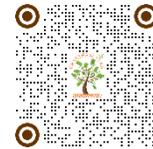


Original Article

## THE IMPACT OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT POLICIES ON EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES ACROSS SOCIAL CLASSES: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

Stephen Guduza <sup>1\*</sup>, Molaodi Tshelane <sup>1</sup> 

<sup>1</sup>Department of Curriculum and Instructional Studies, College of Teacher Education, College of Education, University of South Africa, Republic of South Africa



### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Parental involvement is widely promoted in global and national education policy as a critical driver of learner achievement, school accountability, and democratic participation. In South Africa, post-apartheid education reforms have strongly endorsed parental engagement as a mechanism for improving schooling outcomes and addressing historical disadvantage. However, these policy frameworks frequently operate on implicit assumptions of homogenous parental capacity, access to resources, and familiarity with dominant school cultures. Such assumptions obscure the structural inequalities that shape parents' ability to participate meaningfully in school-sanctioned forms of engagement.

**Aim:** The article undertakes a critical examination of parental involvement expectations as articulated in South African education policy. It argues that these expectations are not socially neutral but are structured in ways that align closely with middle-class norms, resources, and forms of cultural capital. As a result, families from working-class and economically marginalised backgrounds are disproportionately disadvantaged in their ability to meet policy-defined standards of engagement. These effects are most pronounced in township and rural schooling contexts, where structural poverty, limited access to resources, and historical patterns of exclusion continue to shape relationships between schools and households.

**Methods:** The study employs a qualitative narrative literature review design which synthesises national education policy texts, peer-reviewed empirical research, and selected government and civil society reports published between 2018 and 2023. Analysis is guided by Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital and Lareau's notion of concerted cultivation. These theoretical lenses enable a critical examination of how power relations, social class, and institutional norms influence which forms of parental involvement are legitimised within schooling systems.

**Results:** The review indicates that parental involvement policies in South Africa tend to privilege forms of engagement associated with middle-class norms. These include attendance at school meetings scheduled during standard working hours. They also encompass expectations of English-medium communication between schools and families. In addition, policies frequently assume routine parental supervision of homework and active participation in formal school governance structures. These expectations generate multiple mechanisms of marginalisation. Economic constraints such as inflexible work schedules, transport costs, and lost wages limit working-class parents' physical presence at schools. Cultural and linguistic mismatches between schools and families undermine parents' confidence and sense of legitimacy, while deficit-oriented discourses further erode parental self-efficacy. Collectively, these dynamics contribute to the reproduction of educational inequality and the persistence of achievement gaps across socio-economic lines.

**Conclusion:** Parental involvement policies in South Africa cannot be understood as neutral mechanisms of inclusion. Instead, they risk reproducing apartheid-era patterns of exclusion by legitimising specific forms of cultural capital and narrowly defined modes

**\*Corresponding Author:**

**Email address:** Stephen Guduza ([55862594@mylife.unisa.ac.za](mailto:55862594@mylife.unisa.ac.za)), Molaodi Tshelane ([tshelamd@unisa.ac.za](mailto:tshelamd@unisa.ac.za))

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of participation. In the context of limited explicit consideration of the structural conditions shaping families' capacities to engage, such policies may inadvertently intensify existing patterns of educational stratification. Constraints related to income insecurity, inflexible labour arrangements, linguistic exclusion, and uneven access to material resources limit the ability of many caregivers to meet institutional expectations. As a result, schools may misrecognise constrained participation as parental disinterest, further marginalising already vulnerable households and reinforcing unequal educational outcomes.

**Significance:** The article argues for a re-conceptualisation of parental involvement grounded in social justice and contextual responsiveness. Policy and practice must foreground flexible and context-sensitive modes of parental engagement that recognise the diverse social, linguistic, and economic realities of South African families. This includes the provision of multilingual communication strategies, adaptable scheduling of school-parent interactions, and the development of asset-based partnerships that position communities not as deficient but as holders of valuable educational resources and knowledge.

In parallel, sustained teacher professional development is required to strengthen culturally responsive and relational pedagogies that enable educators to engage meaningfully with families across classed and cultural differences. Collectively, these shifts are critical if parental involvement is to operate as a vehicle for educational equity and social inclusion, rather than reproducing patterns of exclusion within post-apartheid schooling.

**Keywords:** Parental Involvement, Educational Policy, Social Class, Cultural Capital, South Africa, Educational Outcomes, Inequality

## INTRODUCTION

Parental involvement is widely regarded as a cornerstone of effective education systems, linked to higher student achievement, improved behaviour, and greater school completion rates (Epstein, 2018, OECD (2018)). In South Africa, this principle is enshrined in the South African Schools Act (SASA) (Act 84 of 1996), which mandates parental participation through School Governing Bodies (SGBs) and community engagement. Global research indicates that parental involvement policies are frequently underpinned by implicit assumptions regarding parents' access to resources, availability of time, and familiarity with institutional norms. These assumptions are rarely articulated within policy texts. Consequently, policy designs tend to align more closely with the capacities and dispositions of middle-class families, thereby conferring disproportionate advantages on this group (Lareau (2015), Vincent and Ball (2007)). This article argues that South Africa's parental involvement framework, while progressive in intent, perpetuates class-based inequalities by privileging middle-class norms.

South Africa's educational landscape is marked by profound socio-economic disparities rooted in apartheid. Although significant reforms have been introduced since 1994, South African schooling continues to reflect deep structural stratification. Former Model C schools, which historically served white learners and now largely cater to middle-class communities, are typically characterised by strong resource bases and high levels of parental engagement. In contrast, township and rural schools that serve large proportions of the learner population frequently operate within contexts of sustained underinvestment. These schools often face inadequate infrastructure and limited material resources. Parental participation in such settings is further constrained by broader conditions of socio-economic precarity, which shape both the forms and the visibility of parental engagement (Soudien (2018), Spaul (2019)). Recent crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, further exposed these gaps, as remote learning required home-based resources (e.g., internet, quiet study spaces) accessible mainly to middle-class families (Department of Basic Education (2021)).

### **This study addresses three research questions:**

- How do South African parental involvement policies reflect middle-class norms and expectations?
- What mechanisms marginalise working-class and impoverished families from effective engagement?
- What are the implications of these dynamics for educational outcomes across social classes?

Foregrounding the South African context, this article contributes to a growing body of literature critiquing "one-size-fits-all" parental involvement models (Le Grange (2020), Mncube (2021)). The findings aim to inform evidence-based policy reforms that prioritise equity in a context of extreme inequality.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### **PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT: DEFINITIONS AND GLOBAL EVIDENCE**

Parental involvement in education encompasses a range of activities that extend across home, school, and community contexts. At home, it includes practices such as assisting children with homework and supporting learning routines. Within the school environment, involvement may take the form of attending meetings, participating in school events, or engaging with teachers. Transcending the household and school, parental engagement can also involve collaboration with community organisations and initiatives that support children's educational development (Epstein (1995)).

Extensive research, including meta-analytical studies, demonstrates a positive association between parental involvement and student academic success (Jeynes, 2017). However, the forms and effectiveness of parental engagement are not uniform, varying considerably according to socio-economic status (SES). Middle-class parents, for example, frequently practise what (Lareau (2003)) describes as "concerted cultivation," a deliberate strategy of fostering children's cognitive, social, and cultural development. These parents are frequently positioned to mobilise cultural capital, as conceptualised by (Bourdieu (1986)), in their interactions with educational institutions. This capacity enables them to navigate school structures effectively and to advocate for their children's

academic and developmental needs. In addition, they are often able to cultivate enriched learning environments within the home and through access to supplementary educational opportunities beyond the school context. This form of engagement enables middle-class families to align their practices with dominant school expectations. Through this alignment, they are better positioned to shape interactions with educators and to influence educational processes in ways that support favourable learner outcomes. Collectively, these dynamics illustrate how socio-economic privilege intersects with institutional structures to differentially shape patterns of student success.

Research indicates that parental engagement practices vary significantly across socio-economic contexts, reflecting broader structural inequalities. In South Africa, working-class and economically disadvantaged families often adopt what [Lareau \(2003\)](#) terms "the accomplishment of natural growth," in which the emphasis is placed on children's safety, independence, and autonomy. Such approaches are frequently shaped by constraints of time, economic precarity, and limited familiarity with institutional expectations. In contrast, education policies and school frameworks frequently define parental involvement through behaviours that mirror middle-class norms. These behaviours typically include regular attendance at school meetings, consistent monitoring of homework, and participation in formal governance structures. Consequently, modes of engagement are normalised as indicators of commitment, while alternative forms of parental support are rendered less visible within institutional accounts.

Comparative international evidence illustrates similar patterns. The [OECD \(2018\)](#) reports marked differences in parental participation across member countries. Approximately 68% of parents from high socio-economic status backgrounds attend school events. In contrast, only about 32% of parents from low socio-economic status households can participate in similar activities. These patterns underscore the persistence of socio-economic inequalities embedded within policy-defined models of parental engagement. In the United Kingdom, [Vincent and Ball \(2007\)](#) demonstrate that policies centred on parental choice are unevenly experienced across social classes. Middle-class families are often able to draw on informational resources and institutional familiarity to navigate these policy environments effectively. Conversely, working-class parents frequently face structural constraints that restrict their capacity to exercise meaningful choice. Therefore, these policies tend to reproduce existing inequalities by amplifying differential levels of agency and access. In the United States, schools often rely on standardized communication mechanisms, such as email-based updates, to engage parents. These approaches tend to disadvantage households with limited English proficiency or low literacy levels. These constraints further limit equitable participation in school activities [Cooper et al. \(2016\)](#).

Collectively, these findings highlight the interplay between policy frameworks, institutional expectations, and socio-economic conditions in shaping parental involvement. The findings demonstrate how certain forms of engagement are privileged, benefiting families whose resources, cultural capital, or familiarity with institutional norms align with these expectations. Conversely, families whose circumstances do not correspond to these normative models are often marginalised within the educational system.

## PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT POLICIES IN SOUTH AFRICA

South Africa's parental involvement framework is established under the South African Schools Act (SASA, 1996). The Act requires the creation of School Governing Bodies (SGBs) with 45% parent representation. It also mandates that schools develop formal home-school partnership agreements, as outlined in Section 58. In addition, SASA requires regular parent-teacher consultations, as specified in Section 59. Subsequent policy instruments, including the Integrated School Safety Strategy [DBE \(2018\)](#) and the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS), further emphasise collaborative engagement between parents, educators, and school leadership. The 2021 National Parental Involvement Framework [Department of Basic Education \(2021\)](#) explicitly aims to strengthen home-school partnerships. However, the framework largely maintains conventional modes of engagement. These include termly meetings and voluntary fundraising activities. Such practices are closely aligned with middle-class norms.

Despite these formal provisions, implementation is uneven across South African schools. [Motala et al. \(2009\)](#) observed that SGBs in historically affluent "Model C" schools are dominated by middle-class parents who possess professional expertise and the time to participate actively in governance processes. In contrast, township and rural schools often face significant structural barriers. Parental participation in these contexts is limited by work obligations. Additional constraints include restricted access to transportation and inadequate institutional support.

Recent studies underscore the persistence of these disparities. For example, only 22% of parents in no-fee schools attend SGB meetings regularly, compared with 65% in fee-paying schools [Department of Basic Education \(2022\)](#), while 40% of township parents report that the inability to take time off work restricts engagement [Le Grange \(2020\)](#). Linguistic barriers, such as the predominance of English as the medium of communication in non-English-speaking households, further marginalise many parents [Msimang \(2021\)](#).

These patterns can be critically analysed through [Bourdieu \(1986\)](#) concept of **cultural capital**, which frames parental engagement as a resource unevenly distributed along socio-economic lines. Middle-class parents often possess the skills, knowledge, and social networks that align with the expectations embedded in school governance and communication structures. Such parents can leverage their familiarity with institutional norms to support their children's educational trajectories, advocate for school resources, and navigate bureaucratic processes effectively. In comparison, working-class and impoverished parents frequently lack the same forms of cultural capital, resulting in reduced participation and diminished influence in school decision-making.

Lareau (2003) framework of **concerted cultivation** further illuminates how socio-economic disparities shape engagement practices. Middle-class families often participate in structured and intentional activities aimed at fostering their children's cognitive and social development. These activities include attending school meetings, helping with homework, and engaging in extracurricular programs. Conversely, working-class and low-income families often follow the approach described as the "accomplishment of natural growth". Their focus tends to be on ensuring children's safety, offering basic support, and promoting autonomy, with comparatively less engagement in formal school structures. In South Africa, parental involvement policies tend to implicitly favour the middle-class model of engagement. This approach benefits families who have the time, resources, and cultural familiarity to meet policy expectations, while simultaneously marginalising those whose socio-economic conditions or cultural practices do not align with these norms.

Collectively, these findings indicate that although South African parental involvement policies formally acknowledge the importance of home-school partnerships, persistent structural inequalities and class-based disparities in cultural capital continue to restrict meaningful participation. Addressing these challenges requires the adoption of flexible, context-sensitive strategies that recognise and accommodate the diverse capacities, languages, and cultural practices of parents. Potential policy reforms could address existing inequities in parental engagement by implementing multilingual communication strategies. Scheduling school meetings outside standard working hours may further enhance accessibility for diverse families. Policies could also prioritise asset-based collaborations with local communities to recognise and leverage existing parental and cultural resources. Additionally, providing teachers with professional development in culturally responsive engagement practices would strengthen their capacity to support inclusive and equitable parental participation. Implementing such measures is essential for ensuring that parental involvement serves as a tool for promoting educational equity rather than perpetuating the stratification inherited from apartheid.

### CLASS-BASED DISPARITIES IN SOUTH AFRICAN EDUCATION

South Africa's education system remains one of the most unequal globally, with disparities in learning outcomes closely tied to socio-economic status. The 2023 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) revealed that 81% of Grade 4 learners in no-fee schools are unable to read for meaning, highlighting widespread "learning poverty" among disadvantaged learners Spaul and Kotze (2023). These educational inequities cannot be explained solely by factors within schools. They are also influenced by differences in parental involvement. Such differences are closely connected to social class, the availability of cultural capital, and the resources present within households.

Middle-class parents, particularly those whose children attend former Model C schools, typically engage in structured and deliberate activities designed to foster their children's cognitive, social, and academic development. This includes attending school meetings, assisting with homework, participating in extracurricular programs, and providing access to private tutoring and digital learning resources. Such engagement aligns closely with Lareau (2003) concept of "concerted cultivation," which highlights how middle-class families intentionally organise children's time and activities to develop skills, competencies, and institutional familiarity that support future success. The effectiveness of these strategies is further reinforced by Bourdieu (1986) notion of cultural capital. Middle-class families often possess the linguistic, social, and cultural knowledge valued by formal education systems, enabling them to navigate school structures, advocate for their children, and leverage institutional mechanisms to optimise learning outcomes.

Collectively, the interplay of concerted cultivation and cultural capital helps to explain patterns of middle-class parental involvement. These practices frequently result in higher academic achievement for children. They also foster greater familiarity with school expectations. Furthermore, they provide enhanced opportunities for children to access social and educational resources.

Conversely, in South Africa, working-class and low-income families, particularly those in township and rural areas, often engage in what Lareau (2003) describes as the "accomplishment of natural growth." This approach prioritises children's safety, basic needs, and personal autonomy. It does not emphasise structured cognitive activities or engagement mediated by schools. These households frequently experience substantial time poverty because many adults engage in informal or precarious labour, including domestic work, street vending, or seasonal employment. Such constraints limit their ability to participate in school-based activities and governance structures Soudien (2018). Moreover, these families tend to possess lower levels of cultural capital. They often have limited familiarity with the specialised language of instruction, institutional norms, and school-based expectations. This lack of familiarity reduces their capacity to navigate formal education, advocate for their children, or utilise institutional resources effectively Bourdieu (1986), Mncube (2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic further exposed and intensified existing educational inequities in South Africa. According to the Department of Basic Education Department of Basic Education (2021), 63% of learners in no-fee schools lacked access to digital learning devices and reliable internet connectivity, severely limiting their capacity to engage with remote education. In contrast, middle-class households were often able to sustain learning continuity through access to online platforms, private tutoring, and other home-based educational resources. Empirical studies underscore that this digital divide disproportionately affected learners from low-income and rural communities, exacerbating the achievement gap between socio-economic groups (Mncube & Harber, 2021, Spaul, 2020, Van der Berg and Gustafsson (2022).

Internationally, similar patterns have been observed in contexts where structural inequalities intersect with emergency remote learning, with low-income students facing amplified learning loss and heightened risks of disengagement (Kuhfeld et al., 2020; Reimers & Schleicher, 2020). The pandemic thus functioned as a “revealer” of entrenched systemic disparities, demonstrating how socio-economic status, parental resources, and cultural capital converge to shape educational outcomes.

From a Bourdieusian perspective, the crisis highlighted the extent to which middle-class families could leverage economic, social, and cultural capital to mitigate educational disruption, whereas working-class and impoverished families faced compounded structural barriers that restricted their children’s learning opportunities Bourdieu (1986), Lareau (2003). This evidence reinforces the imperative for policy interventions that address both digital inequities and the broader socio-cultural constraints that limit meaningful parental engagement and learner participation in disadvantaged communities.

Bourdieu (1986) concept of cultural capital and Lareau (2003) framework of concerted cultivation together illuminate how structural and cultural inequalities intersect to shape educational outcomes. Middle-class families can convert economic, social, and cultural resources into tangible educational advantages. Their familiarity with the norms, language, and expectations of formal schooling allows them to navigate institutional structures effectively, advocate for their children, and participate in school governance, thereby reinforcing academic success Lareau (2003), Bourdieu (1986).

In addition, middle-class parents frequently provide enriched learning environments that extend beyond formal schooling. These supports often include structured assistance with homework, active engagement in extracurricular activities, and access to digital resources or private tutoring Hoadley (2022), Spaul and Kotze (2023). From a theoretical perspective, these practices closely reflect Lareau (2003) concept of concerted cultivation. According to this framework, parents deliberately organise and structure their children’s activities. They also scaffold cognitive, social, and cultural development. The goal of these practices is to align children’s learning and behaviour with the expectations of formal educational institutions.

Simultaneously, Bourdieu (1986) concept of cultural capital provides insight into these dynamics. Middle-class families possess familiarity with the language, norms, and conventions of formal education. This knowledge enables them to navigate schooling systems effectively. It also allows them to advocate for their children within institutional structures. Additionally, they can secure resources and support from schools to enhance their children’s learning outcomes. Together, these frameworks explain why middle-class parental involvement frequently translates into enhanced academic outcomes, greater access to social and educational resources, and reinforced alignment with school-based norms.

Conversely, working-class and low-income families, particularly in rural and township contexts, encounter systemic and structural constraints that limit their capacity to engage with schools in ways that are institutionally recognised. Time poverty, driven by informal or precarious labour, restricts parental availability for school meetings, governance participation, or home-based academic support Soudien (2018), Van der Berg and Gustafsson (2022). These households generally have lower levels of cultural capital. They often possess limited familiarity with the specialised language of instruction, school norms, and expectations for parental engagement. As a result, their capacity to navigate institutional processes effectively is reduced Mncube (2021). These disparities were further intensified by crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. During this period, learners from disadvantaged backgrounds experienced disproportionately severe learning loss. Limited access to digital tools and online learning platforms constrained their ability to engage with educational content. In contrast, middle-class families were generally able to maintain continuity in learning through digital and home-based resources Department of Basic Education (2021), Spaul, 2020; Kuhfeld et al., 2020).

These dynamics illustrate how educational inequities are not merely the product of individual parental effort but are embedded within broader socio-economic structures and policy frameworks. Policies that fail to account for diverse household realities often implicitly privilege middle-class models of involvement, thereby reproducing intergenerational inequalities and reinforcing the alignment between socio-economic advantage and academic success Vincent and Ball (2007), Cooper et al. (2016). Addressing these inequities requires the implementation of policy interventions that are responsive to the specific contexts of families and schools. Such interventions may include flexible scheduling of school interactions to accommodate parents’ work and caregiving obligations. Multilingual communication strategies can ensure that parents who do not speak the dominant language are able to access information and participate meaningfully. Community-based learning partnerships provide opportunities to integrate local knowledge and social networks into school activities. Teacher professional development in culturally sustaining pedagogies equips educators to recognise and build upon the diverse strengths and practices of families. Collectively, these strategies are critical for ensuring that parental involvement serves as a mechanism for promoting equity rather than inadvertently reinforcing historical and structural disparities Le Grange (2020), Mncube (2021).

These disparities require policy and practice interventions that extend beyond the formal school environment to engage with the broader socio-economic and cultural contexts of learners’ households. Research consistently highlights that parental engagement is deeply mediated by household resources, parental education, and cultural capital, all of which shape the forms and effectiveness of participation in school life Bourdieu (1986), Lareau (2003), Mncube (2021). Accordingly, flexible scheduling of parent–teacher interactions is critical, as rigid meeting times often disadvantage caregivers constrained by informal or precarious work obligations, particularly in township and rural communities Le Grange (2020), Soudien (2018). Similarly, multilingual communication strategies

are necessary to bridge language gaps between schools and households, ensuring that information and expectations are accessible to parents who may not be fluent in the language of instruction (Msimang, 2021).

Community-based partnerships provide a promising avenue for enhancing educational engagement. These initiatives enable schools to leverage local knowledge and existing social networks. Such approaches align with asset-based frameworks, which emphasise recognising and mobilising the strengths and capacities of families and communities. This perspective contrasts with deficit-oriented models that focus primarily on limitations or shortcomings Epstein (1995), Hoadley (2022). Moreover, teacher professional development in culturally responsive and relational pedagogies is essential. Such training equips educators with the skills to interpret diverse parental practices. Teacher professional development in culturally responsive and relational pedagogies also enables teachers to mediate different forms of cultural capital effectively. Ultimately, these competencies help foster more inclusive and equitable parental participation in school processes Seeher and Nxumalo (2025), Prinsloo and Mkhize (2024). Evidence from comparative international contexts underscores the effectiveness of these strategies. Research from the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia shows that flexible and culturally attuned parental engagement policies enhance parental confidence. These policies also increase participation rates. Importantly, they contribute to improved student achievement, particularly among socio-economically disadvantaged households Cooper et al. (2016), Vincent and Ball (2007), OECD (2018).

When considered collectively, these measures indicate that parental involvement cannot be understood or operationalised as a neutral policy tool. Instead, deliberate attention to structural constraints, cultural alignment, and relational pedagogy is required to transform engagement into a mechanism for educational equity. If these factors are not considered, parental involvement policies risk reinforcing historical inequalities. Families whose resources, social networks, and cultural knowledge align with institutional norms are more likely to benefit. Conversely, households lacking these advantages may remain marginalised. This dynamic undermines the transformative potential of post-apartheid education policies.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: CULTURAL CAPITAL AND PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT**

This study draws on two interrelated theoretical perspectives—Bourdieu (1986) cultural capital theory and Lareau (2003) frameworks of concerted cultivation and the accomplishment of natural growth—to examine how class-based differences shape parental involvement in South African schools. Together, these theories illuminate the structural and cultural mechanisms that mediate educational inequalities and explain how policy expectations interact with household practices and resources.

### **CULTURAL CAPITAL AND PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT CULTURAL CAPITAL THEORY**

Bourdieu (1986) conceptualises social classes as differentiated by distinct forms of capital: economic, social, and cultural. Cultural capital in both its embodied and objectified forms play a central role in shaping educational outcomes. Embodied cultural capital encompasses the dispositions, skills, and knowledge that individuals acquire through socialisation within the family and broader social environment. This includes ways of speaking, problem-solving approaches, attitudes toward learning, and cognitive habits that are valued by educational institutions. Objectified cultural capital refers to tangible resources such as books, technology, educational materials, and other artefacts that support learning and intellectual development. These resources often mediate access to formal education by providing learners with tools aligned with school expectations. Institutionalised cultural capital represents the formal recognition of culturally valued competencies, typically through qualifications, certifications, or academic credentials, which confer legitimacy and social advantage within education systems Bourdieu and Passeron (1990). Empirical studies indicate that students from families possessing high levels of embodied and objectified capital tend to achieve better academic outcomes, demonstrate greater familiarity with school routines, and access a wider range of educational opportunities (Sirin, 2005, Lareau (2003). Conversely, working-class and low-income families often have limited access to these forms of capital, constraining their ability to support learning and engage fully with institutional expectations Mncube (2021), Soudien (2018). Research further shows that such disparities contribute to persistent achievement gaps, highlighting the critical role of cultural capital in reproducing social inequalities within educational systems Bourdieu and Passeron (1990), Reay (2017).

Within the schooling context, middle-class families tend to transmit cultural capital that closely aligns with the norms and expectations of educational institutions. This includes proficiency in formal communication, familiarity with pedagogical practices, and confidence in interacting with educators and participating in school governance structures. These forms of cultural capital enable children to navigate institutional processes more effectively. They also facilitate access to social and educational opportunities that enhance academic performance and broader educational outcomes Le Grange, L. (2020), Spaul (2019). Research indicates that children from these families are more likely to develop competencies valued by schools, including metacognitive skills, self-advocacy, and familiarity with assessment and disciplinary conventions Lareau (2003), Reay (2017).

In contrast, working-class and low-income families often possess cultural knowledge, practices, and parenting strategies that differ from those recognised and valorised by schools. These households may prioritise children's safety, well-being, and autonomy rather than structured academic enrichment, reflecting Lareau (2003) framework of the "accomplishment of natural growth." The resulting misalignment between home practices and school expectations can lead educators to perceive parents as disengaged or

deficient, even when parents are actively supporting their children within their socio-cultural and economic constraints [Mncube \(2021\)](#), [Soudien \(2018\)](#). Empirical studies from South Africa and comparable contexts suggest that this divergence contributes to persistent educational inequities, as schools inadvertently reward middle-class forms of participation while undervaluing alternative forms of familial engagement [Spaull \(2019\)](#), [Hoadley \(2022\)](#).

Furthermore, research highlights that the transmission of cultural capital is not purely inherited but also shaped by access to institutional resources, social networks, and community support. Families with limited financial, social, or symbolic resources face structural barriers that restrict their capacity to engage in school-based activities, influence decision-making, or provide enrichment opportunities outside of formal schooling [Van der Berg and Gustafsson \(2022\)](#), [Mncube \(2021\)](#). These patterns demonstrate the interdependence of social class, cultural capital, and educational outcomes, emphasising the need for policies and pedagogical strategies that recognise and leverage the strengths of all families rather than privileging middle-class norms exclusively.

## CONCERTED CULTIVATION AND THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF NATURAL GROWTH

[Lareau \(2003\)](#) ethnographic research builds on Bourdieu's framework by linking parental engagement to daily household practices and socialisation patterns. Middle-class parents frequently engage in concerted cultivation, intentionally structuring children's daily activities to promote cognitive, social, and emotional development. Such activities often include facilitating extracurricular enrichment, assisting with homework, attending parent-teacher meetings, and actively advocating for children within institutional structures. Concerted cultivation operates synergistically with cultural capital because the dispositions, knowledge, and skills transmitted at home align with school expectations.

This alignment enables children to acquire the competencies, confidence, and social fluency necessary to navigate institutional norms and excel in formal education [Lareau \(2003\)](#), [Le Roux \(2020\)](#), [Reay \(2017\)](#). Empirical research in South Africa demonstrates that children from middle-class households often benefit from enhanced learning outcomes, greater familiarity with school routines, and improved access to social and educational resources [Spaull \(2019\)](#), [Hoadley \(2022\)](#). International studies similarly indicate that structured parental engagement predicts higher academic achievement, more effective school navigation, and sustained educational advantage across diverse contexts [OECD \(2018\)](#), [Vincent and Ball \(2007\)](#), [Cooper et al. \(2016\)](#).

In contrast, working-class and low-income families frequently rely on what [Lareau \(2003\)](#) terms the accomplishment of natural growth. This approach prioritises children's safety, basic well-being, and autonomy rather than structured academic enrichment or institutional engagement. These households often face constraints such as irregular or informal work schedules, limited financial resources, and restricted access to educational materials, which reduce their capacity to participate in school-based activities or governance structures [Soudien \(2018\)](#), [Department of Basic Education \(2021\)](#). Viewed through a Bourdieusian perspective, these limitations reflect lower levels of cultural capital. Parents may have limited familiarity with the specialised language used in schools, the behavioural norms expected within educational settings, and the forms of participation valued by institutions. Such gaps reduce their ability to navigate schooling processes effectively and to support their children's engagement in ways recognised by educators [Bourdieu \(1986\)](#), [Mncube \(2021\)](#).

Consequently, children from these families often receive less academic support at home. They tend to have minimal influence in school decision-making processes. Access to educational resources, social networks, and learning opportunities is also more restricted compared to their middle-class peers [Hoadley \(2022\)](#), [Spaull \(2019\)](#). Research indicates that these patterns contribute to the perpetuation of educational inequalities. Institutional structures and policies frequently valorise forms of parental engagement associated with middle-class families. At the same time, they often fail to recognise or support alternative practices that emerge from diverse socio-economic and cultural contexts [Le Grange \(2020\)](#), [Motala et al. \(2009\)](#).

Collectively, integrating Lareau's insights on household strategies with Bourdieu's conceptualisation of cultural capital provides a robust theoretical framework. This framework helps explain how socio-economic status influences parental involvement, access to learning opportunities, and educational outcomes. This perspective underscores the need to design school policies and pedagogical practices that respond to the diverse capacities of families. The perspective emphasises the importance of recognising and accommodating different cultural practices. It also highlights the necessity of addressing structural constraints that affect parental engagement. Policies and practices should not privilege the participation patterns of a single social class.

Context-sensitive strategies are essential for promoting educational equity. These include multilingual communication to accommodate diverse language backgrounds. Flexible scheduling of school meetings allows parents with varying work commitments to participate. Community-based partnerships help mobilise local knowledge and social networks in support of learning. Teacher professional development in culturally responsive engagement practices equips educators to interpret and mediate diverse forms of parental involvement. Collectively, these approaches can help mitigate intergenerational disadvantage [Epstein \(1995\)](#), [Seeher and Nxumalo \(2025\)](#), [Prinsloo and Mkhize \(2024\)](#).

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**INTEGRATING BOURDIEU AND LAREAU**

Integrating Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital with Lareau's framework of parental child-rearing strategies provides a comprehensive account of how socio-economic class structures parental involvement and shapes educational outcomes. Bourdieu's conceptualisation provides a macro-structural lens for understanding how education systems operate as sites of social reproduction. It demonstrates that schools are not neutral institutions but are structured around dominant cultural norms that reflect middle-class histories, values, and ways of being. Within this framework, particular forms of knowledge are legitimised as academically valuable, while others are marginalised or rendered invisible. Language practices, modes of reasoning, and interactional styles that mirror middle-class socialisation are treated as indicators of ability and competence rather than as socially acquired dispositions.

Educational institutions also privilege dispositions such as confidence in formal settings, familiarity with abstract reasoning, and ease in engaging with authority figures. These dispositions are closely tied to habitus, which shapes how learners and parents perceive, interpret, and respond to schooling expectations. As middle-class families are more likely to transmit these dispositions through everyday socialisation, their children enter school with cultural resources that align with institutional norms. This alignment enables them to navigate assessment practices, classroom interactions, and governance structures with relative ease.

Conversely, learners and parents whose cultural repertoires differ from those valorised by schools may be perceived as less capable or less engaged, even when they possess rich forms of knowledge and experience rooted in their social contexts. The unequal recognition of cultural capital thus contributes to patterned disparities in academic achievement and participation. In this way, Bourdieu's macro-structural analysis demonstrates that educational institutions play an active role in the reproduction of social inequality. Schools tend to reward familiarity with dominant cultural forms, including modes of language use, interaction, and knowledge expression. These forms are closely aligned with middle-class norms and practices. As a result, alternative ways of knowing and demonstrating competence are often marginalised or rendered invisible within formal schooling. This institutional privileging of dominant cultural resources contributes to the persistence of class-based educational disparities rather than their remediation [Bourdieu \(1986\)](#), [Bourdieu and Passeron \(1990\)](#). These institutionalised norms operate as mechanisms of symbolic power, rendering some parental practices visible and legitimate while marginalising others.

Lareau's scholarship complements structural accounts of inequality by illuminating the micro-level mechanisms through which class-based advantages and constraints are generated and sustained within everyday family practices. Her distinction between concerted cultivation and the accomplishment of natural growth demonstrates that parental involvement is not simply a function of commitment or concern for children's education. Instead, it is profoundly shaped by unequal access to time, economic resources, institutional knowledge, and confidence in engaging with professionals and authority figures [Lareau \(2003\)](#), [Lareau \(2011\)](#).

Subsequent research conducted across a range of national contexts has demonstrated that these patterned approaches to child-rearing are strongly associated with social class. Empirical studies indicate that such practices have enduring effects on children's educational trajectories. Differences in parental strategies shape the development of children's communicative repertoires in systematic ways. These strategies also influence how children perceive and enact their sense of entitlement when interacting with authority figures within institutional settings. In addition, variations in parental engagement affect children's capacity to navigate, interpret, and negotiate institutional spaces, such as schools, where expectations and power relations are often implicit. These dynamics have been documented in comparative studies of schooling in diverse socio-economic settings, underscoring the long-term educational consequences of class-based parenting practices [Vincent and Ball \(2007\)](#), [Calarco \(2018\)](#).

A growing body of research indicates that concerted cultivation is closely linked to the development of specific dispositions. These dispositions are explicitly valued within formal schooling contexts. They include verbal assertiveness, confidence in interactions with adults, and strategic help-seeking behaviours [Calarco \(2014\)](#), [Reay \(2017\)](#), [Vincent \(2017\)](#). Children socialised within this framework learn to question instructions, seek clarification, and negotiate academic demands, practices that align closely with pedagogical norms in middle-class schooling environments. Empirical studies demonstrate that these interactional competencies have a direct impact on children's experiences in school. They facilitate more frequent and higher-quality exchanges with teachers. They also increase access to instructional feedback and enhance opportunities for academic support. Over time, these advantages contribute to cumulative educational benefits [Calarco \(2018\)](#), [Hoadley \(2022\)](#).

In comparison, research on the accomplishment of natural growth indicates that this approach fosters important qualities in children, including independence, adaptability, and emotional resilience. However, it provides fewer structured opportunities for children to develop the communicative and advocacy skills that are highly valued within formal schooling contexts [Lareau \(2011\)](#), [Soudien \(2018\)](#). In many working-class and low-income contexts, children are socialised to respect authority and manage challenges autonomously, which may limit their propensity to seek assistance or challenge institutional decisions. Comparative studies conducted across multiple national contexts suggest that differences in interactional orientations can influence educational outcomes. Learners whose parental engagement aligns less closely with institutional expectations may be disadvantaged in education systems that implicitly require proactive advocacy from both parents and children [Reay \(2017\)](#), [Vincent and Ball \(2007\)](#). Consequently, schools may interpret behaviours such as restraint or deference as a lack of engagement. This misinterpretation can further marginalise learners whose patterns of home socialisation do not align with the dominant expectations of educational institutions.

Collectively, this body of research highlights that differences in child-rearing practices do not reflect variations in parental commitment to education. Instead, they represent structurally patterned responses to unequal access to time, economic resources, and institutional power. The alignment between concerted cultivation and school norms allows middle-class children to transform everyday interactional practices into academically recognised advantages. In contrast, the skills and strengths fostered through the accomplishment of natural growth often remain unacknowledged within formal educational settings.

When considered alongside Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital, Lareau's framework provides a nuanced explanation of how everyday family practices operate as mechanisms for the intergenerational transmission of educational advantage and disadvantage. Cultural capital extends beyond formal resources such as books, educational technologies, or financial investments. It is also embedded in habitual practices, patterns of communication, dispositions, and parental strategies. These practices interact with the expectations and norms of educational institutions. Consequently, cultural capital shapes how effectively children and families can engage with schooling and access educational opportunities (Reay, Crozier, & Clayton, 2010, [Hoadley \(2022\)](#), [Vincent and Ball \(2007\)](#)).

Research conducted across diverse socio-economic contexts demonstrates that middle-class households frequently cultivate cultural capital through structured daily routines. These routines often include organised enrichment activities designed to support children's cognitive, social, and emotional development. Middle-class parents also actively advocate for their children within school settings. Collectively, these practices reinforce alignment between home environments and the expectations of educational institutions, thereby facilitating children's engagement and success (Calarco, 2014, [Lareau \(2003\)](#), [Le Roux \(2020\)](#)). This alignment enables children to navigate educational processes more effectively. It also improves their access to resources, including instructional support and extracurricular opportunities. In addition, the alignment helps children develop interactional competencies that are highly valued within formal schooling environments [Reay \(2017\)](#), [Vincent \(2017\)](#).

In contrast, households facing economic constraints or time poverty often cultivate forms of knowledge, skills, and dispositions that are equally valuable. These may include independence, resilience, and practical problem-solving. However, these competencies frequently do not align with institutionalised expectations for parental involvement or with conventional measures of student competence. Consequently, children from these households may appear less engaged within formal schooling contexts despite the presence of meaningful learning and development at home [Lareau \(2011\)](#), [Soudien \(2018\)](#). Empirical research indicates that when household practices do not align with school expectations, parents and learners may be misrecognised by educational institutions. This misalignment can reduce parental influence in school decision-making processes. It can also restrict access to social networks and learning opportunities that support academic progression. Such dynamics contribute to the persistence of educational inequalities [Mncube \(2021\)](#), [Hoadley \(2022\)](#). International comparative studies reinforce this pattern. Research from the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia shows that children whose families engage in practices that align with institutional norms are more likely to receive recognition, support, and advocacy from schools. In contrast, children from working-class or marginalised backgrounds experience structural disadvantages, even when their parents demonstrate strong commitment and involvement in their education [Cooper et al. \(2016\)](#), [Vincent and Ball \(2007\)](#), [OECD \(2018\)](#).

Collectively, this body of research highlights that educational inequalities are reproduced not only through resource disparities but through the subtle, everyday transmission of cultural capital and interactional knowledge. Policies and pedagogical practices that fail to account for these dynamics risk misinterpreting differences in parental engagement as lack of interest or capability, thereby perpetuating inequities across generations [Le Grange \(2020\)](#), [Spaull \(2019\)](#). Interventions in education must acknowledge the plurality of parental practices. They should also value diverse forms of cultural knowledge. Furthermore, interventions need to provide flexible and context-sensitive opportunities for parental engagement. Such approaches are essential for promoting equitable learning outcomes. These principles are supported by research on inclusive education and culturally responsive pedagogy [Epstein \(1995\)](#), [Seeher and Nxumalo \(2025\)](#), [Prinsloo and Mkhize \(2024\)](#).

Empirical research consistently demonstrates that middle-class families are more able to mobilise economic, social, and cultural resources in ways that align with institutional expectations. These families frequently engage in structured learning support at home, such as setting aside dedicated homework time, enrolling children in private tutoring, music lessons, sports, or coding classes, and organising extracurricular enrichment activities that reinforce school curricula [Lareau \(2003\)](#), Calarco, 2014, [Hoadley \(2022\)](#). In addition, middle-class parents often maintain sustained engagement with teachers. Middle-class parents attend regular parent-teacher meetings to discuss their children's progress. They also communicate promptly through email or school portals. In addition, they engage in proactive advocacy when challenges arise. For example, they may negotiate subject placement for their children. Middle-class parents might also request additional academic support when needed. Participation in school governing bodies is another form of involvement. These practices enable parents to influence educational processes and support their children's learning effectively [Vincent and Ball \(2007\)](#), [Le Roux \(2020\)](#), [Cooper, 2022](#)). The practices provide children with opportunities to develop verbal fluency, assertiveness, self-advocacy.

In contrast, working-class and low-income families often encounter structural constraints that limit the institutional recognition of their involvement. Irregular employment, limited formal education, and restricted access to educational resources constrain opportunities for sustained engagement with schools [Soudien \(2018\)](#), [Mncube \(2021\)](#), [Department of Basic Education \(2021\)](#). Although these families frequently demonstrate strong commitment to their children's well-being and moral development, their

practices may not align with dominant institutional expectations. As a result, parental engagement is often misinterpreted as inadequate or absent, rather than understood as differently constituted within specific socio-economic and cultural contexts [Motala et al. \(2009\)](#), [Hoadley \(2022\)](#).

This integrated theoretical perspective highlights that parental involvement policies are not neutral instruments. Policies that fail to account for household capacities, cultural practices, and structural inequalities risk reproducing class-based educational disparities [Spaul \(2019\)](#), [Le Grange \(2020\)](#). Privileging forms of engagement associated with middle-class families; schools may inadvertently exclude parents whose resources and practices differ from dominant norms. This exclusion can undermine broader reform efforts aimed at promoting educational equity.

Recent scholarship emphasises the importance of developing policy frameworks that acknowledge the diversity of parental knowledge, practices, and capacities. Such frameworks should not assume a single, uniform model of parental engagement. Empirical studies across multiple contexts indicate that when schools implement context-responsive strategies, parental participation increases. These approaches also produce positive outcomes for learners, both academically and socially [Epstein \(1995\)](#), [OECD \(2018\)](#), [Hoadley \(2022\)](#).

For example, multilingual communication that provides school notices, homework instructions, and meeting summaries in multiple local languages has been shown to increase parental participation. This approach is particularly effective for parents whose primary language is neither English nor Afrikaans. Such strategies foster inclusivity in linguistically diverse communities ([Msimang, 2021](#), [Prinsloo and Mkhize \(2024\)](#)). Flexible scheduling of school engagements also supports greater participation. Offering after-hours parent-teacher meetings, weekend workshops, and asynchronous online consultations help reduce barriers for parents working irregular or informal hours. These measures mitigate the effects of time poverty and facilitate more equitable involvement in school activities [Le Grange \(2020\)](#), [Hoadley \(2022\)](#).

Community-based partnerships that adopt an asset-oriented approach leverage local knowledge and social networks to co-create learning opportunities. For instance, programmes that incorporate local craft, agricultural knowledge, or oral storytelling into mathematics or literacy lessons have been found to encourage parental involvement. These initiatives are effective because they value practices that are culturally familiar to families. At the same time, they support the achievement of formal curriculum objectives [Epstein \(1995\)](#), [Seeher and Nxumalo \(2025\)](#). These initiatives not only strengthen home-school linkages but also validate parental expertise and reinforce students' engagement with learning.

Sustained teacher professional development in culturally responsive and relational pedagogies equips educators to interpret diverse forms of parental support, mediate the transmission of cultural capital, and foster meaningful participation. Teachers who receive training in culturally responsive and relational pedagogies are better equipped to recognise the strengths of families whose engagement practices differ from middle-class norms. Such training enables educators to design classroom and school activities that build on these familial assets, thereby fostering more inclusive participation and supporting learner development [Seeher and Nxumalo \(2025\)](#), [Prinsloo and Mkhize \(2024\)](#).

Empirical evidence from international contexts supports the effectiveness of these strategies. In the United States, Australia, and the United Kingdom, schools that implement flexible and culturally attuned parental engagement policies report higher levels of parent confidence. These schools also observe increased attendance at school events. Additionally, student outcomes improve, particularly for children from low-income or marginalised households [Vincent and Ball \(2007\)](#), [Cooper et al. \(2016\)](#), [OECD \(2018\)](#). South African case studies provide similar evidence for the effectiveness of inclusive practices. Scheduling workshops at times suitable for working parents has been shown to increase participation. Providing translation support also facilitates engagement among parents who speak different languages. Recognising and incorporating community knowledge into school activities further enhances involvement. Together, these measures improve participation rates and contribute to more equitable learning outcomes [Hoadley \(2022\)](#), [Le Roux \(2020\)](#).

Explicitly acknowledging the interplay between cultural capital and household strategies for child development, education systems can develop parental involvement models that are both inclusive and equitable. These approaches move beyond deficit-oriented assumptions about families. The approaches recognise that families possess valuable knowledge and skills. When these resources are properly supported and integrated into school processes, they can contribute significantly to learners' academic success. In addition, the approaches enhance learners' social development.

## **CONCERTED CULTIVATION VERSUS NATURAL GROWTH** [Lareau \(2003\)](#), [Lareau \(2015\)](#)

[Lareau \(2003\)](#), [Lareau \(2015\)](#) distinguishes between two dominant parenting styles that shape children's socialisation and educational trajectories. Concerted cultivation is a parenting approach commonly observed in middle-class families. It involves actively fostering children's cognitive, social, and emotional development. Parents engage children in structured activities designed to promote learning and skill acquisition. Communication in these households often emphasises reasoning and dialogue. Families also engage proactively with educational institutions, advocating for their children and supporting participation in school-based activities. Examples of concerted cultivation include enrolling children in after-school enrichment programmes. Parents may facilitate participation in debate clubs or science competitions. They often provide structured support for homework and learning

activities at home. Engagement with schools occurs through attending parent-teacher meetings. Families also advocate for specific subject choices or for accommodations that support their children's learning needs.

Alternatively, working-class and low-income families often adopt what Lareau terms the 'accomplishment of natural growth'. In this approach, parents prioritise children's basic care, safety, and autonomy, emphasising everyday life skills and self-directed problem-solving rather than deliberately structuring cognitive or social development through institutional pathways [Lareau \(2003\)](#), [Lareau \(2011\)](#). Children often spend significant time engaging in community-based play, helping with household chores, or supporting family economic activities such as informal trading or farming. Parents generally provide guidance only when requested, rather than initiating structured learning interventions. Empirical studies in South Africa indicate that working-class and low-income families frequently adopt the "accomplishment of natural growth" parenting style. This pattern is shaped by structural constraints such as time poverty and irregular or informal work schedules. Limited access to educational resources, including books, digital devices, and tutoring support, further reinforces this approach [Soudien \(2018\)](#), [Mncube \(2021\)](#). For instance, children in rural Eastern Cape communities often assist with agricultural tasks before and after school, while parents encourage autonomy and responsibility rather than engaging in school-directed activities.

Internationally, comparable patterns have been observed. In the United States, working-class families in both urban and rural settings frequently emphasise the "accomplishment of natural growth" approach. This style fosters independence, resilience, and practical problem-solving in children. However, children from these households often experience misrecognition within schools. Educational institutions tend to implicitly reward structured enrichment and proactive advocacy, which align more closely with middle-class parenting practices (Calarco, 2014, [Reay \(2017\)](#)). In the United Kingdom and Australia, comparative research indicates that schools often interpret limited parental presence at meetings, involvement in homework, or engagement in institutional advocacy as a sign of disengagement. This interpretation occurs even when parents demonstrate high levels of commitment within their own socio-cultural contexts [Vincent and Ball \(2007\)](#), [Cooper et al. \(2016\)](#). The "accomplishment of natural growth" represents an adaptive and culturally coherent parenting strategy. This approach is shaped by structural constraints rather than a lack of interest in education. These findings underscore the importance of developing school policies that recognise and accommodate diverse family practices and capacities [Lareau \(2003\)](#), [Soudien \(2018\)](#).

In this approach, parents prioritise children's basic care, safety, and autonomy. They encourage independent problem-solving and self-directed play rather than deliberately structuring cognitive or social development through institutional pathways. For example, children may spend more time engaging in community-based play or assisting with household and economic responsibilities. Parental guidance is provided primarily when requested, rather than through the initiation of structured learning activities.

Schools and educational systems frequently reward concerted cultivation, often in implicit ways. Requests for parents to attend workshops on learning goals, participate in school governance, or volunteer for extracurricular activities assume that parents have both the time and the familiarity with institutional norms and communication styles. Families who practise the accomplishment of natural growth may encounter barriers to such participation due to work schedules, limited resources, or unfamiliarity with "school speak." As a result, their engagement is sometimes misinterpreted by schools as absence or disinterest.

In the South African context, these dynamics are further intensified by the enduring effects of apartheid. Historically, working-class families were denied access to quality schooling and opportunities to acquire cultural capital that aligns with formal education [Soudien \(2018\)](#). Comparative research also confirms similar patterns in international contexts. In the United States, children whose parents engage in concerted cultivation are more likely to develop assertiveness, verbal fluency, and advocacy skills [Calarco \(2018\)](#), [Reay \(2017\)](#). These skills enable them to interact effectively with teachers and access academic resources. Conversely, children from households that emphasise the accomplishment of natural growth are often disadvantaged in educational systems that prioritise parental advocacy and structured support [Calarco \(2018\)](#), [Reay \(2017\)](#). In the United Kingdom, [Vincent and Ball \(2007\)](#) show that middle-class families can leverage social networks and familiarity with institutional norms to make informed school choices. Working-class families, however, encounter structural and social barriers, even when they demonstrate high levels of motivation and commitment to their children's education. Similarly, in Australia, programmes that adopt culturally attuned approaches and recognise local community knowledge have been found to enhance parental involvement. Flexible forms of participation, including scheduling adaptations and alternative engagement pathways, contribute to improved learner outcomes among disadvantaged families [OECD \(2018\)](#), [Hoadley \(2022\)](#).

Overall, integrating Lareau's frameworks with Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital highlights that educational inequalities are not simply the result of individual effort or parental motivation. Instead, they emerge from the interaction between household strategies, institutional norms, and structural inequalities. Policies and practices should recognise the legitimacy of diverse parental approaches. They should provide flexible opportunities for engagement that accommodate different household capacities and schedules. Such policies should also value local and culturally embedded knowledge. When implemented, these measures can help reduce educational inequities and promote more equitable learning outcomes for all students.

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**SOCIAL REPRODUCTION THEORY**

Schools, curricula, and pedagogical practices mirror the values, dispositions, and expectations of dominant social groups, thereby legitimising and stabilising inequalities across generations. From this perspective, formal education operates as a mechanism for preserving existing class structures. It does so by privileging behaviours, interaction styles, and forms of cultural capital associated with socially advantaged families. At the same time, it devalues or overlooks alternative ways of knowing and acting that emerge from less advantaged households.

Parental involvement policies in many contexts are framed rhetorically as tools for equity and shared responsibility. However, when policies implicitly define “good” parental participation according to middle-class behaviours, they risk reinforcing existing inequalities. Examples of such behaviours include attending school meetings during standard work hours, communicating confidently with teachers, and participating in formal governance structures. In practice, these criteria may disadvantage families who cannot conform to these expectations due to work schedules, limited familiarity with institutional norms, or other structural constraints. Empirical studies from the United Kingdom demonstrate that middle-class parents are more likely to participate consistently in institutionalised channels of school engagement. These channels include regular communication with teachers, attendance at meetings, and involvement in decision-making processes. Such sustained presence within formal school structures enhances parents’ capacity to advocate for their children. In turn, this advocacy strengthens children’s positioning within competitive and stratified schooling environments [Vincent and Ball \(2007\)](#), [Reay \(2017\)](#). Research from the United States indicates that schools frequently interpret middle-class forms of cultural capital as evidence of strong family support. These forms include assertive communication, regular institutional presence, and proactive advocacy on behalf of children. Alternatively, working-class expressions of care are often rendered invisible within school evaluative frameworks. In some cases, they are mischaracterised as disengagement or deficit. Such interpretations contribute to the reproduction of unequal educational opportunities [Lareau \(2003\)](#), [Calarco \(2018\)](#).

In the South African context, social reproduction dynamics are particularly sharp given the persistent legacies of apartheid and spatial inequality. Former Model C schools, which were originally established to serve white and socio-economically advantaged communities, continue to benefit from comparatively higher levels of material and human resources. These schools often experience strong and visible forms of parental participation, including regular engagement in school activities and governance structures. In addition, well-organised alumni associations and community networks provide ongoing financial contributions and social support that enhance educational programmes and institutional capacity. Parents in these communities are often able to navigate admissions systems, contribute to school governance, and support extramural enrichment, thereby intensifying existing advantages. Township and rural schools, which predominantly serve working-class and low-income communities, frequently operate under conditions of sustained financial constraint. These schools often experience limited parental visibility within formal institutional structures such as governing bodies and scheduled meetings. Consequently, opportunities for meaningful and sustained parental participation are frequently restricted, not by a lack of commitment, but by structural and socio-economic barriers that shape families’ capacity to engage. As such, policies that equate engagement with middle class modes of interaction risk cementing socio economic disparities rather than ameliorating them [Spaull \(2019\)](#), [Motala et al. \(2009\)](#).

Practical examples illustrate these reproduction mechanisms. In many South African schools, invitations to participate in curriculum evenings, school tours, or subject option workshops are scheduled during weekday mornings or afternoons. For parents employed in irregular or informal labour, including domestic work, casual employment, and informal trading, participation in scheduled school events is often impracticable. Working hours are typically inflexible, unpredictable, and poorly aligned with the temporal expectations of schools. Therefore, physical absence from meetings or workshops reflects structural constraints rather than parental indifference. Nevertheless, such absences are frequently interpreted by schools as evidence of limited commitment to children’s education, thereby obscuring the socio-economic conditions that shape families’ capacities to engage. In a similar vein, school governing bodies, which exercise significant authority over resource allocation and institutional decision-making, tend to be disproportionately occupied by middle-class parents. These parents are more likely to possess flexible employment arrangements that permit regular participation in meetings and consultations. In addition, prior exposure to formal governance structures and bureaucratic processes equips them with the confidence and procedural knowledge required to navigate these roles effectively. Accordingly, patterns of representation within school governing bodies often reflect existing socio-economic hierarchies rather than the demographic composition of the broader school community. This pattern reproduces advantage by enabling these parents to shape institutional priorities in ways that reflect their own cultural norms and expectations.

Cross-national research beyond South Africa consistently demonstrates that well-intentioned parental engagement policies may generate exclusionary effects when they do not adequately account for underlying socio-economic structures. Comparative studies emphasise that parental involvement cannot be reduced to individual willingness or educational aspiration alone. Instead, patterns of engagement are strongly shaped by unequal access to material and social resources. Time availability, household income, and access to reliable transport significantly influence parents’ capacity to participate in school-based activities. In addition, familiarity with institutional norms and educational discourse mediates how confidently parents navigate interactions with schools. These structural conditions produce differentiated forms of involvement that are often misread as variation in commitment rather than as

outcomes of unequal opportunity structures. When these structural conditions are overlooked, policies designed to promote inclusion can unintentionally reproduce inequality.

In the Australian context, empirical research indicates that school practices requiring extensive volunteer commitments and sustained fundraising participation tend to privilege families with greater occupational flexibility. Regular in-person attendance at meetings similarly assumes access to stable working hours and financial security. Parents employed in professional or salaried positions are therefore better positioned to meet these expectations. In contrast, families engaged in shift work, casual employment, or multiple jobs face structural barriers to participation. Consequently, patterns of parental involvement reflect socio-economic advantage rather than differential levels of interest or commitment to children's education. Parents employed in professional or salaried positions are more able to comply with these expectations, while those in casual, shift-based, or informal employment face significant barriers to participation. Accordingly, patterns of parental visibility become unevenly distributed, contributing to differentiated learner support and uneven educational outcomes [Baxter \(2019\)](#), [OECD \(2018\)](#).

Similarly, research in the United Kingdom demonstrates that education policy reforms emphasising parental choice, market competition, and school autonomy have disproportionately benefited middle-class families. [Ball et al. \(2013\)](#) demonstrate that families possessing higher levels of cultural capital and familiarity with institutional processes have a distinct advantage in navigating complex school admissions procedures. These families are better able to interpret performance data, understand school selection criteria, and mobilise social networks to support their children's educational trajectories. As a result, they are more successful in securing access to high-status schools. Families from lower-income backgrounds often face significant barriers that limit their school choice options. These barriers may be informational, such as limited access to guidance about admissions processes or performance data. They may also be logistical, including challenges related to transportation, time constraints, or irregular work schedules. Additionally, symbolic barriers exist, where families' cultural knowledge and practices are less recognised or valued within institutional settings. Despite demonstrating comparable levels of educational aspiration to more advantaged families, these obstacles constrain their ability to secure access to high-status schools. These dynamics highlight the limitations of policy frameworks that assume all families have an equal capacity to engage with schools. In practice, such policies may inadvertently reinforce existing social hierarchies. Instead of mitigating educational inequalities, they can amplify disparities by privileging families who possess time, resources, and institutional knowledge.

Through the lens of social reproduction theory, it becomes clear that parental involvement policies must be critically examined not only for their intentions but for their structural effects. To reduce the risk of reinforcing class hierarchies, policy and practice must be carefully designed to acknowledge the diverse capacities of families for engagement. Definitions of "effective involvement" should be decentralised to accommodate varying forms of parental participation. Equitable platforms should be created to ensure that all families, regardless of socio-economic status, can contribute meaningfully to their children's education.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study utilises a critical narrative literature review ([Green, Johnson, & Adams, 2006](#)). This method synthesises both qualitative and quantitative evidence to interrogate policy–practice gaps. It also examines the conceptual and theoretical foundations of parental involvement and educational equity. Unlike systematic reviews, which focus mainly on aggregating empirical findings, critical narrative reviews enable interpretive analysis. They allow researchers to identify gaps in the literature and to evaluate the coherence, quality, and relevance of existing studies ([Baumeister & Leary, 1997](#); [Ferrari, 2015](#)). This approach is particularly well suited for examining policy–practice gaps. It allows for the integration of diverse forms of evidence, ranging from ethnographic studies to large-scale surveys. Moreover, it enables critical interrogation of how socio-economic status, cultural capital, and household strategies influence educational outcomes.

The method also facilitates the incorporation of theoretical frameworks, such as Bourdieu's cultural capital and Lareau's concerted cultivation, linking empirical findings to conceptual insights. The review critically analyses literature from both international and South African contexts. It goes beyond mere description to emphasise the presence of structural inequalities in education. It also considers historical influences that shape schooling practices. Additionally, the review examines how school policies contribute to the reproduction of social hierarchies. This flexibility allows connections across disciplinary boundaries, consideration of socio-political contexts, and the derivation of actionable implications for policy and practice. Overall, the critical narrative review provides a methodologically robust and conceptually aligned approach for understanding how parental involvement policies may perpetuate or mitigate educational inequities.

Figure 1

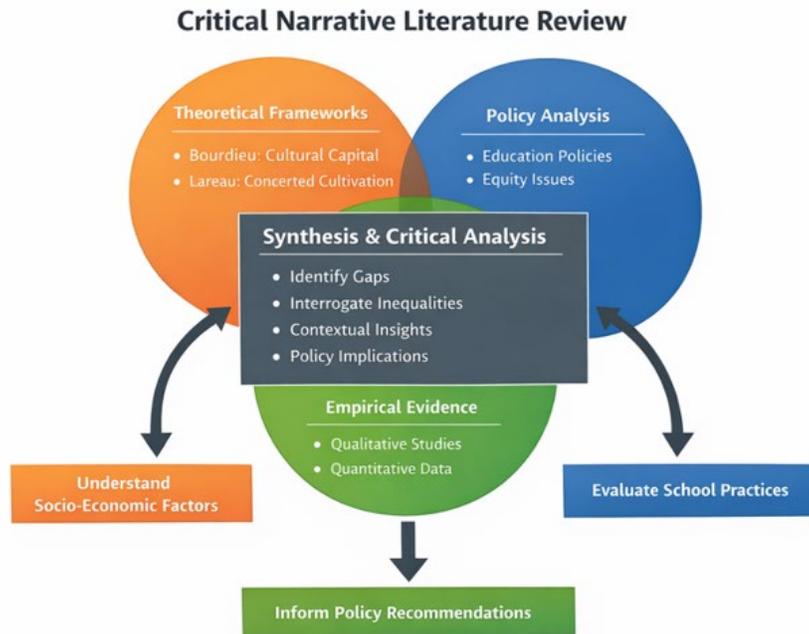


Figure 1

## DATA SOURCES

This study employs a triangulated set of data sources to provide a comprehensive analysis of parental involvement policies. The approach enables a contextually grounded understanding of how these policies intersect with socio-economic status in South Africa.

**Policy documents** form a primary source of data and include the South African Schools Act (SASA, 1996), the 2021 National Parental Involvement Framework (DBE), the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS), and relevant provincial guidelines. These documents were selected because they provide the official legislative and regulatory framework that governs parental engagement in South African schools. Analysing these texts enables the study to identify the intended objectives of parental involvement policies. It also allows for the examination of the language and normative assumptions embedded within the policies, particularly concerning expectations of parental participation and alignment with school norms. Policy documents thus serve as a critical lens for interrogating how institutional frameworks may implicitly privilege certain social groups while constraining others.

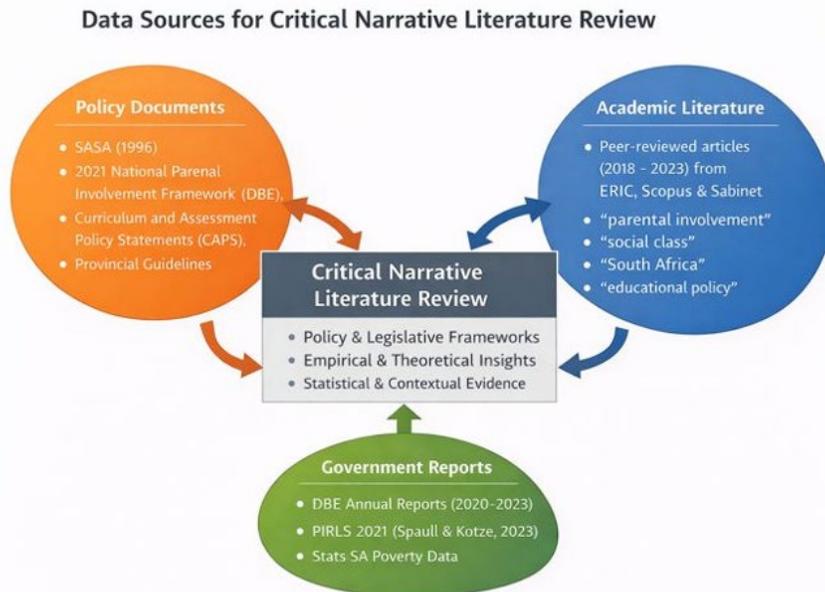
**Academic literature** constitutes a second key source, encompassing peer-reviewed studies published between 2018 and 2023, accessed via ERIC, Scopus, and Sabinet databases using keywords such as “parental involvement,” “social class,” “South Africa,” and “educational policy.” This body of literature offers empirical evidence on the dynamics of parental involvement and cultural capital. It also provides theoretical insights into how socio-economic disparities influence educational experiences, both within South Africa and in comparative international contexts. Integrating qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods studies, the review captures diverse perspectives on how household strategies, institutional expectations, and structural inequalities interact to influence educational outcomes. This enables critical synthesis across contexts, revealing patterns of inclusion, exclusion, and equity in parental engagement practices.

**Government reports** provide additional quantitative and contextual evidence, including DBE Annual Reports (2020–2023), PIRLS 2021 results [Spaull and Kotze \(2023\)](#), and Stats SA poverty and demographic data. These sources were included because they provide authoritative and current statistics on school performance and learner achievement. They also offer data on socio-economic indicators and the distribution of educational resources. Such information is essential for contextualising parental involvement within broader structural and policy frameworks. These data enable the study to connect observed differences in parental engagement with measurable educational outcomes. They also allow for the examination of how socio-economic conditions shape these patterns. This linkage strengthens the evidentiary foundation for critiquing policy and formulating informed recommendations.

**Collectively**, these data sources allow for a comprehensive, multi-layered analysis. Policy documents reveal the normative expectations and priorities of educational institutions. Academic literature provides both empirical findings and theoretical perspectives on social and structural influences. Government reports supply contextual and quantitative evidence that situates

parental involvement within broader socio-economic and policy frameworks. Using these sources in combination strengthens the study's validity and reliability. Triangulation enables the researcher to examine parental involvement policies from multiple perspectives, including legislative, theoretical, and empirical viewpoints. This methodological strategy is highly effective for identifying gaps between policy and practice. It also facilitates evaluation of the socio-economic inclusivity of parental engagement frameworks. Furthermore, it supports the generation of evidence-based recommendations aimed at promoting equitable education.

**Figure 2**



**Figure 2**

## INCLUSION CRITERIA

The inclusion criteria for this study were designed to ensure that the literature selected was both current and directly relevant to the research objectives. Studies published between 2018 and 2023 were prioritised to ensure that the review reflects the most recent developments in education and parental involvement. This period captures the post-pandemic context, in which COVID-19 significantly disrupted schooling, altered modes of parental engagement, and exacerbated existing socio-economic inequalities. During this time, households faced challenges such as limited access to digital learning tools, shifts to remote or hybrid schooling, and heightened economic pressures, all of which influenced how parents supported their children's learning. Focusing on this timeframe, the study is able to examine how these contemporary dynamics interact with long-standing structural and policy factors, providing a more accurate and relevant understanding of parental involvement and educational equity. Limiting the focus to South Africa, or to studies with direct relevance to the South African context, ensures that the review is grounded in the specific realities of the country's education system. This focus enables the study to consider the lasting impact of historical and socio-political factors on education in South Africa. In particular, the legacy of apartheid continues to influence patterns of school funding, the allocation of resources, and the nature of parental engagement across different communities. Acknowledging these enduring effects, the study situates contemporary educational practices within their broader structural and historical context. Importantly, the study considers structural inequalities related to class, race, and geographic location. These factors shape how families engage with schools and affect the ways in which learners access and experience educational opportunities. Focusing on contextually relevant studies enables the research to produce insights that are directly applicable to the South African educational landscape. This approach ensures that the resulting recommendations are meaningful, actionable, and sensitive to local socio-economic and cultural conditions.

Additionally, the review focused on literature that explicitly addresses parental involvement, social class, and educational outcomes. This approach ensures that the evidence collected is directly relevant to the study's focus. It allows for a clear examination of the interplay between household strategies, cultural capital, and school policies, which are central constructs in the study's theoretical framework. Studies that focused solely on rural-urban differences were excluded from the review. Such studies do not adequately address class distinctions and therefore fail to capture the mechanisms through which socio-economic status and parental practices shape educational access and learner outcomes.

This carefully defined inclusion criterion enhances the effectiveness of the study by ensuring that the evidence base is both relevant and rigorous. Applying selection criteria that prioritise recency, contextual relevance, and alignment with the study's conceptual framework, the review ensures that included studies reflect current educational realities and policy environments. This approach allows the synthesis to incorporate evidence that is both empirically robust and theoretically meaningful. It enables a nuanced examination of how parental involvement policies interact with socio-economic status, cultural capital, and household strategies, illuminating the mechanisms through which such policies may either perpetuate or reduce educational inequalities. Furthermore, focusing on studies that meet these criteria supports the development of recommendations that are grounded in contemporary evidence and sensitive to the South African socio-cultural and historical context.

## ANALYSIS

The study employed thematic analysis [Braun and Clarke \(2006\)](#), [Clarke and Braun \(2017\)](#) to systematically identify, organise, and interpret recurring patterns across the literature and policy documents. This method was selected because it offers a flexible yet analytically rigorous approach to examining patterns across diverse forms of data. It enables the systematic identification of both explicit content and underlying assumptions within heterogeneous sources, including policy frameworks, peer-reviewed studies, and government reports. On this basis, the approach is well suited to capturing the complexity of meanings, silences, and power relations embedded in texts that shape parental involvement and educational policy (Nowell et al., 2017). Thematic analysis extends analysis beyond descriptive synthesis. It enables interpretive engagement with how educational policies are framed and justified. Through this approach, underlying assumptions embedded in policy texts become visible. These assumptions often privilege forms of parental involvement that align with middle-class norms. As a result, thematic analysis illuminates how such privileging contributes to differentiated educational experiences and outcomes across socio-economic groups.

### Three primary themes guided the analytical process:

- policy design and middle-class assumptions, which captures how engagement frameworks often presume access to time, resources, and institutional knowledge.
- mechanisms of marginalisation, which highlight how working-class and low-income families may be excluded or misrecognised due to structural and cultural misalignment.
- impact on educational outcomes, which examines the cumulative consequences of these policies on learner achievement and equity.

Triangulation was employed across multiple data sources, including policy documents, empirical studies, and statistical reports [Flick \(2018\)](#), [Patton \(2015\)](#). This strategy strengthened the credibility of the analysis by enabling systematic comparison and cross-verification of findings across different forms of evidence. Drawing on diverse sources also enhanced analytical validity by reducing reliance on a single perspective. Accordingly, triangulation supported more robust and trustworthy interpretations of parental involvement policies and their socio-economic implications. This approach enabled the identification of patterns that were consistent across diverse contexts, including international comparisons and South African-specific studies, while simultaneously acknowledging contextual nuances such as the legacy of apartheid and ongoing structural inequalities. The study combines thematic analysis with triangulation to strengthen the analytical rigour of the findings. This methodological integration enables the identification of recurring patterns across diverse data sources and supports the development of well-substantiated interpretations. Through this approach, the analysis examines how parental involvement policies may contribute to the reproduction or mitigation of educational inequities. It also facilitates the systematic linking of empirical evidence to key theoretical constructs, including Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital and Lareau's frameworks of parenting practices.

Overall, thematic analysis proved effective for this study because it supports a critical, conceptually informed interpretation of policy and research evidence. This approach supports the integration of qualitative and quantitative evidence within a single analytical framework. It enables a comprehensive examination of the complex interactions between household strategies, socio-economic status, and school policy. Through this integrative lens, the study can generate a nuanced understanding of how these factors collectively shape learners' educational opportunities and outcomes.

## THEMATIC ANALYSIS FRAMEWORK

The thematic analysis framework in this study illustrates the systematic process through which data from multiple sources are analysed to generate meaningful insights into parental involvement and educational equity. The framework is structured in four key players:

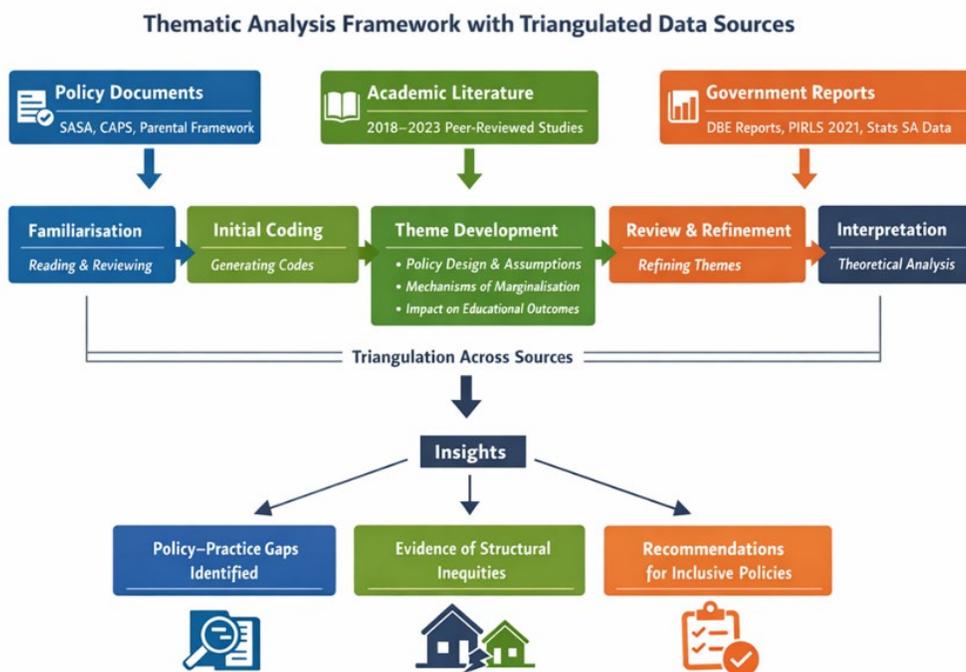
- **Data Sources:** The study draws on a triangulated set of sources, including policy documents (e.g., SASA, CAPS, National Parental Involvement Framework), peer-reviewed academic literature (2018–2023), and government reports (e.g., DBE Annual Reports, PIRLS 2021, Stats SA poverty data). Each category of source contributes a distinct form of evidence to the analysis. Policy documents illuminate institutional priorities, regulatory intentions, and the normative assumptions embedded within parental involvement frameworks. Academic literature provides empirical findings and theoretical

interpretations that contextualise parental engagement within broader social and structural dynamics. Government reports, in turn, offer quantitative indicators and contextual data that situate these dynamics within measurable patterns of educational performance and socio-economic conditions.

- Thematic Analysis Process:** Data from these sources are subjected to a systematic process adapted from [Braun and Clarke \(2006\)](#). The analytic process began with a phase of familiarisation, during which the data were read and reviewed in detail to develop an in-depth understanding of their content and scope. This was followed by initial coding, involving the systematic generation of codes to capture salient features and recurrent ideas across the data set. Subsequent theme development focused on identifying and organising patterned meanings, including assumptions embedded in policy design, processes of marginalisation, and implications for educational outcomes. The themes were then reviewed and refined to ensure internal coherence, analytical clarity, and relevance to the study's aims. Finally, the interpretation phase involved relating the refined themes to established theoretical frameworks, including cultural capital and concerted cultivation, to situate the findings within broader sociological debates.
- Triangulation:** The framework emphasises cross-source triangulation, integrating insights from policy, literature, and government reports. This step enhances the validity of the study by enabling the researcher to systematically compare findings across multiple sources of evidence. It allows for the corroboration of results drawn from both qualitative and quantitative data. Moreover, this approach facilitates the consideration of findings within both local South African and broader international contexts, ensuring that interpretations are grounded, nuanced, and contextually informed.
- Insights and Outputs:** The final stage generates actionable insights by identifying gaps between policy and practice, highlighting structural inequities, and formulating recommendations for inclusive and equitable parental engagement. This multi-layered approach ensures that the study advances beyond mere description, offering a strong analytical foundation to inform policy evaluation and potential reform.

Overall, the framework presents a methodologically rigorous and conceptually coherent strategy which integrates empirical evidence with theoretical interpretation and practical policy implications. This approach enables a nuanced understanding of the ways in which parental involvement policies can either perpetuate or mitigate educational inequities across diverse socio-economic contexts.

**Figure 3**



**Figure 3 Thematic Analysis Framework for Parental Involvement Policy Review**

This flowchart depicts the thematic analysis of policy, literature, and government reports. Triangulated findings were interpreted through Bourdieu's cultural capital and Lareau's concerted cultivation, highlighting policy-practice gaps, structural inequities, and actionable recommendations for inclusive parental engagement.

## RESULTS

### POLICY DESIGN AND MIDDLE-CLASS ASSUMPTIONS

Analysis of South African parental involvement policies reveals that many frameworks implicitly embody middle-class norms. These underlying assumptions often create barriers for working-class and low-income families, limiting their capacity to participate fully in school processes. The influence of these norms is particularly evident across three interrelated dimensions.

The first dimension relates to the timing and accessibility of school engagement activities. Many of these activities are scheduled during standard working hours, presuming that parents have regular, predictable employment. This scheduling can exclude parents who work in informal, shift-based, or irregular jobs, limiting their ability to participate meaningfully in school processes. The second dimension concerns language and communication expectations within school engagement. Policies often prioritise English as the primary language of communication, which can disadvantage parents whose home language differs. Additionally, reliance on digital platforms, such as email, school apps, or online portals, further marginalises parents who lack access to technology or are not digitally literate, limiting their ability to receive information and participate effectively. The third dimension concerns the nature of expected parental involvement. Activities such as assisting children with homework, participating in fundraising events, or volunteering at the school often presume that parents have available time and financial resources. Families with limited time or constrained finances may therefore face additional barriers to participation, reinforcing existing social and economic inequalities.

Collectively, these three dimensions demonstrate the broader implications of policy design on parental engagement. They show that policies, even when well-intentioned, can unintentionally reinforce existing social and economic inequalities. Consequently, instead of fostering inclusive participation, these frameworks may inadvertently marginalise families who face constraints in time, financial resources, or access to institutional and digital communication channels.

### TIMING AND ACCESSIBILITY OF ENGAGEMENT

The timing and accessibility of parental engagement activities in South African schools frequently assume that parents are available during standard school hours, typically between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. This implicit expectation can exclude parents who work in informal, shift-based, or irregular employment arrangements. For instance, the 2021 National Parental Involvement Framework mandates “quarterly parent–teacher meetings” but does not provide alternative arrangements for parents who are unable to attend during the school day [Department of Basic Education \(2021\)](#). Empirical research confirms this misalignment. [Le Grange \(2020\)](#) reported that 78% of parents in Gauteng township schools were unable to participate in scheduled meetings due to work-related constraints. These findings indicate that rigid scheduling practices reproduce structural inequities, privileging parents with flexible work schedules while marginalising those with limited temporal resources. Consequently, such policy designs may hinder equitable participation and reduce the effectiveness of parental engagement initiatives, particularly for working-class and low-income families.

### LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

Language and communication requirements embedded in South African parental involvement policies often prioritise English, even though roughly 75% of the population speaks a home language other than English [Statistics South Africa \(2022\)](#). This linguistic emphasis assumes proficiency in English, which can disadvantage parents who are more comfortable in their first language. In addition, many schools use communication methods that are typical in middle-class contexts. Examples include email, school portals, and mobile applications. These methods assume that parents have digital literacy and access to internet-enabled devices.

In contrast, parents in township schools frequently depend on informal word-of-mouth networks to receive information. Research indicates that this reliance can result in miscommunication or incomplete knowledge regarding school deadlines, events, and expectations for participation ([Msimang, 2021](#)). These findings suggest that, although such policies appear neutral, they implicitly privilege parents with English proficiency and technological access, while structurally disadvantaging those whose linguistic and digital resources do not align with institutional norms. Consequently, language and communication conventions within policy can limit equitable parental engagement and exacerbate socio-economic disparities in schooling contexts.

### NATURE OF EXPECTED INVOLVEMENT

Parental involvement policies often presume that parents have the time and financial resources to support schooling in ways that reflect middle-class experiences. These expectations can include assisting with homework, providing learning materials, participating in fundraising activities, or volunteering for enrichment programs outside school hours. In no-fee schools, such demands may place financial pressure on parents to contribute toward transport, school materials, or event-related costs, even though SASA explicitly prohibits unofficial fees [Department of Basic Education \(2022\)](#).

These assumptions create practical barriers for families with limited economic means. When parents are unable to meet the expectations outlined in school policies, their absence or limited participation is often misread by educators and policymakers. This reduced engagement is frequently interpreted as a lack of interest or commitment to their child’s education. However, such

interpretations overlook the structural and socio-economic constraints that shape parental involvement. Factors such as limited financial resources, long or irregular work hours, and restricted access to institutional knowledge or digital communication channels can prevent parents from participating in school activities. Therefore, what may appear as disengagement often reflects broader systemic inequities rather than individual neglect or disinterest in the child’s learning.

**INTERPRETATION AND IMPLICATIONS**

The analysis of South African parental involvement policies reveals a consistent alignment with middle-class norms, often at the expense of accommodating the realities faced by working-class and low-income families. Policy provisions that assume flexible work schedules, access to digital communication tools, and disposable income tend to privilege families who possess these resources, while inadvertently marginalising those who do not. This structural bias reinforces existing social stratifications and perpetuates educational inequities, despite the ostensibly egalitarian intent of such policies.

These findings are central to the study’s objectives because they provide empirical evidence of the disjunction between policy intentions and the lived experiences of parents. They illustrate the mechanisms through which structural inequalities are reproduced within the education system, including temporal, linguistic, financial, and technological barriers to engagement. Recognising these constraints is critical for policymakers, educators, and researchers who aim to design interventions that are inclusive, contextually responsive, and equitable.

The study highlights important misalignments between policy expectations and household realities. These findings underscore the need for strategies that expand the definition of parental involvement. These strategies should accommodate diverse household capacities and actively support engagement among historically marginalised communities. This approach ensures that parental participation functions as a mechanism for educational equity rather than reinforcing socio-economic disadvantage [Spaull \(2019\)](#), [Hoadley \(2022\)](#), [Seeher and Nxumalo \(2025\)](#).

**Figure 4**

**Policy Design and Middle-Class Assumptions:  
Barriers to Parental Involvement**

Dimension	Assumed Norms in Policy	Barriers for Working-Class / Low-Income Families	Implications for Educational Equity
Timing & Accessibility	 Meetings during work hours (9 a.m.–4 p.m.)	 Work conflicts; Irregular/shift jobs	 Excludes working parents; Perceived as disengagement
Language & Communication	 English language; Digital communication	 Non-English speakers; Limited digital access	 Information gaps; Middle-class bias
Nature of Involvement	 Homework help; Fundraising & volunteering	 Limited time & funds; Resource constraints	 Financial strain; Participation barriers

**Figure 4 Barriers to Parental Involvement in Education**

This flowchart illustrates the design of South African parental involvement policies. It shows how policy expectations related to timing, language, and forms of participation reflect middle-class norms. These norms create barriers for working-class and low-income families, contributing to inequities in parental engagement and educational outcomes.

**MECHANISMS OF MARGINALISATION**

Analysis of South African parental involvement policies identifies three interrelated mechanisms. These mechanisms systematically marginalise working-class and low-income families. As a result, such families face limitations in engaging meaningfully with schools. This dynamic contributes to persistent inequities in educational outcomes.

- **Economic Constraints:** Economic constraints represent a significant barrier to meaningful parental engagement in South African schools. Time poverty is a critical factor, particularly for parents engaged in informal or shift-based employment, who make up approximately 42% of the workforce [Statistics South Africa \(2023\)](#). For these parents, attending school meetings, workshops, or events during standard hours is often infeasible. Transport costs further exacerbate the challenge, especially for rural families, where travel to and from schools can consume up to 20% of a household’s monthly income [Mncube \(2021\)](#). In addition, resource limitations further constrain parental engagement. Many households lack access to digital devices, which are increasingly essential for supporting learners’ schoolwork. Unreliable or absent internet

connectivity compounds this challenge, limiting the ability to access online resources or school communications. Inadequate or shared study spaces at home also hinder children's capacity to complete assignments effectively. Together, these factors restrict parents' ability to provide academic support outside the classroom [Department of Basic Education \(2021\)](#).

Collectively, these economic and structural constraints illustrate that limited parental participation is rarely attributable to disinterest or lack of motivation. Instead, it reflects systemic realities that are often unacknowledged in school policies and engagement frameworks. This underscores the need for contextually responsive strategies that accommodate the socio-economic circumstances of working-class and low-income families.

- **Cultural Mismatches:** Cultural mismatches between schools and families represent a significant mechanism of marginalisation. Middle-class schools often promote forms of engagement that value questioning authority, assertiveness, and verbal fluency. In contrast, many working-class communities emphasise respect for teachers and adherence to institutional hierarchies, reflecting different socialisation practices and priorities [Soudien \(2018\)](#).

Parents with lower levels of formal education may experience reduced confidence when interacting with school staff. Complex administrative procedures, technical language, and unfamiliar educational jargon can lead parents to feel "intimidated" or perceive themselves as insufficiently qualified to participate in school processes [Msimang \(2021\)](#). The misalignment between school expectations and household practices can lead to misrecognition. In such cases, the contributions that parents make, as well as the ways they support their children's learning, are often undervalued or overlooked by educational institutions. This dynamic can diminish the perceived legitimacy of parental involvement.

Consequently, these cultural differences diminish parental voice in decision-making and limit opportunities for meaningful participation. The divergence between school norms and family practices not only affects engagement but also reinforces structural inequalities, as children from these households may receive less advocacy and support within the educational system.

- **Institutional Gatekeeping:** Institutional structures can reinforce educational inequalities through both formal and informal gatekeeping mechanisms. In affluent schools, SGBs often recruit members through professional or social networks. This practice effectively excludes parents who lack comparable social capital, limiting their access to decision-making processes. Conversely, in township or under-resourced schools, SGBs may face challenges related to insufficient training, limited resources, or constrained capacity to support inclusive engagement. As a result, opportunities for meaningful parental input are restricted, even when parents are motivated and willing to participate. Collectively, these dynamics highlight the role of institutional design and policy implementation in shaping parental participation. Such structures can inadvertently advantage middle-class families who possess social and cultural capital. Conversely, working-class and low-income parents may be marginalised, limiting their influence within school decision-making processes. This contributes to the persistence of structural inequities in educational engagement and outcomes [Motala et al. \(2009\)](#).

## SIGNIFICANCE AND EFFECTIVENESS FOR THE STUDY

Examining these mechanisms is critical for understanding how parental involvement policies can inadvertently reproduce or intensify social stratification. Analysing economic, cultural, and institutional barriers, the study identifies concrete points where interventions could improve equity in parental engagement. These include strategies such as flexible scheduling of school meetings, multilingual communication to accommodate diverse home languages, and capacity-building initiatives for SGBs to foster inclusive participation. This detailed analysis provides a strong evidentiary foundation for policy recommendations aimed at creating more equitable and contextually responsive parental involvement frameworks. Moreover, triangulating insights across multiple sources, including policy documents, government reports, and empirical literature, strengthens the credibility of the study's findings. This approach also enhances validity by ensuring that conclusions are supported by diverse and complementary evidence. Consequently, the study's interpretations are more robust and well-founded.

## IMPACT ON EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

Disparities in parental involvement along class lines have significant implications for educational outcomes in South Africa. Academic achievement is strongly influenced by the level and nature of parental engagement. Learners benefit academically when their parents actively engage in school-based activities and provide structured support for learning. This pattern is especially common in middle-class households. Research indicates that these learners perform substantially better on national assessments. Observed differences range from 25 to 30 percentage points compared to peers from lower-income families [Van der Berg and Gustafsson \(2022\)](#). In no-fee schools, where parental participation is often constrained by economic and structural barriers, lower levels of engagement are associated with higher dropout rates (12.5% compared to 3.2% in fee-paying schools) [Department of Basic Education \(2022\)](#). These patterns underscore how unequal access to parental support contributes to measurable educational inequities.

School satisfaction and perceptions of safety are closely linked to patterns of parental involvement. Parents in middle-class schools often report higher levels of trust in institutional processes. They are also more likely to perceive themselves as having influence over school decision-making. This influence extends to areas such as the formulation, implementation, and monitoring of safety and disciplinary protocols. In contrast, parents in township and low-income contexts frequently report limited influence over school policies and decision-making processes. Many describe feeling unable to address disciplinary concerns or to intervene effectively in cases of bullying. This perceived lack of agency can weaken learner well-being and erode community confidence in schools. Such experiences reflect broader structural constraints that shape patterns of participation and trust within disadvantaged educational settings [Le Grange \(2020\)](#).

Long-term educational trajectories are similarly affected. Limited parental engagement during early schooling is linked to lower matriculation pass rates, reduced access to tertiary education, and diminished prospects for socio-economic mobility [Hoadley \(2022\)](#). These outcomes perpetuate cycles of intergenerational poverty, disproportionately affecting historically marginalised Black and Coloured communities [Soudien \(2018\)](#). The cumulative effect of these disparities highlights that parental involvement is not merely a complementary aspect of schooling but a critical determinant of educational equity.

Examining the impact of these disparities is essential for the study, as it clarifies the tangible consequences of policy design and institutional practices. Linking parental engagement patterns to measurable outcomes, the study identifies actionable entry points for reform, such as flexible meeting schedules, multilingual communication, and inclusive decision-making processes. Triangulating these findings across policy documents, empirical studies, and government statistics enhances the analytical rigour of the study. This approach allows patterns and relationships to be corroborated across multiple forms of evidence. As a result, the conclusions are more credible and firmly grounded in a comprehensive evidentiary base, strengthening the justification for the study's recommendations.

## DISCUSSION

### POLICIES AS REPRODUCERS OF CLASS INEQUALITY

The findings of this study indicate that South African parental involvement policies are commonly articulated through discourses of inclusion and partnership. However, closer analysis reveals that these policies are underpinned by normative assumptions that privilege forms of engagement more readily accessible to middle-class families. As a result, particular modes of participation are implicitly constructed as the standard against which parental involvement is evaluated. In practice, these policies define effective parental involvement in ways that privilege access to time, economic stability, institutional familiarity, and linguistic and digital competence. This finding confirms that policy design does not operate as a neutral articulation of expectations. Instead, it actively structures the parameters through which parental participation is defined and evaluated. Through this process, policies determine which forms of involvement are rendered visible, legitimate, and worthy of institutional recognition and reward within schooling contexts.

These results are strongly aligned with [Bourdieu \(1986\)](#) theory of cultural capital, which emphasises that institutions tend to legitimise the dispositions, practices, and resources of dominant social groups. Parental involvement policies frequently privilege modes of engagement. These include regular attendance at school meetings, confident and articulate interactions with educators, active participation in governance structures, and sustained use of digital communication platforms. Collectively, these expectations define a narrow model of parental participation that shapes how involvement is understood and evaluated within schools. These practices presuppose access to time, linguistic competence, and technological resources that are more commonly available to middle-class families. Consequently, parents who do not possess these valued forms of capital are often positioned as less engaged within school contexts. This positioning occurs despite their sustained commitment to supporting their children's education through alternative means. In many working-class households, parental involvement is expressed through practices such as prioritising children's material well-being, ensuring regular school attendance, and providing emotional and moral support. However, these forms of engagement tend to remain less visible and are frequently undervalued within institutional frameworks used to assess parental participation. As the findings illustrate, parents facing economic precarity may be labelled "uninvolved" not because of disengagement, but because their contributions do not conform to policy-sanctioned norms.

[Lareau \(2015\)](#) distinction between concerted cultivation and the accomplishment of natural growth provides further explanatory power. The results indicate that schools and policy frameworks implicitly reward concerted cultivation behaviours, including frequent school presence, strategic advocacy, and structured enrichment activities. Natural growth approaches involve parents placing trust in teachers, encouraging children's autonomy, and supporting learning in less direct ways. These practices, however, are frequently misinterpreted by schools as passivity or a lack of commitment. Consequently, the value of these forms of parental involvement is often overlooked within institutional assessments of engagement. This misrecognition carries tangible consequences for learners. Children from families that practise natural growth are less likely to receive additional academic support, advocacy, or responsive interventions from schools. This occurs despite these parents demonstrating comparable levels of aspiration, commitment, and care for their children's education.

Importantly, the study shows that these policy effects are intensified by South Africa's entrenched structural inequalities. The spatial planning implemented during the apartheid era concentrated poverty in townships and rural areas. This historical structuring has produced long-term disparities in access to quality schooling, reliable transport infrastructure, and digital connectivity. These inequities continue to shape educational opportunities for learners from historically disadvantaged communities [Soudien \(2018\)](#), [Spaull \(2019\)](#). These historical conditions continue to shape contemporary patterns of parental engagement. Parents living in under-resourced communities frequently encounter long commuting times and irregular or informal employment schedules. Additionally, they often have limited access to digital platforms. These factors collectively constrain their ability to participate in school-based activities, which are frequently organised according to middle-class temporal and spatial norms.

The analysis further reveals that recent policy frameworks, including the 2021 National Parental Involvement Framework, insufficiently address these structural constraints. While the framework promotes home-school partnerships and shared responsibility, it does not mandate material support or differentiated implementation strategies for low-income schools. For example, policies encourage parental attendance at meetings and workshops without providing funding for transport, childcare, translation services, or compensation for lost wages. This gap between policy aspiration and material support reinforces existing inequalities by shifting responsibility for engagement onto families who are least able to comply with standardised expectations [Hoadley \(2022\)](#), [Le Grange \(2020\)](#).

From an analytical perspective, examining parental involvement policies through the lens of social reproduction theory strengthens the study's contribution. The findings illustrate how ostensibly progressive policies can function as mechanisms of class reproduction by institutionalising middle-class norms as universal standards of good parenting. This finding aligns with international research indicating that education systems often perpetuate inequality not through explicit exclusion, but via subtle, everyday practices. Such practices serve to normalise and privilege specific forms of cultural capital, thereby reinforcing existing social hierarchies [Reay \(2017\)](#), [Vincent and Ball \(2007\)](#).

The effectiveness of this analysis lies in its ability to connect policy discourse to lived experience and measurable outcomes. Triangulating policy texts, empirical studies, and socio-economic data, the study demonstrates that parental involvement policies are not merely administrative instruments but powerful social technologies that shape participation, recognition, and influence. This strengthens the evidentiary basis for policy critique and underscores the need for more differentiated, context-sensitive frameworks that acknowledge diverse parental capacities and practices.

Overall, the discussion confirms that without explicit attention to class, history, and material conditions, parental involvement policies risk reproducing the very inequalities they seek to address. Recognising this dynamic is essential for reimagining parental engagement as a mechanism for educational equity rather than social reproduction.

## **SOUTH AFRICAN SPECIFICITIES**

The South African context presents unique considerations for parental involvement due to its linguistic diversity, historical inequalities, and socio-economic stratification. Language policies, while officially promoting multilingualism through the Language in Education Policy (1997), continue to privilege English in high-stakes assessments, school communication, and formal reporting systems. Consequently, parents whose home languages are not recognised or supported in schools may experience difficulties in understanding official communications. They may also encounter challenges in completing administrative tasks or interpreting instructions for school-related activities. These barriers can hinder their ability to provide guided support for home-based learning, even when they are highly committed to their children's education.

Apartheid's enduring legacy further shapes these inequities. Former Model C schools, historically serving white and affluent communities, retain significant advantages, including well-established parent networks, active alumni associations, and access to additional financial and material resources [Soudien \(2018\)](#), [Spaull \(2019\)](#). In contrast, many township and rural schools serve predominantly working-class and low-income families. These schools often inherited under-resourced SGBs with limited capacity to implement inclusive governance or community outreach. These structural disparities are compounded by socio-spatial inequalities that continue to affect transport accessibility, school infrastructure, and the digital connectivity necessary for parental engagement [Motala et al. \(2009\)](#), [Department of Basic Education \(2021\)](#).

Recent crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, exposed the vulnerabilities inherent in policies that assume stable home environments and sufficient parental capacity. The DBE's distribution of learning packs, while well-intentioned, often lacked instructions in local languages and assumed that parents could supervise and facilitate learning at home [Department of Basic Education \(2021\)](#), [Spaull and Kotze \(2023\)](#). Families who experience economic constraints, limited literacy, or technological barriers are less able to participate effectively in school activities. This underscores how existing parental involvement policies can inadvertently reproduce educational inequities.

Collectively, these South African-specific factors underscore the necessity of contextualising parental involvement policies within local socio-historical realities. This study accounts for linguistic diversity, historical advantages, and socio-economic constraints in its analysis. It demonstrates that standardised expectations for parental engagement, if not adapted, risk privileging middle-class households while marginalising working-class and low-income families. Recognising these particularities enhances the

study's analytical depth, allowing for policy recommendations that are equitable, linguistically inclusive, and sensitive to structural constraints.

## CONTRADICTIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Despite the structural challenges highlighted above, South Africa's parental involvement policy framework contains latent opportunities to promote equity and inclusive participation. The (SASA, 1996) explicitly recognises the value of diverse family structures and community resources, signalling a policy intent to broaden the scope of parental engagement beyond conventional, middle-class norms. However, the translation of this inclusive rhetoric into practice remains uneven, reflecting gaps in funding, implementation capacity, and contextual adaptation.

Recent initiatives illustrate both progress and limitations. For example, the Department of Basic Education's Parental Support Centres [Department of Basic Education \(2022\)](#) offer free workshops aimed at enhancing parents' ability to support homework and navigate digital learning platforms. Such programmes embody an asset-based approach, leveraging parents' existing knowledge and community resources rather than solely focusing on deficit-based interventions. However, evaluations indicate that these centres are underfunded and often inaccessible to parents in rural and peri-urban areas, limiting their reach and effectiveness (Motala & Pampallis, 2021, [Spaull and Kotze \(2023\)](#)).

This tension between policy intent and practical implementation underscores the necessity of contextualised reforms. Policies must be adapted to local socio-economic, linguistic, and infrastructural realities to prevent the inadvertent reproduction of inequities. Practical reforms could involve modifying rigid school meeting schedules to create flexible engagement windows. For example, schools could offer sessions in the evenings or on weekends. This approach would better accommodate parents who work in informal or shift-based employment, enabling more meaningful participation in school activities.

Communication strategies could expand beyond written notices and digital platforms to incorporate radio broadcasts, SMS messaging, or multilingual guidance materials for non-English-speaking communities [Heugh \(2020\)](#), Msimang, 2021). Additionally, schools could formally recognise diverse forms of parental participation. This might include involvement in community gardens, informal mentoring, or providing logistical support. Recognising these contributions would valorise local knowledge and household practices that are often overlooked or invisible within formal evaluative frameworks [Lareau \(2015\)](#), [Hoadley \(2022\)](#).

Highlighting these contradictions and opportunities, the study provides an evidence-based rationale for policy reform. It demonstrates that equity-oriented parental engagement is achievable when policies shift from prescriptive, middle-class-centric expectations toward flexible, context-sensitive frameworks. This approach enhances accessibility and promotes inclusion by accommodating diverse parental circumstances. The approach also strengthens the potential for meaningful collaboration between schools and families. This type of collaboration can improve learner outcomes and contribute to more equitable educational trajectories.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that South African parental involvement policies are framed in the language of inclusion and partnership. However, in practice, these policies systematically privilege middle-class families. They do so by valuing forms of engagement that align with middle-class cultural capital, available time, and material resources. Several mechanisms embedded within parental involvement policies create structural barriers for working-class and low-income parents. Rigid meeting schedules often conflict with informal or shift-based employment. Communication in English and reliance on digital platforms disadvantage parents with limited language proficiency or technological access. Financial expectations, such as fundraising contributions, further constrain participation. Collectively, these factors marginalise these parents and render their contributions largely invisible within institutional frameworks. Historical inequities stemming from apartheid-era spatial planning and unequal resource distribution continue to shape educational opportunities in South Africa. These longstanding disparities are compounded by contemporary challenges, including the COVID-19 pandemic, which have disproportionately affected under-resourced schools and families. Collectively, these factors exacerbate inequalities, producing measurable differences in learner outcomes, school satisfaction, perceptions of safety, and long-term social mobility [Spaull and Kotze \(2023\)](#), [Van der Berg and Gustafsson \(2022\)](#).

Triangulating evidence across policy documents, empirical research, and government reports, this study highlights the ways in which existing frameworks can inadvertently reproduce social stratification rather than mitigate it. For example, participation norms aligned with middle-class practices, such as "concerted cultivation," are institutionally recognised and rewarded. These practices include attending school meetings, volunteering, and effectively navigating digital platforms. In contrast, "natural growth" approaches, which are more common in working-class households, are frequently misinterpreted by schools as passivity or a lack of commitment [Lareau \(2015\)](#), [Vincent and Ball \(2007\)](#). These findings support the theoretical claims of [Bourdieu \(1986\)](#) and [Reay \(2017\)](#) that educational institutions function as active agents of social reproduction. Policy design and implementation often embody implicit assumptions regarding families' capacities and the legitimacy of their participation. These assumptions shape which forms of parental involvement are recognised, valued, and rewarded within schools.

The study also identifies opportunities to redress these inequities. Flexible engagement models, including evening or weekend sessions, opportunities for virtual participation, and the provision of childcare, can better accommodate parents who are constrained by irregular employment or caregiving responsibilities. Multilingual and culturally responsive communication strategies have the potential to acknowledge linguistic diversity and validate local forms of knowledge. Targeted resource redistribution, such as providing stipends for parental participation and expanding access to digital tools, can help mitigate economic barriers that limit engagement. Additionally, professional development for educators in asset-based partnership approaches can foster meaningful collaboration and improve institutional responsiveness to diverse family capacities [Hoadley \(2022\)](#), [Department of Basic Education \(2022\)](#).

In effect, implementing these reforms could transform parental involvement policies from instruments of social reproduction into mechanisms for equity, enhancing both participation and educational outcomes. This aligns with South Africa's commitments under Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which emphasises inclusive and equitable quality education for all learners. Prioritising structural responsiveness and acknowledging the diversity of household strategies, policies can more effectively support intergenerational social mobility. These approaches also have the potential to strengthen partnerships between schools and communities and to contribute to the development of a more just and equitable education system.

In conclusion, this study underscores the critical importance of critically examining policy design, recognising socio-economic and cultural heterogeneity, and adopting contextually responsive strategies. In the absence of these reforms, parental involvement policies may continue to perpetuate existing educational inequities instead of mitigating them.

This analysis underscores the urgent need for educational policies that are evidence informed, inclusive, and transformative, particularly considering findings that demonstrate how South African education continues to be shaped by the enduring interplay of historical inequality, post-apartheid policy reform, and persistent socio-economic disparities. From a decolonial perspective, these conditions demand a reorientation of parental involvement policies away from deficit based and Eurocentric norms toward approaches that recognise indigenous knowledge systems, community-based practices, and diverse familial forms of participation. Aligning parental engagement with decolonial principles is therefore essential to disrupting inherited power relations, valuing historically marginalised forms of knowledge and care, and advancing more equitable and socially just educational futures.

Although legislative frameworks promote equity, inclusion, and democratic participation, educational outcomes remain deeply stratified along lines of social class, geographic location, and language. The structural legacy of apartheid continues to influence patterns of school resourcing, parental engagement, and learner achievement, with particularly pronounced effects in township and rural schools. These longstanding inequities are further compounded by contemporary challenges, including poverty, unemployment, and digital exclusion, which place sustained pressure on families and educational institutions. Within this context, education policy operates simultaneously as a mechanism for redress and, in practice, as a conduit through which inequality may be reproduced, reinforcing the imperative for context responsive, inclusive, and socially just educational reform.

## LIMITATIONS

This study acknowledges several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the reliance on secondary data sources constrains the analysis to previously published studies, policy documents, and government reports. These sources offer valuable insights into parental involvement and educational equity. However, they may underrepresent the experiences of parents living in rural, peri-urban, or informal settlement contexts. In these areas, engagement practices and structural constraints often differ significantly from those in more resourced settings. Consequently, some of the nuances of localised strategies and barriers may not be fully captured [Spaull and Kotze \(2023\)](#), [Department of Basic Education \(2022\)](#).

Second, there is a gap between the written policy and its implementation at the school level. Although this review synthesises national and provincial policy frameworks, including the South African Schools Act (1996) and the 2021 National Parental Involvement Framework, these documents may not fully capture the realities experienced by schools or parents across all regions. Variations in School Governing Body capacity, school resourcing, and local administrative practices can produce uneven policy enactment, meaning that the findings may overstate or understate the effectiveness of policy prescriptions in practice [Motala and Pampallis \(2021\)](#).

Third, although this study primarily foregrounds socio-economic class, it does not fully explore intersectional factors such as race, gender, disability, or linguistic background. South African educational inequities are profoundly shaped by these intersecting axes, which can compound or mitigate the effects of class on parental engagement and learner outcomes [Heugh \(2020\)](#), [Soudien \(2018\)](#). Consequently, the analysis may not capture the full complexity of marginalisation experienced by households navigating multiple forms of disadvantage.

Fourth, the temporal scope of the review is limited. While the study emphasises literature and policy developments from 2018 to 2023 to account for post-pandemic dynamics, more recent initiatives, including provincial guidelines or emerging digital engagement programmes post-2023, are not included. These developments may introduce new strategies or challenges that could alter patterns of parental involvement and policy efficacy.

Despite these limitations, the study's methodological approach, which integrates triangulation across multiple sources, thematic analysis, and critical synthesis, strengthens both the credibility and the analytical rigor of its findings. The study critically examines policy frameworks in conjunction with empirical and quantitative evidence. This approach enables the generation of meaningful insights into structural inequities in parental engagement. It also allows for the identification of actionable recommendations to guide policy reform. Future research should seek to address these limitations by incorporating primary data collection. Methods such as interviews or focus groups with parents across diverse socio-economic backgrounds would capture a wider range of experiences and perspectives. Additionally, longitudinal studies that track the effects of policy implementation over time would provide insights into changes in parental engagement and educational outcomes. These approaches would offer a richer contextual understanding and further strengthen the validity of the study's conclusions Van der Berg and Gustafsson (2022), Hoadley (2022).

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