

# Chapter 4

## Methods and methodology

"There is general recognition among some researchers and even more practitioners that no one methodology can answer all questions and provide insights on all issues" (Rist 1977:42).

## 4.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the combined use of quantitative and qualitative methodology to more completely investigate parental involvement in Swaziland. Quantitative analysis of the responses to a parental questionnaire was used to determine whether and to what degree parental involvement is initiated by teachers and parents. Teachers' and parents' perceptions, beliefs, and feelings about parental involvement were then explored through qualitative interviews.

### 4.1.1 The choice of methodology

There are essentially four major paradigms used in modern social science each with its own methodology (Gough 2000:9). These are the positivist, interpretive, critical and deconstructive paradigms (Connole 1993:32). Quantitative methodology is traditionally associated with the positivist paradigm while qualitative methodology is usually based on the interpretive paradigm (Firestone 1987:16).

#### 4.1.1.1 *Positivism vs interpretivism*

Previously, followers of the interpretive paradigm had to vigorously defend their choice of methodology, and their epistemology and ontology (Rist 1977:42). The interpretive paradigm includes the belief in a reality that consists of people's subjective experiences of the external world (Terre Blanche & Durrheim 1999:6). Researchers who accept this ontology usually adopt an intersubjective and empathetic epistemology and use qualitative, often, interactional methodologies that rely on the subjective relationship between the researcher and subject to reveal the subjective reasons and meanings that lie behind social action (Terre Blanche & Durrheim 1999:6). The interpretive paradigm is now widely accepted (van der Mescht 2002:44) and in fact, positivism, the dominant model of science

during the early and mid twentieth century (Lather 1993:90-91; Terre Blanche & Durrheim 1999:4), has almost become a dirty word in some social science circles (Lather 1993:90-91). The positivist paradigm refers to the acceptance of a stable unchanging, external reality, which can be investigated objectively usually by using an experimental, quantitative methodology, including the testing of hypotheses (Terre Blanche & Durrheim 1999:6).

Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999:5) note that it is detrimental to pretend that social science operates from within only a single paradigm. Each of these paradigms, and their associated methodologies, has been recognised to be of great value and to contribute a great deal to the social sciences and the improvement of educational practices (Terre Blanche & Durrheim 1999:4). Gough (2000:5-8) comments that each of these paradigms views an issue from its own unique perspective because the researchers in each case are seeking a different type of knowledge. Thus, no paradigm or methodology is better than another. They simply provide different perspectives on reality. Spindler (1982:8) states, "There is no argument between qualification and quantification, even though some people who should know better maintain that there is."

#### 4.1.1.2 *The relationship between quantitative and qualitative methodologies*

There is considerable debate over what the relationship between quantitative and qualitative methodologies should be (Firestone 1987:16).

The pragmatists believe that the researcher's choice of methodology should depend only on the purpose of the study, the questions being investigated and the resources available (Patton 1990:39). However, purists assert that the methodology a researcher uses has to be governed by the paradigm he/she accepts, as each paradigm is based on its own ontology, epistemology, and methodology (Terre Blanche & Durrheim 1999:6). Thus, the researcher's fundamental beliefs must determine whether he uses an empirical quantitative,

interpretive qualitative, critical or deconstructive poststructural methodology to gain understanding of social realities (van der Mescht 2002:45-46). Rist (1977:43) states, "All knowledge is social. The methods one employs to articulate knowledge of reality necessarily flow from beliefs and values one holds about the very nature of reality".

Methodology must, of course, be suited to the purpose of the research, the questions being investigated and the resources available, however, the author of this research believes that it is also necessary to reflect on one's fundamental beliefs and take these into account when choosing a methodology. Nevertheless, the view accepted in this research is in accordance with De Vos (2002:363), Folch-Lyon and Trost (1981:444), and others who are of the opinion, unlike the qualitative and quantitative purists, that this does not necessarily limit a researcher to the exclusive use of a single methodology. Like Firestone (1987:19), the author does not believe that one's method is as rigorously determined by one's choice of paradigms as the purists suggest.

Firestone (1987:20) points out that although the two methods are rhetorically different as they encourage the researcher to adopt certain conventions of presentation that advance certain kinds of argument for the credibility of his conclusions, the results of the two methodologies can be complementary. Further, he notes that both methodologies have been used by the same researchers in several studies to present the reader with different kinds of information. Spindler (1982:8) states, "...actually, quantitative and qualitative data and methods should be interdependent".

Despite his belief that choice of methodology flows from the researcher's choice of paradigm, Rist (1977:47) feels the researcher is able to choose which "paradigmatic spectacles" he wishes to wear. He states, "If we are serious about our quest for an understanding of the social reality about us and the causal

relations within it, then what may be most needed are researchers capable of wearing bi-focal or even tri-focal lenses". This is because in reality some of the phenomena being investigated in the social sciences are so enmeshed that a single approach cannot succeed in encompassing humans in their full complexity (De Vos 2002:364-369). De Vos also feels that, technically, quantitative and qualitative methods are inextricably intertwined.

The author is in agreement with these views and recognises the value and contributions of both the positivist and interpretive paradigms. Consequently, both quantitative and qualitative methodologies were employed to more completely understand parental involvement, by illuminating it from two different perspectives.

#### 4.1.1.3 *The use of quantitative methodology in this study*

A hypothetico-deductive quantitative methodology, in which empirical data is tested as objectively as possible, was used to determine whether certain generalisations about parental involvement found to exist in other parent populations (see 2.7) were also true for the parents of urban Swazi primary school children. The positivist paradigm is particularly well suited for attempting to gain this type of knowledge because of its methodology, which involves the testing of hypotheses (Terre Blanche & Durrheim 1999:6). Moreover, the quantitative approach relies on collecting data from a large number of people and consequently has the advantage of resulting in a broad generalisable set of findings (Patton 1990:14) on which the design of a parental involvement programme for urban Swazi primary schools could be based.

Furthermore, this methodology was chosen because the author's fundamental beliefs are essentially those of positivists, thus, the author believed that the use of this methodology would lead to some knowable general truths about parental involvement in this community. The fact that this study had a practical, utilitarian

aim, namely the development of a parental involvement programme that would benefit the participants of education, again indicates the positivistic orientation of the study and the researcher (Janse van Rensburg 2001:13). A parental questionnaire was used to collect the data.

#### 4.1.1.4 *The use of qualitative interpretive methodology in this study*

The decision to also make use of a qualitative interpretive methodology was based on a number of considerations. The author is not a quantitative purist and believed it was possible to make use of qualitative methodology as well by attempting to don the “paradigmatic spectacles” of the interpretive paradigm. This was made possible, by the author’s appreciation of the interpretivist epistemology and ontology.

The author recognised that researchers are always to some extent subjective and that adopting the positivist paradigm, itself, implied a certain view of reality that would influence the results. Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999:4-5) note that the hypothetico-deductive methodology also produces “perspectival” knowledge. Thus, the author felt that some researcher subjectivity was unavoidable and that her values would have some impact on how she interpreted what was happening in any research situation. Nevertheless, the author differs from true interpretivists in respect to her beliefs on the degree of subjectivity that results (Terre Blanche & Durrheim 1999:6). Further, the author, while recognising the usefulness of generalisations for pragmatic and predictive purposes, also believes that each individual’s view of reality is unique, that these views are important, and that some knowledge of these individual perspectives is required to understand parental involvement more completely.

However, the main reason that qualitative research is used in this study is that the author agrees with one of the criticisms of quantitative research, that it tends to be too superficial (Spindler 1982:8). Consequently, qualitative research was

also conducted to get a different, more detailed, in-depth perspective on parental involvement (Spindler 1982:8; Gough 2000:8). Thus, the researcher, though not an interpretivist, also made use of a qualitative, interpretive, interactional approach using the method of parent and teacher interviews.

#### 4.1.1.5 *The purpose of using a combined approach in this study*

While combining the two approaches is rare and challenging, and is objected to by purists from both approaches, it has been done and is recommended when a complete understanding of a phenomenon is sought (Patton 1990:14; De Vos 2002:364-365). A two-phase approach of quantitative and qualitative research (De Vos 2002:365) was followed in this study to gain a more complete picture of parental involvement in urban Swaziland.

The quantitative hypothetico-deductive methodology provided information on whether certain generalisations presented in the literature were also true for this population. This however, results in a less detailed, more abstract picture of a phenomenon (Firestone 1987:20). Qualitative interpretive methodology, complements the quantitative methodology, by providing detailed information on how a small group of individuals thought about, felt about and, experienced parental involvement. Folch-Lyon and Trost (1981:446) note that while quantitative methods are suited to identifying "how" individuals behave, qualitative methods are better equipped to answer the question "why".

Thus, the combination of quantitative and qualitative methodologies in this study is not primarily intended to make the results of this study more objective. Van der Mescht (2002:48), a qualitative purist, argues that combining methods with different underlying assumptions may present a fuller picture, but not a more objective one. However, operating from a primarily positivistic ontology, the author believes that there are some knowable general truths about parental involvement in Swaziland and that greater objectivity does result from the

combined use of both methods. Firestone (1987:20) notes that when these two methods have similar results, the findings are more robust and one can be more certain that the findings are not influenced by the methodology. In Chapter 6 the findings from the two different approaches are drawn together in order to gain a clear complete, and more reliable, picture of parental involvement in Swaziland on which an effective programme of parental involvement could be based.

## **4.2 The quantitative research**

### **4.2.1 Introduction**

Quantitative research using a parental questionnaire as a measuring instrument was done in order to test whether generalisations concerning the involvement of various groups of parents in other countries (see 2.7 and 3.4.4.1) also applied to Swazi urban primary school parents. Parental involvement was viewed from the perspectives of school initiated parental involvement, parent initiated parental involvement, and parental attitude to the school. The questionnaire was also used to determine the ways in which Swazi urban parents were involved in their primary school children's education and the efforts made by the schools to involve them.

### **4.2.2 Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses were formulated based on the literature study (see 2.7 & 3.4). Each of these hypotheses was stated for each of the three re-named sections of the parental questionnaire. Thus, each hypothesis was tested against the level of parental involvement defined, firstly, as school initiated parental



involvement (SIPI), secondly, as parent initiated parental involvement (PIPI), and, thirdly, as parental attitude to the school (PAS) (see 5.2).

It was necessary to test each hypothesis against SIPI, since this provides a measure of the teachers' and schools' efforts to involve the parents (see 5.2.2.1). These are critical in determining to what extent and in what way parents become involved (see 2.7.4). It was also important to determine, for each hypothesis, the level of parent initiated involvement as this provides an indication of how involved parents were in activities under their own control (see 5.2.2.2). The Swazi parental involvement programme must include ideas and ways to increase the involvement of all parents (see 2.11). Further, it was necessary to examine parental attitudes to the school, since negative attitudes may form a barrier to parental involvement (see 2.7.2.7).

#### 4.2.2.1 Hypothesis 1

**There is a significant difference between the average SIPI of parents of different socioeconomic status (SES).**

**This hypothesis was also stated for PIPI and PAS.**

#### Rationale

Although some researchers have found no relationship between general level of parental involvement and SES, others have often found that parents with a lower SES tend to be less involved in their children's education either generally or in terms of several types of parental involvement (see 2.7.2.1). Lower parental involvement of parents of lower SES suggests that these parents are less spontaneously involved than parents of higher SES and that more deliberate effort needs to be spent to involve parents with a poor SES at least in some types of activities. Parents from all backgrounds can become involved

productively when teachers motivate them (Epstein 1986:293; Shaver & Walls 1998:95).

Urban Swazi parents earn a wide range of incomes, as indicated by their living circumstances. Thus, it was necessary to determine whether more or different efforts would be required to involve parents of different SES.

#### 4.2.2.2 Hypothesis 2

**There is a significant difference between the average SIPI of parents with different levels of education.**

**This hypothesis was also stated for PIPI and PAS.**

#### Rationale

Research suggests that parents with lower levels of education are generally less involved in their children's education or at least less involved in some types of parental involvement activities (see 2.7.2.1). South African educators have described parental illiteracy as the biggest barrier to parental involvement (see 3.4.4.1).

Swazi parents have a very wide range of education levels from those that have no formal education to those that hold university degrees. Thus, it was necessary to investigate whether the level of parental education affects the amount of parental involvement initiated by the parents or their attitude to the school. This would suggest the need for more effort or different techniques to involve parents with different levels of education. Further, it was important to determine whether teachers make different efforts to involve parents with different levels of education.

#### 4.2.2.3 Hypothesis 3

**There is a significant difference between the average SIPI of parents who have different home languages.**

**This hypothesis was also stated for PIPI and PAS.**

#### Rationale

Many studies have shown that language differences form an important barrier between parents and schools (see 2.7.2.7). Although the home language of most parents in Swaziland is siSwati (see 3.2), all of the schools studied communicated with parents in English (see 4.2.4.1). Thus, it is possible that a communication barrier existed between most parents and the schools. This would have to be addressed by a parental involvement programme.

#### 4.2.2.4. Hypothesis 4

**There is a significant difference between the average SIPI of employed and unemployed parents.**

**This hypothesis was also stated for PIPI and PAS.**

#### Rationale

Working parents have been found to volunteer less at the school but be more involved in their children's education at home (see 2.7.2.3). However, in her South African study van Wyk (2001:126) found that unemployed parents were less involved generally than employed parents, probably due to the stress that unemployment creates. This supports Mkwanazi's (1994:29) findings. Unemployment is also a serious problem in Swaziland. Moreover, economic concerns often force both parents to work long hours if they are employed. Thus, it was necessary to test whether unemployed parents initiated parental involvement activities at a different level from employed parents or had a

different attitude to the school. It was also necessary to establish whether the teachers and schools involved employed and unemployed parents differently.

#### 4.2.2.5 Hypothesis 5

**There is a significant difference in the average SIPI of single and married parents.**

**This hypothesis was also stated for PIPI and PAS.**

#### Rationale

Many studies have show that even with SES controlled that single parents are less involved at the school than their married counterparts (see 2.7.2.4). However, Sitole (1993:142) found no relationship between marital status and general parental involvement in his South African study. Nevertheless, as is the case in many modern communities (Edwards & Jones-Young 1992:74) increasingly many Swazi mothers are unmarried (personal observation). Consequently, if differences in marital status effect levels of parental involvement this may have a great impact on parental involvement in Swazi schools and, hence, the design of a parental involvement programme for Swaziland.

#### 4.2.2.6 Hypothesis 6

**There is a significant positive correlation between SIPI and learners' achievement in mathematics.**

**This hypothesis was also stated for PIPI and PAS.**

#### Rationale

Many authors, including Sitole (1993:142) who studied parental involvement in South Africa, have found a positive correlation between academic achievement and parental involvement (see 2.4). Mathematics and English are considered to

be particularly important school subjects (Hartog, Diamantis & Brosnan 1998:326) and Swazi teachers interviewed felt that achievement in these subjects was the best indicator of a learner's success in school. Learner grades, rather than standardised tests, were chosen as these have been found to be more sensitive to parental involvement (Desimone 1999:19-20) and are far easier to obtain. Thus, the learner's achievement in each of these subjects was used to determine whether there was a significant positive relationship between academic achievement and SIPI or PIPI.

Such a relationship might suggest that parental involvement benefits children as most researchers believe (see 2.10.2). Alternatively, because only correlation and not causation was tested, it might indicate, as Ma (1999:78) suggests, that the academic excellence of a child may encourage parental involvement. If this were the case a parental involvement programme may need to include special efforts to encourage the involvement of parents of poor achievers.

#### 4.2.2.7 Hypothesis 7

**There is a significant positive correlation between SIPI and learners' achievement in English.**

**This hypothesis was also stated for PIPI and PAS.**

#### Rationale

The correlation between learner's English achievement and parental involvement was investigated for the reasons explained in 4.2.2.6. A significant positive correlation would suggest that either parental involvement benefits children academically, or that children who do better in English encourage more parental involvement.

#### 4.2.2.8 Hypothesis 8

**There is a significant difference between the average SIPI of parents whose children attend different schools.**

**This hypothesis was also stated for PIPI and PAS.**

#### Rationale

Different schools have different attitudes and adopt different theoretical stances towards the role of parents and towards parental involvement (see 2.7.4.3 and 2.7.4.4). Epstein and Dauber (1991:290) state, "Schools vary in how much and how well they inform and involve families". Research suggests this has a profound impact on the level and type of parental involvement that occurs (see 2.7.4). Thus, the different schools sampled may have different theoretical stances concerning parental involvement and consequently make different efforts to involve learners and have different levels of parental involvement. Furthermore, as Schools A and B were private and Schools C, D, and E were government subsidised and had much lower fees (see Table 4.1), differences in the SES of the parents may have contributed to differences in the levels of parental involvement (see 2.7.2.1). Schools with lower SES have been found to have lower levels of some types of parental involvement (see 2.7.4.3).

#### 4.2.2.9 Hypothesis 9

**There is a significant difference between the average SIPI of parents of different ages.**

**This hypothesis was also stated for PIPI and PAS.**

#### Rationale

Educators in South Africa list older parental age as one of the most important barriers to parental involvement (Mkwanazi 1994:29). Thus, as Swazi parents fall

within a very wide range of ages from teenagers to much older parents (SASB 1999:14), it was necessary to determine whether age has any impact on the level of parental involvement, and suggest ways to overcome any barriers that might result from parental age.

#### 4.2.2.10 *Hypothesis 10*

**There is a significant difference between the average SIPI of male and female parents.**

**This hypothesis was also stated for PIPI and PAS.**

#### Rationale

Evidence from several studies has shown that mothers are more involved in their children's education than fathers (Reay 1995:337; Standing 1999:58). This suggests that extra effort may be needed to involve fathers or remove any barriers that may exist to their involvement. This has implications for the design of an effective educational programme for Swaziland.

#### 4.2.3 The pilot study

A pilot study was carried out shortly before the final design of the questionnaires was decided on. The pilot study involved five siSwati-speaking parents known to the author who had children attending urban Swazi primary schools. These parents' English language skills were believed to be similar to those of the majority of parents whose children attend Swazi urban schools. Each parent was asked to complete the questionnaire and then the wording and meanings of the various items were discussed with the parent. Friends were deliberately chosen for the pilot study in the hope that they would be more frank in their criticisms of

the questionnaire. These discussions resulted in the re-wording of several of the items (see 4.2.6.2).

#### 4.2.4 The sample

##### 4.2.4.1 *The school sample*

As government and aided schools are very similar (see 3.2), the sample schools were assigned to one of only two groups, private and government-subsidised (either fully or partly) schools. Both types of school were sampled since levels of parental involvement have been found to be different in schools of different SES (see 2.7.4.3) and to ensure that both types of urban Swazi primary school were represented in the sample. The proportions of parents in the sample whose children attended private schools and those whose children attended government subsidised schools was very similar to proportion of these parents in the urban population. However, private school children's parents formed a slightly higher proportion of the sample in order to make statistical comparisons between these two types of school possible. Private school parents form 8% of the sample (see Table 4.2) as opposed to the 3% that they actually make-up in this community (SGES 2001:43). The two private schools and three government-subsidised schools were selected at random from the Manzini and Mbabane urban regions. These two urban regions were chosen as Manzini and Mbabane are the two biggest urban areas in Swaziland. Consequently, schools chosen from these regions ought to be representative of urban Swazi primary schools. Coincidentally all five schools used English as the medium of instruction from Grade 1. The characteristics of the school sample are shown in Table 4.1.



**Table 4.1 Characteristics of the schools sampled as of January 2003**

School	Type of school	Number of learners	Grade 5 fees per annum (1US\$ = 8E)	Average class size	Size of Grade 5 class sampled in 2002	Questionnaire return rate
A	Private	197	E11 550	21.8	19	53%
B	Private	143	E4 905	20.4	14	62%
C	Government-subsidised	420	E2 460	30	47	86%
D	Government-subsidised	706	E 900	50.4	96 in two classes	89%
E	Government-subsidised	697	E1 176	49.8	100 in two classes	82%

The majority of the teachers at all of these schools, except School A, were black, Christian, siSwati speaking Swazis. This is true for most Swazi primary and secondary schools (SGES 2001:34). Thus, the culture of these schools primarily reflected Swazi culture and the majority of parents and teachers came from the same racial, ethnic, and cultural background (see Table 4.2).

#### 4.2.4.2 *The parent sample*

Comprehensive sampling was done on the parents of the Grade 5 learners at the five schools in order to study parental involvement at senior primary level. Since six children were absent on the days that the questionnaires were sent home, 270 parents were sent questionnaires. Of these, 230 questionnaires were returned and 218 were usable. The remaining 12 were discarded because parents had failed to answer one or more sections thereof.

The mean return rate of the questionnaire in this study was 81%. This was higher than those of other studies. Epstein (1986:278) had a postal return rate of 59% of her questionnaires, while Gettinger and Guetschow (1998:41) had a 40% return rate. The high return rate of the questionnaires in this study increases the generalisability of the results and suggests that the parents were

enthusiastic to air their views. This may also be an indicator of parental co-operation to requests from the teacher (Becker in Epstein 1986:278).

The characteristics of the parent sample are shown in Table 4.2. As expected (see 3.2), the vast majority of parents were black siSwati speaking parents. However, the larger proportion of other language speakers and races in this population than in the general population (see 3.2), suggests that these other peoples are disproportionately present in urban areas.

**Table 4.2 Characteristics of the parent sample (n = 218)**

<b>Parent characteristic</b>	<b>Percent *</b>
<b>Parent or Guardian:</b>	
Parent	93.1
Guardian	6.9
<b>Home Language:</b>	
SiSwati	82.6
English	10.6
Portuguese	1.4
Other	5.0
<b>Race:</b>	
Black	90.0
Coloured	6.0
White	2.3
<b>Age:</b>	
20 to 30 yr.	11.0
30 to 40 yr.	50.5
Above 40 yr.	36.2
<b>Marital status:</b>	
Single	23.4
Married	71.6
Divorced	1.8
Remarried	0.5
<b>Income:</b>	
Less than E 18 000	28.3
E18 000 to E 52 000	42.9
More than E 52 000	28.78
<b>School children attended:</b>	
School A	5.0
School B	3.3
School C	17.0
School D	37.6
School E	37.1

\* A few parents did not answer every question, as a result values do not always add up to exactly 100%.

#### 4.2.5 The procedure

Several visits were made to each school. During the first visit the researcher met with the head-teacher, explained the study, and obtained permission for the study. An introductory letter (see Appendix I) and a copy of the parental questionnaire (see Appendix II) was given to each head-teacher to clearly convey the nature and purpose of the study, and obtain permission for the study. The introductory letter explained that the study would cause the minimum of disruption for learners and guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity to all participants. Each school was promised a report of the findings and an introductory workshop on parental involvement for the parents and teachers of the participating classes. This was to encourage the head-teachers to give permission for the study. Appointments to hand out the questionnaires were then made with teachers. No school rejected participation in the study.

When the questionnaires were handed out the teacher recorded the number of the parent questionnaire given to each learner on the class list so that she/he would later be able to record the learners' second term mathematics and English grades using the same numbers. The purpose of the questionnaire, and the voluntary and confidential aspects thereof, were explained to the learners and they were told when to return the parent questionnaires to the school.

The returned questionnaires and the marks recorded by the teachers were collected a few days later. The parents' responses were coded and transferred to answer sheets before being entered into the computer for analysis.

#### 4.2.6 The measuring instrument

##### 4.2.6.1 *Introduction*

A questionnaire was used, as this instrument is suited to testing hypothesis. Questionnaires are considerably less time-consuming than interviews and other methods and, thus, can be used to gain information from a large sample of respondents quickly and easily. They have the additional advantages of being relatively economical, having standardised questions, and being able to ensure anonymity (McMillan & Schumacher 1993:238).

A parental questionnaire, rather than a teacher or other educator questionnaire was chosen because parents are in a better position to know to what extent and in what ways they are involved in activities that are not based at the school. Involvement in home based activities necessarily was included in the questionnaire as these have been found to be particularly crucial in terms of positive child outcomes (see 2.7.6).

##### 4.2.6.2 *Choice of a questionnaire*

An existing questionnaire with established reliability, validity, and suitability to southern African conditions (Sitole 1993:87-89) was modified for use in this study. Parents were invited to complete a modified version of Sitole's self-rating parental questionnaire (see Sitole 1993:146-148). Sitole had adapted Epstein and Becker's Form 2-P, 1987 questionnaire to suit the South African context. The original self-rating scale was found by its authors to be extensive enough to yield a valid measure of parental involvement (Epstein & Becker in Sitole 1993:85).

This instrument was chosen because it measured the two determinants of parental involvement (see 2.6). Section C, "school initiated contact", contained items that indicated the teachers and schools efforts to initiate involvement and involve parents. The items in Section B, "parent initiated contact", measured the

degree to which parents were taking the opportunities they had, as a result of the schools efforts to involve them or their status as parents, to be involved. In addition, Section A examined the parents' attitude to the school. This has been found to influence the degree that parents are involved (see 2.7.2.7).

Further, this questionnaire contained items from Epstein's (1995:704) six areas of parental involvement. Thus, parents' responses to the individual items of the questionnaire, each of which describes a specific parental involvement activity, indicated areas of strength and weakness in-terms of parental involvement in these areas in urban Swazi primary schools. Knowledge of this was essential for the design of an effective parental involvement programme (see 2.11).

#### 4.2.6.3 *The final questionnaire*

The final, modified, questionnaire (see Appendix II) had 54 self-rating items and 12 biographical items, which made it comprehensive without being so cumbersome as to put parents off completing it or to threaten its reliability (McMillan & Schumacher 1993:232).

Items 14, 15, 31, 32, 33, 35, 36, and 46 to 54, were not originally present in Sitole's questionnaire. They were adopted from the literature, as these are vital aspects of parental involvement (see 2.4).

In addition, a few modifications were made in the language and vocabulary of a few of the items that the pilot study (see 4.2.3) suggested were not clearly understood. This was necessary to ensure the reliability of the test (Irwin 2002: Box E). Modifications were made to items 7, 12, 21, 23, 28, 30, 34, 43 and 44 and in the opening statements of Sections A, B and C. These items were re-worded with the help of the respondents of the pilot study so they would be clearer and more applicable to the Swazi situation. The opening statements were intended to be clear and inviting.

Section D was designed to investigate the relationship between parental involvement and socioeconomic factors, race/ethnicity, home language, parental education level and other family background variables that the literature suggests have an impact on the degree and type of parental involvement (see 2.7). Categories were used for the questions on age and income as these are sensitive questions and are more likely to be answered if categories are used (Irwin 2002:13).

#### *4.2.6.4 Translation of the questionnaire*

Dr. C. Tsabedze of the English Department of the University of Swaziland translated the questionnaire into siSwati (see Appendix III). Schools were given the choice of using either the English or siSwati version, or both. This was done to give siSwati speaking parents the opportunity to respond in their own language and to increase response rate as it was felt that the parents may feel daunted by pages of questions in English. However, teachers at all five schools insisted that parents would not want to answer the questionnaires in siSwati, since they expected the school to communicate with them in English, the language of communication and instruction at these schools. The very high return rate of questionnaires (see Table 4.1) suggests that the second language questionnaire did not present a significant obstacle to most parents.

#### *4.2.6.5 Features to ensure maximum response*

The self-rating questionnaire and biographical questions simply required that the correct response be circled. This was done to ensure that the minimum amount of effort was required to complete the questionnaire, in the hope that this would improve response rate, and to ensure that responses were unambiguous and could be easily processed statistically. The anonymity of the questionnaire was also, in part, to encourage a high response rate.

In order to encourage parents to complete the questionnaire a cover letter and an empty envelope were included with every parent questionnaire (see Appendix II). The envelope was included to protect anonymity. The cover letter introduced the questionnaire and explained the purpose and importance of the study. The brevity of the questionnaire was noted in the cover letter, to encourage parental participation. It was also worded to make participation in the survey sound like a privilege. It explained clearly that completion of the questionnaire was voluntary and that the results would be anonymous and confidential. Parents were also informed of when questionnaires should be returned to the school and that each child would be rewarded with a few sweets on their return. A contact telephone number and postal address were given so that parents could ask questions and send their replies postally if they preferred.

#### 4.2.7 Validity and reliability

In order for the quantitative findings to form an appropriate basis for the design of a parental involvement programme for urban senior Swazi primary school education, they must be valid and reliable.

##### 4.2.7.1 *Reliability*

The reliability of the study refers to the consistency of measurement, the extent to which, if the study were repeated, it would give the same results (McMillan & Schumacher 1993:168). Reliability is a necessary condition for validity (McMillan & Schumacher 1993:232). There were several indications that the study had high reliability.

Standard conditions of data collection and processing enhance reliability (McMillan & Schumacher 1993:231). Test administration was uniform. Tests were self-administered. The same cover letter, introducing and explaining the study

was sent to all parents and all were given the same amount of time to complete the questionnaire. All responses were coded and entered into data sheets for computer analysis by a single researcher. The use of a closed form questionnaire resulted in higher objectivity but also in some loss of accuracy and variability (McMillan & Schumacher 1993:243).

The pilot test (see 4.2.3) established that the language and reading level of the questionnaire were appropriate. McMillan and Schumacher (1993:231) note that these are criteria for reliability.

Although stability and equivalence tests of reliability were not possible in this study (see 5.4), the reliability of the measuring instrument was established by measuring the internal consistency of the questionnaire. The alpha reliability coefficient for each section was close to 1 (see Table 5.6) and was within the acceptable range of reliability (McMillan & Schumacher 1993:227).

#### 4.2.7.2 *Validity*

Validity refers to the extent that a study measures what it claims to measure (Borg & Gall 1989:249-250). Analysis of the study suggests it had very high internal validity and high external validity.

##### **a) Internal validity**

Internal validity refers to the extent that extraneous variables that might interfere with the results are controlled (McMillan & Schumacher 1993:172). The internal validity of the study was enhanced by the random selection of the five schools. Threats to internal validity such as history, statistical regression, pretesting, instrumentation, subject attrition, maturation, diffusion of treatment and treatment replications (McMillan & Schumacher 1993:173-178) did not apply to this study.



The main threat to internal validity in this study was subject effects (Cullingford & Morrison 1999:255) in the PIPI section. In order to reduce the chance of participants giving socially acceptable rather than true answers, parents were assured of the anonymity and confidentiality of the questionnaire. Nevertheless, participants knew that the study was about parental involvement and may still have biased their responses towards social acceptability. Unfortunately, it was not possible to disguise the purpose of the study by making it wider ranging. This was because the questionnaire was already relatively long and parents would be less likely to complete it if it was even longer, and due to ethical considerations (full disclosure). However, some items in this section received a high percentage of negative responses (see 5.7), suggesting that socially acceptable responses did not pose a great threat to the internal validity of this study.

The content validity of the questionnaire had been established by Epstein (see 4.2.6.2) a well-respected researcher in the field. Factor analysis established the construct validity of the questionnaire (see 5.2). Thus, the quantitative findings had high internal validity.

### **b) External validity**

External validity refers to the degree to which the findings can be generalised (McMillan & Schumacher 1993:179). A very small number of urban schools were sampled (n=5). Nevertheless, the sampling was random and personal observation suggested that these schools were generally representative of urban Swazi primary schools in terms of their facilities and teacher and learner characteristics. The proportion of parents whose children attended private schools and those whose children attended government subsidised schools in the sample reflected the proportion of each of these groups of parents in the urban population (see 4.2.4.1). The large parent sample (n=218) and very high return rate of the questionnaire (see 4.2.4.2) also increased the generalisability of the

findings. Consequently, the findings are probably generalisable to the senior urban Swazi Primary school parent population as a whole.

#### 4.2.8 Ethical considerations

Questionnaires should be anonymous and confidential (Wolfendale 1999:164). Cover letters making this assurance as well as assurances of the voluntary nature of completing the questionnaire were sent to the parents. Anonymity was maintained throughout the study by assigning a number to each parent questionnaire. Teachers then noted the number of each parent questionnaire so that they could use only that number when recording learner marks.

All interviews and opening statements were given or written in language that respected the dignity of participants (Wolfendale 1999:166). Permission to do the study and make use of learners' grades was requested from the schools. Learners were given a few sweets on return of their parents' questionnaires to encourage them not to forget to give their parents these questionnaires. Modest gifts were given to the teachers to thank them for their participation. In other studies (Grolnick *et al* 1997:540; Zellman &Waterman 1988:373) parents and teachers have been paid or given other token rewards for their time.

Unfortunately, after the completion of a study, schools often never hear from researchers again (Irwin 2002:8). This leaves the respondents and communities feeling abused and perceiving no benefit from their input (Irwin 2002:8). The head-teacher of School D had had this experience and was reluctant, as a result, to grant permission for the study. Thus, to ensure that the school, learners, and parents also benefited directly from the research, the researcher gave each school a report of the findings, which included a brief review of the literature on parental involvement. Furthermore, the researcher offered to host a parental

involvement workshop at each school. These workshops were given at two of the five schools, Schools C and D. The other three schools showed no interest in the workshops.

#### 4.2.9 Processing of the results

Factor analysis was conducted on the non-biographical part of the questionnaire (Sections A, B & C) to determine the construct validity of the questionnaire (Child 1976:45). This was followed by item analysis on all of the items of these three sections to determine whether any of the items should be omitted (Schnel 2001:105). The reliability of the questionnaire was determined by calculating the alpha reliability coefficient for each section (Pienaar 1994:78).

Two-tailed t-tests, the F-test or the Pearson Product Moment correlation were used to test the hypotheses (Clarke & Cooke 1986: 254-373). The t-tests were used when differences in the averages of two groups were being examined and the F-test, followed by the Bonferroni technique in the case of a significant difference, was used when more than two groups were being investigated. The Pearson Product Moment correlation was used to test hypotheses 6 and 7. The percentage of each of the four possible parental responses for each item in section A, B and C was also calculated to determine areas of strength and weakness in parental involvement in Swaziland. These findings are presented and discussed in Chapter 5.

### **4.3 The qualitative research**

#### **4.3.1 Introduction.**

As discussed in 4.1 a qualitative approach was taken in order, primarily, to obtain detailed in-depth knowledge and understanding of parental involvement in this community and the subjective meanings, beliefs and perspectives of parents and teachers on this phenomenon. Thus, the qualitative research was intended to provide detail and depth to the more generalisable, but also more superficial, view of parental involvement expected from the quantitative research (Spindler 1982:8). Both types of research were done with the creation of a programme for parental involvement in Swaziland in mind.

The qualitative research done was descriptive and followed an ethnographic approach in many respects. However this was not true ethnography. Firstly, because this research was undoubtedly aimed at educational reform and was thus, utilitarian and pragmatic in nature. This runs beyond the goal, or even contrary to the goal, of true ethnography which is simply to help one understand how particular social systems work (Wolcott 1987:53). Secondly, the purpose of this research was not strictly cultural interpretation and, thus, it cannot be considered to be ethnography (Wolcott 1987:43). However, while this research only “borrowed” ethnographic techniques (Wolcott 1987:53), it was not focussed simply on gaining evidence but also hoped to illuminate and provide understanding of parental involvement in Swazi senior urban primary schools.

Although it is difficult to make the ethnographic approach explicit (Wolcott 1987:45), this will be attempted in the following sections.

#### 4.3.2 The different phases of the qualitative research and their aims

The qualitative research involved two different phases. An initial phase consisted of nine individual teacher interviews and was done to determine the teachers' views, feelings, perspectives on, and attitudes to, parental involvement. Research into teachers' thinking and beliefs, in terms of parental involvement, and reflection on how these may facilitate or restrict parental involvement is necessary for the design of an effective parental involvement programme which must include ways to help teachers have positive beliefs and perceptions of parental involvement (Newport 1992:52). The design of an effective programme of parental involvement also requires knowledge of the levels and types of parental involvement occurring at these schools so that weaknesses can be addressed. Thus, these interviews were also intended to shed light on teachers' experiences of parental involvement, their perceptions of parental attitudes to involvement, and the school's stance on these matters as well. This phase of the research was carried out during the period when the quantitative parental questionnaires were handed-out and collected.

The second phase of qualitative research occurred almost a year later and consisted of two teacher group discussions and six parent interviews. These interviews were done after an attempt had been made to inform these teachers and parents about parental involvement. These interviews were designed to probe how teachers and parents envisaged, on the basis of their new knowledge, a parental involvement programme for Swaziland.

Observation was ongoing throughout the two years over which the study was done.

### 4.3.3 The research instrument

Cantrell (in van der Mescht 2002:46) notes that the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis. The researcher is the medium through which the interpreted world is presented (van der Mescht 2002: 46-47). Patton (1990:14) states, "Validity in qualitative methods, therefore, hinges to a great extent on the skill, competence, and rigor of the person doing the fieldwork".

The qualitative researcher must have good communication skills and be able to listen effectively (Winegardner undated:3). Sensitivity not only to one's own personal biases, but also to all the verbal and non-verbal data, the overt and hidden agendas, and all the cues and nuances of the people and settings is essential (Winegardner undated:3). Further an atmosphere of trust and a rapport must be established with the participants (Winegardner undated:3).

Thus, the researcher is central to qualitative research and it is important to note the characteristics of the researcher, which may either facilitate or hinder the research (van Wyk 1996:153).

#### 4.3.3.1 *Differences in ethnicity, language, and gender*

The researcher is an English-speaking woman from a western cultural background. The majority of interviewees were Swazi siSwati speaking men and women.

The interviews were held in English. Most urban Swazis speak very good English and use this language daily in work related situations (personal observation). The teachers interviewed taught in English. During the interviews all the parents and teachers used the language confidently and the language difference did not obviously create any barrier between the interview participants and researcher.

The researcher is familiar with Swazi culture since she has lived and worked in Swaziland for the past ten years in an integrated community. Thus, she was sensitive to how to approach a Swazi interviewee and ask questions that would elicit responses without offending the interviewee. Furthermore, while interviewees may have been less open towards her due to cultural differences, cross-ethnic interviewing can have the advantage that the interview participants may expend more effort on explaining their ethnic experiences to someone who does not share them (Rubin & Rubin 1995:111). This did occur on several occasions during the interviews.

Rubin and Rubin (1995:111) note that the nature of the topic often determines whether gender differences form a barrier. The gender difference between the interviewer and the male interviewees did not seem to be an inhibiting factor in any of the interviews. This was probably because topics relating to education were being discussed. Male parents and teachers are used to discussing topics relating to education with females, since the majority teachers in Swaziland are female (SGES 2001:58).

Since women wearing pants is considered disrespectful by conservative Swazis, the researcher wore modest skirts or dresses on all occasions when she saw interviewees, but still chose outfits that corresponded with her essential identity (Euvrard 2002:8).

#### 4.3.3.2 *Similarities between the researcher and the interviewees*

There were a number of similarities between the researcher and the interviewees that may have encouraged the interviewees to be more open and responsive.

Firstly, the researcher is the mother of two young boys, one of primary school age, so she could empathise with the experiences of the parents. On many

occasions just the mention of these boys warmed the atmosphere of the interview considerably.

Secondly, the researcher is a teacher and was able to relate to the other teachers' experiences easily. The fact that she had worked in a local well-known government high school for several years helped to form a bond between the researcher and the government school teachers. At the time of the study she was working in a private high school and, thus, had a bond with the private school teachers interviewed.

Rubin and Rubin (1995:114) warn that people talk differently to "ivory-tower" academics, however, this effect was minimised by approaching the interviewees as a fellow parent or teacher rather than as an academic. Similar qualifications and the fact that many of the interviewees were engaging in further studies meant there was little difference in status between the researcher and the teachers interviewed. The parents interviewed were well educated and many held very high positions in their companies so the researcher's status should not have been intimidating to them.

#### *4.3.3.3 Role and relationships*

The researcher was unknown to the participants of the study prior to the study. This increases the reliability of the study (McMillan & Schumacher 1993:386).

Aside from the head-teacher at School D, who was initially suspicious of the researcher's intentions (see 4.2.8), all the teachers were friendly towards the researcher from the outset. The suspicion, hostility and the antipathy towards researchers noted by some researchers in South Africa (Irwin 2002:Box G), was absent. Teachers became even more open and friendly as the study progressed and they came to know and trust the researcher more.



Although a few teachers were reluctant to be interviewed before the interviews, all interviewees seemed to be comfortable and enthusiastic during the interviews. Questions were answered in a free and open way. Most of the teachers and all of the parents interviewed thanked the researcher for giving them an opportunity to express their views. Good rapport seemed to have been achieved with the interviewees. Nevertheless, teachers and parents did not feel they would have the time to be interviewed repeatedly.

#### 4.3.3.4 *Values and biases*

The researcher is a value-based research instrument who interacts with local values but is also in the position to identify and take into account, to some extent, those resulting biases (Lincoln & Guba 1985:39-40). The researcher must be sensitive to how her own biases and subjectivity may effect the study and findings (Winegardner undated:3). Van der Mescht (2002:46) notes that our values shape the way we make sense of what is happening in a research situation. Thus, before starting the interviews, and during the interviews and data analysis, in fact at every stage in the research, the researcher thought carefully about her values on the topic of parental involvement in the hope that this would help her to take into account any resulting biases (Lincoln & Guba 1985:39-40).

The researcher greatly values education believing it to be incredibly important to a child's success and well-being as an adult. She believes that parents have an essential role in their children's education and that ideally this role should be full parental participation in their children's education (see 2.2) according to Swap's Partnership Model (see 2.7.4.4). Responsible parents and good teachers will embrace parental involvement once they understand it.

The researcher expected less educated parents to be less involved in their children's education. She expected teachers in the government-subsidised

schools to be less open-minded about the parent's role. The researcher expected parents to want a partnership role once they became aware of parental involvement. Teachers were expected to be hostile to parents contributing to decisions on curriculum and teaching methods and suspicious of parent volunteers. These expectations before the interviews would have affected the researcher's interpretation of the data and thus, must be taken into account.

The researcher had no difficulty showing interest during the interview but it was more difficult for her to respond in a completely neutral, non-judgmental way (Euvrard 2002:10). The researcher attempted to be encouraging and understanding but could not always hide her approval of the unexpected open-mindedness and dedication of the majority of teachers.

#### 4.3.4 The "problem" of subjectivity

Van der Mescht (2002:46) notes that qualitative researchers should not apologise for the subjectivity inherent in their method. He states, "Far from being a weakness then, the subjective engagement of the researcher is one of the greatest strengths of qualitative research" (van der Mescht 2002:47). However, subjectivity is a challenge as it puts strong demands on the empathy and competency of the interviewer (van der Mescht 2002:47).

Triangulation, in which the researcher draws on more than one source of data or uses more than one method of data collection, has become an integral part of qualitative research (van der Mescht 2002:47). However, van der Mescht (2002:48) notes that to use triangulation to gain greater objectivity implies that there is only one true social reality which researchers are trying to measure, which goes completely against interpretivist ontology. From an extreme subjectivist position, triangulation by interviewing a number of respondents for

the purpose of a more objective picture is impossible, although it is still desirable for completeness (van der Mescht 2002:48).

The researcher is, however, operating from a postivist approach and is trying to don the “paradigmatic spectacles” of the interperative pardigm. Thus, she, like many other researchers (van Wyk 1996:169), believes that greater objectivity, in addition to a more complete picture, can be obtained through the use of different techniques and participants. Thus, the use of observation in addition to the interviews in this study as well as the use of both teacher and parent interviews is believed to enhance the validity of the results.

In addition, although triangulation usually refers to this sort of use of multiple qualitative methods or respondents, it has also been used to describe the situation where researchers choose to combine quantitative and qualitative methodology in order to increase validity and reliability (De Vos 2002:365). Consequently, two types of triangulation have been used in this study to increase the validity of the results.

#### 4.3.5 Data collection

Three data collection strategies were used: individual interviews; focus group interviews; and observation. The interviews were the primary strategy and were done in two sessions almost a year apart. Observation took place at visits to the schools and school events. Wolcott (1987:49) notes that he would never want the two methods perfectly in balance as meanings and actions compete for the researchers closest attention. Interviewing felt more right to the researcher than observation so this method predominated (Wolcott 1987:49). Van Wyk (1996:165) notes, “Since communication is the most basic form of human

interaction, it follows that the analysis of the content of this communication is a justifiable basis from which to understand human activity and behaviour.”

Semi-structured and unstructured interviews were used. An attempt was made to create interview protocols that gave the interviewee plenty of time and space to relate their meanings rather than, merely, their opinions. van der Mescht (2002:47) notes that many “semi-structured” interviews are over structured with questions too closely bound to theory such that respondents have little space to give meaning to their reality through language, metaphor, anecdote and symbol.

#### 4.3.5.1 *Individual teacher interviews*

Individual, rather than group, interviews were chosen for the initial part of the study as at this stage the teachers had not been exposed to the literature on parental involvement and did not know what they “ought” to believe. Thus, in individual interviews, they would not be influenced by the perceptions and opinions of their colleagues and a more valid account of their own meaning would result.

#### **a) The informants in the individual teacher interviews**

While the school’s head-teacher plays a crucial role in determining the nature and extent of parental involvement at the school (Epstein 1987a: 131), teachers rather than head-teachers were interviewed for two reasons. Firstly, the researcher felt that the head-teacher’s actual beliefs and actions in respect to parent involvement would be clearly revealed, either directly or indirectly, by the responses of the teachers. Further, the teachers would probably not feel that the head-teacher’s policy reflected on them and would, thus, be more inclined to give true rather than socially acceptable responses. Secondly, it was the aim of these interviews to illumine parental involvement as it really exists in these schools rather than what the head-teacher, or school policy, feels should be happening. It was felt that this information could be better ascertained through

interviewing the teachers themselves who usually have more contact with the parents and whose actions, feelings and beliefs greatly influence the degree or ways that parents are involved (see 2.7.4).

The informants were nine Grade 5 teachers from the five schools. Purposeful sampling was done to increase the utility of the information obtained (McMillan & Schumacher 1993:378). Comprehensive sampling was done, the main criterion being that the Grade 5 teachers interviewed were those that saw the learners most often and were, thus, those teachers most likely to have contact with Grade 5 learners' parents. In Schools C and D this was a class teacher who taught the learners everything. In these schools the number of teachers interviewed reflects the number of Grade 5 streams. In School E one teacher taught both Grade 5 streams half the subjects and the other taught both classes the other half of the subjects; so both were interviewed. In Schools A and B the "class" teacher taught most of the subjects but other teachers taught mathematics, science and second languages. The class and mathematics teachers were interviewed since they saw the learners most often.

Grade 5 teachers were interviewed, as this is the first year of senior primary phase. Further, as the data collection was expected to take place over several years, the researcher wanted to these children and their parents to be available at the school for a few years.

Some of the characteristics of the teachers are shown in Table 4.3. Teachers' names were changed to ensure anonymity. All parent and teacher names were chosen to reflect the nationality of the teachers. The teachers were Swazi with the exception of Ms. Crawford, Mr. Reed, and Mr. Nkunita. Thus, the majority of teachers came from the same racial, ethnic, and cultural background as the majority of the parents (see Table 4.2).

**Table 4.3 Some characteristics of the teachers interviewed individually**

Teacher	School	Private or government subsidised	Gender	Subject taught	Qualifications	Years of teaching experience
Mr. Reed	A	Private	Male	Mathematics	D.P.E & P.B.M.D	10
Ms. Crawford	A	Private	Female	Class	B.A.(Hons.) & H.E.D.	22
Ms. Costa	B	Private	Female	Class	none	7
Mr. Fortune	B	Private	Male	Mathematics	B.Sc.	1
Mr. Nkunita	C	Government subsidised	Male	Class	H.E.D.	17
Ms. Dube	D	Government subsidised	Female	Class	D.P.E	4
Ms. Malaza	D	Government subsidised	Female	Class	D.P.E & D.A.E	4
Mr. Nyoni	E	Government subsidised	Male	Mathematics	D.P.E	14
Mr. Fakudze	E	Government subsidised	Male	English	D.P.E	10

D.P.E – Diploma in primary education

H.E.D – Higher Education diploma

D.A.E- Diploma in adult education

B.A.(Hons) - Bachelor of Arts with honours

B.Sc - Bachelor of Science

P.B.M.D - Post graduate business managerial diploma

### **b) The procedure used for the individual teacher interviews**

After visiting the head-teachers and gaining permission to do the interviews the researcher was introduced to each of the teachers. Appointments were then made for her return to the school, at a time convenient to the teachers, to carry out the interviews. The interviews were done in comfortable, quiet surroundings, whenever possible. The teacher always chose the location of the interview. Although all locations were private and the interviewee should have had no fears of being overheard, several locations were noisy. This is especially true for the interviews of Mr. Fakudze and Mr. Nyoni which were done in their classrooms while the children made a great deal of noise just outside them. Mr. Reed, Ms. Crawford, Mr. Fortune and Ms. Costa also chose to be interviewed in their, far quieter, classrooms. Mr. Nkunita chose a quiet spot outside his classroom under a tree and Ms. Malaza and Ms. Dube chose to be interviewed in their staffroom. Few interruptions occurred. All the interviews were done during school time, at the teacher's request.

Permission was obtained to record the interviews on video. The interviews took about 30 min each. A typed interview guide (see Appendix IV) was used to ask a series of questions. Wording and order of questions was changed, questions added and responses explored during the interview to ensure clear, thorough and accurate responses. When questions were misunderstood the interviewee was left to complete his response and then the questions were re-worded and asked again. Since most of the teachers were not first language English speakers and came from different cultural backgrounds this was important and was a considerable advantage over questionnaires.

The interviews were done in a courteous and respectful manner and teachers were thanked for their time and help and given a small gift.

### **c) The interview guide used for the individual teacher interviews**

The teacher interview was designed to encourage teachers to relate their beliefs, attitudes, meanings, and values concerning the involvement of parents generally in their children's education. It was essential to investigate teachers' beliefs on parental involvement and on ideal levels of parental involvement, as it is only with the enthusiastic cooperation of teachers that parental involvement programmes can hope to be successful (see 2.7.4). Secondly, questions were included that were meant to reveal the teachers' perceptions of how involved the parents really were, how satisfied teachers were with current levels of contact between teachers and parents, and what they felt the barriers to this involvement may be. Thirdly, some questions were included simply to access the teachers' knowledge of what type of opportunities the school created for parental involvement.

All questions were open-ended to allow for unanticipated answers, probing in more depth and because, this type of item is far better suited to revealing the respondents true values, beliefs, knowledge and meanings than fixed-alternative

items (Euvrard 2002:5). Care was taken not to include negative, leading, “catch-all”, and double questions (Euvrard 2002:7). When the responses of the interviewees indicated that they were unfamiliar with certain words, questions were re-phrased with synonyms or examples were given to explain the word. The interview guide (see Appendix IV) was intended to serve only as very basic outline of the topics that were to be included. None of the questions were asked in the way they were written in the guide. The phrasing of the questions and the order they were asked changed according to the conditions of each interview. This approach was used so as not to constrain the naturalness and relevancy of the responses (McMillan & Schumacher 1993:426). In many cases teachers answered the questions in the guide spontaneously before they were even asked. In order to ensure that the responses of the interviewees were correctly understood, the interviewer attempted to summarise what had been related to her and asked the interviewees if this summation was correct.

#### 4.3.5.2 *Focus group discussions*

Approximately six months after the individual interviews, each of the five schools was sent a report which included a brief explanation of the nature and importance of parental involvement, an overview of the quantitative findings, and unique suggestions for increasing parental involvement at that school. Focus group discussions were held at two of the schools several months later. The head-teachers of the schools promised to give their teachers copies of the report and to discuss it with them before the focus group discussions. Consequently, the original aim of these group discussions was to determine how the teachers envisaged a future parental involvement programme at their school, based on their new understanding of parental involvement. It was felt that group discussions would provide the ideal opportunity for brainstorming on the schools future plans for parental involvement.



However, the interviewer discovered at the start of the group discussions, that only the head-teacher at School C, and the deputy at School D, had read the report. The other teachers were not even aware of its existence. Consequently, most teachers in the group discussion had no new knowledge of parental involvement and had not given thought to the school's future in this respect. Hence, the group discussions were also used to investigate the teachers' beliefs, feelings, understanding of, and experiences of parental involvement and served to triangulate the findings of the individual interviews.

Group discussions have the advantage of providing a supportive atmosphere that encourages participants to disclose attitudes and behaviour that they may not reveal in an individual interview (Folch-Lyon & Trost 1981:445). Discussion in a group can stimulate recall, re-evaluation of previous statements, and result in opinion elaboration (Lofland & Lofland 1984:14).

Successful focus groups are characterised by interactions between the members of the group, rather than alternation between the interviewer's questions and the participants' responses (Adams & van Harmelen 2000:26). Conversation flowed fairly freely between the participants although the interviewer did have to ask questions occasionally to maintain the momentum of the discussion. In each focus group discussion there were one or two dominant speakers but they did not talk to the exclusion of everybody else and were more inclined to "fill in the silences" than to prevent their colleagues from having the opportunity to speak.

#### **a) The informants in the focus group discussions**

Focus group discussions were done at only two of the original five schools, Schools C and D. These schools were chosen as their head-teachers were enthusiastic about the parental involvement workshop and were willing to arrange the focus group discussions as a result. Spindler (1982:8), notes that a good ethnographic study that gives accurate knowledge of one setting, which is

not markedly dissimilar from other relevant settings, is likely to be generalisable to a substantial degree to these other settings. Thus, the choice of these two schools was particularly fortuitous since Schools C and D were typical government subsidised schools (personal observation). Thus, the findings from these focus group discussions may be generalisable to many urban Swazi primary schools.

Comprehensive sampling was done (McMillan & Schumacher 1993:379). All the senior primary teachers that were available were interviewed. All six senior primary teachers and the head-teacher of School C were present at the discussion. The biographical data of the teachers who attended the group discussion at School C are shown in Table 4.4. Teachers' names were changed to ensure anonymity. All teachers were Swazi except Ms. Wade and Mr. Nkunita. Again this illustrates the racial, ethnic, and cultural congruency between these schools and their parent community (see Table 4.2).

**Table 4.4 Some characteristics of teachers participating in the focus group discussion at School C.**

Name	Age	Gender	Grade taught	Teaching qualifications
Ms. Wade	48	Female	Head-teacher	D.P.E.
Ms. Mamba	48	Female	7	D.A.E. & D.P.E
Mr. Mduli	31	Male	7	D.P.E.
Mr. Nkunita	39	Male	6	H.E.D.
Ms. Mazibuko	45	Female	6	D.P.E.
Ms. Nsibande	28	Female	5	D.P.E.
Ms. Thwala	31	Female	5	D.P.E.

D.P.E – Diploma in primary education    D.A.E- Diploma in adult education  
H.E.D – Higher Education diploma

In School D only three of the possible six senior primary teachers were present, one each from Grade 5, 6 and 7. The head-teacher was not present but the

deputy was. Although an appointment had been made for the discussion, at a time chosen for its suitability by the head-teacher, the teachers and deputy did not know about it and the head-teacher had, apparently, forgotten. The biographical data of the teachers who took part in the discussion at School D is shown in Table 4.5. Teachers' names have been changed to ensure anonymity. All teachers were Swazi.

**Table 4.5 Some characteristics of teachers participating in the focus group discussion at School D.**

Name	Age	Gender	Grade taught	Teaching qualifications
Ms. Makhubu	48	Female	Deputy, Grade 7	B.Ed.
Mr. Dladla	44	Male	7	B.A & D.P.E.
Ms. Malaza	44	Female	6	D.P.E. & D.A.E.
Ms. Bhembe	47	Female	5	D.P.E.

D.P.E – Diploma in primary education      B.Ed – Bachelor of Education  
D.A.E- Diploma in adult education      B.A.- Bachelor of Arts

**b) The procedure used for the focus group discussions**

The nature and aim of the discussions was explained to the head-teachers. Permission to do the discussions was obtained from the head-teacher at each school and an appointment was made well in advance to do the group discussion at a time chosen by the head-teacher. The head-teachers felt that a discussion of approximately 30 minutes was the maximum amount of time that their staff could manage.

The discussions took place during break at School D and after school in the normal staff meeting time at School C. The discussions were held in the quiet and comfortable staff rooms of the two schools. There were no interruptions during the group discussion at School C. At School D the deputy had to leave the discussion for about 10 minutes to deal with a learner.

At the time of the discussion the teachers were thanked for their participation and the nature and aim of the discussion was explained to them. They were encouraged to talk freely to each other and the interviewer about the topics raised. When conversation stalled the interviewer would introduce a new topic or try to prompt the teachers to give more information on the current topic. It was also occasionally necessary for the interviewer to intervene to bring the conversation back to relevant topics. This was done as sensitively as possible, after allowing those participants who were particularly enthusiastic about the topic to have their say. When participants appeared to be finding it difficult to find an opportunity to speak conversation was directed their way. The discussion was concluded when the participants appeared to have little further to say. The participants were thanked and a cake was provided for refreshments. The discussions were recorded on video with the participants' permission.

### **c) Discussion guide for the focus group discussions**

Since the teachers were not adequately prepared to discuss a future programme of parental involvement in their school, the discussion guide was abandoned. This resulted in a unstructured conversation that was directed towards teachers' relationships with, experiences of, beliefs in, and feelings about parents and their involvement.

#### *4.3.5.3 Individual parent interviews*

Individual interviews of parents were done after they had attended a workshop on parental involvement. During the workshop the importance of parental involvement was explained. Parents were told about and shown ways to help their children by providing an educative atmosphere at home (based on the work of Jantjes 1995:304), by volunteering at the school, and by the use of paired reading and some mathematical techniques that could be used in the home to help children (see Appendix V).

The purpose of these interviews was to ascertain how these parents, who had some understanding of parental involvement, experienced their realities in respect to parental involvement and how they envisaged their role in a future programme of parental involvement in Swaziland.

### a) The informants in the parent interviews

The informants were parents who attended the parent workshops held at School C and School D. After the workshop parents were asked to volunteer for the interviews. Three parents from each school were interviewed.

The biographical characteristics of the parents are shown in Table 4.6. Parents' names have been changed to ensure anonymity.

**Table 4.6 Some characteristics of the six parents interviewed.**

Name	School child attends	Gender of parent	Age	Marital status	Family lives together	Level of education	Occupation	Nationality
Mr. Nardu	C	Male	48	Married	Yes	Tertiary	Mechanical engineer	Kenyan
Mr. Kunene	C	Male	37	Married	Yes	Tertiary	Business analyst	Swazi
Ms. Nxumalo	C	Female	60	Married	Yes	Tertiary	Teacher	Swazi
Ms. Dlamini	D	Female	36	Married	Yes	Tertiary	Teacher	Swazi
Mr. Tsabedze	D	Male	43	Married	Yes	Tertiary	Electrician	Swazi
Mr. Razibuhoro	D	Male	43	Married	Yes	Tertiary	Civil engineer	Rwandese

### b) The procedure used for the parent interviews

After the workshop it was explained to the parents that by taking part in these interviews they would ensure that their views, feelings and situations were taken into account in the designing of a parental involvement programme for Swaziland. The confidentiality and anonymity of the interviews was also discussed. The parents' names and contact details were recorded. Appointments

at a time and place that suited the parent were then made either immediately or later, telephonically.

Four of the parents were interviewed at their offices. These were generally quiet and comfortable. However, Mr. Razibuhoro's office, which was at a construction site, was noisy. After a while he actually requested his workers to take a break and after that the office was much quieter. Mr. Razibuhoro did not seem to mind doing this, and talked very enthusiastically. He seemed to be in no hurry to end the interview despite being obviously busy.

Ms. Nxumalo was interviewed in quiet, comfortable surroundings at a community center across the road from her home. Ms. Dlamini was interviewed in the researcher's car. This was unavoidable as she was an hour and a half late for the interview and there was no time to drive to a more pleasant venue. The car was air-conditioned and was parked in a relatively private spot so was not uncomfortable as an interview venue. All of the parents were extremely hospitable offering the researcher drinks. Ms. Nxumalo actually came equipped with a tablecloth, plates, cups, tea and home made muffins. Most of the interviews took place mid-morning, although a few took place in the late afternoon.

The purpose of the interview was explained at the start of each interview and permission was requested to record the interviews by video camera. Field notes were also made during the interviews. Biographical questions were asked first, after which the interview guide guided the interview. Parents were thanked for their help after the interview.

### **c) Interview guide for the parent interviews**

The interview guide (see Appendix VI) was constructed along the same principles as the individual teacher interview guide (see 4.3.5.1c). The main differences being that it included a biographical section and that the non-biographical section was less structured than the individual teacher interviews. The guide served only as the most basic outline of questions to be asked and the conversation flowed more naturally and more in accordance with the interviewees' motivation to express themselves. Questions were designed to establish the parents' perspectives on parental involvement and how they could envisage their role in a parental involvement programme.

#### 4.3.5.4 *Observation*

No interviews or other interactions between people can occur without observation necessarily occurring (McMillan & Schumacher 1993:256). Observation played a minor but nevertheless, essential, role in this study. Observation is particularly useful in exposing discrepancies between what people say and what people actually do (McMillan & Schumacher 1993:422).

Observation was ongoing and spontaneous on the numerous occasions when the researcher was at the school or in the presence of teachers or parents, and during the workshops. These observations were recorded immediately when possible. Otherwise, they were recorded as soon as possible after leaving the school or saying goodbye to the person. A video camera was used to record the workshops.

#### 4.3.6 Recording of data

The interviews were recorded using a video camera since neither an audio recorder nor data transcription machine were available. The video camera had the advantages of excellent sound quality, as well as recording body language and facial expressions. The video recorder was not a distraction as it was simply propped up on a desk and left to record. The little red light on the camera indicated that it was recording. Some of the interviewees were surprised to be recorded but they acceded happily to the use of the machine and most seemed to forget about it rather quickly. Two of the teachers actually asked for a copy of the tape afterwards, which was given to them. The interviewees seemed to be confident about the confidentiality of the interviews, answering questions freely and even volunteering negative comments about their superiors in the work situation.

Field notes of researcher perceptions were also taken during the interviews.

#### 4.3.7 Transcription of data

Interviews were transcribed verbatim and by hand in the informants' own words. There is, however, a danger that transcribed words may lose meaning in terms of tone, volume and emotionality. Further accompanying body language and disposition, which was captured nicely by the video camera, could not be portrayed (van Wyk 1996:164). In order to minimise this loss of expression, notes on these aspects were made in brackets within the transcripts.

#### 4.3.8 Analysis of data



After completing the transcripts, and in fact while doing them and even during the interviews themselves, attempts were made to identify common patterns that seem to preoccupy informants' discussions (Wolcott 1987:46).

Like Wolcott (1994:66) the researcher chose to process the data manually instead of using a software programme to identify, manipulate and code data. Computer programmes are frequently used to manage the huge volume of data qualitative studies produce (Patton 1990:383). This study, involving a total of 18 interviews was still manageable manually. Further, although becoming increasingly rare, manual data processing works (Wolcott 1994:66) and was suited the researcher's desire to be able to see the whole of what she was doing.

A methodical and systematic analysis of the transcripts was attempted. Highlighters were used and copies of the interview transcripts cut up in order to sort them into broad themes. Wolcott (1994:63) states that in his experience categories do not simply emerge from the data on their own. The researcher must actively help them emerge (Wolcott 1994:63). This makes pure description impossible, as even in the most rudimentary sorting some structure must be imposed (Wolcott 1994:63). The themes arose both out of the data and also from the theory on parental involvement. Data segments, which took the form of specific quotations and researcher reflections, were labeled and sorted and re-sorted. These were then grouped together in themes and sub-themes in folders. Constant comparison was used to determine whether the data segments were in the most appropriate category. Data segments were rearranged and categories amended when necessary. Categories which were most appropriate to the study were identified and relationships between them found. Throughout data analysis links between the data and the theory on parental involvement were sought. In order to stay as close to the data as possible each theme heading was

descriptive (Wolcott 1994:63). The themes were interpreted and explained (Smith 2002:2). Most of these processes occurred simultaneously.

The original transcripts and recorded interviews were referred back to continually throughout the analysis in an attempt to ensure that an adequate and accurate picture of parental involvement and the experiences of participants was revealed. This is more likely than when a researcher has to depend on what has been filtered through "head-notes" and field-notes (Wolcott 1994:63).

Van der Mescht (2002:49) points out that researchers frequently report findings from data from different sources separately and that this is not true triangulation. During the data analysis the data from the individual teacher interviews, group interviews, parent interviews, observations and, the quantitative questionnaires was drawn together, in order to reveal the reality of parental involvement in Swaziland (see Chapter 6).

No differentiation was made between data segments drawn from the group discussions and those from the individual teacher interviews during the analysis and presentation of the data. This was because these two types of interviews had essentially the same aim and the participants in both cases were urban Swazi teachers who had similar knowledge of parental involvement (see 4.3.5.2).

Wolcott (1987:50) states that ethnographers necessarily make "whopping" generalisations from rather modest observations of a few cases. He notes that experienced researchers can tell the difference between generalisation and over generalisation. It is hoped that over generalisation was avoided in this study, however generalisations based on a combination of the quantitative and qualitative findings were made. In many cases the qualitative data generated grounded inferences which suggested relationships between variables, these were treated as hypotheses which the quantitative findings either supported or

contradicted. When these hypotheses were supported by the quantitative data they were accepted for the population as a whole. When the quantitative findings contradicted these hypotheses, or there were no relevant quantitative findings, they were only assumed to apply to some, rather than most, teachers or parents.

#### 4.3.9 Presentation of data

Analysed data were presented as readable, narrative descriptions and accompanying interpretations. Thick description (Patton 1990:430), the provision of a sufficient amount of data in the informants own words such that readers would be able to form their own assessment of parental involvement in Swaziland, was used during the reporting of the results. This adds validity and conviction to the results (McMillan & Schumacher 1993:391). Doing this successfully requires both talent and skill and is not easy to achieve (van der Mescht 2002:49). Where possible a balance of quotes was provided so that no participant was either over-quoted or omitted. Contradictory quotes were included whenever possible. General description (Erickson in Winegardner undated:9), in which the reader is told whether the quotes used are typical of the data as a whole and in which the parts are related to the whole, was used. Finally an interpretive commentary provided the framework for understanding the general description and the thick description.

Editing of the interviewees' responses was kept to a minimum although material that was completely irrelevant to parental involvement was removed as well as any "umms" and "ahhs". As the purpose was to show interviewees' perceptions, beliefs, values and meanings of parental involvement, their comments were reported in the original unedited form, even if this was grammatically incorrect or words had been used incorrectly. The researcher felt that changing the words

and correcting the grammar would result in loss of meaning and authenticity. Responses were only edited by adding, subtracting or changing one or two words when they did not make sense as written, and the researcher was absolutely sure what the respondent meant. Interview questions were only reported when they were necessary to understand the interviewees' responses. Only that original data believed to be truly important to illuminating parental involvement was included in the results as researchers are responsible for selecting the most revealing data, interpreting it and getting the message across to the reader (Wolcott 1994:67).

#### 4.3.10 The validity and reliability of the qualitative findings

##### 4.3.10.1 *Introduction*

In qualitative research reliability and validity are assessed in context rather than against an external objective standard (Winegardner undated:9). Although authors generally agree on the criteria for "good" qualitative research, there is no uniformly agreed on definition, or set of criteria, for reliability and validity (Winegardner undated:8). For examples see, Lincoln and Guba (1985:290-331), Patton (1990:460-506), Eisenhart and Howe (1992:657-670), and McMillan and Schumacher (1993:385-397). This may be because there is little distinction between validity and reliability in qualitative research (Winegardner undated:9). As a result what one author may describe as a criterion for reliability is often described as a criterion for validity by another author.

##### 4.3.10.2 *Reliability*

McMillan and Schumacher (1993:385) define reliability as the extent to which another researcher could discover the same phenomenon. Measures to enhance reliability involve a complete description of the research process so that

independent researchers can replicate the same procedures in similar settings (Shimahara in van Wyk 1996:167).

### **a) Reliability of the design**

McMillan and Schumacher (1993:386-388) note several aspects that qualitative researchers must make explicit to enhance the reliability of their design. These criteria for a reliable design were met by this study.

Personal or professional information that may have affected data collection, analysis and interpretation (Patton 1990:472) must be reported. In this study the researcher reported her profession, role and status within the research group, relationship with participants, and the experiences that allowed her to empathise with participants. She acknowledged the centrality of her role and reflected on her biases and values throughout the study (see 4.3.3). Thus the researcher met this criterion for reliability.

The process used to choose participants and the participants themselves were described in sections 4.3.5.1a, 4.3.5.2a and 4.3.5.3a. That the parents in the parent sample were possibly those parents that were more involved in their children's education was noted and taken into account during the analysis of the results. Thus, there was no sampling error and the findings were not distorted (Patton 1990:471).

Social context influences data content. Thus, the time, places, and conditions of the interviews were revealed (see 4.3.5.1b, 4.3.5.2b, and 4.3.5.3b). Detailed descriptions were given of the methods and circumstances of data collection and recording (see 4.3.5 to 4.3.7). The details of data analysis and interpretation were recounted retrospectively (see 4.3.8). Lastly, the conceptual framework, in this case the theory on parental involvement, was made explicit in Chapter 2.

### **b) Reliability in data collection**

McMillan and Schumacher (1993:388) state that what is sought in qualitative research is data collection that results in interobserver reliability. The following criteria for reliable data collection were met in this study.

The data were recorded mechanically through the use of a video camera. This allowed the researcher to collect immediate detailed behaviour and improved accuracy (Spindler & Spindler 1987:21). Verbatim accounts were used extensively throughout Chapter 6 to illustrate participant meanings. This enables others to assess for themselves the credibility of the interpretations and is important for external validity as it makes transferability judgements possible (Lincoln & Guba 1985:316). Low-inference descriptors were used throughout the results section of Chapter 6. Negative cases were actively searched for, analysed, and reported in the results sections of Chapter 6 and their implications for participant meanings were reflected upon. Formal member checking (Lincoln & Guba 1985:314) was not workable in this study due to the reluctance of teachers and parents to be approached repeatedly. This problem was partly overcome by the use of informal immediate member checking (see 4.3.5.1c).

#### 4.3.10.3 *Validity*

##### **a) Internal validity**

Qualitative researchers are usually primarily concerned with internal validity. Internal validity refers to the accuracy and value of the interpretations (Winegardner undated:8). McMillan and Schumacher (1993:391-392) note several criteria for internal validity, which were met in this study.

Data were collected over a period of two years at Schools C and D during which time the researcher made many visits to the schools. This enabled the researcher to have some understanding of the school "culture", establish a degree of trust with teachers, and provided many opportunities for observation, continual data analysis, comparison and corroboration. This ensured a better match between

research themes and participant reality (McMillan & Schumacher 1993:391). Nevertheless, the study would have benefited from the researcher making longer visits to the school. Weeks spent at each school would have improved the validity of the findings by allowing the researcher to observe interactions between parents and teachers. Very little time was spent with parents who the researcher only saw at the workshops and then at the interviews.

Interviews were carried out in the natural work settings of most parents and teachers (see 4.3.5.1b, 4.3.5.2b & 4.3.5.3b), and should thus have reflected the reality of their life experiences more accurately. Finally, the researcher tried to submit all phases of the research process to continuous and rigorous questioning and reevaluation. She tried to identify flaws in her reasoning, biases and misconceptions by frequently referring back to the original interviews.

In addition to meeting these criteria of McMillan and Schumacher, the validity of the study was enhanced further in a number of other ways.

The researcher made use of both methods and data source triangulation (see 4.3.4). Bias from one source or method was offset by the application of another source or method (Adams & van Harmelen 2000:22). Many studies are based on only teachers or parent reports (e.g. Heystek 1999:111; Izzo *et al* 1999:837). Epstein (1986:278) notes that teacher reports only tell one part of the story and that parent reports are also needed for verification and clarification.

The researcher believes that she was able to establish meaningful links between the research, questions, raw data and findings and reconstructed participants reality credibly and authentically (Winegardner undated:8).

Lastly, Eisenhart and Howe (1992:660) note that the research should be valuable for informing or improving educational practice. Since virtually nothing is known

about parental involvement in Swaziland and since these findings were used to design a parental involvement programme intended to improve education practice, this criterion was met.

### **b) External validity**

External validity in qualitative research is usually equated with transferability (Lincoln & Guba 1985:316). Transferability refers to the degree to which the findings can be used to understand similar situations (McMillan & Schumacher 1993:394). This requires precise and detailed descriptions of the participants selected, settings and contexts, and historical effects. This was done in Chapter 4. The findings need also to be contrasted with prior research (McMillan & Schumacher 1993:397). In Chapter 6 the findings of this research were contrasted with those of other research. Thus, it should be possible for other researchers to make transferability judgements based on these findings.

In addition to transferability, generalisations to the wider teacher and parent population were also made from the qualitative data. Although many qualitative researchers reject generalisation (van Wyk 1996:167), Wolcott (1987:50) notes that qualitative research necessarily includes making generalisations. In this study generalisations from the qualitative data were made more acceptable by the fact that most generalisations were tested against the quantitative data or were stated tentatively.

#### *4.3.10.4 Improvements to the study*

Unfortunately, the study was not as complete and comprehensive, as the researcher would have liked it to be due to the reluctance of parents and teachers to be interviewed repeatedly and at length. Repeated interviews would have almost certainly captured the informants' realities with more validity (Spindler & Spindler 1992:19). This would have reduced misunderstandings and made participant review possible (McMillan & Schumacher 1993:391). An



examination of learners' perceptions and meanings of parental involvement would also have improved the validity of the findings.

#### 4.3.10.5 *Conclusions*

Patton (1990: 472-477) notes that although researchers can use techniques that enhance the quality and validity of their findings, this is not enough to ensure the credibility of the study, which also depends on the creativity, intellectual rigor, perseverance, and insight of the researcher. Qualitative research requires talent and sensitivity (van der Mescht 2002:49). Winegardner (undated:13) notes that experience plays an important role in the success of qualitative research.

The qualitative findings in this study met many conditions for reliability and validity and the researcher fulfilled her obligation (Patton 1993:462) to provide the reader with enough information to judge the validity and reliability of the study.

#### 4.3.11 The validity and reliability of the combined quantitative and qualitative findings

As discussed in 4.1 there is considerable debate over whether quantitative and qualitative findings should or can be reconciled. Shapiro (in Patton 1990:465) discovered conflicts between these two types of data, which she believed resulted from the fact that they were measuring different things. Although conflicts between the qualitative and quantitative data were found (see 6.2.4.1) these were rare and resulted in a deeper understanding of parental involvement. On the whole the quantitative and qualitative data were remarkably consistent. The quantitative data supported many of the hypotheses that arose from the qualitative data. Further, the qualitative findings provided depth and

understanding to the quantitative results. Triangulation of the qualitative and quantitative findings was one of the greatest strengths of this study.

#### 4.3.12 Research ethics

Murray (2002:1) outlines three major ethical values that should be respected in research, respect for persons, respect for truth and respect for democratic values.

Respect for the informants in this study was shown by addressing them in respectful language at all times, dressing respectfully, asking permission to use the video camera, maintaining confidentiality and anonymity, and informing participants of the nature and purpose of the study and their own role in it.

Respect for truth was shown by working honestly, systematically and analytically in such a way that it would be clear to other researchers how the conclusions evolved from the raw data.

Finally, Murray (2002:2) notes that as part of a democratic society, researchers can expect certain freedoms as long as they accept their responsibilities in terms of respect for people and the truth. These are the freedom to publish, ask questions, criticise others and so forth.

An ethical dilemma, arose in this study from the insistence of some teachers to be interviewed at times when they were meant to be in the classroom. Mr. Nkunita, Ms. Malaza and Ms. Dube left their learners doing revision and Mr. Fakudze and Mr. Nyoni allowed their learners to play outside the class during the interviews. Fortunately, the interviews were short and kept teachers out of their classrooms for no more than 30 minutes.

#### **4.4 Summary**

Although the researcher essentially follows the positivist paradigm she also attempted to don the “paradigmatic spectacles” of interpretive paradigm and combine both quantitative and qualitative methodologies in this study. The combination of these two approaches is difficult and is objected to by both quantitative and qualitative purists. However, it has been done and is recommended by some authors when, as in this study, a more complete understanding of a phenomenon is sought.

The quantitative research was based on a self-rating parental questionnaire, which was designed to measure the two determinants of parental involvement (see 2.6) and had been adapted from a South African study for the Swazi situation. This questionnaire was used to measure the responses of 218 parents of urban Swazi Grade 5 learners. A number of hypotheses, based on the literature review, about the involvement of various groups of parents in their children’s education were tested statistically using t-tests, F-tests and the Pearson Product Moment Correlation. In addition, the percentage of parents involved in certain activities was calculated. The quantitative research had the advantage of providing generalisable results, which were important for the design of a parental involvement programme in senior primary education in Swaziland.

The qualitative, descriptive research following an ethnographic approach was used to provide depth, detail and a more complete picture of parental involvement in Swaziland. Since the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection, researcher’ characteristics that may have affected data collection were described. The researcher’s primary strategy of data collection was interviews.

Semi-structured and unstructured individual teacher interviews and focus group discussions were done in order to establish teachers' beliefs, feelings, meanings and experiences of parental involvement. Parent interviews were done to explore how parents experienced their realities in respect to parental involvement and how they envisaged a future programme of parental involvement in Swaziland. The interviews were supported by observations. Interviews were recorded by video camera and transcribed verbatim. Data segments were sorted manually into themes that arose both from the data and the literature. Data were presented as thick description in the original words of the participants.

Both qualitative triangulation and triangulation through a combination of qualitative and quantitative research was done to increase the validity of the study. The qualitative and quantitative findings were drawn together to provide a more complete, detailed picture of parental involvement in Swaziland. Grounded inferences that arose from the qualitative data were treated as hypotheses, which the quantitative findings either supported or contradicted.

Ethical considerations as well as considerations of validity and reliability were borne in mind throughout the study.

In Chapter 5 the results of the quantitative part of the study are revealed and discussed. In Chapter 6 the results of the qualitative part of the study are narrated and an attempt is made to draw the quantitative and qualitative results together to reveal a coherent detailed picture of parental involvement in Swaziland.