

EXPLORING PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN STUDENTS' ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT: A CASE STUDY OF PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN RURAL GAMBIA

A Thesis

**Submitted to the Master's Study Program of Education at the Faculty
of Education in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of**

Master of Arts (M.A.)



By
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UNIVERSITAS ISLAM INTERNATIONAL INDONESIA

DEPOK

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ABSTRACT

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Student academic achievement is considered the main indicator of the success of any education system. Scholars in education describe academic achievement in education as the overall progress students achieve in their educational journey. Empirical studies have found many factors that are responsible for improving the academic achievement of students in both elementary and higher education, such as teacher quality, school infrastructure, gender, students' personality, motivation, parental involvement, etc. However, this study focuses on how parental involvement in education can contribute to the academic achievement of students in public elementary schools in rural Gambia. The researcher chooses to study this phenomenon because parents, as the first caregivers to children, have long been seen as a critical factor in enhancing children's academic achievement, especially at the elementary level. However, in rural Gambia, the nature and the extent of PI in education remain underexplored. Therefore, this research investigates PI in rural Gambian public primary schools, focusing on the perceptions, forms, barriers, and its influence on the children's academic success. This study employed a qualitative case study, which is grounded in the interpretive paradigm. The research data were gathered from 16 research participants-parents, teachers, school leaders, community leaders, and an education officer-through semi-structured interviews and document review. Thematic analysis was used to analyse and interpret the study data, guided by Epstein's framework of PI and the theory of overlapping spheres of influence. The findings of this research reveal that while parents in rural Gambia are ready and willing to support the education of their children, their involvement in their children's education is often hindered by factors such as economic hardship, low literacy level within the region, cultural norms, and limited access to school decision-making. Moreover, the findings further indicate that parents in rural Gambia are more supportive of their children's education in Islamic education, as it has to do with their faith, compared to secular education. The most common form of PI in rural Gambia was found to be home-based, while school-based involvement is limited and mostly shaped by community participation in school activities. Schools, on the other hand, also faced challenges in building a strong collaboration with the parents due to a communication gap and resource constraints. Finally, this research not only sheds light on the unique challenges and opportunities of rural education in the Gambia but also contributes useful information for stakeholders who are committed to improving the quality of education by involving parents to actively participate in education. The study offers practical policy recommendations to improve family-school collaboration to enhance the educational success of children in rural Gambian public primary schools.

Keywords: *Academic achievement, Education, Parental Involvement, Public Primary School, Rural Gambia.*

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ABBREVIATION DIRECTORY

CRR	: <i>Central River Region</i>
ECD	: <i>Early Childhood Development</i>
GABECE	: <i>Gambia Basic Education Examination Certificate</i>
LBS	: <i>Lower Basic School</i>
MoBSE	: <i>Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education</i>
MoHERST	: <i>Ministry of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology</i>
NAT	: <i>National Assessment Test</i>
PI	: <i>Parental Involvement</i>
PTA	: <i>Parent-Teachers' Association</i>
PTC	: <i>Primary Teacher Certificate</i>
HTC	: <i>Higher Teacher Certificate</i>
UBS	: <i>Upper Basic School</i>
BCE	: <i>Basic Cycle School</i>
MC	: <i>Mothers' Club</i>
RED	: <i>Regional Education Directorate</i>
SIP	: <i>School Improvement Plan</i>
SIG	: <i>School Improvement Grant</i>
SMT	: <i>Senior Management Team</i>
SMC	: <i>Senior Management Committee</i>
SPMM	: <i>School Performance Monitoring Meeting</i>
SSS	: <i>Senior Secondary School</i>
VDC	: <i>Village Development Committee</i>
WASSCE	: <i>West African Senior School Certificate Examination</i>

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter gives a general overview of the research background and provides a detailed conceptual explanation of the phenomenon to give insight to the readers. Additionally, the chapter will discuss the research context, the significance of the study, and the research questions and objectives.

1.1. Research Background

Student academic achievement is considered one of the main yardsticks used to measure the success of any education system (Alrajhi & Aldhafri, 2024). There are many factors that contribute to the academic achievement of children. Empirical studies have found many factors that are responsible for improving the academic achievement of students in both elementary and higher education, such as teacher quality, school infrastructure, gender, students' personality, motivation, parental involvement, e.t.c. (Batool, 2020; Steinmayr et al., 2015). Scholars in education argue that academic achievement is a multidimensional phenomenon (Alrajhi & Aldhafri, 2024; Oyoo et al., 2020). While many scholars in education believe that grade points obtained through summative and formative assessment are the main determinants of academic achievement, Alfred et al (2023) described it as the overall educational success of a child.

In Africa, the academic achievement of children is determined by indicators such as transition from one level to another, ability to read and write, school completion, access to tertiary education and employment opportunity (Chowa et al., 2013). In the Gambia specifically, students' academic achievement in school is measured by their performance in the national assessments, such as internal school assessments, National and international assessments, such as internal school assessment, National Assessment Test (NAT), GABECE and WASSCE, along with school completion and entry to tertiary education (MoBSE, 2023). Given the complexity of the concept of academic achievement, it is prudent to explore various factors that contribute to it-amongst them, Parental involvement (PI) PI. (Alrajhi & Aldhafri (2024). Therefore, this study focuses on how parental involvement can contribute to children's academic performance in Gambian public primary schools. Based on the frequent use of the term Parental involvement (PI) in this study, the researcher will use the abbreviation PI for the rest of this study.

A child's community comprises the immediate relatives, including the parents, uncles, aunts, siblings and friends (Lindsey & Mize, 2019). Parents' involvement in the

education of children, especially at the elementary level, is crucial as it is a stage where children need the company of their parents (Epstein, 2018). Parents' involvement in children's academic lives is widely seen as a catalyst for improving children's academic performance and overall well-being (Akpuokwe et al., 2024). Many scholars within the field of education have the view that involving parents in the academic journey of elementary children, does not only improves their cognitive ability but also sharpens their confidence and attitude toward their education (Erdem & Kaya, 2020; Tan et al., 2020).

Joyce Epstein (2018), the leading scholar on this phenomenon (family-school relationship), defines parental involvement in education as the overall activities undertaken by parents in the academic journey of their children. She argued that this phenomenon is multidimensional, encompassing six main types of parental involvement in education: "parenting, communication, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and community collaboration. Her framework views parental involvement as a partnership, rather than individual work. Meaning parent-school-community relationship should be a collaboration between the three parties to contribute to the academic success of children.

A study conducted by Lambert et al. (2022), reinforces this view, that PI should not be seen as an activity done by parents in the education of children, but rather, it is a way of seeing parents as active partners with teachers and educators in the educational journey of their children. Similarly, Cui et al (2021), Otani (2020) and Castro et al (2015) describe PI as a range of activities done by parents-ranging from assisting their children with homeworks, financial support, behavioural and moral support, to setting expectations. These involvements can either be direct or indirect (Batoool, 2020).

The definition of PI differs across contexts. In the UK, Goodall and Montgomery (2014) defines the concept of parental participation in school activities, while in another study, Turtulla and Lopar (2022) classified it as home-based and school-based. To them, home-based is when parents involved in supporting children's homework, providing financial support, providing moral and behavioral support, creation of conducive learning environment for children, motivation and material support, while school-based is when parents participate in school activities, attending school meetings, school visits to monitor their children's performance, and communication with teachers and schools to enquire about the children's education.

Additionally, Karaagac et al (2022), defines PI as the collective endeavour by parents to sharpen their children's educational success through participating in school activities (e.g. school governance, school seminars, parent-teacher meetings, and helping

children in doing their homework) and provision of educational resources (e.g textbooks, school bags and other educational materials) while In Africa, the involvement of parents in education is defined as the overall activities that parents partook in the academic journey of learners such as parents taking part in school activities, active interaction between parents and teachers regarding teaching and learning at school, taking part in school events, school encouraging parents to take part in the learning of their children, parents supporting their children in completing homework and monitoring their children's learning progress (Alfred et al., 2023; Lephollitse, 2024; Simweleba & Serpell, 2020).

Some researchers in education framed PI as a form of social capital investment made by parents to support the educational journey of their children (Jabar et al., 2023). As children's education is not limited only to schools, but also homes and communities, therefore, collaboration among these three is essential in shaping the educational success of children. Policy makers in education argued that when parents are actively involved in the education of children, it can significantly enhance their academic success (Erdem & Kaya, 2020). This is because they are the first caregivers to children (Wilder, 2014).

Parental involvement as a multidimensional phenomenon is categorised as home-based and school-based involvement (Jeynes, 2012). Home-based PI is when parents provide a conducive learning environment where children are at liberty to learn, develop good morals and attitudes towards education, provide a good and healthy life, provide educational materials, give motivation, and monitor the progress of children through homework supervision. On the other hand, school-based involvement is when parents visit schools to monitor the progress of children, volunteer in school activities, and take part in school governance (Hannah & Dele, 2023; Zarate, 2007).

Educational researchers have found that the involvement of parents in education has a significant relationship with children's academic success (Colley, 2014). Literature has shown that when parents have a good relationship with schools, they tend to be active in their children's education, and this will make their children achieve higher grades in school, be punctual in school and have good attitudes towards their school (Akpuokwe et al., 2024). School involving parents in the educational process of children has both educational, social, and emotional benefits (Jabar et al., 2023). However, these benefits vary based on the type of involvement practised by parents (Hill & Craft, 2003). When parents and schools have effective communication and collaboration, students have higher attention from both parents and educators, hence enhancing their chances of achieving higher academic achievement (Hill & Craft, 2003).

Education decentralisation has placed parents at the forefront of school management, recognising their involvement in enhancing the quality of educational attainment (Van Rensburg & Clasquin-Johnson, 2023). Countries like the US and many developed countries have all established educational policies that explicitly promote PI through legislation and structured initiatives (Altschul, 2011; Coşkun & Katıtaş, 2021). Parental involvement in education is a good strategy for advancing the quality of education in a decentralised education system (Driessen et al., 2005). Encouraging them to participate in children's education has been viewed as a mechanism for advancing the effectiveness of teaching and learning in school, thereby improving the quality of education (Epstein, 2018).

Hartas (2015) argue that parents are the first contact persons in children's lives; therefore, they cannot be left behind in anything that concerns children's development, including education. By involving parents in education, we are creating a collaboration between the school, parents and the community that can make a harmonious learning environment for children to realise their academic dreams (Karaagac et al., 2022). Moreover, it is evident that children spend more time with their parents than at school; therefore, for children to succeed in school, parents (Karaagac et al., 2022).

A meta-analysis conducted by Jeynes (2012), to examine parental involvement in America gave some essential conceptual explanations of parental involvement and academic achievement from the context of American society. This has given the researcher an understanding of the context of parental participation in the education of children in a broader context. In the United States, where education is believed to be very democratic, parental involvement is defined as “the active participation of parents in the learning of their children (Erdem & K aya, 2020).

In many developing countries, including those in sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia, educational predicaments are associated with limited resources, inadequate infrastructure, and different levels of parental involvement in the education of their children (Akpuokwe et al., 2024) Research from various regions explains how factors such as parents' education levels, family economic status, and societal culture towards education can have a significant impact on the extent and effectiveness of parental involvement in the education of their children (Akpuokwe et al., 2024).

As we discuss this phenomenon in a broader landscape, it becomes very evident that while the benefits of parental involvement in educational progress in all spheres of the societies are universally acknowledged, the manifestations of this involvement can vary

widely from one society to another based on variables such as cultural factors, economic status of the family and the education level of the parents (Hill & Craft, 2003; Jabar et al., 2023).

PI varies across societies due to social and cultural norms, economic conditions, and literacy rate amongst parents (Ndwandwe, 2023). A study by Akpuokwe et al., 2024 and Taylor et al. (2004). Reveal that PI in education in Africa is influenced by many factors, which include cultural norms, socioeconomic disparities of individual groups within societies and the level of awareness of parents towards education, which is believed to be related to the educational level of the parents (Akpuokwe et al., 2024; Taylor et al., 2004). However, this involvement, according to scholars, could be direct or indirect involvement, where direct involvement is viewed as parents' regular school visits, financial assistance to children's education, helping children with homework, while the indirect involvement is the provision of a conducive learning environment at home to support children's education (Ndwandwe, 2023).

In a recent comparative study between the United States and Africa on parental involvement in education conducted by Akpuokwe et al (2024), the study reveals a contrasting perspective on parental involvement in education in the United States and Africa. While the perception of the United States on parental involvement in education stressed the need for parents to be involved in education through educational policies, for example, the No Child Left Behind Act in the US, in Africa, cultural differences and societal setups may have different priorities and expectations regarding the parental roles (Akpuokwe et al., 2024; Colley, 2014; Hill & Craft, 2003). This is to say that in the United States, this phenomenon has legislative support, unlike Africa, where this phenomenon is still a mere policy proclamation without legislative backing.

Understanding the different societies and their cultural settings is very important in understanding how different factors influence parental involvement in education (Akpuokwe et al., 2024; Colley, 2014; Hill & Craft, 2003). In a study conducted by Mehta & Kaur (2022), they argued that while ethnicity, cultural and societal factors mostly dictate parental involvement in education in the African context, there seems to be a looming change in the dynamic because of the educational evolution and the parental expectations on education. Many Africans are of the view of the former president of South Africa (Nelson Mandela), that “Education is the most powerful weapon to transform a society” (Mehta & Kaur, 2022).

Since parental involvement in education is a global phenomenon that has been widely studied, it will be of the essence for this research to explain this case from a global perspective to narrow it down to the Gambian context, which this study seeks to explore. Parental involvement as an idea is not new in education (Epstein & Sheldon, 2018). However, this statement seems to represent the developing countries that have already succeeded in the attainment of EFA (Alfred et al., 2023; Ndwandwe, 2023).

In the Gambia, especially in rural areas, these challenges are particularly pronounced. Despite numerous policy directives encouraging parents-school-community partnerships by the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education, PI remains limited. Many parents in rural Gambia are preoccupied with agricultural and other economic activities, leaving their children's educational responsibilities entirely to schools (Blimpo et al., 2019). There is a widespread perception that once a child is enrolled, learning becomes the school's responsibility—a notion that contradicts modern educational models advocating shared responsibility (Colley, 2014).

In an effort to make parents active participants in school operations in the Gambia and to bridge the gap that exists between parents and the school, the government of the Gambia, through the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education, has made regulations which mandate all schools to establish Parent Teacher Associations (PTA) (MoBSE, 2016). This decision was informed by the National Education of the Gambia 2016-2030, which sees the need for parental involvement in the management of schools across the country (Colley, 2014; MoBSE, 2016).

The research conducted by Blimpo et al (2019), has revealed that PI in education in the Gambia is higher in urban areas, where parents are actively involved in the education of their children in both home and school. For example, parents in urban cities take their children to school in their cars and collect them when they leave school, participate in school seminars, attend school debates, participate in PTA meetings and provide extra study classes for their children. However, this is a different case in rural Gambia, where the educational responsibilities of children are believed to be the domain of the teachers and the schools only, with parents taking a passive or no role in the education of their children (Blimpo et al., 2019).

The World Bank impact evaluation report by Blimpo et al (2019) on efforts to empower community participation in school management in the Gambia is one of the studies that delve into the subject of PI in education in the Gambia. The study revealed that

the involvement of local people in education has the potential to improve school leadership accountability, students' performance, and build a strong school-community relationship.

Based on the above-mentioned problem and having the view that quality education cannot be attained without the involvement of parents who are first caregivers to children and spend more time with children than schools, this research explore this phenomenon in order to establish parents' perception about their involvement, identify the most common forms of involvement, contribution of PI in enhancing academic achievement, barriers to PI and strategies to enhance PI in rural Gambia.

Overview of The Gambia



Figure 1.1 The Map of the Gambia.

The Gambia is one of the smallest countries in Africa, with a population of over 2.5 million and a land size of about 10.7 thousand square kilometres (World Bank, 2018). It is located in the western part of Africa, surrounded by Senegal on both sides except for the Atlantic Ocean. Despite its small size, it is among the most densely populated countries in Africa, with 176 people per square kilometre. (World Bank, 2018)

More than half of the population (57%) resides in the urban areas, especially in the Greater Banjul area and the west coast region (DWR, 2022). Geographically, the country is divided into seven (7) regions and is home to seven major tribes, namely Mandingo, Fula, Wollof, Jola, Sarahulle, Serer, Manjago, Bmabara, and Aku. The two major religions in the Gambia are Muslims and Christians, with Islam as the dominant religion, practised

by approximately 95% of the total population, while Christians represent around 4 %, and other religions make up the remaining 1% (MoBSE, 2023).As a low-income country, the Gambia has a GDP of \$2.34 billion, representing a 4.3% increase from 2023 to 2024 (World Bank, 2018).

The country inherited its education system from the British education system (MoBSE, 2016) However, during the second republic, the school system in the Gambia changed from the British “form” system to the American “grade” system, where the education system takes a 6-3-3-4 format. The first 12 years represent Basic and secondary education, while the 4 years represent tertiary education. Moreover, the recent transformation in the basic education of the Gambia has seen an adjustment in the schooling system, where 3 years is designed for early childhood education, making the schooling system in the Gambia a 3-6-3-3-4 format (MoBSE, 2016). The basic education in the Gambia lasts for 15 years, 3 years for early childhood, 6 years for primary education and 3 years of secondary education, after which students take a national examination that determines their transition to senior high school (Blimpo et al., 2019). The senior secondary education lasts for three years, and the student takes national exams which determine their entrance into tertiary education. The structure of basic education in the Gambia is divided into four: early childhood, lower basic school, upper basic school, basic cycle school and senior secondary school. However, the basic cycle is the combination of early childhood, lower basic school and upper school under the same administration. As per the 2023/2024 academic year, the Gambia has a total number of 3335 schools (MoBSE, 2023). 1434 public schools comprising 540 Early Childhood Centres (ECD), 512 Lower Basic Schools (LBS), 138 Upper Basic Schools (UBS), 118 Basic Cycle Schools (BCS) and 126 Senior Secondary Schools (SSS). In addition, there are 1059 private schools comprising 692 ECD centres, 220 LBS, 67 UBS, 34 BCS, and 46 SSS. In the area of Islamic education, there are 842 Madrasas (MoBSE, 2023).

Administratively, the country’s education system has two ministries that are tasked with the responsibility of managing and implementing education programs and policies across the country. Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education” (MoBSE), is responsible for Basic and secondary education, while The Ministry of Higher Education, Research, Science, and Technology” (MoHERST) is responsible for tertiary education. Since the current study focuses on elementary education, which is part of basic and secondary education, the researcher will focus on the structure of basic and secondary education, which is managed by MoBSE.

The Gambia is organised into six administrative regions. Each of these regions has one regional education directorate, except regions 2 and 5 have two directorates because of their size. These regional education directors serve as chief executive officers for the execution of educational delivery in that region (Blimpo et al., 2019; Quality, 2016). The main responsibility of the regional education directorate is to monitor and supervise the activities of schools under its jurisdiction daily. Moreover, they are also mandated to recruit teachers and recommend promotions within the region.

As a secular country, The Gambia's formal education system accommodates religious education within its curriculum. The Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education has mandated all schools across the country, be it private or public, to offer religious moral education into their curriculum by offering Islamic studies and Christian religious knowledge as option for students from primary to senior high school. These subjects are designed to foster the spiritual growth of children, enhance their ethical reasoning and foster interfaith tolerance with the country. While Islamic studies is more widely offered in schools due to the majority muslim population, Christian education is offered in Christian minority schools (MoBSE, 2016)

Elementary Education comprises Early Childhood Education (ECD) and Lower Basic School (LBS).

Basic education in the Gambia begins with elementary education, which consists of early childhood education (ECD), commonly called kindergarten and primary education. The enrolment age at the kindergarten level is 4 years, whereas children spend 3 years at the kindergarten and transition to lower basic school (LBS). The transition age to lower basic is 7 years (MoBSE, 2016). As enshrined in The National Education Policy of the Gambia 2016-2030, basic education in Gambia has 3,6 years, where children spend 3 years in kindergarten and 6 years in primary school.

However, this policy still faces challenges in rural Gambia, where some communities, because of the distance from home to school, cannot enrol their children in kindergarten at the right age (The World Bank, 2016). From 2013 to 2023, the national enrolment rate at the ECD level increased from 75,849 children to 136,283, representing a 44.6% increment. In addition, national enrolment at the LBS level has increased from 2013 to 2023, from 256,912 to 428,053, representing a 40% increment (MoBSE, 2023).

Upper Basic School (UBS):

This is the third level of the basic education structure of the Gambia, and it lasts for three years, from grade 7 to 9. The enrolment age at this level is from age 12 to 15, according to the national education policy (MoBSE, 2023). After the completion of Upper Basic School, students take a national assessment called “the Gambia Basic Education Examination Certificate (GABECE)”, which is coordinated by the West African Examination Council (WAEC) that oversees assessment in Anglophone Countries within West Africa.

Senior Secondary School (SSS):

This level completes the basic education in the Gambia. Admission to Senior Secondary Schools has been declared free since 2013 by former president Yahya Jammeh, as part of the government's Vision 2020 target of poverty alleviation through human capital development (Foltz, 2014; MoBSE, 2016; The World Bank, 2016). Admission into good senior schools still remains competitive as it is determined by the student's results from (GABECE). However, it should be noted that basic education is free; therefore, this competitive nature does not deny the student access to senior secondary education, but their access to the best schools is mostly determined by their performance in (GABECE).

As per the new National Curriculum, senior schools have five areas of concentration, which include science, arts, commerce, technical and vocational, and Agriculture. Each of these concentrations offers English language, mathematics, science and civic education as compulsory subjects (MoBSE, 2023). At the end of the four years of senior secondary school, students sit for another national assessment called “West African Secondary School Certificate Examinations (WASSCE)” which is coordinated by “The West African Examinations Council (WAEC) (MoBSE, 2023; The World Bank, 2016). The results obtained by students in this examination determine their admission to tertiary education, like colleges and universities.

However, unlike basic education, tertiary education in the Gambia is not free; therefore, admission to tertiary education is very competitive. The requirement to be admitted to the university, a student must have credit in 5 out of the 9 subjects, including English language and for the Colleges, students must have a minimum of 3 credits, including English language. Students who could not have any credit are forced to reseat their subjects or venture into vocational areas (The World Bank, 2016).

1.2. Research Problem

Despite the scholarly emphasis on the important roles parents play in education in improving the academic success of children, rural Gambia faces a unique challenge, where this phenomenon remains inconsistent and often poorly understood. Although, the government through the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education has implemented projects such as the Education Sector Support Project (ESSP) and other initiatives that seeks to promote parent-school collaboration, the practical implementation of these initiatives faces numerous challenges. (Blimpo et al., 2019). Factors such as economic hardship, lack of education, societal beliefs, and lack of awareness of the importance of education contribute to disconnect the schools and the parents. (Hill & Craft, 2003; Jabar et al., 2023; Mitra, 1966)

Many parents in rural Gambia perceive the education of children as solely the responsibility of the government and the schools, once a child is enrolled (Blimpo et al., 2019). Their involvement in education is often limited to attending school meetings or financial support, rather than building a strong partnership with schools to enhance the educational journey of their children (Colley, 2014). As a result, they often play a lesser role in the education of their children at both home and school. This has created a blame game between parents and schools over who is responsible for the widespread failure of children in national assessment exams. parents think that teachers are not making enough efforts to teach their children, but teachers, however, believe that the problem is at home because parents are not fulfilling their parental responsibilities at home (Blimpo et al., 2019b; Colley, 2014).

This misalignment in perceptions has led to poor communication between parents and schools and limited opportunities for partnership. In addition, the lack of studies to explore the nature and extent of PI in rural Gambian public primary schools has left a gap in understanding how to address these predicaments. Without targeted data and context-specific strategies, educational policies may ignore critical cultural and social dynamics that influence PI in education, especially in rural settings like rural Gambia.

This study addresses the gap in literature on the nature, contribution and forms of PI in rural Gambia, by investigating how PI is perceived and practised in the rural Gambian public primary schools. It aims to understand the existing form of PI, identify the barriers to PI and explore how these dynamics affect children's academic success. Through this investigation, this research seeks to provide meaningful insights that can inform national

education policies and programmes to strengthen home-school collaboration in rural Gambian public primary schools to enhance the academic achievement of children.

1.3. Research Questions

In this research, the researcher formulated four questions that will guide in exploring parental involvement in the academic achievement of learners within the context of rural Gambia and further unearth the potential barriers that might hinder their involvement in education.

These questions are:

1. How do parents in rural public primary school in Gambia perceive their role in their children's education?
2. How does parental involvement contribute to students' academic achievement in Gambian rural public primary schools?
3. What forms of parental involvement are most common in public primary schools in rural areas?
4. What are the potential barriers that hinder parental involvement in the academic journey of children in rural Gambia?
5. What strategies can be implemented to enhance parental involvement in improving academic outcomes in Gambian rural public primary schools?

1.4. Research Objectives

Based on the research questions, this study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

1. To explore parental involvement in education in rural Gambia.
2. To investigate how parental involvement enhances students' academic performance in rural Gambia schools.
3. To identify the most common form of parental involvement in public primary schools in rural Gambia.
4. To identify the barriers affecting parental involvement in education in rural Gambia.
5. To identify strategies that can be implemented to improve parental involvement in schools to enhance students' academic performance.

1.5. Significance of the Study

This study holds great significance for multiple stakeholders within the Gambian education system and contributes to both academic literature and policy development. The findings of this study will provide useful insights, not only for educators but also for

partners who are interested in uplifting the standard of education in the Gambia, especially in rural settings.

Academically, the study addresses a notable gap in the literature by focusing specifically on rural Gambian communities, an area underrepresented in current research. It advances the discourse on family-school partnerships in sub-Saharan Africa and contributes context-specific knowledge that can inform comparative studies and regional education development strategies. Ultimately, the study's findings are expected to contribute to improved student academic outcomes, more inclusive education policies, and stronger, community-driven educational ecosystems in The Gambia and other similar low-resource contexts. In addition, the results of this study will contribute immensely to the body of knowledge on the state of the educational landscape in the Gambia and provide insights into Gambia's position on PI for education policymakers, it provides important insights for education policymakers, particularly the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education (MoBSE), by proffering evidence-based findings on the current state of PI in rural Gambian public primary schools. The study highlights practical challenges and identifies actionable opportunities to improve parent-school collaboration, thereby informing more targeted interventions and inclusive policies that can improve children's academic success.

In furtherance, the study findings will benefit school administrators and educators by improving their understanding of parental perspectives and the socio-cultural factors that influence parents' participation in education. This can lead to more effective communication strategies, greater inclusivity in school governance, and stronger partnerships that support student learning and well-being. Hence, improve the academic achievement of children in low-income regions like the rural Gambia.

Conclusively, the study emphasises the important role of community leaders and parents in the education of children and explores practical ways to foster active collaboration between family-school-community. By identifying the common forms of involvement in rural Gambian public primary schools, the study can help empower parents to become more proactive participants in the educational journey of their children.

CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

This chapter discussed the literature on parental involvement and academic achievement in education. Relevant literature was gathered from global, regional, national, and rural levels to understand the phenomenon better and identify a gap in the literature. Moreover, the chapter also discussed the theoretical framework that will guide the researcher in explaining parental involvement and academic achievement within the context of rural Gambia by focusing on the perspectives of teachers, parents and school headmasters.

The study explores PI in education to better understand the importance it has on the academic lives of their children, focusing on rural Gambia. As a result of the multidimensionality of the research subject, the researcher conducted extensive reading on the research subject to garner a deeper understanding of the phenomenon from different perspectives to determine the research gap. Luft et al (2022) explain that the importance of literature reviews is to “situate the study's relevance within a topic and field”. To better explain this, we can say that a literature review provides a foundational understanding of any research study, provides a summary of the studies conducted on a specific topic and identifies research questions that remain to be answered. Hence, gives the relevance of the current research topic and its potential contribution to academia.

To address this, the researcher gathered literature pertinent to the study using the University Library at Universitas Islam International Indonesia, as well as digital platforms such as ERIC, EBSCO, JSTOR, ELSEVIER, Google Scholar, and EMERALD, along with students' theses. The researcher also utilised other essential databases. Given the significance of this phenomenon in the educational landscape of The Gambia, the focus was primarily on reputable journals indexed by Scopus to obtain valuable insights from leading scholars on the topic of "parental involvement and academic achievement." The literature search was guided by the research questions of the thesis to ensure relevance to the study.

In conclusion, having reviewed all the definitions of parental involvement in education from the literature, this research agrees with the definition given by Joyce Epstein, which defines parental involvement as the overall activities undertaken by parents in the academic journey of their children (Epstein 2018). This definition gives a holistic description of PI and can be used in different settings, including rural Gambia.

2.1. Literature Review

2.1.1 Definition of Parental Involvement

Alfred et al (2023) conducted mixed-method research in Uganda (Africa) to investigate the involvement of parents in education and its impacts on academic achievement in senior high schools. This study defines PI as a wide range of activities done by parents to provide essential support to their children's education such as parents providing good health care to the children to make their educational journey a success, involvement in behavioural modification, involvement in learning-related activities, involvement in student safety, involvement in embracing diversity, involvement in regulatory activities, involvement in monitoring teaching and learning in school, involvement in fostering student-student relationship, involvement in extracurricular activities, and involvement in counselling. The findings of this research concluded that PI in the health care of their children is the most effective form of parental involvement that has a high effect on academic achievement in senior schools in Uganda at 50.5%, while parental involvement in counselling is the weakest at 24.5%. Although this study was conducted at the senior secondary level, a similar case might happen at the elementary level, which this research seeks to explore.

Epstein (2018), in her handbook, described Parental involvement as a multidimensional phenomenon. Refusing to give it a specific definition, she proposed a framework that explains the nature of parental involvement in education. This framework has six forms of parental involvement: "parenting, communicating with the school, volunteering at school activities, learning at home, decision making and collaborating with the community" (Epstein, 2018). The six types of involvement, according to Epstein, explain the main collaboration between school-parents-community because there is a unique responsibility each of them holds.

The study conducted by Nurhayati (2021) to assess how parents are involved in the elementary education of learners in the context of Indonesia was another interesting academic work that gave a conceptual explanation of parental involvement in education. This study defined the involvement of parents as the participation of parents or guidance in the education of children to enhance their educational success. This research employed a descriptive qualitative design, where 30 parents, 2 educators and 1 school administrator were interviewed. The findings of this research concluded that parents in Indonesia are involved in the education in many forms such as sharing of information between parents and teachers through various communication channels (e.g. WhatsApp Groups), parental

volunteering in school activities, assisting children at home learning, parental involvement in decision making and parental participation in field activities. Furthermore, the study reveals that parents often take part in their children's daily school routine by taking them to school and collecting them after school, and this activity is facilitated by teachers who always communicate with parents about the school closure. Interesting findings have it that parent-teacher communication is the most effective form of PI in education, while parental volunteering is the weakest.

Moving forward, Kalaycı & Oz (2018), researched to find out Turkish parents' perspectives about their involvement in education at the elementary schools in Ankara. This study employed a mixed-method research approach, where 180 parents were involved in a survey and 10 participants for interviewed. The findings of this study reveal that parents in Turkey perceived their involvement in education to be in three categories: “(i) parents and teacher relation, (ii) parents' academic help offered to children at home and (iii) logistics indirect support to children”, with logistics indirect support parents offered to their children and teacher parents-teacher relationship having 100% and 92% respectively. That is to say, parents in Turkey, especially in Ankara, the research site, are involved in educating their children more by rendering indirect logistic support and having a close relationship with the teachers.

Similarly, Oşkun & Katıtaş (2021), also researched to explore PI in Turkey and the factors that affect their involvement in academic success in education. The study employed qualitative research with a phenomenological design, where 12 parents were interviewed. The findings of this research concluded that parental involvement in education in Turkey carries multiple meanings that can be grouped into two categories: home-based and school-based parental involvement. Therefore, the researchers argued that practitioners in education should be aware of the multidimensionality of parental involvement, as it can take different directions.

Ndwandwe (2023) conducted a qualitative study to examine how parents in South Africa perceive their involvement in education. this study focused on elementary schools in rural communities in South Africa. The study involves fifty-eight parents in a focus group discussion to garner their opinions on PI in education. The findings revealed that parents perceived their involvement in education as collaborating with schools, assisting children with homework, inculcating good morals in their children, providing emotional support and providing career counselling to their children at home. Moreover, this study

employed Epstein's theory of school-parent-community partnership to understand the involvement of parents in education.

Zarate (2007) conducted research on the perception of Latino parents of their involvement in their children's education. Interestingly, the findings of the study found that Latinos perceived their involvement in education to be twofold: parents' academic involvement and participation in the life of the child. Parents' academic involvement is characterised as helping the child's academic work at home, such as homework to enhance performance and participating in the life of children is associated with parents providing life education such as creating communication with the child, discussing future plans, monitoring the school attendance, provide advice on life matters, inculcate good morals, build a relationship with the teachers to assess the child's education. Contextually, academic involvement can be associated with cognitive and life participation as social and emotional development. However, (Epstein, 2010; Yamauchi et al., 2017) both argued that PI is important for children's academic, social and emotional development.

In the Gambia, Colley (2014) conducted a study to garner the perspectives of Gambian parents on their involvement in education, especially from early childhood to senior high school. This study employed a qualitative case study design, where 10 parents were interviewed. The findings of this research reveal that parents perceived their involvement to be in many folds, such as monitoring children and the home, visiting schools to check on their children, providing learning materials, and communicating with schools about the progress of their children. however, this study was conducted in the urban Gambia, where most of the parents are educated and know the value of education, unlike the rural areas, which this research intends to explore.

2.1.3 Significance of Parental Involvement

A qualitative study by Karaagac et al (2022) was conducted to understand the involvement of parents in elementary education in the context of Turkey, highlighting that PI in education is important, especially in elementary schools, as they deal with children. This study conducted interviews with 10 parents about how they get involved in their children's education. The research findings reveal that parents participate more in the home level than school level (home-based involvement), where parents are frequently involved in asking their children questions about their school and assisting with homework was common among the participants. Moreover, the research reveals that parents have the view that involvement in education at the elementary level will not only help the child grow academically but also socially and emotionally. This finding resonates with the findings of

Shefelbine (2006), who argues that children's success in education largely depends on how well the school and parents collaborate. PI is not only essential for the children's school performance, but it is also critical to their well-being (Epstein, 2018; Shefelbine, 2006). The involvement of parents in their children's education matters as it is critical to children's academic success.

Mirazchiyski et al (2014) in their quantitative study to examine PI in school activities and its impacts on reading literacy in schools, they used secondary data from the 2011 results of the progress in the “International Reading Literacy Study” (PIRLS) of grade 4 students conducted by the International Association for the Evaluation of Education (IEA). The study also collected background characteristics of all the students, parents, schools and teachers, internationally from 54 of the 56 countries that took the assessment. The finding of the study reveals that countries with the highest score in literacy scores are countries that report higher parental involvement in education, while countries with low literacy scores are countries that report low parental involvement.

Ashim & Ahmed (2018) in a study conducted to investigate the effects of PI on the mathematics performance of children. This study used a quantitative survey design involving 900 students from 30 selected schools in India. The research found that PI in education significantly enhances the performance of students, with a statistical significance value ($p\text{-value} = 0.017$), which is less than 0.05. The researchers concluded that PI in their children's education positively correlates with their high mathematics performance in school.

In Hungary, Bacskai et al (2024) conducted a quantitative study to examine the impacts of different forms of PI on the academic achievement of children in both elementary and senior high schools, using the Hungarian National Competency Assessment database. The research analysed data from 99,615 students from grade 6 and 83,751 students from grade 10. The results from the analysis show that home-based parental involvement such as helping children with their homework has a negative correlation with mathematics test scores and literacy with a $p\text{-value}$ of -0.26^{***} , while school-based parental involvement such as discussion of school matters at home and frequent visiting of school meetings has a significant correlation with higher scores in mathematics and literacy in the elementary level, with a $p\text{-value}$ of 0.05 and 0.26 respectively. However, the results do show a significant correlation between parental involvement and good test scores in mathematics and literacy in upper grades.

A systematic literature review conducted by Şengönül (2022) to analyse the relationship between PI in education and children's academic achievement and whether socioeconomic status can be a mediating factor has found that PI has a positive correlation with children's academic success. The study further highlights the importance of the family-school relationship using Coleman's social capital theory to explain the relationship between the school and the family in helping students' academic journey (Şengönül, 2022).

A qualitative study was conducted to explore the different forms of PI in education and understand their direct and indirect effects on students' academic outcomes in Canada by Piskorz-Ryń (2024) has identified three main categories of parental involvement that significantly enhance the academic outcomes of students in school and their overall well-being. These categories are: "emotional support, academic support and financial support" (Piskorz-Ryń, 2024). This study further concluded that parents' involvement in education has direct effects on the educational outcome of children in the following ways: Firstly, it improves academic performance by improving test scores in schools because many children who were interviewed believe that when they got help from their parents in doing their school homework, they have a better understanding and that improve their test scores in school. Secondly, it improves the emotional and social well-being of children. Parents interviewed believe that their children feel happier when they are involved in their education, especially at the elementary level. And finally, it changes the attitude of children towards education. Children feel more eager and ready to learn when parents are actively involvement in their education, like frequent school visits by parents (Piskorz-Ryń, 2024).

To examine PI in school activities and its impacts on the academic performance of elementary school children in Tanzania, Kimaro & Machumu (2015) conducted a quantitative study, where 288 children and 125 teachers from six different primary schools were studied. This study examines the relationship between PI in school activities as the first variable, parental provision of school materials as the second variable and parent-teacher conferences and parent-teacher physical meetings as the third variable. The findings of the study indicate a significant relationship between parental involvement in school activities and the provision of educational materials, with $p < .01$. Furthermore, the research shows that parent-teacher physical meetings and conferences were found to be the most desirable form of school-parent communication that impacts the learners' academic achievement (Kimaro & Machumu, 2015).

An empirical study conducted by Lara & Saracostti (2019) to analyse the association between the involvement of parents in education and the academic success of

learners in the context of Chile and has found a positive relationship between parents' involvement in school and children's academic success. This research employed a cluster analysis where a sample of 498 parents or guardians who have their children enrolled in the 16 selected elementary schools from three different regions in Chile. This study analyses five different forms of PI, such as "Parental involvement at home, Parental involvement at school, Children's invitation, Teacher invitation, and General school invitation" using a five Likert scale (Lara & Saracostti, 2019). Based on the results of the survey, the five forms of involvement were clustered into high, medium, and low involvement. "The first cluster includes 144 parents (28.9%) that score above the mean score in all the involvement scales (high involvement), the second cluster which includes 228 parents (45.8%) have a mean score closer to the media in all the involvement scales (medium involvement), and the third cluster which includes 126 parents (25.3) with the lower scores in all the involvement scales (low involvement)" (Lara & Saracostti, 2019). On the other hand, academic achievement was measured through the final grades at the end of the academic year, recorded on a scale of 1 (minimum achievement) to 7 (maximum achievement). The findings concluded that "students whose parents have high involvement have higher scores than parents with medium involvement. Students whose parents have medium involvement also perform better than students whose parents have low involvement" (Lara & Saracostti, 2019)

In contrast, Avnet et al (2019) found no relationship between parental involvement and students' test scores. The study used a nationwide survey on elementary education in the United States of America to analyse the relationship between PI in education and student achievement. This study sample includes 550 elementary. The survey questionnaires include the following: "school choice, parents and family involvement at school, the child's behaviour at school, grade retention, parents' satisfaction with the child's school, family involvement in school homework and activities outside the school, and factors affecting family involvement" (p.4). The findings of this research show that students who score "A's" show low levels of parental involvement in class. However, the researcher stressed that this interpretation should be taken with caution due to the small sample size of the research as it might not be representative (Avnet et al., 2019).

2.1.4 Barriers to Parental Involvement

In a study conducted in south-west England, Hornby & Blackwell (2018) concluded that parent and family factors, parent-teacher factors, social factors and practical (time constraints, poor internet, school opening hours) are the most common barriers to parental

involvement in education. This study employed a qualitative research approach, where 11 schools were selected as a sample. An interview was conducted to explore the perceptions of the headteachers of the selected schools. The study further emphasises that while these barriers to parental involvement still exist, there is a need for more parent-community relationship policies in schools for better collaboration and involvement of parents in education (Hornby & Blackwell, 2018).

To examine the conscious experience of parents in Turkey about their involvement in education, Coşkun & Katıtaş (2021), conducted a qualitative research approach with a phenomenological design to have parents' first-hand experience of the meaning of parental involvement and potential barriers that affect their involvement in education. The sample includes four teachers, four parents and four administrators from four different schools that were selected based on a defined criterion (e.g. project high school, a local high school, a vocational high school, and a private high school) semi-structured interview was conducted to garner insights from each of the research participants. The findings of the study reveal that the most common barriers to parental involvement in education are parents' beliefs about education, parents' educational background, parents' socioeconomic status, work conditions, and the number of children. The study, therefore, concluded educational background of parents, income, perception, work conditions and number of children are barriers to effective PI in education (Coşkun & Katıtaş, 2021).

2.1.2 Forms of Parental Involvement

Many studies have been conducted by researchers in education and other social sciences to identify the different forms of parental involvement in education and their importance in enhancing children's academic achievement. On the grounds of empirical studies, Epstein (2018) has developed a framework that proposes six forms of parental involvement in education. These six forms are:

- a. **Parenting:** Schools and parents can collaborate in preparing children. For example, parents are the custodians of children and must prepare the children both morally and emotionally for school, guiding and raising them well, while the school as a social institution, helps parents by creating a positive home environment to promote children's development.
- b. **Communicating:** Schools, in their capacity as social institutions, must comprehensively inform the parents of the learners about the school programmes and policies, school activities and student academic progress and the parents, on the other hand, must be open to communication with the school. This form of

involvement has been seen as the most effective form of involvement in Indonesia, according to the research conducted by (Nurhayati, 2021).

- c. **Volunteering:** Parents' willful contribution and support rendered during school activities such as school celebrations, seminars, and extracurricular activities
- d. **Learning at Home:** helping children with activities related to their academics and monitoring their progress, for example, helping with their homework.
- e. **Decision Making:** parents' involvement in the school policy development and management decision-making, such as parent representation in the school boards and committees and discussions of any decisions that affect the student's education in school.
- f. **Collaborating with the Community:** This form of PI means that community resources and services are identified and integrated with the existing school policies and programmes, with children's upbringing and pupil learning.

A scoping review conducted by Sivabalan et al (2024) In Malaysia, reveals five common categories of parental involvement in education are revealed: “Academic Support and Learning Activities, Language and Skill Development, Parental Involvement at the School, Parental Involvement at Home and Decision Making.”(Sivabalan et al., 2024). However, although there is no general agreement on which category of parental involvement is the best, the study concluded that the most studied category in Asia that was found to have a high influence on student academic success is “Academic Support and Learning Activities “ (Sivabalan et al., 2024).

To garner a deeper understanding of parents, view their role in education, Lepholletse et al. (2024), conducted a qualitative study in South Africa to explore the parents’ perception about their involvement in education. The research was conducted in a rural community in South Africa, where 59 parents participated in a focus group discussion. The findings of the study concluded that parents in rural South Africa perceived their involvement in their children’s education to be: parents collaborating with schools to manage the school resources, helping their children with homework, modelling good attitudes in their children, providing emotional support, and career counselling. The research further reveals that parents helping children with homework is the most challenging form of involvement because most of the parents voice out their inability to do the work their children bring home.

In Ghana, Chowa et al (2013) conducted a longitudinal study to examine the involvement of parents in education and its effects on the academic performance of

Ghanaian students. The study selected eight (8) out of the ten (10) regions in Ghana. The study sample was 6252 students from 50 different schools across the selected regions. The results of this study indicate that parental involvement is a multidimensional construct in Ghana. This means that parents can either be involved at home, which is called home-based such as “checking students’ homework, communicating with the teachers of children about their school activities, talking with children about their expectations in school and school-based such as parents’ attending PTA meetings, communicating with teachers in school, parents’ participating in school events, and parents volunteering in school events and two indicators were used to measure academic performance: continuous assessment and exams score” (p.11). The study further reveals that in Ghana, home-based parental involvement is positively associated with academic performance, while school-based involvement has a negative correlation. Therefore, the study concluded that parental involvement in the education of children in Ghana has high educational implications as it helps in moulding positive attitudes towards schools.

2.1.5 Novelty of the Study

While many studies have been conducted to explore PI in education in the academic achievement of children, there is only one existing study in the Gambian context, which focus on only urban Gambia and only emphasises the perspectives of only educators and policy makers (Colley, 2014) There is no existing study that is found to explore rural perspectives, where socioeconomic conditions, societal cultures, educational levels and institutional practices may significantly differ in urban areas (Colley, 2014). This study brings novelty by exploring this phenomenon in rural Gambian public primary schools. Uniquely, it draws on the multi-stakeholder perspectives-parents, community leaders, teachers, school leaders, and policy makers-to have a holistic understanding of how PI is perceived and practised within the rural Gambia.

2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.2.1 Overlapping Spheres of Influence Theory (Epstein 1995)

This study will adopt the theory of overlapping spheres of influence developed by Joyce Epstein in 1995 to explain the involvement of parents in education in the rural Gambian context. This theory posits that children's development and academic success in education are influenced by multiple contexts or “spheres” that work together simultaneously (Epstein, 2018; Turtulla & Lopar, 2022). These spheres include family, school, and community. The theory recognises parental involvement in education as an

important factor in children's academic success (Turtulla & Lopar, 2022). According to the theory of overlapping spheres of influence, all these three actors have a stake in enhancing the academic achievement of children: parents develop, motivate and prepare children for education, schools provide in learning environment, and increase student reputation and the community extends the social capital and they work in tandem to reaffirm to children the importance of schooling and motivate them to be serious with their education (Epstein, 2018; Turtulla & Lopar, 2022). The theory of overlapping spheres of influence makes children the main actors and therefore, places them at the centre, where parents, schools and the community work together to make their educational journey a success (Epstein, 2010).

In practice, the argument of this theory is seen in everyday life in families, schools and communities. For example, in some families, there is a notion that parents' responsibility is to send their children to school, and it is now the responsibility of the school to inculcate knowledge and morals in them. Like in the Gambia, where this research focuses on, parents would often say, "I have done my duty as a parent to send my child to school, now the teachers are there to put knowledge in them and discipline them". This is a common saying in the Gambia. Some parents will report their children to school to be punished when they misbehave at home. For the schools, some teachers have the view that their responsibility is only to teach children, and the rest of the task is on the parents and the community. For example, there is this common saying by teachers: "If the parents did their parenting work effectively at home, we could also do our work here in school". According to this theory, this notion of both school and family is a "separate sphere of influence" (Epstein, 2018). Similarly, some parents would argue that if they have support from the school, they can help their children at home for example a common saying in the context of Gambia, where parents would say "If I know how to help my child do better in education I will do my best to help" and educator (teachers) on the other hand have this notion "I cannot do my job without the help of the parents of my students". these sayings are what the theory of overlapping spheres of influence posits (Epstein, 2018).

The interaction between these three parties (family, school and community), is what will bring a successful deliverance of quality education in any education system, according to this theory, thus, the overlapping spheres of influence (Newman et al., 2019). This interaction between the three parties will create family-like schools, where the school will treat each child with care and make them feel special and included; school-like families, where each child at home is recognised as a student, and communities also create

family-like programs, where parents are motivated to support their children (Ihmeideh et al., 2020; Newman et al., 2019). An example of this in the context of my research could be how parents in rural Gambia, create an environment where families give educational services to their children such as assisting them in their homework, motivating their children in their education and developing the skills of their children. Furthermore, schools engage all parents regardless of their availability, and finally, a community where programs are designed to support the education of children in schools, for example, community organising study classes during the summer holidays to support children.

In this theory, Epstein argues that the learning environment of the children begins from the home, school and community, where their physical, social, emotional, and psychological development happens (Newman et al., 2019). She, therefore, believes that children learn more when these three agencies (home, school and community) collaborate. The theory has two models: the “external and internal models” (Epstein, 2010). The external model of overlapping spheres of influence recognises that home, school and community are the three contexts that facilitate the learning of children (Epstein, 2010). According to (Newman et al., 2019), the three contexts (home, school and community) may be drawn together or separate, because each of them has their obligation and a joint obligation in the academic lives of children.

On the other hand, the internal model of the theory that where the complex interaction takes place. For example, the inter- and intra-personal communication between parents and teachers and between families at the community level (Newman et al., 2019). In the context of my research, the theory of overlapping spheres of influence will provide a robust framework for the understanding of how home (family), school and community converge to affect children’s academic success.

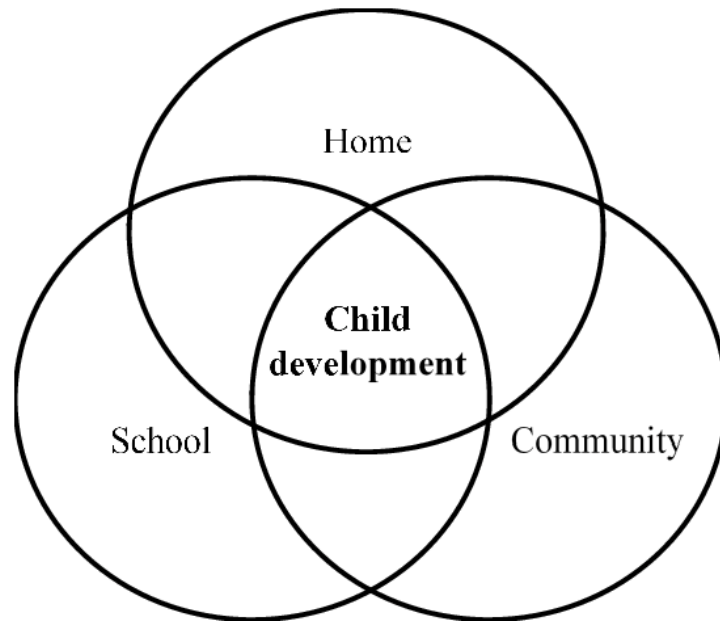


Figure 2.1: The theory of overlapping spheres of influence of Home(family), school, and community. Source (Adegoke, 2013).

The different spheres that are involved in the academic and overall development of children include:

2.2.1.1 The Home (Family)

In the context of this study, the home here will be the immediate family or the guardians who support the children's education. Parents and guidance are very important in the education of children, as they play a key role in providing a learning-friendly environment (Epstein, 2010). The home consists of the father, mother, uncles and siblings, which can be helpful to the children's upbringing and their educational support (Epstein, 2010). Epstein argues that the first obligation of the home (family) is to prepare the child for school, which will include both physical, psychological and emotional development. the home, as the first sphere, has a crucial role to play in the child's development (Shefelbine, 2006). Moreover, parental involvement in the first sphere can be manifested in many ways, such as parenting at home, helping children do their homework, fostering positive attitudes towards education, parents rendering financial support to children's education at home and providing of learning atmosphere at home for children (Epstein,

2010). This theory posits that at home, which is the first sphere, can create a family-like school, where the family recognises the efforts of each child and rewards them, thereby making them feel special and included (Epstein, 2010). An example of this can be seen in homes where parents assist their children with homework, provision of learning materials, and motivate them to learn by rewarding them when they have good results in their assessments.

2.2.1.2 School

The school, as the second sphere, is the environment where the formal education of children takes place, and it plays a pivotal role in preparing children for academic success (Epstein, 2010; Yamauchi et al., 2017). The responsibility of the school, according to this theory, is essential in maintaining a strong partnership between the school, home and community. Such responsibility includes creating a learning environment, where child learning and development are fostered, and a good quality communication channel for parents and the school together with the community to have good interaction for the better educational achievement of the children (Epstein, 2010). In the context of rural Gambia, this will be how schools organise programs or school policies that support parents and the community to be very active in the education of their children. In addition, the theory posits that schools can create a strong bond between the three spheres by inviting parents to school events and making policies that will make parents key decision-makers in the school's policymaking. According to Epstein (2010), the interaction of parents and the schools in the school sphere is very crucial, as it will make parents entitled and they will actively engage in the school's activities and can advocate for better school conditions and support teachers in their quest to make teaching and learning a success in school.

2.2.1.3 The Community

The community in the context of my research is the place where children live with their families. The community where children dwell also influence their educational success (Epstein, 2010; Pavlakis, 2018). For example, in rural Gambia, educational attainment largely depends on the norms, values, culture, and resources of the communities (Blimpo et al., 2019). The theory posits that in this sphere, community support may take the form of participation of local organisations in the education of children to promote educational advancement in the community (Epstein, 2010). An example of this in the context of rural Gambia will be how communities mobilise support for education through various initiatives, such as local community support in school activities (TESITO). Epstein

argues that in this sphere, community involvement would mean the community investing in education through its resources and services that connect the children with real-world experiences, thereby enhancing their educational experience (Epstein, 2010).

2.2.2 Epstein's Model of Parental Involvement

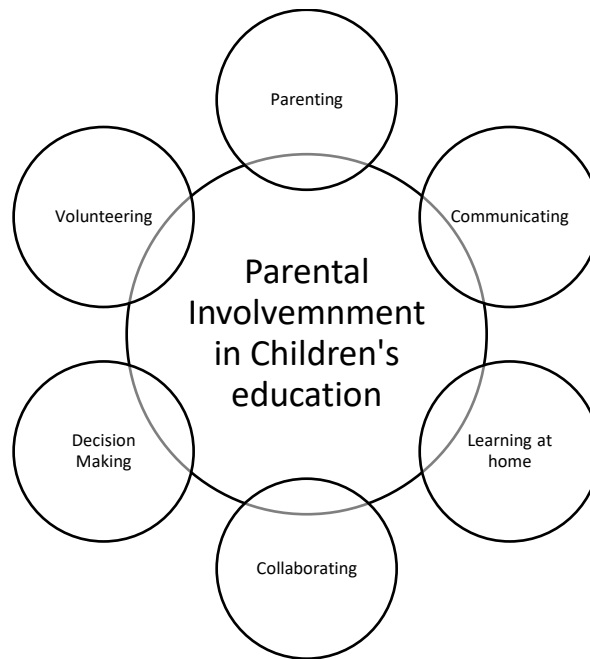


Figure 2.2 Epstein's model of parental involvement

Source; adopted from the study of (Abraha, 2022)

One of the most popular theories on parental involvement in education today, according to scholars, is Joyce Epstein's model of parental involvement (Abraha, 2022). This theory defines the six types of interaction that enable the school-family-community partnership within any given educational setting (Abraha, 2022). According to Epstein, the six types of parental initiative in the education of children are the following (see the initiatives in Figure 2). Each of these types gives a clear explanation of how we can understand parental involvement in education. In each of these types of involvement, there are different practices of partnership and each type presents a particular challenge that must be fulfilled in order to have a basic principle of involvement in education (Epstein, 2010). Based on the six elements of involvement by Epstein's parental involvement model, this research will use the framework to show how these elements of involvement interconnect to enhance the learning of children. The main idea behind the six elements of parental involvement in the model is trust and respect between the students, parents and the school

(Epstein, 2010). Using this framework, my research will be guided to investigate the different interactions at different levels between the school and the parents in helping students achieve their educational goals. below is the systematic explanation of the framework:

a. Parenting

According to Epstein (2010), in this type of parental involvement, all parents need to be assisted in establishing a home environment where children will have comfort in learning and will be supported in their educational endeavours. While it is the responsibility of parents to provide food, shelter and good upbringing to their children and give educational support to children at home, it is the responsibility of the school to provide that needed assistance to the parents on how to carry this task. Therefore, this theory posits that the school should provide training for parents to understand parenting. Hence it will strengthen the partnership between parents and teachers (Abraha, 2022). The collaboration here will be the provision of a family support program and educating the parents on how to help their children at different grade levels (Epstein, 2010). An example of this in the context of rural Gambia, where parents depend more on their children for domestic work at home. Schools can advise parents on how they can balance these activities at home with their children's education. for example, have time for house chores and homework. Moreover, schools can make home visits to conduct neighbourhood meetings to assist families within the community to understand their role in education and in turn, help the schools to understand the families and the different conditions of children (Abraha, 2022).

b. Communication

Schools as social institutions must design effective forms of home-to-school and school-to-home communication channels (Epstein, 2010). Being cognizant of the importance of communication in fostering collaboration and partnership among individuals with shared goals and aspirations, Epstein argues that schools must take the lead in creating effective communication between the school, parents and the community. This, according to the model, can take many forms such as organising conferences with parents at least once every year, weekly or monthly updating parents about the progress of their children at school, sending memos to parents about school progress or useful notice and giving clear information to parents about the school programs and action plans (Epstein, 2010). In addition, Abraha, (2022), argue that parental involvement in education must be a comprehensive exercise. There must be a strong collaboration between the stakeholders,

parents, school and the community and parents and the school should interact in the instructional process of the school (Abraha, 2022). Effective communication between school-parents-community can build trust and mutual understanding between schools, community and educators, which can lead to effective partnerships that can support the learning of students (Ndwandwe, 2023).

c. Volunteering

This type of involvement in this model means schools recruiting and organising parents for school support (Epstein, 2010). In this type of involvement, the model talks about the help and support from parents for the school and the children's activities such as the school feeding scheme (Ndwandwe, 2023). Parents who are interested in serving the school in any capacity should be embraced by the school. In the context of my research, rural Gambia, this phenomenon can be explained as parents who have the resources and want to support the school. This theory is saying that these individuals must be embraced by the school and assist them in their crusade. Moreover, it is common phenomenon in Africa, where youths of the village will volunteer to protect the schools, even though schools have their own security. Based on this theory, there should be an annual postcard survey by the school to identify the active volunteers to be rewarded. In this, there will be a strong partnership between the school and the community (Epstein, 2010). Moreover, the theory emphasises the need to build the capacity of volunteers by conducting training with the school teachers to build a community that can make a harmonious educational environment for children (Epstein, 2010).

d. Learning at Home

The model emphasises the need for schools to be proactive in providing parents with essential information and ideas on how they can help their children at home with their education such as HomeWorks and other education-related matters (Epstein, 2010). Parents should be trained on the basic skills that are needed by their children at each grade level such that they will have the required capacity to assist their children at home. In this, according to Epstein, schools and parents will create an environment, where children's educational journey can be enhanced (Epstein, 2010). In practice, this stage emphasises the need for schools to conduct workshops for parents to teach basic parenting and show them how to support their children at home. For example, in the context of my research, this framework will help me investigate how schools in rural Gambia help parents to be ready

for this task. Whether there is a school policy that provides parents an opportunity to benefit from periodic training on how they can help their children at home.

e. Decision Making

In this type of involvement, the model posits that schools should include the parents in the school decision-making (Epstein, 2010). Such involvement can be the inclusion of the Parents Teacher Association (PTA) in the school policy-making so that they can feel entitled and commit to the school learning process (Epstein, 2010). The school management manual (SMM) prepared by the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education of the Gambia, has placed the parents at the centre of school management, where each school is obligated to form a community called School Management Committee (SMC) and a community member should head this committee (MoBSE, 2016).

f. Collaborating with the Community

This type of involvement, according to the model, calls for identifying and integrating resources and services from the community to enhance the school programs (Epstein, 2010). Additionally, schools should collaborate with the community, where families within the community can be informed about issues like community health and, importance of education in society and in return, schools can learn about the cultures, norms and values of the community they live (Epstein, 2010).

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter gives a general overview of the study's plan, beginning with the research approach and its paradigm, research design, data collection techniques, and participant selection. Moreover, this chapter also gives a comprehensive explanation of the research instrument use, data analysis method, tools used in data analysis and finally, the ethical considerations in the research process.

3.1 Research Paradigm

This research employed a qualitative approach grounded in the interpretive paradigm to explore PI in education and how it can contribute to the academic success of children in elementary schools in rural Gambia. Phothongsunan (2010) posited that the interpretive paradigm, unlike the positivist, did not view the social world as "outside there". They believe that the social world is constructed by human beings. In their view, reality is created by individuals, and it needs to be interpreted. They, therefore, argue that human emotions, feelings and values cannot be measured, but must be understood from their expressions. Qualitative research, according to (Christensen & Johnson, 2020), is research that primarily relies on the collection of non-numerical data such as words and pictures. Creswell (2014), described qualitative research as multi-approach, where researchers explore the opinions of research participants and how these opinions are dictated by the society within which they lived. To simplify this statement, we can say that the qualitative approach is the method of investigation that aims to have a deeper understanding of phenomena, interprets the participant's experiences, and understands their behaviours and actions within a cultural and social context (Christensen & Johnson, 2020; Creswell, 2014).

3.2 Research Design

This research utilised a single case study research design. Christensen and Johnson (2020), posits that a single case study is a form of case study in which a researcher explores a single phenomenon (a case study). The main purpose of single case studies is to have an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2014). The rationale for the single case study design for this study is that parental involvement in education is a phenomenon that will need a deeper exploration to garner the perspectives of parents, teachers, school headmasters, and community leaders from different schools to have more insights of the case, PI (Christensen & Johnson, 2020).

3.3 Research Participants and Data Collection Method

According to the regional census, there are Ninety-Six (96) elementary schools in Central River Region South (CRR South), which includes 1 private primary school. The study uses a purposive sampling selection method to select three (3) schools for this research, namely; school A, B and C. school A is the biggest school amongst the three selected schools located in one of the metropolitan towns in rural Gambia, while school B and C are of the same size but in different geographical locations. Christensen & Johnson (2020) describe purposive sampling as a sampling method where research participants are selected based on specific criteria. This method will allow the researcher to carefully select research participants who have an understanding of the research subject.

Table 3.1 Research Participants

Participants	Number			
	School A	School B	School C	Regional Education Directorate
Parents	2	2	2	
Teacher	1	1	1	
Community Leader	1	1	1	
Education Officer				1
School leader	1	1	1	

For each school, the researcher selected two parents, one teacher and one community leader, and the school leader. Additionally, the researcher selected one education officer to be part of the study participants. This sampling method is not only convenient to the researchers, but it will also give the researchers more substance as it will deal with participants with accurate information about the research subject. The criteria for selecting the schools will be based on the performance of students in the national assessment, socioeconomic background, and education level of the communities.

Furthermore, the researcher collected data through online data collection via WhatsApp, in which semi-structured interviews were used with research participants, to have an in-depth understanding of the research subject. The researcher also analysed some documents, such as school policies, national education policy, school vision and mission statements, parents' attendance book and the school meeting minutes.

3.3.1. Interview

In this study, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with research participants online. The researcher uses online data collection via WhatsApp due to geographical distance and internet accessibility issues at the research site. Creswell (2012) argues that a semi-structured interview is essential because it allows the researcher to obtain personal experiences from the research participants through expressing their feelings and thoughts about a phenomenon studied. This will allow the researcher to garner rich narratives and firsthand insights from the researcher participants that structured questionnaires may overlook.

3.3.2 Document Analysis

According to Creswell (2014), document could be a valuable data source for qualitative research, knowing that personal expression could give misleading information at some points. Therefore, reviewing documents to triangulate the data gives more credibility and validity to qualitative data (Bowen, 2009) . In light of this, this study reviewed some important documents in schools, such as school policies on parental involvement, school mission and vision statements, national education policies that encourage community participation in schools, school meeting minutes, and parents' school visitor log books.

During the interview, the above-mentioned documents were obtained headmasters of the participating schools. For reliability purposes and knowing that sometimes some documents could lack credibility, the researcher double-checked these documents to verify their authenticity, to ensure that they are credible and relevant.

3.4 Data Analysis

The researcher employed thematic data analysis by (Clarke, 2022). To analyse qualitative data obtained from the interview and document reviews. Thematic analysis, according to Clarke (2022), "is the method of analysing and interpreting patterns across a qualitative dataset, which involves a systematic process of data coding to develop themes

for data analysis” (p.39). Additionally, Creswell (2014) argues that thematic analysis is essential for analysing qualitative data by generating essential themes from the interview. To analyse qualitative data from interviews and documents, the researcher employed an inductive reasoning to explain findings from a specific context to a broader context. Creswell (2012) highlights six steps that are used in analysing qualitative research, which this study will employ. The researcher utilised the six steps proposed by Creswell for data analysis, which include “preparing, organising qualitative data, exploring and coding the interviews, describing the findings, forming themes from the transcripts, and reporting the findings” (Creswell, 2012). Interpreting the research findings and validating the accuracy of the research findings. The researcher uses Quirkos software version 2.5.3 to help in qualitative data analysis.

3.5 Ethical Consideration

According to Christensen & Johnson (2020); and Creswell (2014), ethical standards in research are ethics that researchers must uphold and value. Against this backdrop, I uphold the ethical standards of research throughout the research process. All research participants were notified, and they were assured of the protection of their dignity and privacy with utmost care. To maintain the confidentiality of the research respondents, the researcher used pseudonyms for both the schools and participants selected. Moreover, the researcher also sought approval from all the selected participants before conducting any interviews.

3.6 Reliability and Validity

This research intends to explore PI in children’s academic achievement in rural Gambian public primary schools. To have an accurate understanding of this phenomenon, I explore parents’ perceptions about their involvement, the contribution of PI to children’s academic achievement, forms of PI, barriers to PI and strategies that could improve PI in rural Gambian public primary schools. To have this data, I conducted semi-structured interviews, which were done online, and I also reviewed some important documents to serve as a commentary data source to verify my interview findings from the research participants.

To reduce bias and inconsistency in my research, I used data triangulation. I collected data from different groups of people, such as parents, teachers, community leaders, school leaders and an education officer. This was done to maintain the reliability of the research findings, because the nature of humans is itself biased in the sense that when

you ask people to talk about themselves, likely, they will likely only say positive things about themselves. I also used methodological triangulation by utilising both semi-structured interviews and document review. By using different data sources and perspectives for this research, the researcher reduces the bias and strengthens the credibility of its findings. Moreover, the inclusion of direct interview quotes and the multiple stakeholder perspectives improves the authenticity and richness of this research data.

CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the research findings and the discussion. The first section, which is the presentation of the findings, will be in five sections, hence, five research questions. The first section will present a research question that seeks to describe parents' perceptions of their involvement in the education of their children. The second section will focus on findings of the contribution of parental involvement in the academic lives of children in rural Gambian public primary schools:-

The third section will identify, through the findings, the most common form of parental involvement in the public primary schools in rural Gambia, the fourth section identifies the barriers to parental involvement. Finally, the last section discusses the strategies that can enhance parental involvement in rural Gambia.

This study is designed to explore parental involvement in the academic achievement of children with a focus on the public primary schools in rural Gambia. The findings from this research were collected through semi-structured interviews and document review. The researcher also included one principal education officer to have detailed and accurate perspectives about the phenomenon.

Table 4.1 Participant Demographic Details: All Names Are Pseudonyms

NAME	GENDER	OCCOPATION	EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND	ECONOMIC STATUS
Sira	Female	House Wife	Not educated	Poor
Juma	Female	House Wife	Not educated	Poor
Satu	Female	House Wife	Not educated	Poor
Paul	Male	Teacher	PTC	Middle income earner
Jari	Female	Teacher	HTC (primary)	Middle income earner
Cham	Female	House Wife	Not educated	Poor
Saul	Male	Farmer	Not educated	Poor
Moro	Male	Teacher	PTC	Middle income earner
Penda	Female	House Wife	Not educated	Poor
Suti	Male	Teacher	HTC (primary)	Middle income earner
Suntu	Female	House Wife	Not educated	Poor

Mawdo	Male	Farmer	Not educated	Poor
	Male			Middle income
Alkali		Farmer	Not educated	earner
	Male			Middle income
Tata		Teacher	HTC (primary)	earner
Afang	Male	Teacher	HTC (primary)	Poor
	Male			middle income
Luntang		Education Officer	Master's Degree	earner

4.1 RESEARCH RESULTS

4.1.1 Findings on the Perception of Parents about Parental PI (RQ1)

The first question of this study is *how do parents in rural Gambia perceive their involvement in the education of their children?* To answer this question, parents were interviewed to garner their perceptions on their involvement in their children's education. This question is answered based on the major themes and sub-themes that emerged from the interview transcripts and the documents reviewed.

Themes and sub-themes on the perception of parents on their involvement in their children's education.

Main theme:

1. Parent responsibility

Sub-themes:

2. Investment
3. Means for poverty eradication
4. Legal rights of children
5. Share of responsibility with the school

a. Parents' Responsibility

Many studies on this phenomenon have positioned parents as important stakeholders in the education of their children. Parents as the first caregivers to children, are seen as the strongest partners to educators in building the future educational careers of children. This perception given by the literature in this field was found to be similar to what parents in rural Gambia perceive their involvement in their children's education. Hence, the theme "parents' responsibility". All six parents interviewed have repeatedly emphasised that PI is a responsibility of all parents because they hold the view that they are the main

custodians of their children and therefore their education is their sole responsibility. This is what some of them have to say about their involvement in their children's education:

As a parent, who is responsible for preparing the future of my children, I always force my children to read their books and focus on their education because I always provide financial support to them and you know it is not easy to have money here so if we are giving money to our children and we are not monitoring their education at both home and school it is going to be a useless effort (Saul, Parent, school B, 25 march, 2025).

As a concern parent, despite the fact I'm not educated I always prioritize my children education providing a teacher who will take him/her on extra classes at home during the weekend so that his or her performance can be always good because learning always goes with studies at home, if a child is always free that will create more time for him or her to be playful and will not take education seriously (Penda, parent, School A, 25th March, 2025).

One of the parents submitted that their responsibility as parents is to prepare their children to be better citizens. She therefore stated that if their children's education failed, then that means that they have failed in their responsibilities. All the parents argued that the teachers in the schools are just there to assist them prepare their children for them, but in the true sense, they are the very people who will benefit the fruits of the success of the education of their children. This is what (Satu) from school A has to say:

I have no challenges in being involved in my children's education, because to me, it is my responsibility as a mother to participate in my children's education so that they can remove me from poverty. (Satu, parent, School A, 18th March, 2025).

On the other hand, the school PTA meeting minutes were reviewed. In these minutes, it was found that both the school and parents view the role of parents in education as a parental responsibility. A notable statement that was found in the meeting minutes was this: “the school contribution for feeding is the responsibility of parents because the donors are not given money, they only provide food materials and parents are to provide the money for the school to buy condiments, because it is their responsibility to support their children's education”.

Similarly, the same meeting minutes provided by school A provided another evidence to support this view. In the second paragraph of the said document, parents and the school administration agreed that it is the responsibility of the parents to make sure their children are regular and punctual in school to reduce absenteeism in the school “the issue of pupils' attendance is a key to the success of the school and children's performance. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the PTA to make sure the pupils' attendance is not compromised”

In school C, the PTA meeting minutes show that parents have the view that being involved in their children's education is their responsibility. This is evident in the meeting

bullet point 11, which states that “to fix to problem of school dropouts and poor attendance, we, the parents, should do our responsibility by being active in our children’s education”. the parents, even though not educated, have a desire to educate their children because it is seen as the only tool for them to change their status in society. As Nelson Mandela once said, “The most powerful weapon to change a society is education”. the school homework policy of school B has a similar statement that views PI as the responsibility of parents in its third clause, which states that “parents should be sensitized during the PTA meetings so that they can make sure their children do their homework at home by giving them proper guidance and also monitor their education because it is their responsibility.

b. PI as a Form of Investment

Parental involvement as a form of investment by parents is a sub-theme that emerged during the coding process under parental responsibility, as all the participants viewed their involvement as a form of preparing their children to be responsible individuals in society who will later take care of them when they are old. They believe that for their children to be able to take care of them in the future, they have to be educated, so that they can have employment and earn a salary. So, they feel that education is that tool that can change an individual's status in society, and that is why they are trying to get involved in the education of their children so that they will get the education needed to have a good employment and take care of the home responsibilities.

In giving their perspectives about their involvement in their children’s education, the research participants have all highlighted the need for parents to be involved in education, because it will yield a good return for them when their children receive a good education, which they believe cannot happen without their involvement. This is evident in the statements made by the following:

We, the parents, should be ready to take part in our children's education in order the help them achieve their aims and objectives, so that in the future, they will take care of us (Cham, school B, community leader, 20th March, 2025)

We all know that in this country, if you are not educated, you will continue to be a farmer till you die in poverty; therefore, it is better that we educate our children so that they can take care of us when we are old. (Alkali, School C, community leader, 22nd March, 2025).

Showing how much, they are ready to invest in the education of their children, one of the parents interviewed believes that she uses everything that she has to support her children’s education because she has a view that only through education can one achieve status change in society. She stressed that despite being a widow, she struggled very hard to make sure her children had the education they needed. Giving an example, she believes

that many people in the community are enjoying it now because their children are educated and supporting them. This is evident in her statement:

I know as a single mother, this is the only way I can uplift my status in society, when my children are educated (Satu, parent, School A, 18th March, 2025).

In addition, a community that is also a parent argued that taking part in the education of children is a necessity because you are preparing them to be self-independent when they grow older. She believes that one will live forever and that when parents educate their children, they take care of themselves in the future. To her, whatever one does in supporting one's children in their education is never a waste because it will yield a return in the future, which she believes is a form of investing in the future of children. In her statement, she has this to say:

I have taken full responsibility about my child education because I have paid a private teacher who normally come to the house and have extra classes with her so that her performance in school will always be good, despite all the challenges, I'm able to support her education because I want her to have a bright future and be responsible for herself. (Cham, community leader, school B, 21st March, 2025).

A principal education officer from the regional education directorate and a teacher from school C have also opined that PI is a form of investment for parents because parents that involvement in the education of their children are those enjoying the fruits of educational success in society. They believe that this has opened the eyes of other parents who have long ignored the education of their children to come forward. This is what they have to say:

I think the parents are involved in education to mould them in such a way that they can be educated, and then when they are educated, they can help them in the future (Tata, teacher, school C, 21st March, 2025)

The education of the child will also help the parents to be completely out of that darkness. Because if you look at some of the communities in rural Gambia, they are completely in darkness, that is to say, they are not educated and don't know the importance of education in society, but now they are realising the importance education in their societies and they are now getting involved for their future benefits (Luntang, Principal education officer, 15th April, 2025).

From this, we can infer that parents in rural Gambia have now seen the education of their children not only as their responsibility but also as a form of investment where they expect their children's support when they are educated and get employment. All the respondents have registered their desires to be involved in education, citing the example of people who are educated within the community and are now benefiting from it.

In addition, the school PTA meeting minutes of the three schools have validated the participants' perception that parents view their children's education as a form of

investment. The minutes were taken during parent parent-teacher association (PTA). These minutes indicated that parents view their involvement as a way to develop their children into productive citizens in the future who will take care of them when they are old. However, this view is not only from parents, according to the minutes obtained by the researcher, but also from teachers and headmasters as well. An interesting statement from one of the meeting minutes says, “We are ready to invest in our children’s education because they will be the ones to take care of us in the future”.

c. Means for Poverty Eradication

Another sub-theme from the interview is that parents view their involvement in their children's education as a means to alleviate poverty. All the respondents have the view that, for society to change socially and economically, education must be embraced. Their perspective on their involvement in their children’s education is that when their children receive the education needed, they will remove them from poverty, as they saw from many of the people in their community who had their children educated and are now living a luxurious life. As mentioned, two of the parents have this to say:

I prepare my children for school every day and motivate them to learn because that is the only way for us as poor people, and that is why I am doing everything to make sure they are educated. (Mawdo, parent, School C, 23rd March 2025)

I effectively participate in my child's education, knowing that it's the only way to eradicate poverty in our community. (Penda, parent, School B, 21st March, 2025).

Moving forward, another parent believes that for their community to develop, they (parents) have to be very active in the education of their children so that they will receive the education they need. In her voice, she has this to say. She argues that schools cannot do it alone therefore collaboration between the school, parents and the community is essential in the education of children. This is evident in his statement during the interview:

I will tell you this, for any community to develop, they should prioritise education, and we, the parents, should be ready to participate in the education of our children at all levels, so that we can get rid of this economic hardship. (Cham, community leader, school B, 21st March, 2025).

When I read the school vision of school B, though I didn’t see any word like poverty eradication, I found something that represents the term semantically. The school's vision statement explains the school and the community’s desire to develop young people with adequate moral standings, knowledge, and skills to be productive citizens. In my opinion, the term “productive citizens” in the school vision statement can represent poverty eradication to some extent because when someone is productive, he/she will eventually be

self-dependent. Therefore, the poverty eradication that they envisage will be achieved. Moreover, in the school's mission statement, there is another statement that denotes a similar thing, like poverty reduction, because it clearly states that the school was established to work with parents in nurturing the children and inculcating the skills necessary for them to be able to pursue their dreams in the future. At this point, the researcher inferred that the dream of these people is to get rid of poverty, as expressed by the participants.

d. Share of Responsibility with the School

Some parents perceive their involvement in their children's education as a shared responsibility with the school in terms of educating their children. They view their role as very important because they spend more time with their children than they did at school. The issue of children's education as a shared responsibility between the parents and school was not only the perception of parents alone, but teachers, headmasters, community leaders and even education officers. Evidence of this can be found in the following responses from the participants:

I am involved in the education of my children because I believe that children spend more time with us parents than the school, but again, the school knows their ability better than parents, so if we communicate frequently, we can achieve our goal; that is to enhance their educational journey (Satu, parent, School A, 18th March, 2025).

The school and the community are two different organs that cannot go without each other. The collaboration between us has a great role to play in terms of education and a healthy environment for the school, that's why I always took part in anything that concerns the education of my children (Saul, parent, school B, 21st March, 2025).

A teacher from school C, who said he has 30 years of teaching experience, believes that the education of children should not be the business of only the school. He emphasises that it is a shared responsibility of parents and the school to make sure children receive the education they need. From his experience, he argues that parents who are active in the education of their children always succeed compared to parents who perceive the education of children to be the responsibility of only teachers. Tata from school C believes that even within the school, teachers could easily spot out individual students in the school, whose parents are always active in their education, because they perform better academically and also behave better than their fellow students, whose parents care less about their education. this is what he said:

When children are in school, they receive their education from teachers, and parents should not assume that they are not in school and are just at home; therefore, they should

not learn. Education can be enhanced if both parents and teachers put more effort into monitoring children at both home and school (Tata, teacher, school C, 21st March, 2025).

From the view point of Chama, a community leader from school B, who is also a parent in the school said they (the community) realise that the school cannot do it alone so their involvement is very much needed if they want to achieve what they envisage; that is to have productive citizen in the future. She argued that the community for far too long, has struggled to produce educated children because parents before did not show interest in the education of their children, but now have realise that if only if we join hands with the school, can we have our children educated and be productive in society like other educated children at the urban country. To her, schools should welcome parents through their various committees to strengthen the relationship between parents and the school, to achieve the school's mission and vision by 2030. This is what she said:

Schools and the community are two sectors that should collaborate because each of them plays a very significant role in the engagement of our children's education. Therefore, the school, through various communities within the school, should always try to know the problems of individual parents and try to support them when necessary (Cham, community leader, school B, 21st March, 2025).

The perception of shared responsibility was found in the school homework policy obtained from school B. This policy was developed by the school in partnership with parents to improve the performance of children in the school. While reading the school homework policy, it was found that the role of both parents and the school was spelt out clearly. For example, the school, through the teachers, are mandated to give homework to students twice every week, while parents are responsible for making sure children do their homework at home. However, teachers are also mandated to sensitise the parents on how they can monitor their children's education at home. This defines the overlapping responsibility of the school and the parents.

Furthermore, the school behaviour policy of school B, equally validated the points mentioned by the parents in their responses during the interview. The policy has seen parents and schools as close partners in moulding the morals of children because education without morality is meaningless, according to them. In the school behaviour policy of the three selected schools, I idea of shared responsibility was found to be central as the school believes that children's behaviour can only be better in schools when parents mould their children's attitude at home and continue to monitor their activities at the school.

e. Legal Rights of Children

Some of the parents perceive their involvement in the education of their children as a fulfilment of their constitutional right to education. The term “child rights” is a key word in some of the responses from the research participants. They believe that schools are built for students to be educated, and therefore, parents have to be involved to support this worthy cause. It is very clear in the UNCRC that every child has a right to access quality education without facing any form of discrimination. In the Gambia, it is also a constitutional right of every child to attend school, be it formal or non-formal. This is what one of the parents has to say about why she is actively taking part in her children’s education:

My involvement in school decision-making stems from the extensive experience and expertise I have gained through my interaction with educated people within the community and also teachers in the school here, which has profoundly impacted my life. This enables me to understand that my children have a right to be educated, and providing support for them is my top priority (Juma, parent, School A, 18th March, 2025).

Another researcher participant, who is a community leader in school C, is also a parent in the said school believes that he has been working with the school since its establishment. He argued that parents were not actively participating in the education of their children, but with frequent sensitisation from the school through the PTA and SMC, parents were made to know that these children have a right to education and their involvement is sacrosanct for them to have the quality education they deserve. This has had a great impact in changing the perception of many parents to start getting involved in the education of their children. This is evident in his statement:

We also encourage them to send their children with disabilities, too, because every child deserves to learn according to our Constitution. These are things that normally convince parents to take part in the education of their children. (Alkali, community leader, school C, 22nd March, 2025).

4.1.2 Findings of the Contribution of PI in the Academic Achievement of Students in Rural Gambian Public Primary Schools (RQ2)

The second question this research seeks to answer is “*how does parental involvement contribute to students’ academic achievement in Gambian rural public primary schools?*”

PI has been seen as a key contributor to children’s academic achievement. This research question specifically enquires about the contribution of PI in the academic success of children in the rural Gambian public primary schools. Headmasters, parents, community leaders and teachers were targeted for this question because they have a better knowledge

of children's academic achievement. To answer this question, three themes emerged from the responses of the participants.

The following themes emerged:

1. Child motivation
2. Direct school engagement
3. Home reinforcement

a. Child Motivation

Child motivation is a key word found in the responses of some of the respondents to be a key factor that enhances children's academic achievement in rural Gambian public primary schools. The research respondents believe that children are motivated to learn more when their parents are involved in their education. One of the school leaders stated that, as educators, they also see the difference in the performance of children whose parents are involved in their education and those whose parents are not. Explained that even the behaviours of those students in school will be different. This is evident in the response to the following statements:

When I came here, I was told that last year's school head boy, who got first in the GABECE exams in grade nine, was someone whose parents are always concerned about his education. That's what they told me, that the parents always come to school to see their progress and also monitor their education, and it has paid dividends. The child is now in Armitage, one of the most successful senior high schools in rural Gambia, on boarding, not even on the afternoon shift, because he had a very good score in the National Assessment Exams. So, any parents who are after the welfare of his or her children should be visiting the school as expected and actively supporting his or her education will have success in education, because being involved in the education of children motivates them to be serious with their education. (Suti, headmaster, school B, 20th March, 2025).

Moro, a teacher from school A, stated that when parents are involved in the education of their children, their performance in school is always good because they feel motivated to learn. To him, there is always a difference in the performance of children with high parental involvement and children with low parental involvement because children learn more when they have the environment to do so. As mentioned in his statement below:

As a teacher, I have seen differences in terms of performance, behaviour and progress in school between students whose parents are active in their education and those who are not. When the parents involvement is high 100% effective performance you can expect that from the students in particular because the parents are their everything, they spend most of their time at home and the parents are everything to them, so when the parents participation is very strong both at home and also at the school, there is going to be a continuous process of the student's performance, because they will feel motivated and encouraged (Paul, teacher, School A, 18th March, 2025).

Another class teacher from School B narrated his experience about his students who were not performing well in class. According to him, these students were not doing well and when he realised that, he tried to contact the parents of the students and later found out that the parents were not very much aware of their role in the children's education, thereby not participating actively. But when these parents started getting involved in the children's education, the children eventually started doing well in school and developed a different attitude towards education. we can therefore infer that when parents get involved in the education of their children, they are more likely to succeed because they feel motivated and encouraged. This is what he has to say:

Is like from experience as a teacher, when my students in the class are not performing well and I always have discussion with their parents about their performance and how they could help them improve, when they start assisting the children, I always notice improvement in class, because they are always motivated to learn and are always active but when they are not, I also know, because their performance will always not be good. Therefore, I believe that this work is a collective responsibility of both parents, teachers and the community. (Moro, teacher, School B, 20th March 2025).

Similarly, the headmistress of school A and the Headmaster of school C shared a similar perspective regarding the contribution of PI in the academic achievement of children in school. They believe that it is obvious that when parents are involved in the education of their children as expected, there will be academic achievement. to him, children are always motivated when parents show interest in their education. at this point, the headmistress' opinion is not only as a headmaster, but also as apparent who has children going to school. Giving an example of how PI could eventually lead to academic achievement through child motivation, this is what they have to say during the interview:

We have parents visiting book here and we take note of any parent that visits the school and the purpose of their visit and at the end of year, we check the results of students whose parents are also visiting the school and has shown interest in their education to other students, but we normally see differences. Children whose parents show interest in their education have more motivation to learn than others. There is no doubt that when parents are involved in the education of their children, they will succeed in education, and the opposite will happen if they aren't involved (Jari, Headmistress, School A, 20th March, 2025)

As a school, we have parents visiting the book, and we take their attendance, and we compare it to the results of their children at the end of the year. Normally, there is a difference in performance between children whose parents are active in school visits and active in their education and the children whose parents are not participating. Their performances are very different, so we use that to evaluate the impacts of parental involvement in education (Afang, Headmaster school C, 21st March, 2025).

Child motivation as an influencer of children's academic achievement is a key word in the discussion of the parents interviewed. These parents have shared their experience with their children and how they motivate them to make them work hard on their education.

to them, they not only motivate their children with a school visit or material provision, but also reward them for academic excellence in school. The rewarding of children when they perform well in school has been seen by parents to have a great contribution to their children's success in school, because they will also be motivated to do better in school, as they will expect a material reward from them at the end of every term. Evidence of this can be found in the following statement made by respondents during the interview:

When any of them performs extremely well, I have a rewarding policy at home where the person will tell me his/her wish and it will be done for the person. The reward is based on individual performance; the reward for first position is different from the reward for second position, and the list goes on. I do this to motivate them to do more because, psychologically, children do more when they are rewarded for their efforts, and this has really made a difference here because they always compete for good performance in school some of them have now transit to senior high school (Mawdo, parent, School C, 23rd March, 2025).

I organise a party for any of my children who perform well in school because it will serve as a motivation for him or her and will encourage others. I have seen the benefit of that in my house because none of them wants to perform badly in school (Satu, parent, School A, 18th March, 2025).

b. Home Reinforcement

In the discussion of the contribution of PI in education, home reinforcement was found to be a key contributor to children's academic achievement. All the research respondents have seen home reinforcement as very important in the academic lives of children. This is because parents are the main custodians of children, and they spend more time with children than the school. In school B, Cham, a community leader, argued that she has seen progress in the education of her children because she always stood her ground to make sure they are given more attention at home, since they spend more time with her than at school. She went further to say that she doesn't give access to her children to loiter around at home because if children are not reinforced at home, they don't focus on their education. therefore, she always does her best to put pressure on them to read their books and also pays a private teacher to help them. Below is what she said:

I have paid a private teacher who normally comes to the house and has extra classes with them so that their performance in school will always be good, despite all the challenges. I'm able to support their education because I want them to have a bright future and be responsible for themselves. If they are not reinforced at home, they will be playful and will not focus on their education. this has worked for me because my other child has completed her education (Cham, community leader, School B, 21st March, 2025).

Moving forward, parents from the three selected schools have expressed that home reinforcement has helped their children improve in their education. the time children spend at home is higher than at school, and when they are not properly monitored in their

academic activities at home, they will not have the desired academic success. The reinforcement comes in many forms, according to the parents. One of the ways is the provision of a study class teacher at home for their children, and also material support for them. they believe that this has really paid dividends for them, as many of their children are doing well in school as some move to tertiary education, and others are employed now. This is evident in the following statement:

As a concern parent, despite the fact I'm not educated I always prioritize my children education providing them educational materials they need and a teacher who will take him/her on extra classes at home during the weekend so that his or her performance can be always good because learning always goes with studies at home, if a child is always free that will create more time for him or her to be playful and will not take education seriously (Penda, parent, school B, 21st March, 2025).

The other thing I do apart from providing them with educational materials, is to make sure when they come from school, I ask them about their school activities and monitor their work and make sure they do their homework, and I also motivate them at all times, because I believe that children can always do better with this approach (Satu, parent, school A, 18th March, 2025).

c. Direct School Engagement

Another theme that emerged from the response of the research respondents is the issue of direct school engagement by parents. All the research participants have expressed that parents' direct engagement with the school has a great contribution to the academic achievement of their children. When parents are in direct contact with the school regarding the education of their children, it will create a strong connection between the school and parents, according to the participants. In their discussions, Alkali, Suti, Saul, Mawdo, Satu, and Juma all believe that when parents engage the school directly, their education of their children will be improved because these two are very important in the academic lives of children. Notable amongst the statements is the statement made by Alkali, a community leader from school C:

Parents should know that the education of their children requires their commitment, and they must consistently be aware of what their children are doing at both home and school. At school, they should make regular visits, as we always advise them, because if teachers frequently see you at school, they will recognise that you have an interest in your children's education. This will also motivate your children to learn and promote greater discipline in school. I have observed this approach working well for me because my children are performing extremely well in school. (Alkali, community leader, school C, 22nd March, 2025).

A parent from school A gave he perspective about how her children have success in education. to her, buying educational materials for your children and providing some financial support is not enough for them to achieve success in education. She believes that parents should always engage with the school and teacher because is only through that you

will know the potential of your children and also their performance in school. According to her, she is able to educate her older children because of her constant engagement with their teacher. This is what she said:

As a parent, when the school sends my children to me for a meeting, I always come. That is where we discuss many issues that affect my children's education. Sometimes, they will tell us the progress of our children's education, their conduct in school, and some of the challenges the school faces, and how to address those challenges. When we do this as parents, our children will have the better education we desire for them. For example, all my children are educated because this is what I have been doing (Satu, parent, school A, 18th March, 2025).

Another research participant, who is the headmistress of school A, reiterated a similar perspective about the contribution of direct school parents' engagement to the academic achievement of children. She stressed the need for a collaboration between the school and parents such that parents would know the progress of their children and any other thing that affect their education because education takes place in both school and at home therefore when parents and the school have direct engagement, there will be a clear information about the children's education. see the evidence from her statement below:

As I mentioned earlier, we consistently hold meetings with them to ensure they are engaged in their children's education because learning occurs not only at school but also at home. We have observed differences between the children whose parents are involved in their education and those whose parents are not. When parents participate in education, there is no doubt that educational outcomes will be excellent (Jari, headmistress, school A, 20th March, 2025).

4.1.3 Findings of the Most Common Form of PI in Rural Gambian Public Elementary Schools (RQ3)

In this section, I address the research question: *What forms of parental involvement are most common in public primary schools in rural areas?* This question seeks to identify the most common forms of PI in public elementary schools in rural Gambia. To answer this question, 6 parents were interviewed from three different schools. Therefore, these findings are from the response of the parents on their involvement in the education of their children. After the coding process, the following themes emerged:

1. Homework supervision
2. Material support
3. Financial support
4. Creation of a conducive learning environment
5. Attending school meetings (PTA)
6. Volunteering in school activities

a. Homework Supervision

The first theme that emerged from the discussion on the form of parental involvement is homework supervision by parents at home. This idea has emerged from the voices of all the parents interviewed. They shared their experiences on how they supervised their children with their homework. Though they claimed not to be educated, they still feel that their children's education needs constant supervision for them to achieve the desired objective. Juma, Satu, Saul, Penda, Suntu, and Mawdo all share similar patterns in how they supervised their children's homework at home. They believe that their children can do better when they are properly supervised at home, and they have seen an improvement in doing that because their children always perform better when they are supervised well at home. This is what one of them has to say:

As a concerned parent, despite the fact that I'm not educated, I always prioritise my children's education. I always put pressure on them to do their homework and also observe to see if they have done it. I also providing a teacher who will take them on extra classes at home during the weekend so that his or her performance can be always good because learning always goes with studies at home, if a child is always free that will create more time for him or her to be playful and will not take education seriously (Penda, parent, school B, 21st March, 2025).

The homework policy document from the three schools was received from the school through the headmasters of the respective schools. This document was found to describe the role of parents in their children's homework. For children to perform well, parents must be involved in the supervision of homework at home because at that moment, children are under the custody of their parents. Another document review is the school PTA meeting minutes from both schools. it was evident that parents expressed their active support for the homework policy established by the school because they are always involved in the supervision of their children. The meeting minutes also show the commitment of the school to supporting parents on how they could supervise the children in doing their homework at home.

Additionally, the SMC meeting minutes from the three selected schools were also reviewed. This documents also describe the role of parents in supporting the children at home with their homework. It is evident in the minutes that parents have been supervising their children in doing homework at home.

b. Material Support

Material support is another theme that emerged during the coding process. The research participants from both schools cited material support as one of the most common

forms of PI. The parents believe that they always tried to provide learning materials to their children despite all the financial difficulties. To them, this will enhance the education of their children. Therefore, it is a must for them to provide the needed materials like textbooks, school uniforms, school bags, books, shoes, etc. The most comprehensive statement amongst them is the one given by:

I have many children attending school, some are in the upper grades, and others are in the lower grades. My support for their education as a father is to give them money when they are going to school, buy them a school uniform, shoes, bags, textbooks, and books for their education (Mawdo, parent, school C, 23rd March, 2025)

On the other hand, teachers and school heads interviewed from the three schools also affirmed this claim by parents that material provision is the responsibility of the parents. They believe that parents are the sole providers of the materials needed for their children's education. However, there are instances where the government, through donor partners, provides educational materials to children. Jari, the headmistress of school A, has praised parents for their commitment in providing learning materials to their children, but she calls on the government to initiate projects like what was there two years ago (ESSP), which provides learning materials for children from underprivileged families. She believes that this will reduce the burden on parents who struggle to provide this material to their children. This is evident in her statement below:

The parents of this community are trying a lot to provide learning materials for their children despite the economic hardship. I think the government should try to initiate another project like ESSP, because that project has really helped the materials of this community, as they don't need to buy any school materials for their children (Jari, headmistress, school A, 20th March, 2025).

Another participant, Luntang for the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education, shared a similar thought. He believes that parents are very important in the education of children, as they are the main custodians of children. Giving his opinion on the forms of parental involvement in rural Gambia, he believes that parents not only enrol their children on school, but also provide them with learning materials to facilitate their education. He cited that the education of children can never be attained in the absence of their parents. This is what he has to say:

They are responsible for sending children to school when they meet the school enrolment age, and they also help children with materials like uniforms, shoes, bags, exercise books, pencils, and rubbers (Luntang, Principal Education Officer, 15th April, 2025).

c. Financial Support

Another form of PI that was found from the response of parents, community leaders, teachers and headmasters is financial support. The issue of financial support was

frequently by the research participants. For the part of parents, they believe that financial support is one of the ways they support their children's education because there is no doubt that education cannot go without money. Juma, and Satu from school A both cited that despite their financial difficulties, they also give money to their children when they are going to school. Mawdo, from school C and Penda, from school B, also provide the same statement that they provide money to the children on a daily basis, even though it is not enough, because children wouldn't want to go to school without giving them money. This is evident in the statement of two of the parents:

My support for their education as a father is to give them money when they are going to school, especially the younger ones, because they will not want to go to school if they are not given money (Mawdo, parent, school C, 23rd March, 2025)

I always provide financial support to my children. For example, when they have a program at the school, I also give them money, and also, if they are going to school every day, I give them money to buy food at the school. (Saul, parent, school B, 21st March, 2025).

For the part of community leaders, they too shared the same perspective with parents since they are parents as well. Alkali of school C, and Cham of school B believe that parents have always been rendering financial support to their children in their quest to have them educated. They believe that the education of children is a form of investment; therefore, it cannot go without finance. Sira of school A argued that parents have no problem giving money to their children because they knew it would motivate them to learn, even though most of the parents struggled to provide their children the finances needed, but they always tried to provide their daily school money. The statement given by Alkali is the most comprehensive:

As a community leader, who is also a parent, I always provide financial support to my children in many ways, first, I give them money every day when they are going to school, second, I provide them money whenever they have school activities like inter-athletics competition, school excursions, and talent shows. (Alkali, community leader, school C, 22nd March, 2025).

Another teacher from school A believes that parents in rural Gambia perceive financial support as the only way to only in the children's education. he explained that parents have no problem giving money to their children when they are going to school, but they find it difficult to make regular visits to schools to check on their children unless they are called by the school. He acknowledged that parents are very active in providing financial support to children in school, but what is lacking is the regular school visit by parents. Evidence of this can be found in his statement below:

For them (Parents), the only thing they can perceive as their responsibility is to give the children money to go to school, but they don't frequently come to school to check on their children's performance. (Paul, teacher, school A, 18th March, 2025).

d. Creation of a Conducive Learning Environment

The term “creating a conducive learning environment” has been repeatedly mentioned by both parents and community leaders during the interview. Most of them have argued that for children to have the quality education, the school alone is not the place for that, but also at home, because children spend less time at school compared to the home. For the parents, Satu from school A believes that for children to be able to retain what they learn from school, they should be provided with a conducive learning environment at home. She gave an example of what she has been doing at home to make her children do better at school. She said that she has reduced the load of house chores on her children, and also, she does not disturb them with any other issues other than allowing them to focus on their education. below is what she said:

The only thing we do is reduce domestic work on them to allow them to focus on their education. I don't put a lot of household chores on them because that can affect their focus on education. These are the ways I support my children's education at home. (Satu, parent, school A, 18th March, 2025)

Another parent, Suntu, from school C, also shared her experience. She believes that children do better in school if they are provided a learning environment at home. To her, education is between the school and home, and if either of these two fails to function, the education of children will be affected. She said that providing a conducive learning environment at home would mean parents motivating their children to learn, reductive the domestic work on them at home to allow them to focus on their education and also providing all the facilities that will enhance their learning at home. As mentioned in her statement:

For me, I believe that as a parent, the only way we can improve the education of our children is to provide them a conducive learning environment at home, where our children will be able to learn at home too. That is why I always reduce work workload on my children and I also motivate them and provide all the facilities needed for them to learn more at home. (Suntu, parent, school C, 21st March, 2025).

For the part of the community leaders, Alkali of school C believes that the education of children depends largely on what they do at home after school. If the home is more like a school for children, then there is a high chance that they will succeed in academic, and this is why he said for him, his children are also provided materials at home to enhance their learning. he went further to say that children should not be subjected to too much of house chores because it would affect their education. To him, when children

have a conducive learning environment at home, they can easily retain what they learn at school. This is what he has to say:

I provide all the necessary materials at home for my children to learn at home after school. This is because education doesn't stop at school alone, but it happens at home too. If we want our children to retain what they learn at school, they should be provided with that environment at home too, so that they will practice what they learn at school, says Alkali. Therefore, we should reduce the domestic workload on them and allow them to focus on their education. (Alkali, community leader, School C, 22nd March, 2025).

e. Attending School Meetings

Attending school meetings has been a recurring statement in the responses of the participants during the interview. All the research participants voiced out their opinions regarding PTA meeting attendance by parents. For parents, this is their responsibility because they are responsible for the education of their children, and they are always ready to answer the call of school at any time, there are PTA meetings. Moreover, some of the parents believe that aside from PTA meetings, they also attend the mothers' club and SMC meetings. This is what two of the parents said in their responses:

As a parent, when the school sends my children to me for a meeting at the school, I always come and that is where we discuss many issues that affects the education of my children and sometimes, they will tell us the progress of our children's education and some of the challenges the school face and how to address those challenges. (Satu, parent, school A, 18th March, 2025).

We always communicate about my children's education through meetings, and I also visit the school regularly because I am a school committee member. Therefore, that gives me the opportunity to double my efforts in supporting their education. and I think that frequent communication is vital for us to enhance the learning of children. (Mawdo, parent, school C, 23rd March, 2025).

For the school leaders, they also share similar narratives with the parents. The school leaders believe that they conduct meetings at the school twice or more every term because meetings are essential in creating good relationships between the school and the parents. Jari, the headmistress of school A, Afang, the headmaster of school C and Suti, the headmaster of School B shared that these meetings are policy requirement as it is mandated by the national education policy 2016-2030, that schools should conducted meetings in schools to create an environment for parents to share their views as per the education of their children and this will also avail the parents the opportunity to take part in the school decision making. Among their explanations, Jari's explanation is the most comprehensive:

The school management in this school always calls parents for a meeting so that we can share with them the school plan for the academic year and also tell them the performance of their children in the school. We also seek their opinions on how they would want to see the school operate. This is because some of them are very intelligent and offer good

suggestions that can help the school. Thank God that anytime we call them for meetings, they respond positively. (Jari, headmistress, school A, 20th March, 2025).

Schools are mandated to conduct PTA meetings twice in a term: at the beginning of the term and the end of the term. These meetings are important because they are used as platforms to discuss the school's progress and challenges with one of the most important stakeholders in education (parents). During these meetings, parents will express their concerns about the education of their children, and the schools are also obliged to share with the parents the performance of their children and sensitise parents on the importance of their participation in the education of their children. Another meeting that schools conduct is SPMM. This meeting is a policy requirement like the PTA meeting, where the school share with parents, the children's performance in the national assessment test and also share their challenges so that they can discuss a way forward. This is evident from the documents obtained from the school PTA file and SPMM meetings through the headmasters of the three selected schools.

f. Volunteering in School Activities

Parents' volunteering in the school activities is another statement that was repeatedly mentioned by parents during the conversation with them. parents repeatedly mentioned that they will volunteer in the school's activities when they are informed. This volunteering comes in two forms, financial support to the schools and labour. They believe that they are aware that their children's education requires their full commitment and that government cannot do it alone and that is why parents will contribute D25.00 every term through the mothers' club to support some school activities such as prize and speech given ceremony, school inter athletics competitions, talent shows and school feeding. Furthermore, the parents also said they take part in the cleaning of the school at the beginning of every academic year and also help in providing the school with clean water. As mentioned in the statement of one of the parents:

I am part of the mothers' club, and I am always at the school to help them with cleaning and providing water to the children. Again, we clear the school premises every opening of the school opens, and we also provide the school with a school farm that supports the school feeding program through our termly contributions. (Satu, parent, school A, 18th March, 2025).

Another participant, who is a community leader, shared her view on this matter. She gave a scenario that happened at the school, and parents contributed to support the school on the issue. She believes that the parents, together with the community, have always

been involved in the school activities because it is their conviction that only through educating their children will they get rid of poverty. This is what she said:

Some time ago we have realized that our school feeding was finished and that affect the learning of our children and we call an emergency meeting to look for possible solutions and we the parents agree to pay each and buy food to support the school with finance before the arrival of the next supply and the administration of the school was really excited to receive that from the parents. (Cham, community leader, School B, 21st March, 2025).

In addition, the headmasters shared a similar thing about parents volunteering in school events. All the school heads confirmed the parents' commitment to helping the schools with anything the school initiate. Though not all parents, most of them are very committed, according to Jari of school A. Afang of school C and Suti of school B both reiterated the same about parents' consistent support to the school financially and in labour. The headmistress of school A recounted her experience when she was first posted to the school as the headteacher. She said the school didn't have functional teachers' quarters, but with the help of parents, they contributed financially to rehabilitate the quarters for her and her staff to stay. This is how the community is committed to helping the school for their children's future. This is what one of the school heads has to say:

We don't have any challenges with parents volunteering in school activities. When we need anything from them, especially when schools open immediately for the first time, when anything is being announced at the parental level, they all come up to volunteer. This year, even our caretaker at school didn't clean the school. It was all done by the Mother Club, the youth and the community at large. The parents are always ready to support the school at all times. (Suti, headmaster, school B, 20th March, 2025).

4.1.4 Findings of the Barriers to PI in Rural Gambian Public Elementary Schools (RQ4)

In this section, I answered the research question: *What are the potential barriers that hinder parental involvement in the academic journey of children in rural Gambia?* The answer represents the perception of parents, teachers, school heads, community leaders and a principal education officer. These perceptions are explored based on four themes:

1. Economic hardship
2. Limited education
3. Societal belief
4. Exclusion of parents in school decision-making

a. Economic Hardship

Rural Gambia is the most vulnerable region when it comes to economic predicaments. This has been the response of all the research participants during the interview. The research participants from all categories believe that parental involvement

in rural Gambia is still low because many parents live below the poverty line. This is to say, parents' focus is to provide the three-square meals for their family first before anything else. During the interview, parents expressed their interest in their children's education, but cited that their involvement is limited because of the economic hardship they are going through. Mawdo, one of the parents, explained that he struggled very hard to see his children get the education they deserved, but he couldn't because he doesn't have the financial means. Satu, a parent from school A, explained that she is a widow who has been helping her children alone, and this is why she cannot afford to provide certain essential educational materials for her children. As mentioned in the statement of two of the parents:

I have some challenges as a poor farmer with many children going to school, and I have no support. Sometimes, it is a big burden on me to create that environment at home for them to learn more because I cannot provide all the materials, they need for their education due to poverty, even though I have the intention to do so (Mawdo, parent, school C, 23rd March, 2025).

The other thing is that we all know that education is expensive and children's education cannot go without learning materials and like I said earlier, I am a single mother who thinks of feeding the children first before buying school materials therefore I would love to have support from the government to support my children's education. (Satu, parent school A, 18th March, 2025).

Another research participant, who is a community leader from school B, cited that parents are willing to participate in the education of their children, but are hindered by the hard economic situation in the rural Gambia. She said that most of the parents are thinking of how to feed their families rather than buying educational materials for the children or going to schools to check on their children. She went further to give examples of how she and her mother's club members struggled to mobilise parents to come to school meetings, especially fathers, because they are always busy struggling for the survival of the family. As mentioned in her response:

The main problem here is poverty. Many parents here struggle to survive, so they depend on farming to feed their families, and that's why parents here put farming first before education. (Cham, community leader, school B, 21st March, 2025).

For headmasters, they gave similar opinions to parents and community leaders. All the school leaders believe that parental involvement in rural areas is greatly affected by poverty. The rural Gambian parents are going through a lot of economic predicaments, said the headmaster of school C. Parents have the intention to help their children, but are limited by the situation on the ground. He said that when the call for school meetings, especially during the farming season, the attendance is always poor because parents are always busy on their farms, as it is their only source of survival. Sometimes parents will even withdraw

their children from school to help them at the farm. This is evident in the statement made by one of the school leaders:

As I told you, meeting attendance is sometimes poor. Attendance during PTA meetings is sometimes a problem, especially at certain times of the year, like the rainy season, when parents are busy at the farm, they hardly come to school because most of them are poor and they solely depend on farming for their survival. (Afang, headmaster, school C, 22nd March, 2025).

Poverty is the most challenging issue in rural Gambia, said Luntang, a principal education officer. He cited that despite parents' willingness to be involved in their children's education, they cannot because they have a bigger task to do, that is to feed their family. This is what he said during the interview:

The main factor that is hindering parents from participating in the schooling of their children in rural Gambia is poverty. Poverty is the underlying factor, and that has to be addressed. (Luntang, principal education officer, 15th April, 2025).

b. Limited Education

Limited education is another theme in discussing the barriers to parental involvement in education. All the research respondents have the same view with regard to this theme. They believe that the level of PI in education in rural Gambia is very low compared to urban Gambia, because of limited education in rural Gambia. Many parents in the rural setting in the Gambia have not gone through formal education and therefore are not much preview to the importance of formal education.

For the parents, they believe that their limited education has greatly impacted their involvement in their children's education in many ways. Satu of school A, Penda of school B and Mawdo of school C all explained that they wish they could help their children in doing their homeworks, but because they are not educated, they cannot. This has limited their involvement at home because the only thing they can do is to monitor the children, and even that, Sira of school A believes that she sometimes doesn't know how to monitor her children on their homeworks because she wouldn't know if what they do is correct or not. As mentioned in the statement of one of the parents:

For me, the only challenge I face is a lack of education. I love helping my children at home, but because I am not educated, I cannot support them in certain areas like homeworks and other writings. (Saul, parent, school B, 21st March, 2025).

Another parent believes that lack of education is the main reason that some of them cannot even make more impact in the education of their children unless they seek assistance from the teachers at the school. She said sometimes they cannot understand the school performance results given to their children by the school, unless it is interpreted for them

by the teachers. Sometimes, even at the school meetings, if you are not educated, your voice might not be important, said Satu, a parent from school A. This is evident in the statement below:

I have many challenges as far as I know, because I am a single mother and also, I am not educated. Therefore, the only people I rely on to help my children are some teachers and also, and I ask my older child to help the younger ones in terms of doing their homework. (Satu, parent, school A, 18th March, 2025).

Paul, a teacher from school A, also believes that parents' limited education is a serious hindrance to their involvement in the education of their children. He cited that teachers are trying very hard at the school level, but because many parents are not educated, they find it very difficult to assist their children at home. He argued that sometimes, even if parents are invited to school, some don't respond because they don't know the value of education, since they are not educated. Others who are very concerned about the education of their children would attend, but it is also difficult to implement what they learn from school because they cannot read or write. This is seriously affecting the quality of education we envisage, because to have the quality of education, both the school and the parents have to be actively involved, said Paul. As mentioned in his statement:

Here the only challenge we have is about the parents' lack of education and their ignorance of the importance of education that's the most challenge we have because some of them still do not know the importance of education so in that way they leave their children of not coming to school or being absent or not following their regular patterns of their kids' performances in the school. Even though some come to the school for meetings, it is not helpful for their children because they cannot read or write. Therefore, we cannot achieve the quality of education we want if school and parents are not actively involved in children's education. (Paul, teacher, school A, 18th March, 2025).

The school leaders believe that some parents are not getting involved in their children's education due to their lack of understanding of the importance of education, which is caused by limited education. All three school leaders interviewed cited that parents have shown great interest in the education of their children because they knew it is the only way out for them to achieve economic success, but because of their limited education, they are still not fully involved. To get involved in the education of your children requires little literacy because one cannot supervise children if you cannot read and write, said Jari, one of the school leaders from school A. she said that the school do conduct PTA meetings to enlighten parents about how they should monitor their children education at home to make sure they do their homeworks and other assignments, but parents struggle to do this because they cannot understand basic writings in English. As mentioned in the statement below:

Some of them are not participating in the education of their children; maybe they don't know the importance of Western education, because they are not educated. Sometimes, even if we conduct PTA meetings in the school, parents cannot implement what we advise

them to do because they understand basic English writing. This is a big challenge. (Jari, headmistress, school A, 20th March, 2025).

c. Societal Belief

A region with deep-rooted cultural values, rural Gambia still have some cultural and societal perceptions that are barriers to PI in education. during the interview, it was interesting to find out that there still exist parents who perceive secular education as against the Islamic religion and also against our cultural values and societal norms. Parents interviewed cited that some parents withdraw their children from secular education to enrol them in Quranic memorisation because they believe that secular education is here to destroy our religion. Thus, some of them don't value this secular education, and that's why they don't bother coming to school to see their children, even if they are in the school.

A parent from school B explained that the negative perception that some parents have against secular education has caused them not to be involved in their children's education. he cited that some will enrol their children on school because of societal influence, but in reality, they don't value secular education, and this is why they will hardly go to school to check on their children. He said such parents don't even provide learning materials for their children's education. he gave an example in the community where many children are attending school without proper materials, and some will end up dropping out of school because the parents are not showing any interest in their education. As mentioned in his statement:

The other thing is that the society where we live has some negative perceptions about Western education, and that has made many parents not participate in the education of their children. They only enrol them into school, and that's the end; they forget about them because they are not interested in their education. (Saul, parent, school B, 21st March, 2025).

Another research participant from school C, who is a community leader, explained that the societal resistance is a result of Islamic education. Some parents still leave with this perception, and this is why they don't value secular education until. He gave an example of how they struggled to bring the school to the community; many parents rejected the idea as they believe it is a means for destroying their religion and also fading away the deep-rooted societal cultures and norms.

The societal resistance to secular education was very high because of religious education. Here is a Muslim community, and all parents prefer taking their children to the majlis (Islamic boarding school), and they strongly opposed secular education until recently, when

we tried to persuade the government to build a school here, it was a big challenge. This misconception is why some parents are not involved in the education of their children. (Alkali, community leader, school C, 22nd March, 2025).

d. Exclusion of Parents in School Decision-Making

Another interesting theme that emerged from the barriers to parental involvement is the exclusion of parents from the school decision-making by the school. This came from the discussion with the principal education officer, who believes that parents are not very involved in the education of their children, especially at the school level, because they are not involved by the school leaders in their decision-making processes. Luntang argued that school leaders exclude parents from decision-making, especially those dealing with financial matters, and this is making parents stay away from school activities. However, he believes that if the school is open to parents about school activities, the parents will embrace the school because schools belong to communities. This is evident from his statement below:

The most challenging issue is that some schools are not open to parents. They are not open to them all. The community don't know what the school administration is doing, the community don't know what is available in the school, so if you hide everything from the community, it becomes a big challenge. Getting them on board is a problem. I think this is why many parents are still not involved in their children's education as expected. (Luntang, principal education officer, 15th April, 2025).

Interestingly, the documents received from the three schools have not shown any evidence of the school inviting parents in the critical school decision-making process, such as the SIG (school improvement grant) or SIP (school improvement plan). We can therefore infer that the statement made by the Luntang is true, going by the document review. Inviting parents in school decision-making is a policy recommendation as it is mandated by the national education policy 2016-2030 and the school management manual (SMM). Evidence of this statement is from the national education policy of the Gambia 2016-2030 and the SMM.

4.1.5 Findings of the Strategies for Enhancing Parental Involvement in Rural Gambian Public Primary Schools (RQ5)

This section will answer the research question: *What strategies can be implemented to enhance parental involvement in improving academic outcomes in Gambian rural public primary schools?* This question is answered by exploring the perceptions of parents,

teachers, community leaders, school leaders, and an education officer to have better comprehensive strategies that could remedy the low parental involvement in rural Gambian public primary schools. The following themes will explore this question:

1. Building a good school-community relationship
2. Inclusive decision-making
3. Community sensitisation
4. Effective communication

a. Building a Good School-Community Relationship

During the discussion of the potential strategies that can help improve parental involvement in school in rural Gambia, one of the recurring themes is building a good school-community relationship as a strategy to improve parental involvement in schools. All the research participants believe that when schools and the community have a good relationship, there is a high tendency that parents will be motivated to take part in the education of their children.

From the parents' perspective, they believe that the school as an institution is doing well in interacting with parents, and this has created awareness among parents over the years of their roles and responsibilities as far as the education of their children is concerned. Penda, and Saul, both are parent from school B, cited that when schools created an environment where interaction and discussions happened, there would be a strong relationship between the parents and the school, and this would be essential for the education of children because these two parties are the pillars of the education of children. The most comprehensive statement is that of Saul:

The school and community should have a cordial relationship in order to work harmoniously and create a friendly environment for their children to learn without any delay. By creating that strong relationship, the school can easily communicate with the school through means like WhatsApp, the village mosque, where they use the microphone, and also with children to send messages to their parents. (Saul, parent, school B, 21st March, 2025).

One of the leaders from school B has emphasised the need for school-community relationships because it will serve as a means to break the barriers that exist between the school and the community, which might be the cause of a lack of parental involvement, especially in rural Gambia. He cited that in his 25 years of experience as a school manager, he has always been connected to the community, and it has worked for him because he has always improved enrolment and retention in any school he is posted and also the performance of his schools has been excellent. This was what he said:

I make home visits at the community level so we can get used to each other. I do not want to be in a place and hold myself. I have seen myself anywhere that I have gone to, that's where I should be. So, I don't want to see myself as a stranger. So, this collaboration with the parents, which I do, I enjoy it simply because any school that I may see myself, I always see the increment of the school enrolment as far as I am concerned because I want to bring with me the communities, including the youth, so that, you know, any problem that is affecting the school, they can even get up and help us without being told. (Suti, headmaster, school B, 20th March, 2025).

The school missions and visions of the three schools received from the school leaders were reviewed. School mission and vision of schools B and C didn't contain any statement that represents building the school-community relationship; however, the mission statement of School A envisages building a strong collaboration with the community to enhance the quality of education that aligns with the global standard. These statements are evident from the review of the school's mission and vision statements. Moreover, the school SMC meeting minutes of the three schools also indicate that a good school-community relationship could be a catalyst to connect the school and parents for better teaching and learning of children in both school and home.

b. Inclusive Decision-Making

Another interesting strategy that emerged from the voices of the research participants is inclusive decision-making. The research participants believe that when school decisions are inclusively made, parental involvement will be improved. Saul, a parent from school B, argued that parents should be involved in the school decision-making because any decision the school make will affect their children's education, and parents are the sole custodians of their children. He believes that when parents are involved in the school-making process, they will become custodians of those decisions, and this will make them commit to school activities. This is evident in his statement:

I think parents should be included in any decision-making so that they will be responsible for any development in their children's education. Parents are to lay down mechanisms to support their education. (Saul, parent, school B, 21st March, 2025).

From the teacher's perspective, Morro, a teacher from school B, said that when parents are involved in the school decision-making making it makes teaching and learning very easy for the school teachers because they become entitled to those decisions made. He gave the example that when parents are called to participate in the school policy-making, they make sure the policy is implemented, and this will make them commit to school activities, thereby improving PI in schools. As evident in the statement below:

When the parents are involved, like SMC, Mothers' Club when those people are involved in the school policies making, it will make the teaching and learning very easy because they

will participate fully in its implementation in that it will be easy for the teachers, and the school because they will understand their roles and responsibilities. For example, the homework policy: you know that my child, when he's coming home, he/she will come with something that is his homework. So, when your child comes, you will try and engage your child to know whether they do their homework, and when the person doesn't do it, you try and guide them. So, involving them in the policies or any agreements between us to engage the community is very important because it will make them understand that we are doing this together. (Moro, teacher, school B, 20th March, 2025).

Luntang, an education officer, explained that schools can attract parents' attention when they put them at the centre stage of the school decision-making, because when they are involved, they will see themselves as part of the school management. Citing that the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education has consistently called for inclusive decision making at the school, but school leaders only involve parents in voluntary roles, and neglect them when it comes to school decisions that involve finance. As mentioned in his response below:

The strategy that school leaders should apply is to let parents be part and parcel of every program that they are doing in the school, especially in the school decision-making. Once you do that, parents will always chip in anytime the school needs them. (Luntang, principal education officer, 15th April, 2025).

c. Community Sensitisation

Community sensitisation was another recurring statement from the research participants. Parents, teachers, school leaders, community leaders and an education officer interviewed all reiterated that some parents are not involved in the education of their children, not because they don't value education, but they don't know their role in the education of their children. Therefore, the school should engage in community education on the importance of parents taking part in the education of their children. Some of the parents argued that their involvement in their children's education is a result of the enlightenment they got through their interaction with teachers in the school. Therefore, they believe that if the school engages in community sensitisation, many parents will be aware of their roles in their children's education and will fully participate because every parent wishes their children to be educated, as it is their only hope for a brighter future. As evident in the statement of two of the parents below:

I think what we need here is to create more awareness among the community members so that they can embrace Western education. Suppose parents, are aware of their responsibility. In that case, they will be ready to take part in their children's education, and this can only be done through workshops and a strong connection between the school and the community. (Saul, parent, school B, 21st March, 2025).

I think the school can collaborate with the community to create more awareness among us parents about how we can help our children's education at both home and school, just like the mothers' club is doing. This will help us because many parents here are not educated,

but if they are sensitised, they will come forward. (Suntu, parent, school C, 21st March, 2025).

Moving forward, teachers also gave similar suggestions to parents on what strategy could be implemented to improve the participation of parents in the education of their children at both school and in homes. Paul, a teacher from school A, argued that most of these parents who are not participating in their children's education are not educated and don't know their roles in the education of their children. He said that most of these parents believe that their only responsibility is to enrol their children in school, buy them uniforms and books and give them school money every day, without knowing that the education of children has gone beyond that. He suggested that the school should engage in robust community education to create more awareness among parents of their roles and responsibilities in their children's education. As mentioned in his statement below:

For the school, the only thing we can do is to make sure we sensitize the parents about the importance of education through calling meetings or to involve SMC or sub-community of the SMC members who are responsible for community participation to engage them to make sure the parents know they are the first concerned people for their children so for their children's betterment lies on their hands as they spend most of the time at home than inside the school so if that engagement between the school and the SMC, the mothers club and the PTA with the regular meetings it will enhance that effective communication between us. (Paul, teacher, school A, 18th March, 2025).

Cham, a community leader from school B, emphasise the need for community sensitization to create more awareness among parents in rural Gambia, because she believes that aware of parents regarding their roles and responsibilities in their children education is very low, even though many parents want their children to be educated but because of high illiteracy amongst the parents, most of them don't know their roles. She therefore believes that if parents are aware of their roles in their children's education, they will be actively involved because they know that education is the only way to get rid of the economic hardship they are facing. This is what she said:

The school should sensitise parents to create awareness about the importance of education, especially Western education, to support our children's learning activities, because many parents in these communities are uneducated and do not know the importance of Western education. (Cham, community leader, school B, 21st March, 2025).

The school SMC meeting minutes from the school SMC file have also indicated that one of the recommendations for schools to improve community participation and parental involvement in their children's education is that schools should sensitise parents through partnership with donors such as UNICEF. During the meeting, it was noted that to improve the performance in schools, parents have to be involved, and one of the ways to make parents involved is to make them know their roles in the education of their children

through community sensitisation, which should take place at the beginning of every academic year.

d. Effective Communication

Creating effective communication between parents and the school is another interesting suggestion by the research participants. They emphasise the importance of communication in fostering collaboration between entities such as schools and parents. To them, communication will create an environment where the school and parents within the community work together to create a conducive learning environment for children to realise their academic dreams.

Parents believe that communication between them and the school should be improved regarding their children's education, especially in this modern era of technological revolution, where almost every parent has a smartphone. Most of the parents suggested that schools can contact them via WhatsApp or create WhatsApp groups where they will discuss anything that affects their children's education, because when they have effective communication, there will be no room for the children to be idle in school or at home. Saul, a parent from school B, explained that the school has now created a WhatsApp group where SMC members use to communicate. However, he believes this should extend to all parents so that there can be effective communication between the school and parents, and this will improve parental involvement in education. As mentioned in the response below:

I think the school is doing a lot in communication because we even have a WhatsApp group where parents are informed through the school SMC. Still, I think if parents are also part of the WhatsApp groups, we can always share ideas on how to overcome the challenges, such as communication faced by the school in the aspect of learning, and also give courage to all students to adhere to the school policies to have a better educational future. (Saul, parent, school B, 21st March, 2025).

Additionally, Luntang, an educator, believes that the best strategy to involve parents in their children's education is to have effective communication with them through a proper line of communication. He said that sometimes schools will use children to inform their parents, and these children might send any information that doesn't favour them; therefore, schools should have direct contact with parents since we are in the modern era where communication is very cheap and accessible. To him, when this is done, there will be a strong bond between parents and the school, and parents will have trust and confidence in the school, thereby improving the involvement of parents. As mentioned in his statement:

The best method to keep parents involved in their children's education is to have effective communication with them regarding their children's education through a proper line of communication, such as a direct phone call, WhatsApp, or a teacher home visit. (Luntang, principal education officer, 15th March, 2025).

Another teacher explained that he uses direct communication with the parents of his students, and it has worked for him because the parents of the students in his class are very cooperative in terms of their children's education. He gave an example of how he used to contact the parents of his students directly whenever they were not in school or when he realised that their performance was not good so that he could discuss with the parents how to solve the issue. To him, this has hugely impacted the academic lives of his children because they are doing well in school. This is what he has to say:

The strategy I use as a teacher is to have a good connection with the parents of my students, and I always make sure I make them understand that all we are doing in the school is in the best interest of their children and that they must try to see the best for their children. That is why whenever my students are absent from school, I call the parents directly because I have the contact numbers of all the parents here with me, and sometimes, I go to their homes to see how they are living. (Moro, teacher, school B, 20th March, 2025).

The general perception of the research participants has highlighted critical issues regarding PI in rural Gambia and how this phenomenon is perceived and practised in rural Gambia. From the parents' perspective, PI should collaborate between the school and parents, as it is the parents' responsibility to educate the children. Interestingly, the school leaders, teachers, and education officers interviewed supported this assertion of parents. It is important to note that these school leaders, teachers, and an education officer might be speaking from their experience as parents because they, too, have their children going to school. All the respondents narrated that problems such as societal beliefs, economic hardship, illiteracy, and lack of inclusive decision-making affect PI in rural Gambia education.

4.2 DISCUSSION

This section discusses the study's findings presented in the preceding section by contextualising the results from an interpretive lens and connecting the results to the literature presented in chapter two of this study. Considering this study's focus on parental involvement in children's education within rural Gambian public primary schools, the findings are discussed in thematic areas using the lens of overlapping spheres of influence theory and Epstein's framework of parental involvement (PI).

4.2.1 Perception of Parents about PI

This section discusses parents' perceptions regarding their involvement in education. The key findings are parental responsibility, investment, means for poverty eradication, legal rights of children, and share of responsibility. When discussing parental involvement, we mean parents' overall efforts to educate their children.

The findings of this study revealed that parents in rural Gambia perceive their involvement in education as their responsibility to the school. This perception stems from different perspectives: social and moral responsibility, future investment, fulfilment of legal obligation, and means for poverty eradication. These findings align with Epstein's framework, emphasising parenting as a key domain for PI in education. The parents interviewed from the three selected schools view themselves as the primary caregivers to children; hence, they are the first educators, and therefore, supporting them is mandatory.

Similar to these findings, Lambert et al (2022) argued that PI is not a mere involvement in education. However, it shows parents' commitment to their children's educational journey. This is to say that parents in rural Gambia are not seeing their involvement in the education of their children as a service to children, but as a responsibility upon them to prepare their children for the future. This corroborates with the African proverb which says; Where are the young shuckers that will grow when the only bananas die? This implies that parents support children to prepare them for their succession.

This study utilises the theory of overlapping spheres of influence to argue that the education of children is the responsibility of three agencies: the parents, the school, and the community. Each of these agencies has its unique role. They also have intersectional responsibilities that they must perform together to enhance children's education. Parenting, as the responsibility of parents, is to prepare, motivate, and develop children for schooling, as they are the first contact persons with the children. The school, on the other hand, is to provide the teaching and learning for the children, and the community has the responsibility to provide the social capital for the education of children through community support. Moreover, the intersectional responsibilities have to be in the form of collaboration. Given an example for parents to support their children with homework, they need support from the school to prepare them. We can therefore conclude that the findings aligned with this theory.

Parents also view their role in their children's education as an investment. They see education as a pathway out of economic hardship in the region and an opportunity to uplift

their families within the community. This perspective is supported by school leaders, teachers, and an education officer interviewed, as they acknowledged that educated children often help their households. These findings agree with Jabar et al. (2023) that PI in education is a form of investment, where parents educate their children with a view that they will become responsible individuals for a society in the future. Similar to these findings, Epstein (2010) argues in her study that parents are involved in their children's education because of the expectations that they will be responsible in society when they are educated. This study found that parents in rural Gambia have high hopes that when their children are educated, they will live a better life compared to what they do currently, and this is why many are very ready to take part in their children's education.

Moving forward, in discussion with parents about PI, revealed that parents in rural Gambia see their involvement as a means of poverty eradication. This has been the driving force behind their involvement in changing their economic status through education. They believe that their economic hardship results from their lack of education; hence, they depend only on subsistence agriculture to survive. While we discuss perceptions of parents and of their involvement as a means for poverty eradication, we need to critically analyse what might trigger this perception. Some of them who have seen people's success in society due to the education are inspired to contribute to the success of their children. As a result of these influences, they have been motivated to be actively involved in education because they want to live a good life too. We can therefore conclude that PI in rural Gambian public primary schools is triggered by the prevailing economic hardship in the region.

Interestingly, many of the interviewed parents view their involvement as a legal obligation. The national laws mandated that all children, regardless of their abilities or socioeconomic background, be educated, and the parents are responsible for sending them to school. The findings indicated that parents are committed to fulfilling this constitutional right of children to access education. They recognise the effort of the government to build schools and provide qualified teachers to teach, and feel that it is their turn to make sure their children are sent to school and succeed.

The findings have indicated that parents perceive their role in educating their children as a shared responsibility with the school. They believe that their children's education cannot be achieved without their collaboration with the school and the community. Both school teachers and principals supported the views of parents. The school principals believe that the role of parents is crucial because they are the first caregivers of the children. These findings align with Epstein (2018) and Lambert et al. (2022), who state

that PI should be viewed as an ongoing collaboration between parents and the school. Moreover, it aligns with the theory of overlapping spheres of influence, which emphasises sharing responsibility among schools, parents, and the communities in supporting children's educational journey.

However, some parents, on the other hand, believe that while they understand the importance of their involvement in education, they need support from the school to know how to support their children's education. This is because the schools are more familiar with children's learning than the parents. Therefore, the theory of overlapping spheres of influence aligns with the findings in this regard. However, based on the perspectives of the educators interviewed, there is a gap in knowledge on how to help parents create a positive learning environment at home. The schools are not doing enough to equip the parents with the necessary knowledge to support their children's education, as they rely on only PTA meetings, which are insufficient. More support is needed, especially for parents who have not gone through any formal education. These findings align with the study conducted in South Africa by Ndwandwe (2023), where parents in rural areas perceive their involvement in their children's education as collaboration with the school to enhance their children's educational journey.

4.2.2 Contribution of PI in the Academic Achievement of Students in Rural Gambian Public Primary Schools.

This section discusses the findings of PI's contribution to children's academic achievement. PI is believed to be a key contributor to children's academic achievement. The findings have shown that parents' involvement in children's education can contribute to academic achievement in the following ways: child motivation, direct school engagement, and home reinforcement.

After exploring the perception of the research participants on how PI can improve children's academic achievement, they believe that when they are involved in children's education, children will be motivated to learn. On the other hand, teachers believe that children learn more when motivated at home, because this has always manifested in the performance of children whose parents are active in their education. The school leaders emphasise the importance of PI because they argued that from the records, children whose parents show interest in their education are by far better in terms of performance than the other children whose parents show little or no interest.

When talking about motivation, curiosity about how PI can motivate children was a point of concern. Interestingly, all the parents narrated that they always try to provide the learning materials to children and also reward them at work for academic excellence in school. They believe this has worked for them because their children work hard, so they will be rewarded for their hard work. This resonates with theories in the educational psychology, that when children are rewarded (positive reinforcement), they perform well.

All the research participants highlighted the relevance of strong engagement between the school and the families. According to the findings, students whose parents have frequent communication with their teachers or make regular visits exhibit good behaviour and are more discipline and academically successful than others. As narrated by one of the school leaders, who believes that high-performing students often come from families that show serious concern for education and have established regular communication with the school. These findings support the theory of overlapping spheres of influence, which argues that for children's education to be successful, there should be a strong collaboration between parents, teachers, and the community.

When discussing academic achievement, it is not only about the test scores of children in school, but their overall success in school, which could be their transition from one class to another, as well as their behavioural and moral development. This is what the school headmasters and teachers emphasise. They believe that children's academic success is not only about having good scores but also about having good morals, and that when parents are involved, children behave well in school and exhibit good morals in school. This also corroborates with the findings of Piskorz-Ryń (2024) that children feel motivated and composed when their parents get involved in their education thus, enhancing their academic achievement and behaviour in school. Moving on, the view of the teachers, according to the findings, is that when children realise that their parents are very active in visiting the school or are very connected with teachers, they always make sure that they behave well in school and focus on their education, and this has made them perform well in school. This aligns with the findings of Ndwandwe (2023) in a study conducted in South African rural communities that when parents collaborate with the school, children develop good morals, behave and perform well in school. Similarly, Zarate (2007) also concluded that when parents collaborate with the school, they can monitor their children's attendance, which will enhance their academic success.

Another way PI can enhance children's academic achievement, based on the findings of this study, is home reinforcement. The research participants believe that when

children are monitored at home and given the supportive environment they need, they perform well in school. Parents share strategies for reinforcing their children at home to improve their performance in school, such as pressuring them to read their notes at home and do their homework. From the parents' explanations, there is sometimes use punishment (negative reinforcement) as they explain in their responses to ensure their children are committed to their education. Strengthening monitoring at home always makes children focus on their education at home and avoid idling. The community leaders interviewed also believe that children who are well monitored at home always succeed in school. They gave examples of successful children who were closely monitored, have completed their education, and are enrolled at universities and colleges.

The findings revealed how parents and educators see the potential of home reinforcement in enhancing children's academic achievement at school. Teachers argued that children who are well monitored at home have consistently performed well in class because they always do their homework and read their notes at home, and are always prepared well before the next class. Therefore, I believe that when schools build the capacity of parents to strengthen home reinforcement, children's educational journey will be a success.

4.2.3 Most Common Form of PI in Rural Gambian Public Elementary Schools

This section discusses the form of PI commonly practised in rural Gambian public primary schools. Given that PI in education is a multidimensional phenomenon, this section discusses the most common PI practice in the rural Gambian public primary schools based on the study findings. The interview and document review indicate that rural Gambian public primary schools' most common forms of PI include providing educational materials, financial support, participation in school meetings (PTA), and volunteering in school activities. However, assisting children with homework, providing behavioural and emotional support, and having parent school visits were found to be weaker.

Many parents narrate that despite their willingness to support their children's education at home, they cannot help due to their lack of education. This limits their support for children's education at home, especially at the elementary level, where parents' involvement is crucial, as children at this level need parents' company to succeed in academia. Educators believe this could be the reason for the disparity in performance between rural and urban children in national and international assessments. Similar to the findings of Karaagac et al (2022), parental involvement in helping children with their

academic work, like homework and reading at the elementary levels, is one of the most effective forms of PI that enhances their academic success. Based on the findings of the study guided by Epstein's framework and the theory of overlapping spheres of influence, the researcher opined that there is a lack of parent-school collaboration in rural Gambian public primary schools. Therefore, this study suggests that this has to be improved to bridge the performance gap between rural and urban Gambian schools. Teachers interviewed believed that urban children always perform better than rural children in the national assessment examinations because most parents in urban Gambia are educated and can support their children's education at home and school, compared to rural Gambia.

Moving forward, volunteering, especially community participation for the school upkeep, was found to be more prevalent in rural Gambian public primary schools. Findings reveal that parents regularly participate in the school exercise at the beginning of every academic year. They are also involved in supplying clean drinking water and providing school farms and gardens. However, what was found to be interesting in these findings is that in rural Gambia, women are more active parents in school than men, because most of the research participants argued that women are more active in supporting children's education at home and school. This reflects a strong community participation in the school activities in rural Gambia. This aligns with both Epstein's framework and the theory of overlapping spheres of influence, that community-school engagement is essential for building a strong relationship between parents and the schools for effective teaching and learning in schools. However, what was found to be missing in the school-family collaboration based on Epstein's framework is communication and collaboration. According to the findings, there is a gap in communication and collaboration between the school and parents because many respondents narrated that they hardly visit the school and teachers to discuss their children's education, and the document review also did not show any evidence of school-parent collaboration and communication.

Another interesting finding from this study indicated that parents are not involved in behavioural support much, as many respondents lamented the deteriorating situation of discipline in schools. This is the position of the theory of overlapping spheres of influence, which states that when the parenting role is strengthened, children will develop good morals, which will be displayed at home and school. Moreover, educators believe that children's behavioural issues in schools are becoming challenging, and they attribute it to a lack of good parenting at home. From my perspective, this problem is not solely about parents; the school also has a role to play. Epstein's framework of PI in

education argues that parenting is the responsibility of parents, but the school equally has the responsibility to support parents in their parenting responsibilities. Therefore, it is my opinion that there is a need for parent-school-community collaboration to solve this problem as posited by the theory of overlapping spheres of influence.

Teachers, on the other hand, argued that parents perceive their involvement in education to be only at home, forgetting about the school. The only time parents go to the school is when they are called for a meeting, and this is not enough, said one of the school leaders, because he argued that when children see their parents in the school frequently, they feel motivated and encouraged to learn, and behave well in school. This idea supports the claim of the theory of overlapping spheres of influence that parents are very important in children's everyday lives, and therefore, their influence is not limited to only the home, but also the school.

The overlapping spheres of influence and Epstein's framework of parental involvement both argued that there are situations where both the school perceive having different roles in the children's education. An example of that is where parents would say that they have done their parenting responsibility, and now it is the role of the school to educate my child, and the school will say that we teach children in the school, and when they go home is the responsibility of their parents to take care of their education. These perceptions, according to the theory, are a separate sphere of influence, where children's education lacks quality because the two essential partners that could enhance their education are not collaborating. This scenario has been found in both the interview findings and the document review, where both parents and educators view their responsibilities as separate functions. Therefore, this study concluded that children in rural Gambian public primary schools lack what the theory of overlapping spheres of influence calls "home-like school and school-like home.

There is a general belief among scholars that for children to learn more effectively, their homes should be like a school where their education is well monitored and supervised; likewise, their school should be a home where they are treated equally without any discrimination. The findings of this research indicated that although parents recognise their willingness to collaborate with the school to enhance the education of their children, there is a responsibility gap where both parents and the schools do not understand their responsibilities very well. The school's responsibility is not only providing teaching and learning to students, but also assisting parents on how they should support the education of their children at both home and school. Therefore, there is a need for a robust policy on

school-family collaboration to enhance the educational success of children in rural elementary schools

4.2.4 Barriers to PI in Rural Gambian Public Primary Schools

This section discusses the findings on factors that affect PI in rural Gambian public primary schools. Although the literature has given many factors that can affect PI in education in chapter two of this study, this section outlines what was found about the factors in rural Gambia. After exploring the challenges parents faced in their involvement in education, the following will be discussed based on the findings: economic hardship (poverty), limited education (illiteracy), societal beliefs and exclusion of parents in the school decision-making process.

Firstly, the findings reveal that parents in rural Gambia are not involved in the education of their children as expected because of the economic hardship prevailing in the region. This was emphasised by both the research participants who were interviewed, and the document review also shows similar findings. Parents believe that despite their readiness to support the education of their children, they are faced with a huge economic burden. Bearing in mind that many of these parents have many children going to school, they express their frustration about lacking the financial muscles to take care of the family's feeding and also their children's education. These findings align with the findings of (Akpuokwe et al., 2024) that concluded that economic status is one of the key factors affecting PI in education, especially in Africa and Southeast Asia.

Educators interviewed believe that many of the parents did not come to school to check on their children or even attend school meetings because they are always busy on the farms and doing other domestic work to provide food and other necessities for their families. The school leaders, on the other hand, argued that parents have the willingness to be fully involved in their children's education, but it is very difficult because their priority is to provide food, clothing and shelter first. Therefore, many parents in such economic situations hardly get involved in their children's education. These findings agree with the findings of Taylor et al (2004), that PI in education in Africa is influenced by socioeconomic disparities within a society. The findings further indicated that such parents cannot even provide the necessary school materials, such as uniforms, shoes and books for their children's education.

Second interesting findings of this study is that limited education is another factor that affects PI in rural Gambian public primary schools. The research participants revealed

that limited education of parents, in other words, illiteracy of parents, is a major cause of low parental involvement in education. From both the interview and document review, it was found that parents in rural Gambia have the willingness to participate in the education of their children, but due to their limited education, they cannot. For example, the parents interviewed believe that they sometimes want to help their children in doing their homework or supervise their notebooks to see if they are doing well or not, but due to their limited or lack of education, they cannot read and write, and they cannot perform those tasks as expected. They argued that even the school performance reports are interpreted for them by teachers because they cannot, therefore, they wouldn't know if children are doing well in school or not. Moving forward, the school leaders believe that parents' limited education in rural Gambia has affected their involvement because they don't know the value of education and therefore pay little attention to the education of their children. The findings indicated that parents who are literate or semi-literate are active in the education of their children than others who have never gone through formal education at all. These findings are in agreement with the findings of Ndwandwe (2023), which concluded that PI in Africa is confronted with challenges, including parents' lack of education.

Another factor that affects parents' involvement in education in rural Gambia, based on the research findings, is societal beliefs. Rural Gambia, with its deep-rooted conservative cultural beliefs, has long been identified as a region that lags behind in terms of students' performance in national assessment, and also has low enrolment and retention in schools, according to the yearbook released by the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education. The findings of this study reveal that while some parents are ready to take part in the education of their children, there still exist parents who believe that secular education is here to destroy the societal cultures and take away their religious identity. Some of them prefer taking their children to religious education (traditional majalis) rather than enrolling them on secular education. These interesting findings reveal that in rural Gambia, PI in the education of children is hindered by parents' view that secular education lacks the religious teaching that their children need, and therefore, improving Islamic education in schools will be essential in enhancing parental trust in secular education, thereby improving PI in schools. Similar to these findings, Coşkun & Katıtaş (2021) conducted a study and concluded that parents' beliefs about education influence their involvement in education. Hence, the findings reveal that based on the belief held by some parents about secular education, they prefer to enroll their children in an Islamic boarding school.

Lastly, an interesting finding shows that the school exclusion of parents in the school decision-making process is another barrier to PI in education in rural Gambian public primary schools. The findings from both the interviews and document reviews indicated that school leaders are not very open to the community in terms of crucial school decision-making such as financial matters, school curriculum, and donations. An education officer who was interviewed argued that schools only involve the parents and community in decision-making that has to deal with school volunteer activities like preparation of school farms, school gardens, school fencing and other activities that are labour-intensive but exclude them in anything that deals with material gain. According to the findings, this has made parents stay away from school activities.

The schools' exclusion of parents in school decision-making can be attributed to school leadership failure. A parent narrated that the school always invite them for meetings at the school, but denied ever taking part in the preparation of the school's yearly budget. This action by the school is a violation of the school management manual because it is indicated in the school management manual that parents should take part in the preparation of the school improvement plan (SIP), which is the school budget. Therefore, this study suggests that schools should involve parents in such crucial decisions because they affect their children and excluding them will make them stay away from the school management. Epstein's framework of PI argued that decision-making is crucial in enhancing parents' participation in school activities because when parents are involved in the school decision-making, they feel entitled and will be committed to the school management. Therefore, this study opines that when schools in rural Gambian public primary schools are open to parents and the community about the school decisions, the involvement of parents will be enhanced, and the quality of education will be enhanced as well.

4.2.5 The Strategies for Enhancing Parental Involvement in Rural Gambian Public Primary Schools

Parents, as the first caregivers to children, are seen as the most important pillars in the education of children; therefore, their involvement in the children's education must be the priority of any serious country that envisages quality education for its children. This section discusses the findings on the strategies that can enhance PI in rural Gambian public primary schools. Based on the findings, the following strategies are found to be very good in enhancing PI: building a good school-community relationship, inclusive decision-making, community sensitisation, and effective communication with parents.

I explored the strategies through interviews and document reviews. The first strategy based on the study findings is building a good school-community relationship. Findings indicated that when schools create a good relationship with the community, there will be a collaboration between the school, parents and the community for effective school management. This aligns with the theory of overlapping spheres of influence utilised in this study, which posits that school, parents, and the community are inseparable entities in the education of children. The theory argued that the school as an institution, which is the second sphere, should create and maintain a strong partnership between the school, parents and the community. When this happens, parents and the community are motivated to be very active in the school, thereby enhancing their involvement.

Using Epstein's framework, we can view this as connecting with the community, as explained by the framework. Epstein believes that when the school collaborates with the community, it creates an environment where the education of children is well monitored and supported. This has been discussed with some community leaders during the interview. We must not forget that the community is where children lived and it has great influence in their education. One of the community leaders emphasise that sometimes it is difficult to educate children in a community where school and the community are not having good relationship and a parent also narrated similar sentiment that even if parents are active in the education of their children, peer influence can be a deterrent to their academic success because sometimes the community plays a key role in their education.

Moving forward, the findings also revealed that inclusive decision-making will be a good strategy that schools could use to improve PI in education in rural Gambian public primary schools. When parents are involved in the school decision-making process, they develop trust and confidence in the school. This is what the theory of overlapping spheres of influence denotes that collaboration among the three entities (school, parents and community) is vital for the progress of any school. However, the school bears the responsibility to create that collaboration. The findings indicated that schools have not created that collaboration as they are excluding the parents from decision-making. It is therefore suggestion that schools create a collaborative environment where every stakeholder in education, including parents and the community, to take part in the school decision-making process. One of the participants, who is also an education officer, believes that at no point should the school conceal anything from the parents regarding school management because anything the school does affects the school children, who are in the custody of their parents. Therefore, he emphasises that inclusive decision-making will be a

catalyst to improve parental involvement because involving parents in school decision-making is a form of leadership, transparency and accountability. Going by the national education policy 2016-2030, schools are mandated to involve parents in all school decision-making processes, but the findings of this study indicate that school leaders in rural Gambian public primary schools are not adhering to this policy.

In addition to creating good school-community relationships and inclusive decision-making, the findings of this study suggest community sensitisation as another strategy schools can use to enhance PI in rural Gambian public primary schools. This study's findings indicated that when parents are sensitised, there is a high chance of them embracing their children's education. Parents and community leaders believe that many parents are not involved in their children's education as expected, not because they are not interested, but because they don't know the importance of education. They therefore argued that when they are sensitised, they will know their roles and responsibilities in the education of their children. This is in line with Epstein's framework of PI in education, which suggests that schools should provide training to parents to understand their parenting roles. This will help parents to understand their roles in the children's education at their different grade levels. Moreover, the theory of overlapping spheres of influence also explained how parents should be supported by the school. According to the theory, when schools provide awareness to parents on their roles and responsibilities, there will be a strong understanding by parents on how they should support their children's education. This will lead to the creation of a home-like school and a school-like home, where children will have a conducive learning environment to learn more thus, enhancing their academic achievement.

Finally, effective communication between the school and the parents has been revealed by the findings to be a good strategy that can enhance PI in rural Gambian public primary schools. Research participants believe that there should be effective communication between parents and the schools, such that parents and teachers can build strong collaboration where children's education can be mutually monitored and supported to enhance academic success. Epstein's framework suggests that schools as a social institution must design an effective form of home-to-school and school-to-home communication channel, where both the parents and the school will effectively monitor the children's education. While schools and parents interviewed narrate that there is communication between the school and parents, what the researcher observed through the interview and document review is that, the communication is not effective, as the school

used a third party to convey information to parents. Parents believe that the use of social media platforms like WhatsApp or a direct phone call would be ideal. Moreover, the findings further indicated that schools are conducting PTA meetings once a year, which is not enough to engage parents about the educational progress of their children. It is therefore suggested that schools conduct PTA meetings twice every three months as dictated by the national education policy 2016-2030.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This section presents the narrations of findings and the discussion of this study. The chapter also presents the contribution of this study to the academic discussion in the field of community involvement in education, especially in the Gambia. In addition, the chapter discusses the recommendations and the limitations of the study.

5.1. Conclusion

This research is designed to explore PI in rural Gambian public primary schools with focus on parents' perception of PI, PI contribution, common forms of PI, barriers to PI, and strategies to improve PI in rural Gambia. Drawing from the theory of overlapping spheres of influence and Epstein's framework of PI, the findings of this study highlight a nuanced picture of parents' vital responsibility in the education of children in rural Gambia.

To explore parental involvement in rural Gambian public primary schools, the researcher set out five objectives, which are supported by five research questions to uncover a comprehensive understanding of PI in education within a rural context. As mentioned in the first paragraph, the first question describes the perception of parents about PI, the second is the contribution of PI, the third, fourth and fifth are common forms of PI, barriers to PI and strategies to improve PI, respectively.

Key findings revealed that parents in rural Gambia generally perceive their involvement in education as their personal responsibility, a legal obligation, an eradication of poverty, an investment in children and a share of responsibility with the school. They believe that the educational success of their children requires collective responsibility of parents, schools and the community. These perceptions closely align with the theory of overlapping spheres of influence and Epstein's framework of PI, that the school, home and the community have the obligation to collaborate to support the education of children by providing a conducive learning environment that will enhance children's learning. This research confirmed that PI has a significant contribution to the academic achievement of children in rural Gambia. Findings revealed that when parents are actively involved in their children's education through means of motivation, home reinforcement, effective communication with teachers and school, children show improved academic performance in school and behavioural outcomes.

Moving forward, the study confirmed that the most common form of PI in rural Gambia is home-based PI, which entails the provision of material support and financial support. However, there is a limited involvement in children's behavioural support, poor homework supervision, and low engagement between parents and teachers. This suggests a gap in school-based involvement, which, according to the theory of overlapping spheres of influence, is a partial overlap in spheres of home and the school, thereby indicating a need for schools to provide support to parents to improve their involvement in their children's education.

The barriers to PI are economic hardship, low level of education, societal beliefs and exclusion of parents in the school decision-making processes by the school leaders. The study concludes that parents in rural Gambia are willing to be involved in their children's education, but are limited by the low level of education and socioeconomic constraints they face. Many parents are not literate and cannot support their education at home, such as homework supervision, and they are not financially able to support the education of their children as expected. Moreover, cultural and religious norms were found to have hindered the involvement of parents in secular schools. In addition, a lack of transparency and accountability in school management also discourages active participation of parents in school activities.

Finally, this study identifies the following strategies to enhance PI in rural Gambia in a quest to enhance the education of children in rural areas:

- Building a good school-community relationship
- Community sensitisation to raise awareness on the importance of PI in children's academic lives
- Schools to adopt an inclusive decision-making process
- Improve school-parent communication

These strategies will bridge the gap between the school and the parents as they align with the theory of overlapping spheres of influence, which advocates for strong cooperation among stakeholders like parents and the school in the education of children.

5.2. Recommendations

The current study focused on one of the administrative educational regions in the rural Gambia. Given that rural Gambia has four administrative educational regions, the findings of this research might not be generalised to all rural areas of the Gambia based on certain variations in socioeconomic status, culture and education level. Therefore, there is

a need for this study to be expanded to have a larger sample with a bigger scope so as to garner a comprehensive understanding of PI in the rural Gambia and by extension, the entire country.

While this study employed a qualitative approach to explore this phenomenon, future researchers could use a quantitative approach or mixed methods to have a deeper understanding of how PI involvement correlates with children's academic achievement because this research is only limited to the opinions of respondents, which might not be sufficient to unearth the exact effect. Furthermore, due to distance, this study could not conduct FDG and observation, which could give rich insights and a different perspective to the data collected from individual research respondents. Therefore, future researchers could use FDG and observation to have a thorough look into this phenomenon. Moreover, the researcher was not able to conduct a face-to-face interview which could have provided the opportunity to have direct interaction with the research participants. I will therefore recommend that future researchers have a direct interview with participants, which might produce more enriching answers to the research questions.

This study recommends that the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education implement regular workshops on literacy training for parents in rural areas to equip them with adequate skills to be able to support their children's education. The PI policy in the national education policy would be meaningless without any practical approaches, such as training teachers and school leaders on how they should help parents to improve parental involvement. Therefore, policy support and reinforcement are needed to make parental involvement in education more effective.

School leaders should promote an inclusive decision-making process in their school governance to create an environment where the community and parents will embrace school leadership and build trust and confidence in schools. When this happens, the involvement of parents will be improved as the theory of overlapping spheres emphasises that, when there is collaboration between the school, parents and the community, children's educational journey becomes a success. This is because these three actors are the pillars to the children's academic success. In addition, schools should endeavour to strengthen communication between them and parents to foster collaboration between the stakeholders thus enhancing children's academic success.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Research Consent Letter

16th March, 2025.

Indonesian International Islamic University

Faculty of Education

Depok, Indonesia.

Dear Sir/Madam,

RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS' CONSENT LETTER

With reference to the above captioned, I humbly write to inform you that you have been selected to participate in an interview as part of my research study in fulfilment of my Master's degree program at the above-mentioned University.

This study seeks to explore parental involvement in children's academic achievement in public primary schools in rural Gambia. This research focused on the regional education directorate five south in the Central River Region of the Gambia.

Please be informed that participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you choose to participate, you will be asked to complete an online interview, which will take approximately 30-50 minutes per session. The information from this interview will be kept confidential, and your identity will be kept anonymous.

By signing this consent letter, you are giving your informed consent to participate in this study voluntarily. You have the right to refuse to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences.

Please understand that the information you provide will be used for research purposes only. If you have any questions about the study, please don't hesitate to contact me through my WhatsApp number +6283211340297.

Yours sincerely,



Karamo Ceesay.

Research participants' signature.....

Date:

Parent/ Community Leader/School Leader/Teacher/Education Officer

Note: Please underline the title that corresponds to your title above. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study.

Appendix 2: Sample Interview Guide

Informants:

1. Parents
2. Teachers
3. Principals.
4. Community leader/Local education administrator

PARENTS

Parental Involvement	Concepts	Explanation of concept	Questions
	Parenting	Schools should support parents in creating a conducive learning environment, offering training, and fostering collaboration to enhance education.	1. How does the school assist you in creating a supportive learning environment at home for your child? 2. What types of support or training would you like the school to provide to help you in parenting and supporting your child's education? 3. How do you balance household responsibilities with your child's homework, and what help do you need from the school to manage this?
	Communicating	Effective communication between schools, parents, and the community fosters collaboration, builds trust, and supports student learning and progress.	1. How effective do you find the communication from the school (e.g., conferences, progress updates on your child's performance in school, notices of school activities)? 2. In what ways do you feel the school can improve its communication with you regarding your child's progress and school activities?

			3. How do you collaborate with the school in supporting your child's education, and how can this partnership be strengthened?
	Learning at home	The concept emphasizes schools training parents to support children's education at home through workshops and providing essential skills for improving children's learning outcomes.	1. Does the school provide you with any training on how you school help your child's education, if yes, how effective are the training provided by schools in equipping you with skills to support your child's learning at home? 2. What challenges do you face in applying the skills learned from school workshops to improve your child's academic performance? 3. What additional support or resources would help you better assist your child's education at home?
	Collaborating with the community	This involvement integrates community resources to enhance school programs, fostering collaboration on education, health, culture, and shared values	1. How do you currently participate in your child's education, and what additional ways would you like to be involved? 2. In your opinion, how can schools collaborate with families to promote the importance of education and community health? 3. How would you describe the relationship between your family's cultural values and the school's educational practices?

	Decision Making	Schools involve parents in decision-making through PTA and SMC, fostering commitment to the school learning process.	1. How involved are you in school decision-making processes, such as PTA or SMC participation? 2. What challenges do you face in actively contributing to school management and policy-making? 3. How has your involvement in school decision-making influenced your commitment to supporting your child's education?
	Volunteering	Schools recruit and organize parents and community volunteers for support, fostering strong school-community partnerships through involvement, training, and recognition.	1. In what ways do you currently support your child's school, such as volunteering or contributing resources? 2. What challenges do you face in participating in school support initiatives like feeding programs or security efforts? 3. How can schools better recognize and support parents who volunteer their time and resources for school activities?
Overlapping Sphere	Home	The home plays a vital role in children's education by providing support, motivation, and a learning-friendly environment for academic success.	1. How do you support your child's learning at home, such as helping with homework, emotional support or providing learning materials? 2. What challenges do you face in creating a learning-friendly environment at home for your child? 3. How do you motivate and reward your child's academic

			achievements to encourage learning?
	School	Schools foster strong partnerships with parents and communities through communication, policies, and engagement, enhancing children's learning and academic success.	1. How does your child's school involve you in decision-making and school activities? 2. What challenges do you face in actively engaging with the school to support your child's education? 3. How can schools improve communication and collaboration with parents to enhance student learning outcomes?
	Community	Community involvement in education enhances children's success by providing resources, cultural support, and real-world experiences to promote learning.	1. How does your community support your child's education through cultural values, resources, or local initiatives? 2. What challenges do you face in accessing community resources that could enhance your child's educational experience? 3. How can community organizations better support parents in contributing to children's educational success?

Main Canvas Views

Quirks Canvas - Primary

The diagram illustrates the 'Quirks Canvas - Primary' with the following nodes and their associated values:

- parental responsibility: 32 (93)
- government responsibility to provide school resources: 7 (18)
- school-based involvement: 10 (40)
- Inclusive decision making: 38 (91)
- Economic hardship: 27
- school-community relationship: 70 (280)
- societal belief: 11 (56)
- wrong perceptions about regular education: 18
- Lack of awareness of importance of education: 42 (74)
- Illiteracy: 32
- Exclusion of parents in school decision-making: 3 (9)
- community sense of responsibility towards education: 35 (121)
- parental support by the school: 35 (121)

Appendix 4: Sample Interview Transcript

Researcher: Good afternoon.

Respondent: Afternoon

Researcher:

Please introduce yourself.

Respondent:

Good afternoon, Mr. Ceesay. I am Mr. XXXXXX, headteacher of XXXXXX School. I started teaching in March 1990 when I wasn't even yet to qualified. I got my qualification in September 1996 at Gambia College with PTC, after which I had undergone a management program for 13 months, for one academic year at the University of Gambia. I first started school management in 2002 in this very region, cluster 5, in Karantaba, cluster. I chose to be a teacher simply to assist the young generation and to mould them for their betterment in future. I also chose to be a teacher so that I can be professional, I can learn a lot about my profession as far as teaching and learning is concerned. I also like to deal with small children in a gathering or in a group. Those are the reasons I chose to be a teacher, and that's how I became a teacher. And I enjoy it very much, and I'm still enjoying it as long as I'm not retired.

Researcher:

. Thank you so much for that introduction, Master.

Researcher: Okay, so the first question would be, what initiative does your school have to help parents create a supportive home environment for children's education?

Researcher: The first initiative that I had was to have an SMC meeting and then a PTA meeting, so that we can tell the parents about the importance of education at the school level and how to assist the children. That was my first target that I did when I came to this very school here. I called them and then asked them for their real intention as well, so that children can be retained at this level, so that they can continue the life cycle of the school from grade one to grade six without leaving.

Researcher:

Okay, so now, how do you help them to help their kids at home?

Respondent:

That is by giving them homework, because we have homework policies here. We also have homework clubs. Then we ask the parents to help us, to assist them and thereby, we even have our own teachers who will be monitoring those children in their various homework clubs.

Researcher:

The other question is, how do you ensure effective communication and collaboration between the school and the parents to enhance student learning?

Respondent:

I got that from the School Management Committee, SMC. And if I need them, I have to call them, tell them the needs of the school and then after they will select or choose a day that will be conducive for both of us what I mean by both of us, that is the school and the parents, so that we can sit and share ideas as far as the education system is concerned.

Researcher:

How does your school address the challenges faced by parents in balancing their home duties at home and also supporting their children's education?

Respondent:

As far as I know, in our school here, we have School Learners' Welfare Committee and there are sub-committees, which we know as School Learners' Welfare and School Environment. So those are the guys who help us to be assisting us on these matters. Like, any problem that we may find, we have to call those people, talk to them. Even on this personal development, we have a committee for those people. They will call them and tell them what is happening. If you can assist us, either go to the legal office or to the suitable people whereby we can get assistance for those people, so that our problem can be solved.

Researcher:

What steps does your school take to ensure effective communication with parents about their children's progress and the school activities?

Respondent:

That is, by having the assembly with the children, informing them about what we have for them so that they can also disseminate that to their parents. Like, when we have a meeting

with the parents also, we can have an emergency assembly with the children and then tell them now on this, so and so, you tell your parents to come on time, so and so, so that we can have a meeting about them. And then, we also call the Mothers' Club, who are very, very helpful to the school because they are always helping us on our questions, the Mothers' Club members are very, very helpful. They also assist us in anything that we need in the school level here for example financial assistance, school farm and school garden for our school feeding program.

Researcher:

So, as a headmaster, how do you foster collaboration between the school, parents and the community in order to enhance student learning?

Respondent:

As far as I am concerned, I do make home visits to the community levels so that we can get used to each other. I don't want to be in a place and hold myself. I have seen myself as anywhere that I have gone to, that's where I should be. So, I don't want to see myself as a stranger. So, this collaboration with the parents, which I do, I enjoy it simply because any school that I may see myself, I always see the increment of the school enrollment as far as I am concerned because I want to bring with me the communities, including the youth, so that, you know, any problem that is affecting the school, they can even get up and help us without being told.

Researcher:

What are the challenges you face to maintain effective communication?

Respondent:

My challenges are very minor because, like, as long as the communication is already being done, although I may not be able to receive the number that I may like, but every time that I communicate, be it in a meeting or in a gathering or in any program, I always have more than 75%. So, you know, that's not a big challenge.

Researcher: Do you conduct any training or workshop for parents in order to help them, train them on how to help their kids at home?

Respondent:

Not actually with the parents, but the school management committee and the teachers as well. For the parents, we only invite them because in a term that we do have, two times

with the parents, two meetings with the parents, to exercise and to give the, overcome the review of what we have for the children as far as performance is concerned. So, for that reason, I depend on that, but for the SMC, we normally have meetings with them or workshops to tell them their roles of the school. And the teachers also, their duties and their responsibilities, and their constraints in the school. We do have all those workshops at school level here.

Respondent:

What are the key challenges in organizing a sustainable workshop for them, for the workshop that you are conducting?

Respondent:

That is by getting some funding from the SIG. Like, when it is time for SPM, so that we get some funding from the SIG, and then they provide us some snacks or refreshments, because normally we always have these meetings during the evening time, when schools close, or during the weekend, so that we can have refreshments for the participants. And then, thereby, they will all be happy, appreciative, because we cannot pay them, and secondly, it is a joint thing together. All the teachers and the parents, we are all parents.

Researcher:

As a school, what strategies do you implement to foster a strong collaboration between the school and the local community?

Respondent: As I said before, you know, when I came here, what I found here, I think I have to do the same thing, because most of the teachers, they do visit children in their homes. Some even go to the parents to see and know their concerns, and that's what we are also doing. I'm also doing the meeting with my teachers, which is a continuous thing now.

Researcher:

How does your school ensure that local cultures, norms, and values of the community are considered in its programs?

Respondent:

Yes, they are very, very considered, because it was just today we had a meeting about Talent Show, and this Talent Show is bringing so many cultural activities. Some are

educated, some are not educated, but very interested, which children will be able to do it, and they can perform it as expected. Because as we know, not everybody can sit in an office. Some will have to be self-employed on their own.

Researcher:

What role do community resources play in supporting your school's educational goals and student development?

Respondent:

It helps us definitely to make easier learning for our children in school, when we have resources in the school, because sometimes, a month ago, we were given a lot of places in the school for our school feeding, hence we are not getting it from the donors, but a donor, an agent who is from the village here helps us a lot of places, so that the time factor that we are using outside can be minimized, and that is also helping the children as well.

Researcher:

How does your school engage parents in decision-making through PTA or SMC structures? **Respondent:**

Yes, we invite them, especially in the formation of this SIG, so the SIP preparation. We invite the parents, and then the school policies-making, they should be all part of that making, so that it will be a fair thing, so that anybody who may offend it, you say, but we are part of this thing, you know what is happening. So, they are very, very helpful to bring the very good ideas of making some of those things, especially in the policies-making and the SIP.

Researcher:

If you say SIP, what do you mean by here SIP?

Respondent:

School Improvement Grant. Oh, okay, okay, okay.

Researcher:

What impact does parental participation in your school management have on the overall function of the school?

Respondent: The only thing that may have an overall function in our school when the parents are not reporting, or the communities are not doing what is expected of them, because we even have this in CCM, that parents' participation. This is why I created a visitor's book for parents, community-motivated visitor's book, so that any of them who may come to the school here, being a parent or SMC member or Mother Club member, will sign that book and tell me his or her purpose of visiting the school.

Researcher:

How do you recruit and organise parents and community members to support school initiative? How do you do that?

Respondent: That's through dialogue with different groups. We sometimes invite them to a different couple of organisations in the village or in the communities, call them to come, and then seek their consent of anything that we may need. Okay.

Researcher:

What challenges do you face in trying to engage parents and volunteers in the school activities, in trying to volunteer in school activities?

Respondent:

We don't have any challenges over that here. Only when we need anything, especially when schools open immediately for the first time, when anything is being announced at the parental level or volunteers, they all come up. This year, even our caretaker at school doesn't clear the school. It was all done by the Mother Club, the youth and the community at large.

Researcher:

What measures do you have in place to recognise and reward active volunteers in your school community?

Respondent:

We recognise their efforts during school events and provide certificate for the most outstanding ones.

Researcher:

So how do you evaluate, in your own opinion, how do you evaluate the effectiveness of parents' contribution to children's academic success?

Respondent:

I know their involvement will be 100%. And that's how I can even evaluate it. It can be 100% good. If parents are involved in education of their children, there is no doubt that they will succeed in academic.

Researcher:

what challenges does your school face in encouraging parents to actively participate in children's learning at home

Respondent:

Okay. Some parents, you can talk to them, talk to them, they will not understand. Some, they will understand but the challenge here, as far as I'm concerned here, and my SMC, anything that I call, or anything that I wanted for them to do, 90% of them, they will do that.

Researcher:

What policies or programs does your school have implementing to encourage parental and community involvement?

Respondent:

We have a lot of policies whereby you have teacher's code of conduct. We have claims where parents are encouraged to enquire about their children's education. all this are policies that encourage parental Involvement in school.

Researcher:

What challenges do you encounter as a headmaster in trying to foster strong school, home, and community partnership?

Respondent:

There is not a big challenge that I am seeing here because accommodation is not a problem here. Hence, we are all staying in school. The communities are very sociable and they can attend the strangers in any form that they want. So, there is no challenge.

Researcher:

How do you assess the impact of parental and community involvement on students' academic achievement?

Respondent:

Like, as I am standing here, just an hour ago, I received a call from XXXXXX, who purposely came to see whether his child is in school or not. And then when that man came to my office, I was very, very happy. Such people are the people who will, at the end, clap for their children instead of crying for their children. Because, as I came here, the last year school head boy who got first in the GABECE exams in grade nine. That's what they told me, that the parents always come to school to see their progress and also monitor their education, and it has paid dividends. The child is now in Armitage, the most successful senior high school in rural Gambia on boarding, not even on the afternoon shift, because she had a very good score. So any parents who is after the welfare of his or her children should be visiting the school as expected. And the door is open to all of them. This is what I always tell them.

Researcher:

Okay. And what strategies do you put in place to encourage the entire community to participate and support your school activities at home?

Respondent:

That we are doing that with all the school members. In a month, we do it twice, a general cleaning exercise in our school environment, and we make sure every parent attends it through the use of the mothers' club and the SMC committee.

Researcher:

What challenges does your school face in trying to mobilise the community resources for educational development?

Respondent: Well, we don't have any challenges on that here, because when we need anything from the children, like as far as WFP is concerned, at the moment, I'm having two bags of groundnut, which the children brought to make a supplement for our school feeding and I know all those things are from the parents, not from the children.

Researcher:

How do you evaluate the impact of the community involvement on student success at the school, and also on school improvement?

Respondent:

Very impactful! From experience, when the community is involved in education, there is high academic performance.

Researcher: Okay, thank you. Master for granting me this interview. I am grateful!

Appendix 5: Screenshots from the online interview session

