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**INVESTIGATING SCHOOL-COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS ON GRADE SIX
LEARNERS PERFORMANCE AT ONE PRIMARY SCHOOL IN MUTOKO DISTRICT**

BY

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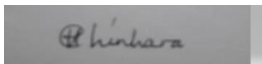
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Dedication

This research is dedicated to my two sons Allen and Wenyasha Bowora and my wife Primerose Makota for their unwavering support during the study.

ABBREVIATIONS/ACCRONYMS

FGD- Focus Group Discussion

TA- Thematic Analysis

T1- Teacher 1

T2- Teacher 2

ABSTRACT

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The study investigated school-community the relationships between the performance on grade six learners and community at one primary school in Mutoko District in Mashonaland East Province. The study unveiled that the teacher and the school head can develop strategies to improve school-community relations with the aim of assisting learners to pass. The study used a qualitative research methodology. The study sampled 2 teachers who are experienced in teaching grade six at that school. Eighteen grade six learners were also involved in the study. In-depth face to face interviews were used, observations and focus-group discussions were used to gather data. Three Focus Group Discussions were done with 3 groups of learners whilst interviews were made to two the seasoned teachers. The observations were made during school general meetings, school events and whenever parents were visiting the school. The data gathered revealed that teacher parental relationship is critical for students' performance. Where there are poor school-community relationships, normally there is a high failure rate of learners. Furthermore, it was revealed that school heads can improve the school-community relationship by having consistent meetings with parents where the role of parents is stressed. Recommendations were made for teacher, school administrators, and the ministry to promote good relationship with community. The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education should conduct a comprehensive recommendations across multiple schools to examine the state of school-community relationships and their impact on student learning outcomes. There should be good guidelines for schools to effectively build and maintain strong community partnerships. Teachers should engage with local community leaders and including parents, business owners, and community leaders, to foster their critical role in making learners perform well.

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CHAPTER 1: GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The relationship between schools and their communities is an integral aspect of the Zimbabwean educational system. This relationship has the potential to significantly influence students' academic performance. Yet, the nature and extent of this influence remain under-researched. Investigating how this dynamic impact learner performance in schools is a concern very significant to educators, policymakers, and society at large.

This research, aimed at filling the gap by searching thoroughly into the causes of poor school-community relationships and challenges faced in trying to improve school-community relationships. The research also covered strategies that can be employed to improve school-community links and unearthing how these relationships affect grade six students' academic achievement. This study is envisioned to shed light on how schools can leverage community connections for supporting students and improving their overall performance. Hence, this first chapter introduces the primary concerns of the research, its overall objectives, and relevant background context, and statement of the problem. Furthermore, research questions, assumptions of the study, significance of the lookout on various stakeholders, delimitations, and limitations of the study and lastly definition of key terms are also included.

1.2 Background of study

Education, for all along, has been an integral part of one's individual life, building a strong foundation for personal and future career development of an individual. Lately, the focus of education has broadened to, not only deliver academic knowledge, but also to foster healthy growth and development of learners. With this in mind, the importance of school-community relationships has gained prominence in contributing to students' academic and personal development. The community in which a school is should take part in the functioning of the school in order for it to move on with development structurally and academically.

The study was seeking to understand the influence of school-community relations on the performance of grade six students. The background of this research topic is grounded on the

observation that school communities often play a crucial role in molding the education and overall performance of students. Schools do not operate in isolation they are a part of and interact with the larger community. Gross et al. (2015), mentioned that school community partnerships play an essential role in successful schools, as it goes beyond what is typically available through school. The relationship between schools and the community can significantly enhance or undermine the learning outcomes of students. However, the nature and extent of school-community relations and its effect on learners' performance has been a topic of critical discourse among education stakeholders.

Within the educational fraternity, there has been growing recognition of the need to establish strong school-community links, as these connections can provide students with rich, real-life learning experiences. Learning is a product of not only schooling but also families, communities, and peers, (Engin-Demir, 2009). The links between schools, families, and the community are viewed as crucial aspects of a child's learning environment and an influential element in their academic success. Schools have increasingly directed their focus on fostering a positive relation with the community as part of their strategy to improve student performance. Conversely, poor school-community relationships may lead to problems like lack of student engagement or apathy towards academic pursuits.

Recent studies in the education sector have shown varying levels of impact of school-community involvement on children's learning outcomes, especially in transitional classes like grade six. Meanwhile, grade six is significant as it is typically a transition year when learners prepare for the move to secondary education after sitting for their grade seven public examinations. Therefore, understanding the impact of school-community relations at this formative stage becomes vital.

Some indicators of the problem

The researcher of this study has noted that percentage pass rates at infant is high and as learners progress to junior grades it will decrease which is worrisome. At infant level considering grade one and two, the pass rates of the grade six, class under study from the table below were a bit high as compared to pass rates at junior grades. The table below is showing the pass rates of the current grade six, class for the past five years.

Table 1: Pass rates for the current grade six on previous years.

Y e a r	2 0 2 3	2 0 2 2	2 0 2 1	2 0 2 0	2 0 1 9
G r a d e	5	4	3	2	1
Overall pass rate.	3 5 . 4 %	2 7 . 3 %	4 5 . 0 %	7 9 . 0 %	7 6 . 6 %

Low turnout of parents at school general meetings at a school with more than five hundred learners was another major indicator of parental ignorance towards their obligation responsibility. Moreover, non-payment of school fees by almost three quarters of the learners was also questionable. One would wonder why the community is so ignorant with their school if teachers come and go, but the school and the community remains there. Waswa (2017) opined that community building is important in schools because it is the tie that binds students and teachers together in a special way to something more significant than themselves. Therefore, school community building must become the core business of any school improvement effort. It seems lack of sound school community relations has a role to play on grade six learners' performance in education. The reason for considering school and community relations is that those two are the ones which, constitutes the largest part of a child's educational life. Hence, lack of school community relations is due to many factors which may have a positive or negative influence on a learners' academic success.

Other things to consider

This study is rooted in the growing awareness and evidence that a supportive relationship between the school and community can contribute significantly to children's academic performances. Additionally, the idea to investigate school-community relationships came from the inconsistent performance of grade six learners across various schools in the cluster, which might not entirely be attributed to variables like curriculum difficulty, teaching competence, or learner aptitude. The researcher hypothesized that perhaps an often, under-explored area like school-community relationships might be impacting learner performance and instigated this study. Understanding this correlation could expose possible causes of poor school-community relationships, adequate strategies that could be put in place among others in engaging the community as allies in enhancing the learners' academic performance. Considering the relationship between schools and their

communities, parental involvement in education could possibly have an effect. However, there are challenges faced by the community to improve relationships with schools which were also investigated in this study. The research was based on the premise that varied contexts may exhibit different forms of school-community relations, which in turn influence student performance in unique ways. Thus, the study is relevant and timely helpful to unravel the dynamics, and possible challenges of school-community relations on grade six learners' performance. This investigation provided insights on schools to leverage these relations to foster improved academic performance among learners and more effectively prepare them for their future learning journey.

1.3 Statement of the problem

Performance of learners in primary school is affected by various factors operating within the educational environment. Among these influences, the school-community relationship is considered to be a critical determinant of student achievement. Despite the significance of this relationship, a lack of effective interaction and communication between schools and the larger community is increasingly becoming a prominent issue. This research, investigated the ways in which the dynamics of the school-community relationship impact the academic performance of learners at primary school. It was observed that many schools are struggling to foster an effective relationship with the community, which in turn, leaves a detrimental effect on the students' performance. Studies have indeed indicated that schools with strong community ties tend to manifest better academic outcomes, enriched curriculums, increased learner participation, and enhanced learner motivation.

However, our understanding of precisely how, why, and to what extent the school-community relationship impacts learner performance remains limited. This gap in knowledge is problematic, given the significance of learner performance for individual future successes, and the importance of education for societal advancement. Thus, there's a pressing need for detailed research on the relationship between schools and their communities, and how this relationship could be optimized to improve learner performance.

1.4 Purpose of the study

The main thrust of this research was to establish the school community relationships which affect grade six learners' academic performance at a selected rural school in Mutoko District in

Mashonaland East Province in Zimbabwe. In other words, this study explored the relationships and interactions between schools and their surrounding communities, and determined how these relations impact the academic performance of grade six students. The study aimed at identifying the key aspects of such relationships, and to understand the ways in which various community factors such as, parental involvement, community resources and socio-economic impact can influence grade six learners to boost their performances. Additionally, this research aimed at identifying, causes of poor school-community, relationships, challenges faced, as well as develop potential strategies for optimizing school-community interactions to support student success.

1.5.0 Research aims and objectives

1.5.1 Major aim:

To explore the school and community relationships that can impact grade six learners' academic achievement.

1.5.2 Research objectives

- a) To establish the causes of poor school-community relationships.
- b) To find out challenges the school community face in trying to improve relationships with the school.
- c) To explore strategies schools can employ to improve school-community relationships to assist learners to pass.

1.6.0 Research questions

1.6.1 Main research question:

What are the school and community relationships that can impact grade six learners' academic achievement?

1.6.2 Sub research questions

- a) What are the causes of poor school-community relationships?
- b) What challenges are faced by the school community to improve relationships with the school?

c) What strategies can a school employ to improve school-community relationships to assist learners to pass?

1.7 Assumptions of the study.

The research has the following assumptions:

>>> It was assumed that there are factors that can lead to poor school-community relations, which has a bearing on the performance of grade six learners at primary school level.

>>> It was also assumed that the research instruments to be used in this research were helpful to unearth the school community links which influence grade six learners' performance, which will have a bearing in their final public examinations at grade seven.

>>> It was also the assumptions of the researcher that the views of participants are not biased, and are in the best of their knowledge and that they are honest in their perceptions.

1.8 Significance of the study

The research is significant to stakeholders in the education fraternity for example the learners, community, the school administration, the ministry, teachers, and the researcher himself among others.

To the researcher: The study findings would be useful to the researcher because this will cultivate new relationships, strengthens existing and creates the opportunity for future collaborations. The researcher will appreciate the pivotal role parents play in educational development of their children.

To learners: The research findings would help the learners to a greater extent. If the community and the school, collaborates it means the learners would improve since they would be sharing their experiences with teachers at school and with parents at home. In turn, parents would be motivated to provide material support needed by their children for the purpose of the children's education.

To the school administrators: The study would be useful to the school administrators as it would unearth the relevance of accommodating the community in the day to day running of the school. The school administrators would enlighten the parents on their obligations towards the school development programs thereby improving the state of affairs of the school as well as child learning.

To the community: It is hoped that the community might consider coming to school to share their experiences and crosscheck the progress in performance of their children. Moreover, the community would have a more profound understanding of how the school operates and have the know-how of improving the performance of their children academically. The community might end up being consistent towards their responsibility in the running and functioning of the school as well as provision of security services so that parents would take a more center role in the schools' academic development. The study would be useful in sensitizing parents and other stakeholders on ways to improve learners' performance in their academic excellence.

To the ministry of primary and secondary education: It is hoped that the research findings would generate a debate on how best to improve school community relations to lift school statuses. The ministry of primary and secondary education from the study findings may also come up with strategies to uplift school community relationships as it has a bearing in the performance of primary school learners.

To other researchers: Lastly, the research findings could serve as a useful source of references for the future researchers interested in this area of study. There might be loopholes in this research which are supposed to be filled, extended on another angle and consolidated by other researchers.

1.9 Delimitations

The study had the following delimitations:

Topic: The research was focused on exploring school community relations which affect grade six learners' performance at a selected school in Nzira Cluster of Mutoko District.

Respondents: Participants are drawn from the teachers at the school, as well as eighteen grade six learners.

Location: The study is limited to one primary school in Mutoko District in Mashonaland East Province of Zimbabwe and only focused on one school and its community relationships. The school is about twenty-eight kilometers from Mutoko Business Center.

1.10 Limitations of the study

The research has the following limitations

One school: The research was limited to only one primary school. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to all schools countrywide but to schools in Mutoko District

Time: The time frame for the research was not that flexible as it was limited. Furthermore, the researcher had other commitments besides carrying out the research like academic, work and family commitments. This had further strained the limited time given to carry out the research. To mitigate the time factor, the researcher had to maximize the use of weekends and other spare time that might have arisen.

Financial constraints: Due to economic hardships the issue of funds cannot be spared as a major constraint to the researcher. Cash crisis to buy data, printing research materials and even traveling to see the supervisor was another blow to the researcher. The researcher resorted to visiting the supervisor once a month and communicated with the supervisor via email and Whats app as a way of mitigating the constraint of cash.

Network challenges: The issue of network for researching was another limitation of the study as the accessibility of Internet for research was troublesome. The researcher had to walk to a distant place where Internet was accessible at night as during the day the network would be poor. To overcome the network challenge, the researcher had to travel to Mutoko Business Center where network was fairly accessible but due to lack of Internet cafes at times it was a worst of time and resources to travel there due to poor network connections at times.

1.11 Definition of terms

School- it is a social institution established by the society to accomplish its goals. The school can also be defined as the process of secondary socialization of the child where formal education and other character molding behaviors are taught. This was supported by Mahuta (2007) who believed that school as a social institution is regarded as the center of knowledge and it possesses the power to mold character and individuals in the community.

Community- it is the geographical location occupied by people who share common language, cultural beliefs, traditions, aspirations, goals, norms, and values as well as socio-economic activities among others. In this research parents also constitute the community and the words community and parents were used interchangeably as they are representing each other.

School-community relations- It is the degree of understanding and goodwill, which exists between the school and the community (Okorie, Ememe and Egu 2009). Atanda and Lameed (2006) conceptualized school community relations as the meaningful interaction between the school and the community. In other words, school community relations are the interdependence of the school and the community whereby these two cooperate to achieve goals of the school and vice versa. The school and the community depend on each other for the realization of the goals of each other. The school does not operate in isolation as it has the immediate community that surrounds it whether be in a rural or urban set up.

Learners' performance- is an issue that deeply concerns parents, teachers, and authorities in many communities and even countries at large. Berg (2012) viewed learners' performance, as an indicative measure and responsive abilities that can be expressed in an estimated way what a person has learned as a result of process of education or training. Learners' performance therefore refers to the results obtained from the learning process whereby one has to meet and achieve set aims and objectives of the school and that of the community.

1.12 Chapter summary

In this chapter attention was on the problem and its setting. The areas covered in this chapter are the background of the study, statement of the problem, research objectives and research questions, assumptions of the study, significance of the study to various stakeholders. Delimitations, and limitations of the study and definition of key terms are other things which were also discussed. The next chapter is going to look on review of related literature.

CHAPTER 2: Review of related literature

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter seeks to inform the reader on what other authorities are saying about the relationship between the school and the community on grade six learners' performance. Hence, the main thrust trolling in this chapter is on reviewing what was said or seen by other researchers on the topic under study in line with the research questions. The chapter was reviewed under the following sub-headings: theoretical framework and conceptual framework.

2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:

This research is guided and grounded in the roots of the theoretical framework of the social cognitive theory or social learning theory from Bandura (1977) and John Dewey's social learning theory. From a social learning perspective, human nature is characterized as a vast potentiality that can be fashioned by direct and vicarious experience into various forms within biological limits (Bandura, 1977). The main idea of the social learning theory is that learning is mainly done by observing other people with the goal of adapting one's behavior in social contexts. Emphasizes observing, modelling, and imitating other people's behavior, attitudes, and emotional reactions. It is about the influence of both environmental and cognitive factors on learning success as well as the overall behavior of a person

Taylor (2005) shared Dewey's vision that it is the responsibility of educators to create cultural changes within the classroom that are accepted, internalized, and acted on by students. Taylor (2005) pointed out that by fostering positive learning communities in classrooms academic achievement should increase. In other words, the way children are socialized and modelled serves as the principal model of transmitting new forms of behavior in them. Children's attitudes towards education form as a result of environmental influences, especially those that occur in interactions with parents (Cao, Forgasz, & Bishop, 2006) and teachers. The school and the community which constitutes the things surrounding the learners form the basis on learners' attitude towards education leading to good or poor performance in the learning areas.

According to Bandura, (1977) people regulate their behavior based on their discernment of the relationships between situations, actions, and outcomes. People avoid things that have been associated with aversive experiences, but like and look for things that have pleasant associations. In the same manner, students create positive attitudes when presented with interesting teaching strategies (Yang, 2015). Therefore, lessons should be lively, child-centered and be captivating as it has a bearing in arousing learners' interest towards education in all grades at primary level as it is the foundation for secondary education and even real-life problem-solving.

2.3 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Involving the community in school affairs is very crucial to improve the learners' performance. According to a study done by Verspoor, (2005) which was done in Bangladesh parental and

community involvement in school affairs has become another strategic drive of school improvement efforts in Africa. There should be harmony between the school and the community if the school has to develop in academics as well as structurally however conflict is as usual inevitable. A three-year study by Steinberg (2006) involving 12000 students in nine high schools in the United States of America reveals that community involvement draws parents into the school physically. It is most effective in improving academic achievement through attending school programs, and extra curricula activities.

From the dissertation of Ubogu (2004), which was unpublished in Nigeria he concluded that schools where parents are actively involved in school development do well on examinations as pupils are encouraged by both parents and teachers. Berg (2009) actively encourage exchange of ideas on the teaching and learning, pointing out that interactions between the school and the community produce positive effects in education. The school and the community should work hand in hand as one in supporting learners in their studies to surpass the set aims and objectives of the curriculum.

2.3.1 Causes of poor school-community relationships:

Strong school-community relationships are vital for the overall success and well-being of students. When schools and communities work together effectively it enhances educational outcomes, fosters a positive learning environment and promotes engagement and support for students. However, poor school-community relationships can hinder these positive outcomes, and also many schools struggle to develop and maintain positive relationships with their local communities. Below are some causes of poor school-community relationships as identified in existing research.

Lack of communication

One of the causes of strained school-community links is a lack of consistent communication and engagement between schools and community stakeholders as pointed out by Epstein, (2001). Jeynes (2005) opined that good communication is the cornerstone of interactions between schools and their external stakeholders. However, poor communication between schools and communities can lead to misunderstandings, mistrust, conflict as well as poor school community relationships. This can occur due to infrequent or ineffective communication channels, language barriers, or cultural differences which can damage the relationship between the school and the community.

Furthermore, Ubogu (2004) mentioned that communication improves how we cope with cultural differences so that they do not damage our relationships. On the other hand, cultural differences between schools and communities can lead to misunderstandings and communication barriers, as mentioned earlier. This can impact the ability to build strong relationships and support student learning. Moreover, schools and communities may have different values and expectations regarding education. This can create tension and conflict if there is a perceived lack of alignment between the two.

Students while at home may discuss with their parents, bad things about teachers, or about the school which can create tensions between the school and the community. However, parents should be careful about what they will hear from their children about the school this is mainly because the child might be the one with an attitude about schooling. And also, teachers should be courteous of what they will be telling students for example about the culture of the community or things happening in the society as it may fuel tensions between schools and their surrounding communities.

In primary schools there are cases whereby a child might not reach school neither being at home but will be in between and can lead to poor school-community relationships. That child may lie at home and while at school may also tell lies to the teachers. Hence, there is need for open and direct communication between the school and parents about the well-being of students to avoid misunderstandings. This may foster improvement in problems of truancy by learners, which may be cleared as some children may spend much time in between schools and home. Miller (2007) emphasizes the necessity for schools and their communities to open communication between them to promote effective use of the human and social capital that is available to each member as well as social cohesiveness.

Socio-economic disparities.

Schools that serve low-income students face challenges related to concentrated poverty. This can pose obstacles in implementing effective community school strategies and providing the necessary resources and support to students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Blair (2014) suggested that poverty, unemployment, and other socio-economic challenges within a community can impact on the resources available to schools and the opportunities available to students. This

can lead to feelings of resentment or frustration among community members. Hence, poor academic performance and social-emotional challenges stemming from socio-economic disparities, can hinder students' future educational and career prospects.

In addition, the negative school-community relationships can perpetuate cycles of poverty and educational underachievement within communities according to Mash et al. (2005). Due to socio-economic status the community members may fail to provide for the needs of their children at school and can result in educational underachievement by learners. Community members may fail to provide fees and even stationary for their children which may become a major blow on student academic achievement. Besides that, poverty and unemployment of community members may lead to members to have a feeling of inferiority and less motivated to provide for their children can end up having children who are underperformed in their academic excellence.

Lack of community involvement.

When schools do not actively involve the community in decision-making or school activities, community members may feel disconnected and less interested in their children's education. The community will tend to distance themselves from school activities and where the community is needed it will drag behind. Henceforth, there is need for a positive relationship between schools and their communities as they are one.

Lack of community involvement in education may also be caused by poor communication between the school and the community discussed above among others. According to Williams (2018) the level of community participation in schools has decreased at the moment. The issues of the schools in their communities are often treated with disrespect and contempt, according to Mahojan (2018). The result is that the grade six children in between will feel the heat and may end up developing a negative attitude towards education, thereby leading to poor performance.

Lack of leadership and ideological differences.

Effective school-community relationships require strong leadership from both schools and the community to reduce conflicts of interest, for example. A survey by Bala (2013) showed that the most serious issue affecting the school community interaction in schools in Zamfara State was

insufficient communication between the school leadership and community leadership. If leadership is lacking, it can be difficult to overcome challenges and foster positive relationships.

Schools may be perceived as having more power or authority than communities, and this can result in serious consequences emanating from that issue. This can create feelings of resentment or inequality, making it challenging to establish partnerships based on mutual respect leading to conflicts between community leaders and school administrators. Noguera (2003) opined that misunderstandings between school administrators and leaders in the community sometimes results in requests to have some principals and employees transferred from their communities. Smith (2020) also pointed out that in certain instances, community leaders intervene adversely with the operation of the school, intrude on the school property, and enforce regulations that are unfavorable to the schools. These circumstances are harmful to a child's growth and portray the community members as being unconcerned with the educational advancement of their offspring (Okongu, 2002)

Political or ideological differences within a community can spill over into school-community relationships. This can create division and conflict, making it difficult to work together effectively.

Lack of resources.

Schools may lack the resources necessary to adequately support community involvement or address the needs of diverse learners. Agbo (2007) performed a study in the United States of America and the findings generally showed that, parents did not believe they had a responsibility to actively participate in their children's education. Hence, the provision of resources by parents would lag limiting learners' accessibility to the necessary resources. This can also create barriers to building strong relationships and providing a quality education.

Also, poor school-community relationships is reflected in the impact on academic performance. Community involvement in schools can be hindered by poor academic performance, inadequate school buildings, and shortages of resources, which can ultimately affect the quality of education provided to students

Conflict between the school and the community.

Another cause of poor school-community relations is that of conflict between the school and the community. Some parents especially in rural set up have a belief and also put all the blame on the teacher if a child poorly perform in academics. This is supported by Blair (2014) who opined that, through discourse, some parents unconsciously subscribe to the belief that it was not their primary responsibility to be involved with the children's schooling; that it was their children's teacher responsibility to ensure that their children perform well. This issue can lead to conflict between the school and the community, the teacher and the learners as well as the school administrators and the parents. The school might get a label from the community that no learning is taking place at that school. The parents might have a feeling that the teachers want to test their educational abilities when giving children homework. Henceforth, there is need for a clear and good collaboration between the school and the community to minimize conflicts.

At times other parents would shout their children if they bring in homework at home thinking that it is the duty of the facilitator to help learners on everything since he or she is the one who is being paid by the government of the country, yet they also have a role to play. Hence, for a child's performance in education to be better there is need for harmony between the school and the community.

However, as Winfield (2010) argues that, the reality is that the root cause of most conflict is born out of poor communication or the inability to control one's emotions. Clear concise, accurate, and timely communication of information will help to ease both the number and severity of conflicts. Therefore, the school and the community should work as one and have a more profound of each. In Zimbabwe in extreme cases, heads and teachers physically fight each other over certain issues (Makaye and Ndofirepi 2012). Such situations disturb the tone and climate of the school and ultimately the performance of the community, teachers, and pupils are negatively affected.

Madziyire (2010) stated that conflict in schools is inevitable because like any other human being's teachers have opposing needs, ideas, beliefs, values, or goals. Hence, Gundiza and Namusi (2012) argued that, conflict may escalate and lead to non-productive results, or it can be beneficially resolved and lead to quality final products. Therefore, learning to manage conflict is integral to a high-performance team. Conflict management is the principle that all conflicts cannot necessarily be resolved, but learning how to manage conflicts can decrease the odds of nonproductive escalation.

2.3.2 The challenges faced by the school community to improve relationships with the school.

Building strong relationships within the school community is crucial for fostering a positive learning environment and promoting student success. However, various challenges can hinder the development of these relationships. Hence, this literature review will explore the key challenges faced by the school community in improving relationships, drawing upon relevant research and scholarly articles.

Communication breakdown:

Lack of clear communication is a challenge being faced by the school community to improve relationships with schools. Ineffective communication channels can lead to misunderstandings, frustration, and a lack of trust. For example, a study by Smith (2020) found that inconsistent communication from the school administrators to parents negatively impacted parent school relationships.

Language and cultural differences are also other barriers to effective school-community relationships. Diverse backgrounds within the school community can contribute language and cultural differences that hinder communication. This can be challenging to families with limited English proficiency or those from different cultural backgrounds.

Moreover, diverse school communities with families from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds can also face obstacles to building strong partnerships. Differences in cultural norms, communication styles and language proficiency can create mixed feelings, misunderstandings and make it challenging for schools to effectively engage all families according to Umstot (2008). Schools need to make concerted efforts to be inclusive and responsive to the unique needs of their diverse student populations.

In addition, modern schools often consist of a diverse student body with various cultural backgrounds. This diversity can present challenges in understanding and respecting cultural differences, leading to potential conflicts and misunderstandings. Schools can therefore promote cultural sensitivity and inclusivity through multicultural programs, diversity training for staff and creating an inclusive curriculum that acknowledges and celebrates diverse cultures.

Differing perspectives and expectations is another communication barrier for schools and their surrounding communities. Stakeholders within the school community frequently have different perspectives and expectations, which can lead to conflict and misunderstandings. For example, teachers may prioritize academic achievement while parents may prioritize social and emotional development.

Time constraints and workload:

Another challenge in improving school community relationships is the limited time and heavy workloads faced by many members of the school-community. This can make it difficult for teachers, administrators, and parents to sufficiently dedicate time to building strong relationships. A study by Kassim (2011) found that teachers' heavy workloads often prevented them from engaging in meaningful interactions with parents.

In addition, schools often face significant time and resource constraints that limit their capacity to dedicate sufficient attention to community engagement. Competing priorities, large student workloads and insufficient staffing can make it difficult for teachers and administrators to devote the necessary time and effort to building relationships, according to Epstein (2001). Inadequate funding for programs and initiatives that support family and community engagement can also be a barrier.

Resistance to change:

Resistance to change within the school community can impede efforts to improve relationships. Teachers, administrators, and even students may resist new initiatives, policies, or approaches due to a fear of the unknown, a lack of understanding or personal preferences. Effective change management strategies such as involving stakeholders in decision-making processes, providing clear communication about the reasons for change and offering professional development opportunities can help overcome this challenge.

School climate.

The overall school climate and culture significantly influence relationships within the school community. Negative school climate can lead to strained school-community relationships, lack of trust and decreased engagement. Schools can address this challenge by fostering a positive school

climate through the implementation of anti-bullying programs, promoting respectful behavior and encouraging collaboration and inclusivity among students, staff, and parents.

Social and economic disparities:

Social and economic disparities within the school community can also present challenges to building strong relationships. Families from disadvantaged backgrounds may face additional barriers to participating in school activities or communicating effectively with school staff. A study by Brown (2021) found that low-income families often felt marginalized and excluded from school decision-making processes.

Schools serving lower income communities typically face greater barriers to engaging families and the broader community. Factors like poverty, unstable housing and parents' work commitments can make it difficult for families to be actively involved with the school (Henderson and Mapp, 2002). Additionally, a history of mistrust or negative experiences with educational institutions in disadvantaged communities can make it harder to build collaborative relationships.

Liu (2011) have observed that economically disadvantaged parents are less able to afford the cost of education of their children and learners do not do their work to their fullest potential because every so often they are expelled from school for non-payment of fees. Jeynes, (2005) have pointed out that there is a relationship of parents' level of education to their children's academic achievements. Hence, educated parents show interest in their children's academic performances they meet and co-operate with educational administrators to ensure children seriousness in their studies. Educated parents are better in providing for the educational needs of their children and help them in school work activities as compared to less educated parents. The less educated parents will have a challenge in providing for the educational needs of their children like financial needs for school levies, school uniforms, and stationary as well as sending their children to better schools such as boarding schools.

Learners with poor background lacks confidence in the classroom as an example because of their dressing leading to their poor performance in learning areas like Mathematics. Therefore socio-economic status of parents determines the destination of their children's education. In addition, because of socio-economic status of less educated parents at times their children would be sent home for none payment of school fees disturbing their learning process leading to poor

performance in their learning at the end. Significant reliable research studies have shown that socio-economic status of a parent is the best predictor of student academic achievement.

2.3.5 Strategies schools and communities can employ to strengthen their relationships.

Improving school community relationships is crucial for creating a supportive environment that can positively impact students' success. When schools actively engage with the community, it fosters collaboration, enhances resources and provide students with a network of support. Schools can improve school-community relationships and assist learners in passing by parent and community involvement in education, transparent communication, building trust and respect as well as community partnerships among others. By implementing these strategies, schools can create a positive and supportive learning environment that benefits both learners and the wider community. A community in which a school is plays a crucial role in the success of the school however at times the relations (Verspoor, 2005).

Parental involvement:

One of the most powerful ways of improving school community relationships is by actively involving parents and families in the educational process. When families feel welcomed and involved it strengthens the bond between home and school. Research has consistently shown that parental involvement positively influences student achievement, attendance, motivation, and behavior. Schools can organize regular parent-teacher associations or meetings, workshops and events to encourage collaboration between educators and families.

The school is an extension of the home so, the experience of the child both at home and at school can be related. This relationship is the same, it therefore then means that the community should be involved in the day to day running of the school. Yara (2017) opined that the school head of the institution should be supportive and accessible to parents and members of the public and should not discourage people also should be courteous to them. This is highly supported by the Ministry of Higher Education Module of (1988), which suggested that if the school links well to their local communities it will help their programs to develop since there will be full interaction. Therefore, a fair interaction between the school and the community brings about change to the school as well as community projects.

Moreover, schools can involve community members in various aspects of the school, such as volunteering in classrooms or as resource personnel, when serving on committees and attending school events. This can help to build a strong sense of ownership and investment in the school, as well as providing learners with additional support and resources.

For a school to develop structurally, and academically, it is of paramount important to include parents in the day to day running of the school. Therefore, for a school to survive it must have parental support. Therefore, their views have to be respected. Parents can be invited to support the school in practical ways such as fundraising for teaching equipment or helping to carry out building repairs and improvements. Hence, one can safely say the role played by parents in school development programs academically is very crucial.

Transparent communication and conducive environment:

Maintaining clear, concise, frequent and transparent communication with families and the community is an essential strategy for improving school-community relations. This can include the use of text messages, newsletters, social media, school websites and other outreach efforts to keep stakeholders informed and involved. Additionally, utilizing digital platforms such as online portals or mobile applications can facilitate communication and engagement between schools and their surrounding communities. This can help to ensure that parents and community members are aware of what is typically happening in the school environment and how they can support their children in education.

Epstein (2001) opined that effective communication is essential for building a strong school-community relationships. Schools should employ various channels to keep the stakeholders abreast about school activities, achievements, and challenges. Furthermore, schools should actively listen to community feedback and address concerns promptly. By maintaining transparent communication, schools can build trust, strengthen partnerships and promote a positive image within the community.

The school administration should create a conducive environment for the learners, facilitators, and community so that none of the members will feel as an outcast. The school should treat the community fairly without looking at their economic status or home background. Umstot (2008) suggested that parents can be invited to visit the school to attend or participate in some of its

activities like school social programs. Here, parents will feel to be part and parcel of the school. The community members can also accept to propose ways they can offer to school development projects as well as making public appeals for public aid, in cash or kind for different projects at school.

Building trust and respect:

Cultural competency is another way of building trust and respect that can be employed by schools to boost their relationships with communities. Schools should strive to understand and respect the diverse cultures and backgrounds of their students and families. Schools that are culturally competent and inclusive are better able to engage with diverse communities and support learners from different backgrounds. School administrators should ensure that school environment is culturally responsive and inclusive as it can help diverse families and community members feel welcomed and valued. This can be achieved through professional development of staff, celebrating different cultures, cultural awareness programs, and partnerships with community organizations as well as adapting practices to meet the needs of the local community.

Moreover, schools can build strong trust and mutual respect with the community by involving parents in decision-making according to Creswell (2007). Schools can also build trust and respect by seeking the community input and being transparent about school policies and practices. This can help to create a positive relationship between the school and the community, which can lead to increased support for learners.

There should be a two-way symbiotic communication between the school and the community. Schools should listen to the concerns and suggestions of parents and community members and respond appropriately in a timely and respectful manner. This demonstrates that the school values their input and is committed to working together.

Additionally, conflict resolution is another way of building trust and respect between schools and communities. Schools should have clear procedures for addressing conflicts between parents, students, and staff. These procedures should be fair, transparent and focused on finding solutions that benefit all parties being involved.

Community partnerships:

Community partnerships is another strategy that can be fashioned by schools to foster their relationships with communities. Developing partnerships with local businesses, organizations, local leaders and other institutions can significantly bring valuable resources into the school. This could involve mentorship programs, career exploration activities, tutoring, or joint community service projects and additional learning opportunities for students. Connecting with the broader community expands the support network for learners.

Schools can engage in joint initiatives such as career fairs and community events to promote positive interactions between students, educators and community members. These partnerships can help bridge the gap between academic achievement and real-world applications. Community organizations can provide students with access to essential resources such as food, clothing, healthcare and mental health services. This helps to address social and economic barriers to student success and also provide additional support for students and teachers.

Schools can also work with the community members to raise funds for school programs and advocate for policies that support student success. This involves organizing fundraising events, contacting elected officials and participating in community campaigns. These partnerships between schools and communities can provide learners with additional resources and support as earlier said, as well as helping to build positive relationships between the school and the community.

Finally, the school administration must evaluate the progress of the school developmental programs like in academics, sports, infrastructure, income generating projects and the state of affairs with the community. This will be easy when setting goals of developmental plans for a certain period of time set and may help on self-evaluation to be effective. Without self-examination a school quickly becomes ineffective. Therefore, set goals and developmental plans for a certain period of time will help, to obtain an effective evaluation for progress check. Goals set must be SMART that's specific, measurable, achievable, result oriented and time framed and if they are not achieved, possible cures must be quickly set out.

2.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter was mainly focused on theoretical and conceptual framework. The chapter involves, school environmental factors and parental environmental factors and their effects

on grade six learners' performance at a Primary School in Mutoko district. If these things are not well catered for, they have a negative impact on the performance of learners overall. Also in this chapter, there was a discussion on strategies that can be employed to improve school-community relationship. Eventually, one would safely say that a good school-community relationship is a milestone towards success and is very crucial if a school needs to develop both academically and structurally. The next chapter will focus on the research methodologies that will be used in this study.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to outline, discuss and examine the research methodology used for the study. In other words, the chapter is all about the research methodology used in this research which was seeking to investigate the relationship between the school and the community and its impact on grade six learners' performance in education. Hence, this chapter mainly focused on research paradigm used by the researcher, research approach and the research design.

3.2 Research paradigm

There are plenty of paradigmatic positions which can be used in research. These include pragmatism, interpretivism, realism and positivism among others. For the purpose of this research, interpretivism is the paradigm which was chosen to be used by the researcher. There is no right or wrong approach as long as they are matched with appropriate assumptions in terms of ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology according to Williams, (2018). In ontology, the truth and reality are socially constructed and not discovered. Epistemology the goal is not to discover universal, context and value-free knowledge but try to understand the interpretations of individuals about the social phenomena they interact with. Methodology researchers apply methods that generate qualitative data.

A research paradigm is a world view on which research has to be looked at. In other words, a research paradigm is a world view lenses which forms the basis of research in terms of viewing, understanding, and interpretation. According to Teddlie and Tashkkori (2010), research paradigm refers to the worldview, together with the various philosophical assumptions associated with that

perspective. The term interpretivism, refers to approaches that emphasize the significance of people's personalities and participation in social and cultural life, (Elster, 2007), this knowledge is philosophically related to a researcher's worldview. Interpretivism is one such worldview that emerged out of the over dominance of positivism. Interpretivism is different from positivism as it aims to include richness in the insights gathered. It does not provide a definite and universal laws that can be generalized and applicable to everyone regardless of some key variables and factors, according to Myers, (2008)

The researcher of this study selected the interpretivism paradigm as it is more focused than other paradigms like the positivism. It is usually based on the concept under study, generalization of data is not that much when using this type of research paradigm. Long back Epstein, (2001) had said that this paradigm would also support the research to be more focused on the specific topic and abstain the research from heading towards more generalization as given in the positivist paradigm. Saunders et al. (2012) opined that the data gathered and analyzed would be less likely to be generalized through adoption of the interpretivism paradigm given the consideration that data were mainly dependent on a specific context, viewpoint, and values. Furthermore, interpretivism as a paradigm assumes that reality is subjective and can differ considering different individuals. Therefore, this can lead to the understanding that research participants would not provide general interpretations (Collins, 2010). Adoption of the interpretivism paradigm would lead to generation of high-level validity in data, as it is based on personal contributions with consideration of different variables (Myers 2008).

Of course, adoption of the interpretivism paradigm can provide in-depth understanding of certain contexts such as cross-cultural studies, factors influencing certain development through collection and interpretation of qualitative data. However, this can lead to deep insight and conclusions that may differ from others, as argued by Myers, (2008). This is mainly because interpretivism is more based on one's point of view, which might differ from another person's understanding.

3.3 Research approach

Qualitative research was chosen as the research approach. According to Berg (2009) qualitative research is the process of collecting, analysing and interpreting data through observing what people say and do. Qualitative approach emphasizes on the use of actual words of the participants which

becomes a tool that minimizes doctoring and fabrication of the conclusions in the study thereby contributing towards credible findings. The qualitative approach can extract and generate detailed, rich and thick descriptions of data based on the views of the participants with less or no fabrication of data.

One of the advantages of qualitative research is that it makes it possible to gather and analyse individualistic data on deeper levels, according to Muzari, Shava, & Shonhiwa, (2022). Qualitative research is adaptable to changes in the research environment and can be conducted with minimal cost in numerous instances. From qualitative research, there is an in-depth understanding of the problem as the data collected would be based on personal contributions of the required data making it more precise, and rich. This is also supported by authorities like Mohajan, (2018) who mentioned that qualitative research creates an in-depth understanding of the attitudes, behaviors and social processes that comprise everyday life which makes it sufficiently fit into the context of social researchers. It implies that, qualitative research reflects the detailed description of participants' feelings, opinions, and experiences, and interprets the meanings of their actions.

Although qualitative research has its advantages it also has some loopholes. On the other hand, the major disadvantage of the data from qualitative research is that it cannot be generalized to other context because it is more specific or the focus is mainly on the topic under study. The University of Southern California Libraries, (2018) stated that one of the drawbacks of qualitative research is that results of qualitative research are not generalizable. In short, the results of qualitative research is fairly limited, so its findings are not always widely generalizable.

3.4 Research Design

Research design is merely an operational framework within the facts placed so that their meaning may be seen. Krashen (2003) described a research design as a plan, structure, and strategy of investigation so convinced as to obtain answers to research questions and problems. Gross et al. (2015) pointed out that a well-conceived research design is essential for the success of any research.

The researcher decided to use the case study research design because case studies are usually diagnostic, explanatory, and comparative in nature. Robson (2011) defines a case study as a strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence. Case studies analyse

factors contributing towards and against a certain aspect. Creswell (2012), states that a case study is used to document the experiences of individuals within a natural setting. This approach views the insider's perspective more essential than the researcher's view according to Myers (2008). The researcher had a strong belief that data collected would be a true reflection of what was obtained in the field. The researcher opted for a case study as it focuses on few individuals. Through a case study approach, the study would incorporate participants' experiences, perceptions, and feelings gathered through rich, thick description obtained through interviews (Creswell, 2007).

3.4.1 Population

Sutton (2011), defines a population as all potential participants from which the sample is drawn. Chivore (2003) explicates a population as the total aggregation of the study elements which the study is interested in. The population for the study was all the fifteen teachers at the primary school under study in Mutoko District. The population also include the grade six learners.

3.4.2 Participants in the study

The research participants was made up of two teachers (one male and one female), as well as eighteen learners (nine boys and nine girls). The teachers chosen had an experience in this field of teaching learners at primary school level. No one was forced, to take part in this study. This study was made up of a total of twenty participants and for this research the issue of gender balance was considered to avoid biased data. Furthermore, the above teachers are abreast of the strategies being used in the teaching and learning process in the primary schools. They are also seasoned teachers in this field of teaching. The teacher participants were interviewed then focus group discussions were done with 3 groups consisting of 6 learners. Observations were made during school and community events.

3.4.3 Sampling Procedure

In this research, the purposeful sampling was used to select participants for this study. In qualitative research, it is ideal for researchers to purposefully select key participants or sites that will best help them to understand the problem. There are seven primary schools in the cluster. Then one primary school was chosen for the purpose of this study. The researcher was of the belief that the school was a rich source of data needed and hence purposive sampling. This is the biggest school in terms

of enrolment and also the geographical location of the schools in this cluster is just the same. Time frame and financial resources were also considered for selecting the school under study. Cresswell, (2007) suggested that in qualitative research, the researcher purposefully selects key participants or sites that will best help them to understand the concern. Purposive sampling is designed with a particular goal in mind.

3.5 Methods of data collection

The data collection procedures that were used to address the research questions are the interviews, focus group discussions and observations. These were selected because of their ability to bring detailed information that can be reliable and trustworthy.

3.5.1 Interview method

Interviews are not limited to particular questions, and can be redirected by researchers in real-time to probe for a more in-depth understanding of a phenomenon. Interviews are based on human experiences and observations resulting in being more convincing and powerful according to Muzari, Shava, & Shonhiwa, (2022).

Hence, an interview involves the interviewer and the interviewee where the interviewer will be collecting data and the interviewee is the one who will be providing data. The main reason the researcher chose this tool was that according to Yara (2017) interviews enable the researcher to establish rapport with potential participants and therefore gain their cooperation. Interviews were used since they allowed the researcher to probe further the responses for interviews where responses seem not to be clear. According to Liu (2011) interviews allow the researcher to get in-depth understanding with each respondent by asking open questions and follow-up questions.

Merriam (2009) states that data collection in the form of interviews is considered a common approach in educational research. Merriam (2009) further points out that interviewing is probably the most common form of data collection. The interviews lay bare the informants' motives thoughts, feelings and other emotions which cannot be seen through observation and record analysis alone. In circumstances where a respondent failed to understand a question, the researcher rephrased it. The interview provided the researcher with non-verbal responses such as facial impressions and voice tone. This added meaning on information retrieved through body language interpretation.

The open-ended questions used in interviews were designed to allow interview participants to elaborate more fully on methods being used in the understanding school-community relationships in the teaching and learning process. Taylor (2005) suggested that, interviews also offer interviewers considerable latitude to pursue a range of topics and give interviewer the opportunity to shape the content of the interview. This offered the researcher the chance to explore points of interest that emerged during the interviews. The methods provided the researcher with complete and wholesome responses from the participants.

3.5.2 The Focus Group Discussion (FGD).

Lune & Berg, (2017) presumed that focus group is any meeting style planned for small groups of not related individuals, formed by a researcher and led in a group discussion on some exacting topic or topics. A focus group discussion consists of hardly any people who gathered for a purpose. It has to be organized by the researcher.

For this, research, the focus group discussions comprised of 3 groups of six learners from different socio-economic backgrounds at a time. The groups were FGD A, FGD B and FGD C. These participants were inspired to discuss around a particular set of issues in focus group discussions or group interview. The focus group provides the researcher with an opportunity to initiate a platform from which members of the group interact with each other on a given topic (Silverman, 2011). As the discussions were going on, the researcher was carefully studying, and recording reactions of group members purposefully and also chip in where possible.

3.5.3 Observation:

Denzin & Lincoln, (2000) defined observation as a purposeful, systematic and selective way of watching and listening to an interaction or phenomenon as it takes place. Observation on its own is a way of data generation procedure which was used in this qualitative research. Observations allow researchers to gather firsthand data without relying on participants' interpretations or recall biases. This provides a more authentic and unfiltered view of the phenomenon under study. Observations provide a rich and detailed description of the phenomenon being studied according to Berg & Lune, (2014). Observations can be combined with other research methods, such as interviews or surveys, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. This triangulation strengthens the validity and reliability of the findings.

On the other hand, observations are often conducted in specific settings or with a limited number of subjects, which may limit the ability to generalize the findings to a larger population.

Furthermore, Gay (2009) suggested that using observations to collect data is time-consuming. Conducting thorough observations can be a time-intensive process, requiring the researcher to spend significant time in the field collecting data. Hence, researchers should carefully consider these factors when deciding whether to use observations in their studies and take steps to mitigate potential biases and limitations.

3.6 Trustworthiness of the research

Trustworthiness refers to the authenticity of data collected according to Epstein (2001). Trustworthiness was to be achieved through credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformity in this research. In this study, trustworthiness was achieved through investigating participants whilst they were at their school and classes. This was done so that participants were not influenced by the change of environment.

Credibility is achieved through triangulation of data. Triangulation is the use of more than one method of data collection in a single study. For this study, the researcher used interviews, focus group discussions and observations to check the consistency of findings generated. Credibility makes the reader trust the research findings as authentic. The researcher made the participants read for themselves the data collected so that if there was a divergent data, it would be corrected. This means that the data collected was not wrongly interpreted.

Sanders (2012) argued that, transferability is the degree the results of the research can be generalized or transferred further than the limits of the project. This means that the results obtained from investigating school-community relationships can also be the same results being faced in the district as a whole. Transferability helps in solving similar problems in which the same findings may solve.

Newman (2006) asserts that dependability refers to the repeatability of the results if the research can be carried out several times. It ensures that the research is trustable. Korthari (2004) sees conformability of the research as the degree to which results obtained can be proved. It serves to make sure the researcher gives the results with no bias.

Ubogu (2004) argues that there are four aspects to achieve trustworthiness which are truth, value, applicability, consistency, and neutrality. Truth can be achieved by getting data directly from the participant and reflecting on what is obtained in the documents to be analysed. This reflected the

truth of what is taking place in the schools. Neutrality of the research refers to whether the findings of the research were obtained as tips. Consistency is also used to achieve trustworthiness. A similar research using these same participants is likely to reach the same findings.

3.7 Data analysis

Analysis of data, according to Lune and Berg (2018), is the reasoning strategy with an objective of splitting complex whole into its parts. Mouten as cited in Zireva (2013) thought that during data analysis there is breaking down of data into manageable themes, patterns, trends, and relationships. Data analysis can be viewed as the grouping of data, searching for patterns and putting the data into smaller feasible units which can be easily interpreted and analyzed.

Objective of data analysis according to Muzari, Shava, & Shonhiwa, (2022) is to comprehend the different constitutive parts by inspecting relationships between concepts and finding out if there could be any patterns that can be isolated to form themes with the data. In this research thematic analysis (T A) was used. T A is an approach to analyze data, a strategy to organize and bring meaning to data. In other words, T A can be defined as looking and checking on noticeable and recognizable themes which comprises a pattern or trend. One of the major advantages of T A is that data coding does not allow the researcher's own biases to contaminate data as the themes repeat themselves as they come from the participants according to Bryman (2012). Another positive attribute of T A is that it is bendy in nature. Thus, it approves researchers to use it in any feasible approach, and it is still important for the researcher to stick to habitual issues. However, recurring themes may mislead the researcher as they may not be influential to the study.

For this research there are six steps which were followed for data analysis. According to Terry, Hayfield, Clarke and Braun (2017) the steps are as follows:

First Step-Familiarization with the data with a critical insight and a deep thought.

Second Step-Categorizing and coding of the data.

Third Step- Creating themes that emerged from the data.

Fourth Step- Taking themes and refining them, utilizing the most relevant information and trimming the irrelevant one.

Fifth Step- Defining and finalizing Data.

Sixth Step- Writing of a report on collected data.

3.8 Ethical considerations

In partaking the research ethics into consideration, the researcher added himself with the resource of a student identification card, introductory letter from the faculty and permission letter from the Registrar. The researcher explained the purpose and the circumstance of the lookup. The researcher also sought permission from the school head and requested the consent of all the participants.

Muchenetwa (2005) points out ethics in research as rules for differentiating between right and wrong behaviour in research. The concerns about research ethics revolve around salient issues of harm, consent, privacy and the confidentiality of data (Lune and Berg 2017). Ethical consideration is all about professional code of conduct. The research ethics were to protect the participants and to make sure that the interests of the participants are served in the research (Smith et al. 2021). Ethics also prevents giving false data and encourage one to search for knowledge and truth.

Participants were assured of the use of codes instead of the participants' names for anonymity's sake. They, the participants were told of their rights and discussed the strategy of using pseudonyms to maintain participants' confidentiality. In this research study, pseudonyms were used as names for all the participants for the interviews. Participants were allowed to withdraw at any stage, with or without reasons. The participants or informants were informed about the purpose of the study that is about investigating the school community relations which can affect grade six learners in their academic achievements. All these gave them, confidence to provide unbiased information on the study.

3.9 Chapter summary.

The chapter has looked into the research paradigm, approach as well as research design. Also included in the chapter is data collection tools which were used in this research, trustworthiness of the research and ethical considerations. The next chapter is chapter four. Chapter four is going to dwell much on data presentation, analysis, interpretation, and discussions.

CHAPTER 4: Data presentation, interpretation, analysis and discussion.

4.1 Introduction

This chapter is on data presentation, interpretation, analysis and discussion. The data was collected using interviews, focus group discussions and observation. Tables and thick descriptions were used on the presentation of data which was objectively analyzed to have a more in-depth understanding on the topic under study. In the context of this investigation the researcher seek to understand the relationship between the school and the community and their impact on grade six learners' performance. The next section presents biographical data of teachers who took part in the research.

4.2 SECTION A: Biographic data for teachers.

Table 2: Biographical data for teachers (N = 2)

	Sex	Age	Teaching Experience	Experience In Teaching Grade 6	Highest Qualification	Area Of Specialization
Teacher 1 (T 1)	Female	41-50 years	11-15 years	6-10 years	Diploma in education	R. M. E.
Teacher 2 (T 2)	Male	41-50 years	More than 15 years	6-10 years	Diploma in education	E. S.

The table above shows that there is one male teacher and one female teacher. These teachers are in the same range in terms of their age. The age range is from forty-one to fifty years. T 1 the female one has a teaching experience which falls in the range 11 to 15 years in the field. T 2 the male one has more than 15 years teaching experience. More so, from the table, it proves that the teachers who were interviewed are in the same range in terms of experience in teaching grade 6 learners. The qualifications of the teachers who took part voluntarily in the study is the same. They are all holders of diploma in education, which is their highest qualification. However, their areas of specialization at diploma level are different. T 1 majored with Religious and Moral Education by then while, T 2 majored with Environmental Science.

4.2.1 Impact of sex:

In terms of school-community relationships, research suggests that teachers' sex can impact their interactions with parents and community members. A study, by Liu (2011), found that female teachers were more likely to engage in collaborative partnerships with parents and community members than male teachers. The sex of the teacher being interviewed can have an impact on the findings when investigating school-community relationships and their influence on grade six learners' academic performance. Research suggests that both male and female teachers can have unique feelings and understanding on school-community interactions, which can have an impact on the results of the research.

For this, research, there was gender balance having one male and one female teacher, as well as on learners who took part in the study. There were nine girls and nine boys for the focus group discussions. The researcher had to consider gender balance to avoid the issue of coming up with results which are gender biased since from the nature of creation males and females in terms of thinking and doing things they are different. Overall, there is limited research specifically on the impact of a teacher's sex on investigating school-community relationships and grade six learners' performance. There is evidence to suggest that teachers' gender can impact student achievement, classroom dynamics, and interactions with parents and community members according to the study by Carlana (2019). Marsh et al. (2012) concluded that students tend to have more positive academic self-concepts and attitudes when taught by a teacher of the same sex. This may be due to gender stereotypes and students' identification with same-sex teachers.

In summary, the sex of the teacher being interviewed can influence the findings when investigating school-community relationships and grade six learners' performance, but the effects are complex and context-dependent. Accounting for these nuances is crucial when interpreting research in this area.

4.2.2. The impact of teacher's age:

Both T1 and T2 are in the age range of 41-50, although their teaching experience in the field is different. It implies that these teachers are mature adults and they have come across lavish years of ups and downs in real life.

The impact of teacher's age on school-community relationships and grade 6 learner performance is a complex issue with no simple answers. It's crucial to consider the specific context, individual teacher characteristics, and the dynamics of the school and community. While older teachers may bring valuable experience and community connections, it's essential to acknowledge potential challenges related to generational differences, communication styles, and adaptability to changing educational landscapes. Smith (2020) opined that younger teachers may be more adaptable to changing educational trends and technologies than the older ones.

Experienced teachers may have deeper roots in the community, fostering stronger connections with parents, families, and local organizations. This can lead to increased parental involvement, community support for the school, and a sense of shared responsibility for student success. Furthermore, older teachers might have better communication skills and be more adept at collaborating with colleagues, administrators, and community members. This can lead to a more cohesive school environment and a shared vision for student success.

However, it is important to note that the age of a teacher is not the only factor that can impact school-community relationships and student achievement. Other factors, such as teacher training, professional development, and school culture, can also play a significant role. Besides that, older teachers might be less comfortable with technology-based communication or struggle to adapt to new communication styles.

4.2.3 Teaching experience:

T1 has a teaching experience which is in the range 11-15 years while T2 has an experience in the field of teaching which is greater than 15 years as shown on the table above. This entails that T2 is more experienced than T1. Experienced teachers often have a more profound understanding of the community and its needs. They can leverage this knowledge to build stronger relationships with parents, local organizations, and community leaders. This can lead to increased parental involvement, access to resources, and a more supportive environment for learning. Hence, if seasoned teachers are interviewed, they at least have plenty to tell since they would have come across numerous things on the relationship between schools and their communities. Meaning that they have encountered various challenges and have developed strategies to overcome them

according to Epstein (2018). They are more resilient and adaptable to changing circumstances, which can benefit students, especially during challenging times.

However, these seasoned teachers may experience burnout due to prolonged exposure to demanding work environments. Gay (2010), suggested that, this can lead to reduced motivation, decreased engagement, and a decline in teaching effectiveness. Furthermore, these experienced teachers may be resistant to new teaching methods or curriculum changes. This can potentially hinder student learning and may become complacent and rely on established practices, limiting their ability to innovate and adapt to changing educational landscapes.

The impact of teacher experience when being interviewed on school-community relationships and grade six learners' performance is complex and multifaceted. Of course, experience can bring significant benefits, it's crucial to address potential negative impacts like burnout and resistance to change. By fostering a supportive environment for experienced teachers and encouraging ongoing professional development, schools can maximize the positive impact of experienced teachers on student learning and school-community relationships.

4.2.4 Experience in teaching grade six:

Interviewing a teacher with experience in teaching grade six can have a significant impact on investigating school-community relationships and their influence on grade six learners' performance. Teachers with experience in a specific grade level often profoundly have understanding of the unique challenges and opportunities that come with teaching that age group. The teachers who were interviewed for this study both have a teaching experience of grade six which is in the range 6-10 years. These experienced teachers in grade six level possess a deep understanding of the specific community their school serves. They can shed light on existing strengths in the school-community relationship, such as active parent involvement, community resources, or shared values. Experienced teachers have a wealth of knowledge. Darling-Hammond (2017), opined that they can provide insights into how school-community relationships can be used to support strategies for improving relationships as well as learner performance. For example, they may suggest ways to engage community members in supporting learners' literacy development or mathematical understanding. Conversely, they can also be able to identify challenges like

communication barriers, cultural differences, or lack of community support because of their experience.

Interviewing teachers with an experience in grade six level have an advantage of having a better introspection into school-community relationships of that area. Epstein (2018), recommended that, a teacher with experience in a certain grade level can provide valuable insights into the existing relationships between the school and the community. Therefore, they can identify strengths and weaknesses in these relationships and propose ways to improve collaboration. This information can be used to develop strategies to enhance school-community relationships, which can positively impact learners' performance. In addition, these experienced teachers have an in-depth understanding of the academic, social, and emotional needs of their learners according to Hoover-Dempsey, Walker and Sandler (2005). They can as well, provide insights into how school-community relationships can be used to support learners' needs and improve their performance. For example, they may recommend ways to engage parents and community members in supporting learners' academic achievement or social-emotional development.

In short, interviewing experienced grade six teachers about school-community relationships is a valuable step towards improving student performance. By understanding the local context, identifying challenges and opportunities, and gaining insights into effective practices, schools can create stronger partnerships with communities and foster a more supportive learning environment for all students. Teachers can share successful strategies they have used to strengthen school-community relationships and improve student performance. This can be a valuable resource for other educators and researchers.

4.2.5 Qualifications of a teacher:

The qualifications of a teacher being interviewed on investigating school-community relationships can have a significant impact on grade six learners' performance. Teachers who have higher qualifications and more experience are likely to have a deeper understanding of how to build positive relationships with the community, which can in turn improve the learning outcomes of their students. For this, study the teachers interviewed are holders of a Diploma in education. Moreover, being diploma holders, the teachers have better understanding of the curriculum and instructional strategies, which can lead to more effective teaching and improved student learning

outcomes (Darling-Hammond, 2017). They have knowledge and skills in education, which can help them to adapt their teaching to meet the needs of individual students and those of community members.

For example, a teacher with a master's degree in education and several years of experience may have developed a range of strategies for engaging with parents and community members. These may include, hosting regular parent-teacher meetings, organizing community events, and involving community members in the classroom. These strategies can help to create a positive learning environment and foster a sense of ownership and investment in the education of the students. Hence, teachers who have higher qualifications and more experience are better equipped to build positive relationships with the community. They also provide high-quality instruction that meets the needs of individual students.

Overall, the qualifications of a teacher being interviewed on investigating school-community relationships can have a significant impact on the grade six learners' performance. Highly qualified teachers who are skilled in building relationships with the community can create a positive learning environment that promotes academic achievement, leverages community resources, and fosters a sense of belonging and engagement among students.

4.2.6 Area of specialization:

For the teachers who took part in this study, they specialized in different subject areas at college level. T1 specialized in Religious and Moral Education, which is similar to the current Family Religious and Moral Education. Then T2 at college level specialized in Environmental Science, part of it currently can be linked with Agriculture, Science and Technology.

The area of specialization of a teacher being interviewed can indeed have an impact on investigating school-community relationships and grade six learners' performance. In the context of school-community relationships, a teacher's area of specialization may also influence their ability to make relevant connections between the curriculum and students' lived experiences. Teachers specializing in heritage studies, community development, or related fields are better equipped to bridge the gap between the school and the community, ultimately contributing to a more supportive and enriching learning environment that positively impacts student performance. This is supported by Epstein (2018) who presumed that, a teacher with a background in subjects

like heritage studies, science, or the arts may be better equipped to incorporate local community resources, issues, and perspectives into their lessons. This can enhance student engagement and motivation, ultimately supporting improved academic performance.

Furthermore, a teacher's area of specialization can influence their ability to collaborate with community partners and organizations. For example, a teacher with a background in environmental science may be better able to establish partnerships with local conservation groups or parks, which can provide opportunities for learners to engage in hands-on, experiential learning. For instance, a mathematics specialist may identify specific community resources that can enhance mathematics education, leading to improved student outcomes (Bennett 2016).

4.3.0 SECTION B: Causes of Poor School-Community Relationships.

4.3.1 Introduction:

Strong relationships between schools and their surrounding communities are crucial for supporting student success and overall school performance. Positive school-community relationships can lead to improved academic performance, better behavior, and increased engagement in school activities. However, in some cases, these relationships can be strained, leading to negative outcomes for students. Also, many schools struggle to foster positive connections with their local communities. This section will present, analyze, interpret, and discuss data on the causes of poor school-community relationships, gather and highlight the significance of building strong school-community ties.

4.3.2 Communication Breakdown:

One of the major causes of poor school-community relationships is communication breakdown between the school and the community. Participants reported that inadequate communication between students, teachers, and parents contributes to misunderstandings and mistrust. Many students from the group discussions reported that there was a lack of communication and engagement between the school and the community. They felt that the school did not make an effort to involve the community in school activities, and that the community did not have a clear understanding of what was happening in the school.

Learners also, reported feeling disconnected from the school, with limited opportunities for involvement and poor responsiveness to community needs. From the learner perspective, the disconnect may contribute to feelings of isolation and a lack of belonging within the broader community. This could negatively impact their academic motivation, social-emotional development, and overall well-being. In addition, this suggests a breakdown in two-way communication and collaboration.

Furthermore, Earl and Katz (2002) viewed lack of effective communication between schools and communities as a major cause of poor school-community relationships. Teachers who participated in the research expressed feeling a lack of clear and regular communication about school activities, policies, and student progress. This can lead to misunderstandings and a sense of disconnect between the two groups.

On another angle learners and teachers both highlighted a lack of opportunities for joint activities, events, and projects that could help bridge the gap and foster a sense of community. T1 suggested that usually there are perceived uninformed decisions about each other's activities, priorities, and needs. Henceforth, there was a perceived disconnect and lack of two-way dialogue. This leads to a lack of understanding about each other's goals, priorities, and opportunities for involvement.

However, there is need to enhance communication channels so that information would reach the recipients in time. From the observations made there is need to emphasize more frequent, transparent, and accessible communication. These could include regular meetings with parents, text messages, newsletters, and even school website. Of course it is good to enhance and use technology for example using school websites however, it is a tall mountain to climb. Most parents in the area under study they do not have smart phones from the observations made and others have a challenge in reading. Also, there is a network challenge which the members of the community face which can block the use of social media platforms for communication. This implies that to use technology it is not an easy thing in this area.

4.3.3 Limited Resources and Time:

Lack of resources in communities can significantly impact school-community relationships according to Noguera, (2003). Hence, another cause of poor school community relationships is limited resources available and time constraints. Tight budgets, heavy workloads, and competing

priorities were cited in group discussions as challenges that prevented schools and community organizations from investing in relationship-building. This was supported by both, teachers who cited systemic issues like insufficient funding, heavy workloads, and lack of administrative support as barriers to building stronger community ties. This indicates that the school may not have the necessary resources or prioritization of community engagement. Therefore, lack of resources and support for school-community partnerships can also be a significant barrier to building positive relationships between schools and communities, (Sanders, 2014).

Parents also, have limited time and resources as they will be committed to their own work by trying to make ends meet on provision of food on the table. At the end of the day, they will be tired however, there is need to increase opportunities for engagement. The learners in FGD C expressed a desire for more avenues to get their parents involved in the school, such as volunteering, attending school events, and serving on advisory committees.

4.3.4 Lack of Shared Vision:

Furthermore, lack of shared vision can also strain school-community relations. There was a perceived disconnect between the school's priorities and the community's needs and expectations. When there is a perceived disconnect between the goals and values of the school and those of the local community, it can be difficult to build strong partnerships, (Smith, 2020). This could make it difficult to align efforts and work towards common goals. Students reported that there were negative perceptions of the school within the community. Another student said that, "Some community members saw the school as a failing institution," this has a bearing of negatively affected the way community members interacted with the school.

Learners feel disconnected from the community, with low participation in community events. Teachers also opined a lack of joint initiatives between the school and community. From FGD B the researcher noted that some community members felt that schools were not interested in their input or did not value their role in supporting student learning and well-being.

To foster collaborative goal-setting is a way out to ease the issue of lack of shared vision. Participants suggested that the school and the community should work together to identify shared priorities and develop a joint plan for addressing them. This would help to build a sense of shared

ownership and investment. Hence no one would point a finger on another one as the ideas would be owned by both the school and the nearby neighborhood community.

Another solution is to address negative perceptions of the school within the community. This could involve working with community leaders to change the narrative around the school, and to highlight the positive aspects of the school and its students. The school could also engage in community outreach programs, such as volunteering in the community or partnering with local organizations.

4.3.5 Mistrust and Skepticism:

Another cause of poor school-community relations is mistrust and skepticism. Bryk and Schneider (2002) also pointed out that lack of trust and accountability between schools and communities can lead to poor school-community relationships, with communities feeling that schools are not meeting their needs or expectations. Many students in FGD A and C reported a lack of trust between the school and the community. They felt that the school did not trust the community, and that the community did not trust the school. It implies that there is negative perceptions on each other between the schools and communities. Hernandez (2022) was of the view that negative perceptions and biases, both from the school and the community side, can perpetuate cycles of mistrust and conflict. This lack of trust led to a breakdown in communication and cooperation. Overcoming these entrenched attitudes requires sustained effort and a genuine commitment to mutual understanding.

One of the students in FGD A confidently said that, their parents have a general distrust of the school administration and feeling that their concerns were not being adequately addressed. A general sense of distance and mistrust between the school and community was also reported by the teachers, potentially stemming from a perceived lack of effort and responsiveness on both sides. This further creates a negative cycle of poor engagement and further mistrust that is difficult to break.

The poor school-community relationships appear to be a multifaceted issue rooted in both institutional and interpersonal factors. The data suggests that the school may not be adequately resourced or prioritizing community engagement, leading to disconnections and mistrust between the school and local community. This disconnect and mistrust is likely exacerbated by a lack of

meaningful opportunities for interaction, collaboration, and shared experiences. Without a concerted effort to build stronger connections, the gap between the school and community will likely persist, negatively impacting the educational experience and outcomes for the learners.

4.3.6 Cultural and socio-economic differences.

Cultural and socio-economic variables cannot be left out as major causes of strained school-community links. Disparities in cultural values, beliefs, or practices was hindering effective collaboration between the school and community. The teacher participants noted that diverse backgrounds, languages, and socioeconomic statuses contributed to misunderstandings and barriers to engagement. This could mean that when schools fail to engage with the cultural backgrounds and experiences of their students, it can lead to poor school-community relationships according to Collins (2010).

From the observations made by the researcher student population was diverse, with many coming from low-income families and different cultural backgrounds than the majority of the teaching staff and school leadership. This contributed to a sense of disconnect and misunderstanding between the school and the community. The data collected also showed that cultural differences between the school and the community were a significant factor in poor school-community relationships. Garcia (2019) opined that socio-economic disparities between school staff and community members can contribute to cultural misunderstandings. Students reported that the school did not understand or respect the cultural backgrounds of the community, and this led to misunderstandings and conflict. Wilder (2014) also confirmed that the schools that fail to recognize and address the social and emotional needs of their students, as well as their academic needs, can contribute to poor school-community relationships.

However, as a way of trying to improve cultural differences there is need to promote cultural competence. Interviewee participants highlighted the importance of the school staff developing a deeper understanding and appreciation for the diverse backgrounds and experiences of the student population and their families. This can help to build better and strong school-community relationships.

4.3.7 Importance of building strong school-community relations:

Improved student outcomes:

Both teacher participants highlighted that when schools and communities work together, students benefit from enhanced academic support, social-emotional development, and access to resources. It implies that positive school relationships can contribute to increased academic achievement and engagements with the local community. Besides academic achievement strong school-community relations can foster students' social-emotional growth and resilience.

Increased community involvement:

Increased community involvement is another theme noted in FGD A and B as an advantage of having a strong school-community relationship. Strong school-community ties can lead to higher levels of volunteerism, philanthropic support, and overall community engagement with the education system. Furthermore, a strong school-community relationship can encourage greater community participation in school activities and decision-making processes which would be good for the betterment of children's academic success at the other end.

Enhanced school reputation and support:

T2 identified the issue of the school's good reputation and support as another importance of building strong school-community relations. Positive relationships with the local community can raise a school's profile, improve its reputation, and foster greater public trust and investment in its success. In addition, effective school-community relations can lead to fewer disciplinary incidents and a more positive school culture. Most people are crying loudly over the issue of drug abuse by the youth country wide, however this challenge can be lessened if there is a good rapport between schools and their surrounding communities.

4.3.8 Conclusion:

In conclusion, the data presented in this report highlights the importance of positive school-community relationships for the success of grade six learners. To improve these relationships, it is essential that the school and the community work together to address the factors contributing to poor relationships, including a lack of communication and engagement, lack of shared vision and negative perceptions, cultural differences, a lack of trust as well as limited time and resources.

When addressing these issues, the school and the community can build a stronger, more positive relationship that will benefit all stakeholders.

By analyzing data from focus group discussions, interviews, and observations, I have identified several causes of poor school-community relationships. Strengthening school-community relations is vital for promoting academic success, increased community involvement and enhanced school reputation and support.

4.4.0 SECTION C: Challenges faced by schools to improve their relationships with communities.

4.4.1 Introduction:

This section presents the findings from focus group discussions, interviews, and observations conducted to identify the challenges faced by schools in improving their relationships with communities. Effective school-community relationships are crucial for students' academic success, social development, and overall well-being. However, fostering strong relationships between schools and their surrounding communities can be a daunting task. This section aims to present, analyze interpret and discuss data collected on the challenges faced by school-communities in improving their relationships with schools. A qualitative method was employed for data collection and analysis. An observation method of collecting data was used as well as focus group discussions with grade six learners was also employed in the collection of data. Additionally, in-depth interviews were conducted with seasoned teachers to gather more nuanced insights.

Table 3: Showing responses from T 1 and T 2 on challenges faced by schools in improving their relationships with their surrounding communities.

	Challenges faced
T 1	-differing in expectations and priorities -resource constraints -communication and trust barriers
T 2	-communication challenge -lack of trust - Resource and capacity constraints.

From the table above, the interview results indicate that communication barriers, lack of trust, and limited resources are the most significant challenges faced by school-communities in improving relationships. The interview data revealed that these challenges are intertwined, with communication breakdowns contributing to trust deficits, which in turn exacerbate resource constraints from the community and the school. Thematic analysis was employed to identify patterns and themes in the data. The challenges faced by school-communities in improving relationships are complex and interconnected. To overcome these hurdles, schools must adopt a collaborative, inclusive, and responsive approach that acknowledges the diverse needs and perspectives of their communities. By doing so, schools can foster stronger relationships, leading to improved student outcomes, enhanced community engagement, and more effective use of resources.

4.4.2 Communication and engagement gaps

Jeynes (2007) noted that, the biggest challenge in building a strong school-community relationship is communication. Parents need to feel like they have a voice and that their concerns are being heard. This requires open and honest dialogue, not just one-way communication from the school. However, when it comes to certain community groups, such as immigrant families and those with children with special needs, they may have a feeling of unwelcome or that their needs were not prioritized by the schools. Bauer (2017), opined that, the challenge for school-communities is to

create learning environments that are welcoming, inclusive, and respectful of all students, families, and community members. Also, language differences could make it difficult for some community members, particularly low-income and non-English speaking families, to actively participate in school activities.

Both teachers and learners reported a lack of clear, consistent communication about school policies, programs, and opportunities for involvement. T1 confirmed that many parents feel disconnected from the school and don't know how to get involved. This can be due to a lack of clear communication channels, a lack of time, or a lack of understanding of what the school needs according to Sanders (2014). These prolonged challenges can lead to misunderstandings and a sense of disconnect. Ineffective communication and limited community involvement in decision-making processes contribute to a perceived lack of transparency and trust between schools and their local communities. The data suggests that communication barriers are a significant challenge in fostering positive school-community relationships.

Schools need to explore diverse communication channels and strategies to reach all families effectively. Schools should prioritize developing comprehensive communication plans that ensure regular, transparent, and accessible information-sharing with community members. Actively involving parents and community stakeholders in decision-making processes can help build trust and a sense of shared ownership.

Observations in schools and community settings confirmed these challenges and highlighted the importance of providing accessible information. Schools that use clear, consistent language and multiple communication channels (for example, text messages, newsletters, websites and social media) are more successful in engaging parents. Therefore, schools should use clear, simple language to communicate with parents and community members.

There is also need to facilitate flexible engagement opportunities. Schools should work to create a variety of engagement opportunities, both during and outside of traditional school hours, to accommodate the diverse schedules and needs of community members. This could include virtual events, flexible volunteer options, and alternative meeting times.

4.4.3 Lack of trust

From the FGD B and C with learners, many community members, particularly in low-income and minority neighborhoods, have a feeling of distrust and skepticism towards their local schools. There was a perception that schools were not responsive to community needs and priorities. Another learner had to say ‘Vabereki vanochema chema nerekuti varairidzi vanotsvinya havabati vabereki zvakanaka.’ This means that some parents felt intimidated or unwelcome when trying to interact with school personnel.

Lack of trust and mutual understanding between parents and school staff can create significant barriers to effective collaboration and engagement, (Smith et al., 2021). Of which Jeynes (2005) said that, building trust is essential for a positive school-community relationship. This can be difficult when there are past experiences of mistrust or when there is a lack of transparency from the school. From the observations many parents, especially from marginalized communities, expressed distrust in school leadership and felt their concerns were not heard or addressed. This strained the relationships due to historical mistrust between schools and communities, lack of transparency, perceived lack of accountability. Trust issues are also evident in the data, with learners expressing dissatisfaction of their parents with the transparency and accountability of schools. Building trust requires open communication, active listening, and genuine efforts to address community concerns.

Rebuilding trust is the only way out, to ease the strained relationship between the school and the community. This can be done by increasing transparency and accountability in school practices around decision-making processes and responsiveness to community concerns. Provide cultural competency training for school staff to better understand and serve diverse families. Schools can also engage in regular, open dialogue with parents and community members to address concerns and build understanding. Empowering parents through community advisory councils to have a meaningful voice in school policy is also another way of rebuilding trust.

An observation made is that of building personal connections with community members. This is mainly because teachers and school staff who make an effort to get to know community members on a personal level help foster positive relationships.

4.4.4 Linguistic/Cultural and Socio-economic challenges:

Socio-economic disparities and cultural differences between families and schools can lead to misalignment of expectations and values, hampering efforts to build strong school-community partnerships according to Garcia and Weiss (2019). In schools with diverse student populations, language barriers and cultural differences between staff and families were seen as impediments to building strong relationships. School teachers who were interviewed acknowledged a need for more multilingual resources and staff who reflect the backgrounds of their communities.

From the interviews, both T1 and T2 reported feeling unprepared to engage with families from diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds, leading to continued strained relationships. This implies that there are also other teachers who are not ready for engagement. The inability of schools to effectively engage with diverse families, due to a lack of cultural competency and resources, can perpetuate feelings of disconnection and marginalization by the parents. T1 further said that, schools face challenges in addressing the unique needs and perspectives of diverse communities.

On the other hand, this challenge can be improved by the issue of accessibility and inclusivity. Schools should partner with community organizations to co-host activities and address specific needs like recognizing and celebrating the diversity of the school community. It can also offer flexible scheduling for school events and activities. Implementing inclusive policies and practices can help bridge cultural divides and make all community members feel welcomed and valued. Schools should work to recruit and retain a diverse workforce that reflects the backgrounds of their student populations. They should also offer professional development opportunities for staff to enhance their cultural competency and ability to communicate across linguistic and cultural divides. Creating welcoming environments was observed as a key to unlock the challenge of language barriers and cultural differences. Schools that make an effort to be inclusive and welcoming to all community members, regardless of their background, are more likely to build strong relationships. Hence, there is need to create opportunities for parents and community members to share their unique perspectives and experiences.

4.4.5 Resource and Time constraints:

Time constraints, competing priorities, and limited resources often prevent schools from dedicating sufficient attention and support to developing robust community engagement strategies,

(Epstein 2018). T1 had the view that many parents would be busy with work and family commitments and don't have the time to get involved in school activities. Therefore, schools need to find ways to make it easier for parents to participate, such as offering flexible meeting times and online communication options. Busy schedules of parents and educators, limited resources are barriers for community engagement. Both schools and community members often struggle to balance the demands of their primary responsibilities with the time and effort required to nurture collaborative relationships. Both schools and community members often struggle to find the time and resources to dedicate to building collaborative relationships. Time constraints and lack of resources are major challenges in improving school-community relationships that need to be addressed. Schools need to invest in staff training and resources to support effective community engagement initiatives.

T1 and T2 from the interviews both, highlighted limited budgets and staffing as major barriers to developing robust community engagement programs. The school administrators struggled to find time and funds to organize events, outreach initiatives, and collaborative projects with local organizations. T1 further hinted on limited funding and staffing which make it difficult for schools to implement community outreach programs. Therefore, insufficient funding, staffing, and support for schools to dedicate time and effort towards building strong community partnerships is a significant barrier. This is supported by Epstein (2018) who suggested that schools often lack the resources to support strong school-community relationships which can include funding for communication materials, staff time for outreach, and training for teachers and administrators.

Addressing resource constraints, schools should seek out partnerships with local organizations and businesses to provide additional support and resources. Also, policymakers and school districts should prioritize allocating sufficient funding and resources to support the development and maintenance of strong school-community partnerships. This could include dedicated staff positions, community engagement programs, and opportunities for collaborative planning and problem-solving.

4.4.6 Parental Role Confusion:

Many learners from the focus groups expressed uncertainty about the specific role of their parents and how best they can be supported in their educational life. Some learners pointed out that their

parents don't even give a damn to ask about homework or anything to do with the school. This entails that there was a lack of clarity around expectations of the parents from the school. Parents may end up feeling disconnected from teachers and the school administration. Hence, they would desire more proactive, two-way communication about their children's progress and ways to get involved according to observations seen by the researcher.

The data collected, suggests that many parents want to be more involved in their children's education but face significant barriers, both practical and psychological. The theme of role confusion indicates a need for schools to provide clearer guidance and support to help parents understand how they can constructively engage. Agbo (2007) performed study in the United States of America the findings generally showed that, parents did not believe they had a responsibility to actively participate in their children's education and always viewed teachers as professionals who are very knowledgeable about their job. This makes it harder for the school to include the community.

4.4.6 Conclusion

The data analysis reveals that communication barriers, trust issues, cultural differences parental role confusion and resource constraints are significant challenges hindering positive school-community relationships. To address these challenges, schools need to prioritize effective communication strategies, build trust through transparency and accountability, foster cultural responsiveness and invest in resources for community engagement which are looked at in the next section. Addressing cultural and language differences through targeted programs and services can also help bridge the gap. Furthermore, policy makers and administrators should work to simplify bureaucratic processes, allocate adequate resources, and empower community leaders to take ownership of collaborative initiatives. By working collaboratively and addressing these challenges, schools and communities can foster stronger partnerships that benefit all students.

4.5.0 SECTION D: Strategies schools can employ to improve school-community links.

4.5.1 Introduction:

The section employed a mixed-methods approach, combining focus group discussions, interviews and observations to gather data on the strategies schools can employ to improve school community

relations and build trust with the local community. School-community relations are crucial in creating a positive and supportive environment for students. Improving these relations can lead to better academic outcomes, increased student engagement, and stronger community partnerships. Through a series of focus group discussions with grade six learners, as well as individual interviews with teachers and observations of school events, several key themes emerged regarding strategies schools can use to improve community relations and building trust.

Three focus group discussions were conducted and explored perspectives on current school-community relations and ideas for improvement. In-depth interviews were conducted with two seasoned school teachers. The interviews delved into best strategies for building stronger partnerships. The researcher observed several school events and community meetings to gain first hand insights into the dynamics and interactions between the school and community stakeholders.

4.5.2 Increased Communication and Transparency.

One of the strategies which schools can employ to improve school-community relations with an aim of assisting learners to pass is open and transparent communication. From the three focus groups, participants consistently highlighted the importance of clear and consistent communication as a cornerstone of strong school-community relations. They emphasized the need for regular updates on school activities and achievements, using various communication channels like text messages, websites, social media, and community meetings. Schools should ensure clear and accessible communication in multiple languages to reach diverse community members. They should also provide regular updates on school decision-making processes and invite community input.

From the interviews T1 and T2, they both acknowledged the importance of communication but also highlighted challenges in reaching diverse community members effectively. They expressed the need for tailored communication strategies to address different language backgrounds, cultural sensitivities, and technological access. Participants emphasized the need for more frequent and transparent communication from the school in order to improve school-community relations to assist learners to pass. This includes regular updates on school activities, policies, and decisions, as well as opportunities for community feedback and input.

The observations made by the researcher on school events revealed a lack of consistent communication strategies. While some events were well-advertised and attended, others lacked clear communication channels and engagement with the community which in turn halt the efforts.

The findings indicate that schools often struggle to bridge the gap between their institutional priorities and the diverse needs and perspectives of the local community. Lack of transparency and limited opportunities for involvement can contribute to a sense of disconnection and mistrust among community members, especially those from marginalized backgrounds. To address these challenges, schools should prioritize enhancing communication channels, creating structured platforms for community participation and input, and actively cultivating trust and relationships with local stakeholders.

Collaborative initiatives that leverage community resources and expertise can also help to align school programs with community priorities and build a stronger sense of shared ownership and investment. Increased communication and transparency can help address the community's desire for more information and opportunities to provide input. By regularly sharing updates and actively soliciting feedback, schools can demonstrate their commitment to transparency and collaborative decision-making.

4.5.3 Family and community engagement

Another theme obtained from FGDs and interviews is that of engaging the community so as to improve school community relations. By engaging families and community stakeholders, schools can leverage resources and support to create a more holistic learning environment for students, Smith et al. (2021). This implies that schools could get resources by engaging the community however, if it is a low SES community then, the challenge of lack of resources can persist.

Community engagement can also be done through the establishment of community advisory board to the school. Establishing a community advisory board or task force would facilitate ongoing dialogue and collaboration between the school and local stakeholders. Family and community engagement activities can foster a sense of shared ownership and investment in the school's success. When the community feels welcomed and involved, they are more likely to develop a sense of belonging and trust in the school.

In addition, family and community engagement is also vital in improving school-community relations. Teacher participants expressed a desire for the school to actively engage families and the broader community through events, volunteering opportunities, and partnerships. This could include parent-teacher conferences, community service projects, and collaborative decision-making processes. These ideas are also supported by Epstein (2018) who suggested that schools can improve school-community relations by involving parents and community members in decision-making processes and providing opportunities for two-way communication. However, limited resources and time can be a stumbling block to good ideas of improving school-community relationships.

Furthermore, schools can also host community events, workshops, and volunteer opportunities that bring the school and community together as a strategy of enhancing school-community relationships. They can encourage parents and community participation as well in school-based committees, clubs, decision-making processes and partnering with civic organizations and the business community. Partnering with local businesses, nonprofits, and civic organizations can provide authentic learning experiences, (Epstein, 2018). It implies that, schools can build partnerships with local businesses and organizations to provide students with real-world learning experiences and mentorship opportunities

4.5.4 Responsiveness to community needs

Gay (2018), observed that using culturally responsive teaching practices can help to build connections between students' home cultures and the school environment, thereby improving school-community engagements and learner's academic achievement. Participants noted that schools should strive to understand and address the unique needs and concerns of the local community. This may involve conducting needs assessments, incorporating community feedback into school planning, and tailoring programs and services to meet the community's priorities. Responsiveness to community needs is crucial for building trust and demonstrating the school's dedication to addressing the unique challenges and priorities of the local context. Hence, by conducting needs assessments and incorporating community feedback, schools can tailor their programs and services to better meet and engage the community's expectations.

4.5.5 Building trust:

Another important strategy that can be fashioned by schools to enhance school-community relationships is that of building trust. Both individual interviews and observations highlighted the importance of school leadership and staff in building trust and positive relationships with parents, community organizations, and local businesses fraternity. Building trust can be done when schools actively communicate with families, seek their input, and work to address their needs, it demonstrates a commitment to supporting the whole child. Henderson and Mapp (2002), noted that this can enhance trust, participation, and students' academic motivation.

Cultivating positive relationships between school leadership, staff, and the broader community is foundational for developing trust. This can be achieved through personalized outreach, active listening, and a genuine commitment to collaborating with the community. The findings of this study highlight the importance of building trust and improving school community relations to create a positive and supportive learning environment. The study's findings have implications for school administrators, teachers, and policymakers. Schools can employ the strategy of building trust which was identified in this study to improve school community relations. Additionally, policymakers can use the findings to inform policies and programs that support school community relations and trust-building.

In addition, programs and initiatives could be developed that showcase the school's commitment to the well-being and success of all students including marginalized groups. Participants in FGD C emphasized the need for collaborative initiatives that involve both the school and the community. This includes joint projects, volunteer opportunities, and shared decision-making processes which can promote positive interactions between school staff and community members. School teachers expressed a desire for more community involvement in school activities and decision-making. They highlighted the need for creating opportunities for community members to contribute their expertise and perspectives.

Schools should actively seek community involvement in school activities, decision-making processes, and joint projects. This can be achieved through volunteer programs, community advisory boards, and collaborative initiatives that address shared interests. It can also be achieved through creating a welcoming and inclusive school climate which in turn help to build trust and engagement with families and the broader community. However, organized community events,

often lack meaningful engagement and may become more like token gestures than genuine partnerships.

4.5.6 Addressing perceived barriers:

Participants in FGD A identified several barriers to strong school-community relations, including lack of trust, cultural differences, and communication breakdowns. They expressed concerns about school safety, academic performance, and the perceived lack of responsiveness to community needs. T2 highlighted the need for addressing these concerns through targeted initiatives. He emphasized the importance of diversity and inclusion programs, conflict resolution strategies, and community outreach programs that address specific community concerns. Schools should proactively address community concerns, promote diversity and inclusion, and develop conflict resolution strategies. This requires a commitment to understanding community needs, building trust, and creating a welcoming and inclusive environment for all. While schools could respond to specific issues, they often lacked a comprehensive approach to fostering trust and addressing underlying barriers.

4.5.7 Chapter summary.

Improving school community relations and building trust with the local community are critical for creating a positive and supportive learning environment which can assist learners to pass. The causes of poor school-community relations and challenges faced in trying to improve school-community relationships should be addressed if schools had to improve their relationships with communities. The strategies identified in this chapter can be employed by schools to improve communication, build relationships, and foster trust with the local community. Employing these strategies, schools can create a positive and supportive learning environment that benefits students, teachers, and the broader community. Building strong school-community relations requires a concerted effort from both schools and communities. Hence, by prioritizing communication, community engagement, addressing community needs and addressing perceived barriers schools can foster trust, create a sense of shared responsibility and improve the overall well-being of students and the community.

CHAPTER 5: Summary, conclusions and recommendations.

5.1 Introduction.

The chapter provides the summary, conclusions and recommendations of the study. The research sought to investigate school-community relationships on grade six learners' performance. It was trying to answer the following research questions:

- a) What are the causes of poor school-community relationships?
- b) What challenges are faced by the school community in improving relationships with the school?
- c) What strategies can a school employ to improve school-community relationships to assist learners to pass?

5.2 Summary

Summary of the key findings are as follows; on the causes of poor school-community relationships, there are several common themes that emerge from the study. One of the causes of poor school-community relationships is a lack of effective communication and engagement. Poor communication and limited engagement between schools and the local community was found to be causing misunderstandings, mistrust, and disconnect. Other causes which were noted in this research include socio-economic challenges and cultural misunderstandings where the school and communities have different values, beliefs, and traditions that lead to lack of trust, misunderstandings and conflicts. Lack of time and limited resources to dedicate to community engagement efforts was also found as another cause of poor school-community relationships. Lack of shared vision was another cause of poor school-community relationships which was found in this study. These are the key themes that often contribute to poor school-community relationships which were noted in this study. Addressing these underlying causes is crucial for building stronger, more collaborative partnerships between schools and the communities they serve.

Additionally, there are several challenges faced by school-communities in their efforts to improve relationships with schools which were established. There are communication breakdowns and lack of mutual understanding between the school and the surrounding community. Schools do not effectively reach out to parents and community members, while community members may feel

their concerns are not heard by the school. Schools also struggle to understand and respond to the unique needs and experiences of families from different cultural backgrounds. This can lead to misunderstandings and mistrust, which can make it harder to build strong relationships.

Another challenge which was highlighted in the study was lack of trust. Due to past negative experiences, many community members may be distrustful of schools and skeptical of their motives and intentions. Building trust and credibility takes sustained effort. Lack of time and resources is another challenge which is faced by schools in building strong school-community relations. Both community members and the school staff have busy schedules and competing priorities which are blocking them from investing in outreach and engagements.

Overall, the challenges reflect the inherent complexities and tensions involved in bridging the gap. These challenges require multifaceted approach, including improving communication, fostering trust, and creating more inclusive and collaborative school-community partnerships. Other strategies which were mentioned that can be fashioned are responsiveness to community needs and addressing perceived barriers.

5.3 Conclusions

The research indicated that when parents are actively engaged in their children's education, it can lead to significant positive outcomes across academic, social-emotional, and behavioral domains. However, schools and policymakers should also consider ways to support and enable parental involvement, especially for families facing socio-economic or other challenges. Of course, there are positive outcomes of parental involvement. However, there are some barriers which lead to poor school-community relationships. These causes include communication challenges, shortage of resources and time for engagement. Furthermore, lack of shared vision as well as cultural and socio-economic variables are other causes of poor school-community relationships which were noted as well.

There are some key challenges that schools and communities often face when trying to improve their working relationships and collaboration with each other. Overcoming these barriers requires a concerted, long-term effort from all parties involved.

It can also be concluded that there are specific strategies that need to be tailored to the unique context and needs of each school and its surrounding community. These approaches can help foster stronger, more collaborative relationships with the surrounding community. Leading to improved educational outcomes, enhanced resource sharing, and a greater sense of community ownership and support for the school system. The strategies which were highlighted include increased communication, family and community engagement as it helps to build trust. Furthermore, addressing perceived barriers was also indicated as a good strategy of improving school community relationships.

5.4 Recommendations

From the study's findings, the following recommendations are made:

>>>Teachers should engage with local community members, including parents, business owners, and community leaders, to understand their needs and expectations from the school.

>>>Teachers to regularly communicate with parents and community members about learners' progress, encouraging their involvement in learners' education.

>>>Administrators should involve community members in decision-making and encourage them to be actively engaged in their children's education.

>>>Implement strategies to improve communication and partnership with the local community.

>>>Parents to establish open communication channels with teachers to stay informed about their child's progress and provide feedback on their child's learning experiences.

>>>Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education should:

a) Conduct a comprehensive study across multiple schools to examine the state of school-community relationships and their impact on student learning outcomes.

b) Develop guidelines and frameworks for schools to effectively build and maintain strong community partnerships.

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Interview guide (for teachers)

My name is Peter Bowora I am currently studying for a Bachelor of Science Honors Degree in Mathematics with Bindura University of Science Education, Department of Science Education. As

part of my degree program I am currently carrying out a research on, **Investigating school-community relationships on grade six learners' performance at one primary school in Mutoko District**. This information will only be used for purposes of this study. Your participation in the study is voluntary and the information you give will be treated as confidential.

SECTION A. DEMOGRAPHIC DETAILS FOR FACILITATORS. (Tick where appropriate)

A.1. Name of Respondent _____

2. Sex : Male Female

3. Type of school (Tick where appropriate)

Day school	☐	school	Pvt school	☐	Others (specify)

4. Location of the school

Rural	Growth point	Mine	Others (specify)

5. Age of the teacher (years)

21-30	31-40	41-50	>50

6. The highest educational level the teacher has completed?

Secondary level	Diploma in Education	First Degree	Post Grad.	Others (specify)

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7. Area of specialization:

Mathematics	English	Shona	Other (specify)

8. Teaching experience.

0 – 2 years	3 – 5 years	6 – 10 years	11 – 15 years	>15 years

9. Class size (ratio)

1:20	1:21 - 30	1:31 - 40	1:41- 50	>1:50

10. Any other qualifications

1. _____

2. _____

11. Grade 6 teaching experience. (years)

1-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	>20

SECTION B. Causes of poor school-community relationships.

1. From your experience in this field of teaching, what do you think are some of the main reasons why school-community relationships can be strained or poor?

2. What are your thoughts on the importance of building strong school-community relationships?

SECTION C. Challenges faced by schools to improve their relationships with communities.

1. What do you think are some challenges that our school and community face when working together?

SECTION D. Strategies schools can employ to improve school-community links.

1. From your experience what strategies can be employed to improve school community relations?
2. How can schools build trust with local community members?

Thank you very much for your cooperation and your time