

The Role of Parents in Addressing the Discipline Problems of Children at School

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Keywords:	Abstract
discipline problems; family life; legal framework; parental involvement; school environment	<p>The study reported in this article addressed a gap in research on the role of parents in managing their children’s discipline problems in South African schools. Through a quantitative research approach, data were collected by means of questionnaires from 212 parents in the North West province and 236 parents in Mpumalanga province. The findings revealed shifting gender norms, with increased male participation in addressing children’s disciplinary matters. Key factors influencing parental involvement were age, the number of children parents had, school level, school type, and demographics. The study emphasised the importance of considering these factors for effective strategies to enhance parental participation in children’s disciplinary matters. This research contributes to the field of education by providing a legal framework and insight into the role of parents in addressing their children’s school discipline problems. The following recommendations are made: holding awareness campaigns that challenge gender stereotypes; parenting programmes targeting fathers; tailored initiatives for specific age groups; flexible engagement strategies for parents with multiple children; targeted programmes for secondary and public schools; sharing best practices; context-specific interventions; and training sessions for school governing body members to enhance their capacity and facilitate knowledge sharing among parents.</p>

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

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Learner misconduct remains a pressing and persistent challenge within the landscape of South African public schools (Monare, 2013; Zulu & Wolhuter, 2013). Learner misconduct not only disrupts the learning environment but is also a barrier to the effective operation of educational institutions. In response to this ongoing concern, there is a growing acknowledgment of parents' instrumental role in ensuring proper discipline within the school setting. The legal framework governing education in South Africa – articulated through the Constitution of South Africa (1996) (hereafter the Constitution) and the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 (hereafter the Schools Act) – indicates the responsibilities that parents are expected to bear in assisting schools to address the intricate challenges of learner discipline. These legal provisions emphasise the collaborative nature of the educational enterprise, recognising parents as essential partners in fostering a conducive and disciplined learning environment.

Beyond statutory regulations, common law and case law provide additional layers of guidance on the role of parents in navigating the complex phenomenon of learner discipline in schools. Legal precedents and established norms offer insights into the rights and responsibilities of parents, shedding light on their potential impact on addressing issues related to learner misconduct. Therefore, this legal backdrop establishes a multifaceted framework within which parents are both empowered and obligated to contribute meaningfully to the resolution of disciplinary matters. The research reported in this article sought to contribute to the discourse around learner discipline by delving into the unique perspective of parents. By providing a platform for parents to articulate their experiences, challenges and insights, this research endeavoured to enrich an understanding of the multifaceted dynamics at play in addressing the problem of discipline in South African schools. Through an exploration of parental perspectives, the aim was not only to uncover their role but also to identify potential areas for improvement and collaboration between parents and schools.

As this investigation unfolds, it is imperative to acknowledge the broader societal implications of effective learner discipline. Beyond the immediate educational context, the ability to address and rectify issues related to learner misconduct holds promise for enhancing the overall well-being of South African communities. By fostering a culture of discipline and responsibility within schools, pathways are created for the development of responsible citizens who are not only equipped for academic success but are also prepared to contribute positively to the nation's social fabric.

Problem of The Study

Several South African studies underscore the role of parents in the discipline of their children at school (Bunijevac, 2017; Maluleke, 2014; Meier & Lemmer, 2015; Page, 2016; Sapungan & Sapungan, 2014). Furthermore, some studies reveal that a majority of parents actively participate in school activities (Ntekane, 2018; Adele, 2017), whereas others indicate that parental involvement is hindered by various factors (Ntekane, 2018; St. George, 2010). Moreover, Meier and Lemmer (2015) found that “engaging parents in schooling by providing them with a voice through annual surveys can contribute to the improvement of the quality of teaching and learning.”

The literature review conducted for this study identified a gap in empirical research on the role of parents in addressing disciplinary issues within schools. Accordingly, this research aimed to bridge that gap by contributing to the body of knowledge and proposing strategies to encourage parental involvement in mitigating these problems. South African media continue to report on serious incidents that attest to a lack of discipline in schools, thereby underscoring the need for enhanced parental participation in addressing such issues. For example, one headline asserts, “Unruly pupils must be tackled.” It reports that upon entering school premises, learners exhibit violent and aggressive behavior—a manifestation attributed to parents failing to fulfill their role in their children's education (Sowetanlive, 2018).

The above academic and real-world problems necessitated a study on the role of parents in addressing the discipline problem of their children at school. Therefore, in this study, the research

question was as follows: What do parents see as their role in addressing the discipline problems of their children when at school? This research question is answered in section 6 of this article.

Research's State of the Art

This section presents the literature review on the role of parents in addressing the discipline problem of their children at school. It focuses on two types of literature: the legal and policy framework, and academic literature.

A legal and policy framework for the role of parents in addressing their children's discipline problems at school

The preamble of the Schools Act affirms the rights of parents to be actively involved in the education of their children. One of the key responsibilities entrusted to parents is the discipline of learners, which is vital for fostering a structured and conducive learning environment. Section 8(1) of the Schools Act mandates that parents be consulted during the formulation of the school's code of conduct for learners, thereby ensuring that their perspectives are incorporated into establishing a disciplined educational setting. Furthermore, section 8(6) requires that parents be given the opportunity to accompany their children during disciplinary proceedings, reinforcing their role in the process. In addition, section 9(4) provides that parents of learners who have been expelled may appeal the decision of the Head of Department through the Member of the Executive Council within 14 days of receiving the expulsion notice, should they be dissatisfied with the disciplinary process. Collectively, these provisions underscore the integral role of parental involvement in addressing disciplinary issues in schools. Based on these legal principles, South Africa demonstrably promotes parental participation in the disciplinary proceedings of their children.

Importance of parental involvement in learner discipline

The involvement of parents in the creation of a disciplined school environment is needed. Masingi (2017) states that "both learners and teachers mentioned parental involvement as the most effective strategy to curb indiscipline". Furthermore, Cole (2017) and Henderson & Mapp (2002) are of the opinion that active parental involvement plays a significant role in ensuring learner discipline and improving their academic performance. If parents do not provide support, minimal progress would be made regarding discipline. It is imperative for parents to be accountable and lead the way in disciplining their children. This means that parental involvement can contribute positively to the creation of a disciplined school environment.

Parental perspectives on learner discipline

A study conducted in Michigan on parents' perspectives of school discipline revealed that some parents considered school discipline as being negative when it is applied excessively (Bell, 2018). Parents' perceptions on whether discipline is progressive or not are important. Parents should be given a chance to give feedback and participate in the discourse about how effective discipline can be implemented in schools.

In loco parentis role in learner discipline

Parents—or those acting in *loco parentis*—play a pivotal role in the holistic development of children that extends beyond mere physical care. According to Nussbaum (2011), they are responsible for leading, guiding, equipping, training, and nurturing the potential of young people in order to cultivate active and responsible citizenship. This process necessitates a balanced approach to discipline—not in a rigid, behavioristic sense, but through compassionate and supportive guidance. The primary objective is to prepare children to willingly embrace parental guidance when confronted with ethical and moral decisions. Moreover, within educational settings, teachers frequently assume

an *in loco parentis* role, further guiding and equipping learners to develop both academically and morally.

Parental support for learner discipline

Parental support is crucial to ensuring that their children do not behave badly at school. In a study conducted by (Moloi, 2012), it was found that teachers deemed parental support as vital in schools. Furthermore, Jinot (2018) found that parents who do not provide effective parental discipline in support of schools add to a lack of discipline in schools. In addition, Obadire & sinthumule (2021) mentioned that “educators believe that some of the learners come from child-headed families, where there is inadequate parental care”. Moreover, in a study conducted by (Bunijevac, 2017), it was found that “teachers believe parents do not support the school and do not discipline children when there has been a problem at school”. Therefore, for schools to be conducive to teaching and learning, there is a need for effective support from parents.

Family dysfunctionality and poor parenting affect learner discipline

Family dysfunction has been identified as a contributing factor to the lack of discipline observed among learners in schools. Jinot (2018) reported that participants noted learners from dysfunctional family environments often lack exposure to character education, which in turn contributes to diminished discipline within schools. Moreover, research indicates that certain disruptive behaviors in educational settings may be attributable to ineffective parenting practices. For instance, Ghazi et al. (2013) found that inconsistent parenting—as well as overprotective and uncaring approaches—can precipitate disruptive conduct among learners. These findings suggest that some parents fail to attend school events when invited, and among those who do participate, a tendency to defend their children against allegations of misconduct further exacerbates the issue.

The role of social skills in learner discipline

The teaching of social skills also plays a role in the creation of a disciplined school environment. Some parents are sensitive to the teaching of social skills in schools. They attack schools for teaching their children sensitive topics. A study conducted by Sibanda (2018) showed that “some parents do not appreciate the value of social skills because of the bias they have towards academic subjects. As a result, they discourage their children to take part in club activities”. The role of parents in encouraging their children to attend school activities that would develop their social skills can improve the standard of learner discipline in schools.

The influence of gender on parental involvement in learner discipline

Parental involvement in learner discipline varies considerably and should not be determined solely by gender. Both mothers and fathers ought to be actively engaged in their children’s educational and disciplinary processes. In this context, Lumadi (2019) asserts that “the role of both (male and female) parents is to ensure that learner discipline is improved and to curtail disruptive behaviour by reinforcing disciplinary intervention programmes at schools. Both parents should monitor, supervise and offer guidance to their children to avoid disruptive behaviour in schools.”

Smith et al. (2005) observed that mothers tend to employ physical punishment more frequently than fathers. They further noted that “given mothers’ greater caretaking roles, some researchers have suggested that fathers are actually more physically punitive relative to the time they spend with their children.” Moreover, Carvalho et al. (2017) indicated that “the involvement of fathers in the disciplinary practices of children is increasing, and the stereotype of gender, in which the mother is the primary caregiver of the children, is being left behind, which may partly be due to the greater inclusion of women in the labour market.”

The influence of age on parental involvement in learner discipline

Smith et al. (2005) made a notable observation: younger parents tend to employ physical punishment more frequently compared to their older counterparts. Lang & Diener (2020) echo this sentiment. They emphasise that parental age is a significant characteristic that influences learner discipline. It is evident that the age of parents plays a pivotal role in shaping disciplinary practices within the realm of parenting.

The influence of the number of children on parental approach to learner discipline

The number of children in a family can significantly influence parental approaches to learner discipline. One essential responsibility of parents is to monitor their children's behavior both at home and at school. Straus (2010) highlights that "with more children, parents have less time and energy to monitor, explain, and reason with each child." Consequently, parents with fewer children may find it easier to provide individualized time and attention. Carvalho et al. (2017) further observe that family size impacts parental disciplinary practices. In larger families, parents may face considerable time management challenges, as coordinating school-related activities for multiple children can be demanding. Thus, family size emerges as a critical factor in shaping parental strategies for learner discipline, influencing both the quality and individualized nature of the attention each child receives during their upbringing.

The trend of parental involvement in learner discipline across different school levels

The statement that "misconduct is more common amongst secondary school learners than in primary school learners", as mentioned by (Lekganyane, 2011), highlights an observed trend in learner discipline across different educational levels. Secondary schools often deal with a broader range of social issues, including bullying, substance abuse and relationship complexities. The diverse nature of these issues may contribute to an overall higher prevalence of learner misconduct.

The state of parental participation in learner discipline based on school type

Parental participation in their children's behaviour may vary according to the type of school their children attend. In a study conducted by (Breedt et al., 2021), in which parents of independent school learners were participants, one parent said that the issue of learner discipline in independent schools had become a problem because of large class sizes. Manamela (2015) conducted a study in public schools and found that the participation of parents in learner disciplinary matters was problematic. These studies highlight the multifaceted nature of issues related to learner discipline, parental participation, and the unique challenges that may exist in different types of schools.

Parental involvement in learner discipline across various school quintiles

It is imperative to recognize the critical role of parental engagement across all school quintiles to foster effective learning environments. Miller and Venketsamy (2022) emphasize that collaborative relationships between parents and educational institutions are fundamental to academic success. In South Africa, no-fee schools—classified under quintiles 1–3 and predominantly located in rural areas and townships—are legally prohibited from imposing compulsory fees on parents, as stipulated by Section 43 of the *National Norms and Standards for School Funding* (Department of Education, 2006). In contrast, fee-paying institutions (classified as quintiles 4–5 and typically situated in urban centers) grant parents the authority to institute compulsory school fees through formal governance structures.

However, disparities in parental involvement persist. Dlamini's (2022) research revealed limited cooperation from parents in no-fee schools regarding learner discipline, a challenge less prevalent in fee-paying schools. Matsebele (2020) observes that former Model C schools experience minimal disciplinary challenges, attributing this phenomenon to their SGBs' capacity to create specialized

support positions. These positions reduce teacher-learner ratios, thereby enhancing educators' ability to maintain classroom discipline.

The South African quintile system thus underscores systemic inequities in parental participation and behavioral management. Addressing these disparities necessitates a holistic strategy involving policy reform, equitable resource distribution, and strategic stakeholder collaboration to ensure consistent educational quality across all quintiles.

Participation of the SGB parent component in their children's disciplinary proceedings

Parent members of SGBs should have children who attend the same school. Section 23 of the Schools Act provides that the parent component of the SGB should comprise parents of a child at the school. The inclusion of parent members is grounded in the belief that they have a vested interest in the school's success and are directly impacted by the policies and decisions made by the SGB. The fact that section 8(6) of the Schools Act requires parents to accompany their children to disciplinary proceedings and section 23 of the Act requires parents to be part of the SGB show that parents and schools are partners in the education of children. Section 16(2) of the Schools Act states that "a governing body stands in a position of trust towards the school". This means that SGB members, including the parent component, should be trusted with maintaining learner discipline in the school. This may also include being trusted with participation in their children's disciplinary proceedings.

Theoretical framework on role of parents in addressing the discipline problem of their children at school

This study was underpinned by American psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems (ecosystemic) theory (Bronfenbrenner 1979; 1994). The ecological systems model was developed by Bronfenbrenner in the 1970s. In this theory, Bronfenbrenner proposes five levels or spheres of influence in a child's development, starting from the closest level to the most distant level: the *microsystem*, *mesosystem*, *exosystem*, *macrosystem* and *chronosystem* (Bronfenbrenner 1979; 1994). This article focuses only on the mesosystem sphere to explore the role of parents in addressing the discipline problems of their children at school. It is a system of interrelationships or linkages between "processes taking place between two or more settings containing the developing person" (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). For this study, it is a system of interrelationships between the parent and the school. Therefore, the role that is played by the family (parents) in attending to their children's discipline problems at school may influence how the child behaves at school and vice versa. An instrument based on the conceptual-theoretical framework outlined above was developed to determine what parents saw as their role in addressing the discipline problems of their children at school. The remainder of this paper consists of a report on this investigation, the findings and the recommendations flowing from them.

Gap Study & Objective

The academic and real-world problems mentioned in the problem of the study and the gap in the literature review (research's state of the art) necessitated a study on the role of parents in addressing the discipline problem of their children at school. Therefore, in this study, the research question was as follows: What do parents see as their role in addressing the discipline problems of their children when at school? This research question is answered in the results section of this article.

METHOD

Type and Design

An empirical investigation was conducted to obtain parents' perspectives on their role in addressing the discipline problem of their children at school. The study followed a survey (quantitative) research approach. A self-constructed questionnaire was used to collect the data. A questionnaire is a

data collection technique that requires respondents to answer questions (Fikriah & Rukmana, 2022). Respondents reacted to statements on a Likert-type scale with the following categories: “never”, “once in a while”, “about half of the time”, and “always”. The statements were derived from the theoretical framework of this research project, as outlined above. Respondents were also asked to provide some biographical details.

Data and Data Sources

Three of the authors of this paper, as well as a researcher who has since retired, compiled the questionnaire. The questionnaire was checked for validity by independent experts – i.e., two researchers who joined the project at a later stage and were therefore not involved in the original drafting of the questionnaire, as well as a statistician from the university’s statistical advisory service (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). As the relevant section of the questionnaire was not used as a subscale, no factor analysis was performed on the data that emerged from the questionnaire.

Data Collection Technique

Two provinces of South Africa were selected as research sites, namely the North West and Mpumalanga provinces. A purposive sampling (non-probability) strategy was used to select different research sites and parents. Schools were targeted based on their availability. In each province, the research sites included one former Model C primary school (which was either quintile 4 or 5), one former Model C high school (which was either quintile 4 or 5), one township primary school (which was either quintile 2 or 3), one township high school (which was either quintile 2 or 3), one former homeland primary school (which was either quintile 1, 2 or 3), one former homeland high school (which was either quintile 1, 2 or 3), one farm primary school (which was either quintile 1, 2 or 3), and one farm high school (which was either quintile 1, 2 or 3). The questionnaires were distributed to all parents of the (8) schools in each province. After ethical clearance was obtained from the university and written permission was granted by the Department of Basic Education, schools and parents, data collection started.

Data Analysis

Two hundred and twelve (212) parents from the North West province and 236 parents from Mpumalanga province participated. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyse the data. It was decided beforehand that responses lacking more than 10% of the 90 statements (apart from the biographical information) would be removed from the database. This left a total of 402 of the original 448 questionnaires in the database. In N=70 cases, respondents did not closely follow the guidelines provided for completing some specific questionnaire items. The resulting incorrect responses were eliminated from the database. The tables in the next section provide descriptive information. The responses from respondents are presented in both absolute numbers and percentages. Starting with Table 2, biographical data are introduced as independent variables. Based on this data, respondents are categorized into subgroups (e.g., male/female, SGB member/non-member). A Chi-square test was conducted to identify significant differences between these subgroups. The results of these tests are detailed in Tables 2 to 9.

RESULTS

This section discusses the results gleaned from the acceptably completed questionnaires.

The Role of Parents in Addressing the Discipline Problems of Their Children at School

Table 1 shows the descriptive findings (i.e., frequencies and frequency percentages) of the questionnaire items concerning the role of parents in addressing the discipline problems of their children at school.

Participation of Parents in Disciplinary Proceedings of Their Children

Out of the 394 parents who responded to the question on participation of parents in disciplinary proceedings, 46% (n=180) acknowledged their active involvement in disciplinary proceedings for their children's behaviour, and 49% (n=193) indicated that they had never participated in such proceedings. A minor portion, constituting 5% of the respondents (n=21), marked "not applicable" in their questionnaires, suggesting a range of parental engagement levels in addressing disciplinary matters related to their children's behaviour.

The Impact of Parent Participation in Disciplinary Proceedings of Their Children

Among the 177 parents who addressed the impact of their participation in disciplinary proceedings on their children's behaviour, a vast majority, constituting 95% (n=168), reported a noticeable improvement in their children's behaviour. In contrast, 5% of the respondents (n=9) stated that they had not observed any positive changes in their children's behaviour because of their (the parents') involvement in disciplinary proceedings.

Response of Parents to School Invitations Regarding Disciplinary Matters

(Table 1) among the 396 parents who responded to the question about their attendance when invited to school events, a significant majority, totalling 85% (n=336), affirmed that they consistently attended such invitations. Conversely, 12% of respondents (n=49) indicated that they did not always attend school events when invited, while 3% (n=11) marked "not applicable". In the context of attending school even without invitations, of the 393 parents responding to this question, 37% (n=147) conveyed that they proactively attended school events without formal invitations. However, a majority, comprising 61% (n=239), mentioned that they refrained from attending such school events unless specifically invited. A minor proportion, 2% (n=7), noted "not applicable" in response to this question.

Table 1. Frequencies and frequency percentages of the questionnaire items

Statements	Yes		No		Not Applicable		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
I have participated in a disciplinary proceeding regarding the behaviour of my child.	180	46%	193	49%	21	5%	394	100%
If your response in 6.1 is "yes", does this mean that your participation in your child's disciplinary procedures has improved your child's behaviour at school?	168	95%	9	5%	0	0%	177	100%
I always go to school when I am invited.	336	85%	49	12%	11	3%	396	100%
I go to school even when I am not invited.	147	37%	239	61%	7	2%	393	100%

Parents' Participation Against the Background of Biographical Details

This section provides and discusses the frequencies and frequency percentages of parents' participation in disciplinary proceedings of their children against the background of their biographical details and the significant differences (after applying the chi-square test). The following tables provide biographical information of respondents as well as the results of the chi-square test.

Participation of Parents in Disciplinary Proceedings Per Gender

In this study, 81 male parents and 285 female parents responded to the question regarding their participation in their children's disciplinary proceedings. Table 2 shows that male and female respondents did not differ significantly in their reactions to the statement "I have participated in a disciplinary proceeding regarding the behaviour of my child" ($p > 0.05$).

Table 2. Participation in disciplinary proceeding and gender

Gender	I have participated in a disciplinary proceeding regarding the behaviour of my child.						Chi-square		
	Responses								
	yes		no		total		Chi ²	df	Sig.
	N	%	N	%	N	%			
male	38	47%	43	53%	81	100%			
female	138	48%	147	52%	285	100%	0.06	1	0.81
Total	176	48%	190	52%	366	100%			

Participation of Parents in Disciplinary Proceedings Per Age Category

Table 3 shows that 311 parents responded to a question regarding age. Of the seven parents aged 60+ years, five parents (71%) participated in disciplinary proceedings of their children. Furthermore, of the 38 parents aged 18–20 years, 24 parents (63%) participated in disciplinary proceedings of their children. This means that parents in the age group of 60+ and 18–20 years participated in disciplinary proceedings significantly more than parents who were in other age groups. Furthermore, there was a significant difference in the distribution of responses to the statement "I have participated in a disciplinary proceeding regarding the behaviour of my child" received from parents in the age group 40–49 years. In this age category, a significant majority indicated "no".

Table 3. Participation in disciplinary proceeding and age category

Age category	I have participated in a disciplinary proceeding regarding the behaviour of my child.								
	Responses						Chi-square		

							Chi ²	df	Sig.
	yes		no		total				
	N	%	N	%	N	%			
18–20	24	63%	14	37%	38	100%			
21–29	9	45%	11	55%	20	100%			
30–39	60	54%	52	46%	112	100%			
40–49	36	36%	64	64%	100	100%	13.56	5	0.02
50–59	20	59%	14	41%	34	100%			
60+	5	71%	2	29%	7	100%			
Total	154	50%	157	50%	311	100%			

Participation of Parents in Disciplinary Proceedings Per Number of Children

In this study, 358 parents answered the question about the number of children they had (see Table 4). There was no significant difference in the distribution of responses to the statement “I have participated in a disciplinary proceeding regarding the behaviour of my child” with regard to number of children ($p>0.05$).

Table 4. Participation in disciplinary proceeding and number of children

I have participated in a disciplinary proceeding regarding the behaviour of my child.									
Number of children	Responses						Chi-square		
	yes		no		total		Chi ²	df	Sig.
	N	%	N	%	N	%			
1	27	47%	31	53%	58	100%			
2	47	46%	56	54%	103	100%			
3	48	52%	44	48%	92	100%			
4	32	51%	31	49%	63	100%	1.35	5	0.93
5	14	44%	18	56%	32	100%			
6	5	50%	5	50%	10	100%			
Total	173	48%	185	52%	358	100%			

Participation of Parents in Disciplinary Proceedings Per School Level

A total of 362 parents responded to the question on the participation of parents in disciplinary proceedings per school level attended by their children (see Table 5). There was no significant difference in the distribution of responses to the statement "I have participated in a disciplinary proceeding regarding the behaviour of my child" regarding school level ($p>0.05$).

Table 5. Participation in disciplinary proceeding and school level

I have participated in a disciplinary proceeding regarding the behaviour of my child.									
School level	Responses						Chi-square		
	yes		no		total		Chi ²	df	Sig.
	N	%	N	%	N	%			
primary school	69	46%	80	54%	149	100%	0.24	2	0.89
secondary school	42	49%	43	51%	85	100%			
Primary and secondary schools	62	48%	66	52%	128	100%			
Total	173	48%	189	52%	362	100%			

Participation of Parents in Disciplinary Proceedings Per School Type

Table 6 shows the division of the 362 parents who responded to an item on the participation of parents in disciplinary proceedings in three school types. Considering the school type, there was no significant difference in the distribution of responses to the statement "I have participated in a disciplinary proceeding regarding the behaviour of my child" ($p>0.05$).

Table 6. Participation in disciplinary proceeding and school type

I have participated in a disciplinary proceeding regarding the behaviour of my child.									
School type	Responses						Chi-square		
	yes		no		total		Chi ²	df	Sig.
	N	%	N	%	N	%			
public	159	47%	176	53%	335	100%	2.52	2	0.28
independent	10	53%	9	47%	19	100%			
home schooling	6	75%	2	25%	8	100%			

Total	175	48%	187	52%	362	100%
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Participation of Parents in Disciplinary Proceedings Per School Quintile

Table 7 shows that 312 parents responded to a question on the school quintile of their children. There was no significant difference in the distribution of responses received from parent participants whose children attended schools in different quintiles ($p > 0.05$).

Table 7. Participation in disciplinary proceeding and school quintile

I have participated in a disciplinary proceeding regarding the behaviour of my child.									
School quintile	Responses						Chi-square		
	yes		no		total		Chi ²	df	Sig.
	N	%	N	%	N	%			
1	20	42%	28	58%	48	100%	7.74	4	0.10
2	57	58%	42	42%	99	100%			
3	34	54%	29	46%	63	100%			
4	13	39%	20	61%	33	100%			
5	28	41%	41	59%	69	100%			
Total	152	49%	160	51%	312	100%			

Participation of Parents in Disciplinary Proceedings Per School Demographics

Table 8 presents the data of 360 parents who responded to the item on school demographics. Regarding the participation of parents of learners who attended school in town, a significant smaller number of parents had participated in disciplinary proceedings than parents with children in other school types ($p < 0.05$).

Table 8. Participation in disciplinary proceeding and school demographics

I have participated in a disciplinary proceeding regarding the behaviour of my child.									
School type	Responses						Chi-square		
	yes		no		total		Chi ²	df	Sig.
	N	%	N	%	N	%			
Town	17	27%	47	73%	64	100%	15.94	3	0.00
Township	57	49%	59	51%	116	100%			

Homeland	72	55%	58	45%	130	100%
Farm	28	56%	22	44%	50	100%
Total	174	48%	186	52%	360	100%

Participation of Parents in Disciplinary Proceedings Per Role as SGB Member

Of the 364 parents who responded to the questions on whether they were members of the SGB or not (see Table 9), 25 parents (7%) were members of the SGB. Of the 25 parents who stated that they were members of SGBs, 15 (60%) indicated that they had participated in a disciplinary proceeding regarding the behaviour of their children. The differences between SGB members and non-members were not significant ($p>0.05$).

Table 9. Participation in disciplinary proceeding and membership of SGB

Are you a member of the school governing body?	I have participated in a disciplinary proceeding regarding the behaviour of my child.						Chi-square		
	Responses								
	yes		no		total		Chi ²	df	Sig.
	N	%	N	%	N	%			
Yes	15	60%	10	40%	25	100%			
No	160	47%	179	53%	339	100%	1.53	1	0.22
Total	175	48%	189	52%	364	100%			

DISCUSSIONS

In this section, the research question “What do parents see as their role in addressing discipline problems of their children when at school?” is answered based on the empirical investigation and against the background of the conceptual and theoretical framework. Considering what has been outlined by Jinot (2018) on the correlation between inadequate parental discipline and the lack of discipline within school environments, it becomes imperative to emphasise the important role parents play in addressing and mitigating disciplinary issues concerning their children in schools. This section delves into the critical importance of parental involvement and effective discipline strategies to foster a conducive learning environment and promote positive behaviour in schools.

Inadequate Parental Involvement in Their Children’s Disciplinary Proceedings

The indication from just over half of the parents in this study that they had never been involved in their children’s school disciplinary proceedings raises the question (apart from the possibility that the respondents gave socially desirable answers) whether this was because of their children being well-behaved or whether parents had overlooked section 8(6) of the Schools Act. This legislative provision mandates that parents should have the opportunity to attend disciplinary proceedings, affording both parents a role in addressing learner discipline problems. Lumadi (2019) reinforces this perspective, asserting that both male and female parents play a crucial role in enhancing learner discipline and

curbing disruptive behaviour through the reinforcement of disciplinary intervention programmes at schools. Consequently, there is a need to enhance parental participation in addressing their children's discipline problems within the school setting.

Positive Impact of Parental Involvement on Improving Their Children's Behaviour

The overwhelming majority of parents (95%) who had participated in a disciplinary proceeding and reported a noticeable improvement in their children's behaviour is a promising sign for fostering discipline in schools. This study not only highlights the positive change observed but also a significant perception of heightened efficacy of parental participation, aligning with established research emphasising the substantial impact of parental involvement on child development. Active parental engagement consistently correlates with behavioural issues and improved academic performance among children (Cole, 2017). These findings resonate with well-established literature that emphasises the influential role of parents in shaping their children's behaviour and overall wellbeing.

Parents' Positive Response to School Invitations

The fact that a substantial majority of parents (85%) consistently responded to invitations to disciplinary proceedings offers valuable insights into the diverse degrees of parental engagement in school events, whether through formal invitations or voluntary participation. This finding aligns with existing research that emphasises the importance of parental involvement in school-related activities (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Henderson & Mapp (2002) argue that parents who actively engage in school events, including disciplinary proceedings, contribute significantly to the overall success and wellbeing of their children. The observed response rate in this study thus resonates with the broader literature, underlining the critical role that parental engagement plays in fostering a collaborative and supportive educational environment.

Parents' Reluctance to Visit Their Children's Schools Without Formal Invitations

According to research conducted by Durišić and Bunijevac (2017), teachers experience a lack of discipline and parental involvement in school-related issues. This sentiment was echoed in the present study in that only 37% of parents attended school events without formal invitations, indicating a reluctance among many parents to actively engage with their children's behaviour and academic performance unless prompted by the school. In essence, most parents (61%) did not take the initiative to participate in their children's school affairs unless specifically invited by teachers to do so.

Males and Females Collaborate Towards a Disciplined School Environment

Despite a marginal (not significant) one per cent difference in participation between males and females, this finding aligns with the evolving societal trend described by Carvalho et al. (2017) which indicates a departure from traditional gender stereotypes where mothers were considered the primary caregivers. The study suggests a growing shift towards shared parental responsibility to address learner discipline problems. This shift corresponds with the broader societal changes documented by Carvalho et al. (2017) that reflect a move towards a more equitable distribution of parenting roles and responsibilities. As contemporary research acknowledges the evolving dynamics of parental involvement (Carvalho et al., 2017), the observed marginal difference in participation between genders supports the notion of a progressive shift in shared responsibilities in the context of addressing learner discipline issues.

Age Demographics of Parents Shape Disciplinary Interaction Dynamics in Schools

Smith et al. (2005) mention that discipline can also be influenced by the age of parents. The results of this study indicate a noteworthy trend in parental involvement in disciplinary proceedings; it highlights a higher participation rate among parents aged 60 and above as well as among those

within the 18–20 age bracket. These results suggest a complex interplay between age demographics and the dynamics of disciplinary interactions, emphasising the need for further exploration of the factors that influence parental involvement across various age groups.

Parents with Multiple Children Have Limited Time for Involvement in Learner Discipline Problems

Straus (2010) suggests that, as the number of children in a family grows, parents may find themselves having limited time and energy to dedicate to each child, potentially affecting their ability to effectively address disciplinary matters. This study, however, showed no significant differences concerning family size and participation in disciplinary proceedings.

No Significant Difference Between School Type and Parental Involvement in Disciplinary Issues

In a study conducted by (Lekganyane, 2011), it was found that secondary schools had a higher incidence of misconduct than primary schools. Based on this finding, it was expected that there would be a high percentage of parents who attended disciplinary proceedings in secondary schools. However, the present study revealed a different pattern of parental participation in disciplinary proceedings at various school types than what was expected, i.e., there are no significant differences between the school type and parental involvement in disciplinary issues.

Public Schools Experience Lower Parental Involvement in Learner Discipline Issues

The current study's findings revealed a lower percentage of parental involvement in public schools (47%), which aligns with Manamela (2015) observation, who highlighted challenges with regard to parental participation in learner disciplinary matters within the public school context. Manamela's research sheds light on the complexities and issues surrounding the engagement of parents in the disciplinary processes of public schools, which offered a valuable reference point to understand the observed lower participation rates in the present study.

No Significant Difference Between Parental Participation in Learner Discipline and School Quintiles

The results show that 49% of the participants who had children in quintile 1–5 schools participated in their children's disciplinary proceedings, and 51% did not. This means that there was no significant difference with regard to parental participation across school quintiles in learner discipline. Regarding the difference between no-fee schools and fee-paying schools as far as parental participation is concerned, the study revealed that 51% of parents who had children in quintile 1–3 schools participated in their children's disciplinary proceedings, whereas 49% of parents did not. This study did not establish whether the 51% was as a result of parents' dedication or as a result of the high number of misconduct that occurred in no-fee schools. Quintile 4 and 5 schools may have lower percentages (40%) of parental involvement in disciplinary issues because they have fewer learner disciplinary challenges, as their SGBs can create posts that reduce the teacher–learner ratio and make it possible for teachers to manage learner behaviour (Matsebele, 2020).

Few Parents with Children in Town Schools Participate in Learner Disciplinary Proceedings

Few parents (27%) with children in town schools participated in disciplinary proceedings for their children's behaviour. These results contradict Dlamini (2022) findings, which show that parents who have children in no-fee schools (which are mostly township, homeland and farm schools) do not cooperate in issues of learner discipline. The notable participation of parents in township schools – particularly their attendance of disciplinary proceedings – could be attributed to multiple factors. One possibility is that the higher presence of parents is a response to instances of misbehaviour among learners in township schools. Alternatively, it may reflect a commendable commitment on the part of

these parents to actively support and engage with the educational processes of township, homeland and farm schools.

Most SGB Members Attend Their Children's Disciplinary Proceedings

Most SGB parent members (60%) reported participating in disciplinary proceedings for their children's behaviour. Their participation in this regard may be influenced by the expectation that SGB members would cooperate because of their influential positions in schools. SGB members, including the SGB parent component, as provided by section 16(2) of the Schools Act, should participate fairly in children's disciplinary proceedings. Therefore, the SGB parent component who have children enrolled in the school might perceive engagement in disciplinary matters as a means to address behavioural issues more effectively. The majority of the SGB parent component who participated in this study seemed to believe that parents and schools were partners in the education of children.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to address the pressing issue of learner misconduct in South African public schools and the pivotal role of parents in mitigating discipline problems. The research sought to bridge the gap in research on this subject and contributes insights into the understanding of parental perspectives and effective strategies to encourage their active involvement. The findings highlighted a range of factors that shape parental participation in addressing disciplinary matters, including evolving gender norms, age, the number of children parents have, school level, school type, and demographics. Notably, parents belonging to specific age groups, those with multiple children, and those affiliated with certain school types show distinct levels of engagement. The study outcomes emphasise the immediate need for comprehensive strategies to boost parental participation in managing their children's discipline problems. This research not only addressed the current challenge of learner discipline but also laid the groundwork for strategic interventions that enlist parents in a collaborative effort to ensure proper discipline in South African schools. The implications of these findings extend beyond the immediate context, offering a blueprint for fostering a more engaged and proactive parental role in education.

Schools and stakeholders in education should conduct awareness campaigns to challenge and break down remaining gender stereotypes surrounding parental involvement. Such campaigns should emphasise that both parents play crucial roles in addressing disciplinary matters. Schools and stakeholders in education should tailor parental involvement initiatives to specific age groups based on the situation of each school. They should develop strategies to engage parents of age groups who do not attend disciplinary proceedings through targeted interventions and communication. Schools and stakeholders in education should recognise the time constraints of parents with multiple children and develop flexible engagement strategies, such as online platforms. Schools and stakeholders in education should implement targeted programmes to enhance parental involvement in disciplinary proceedings in secondary schools. Explore innovative approaches that resonate with parents of secondary school learners to ensure their active participation.

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