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Strengthening Parent-Teacher Collaboration in a Rural Secondary School: A Pathway to Learner Academic Success

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Abstract. This study highlights the importance of parent-teacher collaboration in rural schools for enhancing the academic success of learners. While there has been significant research on parent-teacher partnerships in educational settings in general, less attention has been given to the unique context of rural schools. An interpretive qualitative approach was employed to conduct this study, and thematic analysis was used to analyze data collected through semistructured interviews with six participants who were parents and teachers at a rural secondary school in the Amathole East district, South Africa. The study demonstrates the critical necessity of fostering collaboration between parents and teachers to enhance learners' academic performance. Collaboration entails actively involving both parties in decision-making processes and establishing a robust communication framework to facilitate improved academic outcomes. The study recommends that, in rural schools, parent-teacher collaboration can be enhanced through consistent communication, active involvement in decision-making, community engagement, and fostering a welcoming environment, to ultimately improve education outcomes for learners despite them facing challenges such as geographical barriers and limited resources.

Keywords: Parent-teacher collaboration, rural schools, academic success

1. Introduction

In rural schools, there exists a significant gap in parent-teacher collaboration, which could stand in the way of learners achieving academic success. The absence of effective communication and partnership between parents and teachers poses

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a critical challenge to the holistic development and education attainment of learners in these communities. The absence of a robust parent-teacher collaboration framework in rural schools negatively affects learners' academic performance, emotional well-being, and overall growth (Siebert et al., 2018). Parent-teacher collaboration is widely recognized as a key factor in promoting the academic success and overall well-being of learners (Sokip et al., 2019). Authors consistently demonstrate that, when parents and teachers work together effectively, learners tend to exhibit improved academic performance, better behavior, and enhanced social-emotional development (J. L. Epstein, 2018; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Although the importance of parent-teacher collaboration has been extensively studied in various educational contexts, limited attention has been given to exploring this collaboration in the unique context of rural schools. Rural schools face distinct challenges for parent-teacher collaboration. Geographical isolation, limited resources, cultural differences between parents and teachers as a result of their different backgrounds, and communication gaps are among the barriers that parents and teachers in rural communities often encounter (Malatji et al., 2018).

These challenges can impede effective communication, hinder parental involvement, and ultimately limit the positive effect of collaboration on learner outcomes. Moreover, rural schools often serve as focal points for community engagement and support (Malatji et al., 2018). Building strong partnerships between parents and teachers in these contexts is likely to enhance educational experiences, strengthen community ties, and promote a sense of collective responsibility for learner success (Cabus & Ariës, 2017). Therefore, there is a need to explore the dynamics of parent-teacher collaboration in rural schools, identify the challenges faced, and develop strategies to enhance collaboration. By understanding the unique characteristics and needs of rural communities, educators and policymakers can create effective approaches to foster strong partnerships between parents and teachers, to ultimately improve the academic success of rural learners (Anastasiou & Papagianni, 2020).

Parental engagement with children's learning is not the same as parental involvement in school-based activities. Goodall (2018) distinguishes parental engagement, which is the participation of parents in their children's academic learning, from parental involvement, which entails taking part in an activity arranged by the child's school. Parental interactions with the school lie on a continuum, and there is no simple pathway for schools to follow to encourage parents to move from involvement to engagement (Goodall, 2018). Harris and Goodall (2008) suggest that mere parental involvement in school-based activities is of little benefit to a child's learning. This view was later supported by Goodall (2018), who suggests, however, that a parent's involvement with their child's school can act as a precursor to increased engagement levels of the parent in the child's learning. Schools and parents must understand the distinction and develop ways of promoting parents' engagement in their children's learning, which may not necessarily be through involvement in school-based activities.

From a socio-cultural viewpoint, in addition to being learners, children are active members of their families, schools, and communities (Ndebele, 2015). Children's early personality development and academic success are largely determined by their families (Boshkova et al., 2018; Bozhkova et al., 2020; Essa & Burnham, 2019). It is the duty of parents to guide and foster their children's growth in all areas, whether physical, intellectual, artistic, spiritual, or moral, so that children can achieve their academic objectives at school (Sokip et al., 2019, Tomczyk & Wasiński, 2017). A child's achievement is influenced by their family, particularly their parents, their schoolteachers, and their friends. In a similar way, children's learning outcomes are significantly affected by their surroundings (Adegboyega et al., 2017; Gonida & Cortina, 2014). One of the key indicators of an education institution's excellence is parental involvement in its curriculum. Parents are increasingly demanding that their children study in a safe and healthy environment. The Directorate General of Early Childhood and Community Education in Indonesia established the goal of enhancing parents' involvement and role in education (Anastasiou & Papagianni, 2020). This goal emphasizes the importance of parental participation in helping children achieve their learning objectives (Sadiku & Sylaj, 2019) and developmental goals (J. L. Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). To develop successful partnerships, a shared perspective between the school and parents is essential; however, teachers may feel apprehensive about parental involvement because of concerns about sharing power and its effect on teachers' professional autonomy (González & Jackson, 2013). When parents express dissatisfaction, it can challenge the educator's authority and lead to conflict (Lasater, 2016). These concerns must be addressed to ensure that schools transition from merely doing things to and for families, to co-creating with them and fostering collective productivity for the benefit of the child (González & Jackson, 2013). Traditionally, schools have not involved parents as partners in the educational process. Goodall (2018) argues that school staff should be aware of the educational activities that take place at home. While it might seem impractical to do for most secondary education learners, it can be feasible for specific groups, such as learners with additional needs who receive more individualized attention at school. Additionally, parents need to be informed of the learning occurring in school, so that they can fully support their children at home (Goodall, 2018).

Parents have a big influence on how well their kids do in school. Research indicates that children whose parents are not involved in their education could do poorly or even fail (Arwen & Haq, 2021). When children see that their parents are as motivated to succeed as they are to enhance the learning outcomes or successes that their children achieve, they will be inspired to be more engaged and eager to learn, in contrast to children who receive constant parental attention, especially for their learning activities at home (Zamroni et al., 2021). Children often imitate the behaviors and attitudes of their parents. When they see their parents striving for success and valuing education, they internalize these attitudes and develop a positive outlook on learning. Parents need to be aware that children can grow to their full potential if they receive the right assistance and are open and honest about their growth. Naturally, identifying learners' talents requires parents and teachers to communicate about children's academic progress (Anastasiou &

Papagianni, 2020), though doing it in the context of collaborative learning with educators and educational institutions is not an easy task.

Teachers and parents need to be able to communicate regularly about how children's academic abilities are developing, so as to assess children's achievement, and to ensure each learner receives counseling for both academic and non-academic talents. Ndebele (2015) emphasizes that parental responsibilities for managing and parenting must be matched with a desire in parents for their children to succeed. Research has found that improving learner achievement requires parents and teachers to work together to achieve learning goals (Malatji et al., 2018). This paper will, therefore, provide an overview of the forms of cooperation and communication that should exist between parents and teachers, and of the efforts that should be made by parents and teachers to collaborate to increase the learning motivation of the learners. This is a requirement for synergy between teachers and parents to achieve learning goals, which is a crucial element of enhancing learner achievement (Malatji et al., 2018).

2. Research Question

This paper was guided by the following research question: How does enhancing parent-teacher collaboration in rural schools affect learners' academic success?

3. Literature Review

3.1 Challenges of Parent-Teacher Collaboration in Rural Schools

Rural schools often face challenges related to geographical distance from cities where learners' parents live and work, which could hinder effective communication and involvement of parents in school activities (Baker & Baker, 2017). This distance limits the frequency and quality of face-to-face interactions between parents and teachers. Rural schools are often located in remote areas, which results in significant geographical distances between schools and parents. This distance makes it difficult for parents to actively engage with teachers, attend school events, or participate in meetings, which limit the opportunities for collaboration. Rural schools often experience resource constraints, including limited funding, staffing, and access to technology (Boyd, 2018). Furthermore, the absence of parental involvement affects the school environment by impeding the creation of a nurturing and stimulating atmosphere that is conducive to learning (Zamroni et al., 2021). Learners may struggle with their studies because they do not receive consistent reinforcement and guidance from both their parents and teachers, which could ultimately cause a decline in their academic performance. Some children in rural communities live with their grandparents, who may be illiterate and who find it difficult to be involved in their grandchildren's education (Siebert et al., 2018). Furthermore, rural communities have unique cultural dynamics that influence parent-teacher collaboration. Cultural norms, values, and beliefs can affect parental involvement and attitudes toward engaging with schools (Boyd, 2018). Understanding and addressing these cultural factors are crucial for fostering effective collaboration. In rural communities there may be a higher prevalence of families with limited access to technology, such as reliable internet connections or smartphones (Dyanty & Ncanywa, 2024). This lack of access hinders effective communication between parents and teachers and makes

it difficult to share important information and updates or engage in regular communication.

Barriers to parental involvement in schools, such as teacher hegemony, teachers who feel superior to parents, a lack of awareness of and exposure to the benefits of parental involvement in education and fear of criticism, comments and suggestions from parents affect parental involvement in schools (Tuli & Tarekegne, 2019). Furthermore, teaching workload, the absence of teacher training on parental involvement, the possibility that the autonomy of the teaching profession could be undermined, poor relationships between learners and parents, unfair teacher evaluation by their immediate supervisors, large classes, the school leadership vision, and parental attitudes are factors that discourage parental involvement in schools (Dyantyi & Ncanywa, 2024). In South Africa, significant barriers to parental involvement in public schools include that parents find it difficult to follow the revised school curriculum currently in force, teachers lack professionalism, parents may be experiencing financial issues, or may be indifferent to their children's education, and may be reluctant to talk to teachers, and the physical distance between teachers and parents (Anastasiou & Papagianni, 2020). Teachers in rural schools may have limited opportunities for professional development and training on effective strategies to encourage parent-teacher collaboration. This lack of training opportunities hinders their ability to establish and maintain meaningful partnerships with parents.

3.2 Strategies to Enhance Parent-Teacher Collaboration in Rural Schools

Creating consistent and reliable communication channels between parents and teachers is essential. These channels can include regular newsletters, phone calls, emails, and online platforms for sharing information and updates (Lasater, 2016). Encouraging parental participation in decision-making processes at the school level can enhance collaboration. Involving parents in committees for community engagement initiatives, advisory boards, and in school governance can create a sense of ownership and strengthen partnerships (Sadiku & Sylaj, 2019). Engaging the wider community in school activities and events can foster collaboration. Collaborating with local organizations, businesses, and community members can provide additional resources and support for educational initiatives (Arwen & Haq, 2021). Utilizing technology can overcome geographical barriers and improve parent-teacher communication in rural schools. Online platforms, video conferencing, and mobile applications can facilitate real-time information sharing and remote collaboration (Boyd, 2018). Studies report a positive association between parent-teacher collaboration and the academic achievement of learners (Okeke, 2014). Collaborative efforts that promote shared goals and mutual support can contribute to improved learner performance. Effective collaboration between parents and teachers can enhance learner motivation and engagement in rural schools. When parents and teachers work together, learners perceive consistent support and encouragement, which improves their motivation and active participation (Sadiku & Sylaj, 2019). Research suggests that parent-teacher collaboration positively influences learner attendance and lowers dropout rates (Gonida & Cortina, 2014). Regular communication with and involvement of parents can create a supportive environment that fosters learner commitment to

education (Dyantyi & Ncanywa, 2024). Therefore, it is imperative to develop comprehensive strategies and initiatives to bridge the communication gap between parents and teachers and to foster strong and supportive collaboration that nurtures the academic potential of every learner in rural schools.

Despite existing evidence of the positive impact of parent–teacher collaboration on learner outcomes, there remains a significant need to explore and understand the nuances and complexities of this relationship further, especially in diverse education settings. The need to conduct this study arose from the changing dynamics of education, including the integration of technology in learning, evolving parental roles, and varying levels of community resources across different regions in South Africa. Moreover, identifying effective strategies for fostering parent–teacher partnerships in rural settings, where resources might be limited and challenges unique, is critical. This study aimed to delve deeper into the mechanisms through which parental involvement and teacher collaboration could be optimized to support learner achievement. Additionally, it sought to provide actionable insights and recommendations for educators, policymakers, and community leaders in the form of more effective collaborations in education that are inclusive and equitable. Understanding these dynamics could pave the way for innovative solutions that adapt to the changing education landscape, and ultimately contribute to enhancing academic success and the well-being of learners in rural schools.

4. Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded on J. L. Epstein’s theory (1996) on family and community partnerships. The theory explains parental involvement in terms of two perspectives on family and school relations. These are, firstly, separate responsibilities for families and schools, in terms of which parents separate themselves from school activities. Generally, parents in the United States are of the view that the only way they can be part of the school is to help with their children’s homework. In South Africa, a study by Msila (2014) reports that parents believe that helping their children with homework is enough. Researchers such as Okeke (2014), however, believe that parents have more than one responsibility in their children’s education, and that this responsibility should be ongoing, and not limited to engaging in sporadic devotion to a single activity. The second perspective distinguished by J. L. Epstein (1996) is that of responsibilities shared by families and schools. In the context of this study, teachers and parents must share ideas on the best way to educate children and improve their academic achievement. Sharing responsibilities between the school and home emphasizes coordination, cooperation, and the complementary roles of schools and families. In this study, the focus was thus on how parents and teachers can share the responsibility for children’s socialization and academic development, by engaging with each other to improve academic performance.

J. L. Epstein’s framework comprises six key principles of parental involvement in education: parenting, communicating, volunteering, helping learners at home, decision-making, and collaboration. The current study focused on three of these principles: communication, decision-making, and collaboration. These principles

are discussed because they are relevant to the focus and context of parent-teacher collaboration in rural schools that have the aim of enhancing learners' academic success.

4.1 Communication

Communication is key to a good partnership. J. L. Epstein (1996) observes that there should be clear channels of communication between parents and teachers to promote sound collaboration. Malatji et al. (2018) found that teachers tend to communicate with parents only when their child has done something wrong or when issuing a semester progress report; this communication is seldom accompanied by discussion. Teachers should engage with parents about the academic progress of their children (whether positive or negative) and plan for improvement. J. L. Epstein (1996) suggests that teachers should meet with every parent at least once a year, and conduct follow-up if needed. When there is effective communication between teachers and parents, parents will feel comfortable about discussing challenges they experience with their children's development and that might be affecting their academic achievement.

4.2 Decision-Making

The school must involve parents in decision-making, so that parents feel welcome to participate in and form part of the education process. B. Epstein (2015) suggests that teachers should include parents in school decisions, thereby developing parental leaders and representatives. If parents are involved in their children's education, learners' academic performance is likely to improve. B. Epstein (2015) envisages decision-making as a process of partnership, and of sharing views and actions to achieve shared goals, and not the result of power struggles between conflicting ideas. Parents should not only be involved when there is conflict but also in general, to improve learner performance. Cabus and Ariës (2017) observe that parents can take an active role in decision-making in schools by becoming involved in school governance committees and other organs of the school community.

4.3 Collaboration

Since a school is situated in a community, there should be a good working relationship between the school and the community. Parents and guardians in a community must collaborate with the teachers at the school to plan the best ways teaching and learning can take place. J. L. Epstein et al. (2011) recommend that the school identifies and integrates resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and the learning and development of learners. Ndebele (2015) observes that some rural schools in South Africa use churches and community halls as libraries and learning spaces when the buildings are not being used for other activities.

5. Research Methodology

This research adopted the qualitative approach that was grounded in the interpretive paradigm, and underpinned by the constructivist theory, as outlined by Cherry (2020). Constructivist theory suggests that individuals craft their unique perspectives of the world, which in turn, shape their interpretation of

observed phenomena and experiences. The decision to utilize the interpretive paradigm was strategic, and aimed at uncovering the nuanced ways individuals ascribe meaning to their environments, and the impact of these interpretations on their comprehension (Maree, 2019). Interpretive research fundamentally seeks to delve into the motivations behind human actions. Henning et al. (2005) highlight that qualitative studies do not generally manipulate variables, but rather allow for the natural emergence of themes that researchers wish to explore. This methodological choice facilitates a deep exploration of the attitudes, experiences, and viewpoints of relevant stakeholders (Kemparaj & Chavan, 2013), thereby enhancing the applicability and relevance of the research findings to real-world contexts (Pyett, 2003). Among the various research designs, participatory research is touted as among the most effective, because it fosters active stakeholder engagement. According to Petrova et al. (2016), employing a participatory research design ensures the inclusion of stakeholders in the research process, and enables them to make a contribution to solution generation. This method achieves lasting and effective change in schools and communities because of an increased probability of stakeholder buy-in and solution implementation. The interpretive paradigm, coupled with the participatory research design, offered a philosophical foundation for strengthening parent-teacher collaboration to improve learners' academic success.

5.1 Research Context

The research took place in a secondary school located in the Amathole East District of the Eastern Cape, South Africa. The institution's primary aim is to provide its learners with access to quality education and thus contributing to societal advancement through knowledge creation and dissemination, in partnership with parents (Maree, 2019). The study considered the involvement of these stakeholders as critical for devising strategies to enhance effective parent-teacher collaboration, and ultimately improving academic outcomes for learners.

5.2 Participant Selection

Six participants were sampled through convenience sampling; they were three parents and three teachers (Table 1). This type of sampling facilitated quick and efficient data collection, which is particularly beneficial when time or resources are limited. Convenience sampling prioritizes the sampling of participants who are readily accessible and willing to participate (Han et al., 2021), thereby ensuring ease and efficiency of data collection. The sampled participants were invited to share their insights about fostering effective parent-teacher collaboration that would benefit learners' academic success. This approach also aimed to create a friendly atmosphere and minimize power imbalances between the participants and the researchers.

Table 1. Biographical information of six participants

Name assigned to participant	Gender	Age in years	Qualification	Years of formal work experience
Teacher A	Male	42	Bachelor of Education	14
Teacher B	Female	38	Bachelor of Education	12
Teacher C	Female	29	Bachelor of Education	7
Parent A	Female	34	Diploma: ICT	6
Parent B	Male	46	Master of Arts	15
Parent C	Female	51	Standard 6 (Grade 8)	N/A*

Note. * Parent C had never worked outside the home.

5.3 Data Collection Techniques

Semistructured interviews were employed to collect data from participants. This technique is valued for its flexibility and open-ended nature, which encourages in-depth sharing of experiences, opinions, and insights (Whiting, 2008). It promotes a cooperative environment between the interviewer and the participant, which could result in richer, more nuanced data being collected. Additionally, semistructured interviews provide the opportunity for follow-up questions, which ensures thorough and precise data collection (Adams, 2015). Thus, semistructured interviews could enhance the authenticity and depth of the data that are collected and ensure comprehensive insights into the participants' experiences and viewpoints.

To establish the trustworthiness of the study and to ensure credibility of the data, various strategies were employed, including prolonged engagement with participants, conducting in-depth interviews, and doing member checking. Transferability is enhanced by providing detailed descriptions of the research context, while dependability is supported by maintaining an audit trail of research activities. Additionally, confirmability was achieved by bracketing personal biases and using reflection journaling, triangulating data sources and validating findings and minimizing researcher bias.

5.4 Data Analysis Approach

The analysis was conducted through thematic analysis, which is a method to identify themes in the participants' responses. This flexible and iterative approach to analysis enables researchers to identify patterns, meanings, and connections in the data (DeJarnette & González, 2016). With reference to a singular research question, this study applied the six-step process of thematic analysis described by Clarke and Braun (2017) to ensure a structured and meticulous examination of the data.

The data for this study were analyzed using thematic analysis, which is a systematic approach for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) in the data. Data were analyzed inductively, meaning that themes were derived directly from the data rather than being imposed by pre-existing theoretical frameworks. The six steps of thematic analysis are familiarization with the data,

generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing the themes, defining and naming themes and producing a report.

5.6 Ethics Considerations

Maree (2019) underlines the responsibility of researchers to adhere to ethical norms when gathering data and to ensure the confidentiality of data in a manner that preserves the participants' rights and well-being. Ethics approval for this study was obtained via protocol FEDREC15-06-23-3, issued by the Walter Sisulu University Faculty of Education. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before they participated, and detailed explanations were provided regarding the methodology and the potential risks and benefits of participation. Furthermore, it was made clear to participants that they had the freedom to opt out of the study at any point without any adverse effects. The respect for participant autonomy and rights helped maintain research integrity and trustworthiness. This study exemplifies the commitment of the researchers to carrying out a study that would be considerate, ethical, and advantageous for all involved. To protect participant anonymity, pseudonyms were used in the documentation, to ensure that no comments or inputs could be traced back to any participant. For example, teachers were referred to as Teacher A to C, and parents as Parent A to C.

6. Results and Discussion

This section discusses findings in relation to the literature review.

6.1 Development

It emerged from the semistructured interviews that, to strengthen parent-teacher collaboration in rural schools, parents should actively engage with teachers regarding their children's academic achievement.

Parent A: *I believe that strengthening parent-teacher collaboration in rural schools is crucial for the overall development of our children. As parents, we need to actively participate and engage with teachers to ensure our child's progress.*

Teacher B: *Parent-teacher collaboration is important, and we can share valuable insights about our children's learning styles and challenges, advocate for better resources, and create a supportive community that fosters both academic and personal growth for our children.*

These findings indicate that active participation and engagement of parents in their children's education can make a significant difference in children's academic achievement, social development, and overall well-being. In rural settings, where community ties often play an important role in the promotion of education, enhancing parent-teacher collaboration becomes even more important. This echoes the findings of J. L. Epstein (2018), who indicates that, when parents and teachers work together effectively, learners tend to exhibit better academic performance, better behavior, and enhanced social-emotional development. One of the primary benefits of parent-teacher collaboration is the exchange of information and insights between parents and teachers. By actively participating in school activities, parent-teacher meetings, and other communication channels,

parents can share their knowledge about their child's interests, strengths, and unique needs. This information can be invaluable to teachers as they strive to personalize instruction and create a supportive learning environment. Similarly, teachers can provide parents with valuable feedback on their children's progress, areas for improvement, and strategies for continued support at home.

6.2 Collaboration

A finding that emerged from semistructured interviews is that, to strengthen parent-teacher collaboration in rural schools, parents should work collaboratively with teachers to enhance learner academic progress:

Parent B: *It is the responsibility of the parent to guide and develop their children to succeed. Parents should work collaboratively with teachers to ensure academic excellence of their children.*

Teacher A: *Parents play a pivotal role in their child's educational journey. If parents can work hand in hand with teachers, they can help reinforce learning at home and address any challenges their child might face. This collaboration not only supports the child's academic progress but also helps in building a strong foundation for lifelong learning.*

Parent C: *When we regularly communicate with teachers and participate in school activities, we can better understand our children's strengths and areas for improvement.*

The study findings emphasize the crucial role that parents play in guiding and developing their children so that they can succeed, particularly academically. By stressing the importance of collaboration between parents and teachers, these findings recognize the value of a supportive environment for children's educational development. This perspective suggests the need for a proactive approach to parenting, in which parents are actively involved in their children's academic journey and parents work alongside educators to ensure the best outcomes for their children. This paper advocates for a collaborative approach to education where regular communication and active participation by parents significantly contribute to a child's academic success and overall development. This partnership ensures that children receive consistent support and guidance, both at school and at home. These findings confirm the findings of Ndebele (2015), who explains that parental responsibilities for managing and parenting must be matched with parents' desire for their children to succeed. This finding confirms the pivotal role of parental engagement in shaping children's educational outcomes and reaffirms the importance of aligning parental efforts with their aspirations for their children's achievements.

6.3 Resources

It was found that parent-teacher collaboration can help generate resources for schools, which can be used to enhance teaching and learning and thereby improve academic performance.

Teacher A: *When parents, teachers, and the school work together, they can gather resources to help with teaching and learning. This teamwork can lead to better academic results.*

Parent C: *If we can work together with teachers, we can identify students' specific needs, secure funding for essential technology, and provide comprehensive support systems. This united effort can ensure that all students have equal opportunities to engage with digital learning tools to enhance their educational experience and outcomes.*

The study findings highlight the importance of collaboration between parents, teachers, and the school for improving academic outcomes. By working together, these stakeholders can pool resources, which include financial support, teaching materials, and expertise, to enhance the teaching and learning process. This collaborative effort creates a supportive environment for learners, in which they have access to diverse resources and perspectives, which ultimately contributes to better academic performance. Similarly, J. L. Epstein et al. (2011) recommend that the school must identify and integrate resources and services in the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development. This view is supported by Arwen and Haq (2021), who emphasize that engaging the wider community in school activities and events can foster collaboration. Collaborating with local organizations, businesses, and community members can provide additional resources and support for educational initiatives. Partnering with local groups, businesses, and community members can offer supplementary resources and backing for education endeavors. Together, the perceptions of participants and scholars highlight the significance of teamwork and community engagement for advancing academic success.

6.4 Decision-making

This theme relates to the aim of this paper, which was to investigate mechanisms to strengthen parent-teacher collaboration in rural schools. The study found that teachers should involve parents in every decision regarding the well-being of the learners.

Teacher B: *Teachers should include parents in decisions about their children's schoolwork because parents are important members of the school community. Parents should have a say in any decisions made at school that affect their children's academic progress.*

Parent A: *As a parent, I believe our involvement is crucial in our children's education. When teachers and schools actively seek our input and keep us informed, we can better support our children at home. Being part of the decision-making process ensures that our concerns and insights are considered, leading to more effective and tailored educational strategies that benefit our children's learning and development.*

The findings arising from these statements highlight the importance of involving parents in decision-making processes of education. By recognizing parents as essential members of the school community, the statements emphasize the value

of parents' input and engagement in shaping their children's academic experiences. This collaborative approach acknowledges parents as key stakeholders in their children's education, by highlighting the significance of parents' perspectives and insights. Furthermore, by advocating for parents' involvement in decisions that affect their children's academic progress, the statements promote transparency and partnership between educators and families. This collaborative effort fosters a sense of shared responsibility for learners' success, and promotes a supportive and inclusive school environment. This is in line with the theory of family and community partnerships of J. L. Epstein (1996), which suggests that teachers should include parents in school decisions, thereby developing parent leaders and representatives. If parents are involved in their children's education, learners' academic performance is likely to improve. This collaborative endeavor cultivates a shared responsibility for learners' success, and nurtures a supportive and inclusive school environment.

6.5 Communication

It also emerged from semistructured interviews that, to improve learners' academic progress, there should be effective communication between parents and teachers about the learners' well-being.

Teacher C: *Teachers should regularly talk to parents about how their children are doing in school. This helps parents stay informed about their child's progress and how they're feeling, which can lead to better grades in school.*

Teacher A: *As teachers, it is important to keep parents updated about their child's achievements and areas needing improvement, we can work together to provide the necessary support and interventions. This can help to create a supportive environment both at school and at home, which will in turn fostering a sense of partnership that is crucial for learners' academic success and overall well-being.*

The findings emphasize the critical role of parent-teacher communication for fostering learners' academic success. Regular updates from teachers on learners' academic progress and emotional well-being enable parents to provide additional support and address challenges that affect performance. This collaboration creates a supportive learning environment, and enhances learners' academic and emotional development. As stated by J. L. Epstein's (1996) theory of family and community partnerships, which highlights that effective communication encourages parents to share concerns and enables educators to offer tailored support, learner outcomes are, ultimately, improved through collaborative efforts. When parents are comfortable about discussing any challenges their children may be facing, educators can provide tailored support, and this enhances learner success. This synergy between teachers and parents exemplifies the power of collaborative efforts for creating a conducive learning environment in which learners can thrive academically and emotionally.

7. Conclusion

Fostering robust parent-teacher collaboration in rural schools has emerged as a pivotal pathway for achieving academic success for learners. Through active

engagement, communication, and shared decision-making, parents and teachers can work together to create a supportive educational environment that nurtures learners' growth and development. This collaborative approach not only addresses the unique challenges faced by rural communities, such as geographic isolation and resource constraints, but also leverages the strengths of community ties to enhance educational experiences. By recognizing parents as essential partners in the educational process and empowering them to play an active role in shaping their children's academic journey, rural schools can bridge gaps, overcome barriers, and pave the way for improved academic outcomes and holistic student success. Moreover, as evidenced by research and theoretical frameworks, such as J. L. Epstein's family and community partnerships theory, the significance of parent-teacher collaboration cannot be overstated. It is not merely a matter of improving academic performance, but also of fostering a sense of collective responsibility, shared goals, and mutual support between educators, parents, and the wider community. By embracing collaboration as a fundamental aspect of education, rural schools can harness the collective expertise, resources, and commitment of all stakeholders to create an inclusive, empowering learning environment in which every learner can thrive, academically and personally.

8. Recommendations

Teacher-parent collaboration in rural schools faces unique challenges related to geographical barriers, limited resources, and cultural factors. To address these issues, several strategies should be considered: Schools should develop consistent and reliable communication channels between parents and teachers. Various mediums, such as newsletters, phone calls, emails, and online platforms, should be utilized to facilitate regular communication about learners' progress and academic needs. Schools should actively involve parents in decision-making processes, to foster a sense of ownership and partnership. This involvement could include creating opportunities for parents to participate in school governance committees, advisory boards, and other decision-making bodies. Schools should engage the broader community by organizing activities and events that encourage collaboration. Partnering with local organizations, businesses, and community members should be prioritized to access additional resources and support for educational initiatives. A culture of shared responsibility between parents and teachers should be fostered to support socialization and the academic development of children. Collaborative decision-making and partnerships should be encouraged to enhance learner performance and well-being. Schools should cultivate an environment that is welcoming and inclusive, and that acknowledges and respects the unique needs and circumstances of rural families. This approach should aim to strengthen collaboration and improve education outcomes for learners.

9. Limitations of the Study

This study was limited by several factors, including its focus on rural education settings, and the findings may not have universal application in urban or suburban contexts where resources and parental involvement dynamics differ significantly. Additionally, the sample size and lack of participant diversity may restrict the generalizability of the findings, and the perspectives of a broader range

of parents and teachers could provide a more comprehensive view of parent-teacher collaboration. Furthermore, relying on self-reported data from participants may introduce bias, because individuals could overstate or understate their involvement and experiences. Lastly, the study's cross-sectional design limits its ability to draw causal relationships between collaborative practices and learner outcomes, which necessitates longitudinal research to explore these dynamics over time.

10. Directions for Future Studies

Future studies could explore innovative strategies to strengthen parent-teacher collaboration in rural secondary schools by focusing on leveraging technology to overcome geographical and resource barriers. Research could examine the effectiveness of digital platforms in facilitating communication, the role of culturally responsive practices in engaging rural families, and the impact of community partnerships on fostering collaboration. Additionally, longitudinal studies could assess the long-term effects of sustained parent-teacher partnerships on learners' academic success and well-being. Investigating the perspectives of learners, teachers, and parents could provide a holistic understanding of challenges and opportunities and could contribute to evidence-based interventions tailored to rural contexts.

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