the child's learning (Ahmed et al., 2024). Teachers also need to encourage parents to participate in school governance structures. The South African government has created a legislative mechanism using the SASA that empowers parents to serve on the school governing bodies. This gesture highlights South Africa's efforts to promote and attain quality education and other SDGs.

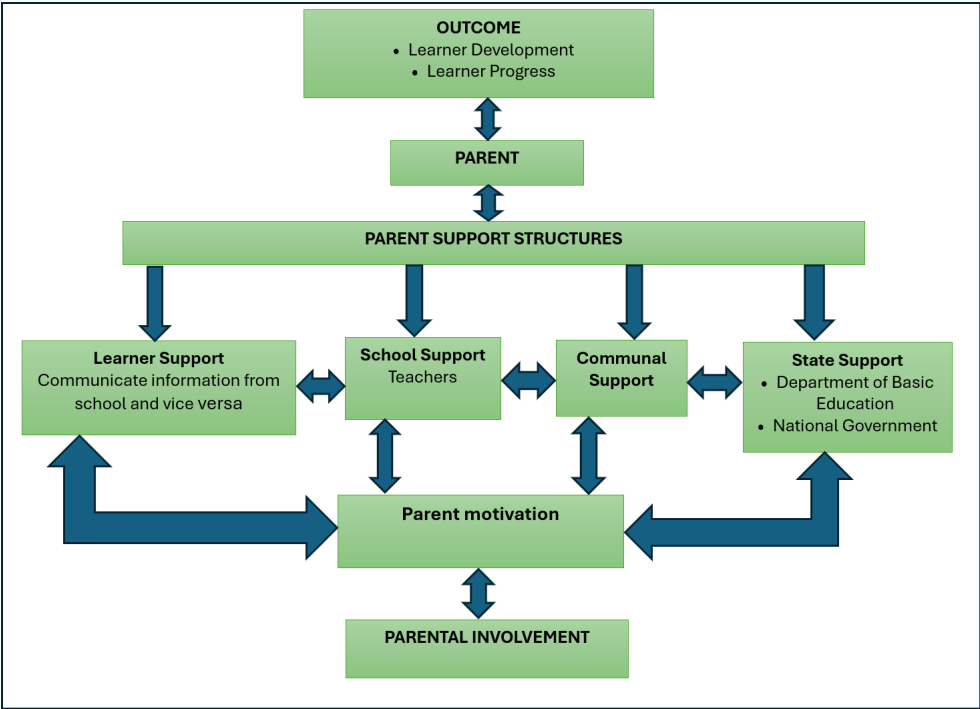
The advent of digital technologies is also a method that can be used to improve participation across the six PI types identified by Epstein in the PI model and across the three levels of factors that determine parental motivation identified by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) in the PI model: parents' motivational beliefs, parents' perceptions of invitations from others, and parents' perceived life context. The Department of Basic Education, schools and parents can use digital technologies to improve PI in education and leverage efforts to achieve the SDGs. Emails, phone calls and social media are now widely used to improve PI (Hlongwane & Lekhetho, 2025). Teachers can use these platforms to inform parents about school meetings, invite them to school, and inform them about important events at school and strengthen their efforts to achieve the SDGs. The findings confirm the claims made in the literature that some schools try to involve parents in their children's education and activities using different methods. These schools encourage PI despite the barriers of parental unemployment, poverty and poor health. Some schools use diaries to establish connections between homes and schools (Núñez et al., 2021), while in some schools, teachers visit homes to learn more about the learners' backgrounds and strengthen relations with parents (Ostendorf, 2020). In contributing to efforts towards interventions to PI challenges, this article proposes a PI model below.

The Proposed Parental Involvement Model

The proposed model is context-specific and derived from a PI study conducted in the Tshwane South District. However, it can be applied to schools in similar contexts and expanded. The model draws from existing literature, Epstein's and Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's models of PI and empirical data. The central idea from all three sources of information is that PI is critical for successful learning and learner achievement in schools. Thus, PI is not an end but part of a complex web in that process. It is also not a linear but a complex process that must bring about positive results for learners. Although the model acknowledges that parents are vital to the success of PI, other stakeholders also play a critical role in enhancing PI. Figure 1 proposes how to improve PI in case study schools. The arrows in the model are double-headed to show how different factors can harmoniously work together to achieve shared objectives.

The first block at the top indicates learner development and academic progress as the centre of PI interventions. It highlights that the learner is the most important stakeholder in education. The second block shows the parent as the second most important stakeholder in the education process. Parents are central because they choose schools for their children. The parent has much power and influence on the child's academic journey and future. After placing their children in school, the parents' involvement in the entire education process becomes even more important. Literature and the findings of this study have indicated that functional PI is central to successful learning and student outcomes. Therefore, schools must put in place structures that can promote PI functionality. While each structure focuses on the parent, all structures should also link to each other to ensure harmony and complementarity. The learner is the first PI support structure shown in Figure 1, as they are the main link between the home and the school. Therefore, the learner can support PI by keeping the parent updated by communicating information from the school and *vice versa*.

Figure 1
Proposed Parental Involvement Model



The second block on the support structures is school support. Learners spend most of their time at school, so teachers have more time with them than parents, meaning the school wields much influence on their learning. Teachers’ and other staff members’ attitudes, engagement, and respect towards parents can support or weaken PI. The school can support PI through parent-teacher meetings, guidance counsellors, parent workshops and home visits. Opportunities for parents to gain parent support can be provided by guidance counsellors at school. The third block shows the role of the broader local community in facilitating PI. The community is vital in informing parents and the schools about children’s behaviour before they get home from school or *vice versa*. This information provided by community members can make parents act swiftly, thus helping them to become involved as learners’ parents.

The last block in the sequence shows the state’s role in the form of the Department of Basic Education and the national government. The state makes rules and regulations on managing schools and how parents can participate in children’s learning. Policies such as including the SGBs are also an effort of the state to support PI. Stakeholders’ collective or individual actions can enhance parents’ motivation. Once parents feel supported and their participation is welcome in schools, they will likely be interested in engaging regardless of their social and economic status. Where this occurs, PI will increase because of the collective efforts of all stakeholders to involve parents in their children’s education. Through stronger PI, the Tshwane South District could attain sustainable quality education for all learners and other SDGs.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This article explored the challenges of PI in former Model C schools, linked PI to the possibilities of attaining sustainable quality education and other SDGs and proposed a model for enhancing PI and improving students' learning. It shows that PI faces several socioeconomic, political and religious challenges that undercut the possibilities of attaining the SDGs. The research also found that the same factors that present challenges to PI could be transformed into opportunities. Some opportunities identified include the existence of the SGB and digital technologies that can be used to influence and enhance school-parent communication. The article posits that there is no single strategy for addressing PI challenges in schools, particularly the elite former Model C schools with a diverse composition of learners, parents and teachers. Due to this diversity in socioeconomic and educational makeup, each school should formulate its strategies based on individual needs, conditions and available resources.

Furthermore, it is recommended that the Department of Basic Education formulate policies that promote greater collaboration between teachers and parents to enhance the quality of teaching and learning. The Gauteng Department of Education should also mobilise the participation of male parents, as they are less involved than female parents. This action may require schools to incentivise PI by rewarding active parents in their children's education as a form of motivation. The Department of Basic Education should offer training to teachers focusing on PI's importance before being deployed to schools. Training workshops should also be held regularly to update teachers on emerging PI challenges and new ways of dealing with them. Digital tools that allow for online and hybrid methods of running parents' meetings can be used to enhance PI and parents' participation in meetings. Schools can use the innovative and flexible modes of holding meetings to supplement face-to-face meetings to ensure greater parents' participation. Specifically, schools could hold hybrid meetings using digital platforms such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams and Google Meet to accommodate parents who can attend remotely, given their circumstances. Using technology could enable some parents who cannot attend physical school meetings to attend virtually. These efforts optimise the chances of attaining the SDGs through improved PI in the Tshwane South District.

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