Effects of Parental Involvement in Education
A Case Study in Namibia

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This paper is my final project submitted for the completion of M.Ed. degree in Educational Administration in the Faculty of Education Studies at the University of Iceland. The project accounts for 20 ECTS. In the project I investigated how parental involvement in children’s education affects academic achievement. Parents of high achieving students at Combretum Trust School in Windhoek in Namibia were interviewed for this purpose. Most of the research was done during the first half of 2010, with interviews conducted in June.

My supervisor was Professor Börkur Hansen, Department Chair of Educational Administration and Evaluation Studies. I want to thank him for his guidance and assistance during my research work. I also received input from Allyson Macdonald, Professor at the Faculty of Education Studies, and I wish to thank her for her valuable comments and insights.

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I also want to thank Tinna Wiium, my research assistant, for proofreading and for her valuable assistance with transcribing all the interviews.

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Abstract

In my research, I endeavour to ascertain how parental involvement at Combretum Trust School in Namibia affects the academic achievement of students. In the educational literature it is often claimed that involvement of parents results in better academic achievement than if parents are not involved. The aim of the research is to see if this relationship exists at a school in Namibia, a developing country that faces many educational challenges.

In this case study a qualitative research approach was used. Data was gathered by interviewing parents of seven students at Combretum Trust School in Windhoek, who all have achieved academically. The objective of the interviews was to learn if and how the parents are involved in their children’s education. In addition, I wanted to gain information as to the experiences and attitudes of those parents towards their children’s education and education in general.

The main findings are that all the parents who were interviewed are highly involved with their children’s education. They have high expectations towards their children’s education and their future. In addition, they are all quite vocal about their expectations to their children. The parents all recognise the importance of staying involved with their child’s education and participate fully. All the parents want to know how their child spends his or her time outside of school and with whom their child spends his or her time. Most of the parents consider themselves to have a good relationship with their child’s teachers and the school. Homework is considered to be important by each parent and they all assist their child with homework if the need arises.

Thus, it may be concluded that by staying involved with their children’s education in this way the parents do impact positively on the academic achievement of the students chosen for this study at Combretum Trust School in Namibia.
Ágrip

Áhrif þátttöku foreldra í námi barna sinna: Dæmi frá Namibíu

Í verkefninu er leitast við að varpa ljósi á þau áhrif sem þátttaka foreldra í námi barna sinna hefur á námsframmið nemenda í Combretum Trust skólanum í Namibíu. Í fræðigreinum er því oft haldið fram að þátttaka foreldra leiði meðal annars til betri námsrárangurs nemenda. Markmið þessarar rannsóknar er að kanna hvort þátttaka foreldra sé til staðar í skóla einum í Namibíu sem er þróunarland og á við margskonar vanda að striða í menntamálum.

Um er að ræða tilviksrannsókn þar sem eigindlegri rannsóknaðferð var beitt. Gagna var aflað með viðöllum við foreldra sjö nemenda, sem hafa sínt góðan námsrárangur, í Combretum Trust skólanum í Windhoek. Markmið með viðöllum er að kanna hvort og þá hvernig foreldrarnir taka þátt í námi barna sinna. Að auki vildi ég fá að heyra af reynslu og viðhorfi foreldranna gagnvart námi barna sinna og námi almennt.


Því má leiða likum að því að með virki þátttöku í námi barna sinna hafa foreldrarnir jákvæð áhrif á námsrárangur þeirra nemenda sem valdir voru til þátttöku í rannsóknin í Combretum Trust skólanum í Namibíu.
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1 Introduction

Research findings suggest that parents’ attitudes, along with their behaviour and activities with regard to their children’s education, do affect academic achievement in a positive way (Hui-Chen Huang and Mason, 2008). There appears to be general agreement about the effects the family can have by being involved with their children’s education. Students earn higher grades, they enrol in higher education, and their attitude towards school becomes more positive if the family, the community and school all work together (Henderson and Mapp, 2002). In addition, Henderson and Berla (1994) claim that parental involvement in their children’s education affects their school attendance, more students graduate, and behaviour of students’ improves.

According to Epstein (2009), ample research evidence suggests that most parents want their children to succeed in school and in order for them to be good partners in their children’s education, they yearn to obtain more information from schools. Likewise, most students at all school levels, whether it being elementary school, middle school or high school level, want their families to be familiar and acquainted partners about schooling. The positive effects that parental involvement has on students’ academic achievement appear to be undeniable. Therefore, it should be a top priority for parents and schools to establish and maintain a strong partnership between schools and homes.

The purpose of this study is to ascertain in what ways parents of academically high achieving students at Combretum Trust School in Windhoek, Namibia, are involved in their education. The parents are for instance asked about their expectations to their child’s education; the relationship they have with the school and staff; and whether they monitor their children’s schoolwork. In addition, the aim is to learn what effects it may have on academic achievement of the students selected for this study, if their parents are actively involved with their education.

Since education is one of the key factors for the country’s development, it goes without saying how important it is for Namibia that its students to do well in school. Therefore, it will be interesting to study how parents in one school in Namibia are involved with their children’s education. In addition, it will be intriguing to learn the parents’ attitude towards their children’s education, and education in general.
For the purpose of the study, I selected seven students who have shown their academic ability, irrespective of their socio-economic status, nationality and gender. However, the one common denominator is their academic achievement. I conducted interviews with the parents/guardians of these students and assessed the effects their involvement has on their education, irrespective of their socio-economic status.

The structure of the dissertation is as follows. In chapter two, education in general in Namibia is discussed, along with description of Combretum Trust School. Chapter three gives theoretical background on parental involvement, which is discussed in some detail. In chapter four, the methodology chapter, a qualitative research approach is discussed which is the approach used in this study. Chapter five includes main findings, where direct quotes from participants are used to give their experiences and attitudes more weight. In chapter six, the main findings of this study are discussed in relation to theory and other research findings. Then follows a list of references, and lastly the questions used for the interviews.
2 Education in Namibia

Namibia gained its independence from South Africa on 21 March 1990. At that time, there was no compulsory education in the country (Amukugo, 2002). Many children in rural areas either started schooling much later than at age seven, which was the Namibian school entering age, or did not enrol in school at all. The consequence was that, at the time of independence, there was a high rate of illiteracy in Namibia. Callewaert and Kallos (in Amukugo, 2002) investigated the enrolment at schools in the northern part of Namibia, where most African Namibians live. They concluded that in the year 1988, after four years in school, less than 50% of students who started school in the north remained in school. Inequalities in education are demonstrated further when the colonial government’s education budget is analysed. In the year 1986, on average the South African colonial government spent more than three thousand rand on each white student in Namibia; which is six times higher than the lowest amount spent on an African student (Amukugo, 2002). This differential expenditure in education, in accordance with race and class division continued until independence.

It is also interesting to look at qualifications of teachers in Namibia at the time of independence. It has been estimated (Amukugo, 2002) that 57% of all employed teachers in Namibia did not graduate from grade ten. Furthermore, between seven and 37% of the total number of teachers in Namibia did not graduate from grade eight. With this lack of qualifications among Namibian teachers, it is easy to imagine the quality of teaching since many will agree that the quality of education depends highly on the quality and availability of teaching staff.

So, the new democratically elected Namibian government made it one of its top priorities to make education in Namibia compulsory for all children. Soon, grade one through grade ten became compulsory (Government of Namibia, 2002). When Namibia became independent, the new government inherited the colonial socio-economic system. This meant that changes were introduced gradually, rather than revolutionary. Amukugo (2002) stresses the point that educational reforms after independence need to be viewed against that background.

It is interesting to look at statistics on teacher qualifications in Namibia since independence. The percentage of primary school teachers
qualified to teach grew steadily between the years 1997–2007. In the year 1997, only 21% of primary school teachers were qualified to teach. By the year 2000, this number had reached 36.3% and in 2003 it had more than doubled since 1997 and was now 50.9% (Ministry of Education, 2005). In 2006, 65.1% of primary school teachers were qualified and by 2007, the percentage had reached 71% (Ministry of Education, 2008).

The growing percentage of qualified secondary school teachers is similar as the primary school teachers. Between the years 1997-2007, the percentage of qualified secondary school teachers has grown from 53% in 1997, to 90.3% in 2007 (Ministry of Education, 2005 and 2008).

Even though grade ten is the last compulsory grade, many schools in Namibia offer grades eleven and grade twelve. Students write their matriculation examination at the end of grade twelve. If a student fails any grade, he or she is required to repeat that grade. When students reach the twelfth grade, they can choose to study at an ordinary level or a higher level. The difference between these two levels is the pace and content of the study material. A student who graduates from a higher level in grade twelve can be guaranteed admittance to the University of Namibia. However, a student who graduates from an ordinary level cannot be sure of being admitted. This is especially true with regards to universities in South Africa, where many of the young people of Namibia go for their university education. Therefore, it is vital for students to study at a higher level if they plan to study at a university.

In spite of it being compulsory to finish grade ten in Namibia, not all students finish their compulsory education. Statistics for school-leavers and failures are very similar from one year to the next for each grade. When statistics are looked at for the year 2006, for the rate of school-leaving at grade one, grade five, grade eight and grade ten it is clear that 4.7% of children who started grade one dropped out of school that year. The percentage of children who left school in grade five, was 6.6% and 10.7% of students in grade eight left school in 2006. The promotion rate from grade ten to grade eleven in 2006 was 55.7%, which means that 44.3% of students failed grade ten. The percentage of school-leavers in grade ten that year is 37.3% (Ministry of Education, 2008). The high percentage of students who fail and/or drop out of grade ten is quite worrisome because unemployment rate in Namibia is very high. Unemployment rate amongst young people between the ages of 15 and 24
in the year 2001 was 44.8% (IndexMundi, undated). The national average unemployment rate among the unskilled is 56% (Marope, 2005).

The Namibian school year follows the calendar year, that is, it starts in January and ends in November, with three semester. As of today, the average class size in Namibia is 30.9 students per teacher. For primary schools the average class size is 30.7 students, and at the secondary level the average class size is 32 students per teacher. There are 1,048 primary schools in the country, of which 54 are private. Secondary schools are 176, of which 16 are private. In the year 2007, 76.3% of schools in the country had sanitary facilities for the students, with 63.5% of them as flushing toilets and the rest being pits. That same year, 80.5% of schools had water supplies (Ministry of Education, 2008). The Namibian population consists of about 2 million inhabitants. The adult (15-49 years) literacy rate in Namibia is 82% and the enrolment rate for primary schools is 89.1% and 48.3% for secondary schools. By the end of 2001, the prevalence rate of HIV/AIDS among young people (15-49 years) was 22.5%. In the year 1991 the life expectancy at birth was 61 years but by 2005 it had declined to around 40 years (Marope, 2005). By 2021 the number of orphans in the country is expected to rise from 84,000 in 2001 to 250,000; HIV/AIDS orphans accounting for 198,000.

Poverty in Namibia is generally very high and, on average, 41% of homes in Namibia lived in either poverty or abject poverty in the years 2003/2004 (National Planning Commission, 2008). Whether or not the family lives in poverty depends highly on the educational level of the head of the household. The percentage of homes that live in poverty or abject poverty where the head of the household has no formal education is 76.7%. When the head of the household has either primary education or secondary education, the percentage of homes that live in poverty or abject poverty is 53.2% and 17.7% respectively. On the other hand, amongst the households where the head of the household has finished a university degree the percentage of homes who live in poverty or abject poverty is only 0.5%. These numbers show how important education is for the homes in the country. Therefore, it is quite evident that in order to get out of the cycle of poverty, parents need to educate their children, and that way try to ensure that their children do not fall into the poverty trap.

These statistics emphasise the importance for families, schools and authorities to work together and support students in every way possible in
order to impact and affect students’ academic achievement. Therefore, I believe it to be fundamental to understand what factors are important in our children’s education. The goal with this research is not only to find out what my participants have in common when it comes to parental involvement in their children’s education, but not least to help parents to understand how important it is for their children that they are involved with their education. Therefore the importance of this research for Namibian society must be considered quite valuable, in spite of little generalisation.

2.1 Combretum Trust School

Combretum Trust School is a small, private secondary school in Windhoek, the capital of Namibia. The school is owned and run by Combretum Educational Trust. Combretum Educational Trust is a non-profit, non-government organisation working in the field of education in Namibia. The main objectives of the Trust are to study and develop new ways in co-operation with the private sector in Namibia that will lead to more quality education and to give the young people of Namibia a chance, especially those who have talent, potential, commitment and motivation. The school offers classes with relatively few students in each, at an affordable price.

Combretum Trust School began in the year 2004 and in the beginning, the school only offered grade eight and nine with about 35 students. Each year the school added another grade until the year 2007, when the school had grades from eight to twelve. Only one class is in each grade and around 130 students are studying at the school today. In grade eight, nine, ten and eleven, there are 25 students in each grade, whereas grade twelve has 30 students.

Students at Combretum Trust School come from quite a diverse background, both with regards to ethnic group and country. Namibian students at Combretum Trust School come from six different ethnic groups, with most of them from the Oshiwambo and Herero ethnic groups. There are also Damara/Nama students, Rehoboth Basters, coloured and white. Almost 30% of the students are foreigners with most of them coming from Angola and Zimbabwe. There are also students from South Africa, Cuba, Zambia and Ethiopia.
New students do not need to write an entrance exam when they start their schooling at Combretum Trust School. The school considers each and every student to have a capability to study, but he or she only needs to be given an opportunity in order to achieve academically. If questions arise as to whether applicants have any problems, either socially or academically, they are interviewed. Through these interviews, the school assesses if it is qualified and equipped to give the student the required assistance before his/her application is approved.

School fees cover the administrative and running cost of the school. Since the school fees are moderate, the financial situation of the school is not very strong. Therefore, little room is for renovating class rooms, or to buy books or equipment for the school. The school rents the premises, which is a considerable part of the school’s expenditure.

The staff at Combretum Trust School includes sixteen personnel, thirteen teachers, thereof seven who are full time, one secretary and receptionist, one property overseer and the Director. The teachers, similar to the students, are a group of mixed internationals; eight are Namibians, two are Zimbabweans, one from the Republic of Congo, one from the United States and one from Canada. The foreign teachers are on a work permit, which is issued for one year at a time. All the teachers, but two, at Combretum Trust School have a university degree in their teaching subject.
3 Theoretical background

Parental involvement in education has been a topic of interest for many years among those who are concerned with improving academic achievement for children (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 1997). After reviewing the literature, Henderson and Mapp (2002) indicate that student achievement is most commonly defined by report cards and grades, grade point averages, enrolment in advanced classes, attendance and staying in school, being promoted to the next grade, and improved behaviour.

Many researchers recognise the important role a strong positive bond between homes and schools play in the development and education of children (Sanders and Sheldon, 2009; Richardson, 2009; Sheldon, 2009; Edwards and Alldred, 2000; Henderson and Berla, 1994). The theories put forward have been supported, and reaffirmed, by numerous studies that have shown that good cooperation between schools, homes and the communities can lead to academic achievement for students, as well as to reforms in education. Research has also shown that successful students have strong academic support from their involved parents (Sheldon, 2009). Furthermore, research on effective schools, those where students are learning and achieving, has consistently shown that these schools, despite often working in low social and economic neighbourhoods, have strong and positive school-home relationships (Sanders and Sheldon, 2009; Sheldon, 2009). More importantly, these effective schools have made a real effort in reaching out to their students’ families in order to bring about liaison and cooperation.

Bryk and Schneider (in Sanders and Sheldon, 2009) maintain that schools become successful when a strong and positive relationship among students, parents, teachers and the community has been established. All students are more likely to experience academic success if their home environment is supportive (Sanders and Sheldon, 2009; Henderson and Berla, 1994). The benefit for students of a strong relationship between schools and homes is based on the development of trust between parents and teachers. According to Bryk and Schneider (in Muscott et al., 2008), this trusting relationship occurs when teachers and parents respect one another and believe in the ability of the other person and his or her willingness to fulfil their responsibilities.
Research has regularly shown that with increasing parental participation in their children’s education student success rate increases. According to the Department of Education (2004) in the United States, studies have shown that students with involved parents are more likely to earn higher grades, pass their class and be promoted, they are more likely to attend school regularly and graduate and go on to postsecondary education, irrespective of their socio-economic status. Jerry Trusty (in Henderson and Mapp, 2002) concurs with this, and claims that the level of parental involvement in high school influences the students’ expectations to finish college. In addition, Obeidat and Al-Hassan (2009) maintain that not only do children with involved parents gain academically, but they are also more likely to show improved behaviour and to have better social skills.

The definition of parental involvement, according to the Department of Education in the United States (2004) is

the participation of parents in regular, two-way and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities, including ensuring that parents play an integral role in assisting their child’s learning; that parents are encouraged to be actively involved in their child’s education at school; that parents are full partners in their child’s education and are included, as appropriate, in decision-making and on advisory committees to assist in the education of their child.

In the national educational goals for the United States, the notion of partnership between family and school in order to prevent school failure for children is implicit (Christenson and Sheridan, 2001). Such partnership has been defined as a principal protective factor for children and is characterised as a form of safety net in order to promote children’s education and their school experience. The goal of family involvement in their children’s education is to strengthen learning and the development of children. It is beneficial for the students to have schools, teachers, parents and the community working together as a unity with the focus on students (Glasgow and Whitney, 2009). Since countless research strongly and consistently supports relationships between homes and schools,
Corrigan and Bishop (1997) maintain that such liaison should no longer be regarded as an option, but rather as a necessity.

Gutman and McLoyd (2000) carried out research with the aim of ascertaining the parental behaviour of typical successful students and comparing them with students who were encountering behavioural and academic problems. Their findings suggest that parents of academically successful students used a more specific approach to assist their children with schoolwork. For instance, they had more supportive communication with their children than the parents of less academically successful students. In addition, they frequently checked their children’s progress by contacting the school, and maintained positive relationships with school staff. Whereas, the parents of less achieving children seldom contacted the school. Sheldon (2009) concurs with this, and claims that parental involvement and a supportive home environment are no less important for academic success, than quality teaching and committed and caring teachers are.

Epstein (2009) alleges that there are many reasons for developing and establishing a partnership between school, family and community. The main reason for such a partnership is to aid students in succeeding at school. Other reasons are, for example, to improve school climate and school programs, to advance parental skills and leadership, to assist families to connect with others in the school and the community, as well as to assist teachers with their work. All these reasons emphasise the importance for parents to play an active role in their children’s education and to keep a strong and positive relationship with schools.

3.1 Epstein’s Framework

A framework containing six important factors with regards to parental involvement has been developed by Epstein and her co-workers at the Center on Family, School, and Community Partnership at John Hopkins University. This framework is based on findings from many studies of what factors are most effective when it comes to children’s education (Epstein, 2009). Those six factors are parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making and collaborating with the community. Parenting pertains to helping all families understand the development of both the child and the adolescent. It also helps establishing a supportive home environment for children as students.
Communicating refers to how best to design and conduct an effective two-way communication, that is school-to-home and home-to-school, about school programs and their children’s progress. Volunteering applies to recruiting and organising help and support from parents for school programs and students’ activities. Learning at home pertains to providing ideas and information to parents about how they can best assist their children with homework and curricular related decisions and activities. Decision-making refers to including parents in school decisions and to developing parent leaders and representatives. Collaborating with the community pertains to identifying and integrating communities’ services and resources to support and strengthen schools, students, and their families.

Each of these factors can lead to various results for students, parents, teaching practices and the school climate. In addition, each factor includes many different practices of partnership. Lastly, each factor poses challenges to involve all families and those challenges must be met. That is why Epstein (2009) considers it to be important for each school to choose what factors are believed to be most likely to assist the school in reaching its goals for academic success, and to develop a climate of alliance between homes and the school.

Even though the main focus of these six factors is to promote academic achievements, they also contribute to various results for both parents and teachers (Epstein, 2009). For instance, it may be presumed that parents will gain more self-confidence in their role as parents, they will show leadership with decision-making, they will have more effective and productive communication with their children with regards to school work, and will have more communication with other parents at the school. According to Henderson and Berla (1994), parents also gain a more positive attitude towards the school and its staff, and gain more confidence in assisting their children with homework, by being involved with their education. In addition, they are more likely to gather support for the school and its programs in the community and become more active community members.

For teachers, the benefits may be presumed to be better communication with parents, a deeper understanding of the family of their students and their situation, and more effective communication with both the homes and the community (Epstein, 2009). Henderson and
Berla (1994) also claim that the schools will benefit by parental involvement by improved teacher morale, more support from families and higher student academic achievement. In addition, Clarke (2007) asserts that schools function best when parents and the community are active participants and have a sense of ownership of the school. Therefore, it is safe to say that these six factors not only benefit the students, but also their parents, teachers and the schools.

3.2 The family’s socio-economic status

Besides parental involvement, there is another important factor for students’ academic success and that is their family’s socio-economic status (Deforges and Abouchaar, 2003; Malecki and Demaray, 2006; Ho Sui-Chu and Willms, 1996). Although countless research has been conducted on socio-economic status, it appears to be an ongoing dispute about how to measure and define the concept. However, despite such a dispute there seems to be relative agreement on Duncan, Featherman, and Duncan’s definition (Sirin, 2005). Their definition incorporates the tripartite nature of socio-economic status, that is, parental income, parental education and parental occupation.

Extensive research has been carried out in order to study the relationship between the socio-economic status of the family and students’ academic achievement. The findings appear to be conclusive in this regard, that is, there is a positive relationship between the socio-economic status of the family and the academic achievement of students (Caro, McDonald and Willms, 2009; Thomas and Stockton, 2003). Thus, it appears that socio-economic status correlates with academic achievement positively. Furthermore, scholars have demonstrated with their research that children who come from a low socio-economic background in their early school years experience more problems as they grow older. These children tend to drop out of school early and are less likely to seek college education (Caro, McDonald and Willms, 2009).

Though studies have shown that students from higher income families tend to do better at school, students from all backgrounds do benefit if their parents become involved (Henderson and Mapp, 2002; Henderson and Berla, 1994). Malecki and Demaray (2006) concluded from their study, that students from a low socio-economic background, achieved more academically if their parents were involved with their school. From
their research, Ho Sui-Chu and Willms (1996) maintain that higher-income, and two parent family households, are not necessarily more involved with their children’s education than lower-income families headed by one parent. However, involvement is more likely to occur in families with a more educationally and financially stable background, unless the schools make a concerted effort to reach parents (Muscott et al., 2008).

In a study by Keith and Keith (1993) they found that families from all socio-economic levels are involved with their children’s education at home. However, families with a higher socio-economic status tended to be more involved at school. Lareau and Horvat (1999) addressed these variations on involvement by parents of different socio-economic status in a case study. They observed that white middle-class families appeared to share social and cultural capital with school staff and were therefore more comfortable in communicating with them. These families also use the same vocabulary as teachers and feel entitled to treat teachers as equals and they have culturally supportive social networks. These factors allow the families of a higher socio-economic status to construct their relationship with the school with more trust and comfort.

### 3.3 Parental involvement and academic outcomes

According to Epstein (in Richardson, 2009), parental involvement is the most powerful influence in a child’s education. It can have various effects on students, both academically and behaviourally. Initially, research on family involvement generally did not aim at differentiating between the effects of specific types of involvement on definite student outcomes (Sheldon, 2009). But rather, the connections between general measures of parental involvement with students’ test scores and grades were analysed. However, recently, researchers started studying how different types of involvement connect to specific student outcomes.

According to the Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement (Obeidat and Al-Hassan, 2009; 124-125), successful parental involvement may be defined as “the active, ongoing participation of a parent or primary caregiver in the education of his or her child”. At home, parents can demonstrate their involvement in different ways; such as by reading for their child, assisting with homework, and having regular discussions about school or school work with their child. In addition, it is
important for parents to convey their expectations to their child’s education.

Research has provided ample evidence that parental involvement affects achievement in core subjects such as reading, mathematics and science, and the behaviour of students, their school attendance and their attitude and adjustment to school (Sheldon, 2009; Sanders and Sheldon, 2009). According to Jerry Trusty (in Henderson and Mapp, 2002), student perception of their parents’ involvement and expectations are also highly effective and influential in their education. Moreover, students who feel their parents’ support for their education and have good communication are more likely to continue their studies past high school.

3.3.1 Parental involvement and reading

Research findings have demonstrated that there is an overwhelming connection between literary resources in the homes and children’s reading skills (Sheldon, 2009; Sanders and Sheldon, 2009; Glasgow and Whitney, 2009). Children who come from reading oriented homes, where books are readily available to them and their parents are avid readers, have a tendency to score higher on reading achievement tests than children from less reading oriented homes. It also affects their literacy skills to have their parents read to them. Thus, parents can have positive effects on their children’s reading skills and boost their reading comprehension by reading to them and making sure there are always books available.

Most of the research on the effects of parental involvement on students’ literacy skills and reading has been done with families of preschool children and children in the first grades of primary school (Sheldon, 2009; Sanders and Sheldon, 2009). However, studies have been conducted with families of older students and it is evident that, although teachers and schools have significant influences on children’s learning to read in the first grades, parents still remain very influential (Sheldon, 2009).

Furthermore, studies have reported that parental involvement does not cease to affect reading achievements of students in the early years of schooling. Instead, it appears to continue to positively affect the reading achievement and academic development of students well into primary school, secondary school and even high school (Sanders and Sheldon,
Research among secondary school students shows that those students whose parents have high educational expectations for their children, discuss with their children their school and future plans and monitor their homework, have a tendency to earn a higher grade in English and to score higher in reading achievement tests (Sanders and Sheldon, 2009). According to Sheldon (2009), findings, such as these, confirm that parents’ support and interest for reading continues to be an important factor in young people’s academic development through high school.

These findings emphasise the importance for both parents and schools to establish and maintain a good strong relationship throughout our children’s school years. Especially in secondary schools where we, as parents, often lack confidence in our ability to assist our children with their school work. To read for our children in the early years and to continue to be involved with their schoolwork are all things that each of us as parents can do, in spite of our socio-economic status or level of education. Furthermore, it is worth considering that good reading skills and reading comprehension affects student achievements in other subjects as well, since reading is fundamental in almost all subjects.

3.3.2 Parental involvement and mathematics

Studies have shown that parental involvement directly affects their children’s math achievement (Sanders and Sheldon, 2009; Yan and Lin, 2005). Students whose parents are involved in their education are more likely to perform better in math and achieve more than other students. Sirvani (2007) agrees with this and claims that parental involvement contributes significantly to achievement of both primary and secondary school students in math. In addition, these students are more likely to continue further in mathematics (Sheldon, 2009). Yan and Lin (2005) also claim that the higher the expectations parents have for their children’s mathematics achievement the more the children achieve.

In addition, there appears to be a large body of evidence that suggests the home environment not only affects students’ achievement, but also their abilities and attitudes towards math (Sheldon, 2009). Sanders and Sheldon (2009) claim that partnership and cooperation between homes and schools are important when it comes to mathematics because how the parents socialise their children can greatly affect their children’s self-
perception of their own ability and achievement. According to studies, children’s self-concept of their math ability is more closely related to how their parents perceive their ability rather than the actual grades obtained (Sanders and Sheldon, 2009; Glasgow and Whitney, 2009; Sheldon, 2009; Bleeker and Jacobs, 2004). Bleeker and Jacobs (2004) claim these psychological effects to be important, since other evidence suggests that children’s self-perceptions influence their later career decisions.

Gal and Stoudt (in Sanders and Sheldon, 2009) and Sheldon (2009) argue the importance for schools to bring about strong partnership with families when it comes to math and to reach out to parents. Studies suggest that many families need help and assistance with their interactions with their child with math (Sheldon, 2009). This is a result of parents feeling a lack of confidence regarding their own ability to assist their children with math. In addition, it seems that the approach to teaching math has changed since many of the parents were in school (Glasgow and Whitney, 2009). Therefore, it is essential for schools to implement activities and partnership programs with parents. Unfortunately, this is seldom done. Baker, Gersten and Lee (in Sanders and Sheldon, 2009) found by reviewing research, that few math programs actually try to connect with parents. They claim that this failure to get parents involved is contradicting to study findings that suggest that efforts to get parents involved in students’ math learning can indeed improve the students’ performances.

3.3.3 Parental involvement and science

Far less research has been done on the effects of parental involvement on students’ science achievement than on reading and mathematics. However, Sanders and Sheldon (2009) claim that because of the increased interest in science achievement today, it is important to recognise the findings of those few studies that actually have been conducted.

According to Sanders and Sheldon (2009) it is evident that parental involvement does affect children’s science achievement, and particularly those children that are at risk in the subject. A study by Senler and Sungur (2009) revealed that parental involvement is connected to how students perceive the subject, and thus their attitude towards it. In addition, parental involvement contributed positively to student
achievement in science. They concluded that students, whose parents make time to talk with them about science, who have confidence in their children’s ability in science, and who have higher expectations, are inclined to be more interested in the subject. In addition, when it comes to higher levels in science, these students are more likely to succeed. George and Kaplan (in Sanders and Sheldon, 2009) concur and claim that parents play a considerable role in the development of their children’s attitude towards science. By engaging in science activities at home and by taking their children to visit museums and libraries they help their children to develop a positive attitude towards the subject.

3.4 Parental involvement and non-academic outcomes

According to research, parental involvement does not only affect academic outcomes, but also non-academic outcomes, such as students’ school attendance and their behaviour and attitude towards school (Henderson and Berla, 1994). Furthermore, studies suggest that parents who are involved, can assist their children with transition from one school level to another school level, or from one school to another (Sheldon, 2009).

3.4.1 Attendance

As Sanders and Sheldon (2009) argue, it is important for schools to improve students’ attendance. As it goes without saying, being in school gives students more opportunities to learn. Even though schools have not systematically and consciously worked in a partnership with families in order to reduce student absenteeism, cooperation and partnerships with families are known to be important factors in order to increase student attendance (Sheldon, 2009). Research findings have identified certain aspects of parental behaviour as important indicators of lower levels of truancy among students (Sanders and Sheldon, 2009; Sheldon, 2009). These include monitoring student’s whereabouts, discussions with their children about school, volunteering at school and being members of a parent-teacher association. It has also been shown to be helpful to improve attendance, that the school informs parents of their absent children (Sanders and Sheldon, 2009). This gives parents a chance to monitor and supervise their children’s attendance more adequately.
3.4.2 Behaviour

Children’s behaviour, both in school and out, is closely related to the family dynamics and their home environment. Snyder and Patterson (in Sheldon, 2009) came to the conclusion twenty years ago, after reviewing the literature, that there are certain factors that are predictive of misbehaviour among juveniles. These factors are, for instance, neglectful and passive parenting styles, lax disciplinary approaches, inadequate strategies to solve problems, poor parental monitoring and frequent conflicts within the home.

Among educators, it is generally understood that students’ family life does affect the behaviour of students. Therefore, the goal of many schools is to improve student behaviour by focusing on a partnership program with parents (Sanders and Sheldon, 2009). Focusing on such a partnership may, in addition, help to improve their academic achievement. Thus, better behaviour of students help to improve their academic achievement (Sheldon, 2009). A study of 827 African American eighth graders found that how students perceive their family support for academic achievement positively influences their behaviour. The improved behaviour in turn positively and significantly influences their school grades (Sanders and Sheldon, 2009). Richardson (2009) claims that better behaviour, among students, is one of the major benefits of parental involvement.

In order to improve student behaviour, the school usually only focuses on what teachers need to do in school, instead of the school, parents and the community to work together towards that goal (Sanders and Sheldon, 2009; Sheldon, 2009). This is in spite of suggestions that the co-operation of everyone is needed to reduce problematic behaviour and to improve learning in school. Sheldon and Epstein (in Sanders and Sheldon, 2009) also claim that schools who have improved their partnership program with parents and the community have fewer students sent to the principal, given detentions or suspensions.

3.4.3 Attitude

Parental involvement is also important for students’ social and emotional development (Sanders and Sheldon, 2009). Students who have parents that are involved in their education have been shown to have a higher motivation to achieve in school and a higher level of school engagement.
Thus, parental involvement can affect the student’s academic achievement through the impact on the development of the student’s attitude and engagement with school, as well as a student’s perception of their potential.

These benefits are very important for students, not least when they are moving to new schools or between school levels. Findings in a study by Brizuela and Garcia-Sellers (1999), for instance, support other research with regards to adjustment. Students with involved parents have an easier time with adjustment to new schools than students whose parents are less involved with their education. With regards to transition between school levels, studies suggest that if measured in grades and test scores, students cope more successfully going into middle school and high school if they have involved parents who monitor their homework and discuss their school works frequently (Sanders and Sheldon, 2009; Henderson and Mapp, 2002; Sheldon, 2009).

### 3.4.4 Homework

It is understood that schools need more involvement from parents since the chief benefits on their children’s education are higher grades, positive behaviour and attitude and more effective schools (Richardson, 2009). According to Epstein (in Patall, Cooper and Robinson, 2008), parental involvement in their children’s education takes on various forms. For instance, parents may be involved by volunteering at school, communicating with the school, partaking in school decision-making, or supporting learning at home.

According to Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995), parents agree that they have an important role to play in home-based activities when it comes to children’s learning. These home-based activities include, among others, monitoring their child’s school work and progress, discussing school related issues with their child, and assisting with homework. Furthermore, research has shown that of all the different types of parental involvement, parents report that helping their children with homework is particularly effective for enhancing their academic achievement. According to the Department of Education in the United States (in Patall, Cooper and Robinson, 2008), parent behaviour appears to corroborate this belief, 90% of parents report setting aside a place for homework, and 85% of them report checking to see that homework has been done.
Students generally feel that when parents help, they do better at school. In a study by Balli (in Patall, Cooper and Robinson, 2008), 95% of students reported that they did better in school at least some of the time when they received help with homework from their parents. Williams et al. (in Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003) carried out research in 2002, among English students between the ages of five and sixteen. Their findings show that 71% of parents of children in their first year in school considered themselves to be involved in their children’s homework. This participation declined steadily with each grade, and by grade eleven, only 1% of parents considered themselves to be involved with their child’s homework.

Studies have shown marked improvement in students’ academic achievement when their parents are involved with their homework (Keith and Keith, 1993). For instance, a study of third and fifth grade students was conducted in an urban school district in the United States in 2001 (Sanders and Sheldon, 2009). After controlling for prior reading achievement, that study suggests that students who have teachers that more frequently involve families with learning activities at home gained higher in reading achievements from one year to the next, compared to students with teachers who less frequently involved the families.

Similarly, findings from a study that Sirvani (2007) carried out showed that students with involved parents reached higher mathematical achievement than other students. In this study parents were divided into two groups, a control group and an experimental group. Parents in the experimental group were asked to monitor their children’s homework and twice a week they received statements on their child’s homework and test grades. Parents in the control group did not receive statements on their children’s progress, nor were they asked to specifically monitor their children’s homework. This light parental involvement in the experimental group was enough to increase their child’s achievement in mathematics, compared to their own achievements the year before and compared to the achievement of the control group.

Finally, the findings of Van Voorhis’ study (2003) show that families in the experimental group, who received weekly interactive homework in science, were considerably more involved with their children’s science learning than the control group, which did not receive such homework. In addition, the students from the experimental group returned more
homework assignments and earned higher grades in science compared to students from the control group.

### 3.5 Parent–school communication

In spite of much research on what affects parental involvement has on academic achievement, Epstein and Sanders (2006) claim that many teachers and administrators still see themselves as individual leaders of their classrooms and schools. Thus, little attention is paid to partnerships and collaborations with parents. In order to enhance educational achievement of students, educators need to scrutinise possibilities to develop and form partnerships with parents (Richardson, 2009). Such a partnership is, especially, essential in secondary schools, where parents often lack the confidence in their ability to assist their children with the curriculum (Sheldon, 2009).

It depends largely on the school whether parents decide to participate in their child’s education or not (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 1997; Christenson and Sheridan, 2001). Whether parents perceive themselves to be invited to become active participants in the educational process has a major influence on their decisions. Sanders and Sheldon (2009) agree with the notion that the school is the major influencing factor of parental involvement. However, they mention that students and parents are also part of the factors influencing the quality of such a partnership. Factors such as parental role construction, time, energy and skills rest with families, while other factors, such as age, academic needs and temperament rest with students. Still other factors rest with schools, such as experience, professional knowledge and resources. In spite of their acknowledgement of multiplicity of factors affecting school, family and community partnership, they claim that studies have shown that when schools develop culture that supports partnership activities and programs, other factors can be minimised.

Research has suggested that the extent of parental involvement depends, among other things, on how frequently the school approaches parents (Glasgow and Whitney, 2009). The more frequently the school reaches out, the more involved parents become. An American study from 2001 carried out by Westat and Policy Studies Associates (in Henderson and Mapp, 2002) looked at the effect of family involvement on student achievement, by examining student achievement in 71 elementary
schools. One of the factors they studied was outreach to parents. This they measured by how much teachers communicated with parents of low-achieving students through meeting with them face to face, sending materials home with the students to better equip parents to help their children at home, and telephoning routinely. The study findings suggest that there was a positive relationship between teacher outreach to parents of low-achieving students and improved student achievement in both reading and math. Test scores grew at a rate of 40% higher in schools where teachers reported high levels of outreach to parents, compared to schools where teachers reported low levels of outreach.

School leadership is instrumental in establishing and developing a partnership between homes and the school, for instance, by creating opportunities for joint activities for all concerned and thus lead the efforts of the grassroots towards a partnership (Price-Mitchell, 2009). Schussler (in Graham-Clay, 2005) claims that establishing and fostering a teacher-parent relationship has been recognised as essential to the development of schools as learning communities. School climate is closely connected with how involved parents are with their child’s education (Glasgow and Whitney, 2009; Christenson and Sheridan, 2001). The more welcome parents feel at school and the easier the school makes it for them to be involved, the more likely the parents are to be actively involved with their children’s education. Thus, it is vital that the school should be instrumental in establishing a connection with families and in forming such a partnership. Studies suggest that whether connections are formed, and sustained among schools, families and communities, is influenced by the quality of the relationship (Henderson and Mapp, 2002). Trust is a major factor of the relationships that are formed. Christenson and Sheridan (2001) claim that trust is prerequisite to any effort to involve parents in educational partnerships.

One way to increase parental involvement is for the school to recruit volunteers (Sanders and Sheldon, 2009; Epstein, 2009). By volunteering, parents and the community can observe children in a school environment and that way learn how they can better assist them to achieve in school. Also, by volunteering, they express their value of education. There are a number of benefits that are gained by volunteerism, such as increasing family participation, increasing families’ awareness of school rules and processes, and creating opportunities for impromptu informal interactions between homes and schools. Among many of the different volunteer
activities parents can participate in are language translations, monitoring attendance of students and phoning parents of absent students, conducting parent patrols, supporting extracurricular clubs, and enriching students’ subject classes (Epstein, 2009). In addition, schools can organise volunteers to become homeroom parents, neighbourhood representatives and contacts for other parents at school.

Epstein (2009) also claims that in order to get parents involved, it is very important to include parents in developing, reviewing and improving school policies that affect students at the school. This will allow families to have some input in decisions that affect their children’s education. Finally, it is quite valuable in order to strengthen school programs, family practices and student learning, to include the cooperation of community businesses, cultural and religious organisations, senior citizen groups and colleges and universities. Some community activities are after school recreation, tutorial programs, health services, cultural events, summer programs and part-time jobs. Epstein claims that if this is well implemented, students, families and schools will increase their knowledge of community resources, and that will help students reach important goals for learning.

According to Epstein (1995) studies have shown that most teachers would like to have the families of their students involved. The problem is that few of them know how to go about getting the parents to participate and be involved. Baker et al. (in Ferrara and Ferrara, 2005), and Lawrence-Lightfoot (1999) say that teachers themselves freely admit their lack of training in working with parents, especially in the skills they need in order to have effective communication with parents. Since the practices of communication are so fundamental for schools in order to involve parents in their child’s education, Caspe (2003) suggests that professional development and preparation programs for teachers should advocate the development of communication skills for teachers.

Lindle (1989) reports that, according to surveyed parents, they want teachers to treat them as equals and with respect. Parents do not appreciate professional and cold approach from teachers. On the other hand, teachers who cultivate a personal touch in their communication style improve school/home relationships. Likewise, Lawrence-Lightfoot (1999) maintains that teachers need to express a value for parents’ wisdom and authority about their children. Furthermore, it may cause
tension between the teacher and parents if the only contact from school is when the child is not behaving. According to Obeidat and Al-Hassan (2009) it is, therefore, essential for teachers to contact the homes to notify parents of a job well done or their child’s progress, not only when they are lacking in their performances, or when their behaviour is causing problems. This, in turn, will promote positive relationships with parents.

Rubin and Abrego (in Obeidat and Al-Hassan, 2009) and Christenson and Sheridan (2001) claim that many researches have shown that there are numerous challenges facing the formation of school-home-community partnership. For instance, Glasgow and Whitney (2009) mention that parents and teachers have a misconception about each other’s true desire and support for parental involvement. Such as, since parents do not always respond to communication from school, teachers may feel that parents are not interested in becoming involved. In the same manner, parents often believe that, in reality, teachers do not really want the parents to be involved. To add to this misconception, both parents and teachers often believe that some students may not necessarily appreciate or support parental involvement. This misconception needs to be overcome in order for parents to be actively involved with their children’s education.

However, there are other hurdles that prevent good communication between teachers and parents. For instance, Brandt (1998) claims that the public in general is increasingly becoming alienated from public institutions, such as schools, and the schools themselves are commonly the target of negative reports. In addition, Taffel (in Graham-Clay, 2005) professes that parents today feel, because of increasing demands that are placed on them, misunderstood, unsupported and overwhelmed. Colombo (2004) claims that cultural differences can bring about considerable communication problems if teachers use their own cultural lenses when interacting and communicating with heterogeneous group of parents. Parents’ own negative school experiences may also affect the building of a positive relationship with their child’s teacher (Graham-Clay, 2005; Richardson, 2009; Christenson and Sheridan, 2001). Indeed, parents may also lack the understanding of how to interact with the educational system effectively. Finally, the educational jargon schools frequently use with parents is another all too familiar communication problem (Graham-Clay, 2005).
Christenson and Sheridan (2001) mention financial and time constraints as other obstacles to effective communication between teachers and parents. Parents’ work schedule may also conflict with school events, and thus make parents unable to attend (Lindle, 1989). Finally, Nichols and Read (2002) claim that a compelling barrier to meaningful communication is the traditional parent-teacher conference that only lasts five to fifteen minutes. This short time does not offer any satisfactory communication with regards to the child’s academic and social progress.

Then there are teachers who feel that parents of adolescents should not really be all that involved with their education to begin with (Richardson, 2009). They find it to be both too difficult and troublesome to involve the parents at secondary level. As a result, they actively discourage parents to get too involved.

Nevertheless, effective teachers recognise the importance of maintaining a strong, positive relationship with their student’s parents (Obeidat and Al-Hassan, 2009). Fullan (2007) makes a valid point, where he asserts that teachers today can not educate our children on their own. They need the cooperation of the parents. Schools can benefit enormously by parents and their assistance (Clarke, 2007). Thus, it is important for school staff to encourage parental involvement and develop partnership. In order to maintain a successful partnership, however, mutual collaboration is required. It may also be effective for schools to conduct regular orientation sessions with parents (Lumpkin, 2010), where teachers assist parents in how they can give their children more effective support with their education. These sessions may bridge the gap between school personnel and parents and improve communications.

3.6 Level of parental involvement

Some researchers have pointed out that many parents wish to be more involved with their children’s schoolwork and want to receive more information and assistance from schools in order for them to reach this goal (Richardson, 2009; Epstein 1995; Keith and Keith, 1993). However, it is unfortunate that many of our schools have a problem with establishing connections with families. According to Dauber and Epstein (in Sanders and Sheldon, 2009), parents report less involvement in their children’s education after the third grade. Similarly, educators report
putting less effort into including parents in their children’s schooling. The findings of Epstein and Connors’ study from 1994 (in Sirvani, 2007) are quite interesting. According to that study, 90% of parents and 80% of students in secondary schools consider parental involvement to be important for students’ academic achievement. In spite of these statistics, studies suggest that parental involvement declines with each passing year that the child stays in school.

Various studies have shown that active parental involvement in their children’s education declines the older the children become (Sirvani, 2007; Richardson, 2009). For instance, according to Shaver and Walls (in Henderson and Mapp, 2002), parents of elementary school students are more likely to be involved with their children’s education than parents of students in middle school or junior high school. Senler and Sungur (2009) concur and their study findings suggest a significant difference between self-concept, task value and parental involvement for students in primary school and secondary school. With the growing age of the students, parental involvement declined.

Other studies and reports show the same pattern. For instance, according to statistics of the National Center for Education in the United States (in Sirvani, 2007) parental activity and involvement decreases the older their children grow. As an example, in the years 1996 and 1999, 86% of parents with children in primary schools in America had at least one meeting with their children’s teacher, while only 50% of parents with children in secondary school had at least one meeting with the teacher.

In 2002-2003, the Department of Educational National Center released another report on parental involvement in schools in the United States, for Education Statistics in America (in Sirvani, 2007). According to that report, more than 90% of parents with children from kindergarten through grade five participated in their children’s education, compared with 75% of parents in middle school, but when it came to grade nine and ten, 59% of parents were involved. However, only 53% of parents with students in grade eleven and grade twelve were involved with their child’s education.

Findings such as these appear to contrast with the importance of parental involvement, and how important both parents and students believe parental involvement to be. Therefore, in my view, it is crucial for schools to establish and maintain a good and positive relationship with
parents. But not only that, it is also essential that the schools clarify for parents the importance for them to stay involved and participate in their children’s education.

3.7 Summary

As the discussion in this chapter has illustrated, there is a steady and growing body of evidence of how important parental involvement is in improving student’s academic achievement. Parental involvement has a positive effect on test scores and grades in core subjects, such as reading, math and science. However, the effect of parental involvement is not only on the academic side, but also on the non-academic outcomes, such as school attendance, student behaviour in school, student attitudes towards school, and their social skills. It has been argued that these benefits hold for students of all ages, across educational, economic and racial and ethnic background. Thus, generally it is accepted that in order for students to excel in school, they need the support and encouragement from their parents.

The benefits emphasise the importance of getting parents involved. It also asserts the importance that parents feel both welcome and respected at school. The key factor to get parents involved, is to have an inviting school climate, where parents are frequently invited to be involved at school and where parents perceive themselves to be welcome. Therefore, school personnel need to establish a trusting relationship with parents and to regard them as partners in their children’s education. Such relationship influences how parents become involved in their children’s education and reinforces their willingness to be actively involved.

Studies have shown that parents consider their assistance with homework to be particularly effective for their child’s academic achievement. In addition, students themselves, claim to do better in school, at least some of the time, if they receive help from their parents. The importance for parental volunteerism and participation in decision-making at school has also been discussed. It is well worth considering whether parents feel more part of their child’s education by volunteering and by participating in school decisions. By being a part of something, gives us ownership and therefore it is reasonable to assume that such ownership makes it more likely that parents will be active participants in their child’s education.
Since a myriad of studies have shown the importance of parental involvement in children’s education, it is vital for both parents and schools to acknowledge that and establish such partnerships. Parental involvement not only influences students’ academic achievement and behaviour but also whether students continue their studies or not.

To become involved in our children’s education is something most of us can do, regardless of our socio-economic status and situation. For instance, we should all be able to monitor our children’s homework and be supportive and inquisitive about their schoolwork. Therefore, schools should do their utmost to encourage and emphasise partnership between schools and homes.

Since there is so much at stake, it must be considered essential for schools to build a bridge between schools and homes, where parents feel welcome and valued and trusted by teachers. Teachers need to build a strong and trusting relationship with parents. It will be much more likelier for parents to become actively involved with their children’s education, if the school cultivates a rich and inviting atmosphere at school. Research has shown us that this kind of a strong partnership between parents and schools is more likely to produce successful students who achieve academically.

What I want to ascertain with my research is how parents of academically achieved students participate in their children’s education, and what affect it has on their academic achievement. For instance, do the parents monitor their children’s school work and progress; what are their expectations of their children’s education; do they convey these expectations to their children; do they assist their children with homework; what kind of a relationship do the parents have with their children’s teachers. These are some of the questions I want my research to answer.
4 Methodology

The goal of this study is to ascertain how parents of high achieving students at Combretum Trust School participate in their children’s education. I also wish to learn whether parents’ behaviour and participation of the selected students is similar. In addition, the goal is to assess the effects the parents’ involvement may have on the academic achievement of their children.

In order to answer the research question “In what ways does parental involvement at Combretum Trust School affect their children’s academic achievement?” I selected seven high achieving students at Combretum Trusts School and interviewed their parents/guardian. The methodology used for the purpose of the study was qualitative approach in the form of interviews.

4.1 Qualitative methods

Qualitative research builds on descriptive data that has been collected in the field, that is, in the environment of the participants, using various techniques. Qualitative data can be in the form of field notes, photographs, video recordings, personal documents, memos, public records or transcribed interviews.

In order to conduct a good interview Bogdan and Biklen (2003) claim that it is important to make sure that participants feel at ease and talk freely about their experiences and points of view. Such interviews produce good and rich data, which clearly convey the participant’s perspectives. The golden rule of conducting good qualitative interviews is deep listening and if the researcher does not fully understand everything the respondent is saying, he needs to ask for clarification. He may also need to ask probing questions in order to get more details and particulars.

An important point which the qualitative interviewer must take into account is the potential effect he can have on the interview. Such factors as a different social position between the researcher and respondents, different culture and language can affect the interviews. In chapter 4.1.1 some methodological problems are discussed and linked with this study.

Qualitative researchers are concerned with context and therefore collect their data on location. They believe the best way to understand
any behaviour is to observe it in the setting it occurs. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) assert that such data is often called “soft data” since it has been submerged deep in the life of the person. The point of view of qualitative research is therefore the person itself.

In qualitative research the researcher is the main tool, collecting data and examining the understanding the person itself has on his or her reality. The emphasis is on the subjective view of the participant. Such researches are methodical and demand accuracy and to follow fixed and predetermined rules, although they are not standardised.

The researcher analyses his rich data to precision by reviewing them again and again and then cross checking them. The researcher’s intuition is the key factor in the data analysis. During the analysing, themes and ideas emerge and develop from the data, which the researcher builds on. When data analysing has been completed, the researcher often uses quotations from the data to paint a picture and substantiate the presentation (Bogdan and Biklen, 2003).

In qualitative research the sample size is usually small and therefore, generalisation from the sample over to the whole is not possible. Indeed, generalisation is not the aim of a qualitative research, but rather to understand and illustrate the experiences of individuals. Like Bogdan and Biklen (2003) claim, qualitative researchers look at findings of each research as a small part of a bigger picture. Individuals experience things differently, and interpret their experiences and situations in different ways.

Despite being fixed and have predetermined rules, qualitative approach is flexible. The researcher views, subjectively, people’s experiences in their context. Thus, it is especially suitable to use qualitative approach when the researcher wants to gain a deep understanding of individual’s experiences, in their correct settings. With this approach he gains an integral picture of peoples’ lives, their experiences and encounters.

According to Bogdan and Biklen (2003), in order to conduct good qualitative research, there are a few things that the researcher needs to consider. First of all, the researcher must treat his participants with respect and develop a close relationship built on trust. Equality, closeness and informality in the relationship should be stressed. Second, the researcher must secure the participants’ interest and make sure that
participation in the research does not lead to loss of prestige or cause any harm to them. This can be secured by anonymity, where the researcher does not use participants’ real names in the research. Third, the researcher must seek the cooperation of participants and do his utmost to avoid the appearance of coercion. Fourth, the researcher must be particularly sensitive when explaining himself and gaining consent of vulnerable people, such as mentally disabled people, the very young or very old or those who lack formal education. Finally, the researcher must tell the truth when reporting his findings. These are only some of the ethical factors the qualitative researcher must keep in mind and follow.

During the interviews, I was able to build a trusting relationship with my participants and the interviews were like a conversation between acquaintances, informal and cordial. I treated my participants with respect and informed them that they could discontinue their participation at any time. I explained my research and the reason for it and they all seemed genuinely interested in the topic. In order to secure their anonymity, I assured them that I would not use their real names.

4.1.1 Critical issues

When conducting qualitative research there are some problems that may arise such as problem with accessibility, language, different social position and culture of the researcher and participants (Bogdan and Biklen, 2003). I will now briefly discuss these methodological problems and at the same time discuss the problems, if any, that arose during my research.

It can be difficult for a researcher to get into contact with, and recruit, participants for his or her study. Therefore, it can be necessary to have a contact, or a middleman, who will introduce the researcher to some potential participants. This middleman can be a friend, an acquaintance, or even an employer of the person who is asked to participated in a study. However, this may cause a problem. The person asked to be a participant may feel obliged to participate so as not to insult or cause unfriendliness to the middleman.

In my study, the director of Combretum Trust School was my contact person. She gave me a list of names of students who had shown academic achievement at her school. Through these students I got into contact with the parents. The parents were informed of this procedure and it is worth
considering whether the parents felt obliged to participate in my study. However, I must say that all the parents I spoke with, showed genuine interest for my study and all but one was quick to get into contact with me and make an appointment for our interview. Therefore, I can not say I encountered any methodological problems with regards to accessibility.

Language is another potential methodological problem. Different languages between participants and the researcher can lead to misunderstanding and misinterpretation at the hands of the researcher on what the participants mean. Often a person uses rich intonation in his/her words, or emphases and nuances. If the researcher does not speak the same language he can miss those intonations that each language has.

English is not my native language, nor for many of my participants. My participants’ mother tongue is either Portuguese, Oshiwambo or English, but everyone speaks English. Since I do not speak Portuguese nor Oshiwambo, all the interviews were conducted in English. One of my participants had a slight problem with English, but his daughter sat in on our interview and translated when necessary. In spite of this, I had no trouble understanding all my participants and in turn, my participants did not seem to have too much trouble understanding me. If there was something that either they or myself did not understand, we just asked the other person to please repeat what he or she had said.

Different social positions of the researcher and his participants can lead to a methodological problem. The researcher can be seen as having a higher social position than the participants and this can lead to problems. If a participant sees himself in a lower social position, is he then likely to express himself normally and does he freely tell of his experiences and situations?

I do not think I encountered too big a problem in this regard. Many of my participants are themselves well educated and experienced people. However, in one of my interviews there may have been a slight problem with regards to social position. That particular participant was a young woman who is not working outside the home and without any tertiary education. During our interview she seemed a bit timid, but that can just as well be her natural disposition.

It can be difficult to get to know people of different cultural backgrounds and to gain their trust and it may cause problems. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) mention, for example, different rules with regards to
human communications and interactions in diverse cultures. For instance, in some cultures it is inappropriate to express oneself about personal matters or opinions with irrelevant people. Therefore, it can be a good thing to have a contact who can introduce the participants to the researcher.

I can honestly say that I did not encounter any problems related to different cultural backgrounds. I have lived in Namibia for many years and am accustomed to what social behaviour is accepted. Therefore, I did not experience any problems in this regard.

I have only touched on a few problems that may arise during qualitative research, such as access to participants, language problems, problems related to different social positions and problems related to different cultural background of the researcher and participants. When conducting an interview it is crucial to build up trust in the relationship between the researcher and participants. This is essential in order for the participants to freely talk about their experiences and situations. It is also vital to build this relationship on an equal grounding. Thereby minimising any potential methodological problems that may otherwise arise during a qualitative research.

I am happy to conclude that I managed to build up trust between my participants and myself and did not encounter any real methodological problems during my study.

4.2 The research question

In order to answer my research question, “In what ways does parental involvement at Combretum Trust School affect their children’s academic achievement?” I examined what the students have in common when it comes to the role their parents play in their education, irrespective of their social-economic status, nationality and gender. Are the parents actively involved with their education? What is their attitude towards their child’s education and education in general? Do they make any demands on their children with regards to their schooling? Do the parents have expectations of educational performances? Do they have expectations for their child’s future college attendance? Do they convey these expectations to their children? Do the parents have relationships with other parents at school? These are few of the questions I asked the parents. See Appendix I, the Interview guide.
4.3 My research, the process, and data analysing

For a long time it has been a considerable interest of mine to understand all that we, as parents and teachers, can do to make sure that our children reach their full potential. I knew I wanted to do my research in this area. However, this area is quite vast and I was uncertain as to what exactly I should study.

After pondering over this for a while, I spoke with Mrs Susan Brown, the Director of Combretum Trust School in Namibia, about a potential research topic and asked for her advice. She immediately mentioned the relationship between schools and homes and how to get parents involved with their children’s education. She has for a long time tried to develop a strong relationship with the homes of her students, without much success. It became clear what I wanted to study, that is, the level of parental involvement in a child’s education and the potential affects it has on academic achievement.

After deciding on the topic, I took some time to consider how would be best to conduct the research. Should I, for instance, conduct it in Iceland, my native country, or in Namibia where I have lived for many years? Mrs Brown urged me to do the study in her school and she assured me of her assistance in any way possible, the most important being an access to academically achieved students and their families.

After having read many articles on research findings on how parental involvement can positively affect academic achievement of students, I became convinced that that was the topic for my research. It is my belief and experience, both as a teacher and as a parent that parents today often feel intimidated by their children’s schoolwork and they feel inadequate in helping with their studies. Therefore, many do not get involved with their children’s homework. However, is there something else parents can do to make sure their children can achieve academically? Does it have to be direct involvement with schoolwork, or can it be involvement in other areas? I found it fascinating to read about how parental involvement in areas such as making sure their child does its homework, to know where their child is when he or she is out of school, to have discussions with their child about his or her schoolwork, to have expectations of their child’s learning, and to know every subject their child is taking at school, can positively affect their academic achievement. If this kind of involvement helps our children to achieve at school, do all parents
involve themselves this way? Another important question is whether all parents understand the effectiveness of this kind of involvement? Does this mean that children who achieve academically have parents who are involved? These are some of the questions I wanted to know the answer to.

Academic achievement is often measured from students’ grades and their test performances (Sheldon, 2009). For this research, I chose seven students at Combretum Trust School who have shown their academic achievement in this way. Those students have earned good grades and performed well in tests. Through the students, I gained access to their parents/guardians. In my study I use the word “parent” whether I spoke with blood parent, stepparent or a guardian. I conducted an interview with one parent of each of the students I selected, and every parent was asked permission to have the interview recorded. I let my participants choose the settings for the interview. That way I ensured they felt relaxed and at ease in their own surroundings.

In order to assess the involvement of parents, I used Epstein’s framework (see chapter 3.1) as a rough guide for my research. According to Epstein (2009), this framework can be used effectively by researchers in order to position and pinpoint both the questions and findings in an informative way, and thus improve procedures in schools. Epstein’s framework includes six main factors; namely parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community. I attempted to evaluate whether the parents of the seven students in my study were actively involved with their children’s education, according to those six factors. In addition, I asked each parent of their attitude towards Combretum Trust School, about their own educational level and current job position. The reason for those questions was for me to ascertain whether the students come from a diverse socio-economic background or not.

The goal of my study is to find out what effects parental behaviour has on academically achieved students at Combretum Trust School. How are these parents involved with their children’s schoolwork? Do they monitor their children’s homework? Do they discuss school matters with their children? Do they participate in school events? Do they have expectations as to their children’s academic success and continuation to university? Is
the behaviour of the parents of those students I selected, similar in this way? Those are some of the questions I want my study to answer.

4.3.1 The research process

In order to collect data for my research, I thought it would be best to conduct interviews, as they are considered powerful means to get an answer to a research question. According to Neuman (2003), field research interviews are informal and nondirective. Such an informal approach is considered more likely to provide more insight than a formal questionnaire (Parfitt, 1997). It is very common to use open-ended questions and for the interviewer to probe deeper. During an open-ended interview the researcher encourages participants to talk in the area of interest and probes more deeply in order to gain a deeper understanding (Bogdan and Biklen, 2003). These kinds of interviews are described as being more like guided conversations rather than interviews (Bogdan and Biklen, 2003; Neuman, 2003).

At this stage of the research process, I started to consider what questions to ask my participants and put them down on paper. I ended up with 40 questions that I divided into six categories. These questions were designed to accord with Epstein’s framework, which is discussed in chapter 3.1. In addition to these 40 questions and six categories, I added three more questions and put them in the seventh category. These three questions relate to parents’ attitude towards the school, their level of education and their occupation. The number of questions in each category ranged from two and up to eleven questions. The list of questions was informal and open and served as a guideline when I conducted the interviews. I would not necessarily ask the questions in the same order. I just let each interview and participant lead me forward. However, each participant was asked the same questions, which was the main reason for the question guide.

Before interviewing the parents, I met with the seven students I had selected, on Monday 7th June 2010; the venue was Combretum Trust School. I prepared myself well for that meeting and asked them to please take home with them a letter from me to their parents. In that letter I introduced myself and my research. I explained my request, and purpose, for the interviews.
Most of my participants live in or near Windhoek, the capital city of Namibia. The interviews were conducted during the month of June 2010. I began each interview by introducing myself and my research and what exactly I was studying. I also explained why I was interested in this particular topic. I asked each participant whether I could record our conversation and everyone gave his or her consent. In addition, I promised everyone anonymity and gave my assurances that it would be impossible to trace who said what in my findings.

As stated earlier, I let my participants choose the venue for the interviews and out of the seven parents interviewed, three of them where interviewed at their homes. Three interviews were conducted at their place of work and one interview took place at Combretum Trust School.

In general, all the interviews went well and usually they were more like a good conversation between acquaintances rather than a researcher conducting interviews with his participants. The atmosphere was relaxed and cordial. All interviews were recorded and on average each interview lasted for about 30 minutes. The shortest interview lasted for 18 minutes, and the longest for 41 minutes. Before conducting the interviews, I had hired a college student to do the transcription. She put a lot of care and detail into the transcription of each interview, and made sure to type each and every word the participants said.

4.3.2 Data analysis

Data analysing is the process where the researcher works with the collected data and its meaning becomes clearer. During qualitative research, it is common to start data analysing along with the data collection, which I did. As soon as one interview had been transcribed, I would read it carefully over a few times. I did this in order to gain some feeling for the interview and in order to familiarise myself with what each of my participant had said. In order not to miss any information in the data, I re-read them over carefully and systematically a few times.

After finishing the data collection, Neuman (2003) claims that it is best to use open coding. Open coding is when the researcher goes over the data carefully and looks for themes and ideas. Before starting on the coding process, I had assigned a different colour to each of the seven categories. For instance, the category “Parenting” was assigned purple colour and the category “Decision-making” an orange colour, and so on.
As I read the interviews, certain words, phrases and patterns emerged and I assigned each one of these themes the colour of the corresponding category. This way I gathered all the information that related to each category together and assigned a certain colour to them. After colour coding I used systematic coding. During this process, I went over every line of each theme, and every sentence that was related to each theme was coded together. This way, my data started to make sense and gain meaning, which is outlined in chapter five.

4.4 Choice of research method

There are a few reasons as to why I decided to use a qualitative approach in my study. For example, few participants, the importance of trust and good communication between participants and the researcher, and accessibility to participants. My aim was to dig beneath the surface and gain deep understanding of my participants’ behaviour. These points will now be discussed further.

One point of qualitative approach is that it has few non-representative participants. For my research, I had only a few participants and I wanted to gain deep understanding of each participant’s experiences. I wanted to establish a trusting relationship with the participants in order to be able to probe deep in their experiences and attitudes. The goal of my study is to assess the effects of my participants’ involvement in their child’s education. I have no intention to generalise from my findings, but rather to gain understanding and discuss my participants’ experiences. Thus, qualitative approach suited my research well.

Another reason for using qualitative approach was accessibility to participants. In order to get into contact with participants for my study, I contacted Mrs Susan Brown, the Director of Combretum Trust School. Through her, I gained access to students and their families. She gave me a list of names of students at her school, who have shown good academic achievement and from that list I chose seven students for my study and contacted their families.

4.5 Participants

All the parents I interviewed showed an interest in the topic and seemed to be genuinely interested to participate in the study. They all received me with warmth and anticipation, which quickly put me at ease.
The parents, as a group, are quite heterogeneous; three are Namibians, three Angolans and one Zimbabwean. I spoke with six mothers and one father. Five of them live in Windhoek; one lives in a town about 65 km out of the city and commutes to Windhoek every day for work. One works in Angola and is away for five weeks and then stays in Windhoek for five weeks. Two of the parents have lived and studied in Europe, and one of those had her children with her there. Three of them have a university degree and three finished Grade 12. One parent did not finish compulsory education, but graduated from Grade 8. Four of the parents are blood parents of the students, one is a stepmother, and two are aunts who have been caring for their child for many years.

Here follows a brief account of the parents who participated in my study. The names I use are not their real names.

My first participant is Laura. I met her at her office where the interview was conducted. Laura is Namibian and has always lived in Namibia. She is the stepmother of one of the students I selected. She met and married his father years ago and has raised him since he was just a young boy. Her son is in Grade 12 at Combretum Trust School and has been a student there since Grade 10. He is 17 years old. Laura has other children with her husband. Laura graduated from Grade twelve and she works as a secretary.

Oprah is my second participant. We met at her office and conducted the interview there. Oprah is from Zimbabwe and lived for a few years in Europe, with her children, while she studied for her master’s degree. She is looking into a Ph.d program for herself. Oprah is married to a Namibian man and has a stepson and other children by her husband. Oprah’s daughter is 16 years old and is in Grade 12 at Combretum Trust School, where she has been a student since Grade 8. Oprah founded, and runs, an organisation in Namibia that assists orphans and vulnerable children.

My third participant is Denise. Denise is from Angola and has lived in Namibia for a few years. She is the aunt of one of the students I selected for the study, and has cared for him for a few years. He is 18 years old and is in Grade 11 at Combretum Trust School. This is his first year at that school. His mother lives in Angola. Denise lived in Europe for a few years while she was studying for her Bachelor degree. Denise has a child with her husband. Denise and I met at her home.
Hilda is my fourth participant. She is Namibian and has always lived in Namibia. She is a nurse and works as such. Hilda’s son is 18 years old and is in Grade 12 at Combretum Trust School and has been a student there since Grade 10. Hilda has other children but does not live with their father. We met at Hilda’s home.

My fifth participant is Trina. Trina is from Angola. She is the youngest of my participants, in her early twenties. She has lived in Namibia for a few years and cares for one of the students I selected, along with that student’s two younger sisters. Trina’s daughter is 16 years old and is in Grade 11 at Combretum Trust School. She started in the school at the beginning of this school year. Trina does not have a husband or children of her own, nor does she work outside the home. Trina graduated from Grade 12. We met at Combretum Trust School where I conducted the interview.

Josef is my sixth participant. He is from Angola and works there for five weeks at a time and then stays in Windhoek for five weeks. Josef’s daughter is 17 years old and is in Grade 10 at Combretum Trust School and this is her first year at that school. Josef and his wife have other children, all of whom live in Windhoek. Josef finished Grade 8 in Angola, which is equivalents to Grade 8 in Namibia. I met with Josef at his home here in Windhoek.

My seventh, and last, participant is Clara. Clara is Namibian and has always lived in Namibia. Her daughter is 18 years old and is in Grade 12 at Combretum Trust School, where she has been a student since Grade 10. Clara graduated from Grade 12 and today she works as a Branch Administrator. We met at her office.

This was a brief description of the parents who participated in my study, and their circumstances. Conducting the interviews was both gratifying and a valuable experience. I am eternally thankful to all my participants for letting me pry into their private lives and for sharing their experiences with me. I, humbly, did my utmost to treat their story with respect and cordiality. Without my participants, this study would not have materialised.
5 Findings

In this chapter, main findings of this study will be discussed. In order to give the participants’ words more weight, direct quotes from them are used and most hesitant words have been removed.

5.1 Parenting

When it comes to parenting, all the parents have high expectations of their child’s education. They all voiced their expectations that their children’s education would open doors for them with regards to their future. Josef mentioned that he works hard and all his money goes towards his children’s education. The parents all expressed their desire, and their expectations, for their children to do well in school and to become something. They all want a better life for their children, than what they themselves had. For instance, Laura wants her son to:

...become something in future, better than what I have become.

Oprah has similar expectations for her daughter’s education:

Well, I expect that what she is getting will equip her for life and also to pass exams, but more, that her education will take her where she wants to go.

The same goes for Denise. She wants her son to:

… do well and get qualifications to do a job with some title.

All the parents told me that, not only do they have expectations for their children’s education, but also they convey these expectations to their children. Thus, the students are well aware of what their parents expect of them. Parents of the students in twelfth grade are especially expressive to their children of their expectations. All of them have regular and open discussions with their children about their schoolwork and education. Oprah told me that she has regular discussions with her daughter about setting goals and what she needs to do in order to reach those goals:
We had one major one at the beginning of the year. Basically at the beginning of every year we sit down and I say to her, you know, ‘What do you expect to get out of this year? What do you think you need to put in and exactly where do you want to go?’ So that she knows where to concentrate her energies.

In spite of having high expectations, the parents are well aware that they can only be supportive, rather than telling their children what to do. Like Clara says:

I expect her to finish grade 12 and go on to university. But I can not tell her what to study, just to support whatever she chooses.

Laura seems to agree with this and does not want to push her son too much:

...because I know he can really push himself so I don’t want to go to that extent. I’m just telling him, ‘This is my expectations, I know yours is also similar to mine. But at least this way we can meet both.’

Education is very important to all the parents I spoke with. They all have discussions with their children of how important it is that they receive an education and graduate from grade twelve. Oprah’s view is that, without education, her daughter’s future will be bleak. She tells her daughter that people can take everything away from her, except her education. Hilda has the same thoughts about the importance of education for her son:

Because if you didn’t have any education then I warned him, he is not going to be successful in any way in this world.

Josef illustrates very well how important education is for the parents:

The first thing in the life is health and education.
I asked the parents what they believe parents can do in order to prevent their child from dropping out of school. They all had strong opinions in this matter, mostly in the form of guidance, support and open discussions with the child and just to be there for the child. Denise mentioned the importance for parents to create an environment for their children that is suitable for studying. She also spoke of the importance of a good role model for the children. Laura said:

But if you can, to mainly prevent the children from dropping out, just support the children, just be there for them. Especially the teenage, at the adolescent age, it’s very difficult.

Oprah was very vocal about both the reasons and prevention of children dropping out of school. She believes there to be many different reasons as to why children drop out of school; for instance, it can be because of the teachers, or either lack of support from the family or lack of motivation:

…find out what it is that motivates your child and keep your child motivated by getting interested in their work and with them. And when you feel that they are de-motivated, keep pushing them, and also, be involved in the school so that you find out, because both of us are responsible to the school and our self. Find out what it is they are doing that can help your child not to drop out of school.

Hilda was concerned with the peer group and its influence on children:

…you must always educate the child, how important it is this school, how important it is to attend all the classes and how important it is to get that something out of this school. Always talk to the child. If you are not talking to him then he will have other talks from the peer groups, and then…

In addition, the parents mentioned the importance of expressing their expectations to their children. If the children are aware of their parents’ expectations concerning their education, they are less likely to drop out of
school. Thus, it is important to convey your expectations to your child and to let them know what you want for them. Hilda also stated that parents must educate their children of the importance of being in school and attending all the classes. Josef believes it is also important for parents to sign their children up for extra classes in subjects in which they may be experiencing problems.

When asked about their opinion of parental involvement in children’s education, all parents believe it to be very important to be involved. Hilda said that she finds it very important to involve herself in her son’s education and to meet with his teachers. That way she has more knowledge of his progress and behaviour at school and is better prepared to talk to him. Oprah agrees with this and says that it is necessary for parents to be involved, because if parents are giving their children to someone else to educate, they need to know what is going on. Denise agrees with this importance and says:

Of course, parents do have to be involved. I mean, it’s a partnership between teachers and parents. ‘Cause there’s no point of good teachers, good school if the parents have no interest and they don’t provide the environment for the child to study. Uh, I mean, they will see what’s the point and it’s not really important. So parents do have to be involved.

Some of the parents mentioned that it is not only necessary for them to be involved with their education, but also with their whole life. As Josef said:

Yes I think I should involved for everything. What she doing in school, even in the street when with friends. When she is going to the shopping, but I want to know what she doing when she gets some friends or some school mate talking. You know, I am the father you know.

The parents all consider themselves to be very involved with their child’s education and to monitor their schoolwork. Every now and again, they look at their child’s schoolbooks and ask questions about their work. They also closely follow their child’s progress at school. Denise likes to look at her son’s notes and see whether he needs to work harder. She is
especially interested in his progress in English since that is not his mother tongue. She monitors his work and pushes him to make sure that his grades will not slip.

Trina does her best to assist her daughter with schoolwork, if she has any problems. Oprah also considers herself very involved in her daughter’s education. If her daughter has any problem at school, she makes sure that she meets with that particular teacher and they work things out. Oprah continued and said:

Every week I try to find out what the expectations are for each subject, what tests are for that week. And then because I think if you make it a month, somewhere the children will slip away, and it’s too far. So for a week, usually by Monday or Tuesday, they have an understanding of what’s happening for the week, the tests they have, the projects, the assignment, and then how they are going to, to use that week.

Josef told me that whenever he comes to Windhoek, he makes it his priority to spend a whole morning at school. He talks with his daughter’s teachers and finds out how she is doing in school, both educationally and behaviourally. It was interesting that two of the parents specifically mentioned the importance of the behaviour of their child at school. Both Josef and Hilda find it very important that their child behaves well at school.

When asked whether they monitor how their children spend their time outside of school, all the parents do. The parents expect their children to notify them where they are and with whom. Hilda says she does her best to follow her son’s whereabouts when he is out of school. Oprah said:

Yes. I think, maybe, almost 95%. My husband and I, we’re very strict on all our children. …because I think there’s a lot of influence outside that if you don’t get hold of, can actually influence your child negatively. So, even her friends we know them, and we ask her friends to come home so that we can monitor, or she goes to visit, she tells us exactly what time to be expected back. We even try and collect her, if
possible from wherever she needs to go and we give them a specified time to socialise. So we know exactly.

Most of the parents are quite strict when it comes to knowing what their children are doing. Guardians do not seem to be any less strict than blood parents are in this regard. Like Denise said:

Yeah. Yeah, I do monitor. I mean, I do give a leeway, but if I see that he goes out Friday, Saturday and Sunday, it’s too much so he needs to leave two days at least to prepare his uniform and his, uh, homework.

Josef emphasises to his wife that, whenever he is in Angola, she must be responsible for everything here in Windhoek. She is to know at all times where their daughter is and with whom she is spending her time.

All the students have a curfew and need to be home before a certain time every day. That curfew is before dinnertime.

5.2 Communication

All parents were asked how often, on average, the school contacts them. Four of the parents maintain that the school contacts them regularly, about once a month. According to them, this contact is mostly in the form of circular letters informing them what is happening or requesting their attendance at school. However, according to Hilda and Trina the school only contacts them once a semester and Denise said the school had not contacted her at all this school year:

No, not much. I haven’t been [contacted] since he moved to Combetrum School, they haven’t contacted me.

In spite of such lack of communication, she believes it is very important for the school to have a fair amount of communication with the family.

Five of the parents contact the school themselves regularly, because they have a longing to know everything that is going on there. According to Laura, such contact between the home and school is very healthy. Hilda said that whenever she has any questions she does not hesitate to contact the school. Clara agrees and said:
Every time I hear something, I will phone Ms Sue [the school Director] and ask about it... Because I am paying N$21000 for the school year, I want to know everything that goes on there.

If Trina has any questions, she talks with the secretary when she makes the payment of school fees every month. Denise, however, has so far not contacted the school at all. However, all the parents find it very important to be in contact with the school and want more of such a relationship. Like Trina said:

It should be more often. And also to go through the work and what problem she have and all that stuff so that we can know which kind of communication and what can I say, uh, way she’s behaving at school. So that we can also help at home so that we can talk together.

Oprah’s view of this is similar:

I like it. It’s important for, I think, for me to keep understanding what’s going on at the school. So, I like regular contact.

Josef said:

Very, very important to be in contact because sometimes we, we are hear, have something wrong, maybe out of school. We, I trust my daughter, but we want to know because there’s something we don’t know but the teacher maybe know. The teacher can see.

Most of the parents consider them to have a good relationship with their child’s teachers and to know them. Oprah’s daughter openly discusses her relationship with her teachers, and what is going on at school with her mother, and through that Oprah relates to the teachers. She considers her to know her daughter’s teachers very well. Denise and Trina, however, have not met any of the teachers at school, and only met the Director when their child began their schooling at Combretum Trust School.
Both Hilda and Clara mention the frequent turnover of teachers at Combretum Trust School and find it even more difficult to get to know the teachers because of it. As soon as they have built up a relationship with a certain teacher, he or she leaves and someone else starts teaching their child.

All the parents agree that the school communicates their child’s progress adequately. As Laura said:

Yes, they do, they do. Every semester, or even in the middle of the semester if, especially Ms Sue who is very much concerned about her best learners. And if they see that you something, seems like… is stepping a bit backwards and they will call and ask ‘Is something wrong?’ or ‘What is happening?’

Oprah said:

Yes. I think whenever we meet, which is like monthly, we need to discuss with the teachers, and specifically we like, talk to a specific teacher. And they give us, you know, enough time to talk about her progress and the good things that, you know, they actually say if you need more time, we can come back and book a time with the teacher if we want to talk more, you know, just outside of that. That, I find that very good, yeah.

When asked about school policies and programs, all the parents maintain to know about that. The parents all know about, for instance, policies with regards to the uniform, and what is considered proper uniform and not, and what behaviour is appropriate at school. They also appear to know about sports and extra classes that are available to their child. As Oprah said:

Yes. Um, I think in the beginning we didn’t get so much, I didn’t get so much information, but then when I started to ask about the policies of the school I discovered that there are very well laid out policies and so I began to follow those.

Denise said:
Yeah, I do. I did read, I mean not because I was communicating but because I did read the school policy that they have to wear uniforms, no jewellery, or dirty uniforms and so on.

Trina said:

Yeah, probably when we came, then they do bring the letter, the school policy or that, how to make the payment, how the school is, all that.

The parents were asked whether they find the school responding effectively to any problems their child might have at school. Most of them feel the school responds both effectively and promptly to any kind of problems. Josef trusts the school completely to solve any problems that may arise. He continued and said:

Yes. I find the school fix. I think, yeah, if something happens in the school the first person who can found the solution or can fix the problem is the school.

Oprah thinks the school does its best to solve any problems students may have. If her daughter, for instance, has any problems she makes an appointment with that particular teacher, or the Director, and together they solve the issue.

The parents were also asked whether they feel the school is trying to reach out to parents and build a relationship with them. Most of them believe so, however, they mentioned that the problem appears to be parents themselves. When the school is organising a meeting with all the parents, usually it is the same group of parents who attend those meetings. More often than not, those are the parents whose children achieve at school. Therefore, the parents who really need to be there are the ones that do not attend. As Oprah said:

I think, let’s say, I think this year, and last, I think the school is really trying to reach out much more than they were doing before. They are really trying to reach out to parents, but I don’t know if they are getting the response that they should be getting from all parents… But I think, what’s, what is
important is that more than educating parents to understand the role that they play in the child’s education, because as much as you are trying to reach them out, they don’t know why we, the school is trying to reach out to them… So I think what is more important is the, apart from just the reaching out, is the educating them to understand why the school is reaching out to them.

However, according to Denise the school is not particularly trying to reach out to the parents:

Not really. I think there’s more communication at the beginning of the year when he comes to enrollment. And during the year, no, no.

She believes that since her son is doing quite well at school, that that is one of the reasons the school is not really trying to reach out to her specifically.

5.3 Volunteering

The parents were asked whether they had done any volunteering at Combrerum Trust School. Such volunteerism can come in many different forms, such as teaching extra classes or giving any kind of assistance within their own profession. Only Oprah and Laura claim to volunteer at school. Oprah has just recently started, as she said:

Well, I’ve just started this year. I’ve started to try and volunteer, but the year before there was no opportunity.

Laura said that whenever she is contacted by the school for any kind of assistance, she tries her utmost to accommodate them. As a result of her work, she is in a position to assist them with gathering different kinds of information and this she does. However, the rest of the parents have never volunteered at school, but the desire appears to be there, at least for some. Denise told me that she had offered the school to teach English as a second language on a volunteer basis:
No, I’ve never been contacted to do. I did actually ask at the school before if they need a teacher for English students or second language speakers or anything, but no, nothing has come out of that. And there has not been any request for any volunteer work.

The parents were also asked whether they have done any fundraising for the school. No one, except Oprah, has been asked to assist with fundraising, and no one appeared to know about any fundraising event for the school. Like Oprah said before on volunteering, she just recently started and has now joined a subcommittee at school, which will lead and organise fundraising events at school:

…I have never found myself involved in any fundraising event until now that we have, I’ve just brought myself into a committee, fundraising committee, where we think we need to start raising funds because, you can say you are involved in improving the school, but what’s important is the action behind it. We need to do something.

When the parents were asked whether they attend any school events, they all appear to be eager to attend events such as parent-teacher consultation meetings and prize giving days. Like Oprah said:

Yes, yes. Like there’s been, like a soccer, there was a soccer match between schools and we went to support them and then the school dance, children’s dance in the school… they had some prize giving days and I’ve attended every one. Yes.

However, three of the parents do not regularly attend school events. Since Josef is out of the country for five weeks at a time, he finds it difficult to attend school events. He also told me that since his wife does not speak English, she does not attend school events either. Denise told me that she has never received any invitation from Combertum Trust School to attend any event:

Well he didn’t tell me anything. I know he went, he goes to, he tells me he goes to a school activity but I didn’t because
at the other college they used to send a paper and just say, this invitation. Yes, but not at Combretum, I haven’t received anything.

Trina has also never attended any school events at Combretum Trust School. Her daughter just started Combretum Trust School last January, same as Denise’s son, and at the old school, she says she was quite active. There she participated in fundraising for the needy and attended many school events. However, she maintains that she is very shy and finds it difficult to get to know new people at Combretum Trust School. In spite of that, she appears to be eager to assist in any way possible, if the opportunity arrives.

Denise said very much the same thing, that is, at the old school there were much more parental activities than at Combretum Trust School. This is such a shame, because it seems that both Denise and Trina would be more than willing to participate in any school events and assist if possible. As Denise said when I asked her whether she would participate if the school would contact her:

Yeah, of course. I mean, I suppose it’s like, supportive for the kids or something.

The parents were asked whether they feel welcome at school or not. They all appear to agree that the school does make them feel welcome. For instance, Josef always feels very welcome whenever he visits the school to talk about his daughter’s progress and behaviour. He mentioned the warmth with which the secretary always greets him. Laura also feels welcome at school and mentions the open and friendly atmosphere there. Oprah also feels welcome at school and was quick to answer when asked:

Very. I found myself, feeling very, very welcome.

Even parents who have not been to Combretum very often feel welcome. Like Denise:

To be honest, I’ve been there twice. But it’s nice, it’s a nice school.
5.4 Learning at home

The parents I spoke with all agree that homework is very important and they emphasise that their children do their homework. They see it as an opportunity for their children to revise what they learned at school. Like Denise said:

Yes. It’s normally very important, it’s just a way of revising and a way of practicing what he learned.

When Oprah was asked about the importance of homework, she said:

Absolutely. I think it’s absolutely important because in my view work done at home will demonstrate retention and learning. Because work done in the classroom, the information is there and they’ve got skilled help. But when they go home, they are practicing the skills they learnt at school...

All the parents monitor their child’s homework and make sure that the homework is finished. Oprah looks at her daughter’s homework to make sure she has completed everything. Hilda requests that her son writes everything he is supposed to work at home in a book so that she has a better overview of his homework. This makes it easier for her to monitor his homework and to make sure that he completes it.

Denise says that this year her monitoring is not as much as she would like it to be. The reason being that she has a young daughter and much of her time is geared towards her:

Yeah. I mean... not this year much ‘cause I have a one year old daughter... But, yeah, before because I had to constantly check what he’s writing, especially in his English...

The parents all maintain that they assist their child with homework whenever possible. However, they are very aware that their assistance is more in the form of guidance, rather than telling them the right answers. As Hilda says, she only tries to guide her son in the right direction if he has problem with homework. Josef says that if his daughter has a problem with understanding a certain question, he tries to assist her with
comprehending it. Clara does assist her daughter if possible, otherwise she finds some person who can give her extra lessons. Trina concurs with this and says that if her daughter has problems, they try to talk it through but if that does not work, she contacts the teacher and asks for assistance. Laura agrees with this and says that she and her husband help their son whenever possible. They will sit down with their son and try to work through the problem. Like Oprah said:

...but sometimes there are specific questions that she asks that I assist. For example, when she’s talking about, when she’s doing literature. And what I try to do is not to give her the answer but to guide her towards thinking a bit more open...

Every parent is aware of all the subjects their children are learning at school. However, they are not fully aware of the syllabus in each subject, but they have a fairly good idea. Clara says that she has a good idea of what her daughter is learning at school. Hilda goes along with this and says that she knows all the subjects her son is studying and how he is doing in each subject. Josef concurs and says:

Yeah, I know the, the subjects. About the material, I don’t know all but...

Denise said:

Uh, yes. When I look at it now and again, I come and see what he’s reading about and studying, yes.

All the parents maintain that they have regular discussions with their children about both schoolwork and homework and they find these discussions to be very important. Josef says that to him these discussions are crucial, especially since he is away from home for such a long time. Whenever he comes back to Namibia, he always goes over his daughter’s schoolbooks with her. This way, he catches up with his daughter’s schoolwork:

It’s very important. We doing that, always... I want to see, to see the books. Yeah, even now I came last night, maybe
tomorrow we are going to do that, ’cause I do not know what happened during the time I wasn’t here. So it’s very important.

The parents were asked if they recognised what kind of a student their child is, that is whether their child is quick to learn, or really has to work hard at getting good grades. Every parent was quick to answer and it is apparent that they have a good idea. Denise says that her son has had to work hard to get good grades. The main reason for that is the language and different school systems in Angola from Namibia. She claims that the school system in Angola is not the best and that made it very difficult for her son when he started school in Namibia. Therefore, he has had to work very hard for his grades. Oprah says that she is very much aware of what kind of a learner her daughter is:

Yes, I think I am aware of the kind of learner she is. I think she’s a learner that, um, needs to work very hard... I believe that she’s an academic because she actually likes to read.

Laura recognises her son to be a very quiet learner and appears to worry about him being too quiet at times. However, he does get good grades and she is thankful for that. Hilda tells me that she needs constantly to push her son to study. According to her, he spends too much time with his friends at the expense of his studies. Therefore, she feels that she needs to repeatedly steer him on the right track. Trina’s daughter has never needed to study hard in order to get good grades; so learning comes very easy to her. Josef describes his daughter as a very eager learner:

...but the, the best thing she has got is uh, she’s very interested. If she has difficult to understand maybe she doesn’t sleep the whole time... very interested to understand, to sort the problem.

Every parent has had regular discussions with their children about the child’s aspirations of going to university. Everyone expects their child to go on to a university after graduating from grade twelve and they actively encourage them in that direction. According to the parents, the students all have good ideas of what to study after obtaining their matriculation.
Many of the parents have started gathering information with their child about universities and programs that interest their child. For instance, Laura says that she and her son are busy looking at different options for him in this regard. Hilda says that she just recently had internet connection put up in her house, so that her son can go on the internet and look for information about different university programs that may interest him. Oprah says she is also busy looking up information with her daughter:

Yes. Yes. We sit down, we are actually sit down over this last, um, this term we’ve been sitting down every two weeks. We sit down and we Google it on the internet together.

Thus, every parent finds it extremely important for their child to graduate from grade twelve. Oprah says that matriculation is just the groundwork for her daughter to build on. Josef concurs and says that matriculation is just the first phase in his daughter’s future.

5.5 Decision-making

At Combretum Trust School, there is no official parent association. However, some of the parents discuss with other parents, the school and any issues they may have. These discussions appear to take place at meetings at school that the school has organised and invited parents to attend. Laura says that, at these meetings, she often socialises with some of the other parents. For instance, they may discuss where the school is going and things like that. Oprah concurs and says:

...and during that meetings, parents are free to discuss. But I feel the forum is too wide. For those parents that are not so outspoken and for those parents that really need a smaller forum to discuss the issues, there isn’t that rapport.

Josef only knows two other parents at Combretum Trust School and he and his wife sometimes discuss with them issues relating to the school. The same goes for Hilda. She only communicates with a few other parents at school. Clara discusses issues related to Combretum Trust School only with one other parent.
However, neither Denise nor Trina has any communication with other parents at Combretum Trust School. Denise says there have been no opportunities for her to meet, or discourse, with other parents:

No, not any of the parents at all... any opportunity to meet other parents, not that I’m aware of. Unless the invitation didn’t get to me.

When asked whether they believe that Combretum Trust School listens to, and really hears, what the parents have to say, five of the parents believe that to be the case. Josef says that whenever he goes to a meeting at school, the parents are always asked about their view on things, and he feels that the school listens. Hilda agrees, and says that the school hears them. Laura concurs and says that, in her experience, they do listen. Not only do they listen, but also they truly care about the students and thus the family.

Trina tells me she does not know if that is the case or not, since she has never talked to anyone at school about school issues. The only times she goes to school is at the beginning of each month to pay school fees. Denise, however, does not believe the school listens to the voices of parents. She has never received any invitation from the school to attend any meeting or another event. Thus, she does not think that parents are being listened to by the school.

5.6 **Collaborating with the community**

The parents were asked whether they had taken their children to visit museums or introduced them to libraries, to widen their horizon and make them more aware of their community. All the parents have taken their children to visit museums here in Namibia, and when they are travelling, they always make sure to visit museums or historical sites. The students themselves appear to enjoy these visits, as Laura says about her son:

... If we plan a route, he says: ‘But mommy can we also make a turn here so I can see what I have read in history or what I have read somewhere in reality also happening.’
Hilda agrees, and says that her son really enjoys these visits and goes there by himself. Denise says she often took her son to museums, especially first after they moved to Namibia. Most of the parents also have taken their children to the public library and they are members there. Oprah says that her daughter, who is already a member of the public library, now wants to join the library at Polytechnic. Oprah supports that idea since she believes that that will expose her daughter to so much more learning. Trina concurs and says that her daughter also wants to join the library at Polytechnic.

None of the parents is a member of a community association. However, they are all active members of their local church, especially Laura and Oprah, who both teach at their local churches. Laura says that she is very much involved in church work and she teaches the young people, at her church, about her faith. Oprah also participates fully in her church activities. Her responsibilities are poor people that need urgent help. In addition, she is a member of the permanent task force of orphans and vulnerable children in Namibia:

...helps the government to understand you know, what is happening on the ground with vulnerable children because they [the government] don’t have enough information.

When asked about their attitude towards Combretum Trust School, the parents all agree that their attitude is very positive, except for one parent. Clara was not very positive and on the scale of one to five, where one is very negative and five is very positive, she only valued Combretum Trust School at two:

I would say, compared with other private schools, 2. I am not happy with what we get out of the school. Every year, the mark for students are very low and that is not what I expect. Not when I am paying N$21000 every year.

Other parents, however, were very positive towards the school. For instance, Oprah mentions how important it is to her that the school allows the students to think outside the box and that the school lets each child build on his or her own strength. Hilda agrees and says that what she particularly likes about the school is how it works holistically with each
child. It strives to develop the children’s whole being, not only their brain. Denise likes the international flair to the school, since many of the teachers come from abroad. She believes that that exposes the children to different cultures, which is a positive thing.

5.7 Summary
My main findings show that the parents I spoke with consider education to be very important for their children and they are all highly involved with their education. They all expressed their desire to follow their child’s progress closely and to know what is going on at school. They all have regular discussions with their children about schoolwork and school related matters, and have high expectations with regards to their children’s education. Most of the parents, also feel they have a good relationship with the school. The parents consider homework to be important and do their most to assist their child when necessary. In addition, every parent expects to know how their child spends his or her time out of school and with whom.
6 Discussion

The aim of this research was to answer the research question “In what ways does parental involvement at Combretum Trust School affect their children’s academic achievement?”. In order to do this, I interviewed parents of seven high achieving students at Combretum Trust School. The students come from a different socio- and economic background, they are of a different nationality and gender.

In this chapter, it is the intention to sum up the main findings from these interviews and discuss them in relation with theory and other research findings. The categories discussed are those identified in the literature; parenting, communication, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making and collaborating with the community. As has been mentioned, the findings only relate to Combretum Trust School in Windhoek, and the purpose is not to generalise from them to other schools.

Briefly, my findings show that the parents I interviewed are active participants in their children’s education. They recognise how important education is for their children’s future and how important it is for their children’s academic achievement that they stay involved. The parents have high expectations towards their children’s education and convey these expectations to their children. They follow their children’s progress in school and monitor their child’s schoolwork and have regular discussions about schoolwork with their children. Most of the parents interviewed consider themselves to have a good relationship with their children’s teachers. The parents know how their children spend their time outside of school and with whom they spend their time. The parents find open communication with the school to be highly important and believe that a trusting relationship between the homes and the school is imperative for children’s academic achievement. The parents believe homework to be an important factor in academic achievement and they monitor their children’s homework. Finally, all the parents interviewed expect their children to enter university after matriculation.

Thus, my findings suggest that involvement of parents positively affects student’s academic achievement at Combretum Trust School, irrespective of family social- and economic background.
6.1 Parenting

After interviewing the parents who participated in my study, I learned a great deal about their attitudes to their child’s education and their expectations in that regard. In addition, I learned about their opinions and beliefs of parental involvement. In spite of different socio-economic status, nationality and gender, all participants consider education to be important for their children. Both those who have tertiary education and those who do not, recognise the importance for them to be active and fully participate in their child’s education.

The parents put a lot of emphasis on education in order for their children to succeed in life and they are well aware of the changes education can have for people. They all have high expectations for their child’s education and want them to reach high goals and to become someone; they are also very vocal about their expectations. The parents are very much involved with their child’s education and they recognise the importance of such an involvement. They monitor their children’s schoolwork and most of them consider themselves to have a good relationship with the school and the teachers. The parents have regular discussions with their children about schoolwork and school related matters.

It was obvious to me, that the parents see education as the only way for their children to become successful individuals in society. The parents were very vocal about their expectations when it comes to their children’s education and the importance they place on it. Thus, it may be expected that the children strive to do their best, knowing the emphasise their parents put on their education.

In addition, it was interesting to hear that all the parents are quite certain, and aware, that they themselves can prevent their children from dropping out of school. They believe that the best they can do is to be there for their children, to guide them and assist in any way possible. This is a valuable point, since it may be presumed that if children feel the support and encouragement from their parents, they will stay motivated.

As was discussed in chapter two, the dropout rate of students in Namibia is quite high. Combined with high unemployment rate, it is therefore, imperative for parents to do whatever they can so their children will stay in school and graduate. Thus, I find it very informative that the parents I spoke with, all feel that they themselves can prevent their
children from leaving school. The more education people have, the more likely they are to find work, thus less likely they are to be trapped in poverty. Therefore, it is an important point for Namibian society and the development of the country.

It is imperative that parents convey their expectations to their children and openly discuss it. According to the participants in this study, they all appear to do just that. But not only that, they also have regular discussions about their children’s education with their children. Thus, the students know what their parents expect of them. This discussions and communications between parents and their children are an important factor in students’ academic achievement, as research findings by Gutman and McLoyd (2000) show. They claim that students who are doing well in school and achieve academically, have supportive communication with their parents.

When it comes to monitoring their child’s schoolwork, the parents all agreed on doing that. This is important for the academic achievement of every child. That is, to have parents that are fully aware of what their children are working on at school, and how they are doing in school. I firmly believe that when children feel and recognise that their education and progress in school really is important to their parents, it serves as an encouragement for them to strive to do even better. As Epstein (2009) claims, most students, whether they are in elementary school, middle school or high school, want their families to be involved and to be knowledgeable partners.

When parents participate in their children’s education by having regular discussions with them about their school work and monitoring their work, it may be presumed to affect their motivation to strive to do their best at school. Because by overtly showing their interest in their children’s lives, surely can act as a strong factor for encouragement.

### 6.2 Communication

With regards to communication between school and homes, such relationship is imperative for children’s academic achievement. The parents who participated in this study concur with this belief and find it to be both important and healthy. It is in accordance with Epstein (2009) who claims that the main reason for establishing a relationship between schools and homes is to assist all students to succeed in school.
addition, Sanders and Sheldon (2009) claim that effective schools make conscious efforts in reaching out to parents. Nevertheless, it appears that communication between Combretum Trust School and parents is more just to inform the parents of what is happening. Rather than to build a rapport with the parents, where they are treated as equal partners, who can discuss school matters, parents are treated more like receivers of information. It is important that the school reaches out to parents and establishes a strong positive relationship with them. It is also important that this outreach is frequent. As Glasgow and Whitney (2009) claim, the more frequently schools contact parents, the more involved parents become.

However, not all the parents, who participated in this study, are being contacted by the school. Two of the participants experience a lack of regular communication, however both of them wish it would be more. This is an important point. Combretum Trust School must improve in this regard, and reach out more actively to parents and develop a relationship with them. That includes contacting the parents on a regular basis to discuss their child’s progress. According to Obeidat and Al-Hassan (2009) such contact is essential for students’ academic achievement. It also includes listening to parents, to make it easy for them to discuss their expectations, hopes and aspirations they have for their children. For instance, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) claim that it depends, for the most part, on schools whether parents involve themselves in their children’s education or not.

In addition, Richardson (2009) maintains that schools need to be the initiating force in establishing and developing a partnership with parents. Thus, the initiative for communication between the school and parents must come from Combretum Trust School. Furthermore, Price-Mitchell (2009) claims that school leadership is instrumental in this regard. However, it is important that all teachers at the school communicate with the families of their students. It is not enough that the school Director does all the communication; it has to come from all teachers as well. As Glasgow and Whitney (2009) say, many parents do not believe that teachers really want them to be involved with their children’s education. Thus, it is important that teachers communicate with the families, and that way make it explicit that they do seek the parents’ involvement.
After talking with the parents, it became obvious to me, that they all want open and frequent discussions with the school. In spite of most of the parents feeling they have a good relationship with the school, two parents do not. Those two parents are two too many. The other five parents spoke more warmly about the school than the two who feel the lack of communication. For the school to build up, and maintain, a good reputation, I find it vital to include all parents at the school. I firmly believe that when the homes speak warmly about the school their child goes to, does affect the attitude of the child towards the school. As a result, the child will do better at school.

Once such relationship between the homes and the school has been established, it must be maintained. It can be expected that after developing a good relationship with parents, it will become easy to maintain it. I believe that if parents really feel that their partnership is being sought after and that they are valued as equal partners, they will want to keep in contact with the school and maintain the relationship. This is in accordance with Lindle (1989), who claims that parents want to be treated with respect and as equals. In addition, Richardson (2009) says that parents wish to be more involved with their children’s education. Thus, it should not be too difficult to maintain a relationship with the parents, once it has been established.

There is another point to be made. It must be regarded as vital for schools to inform parents of how important it is, for their children’s education, for them to be involved and fully participate in their education. It needs to be clarified, what exactly it means to be involved with your child’s education. For instance, many parents lack the necessary know-how to be able to assist their child with math or science and therefore consider themselves unable to be involved, as Sheldon (2009) suggests. However, involvement can take many forms not just assisting with homework. For instance, involvement can mean something as helping your child staying motivated and convey your expectations to your child. It could be volunteering at school events, or being a parent representative in various school committees. Thus, it makes it even more important for schools to clarify for parents what parental involvement precisely entails.

Combretum Trust School needs to educate the parents of the importance of their involvement. Some of the participants in this study specifically mentioned that those parents who attend meetings at school,
are those parents whose children are doing well in school. Whereas, the parents of children who are doing less well, do rarely attend. This underlines the importance for explaining to parents what effects their involvement may have on their children’s academic achievement.

My experience as a teacher, concurs with this, that is that those parents whose children are struggling academically rarely attend school events or involve themselves with school matters. Therefore, I consider it to be essential for Combretum Trust School to reach out to all parents, but especially those whose children are struggling academically. Since we now know how important it is for children’s academic achievement that parents involve themselves, Combretum Trust School must make a conscious effort to reach out to those parents.

6.3 Volunteering

Parents can be involved in their children’s education, by volunteering at school, and volunteerism is in fact, according to Sanders and Sheldon (2009) one way of increasing parental involvement. Thus, by volunteering at school, parents can have an impact on their child’s academic achievement. This volunteerism can take many different forms such as, translations, patrolling, and monitoring students’ attendance.

When parents involve themselves by volunteering at school, they gain some sort of ownership. That is, they become visible and show school staff, and their children, their seriousness in being involved parents. They become part of the school and thus their child’s education. In addition, when children discover that their parents really mean to be involved and want to be involved, will affect them positively. Not only in their academic outcomes, but also non-academic outcomes, such as attendance, behaviour and attitude. As Sheldon (2009) claims, research has shown that parental involvement does affect such factors. Furthermore, by volunteering, parents show teachers that they are serious about their children’s education and that they want to be involved. As Glasgow and Whitney (2009) claim, many teachers have the feeling that parents do not wish to be involved. However, it must be considered that by volunteering, parents are showing their commitment.

At Combretum Trust School, there appears to be a lack of volunteering from parents, mainly because the school does not approach them. It would be a strong move for the school to approach parents and
ask for their assistance in any way. As some of my participants expressed their desire to do volunteer work for the school, thus it may be presumed that it will not be too difficult to involve them. This will establish a relationship between the school and homes and involve the parents, which in turn, will benefit the students.

6.4 Learning at home

When it comes to homework, parents generally feel that it is important. Participants in this study concur with this notion, and find homework to be an important factor in their children’s education. This is in accordance with other research. For instance, according to statistics by the Department of Education (2004) in the United States, 90% of parents make sure their children have a place to do their homework. In addition, 85% of them inspect whether their children have finished their homework or not. It also concurs with Van Voorhis (2003), that parents generally agree on the importance of homework.

By monitoring their children’s homework, parents are participating in their education. This type of involvement will both stimulate and motivate students to do their best. As Sanders and Sheldon (2009) and Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) claim, when parents are involved with their children’s homework, the students improve their academic achievement. Monitoring their children’s homework may also be regarded as a tool for parents to gain information as to what their children are learning at school.

In addition, by monitoring their children’s homework, the parents show their interest in what their children are doing at school. I believe this is yet another factor to motivate and encourage children to do better at school.

It was interesting to see how all the parents who participated in this study were quick to answer what kind of a learner their child is. To me, that underlines and confirms their assertion of their involvement. They really follow their child’s progress and how he or she learns. It is worth considering whether the parents had been able to describe so confidently, what kind of a learner their child is, had they not been involved with their education.

All the parents who participated in this study expect their child to enter university after matriculation, and actively encourage their children
to go on to post-secondary education. According to Henderson and Mapp (2002), students, whose parents are involved with their education, are more likely to enroll in higher education. Thus, it may be presumed that the seven students that were chosen for this study, will all enroll in university after graduating from Grade 12.

I find this to be an important point. As was discussed in chapter two, education is imperative for the development of Namibia, and as a means to escape poverty. On average, 41% of households in the country live in poverty or abject poverty. Whereas, only 0.5% of households where the head of the household has a university degree, lives in poverty. This illustrates the importance for education. Thus, parents must recognise their importance and how vital it is for their children’s future that they participate in their children’s education. In addition, parents must understand that their expectations towards their children’s post-secondary education are crucial. Therefore, it is essential that Combretum Trust School reaches out to parents and educates them of how important their participation is towards their children’s future.

6.5 Decision-making

According to the participants, there appears to be no formal platform for parents at Combretum Trust School, such as parent association, where they can discuss, with one another, issues they may have regarding the school, and collectively bring those issues before the school-board. Nor is there a platform for parents to have an input in decision-making that affects the students. According to Epstein (2009), schools need to include parents when it comes to any decisions that affect the students and their education. By being included in this way, makes it more likely for parents to become involved with their children’s education.

Obeidat and Al-Hassan (2009) also claim that it is necessary that parents feel welcome at school and that the school frequently invites them to school. Notwithstanding the lack of formal platform for parents, some of the parents who participated in this study, do converse with other parents about school related matters. In spite of lack of such formal platform, it must be considered that most of the parents who participated in this study, feel that the school listens to them and hears their concerns.

However, as has been discussed before, parents whose children are struggling academically, do rarely attend school functions and therefore
have fewer opportunities to meet with other parents and converse with them about school matters. Therefore, it must be considered vital for Combretum Trust School to make an effort to get them to attend school functions. Or at least to find out the reasons for their absence. There may be a good reason for them not to attend, such as unavailability to get someone to look after their children for instance. Or their working schedule. If this is the case, the school should be able to work around parents’ schedule to offer them an opportunity to be included. It must be kept in mind that the reason for them not to attend school functions may have nothing to do with their willingness.

6.6 Collaborating with the community

None of the parents who participated in this study is a member of community associations, but all of them are active in their local churches. All of the parents have taken their children to museums and introduced them to the public library in order to widen their children’s horizon and to make them more aware of their community. In addition, according to the Director of Combretum Trust School, the school has taken the students on day trips to community businesses and museums. Epstein (2009) claims that such a cooperation with the community is valuable in order to strengthen school programs, family practices and student learning.

I believe it would be quite beneficial for Combretum Trust School and its students to establish a stronger connection and relationship with organisations in the community and utilise community resources more to their advantage. As Epstein claims, such a team work will strengthen the programs the school is offering. Different companies and organisations could work closely with the school by, for instance, offering the students career days, where the students would get an opportunity to get to know varied aspects of each company or organisation. In my view, this would be invaluable for the students in their decision-making with regards to their future career choices.

When it comes to the parents’ attitude towards Combretum Trust School, most of them have a strong, positive attitude, and are happy with the school and the direction it is going.
6.7 Summary

The findings of my research clearly indicate that my participants are all highly involved with their children’s education. They follow their children’s progress closely, they know with whom their child is spending their time outside of school and where they are. They all recognise the importance of parental involvement and are themselves highly involved in every aspect of their children’s education. Finally, every parent has high expectations for their children’s education, and conveys their expectations to them.

My findings suggest that parental involvement has positive effects on students’ academic achievement at Combretum Trust School. These findings correspond with other research findings that suggest that successful students come from a nurturing and supportive home environment. In addition, it does not appear to matter what socio-economic background the students in my research come from. This is in accordance with other research that claims that parental involvement affects students’ academic achievement irrespective of age, socio-economic background, and racial and ethnic background.

My hope is that these findings will, first and foremost, inspire Combretum Trust School to educate the parents what parental involvement really means, and how important it is for every child’s educational achievement. Secondly, I hope that this will encourage Combretum Trust School to actively reach out to all parents and establish a strong and positive relationship with them, and to develop a platform for parents to collectively voice their concerns. Thirdly, my hope is that Combretum Trust School will be able to maintain the relationship with the parents, once it has been established. Finally, it is my desire that these findings will lead to parents of all students at Combretum Trust School to seriously consider to become actively involved with their children’s education. As we know, parental involvement plays a highly important role in student’s academic achievement, and surely we all want our children to succeed. Since education is such a vital factor for this country’s development, to involve the parents in their children’s education is therefore extremely important.
References


Appendix I: Interview guide

Parenting
1. What are your expectations with regards to your child’s education?
2. Is your child aware of your expectations?
3. Do you have discussions with your child about education, and his/her interests?
4. Do you find education to be important for your child? Do you believe your child is aware of that?
5. What do you belief parents can do in order to prevent their child from dropping out of school before graduating from grade 12?
6. What is your opinion of parental involvement in their child’s education?
7. Do you consider yourself to be involved in your child’s education? How?
8. Do you monitor your child’s school work? If so, how?
9. Do you monitor the way your child spends his/her time outside of school? How do you monitor that?
10. Do you make sure that your child goes to bed at a reasonable hour on school night?

Communication
11. How often each month does the school, on average, contact you?
12. How often each month, on average, do you contact the school?
13. What is the main reason for this communication? (behavior of your child, his/her homework)
14. What do you think of the school communicating you?
15. Do you have a good relationship with your child’s teachers?
16. Does the school communicate to you your child’s progress adequately?
17. Are you aware of school policies and programs?
18. If your child has a problem at school, do you find the school responds to it effectively?
19. Do you feel like the school is trying to reach out to you as a parent and to develop a partnership with you?

**Volunteering**
20. Do you volunteer at school? If so, how and doing what?
21. Do you participate in school events? If so, what events?
22. Do you do any fundraising for the school? If so, how?
23. Do you find that you as a parent are welcome at school?

**Learning at home**
24. Do you find it important that your child does his/her homework?
25. Do you emphasise to your child that he/she does his/her homework?
26. What is your attitude towards your child’s homework? Do you find it too much or too little?
27. Do you assist your child with his/her homework?
28. Do you monitor your child’s homework? Do you make sure he/she does its homework?
29. Are you aware of all the subjects your child is learning at school? And what he/she is learning in each subject?
30. Do you have discussions with your child about his/her school, classwork and homework?
31. Are you aware of how your child is as a learner? Does he/she work hard?
32. Is it important to you that your child graduates from grade 12? If so, why?
33. Do you and your child discuss together his/her aspirations of going to university? Do you encourage your child to think of going to university?
34. Do you expect your child to go to university after matriculation? Which university?
35. Do you try to gain information about what is available to your child, education vise? If so, where do you look for those information?

**Decision-making**
36. Do you participate in any parent association at school?

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37. Do you feel that parents’ voices are heard at school with regards to school decisions?

38. Have you ever communicated with other parents at school, where you discuss issues or concerns about the school? And where you share your experiences?

**Collaborating with the community**

39. Through the years, have you taken your child to visit museum? Or do you encourage such visits?

40. Are you a member of any community association? (scouts, any sports teams, neighbourhood associations, etc)

**Other questions**

41. What is your attitude towards the school? between the scale 1 – 5 where 5 is very positive.

42. What is your educational level?

43. What is your current job situation?