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Homework, Hegemony, and the Marginalised Parent: Unmasking Structural Barriers to Working-Class Involvement in Mathematics Education in South Africa

France Khutso Lavhelani Kgobe*

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Abstract:
Introduction: This study interrogates how mathematics homework in South African rural schools reproduces structural inequality through neoliberal and colonial schooling systems.
Methods: A systematic review of 18 qualitative and quantitative studies (2018–2024) was conducted using secondary data analysis from academic and policy sources.
Results: The findings reveal that economic hardship, epistemic exclusion, and linguistic barriers severely limit rural parental involvement in homework. Homework reinforces educational stratification by privileging middle-class norms and resources.
Discussion: The deficit discourse surrounding "uninvolved" parents is critiqued, revealing systemic oppression embedded in education policy and practice. Homework is often portrayed as a site of alienation, rather than empowerment.
Limitations: The study is limited by its reliance on secondary data and exclusion of direct parental voices from primary data collection.
Conclusions: Educational equity demands the abolition of homework as currently structured and the reimagination of parental involvement within a decolonial, socialist ethic that values rural parents as co-educators.

Key words: parental involvement, homework, neoliberal education, primary schools.

* France Khutso Lavhelani Kgobe, Research Associate, Varsity College, The Independent Institute of Education, Pretoria Campus, City of Tshwane, South Africa; Fkgobe@iie.ac.za; https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7238-0140

Introduction

The struggle for quality education in South Africa remains a battleground of structural inequality and historical injustice, particularly in rural communities (Khumalo, 2025). Contemporary research increasingly recognises that children's education is inextricably linked to their socio-economic, cultural, and political contexts (O'Toole, Kiely, & McGillicuddy, 2019, p.5). Within this framework, the collaboration between schools and families especially through parental involvement in mathematics homework has been valorised as a key determinant of learner achievement (Schneider & Arnot, 2018). However, what is often omitted in mainstream discourses is how systemic marginalisation, economic precarity, and linguistic alienation undermine such collaboration. Parental involvement, defined by Salac and Florida (2022) as active communication between parents and their children regarding education, is framed as a universally beneficial concept. However, it often disregards the socio-political realities of Black, working-class families in rural South Africa. According to Sibanda (2021), meaningful parental involvement requires parents to maintain high aspirations for their children, support school-related activities, and create a home learning environment. However, this neoliberal framing of parental responsibility conveniently obscures the material conditions under which these parents must labour, conditions shaped by apartheid legacies, state neglect, and capitalist extraction.

Although scholars like Daniels (2018; 2020) and Park and Holloway (2017) promote the idea that parental involvement enhances learner outcomes, they seldom critique the structural barriers that exclude the rural poor from full participation in their children's education. The South African Schools Act of 1996 (SASA), while progressive in spirit, places undue expectations on parents without providing the necessary state infrastructure, social support, or epistemic inclusion to make such involvement meaningful. Bunijevac (2017) rightly highlights the difficulties rural parents face in supporting academic work, a challenge that should be situated within the broader context of systemic underdevelopment of rural areas. Daniels (2020) points to a pedagogy of learning at home, but fails to interrogate how educational content, designed through Eurocentric and elite lenses, remains inaccessible to the majority. Homework, as Geduld (2024) and Odabass (2022) argue, can indeed bridge school and home, but only when the home has the cognitive, material, and linguistic resources to meet the school halfway. Darragh and Franke (2021) expose how mathematics homework can become a site of alienation and conflict, rather than empowerment, particularly when families lack fluency in the dominant curriculum. South Africa's unstable and frequently revised mathematics curricula (Vale & Graven, 2022) further alienate parents, many of whom never had access to quality schooling themselves due to apartheid-era

exclusion. As Geduld (2024) notes, the cognitive load of mathematics, amplified by language barriers and curriculum opacity, makes genuine parental support almost impossible. Meanwhile, the economic violence of capitalism ensures that parents in rural areas remain too overworked and underpaid to provide the assistance schools expect. This review, therefore, seeks to examine not simply the barriers to parental involvement, but the deeper systemic logics that manufacture and maintain these barriers in rural primary schools.

1 Problem statement

In the rural heartlands of the Limpopo Province, mathematics homework has become an enduring site of failure not because rural learners are inherently less capable, but because the socio-economic and epistemological conditions necessary for success have been systematically denied to them. The persistent inability of learners to complete mathematics homework should not be viewed as a personal or parental shortcoming, but rather as a structural outcome of an education system that continues to marginalise the Black rural poor. Research by Grandly (2022) identifies numerous "barriers" to parental involvement, including economic hardship, limited formal education, a lack of curriculum knowledge, and negative past schooling experiences. However, it fails to examine how these factors are consequences of state abandonment and a market-driven education model. The dominant discourse around parental involvement too often pathologises poor families instead of critiquing the system that produces their exclusion. Parents in rural schools, most of whom are Black women, are expected to navigate the technical demands of the CAPS curriculum with minimal support or recognition of their socio-political context. As Caro (2018) notes, parents experiencing economic deprivation must prioritise survival over schooling, yet they are subtly blamed for their children's academic struggles. This reinforces a neoliberal logic in which the burden of education is individualised and privatised, while structural inequality remains unchallenged.

Spinelli et al. (2021) highlight how the labour demands placed on parents erode their ability to engage with their children's education. However, this analysis must be further developed: the issue is not simply a work-life imbalance, but the exploitative conditions under which Black rural families are forced to labour without the means to support educational success. Family structures are also implicated in these dynamics. Single-parent households, predominantly led by women, bear the brunt of these challenges, yet educational systems rarely offer material or emotional support to mitigate these conditions (Grandly, 2022). Tamboto et al. (2021) reveal that mothers tend to be more involved in homework. However, this involvement becomes unsustainable when coupled with financial provision, caregiving, and domestic responsibilities under patriarchal and capitalist constraints (Gežová, 2015). Language further

compounds exclusion. When the language of instruction is not aligned with the learners' or parents' home language, comprehension and, therefore, participation are fundamentally obstructed. As Grandly (2022) and Otani (2019) point out, parents with limited proficiency in English or Afrikaans are unlikely to approach teachers or assist with homework, reinforcing cycles of alienation. In sum, this systematic review aims to uncover not merely the surface-level "barriers" to parental involvement in mathematics homework but the deeper, historically rooted, and ideologically driven systems that reproduce educational inequality. A radical critique demands I interrogate how rural, Black, working-class families are structurally excluded from education systems designed without them in mind.

2 Theoretical framework

This study draws on Joyce Epstein's Model of Overlapping Spheres of Influence, also known as the Framework of Six Types of Involvement (Epstein, 1990; 2001), but interprets it through a critical, far-left lens that interrogates the structural violence embedded in mainstream notions of "parental involvement". While Epstein's framework was originally presented as a tool to foster collaboration among families, schools, and communities, this study contends that such collaboration is not neutral. It is conditioned by the material realities of race, class, and historical marginalisation, particularly in rural South African contexts. Epstein's model suggests that effective education requires the coordination of efforts between schools, families, and communities, spheres which may function either independently or in interdependence (Epstein, 1990; 2001). However, in the context of post-apartheid South Africa, where racial capitalism, spatial inequality, and epistemic injustice still dominate the landscape of basic education, the assumed harmony among these spheres obscures the deep-rooted contradictions that define. The school, shaped by colonial curricula and neoliberal accountability measures, tends to dominate, marginalising the input of rural parents and communities. Rather than interpreting "non-involvement" as parental neglect or disinterest, this study situates it as a product of structural exclusion. Parents in rural areas are often excluded by a schooling system that is fundamentally alienating, linguistically, culturally, and economically. The schooling system demands participation on its own terms, privileging middle-class norms, while overlooking the historically constructed barriers faced by working-class and rural families. In alignment with critical education theorists such as Paulo Freire (1970) and Frantz Fanon (1961), this study recognises the need to politicise education and resist deficit narratives that blame the poor for systemic failures. Epstein's typology, when interpreted uncritically, risks reinforcing liberal notions of individual responsibility while concealing structural oppression. Each of Epstein's six categories of involvement

is reconsidered here through a lens of radical pedagogy, class struggle, and epistemic justice.

2.1 Type 1: Parenting

Đurišić and Bunijevac (2017) define parenting as the provision of home environments that support children's development as learners. However, as Višnjić Jevtić (2023) notes, this assumes a level of agency and resources not available to most rural parents. Conditions of labour exploitation, poverty, and displacement shape parenting. Within the context of racialised capitalism, "good parenting" is not simply a choice, it is a luxury conditioned by historical dispossession. This study rejects deficit perspectives and instead focuses on how systemic precarity limits parents' capacity to enact middle-class models of involvement.

2.2 Type 2: Communicating

Communication is not merely the exchange of information, it is a struggle over whose knowledge is legitimate. While Đurišić and Bunijevac (2017) advocate two-way communication, the form this takes is often dictated by institutional norms that exclude parents unfamiliar with bureaucratic or academic discourse. Višnjić Jevtić (2023) rightly points out that parents' voices are rarely given equal weight. In Fanonian terms, rural parents are often the "wretched of the classroom", spoken about rather than with. This study frames school, home communication as a site of epistemic inequality, where parents' knowledge is systematically devalued.

2.3 Type 3: Volunteering

Mainstream educational literature presents volunteering as a universal good, yet as Višnjić Jevtić (2023) warns, this model assumes that parents have surplus time and financial resources. From a Marxist perspective, volunteering represents the extraction of unpaid labour from already overburdened families. Đurišić and Bunijevac (2017) outline several forms of volunteering, however fail to interrogate the class dynamics that determine who can participate. In rural contexts, the invitation to volunteer becomes an ideological tool that masks inequality by valorising middle-class norms of participation.

2.4 Type 4: Learning at home (Core focus of this study)

This form of engagement, supporting children's homework at home, is often lauded as key to academic success (Đurišić & Bunijevac, 2017). However, in the South African context, it assumes parents possess the educational background, time, and psychological confidence to assist with a curriculum that may itself be alien and technocratic. Višnjić Jevtić (2023) suggests that "learning at home"

involves accessing information about schoolwork, but this often requires digital connectivity, functional literacy, and prior formal education, resources that apartheid systematically denied to generations of Black rural families. This study foregrounds "learning at home" as a site of structural struggle, where under-resourced parents are expected to compensate for a state that has abdicated its responsibility.

2.5 Type 5: Decision-making

While democratic in theory, the SGB system often mirrors broader patterns of exclusion. Višnjić Jevtić (2023) notes that a minority of parents dominate these structures, reinforcing class and gender hierarchies. Participation is often tokenistic, and school leadership may sideline dissenting voices. Rather than celebrating parental participation in school governance, this study interrogates which parents are allowed to speak, whose interests they serve, and who remains unheard. Decision-making thus becomes another mechanism through which the school reproduces dominant class interests.

2.6 Type 6: Collaboration with the community

This form of involvement assumes that communities are coherent, resourced, and empowered to act. However, as Višnjić Jevtić (2023) cautions, parents' social capital is unequally distributed. In practice, collaboration often benefits parents who already occupy privileged social positions. For marginalised rural parents, collaboration is a space of exclusion. From a radical standpoint, genuine collaboration would involve not only engagement but also the redistribution of power and resources, as well as the recognition of indigenous knowledge systems that have long been devalued by formal schooling.

This theoretical framework does not reject Epstein's model outright but reclaims it as a tool of resistance. Parental involvement, particularly in rural communities, must be understood in the context of structural oppression, not individual failure. Drawing on critical theorists such as Freire (1970), this study positions parental engagement as part of a larger struggle for liberation from systems that pathologise the poor while absolving the state of its responsibilities. This study asks: What would parental involvement look like if it were rooted in justice, not compliance? In solidarity, not surveillance? In empowerment, not exclusion?

3 Literature review

Parental involvement in education must be understood not simply as a neutral or technical concept, but as one embedded within broader structures of inequality, dispossession, and capitalist exploitation. Hill (2022) and Muttaqin and Soetjipto (2021) define parental involvement as active engagement in school-related

learning. However, such definitions often assume equal conditions and overlook the systemic marginalisation of working-class, rural, and Black parents. From a radical standpoint, particularly informed by Frantz Fanon's critique of colonial hierarchies and Paulo Freire's (1970) pedagogy of the oppressed, parental involvement cannot be divorced from the socio-political conditions that shape the capacities and limitations of parents to engage. Sreekanth (2023) and Fan and Chen (2001) highlight the importance of communication and collaboration, but such framings risk romanticising a system in which many parents are structurally excluded from full participation. In South Africa, for instance, the legacy of apartheid spatial planning, coupled with neoliberal education reforms, has systematically under-resourced rural schools, making active engagement a luxury rather than a norm. Geduld (2024) correctly identifies that parental involvement varies according to school quintiles, a reality that reflects the entrenched class divisions and the commodification of education.

Parental involvement, then, should be seen as a site of struggle. While scholars like Silinkas and Kikas (2019) and Sengonoul (2022) offer useful descriptions of involvement, ranging from homework assistance to dialogue with educators, a radical critique insists that these acts take place within unequal power dynamics. Ndwandwe (2023) rightly notes that collaboration between parents and teachers is vital, but such collaboration is limited when parents are alienated from schooling systems built around Eurocentric epistemologies and neoliberal bureaucracies. Sibanda (2021) reveals the epistemic misunderstanding that parents are solely responsible for upbringing, while teachers alone are tasked with education. This binary reinforces colonial hierarchies of knowledge production where community knowledge is devalued. Fanon would describe this as part of the coloniality of education, where the "native" parent is seen as incapable unless assimilated into formal schooling logic. Mekgwe and Maseko (2023) argue for the importance of parental involvement in academic performance. However, a truly liberatory approach would require dismantling the socio-economic and cultural barriers that restrict working-class and rural parents from such involvement.

Homework, too, is not a neutral educational tool. It operates within a pedagogical model that assumes a stable, resource-rich home environment, something denied to many learners under global capitalism and post-apartheid neoliberal governance. While Jenjić and Mihailovic (2020) and Hidayah et al. (2021) present homework as an extension of the classroom and a means of fostering independent learning, this assumes that learners have the time, space, and adult support necessary to complete such tasks. In rural South Africa, this is often not the case. The Western Cape Education Department (WCED, 2005) formalises homework as a compulsory aspect of learning, expecting oversight by guardians. However, this framework ignores the lived realities of working-class

and single-parent households, many of whom are engaged in precarious labour and have limited educational experience due to historic dispossession. In this context, homework can reproduce educational inequality by rewarding those with access to private tutors, internet, and stable electricity, resources unequally distributed across race and class lines. Epstein and Sanders (2000) conceptualise homework as an interactive process that strengthens school-family relationships. Nevertheless, from a critical perspective, homework can also serve as a disciplinary mechanism, a form of pedagogical control that shifts the burden of education from the state to the family, especially in contexts of austerity and budget cuts. It becomes a tool of neoliberal responsibilities, where parents are held accountable for educational outcomes despite structural under-resourcing and systemic neglect.

Thus, both parental involvement and homework, when viewed through a far-left and radical lens, expose how education systems continue to reproduce inequality under the guise of meritocracy, individual effort, and "parental support." A radical reimagining demands not only policy reform but the decolonisation of pedagogical assumptions and the redistribution of resources to support equitable education in rural South Africa.

4 Research methods

The article employs a qualitative case study design and qualitative research methods. This study adopted a secondary data analysis approach, drawing on existing datasets and scholarly literature to explore the role of parental involvement in the completion of mathematics homework in South African primary schools found in rural areas. These data were gathered from a variety of sources, including academic journals, government documents, news articles and policy papers. The study utilised Google Scholar, ISI, ProQuest, and Scopus search engines to locate relevant studies using keywords such as parental involvement, homework, mathematics, and primary schools.

4.1 Data identification

Data for this study were identified through a comprehensive search using multiple search engines, including Google Scholar, ISI, ProQuest, and Scopus. However, the process was complex as some search engines require a subscription and payment to access. The search focused on locating relevant research studies and other documents that could provide insight into the role of parental involvement in the completion of mathematics homework in South African primary schools found in rural areas. Keywords used in the search included parental involvement, homework, mathematics homework and primary schools.

4.2 Inclusion criteria

To achieve the objective of this article, a unique selection criterion was developed to identify relevant articles and documents for review. These criteria included articles and documents with titles, themes, and keywords related to parental involvement, homework, mathematics homework, and primary schools. A comprehensive literature search was conducted on Google Scholar, ERIC, ProQuest, ResearchGate, and Scopus, using the specified criteria, which resulted in the identification of 146 articles and documents. Eighteen relevant articles and documents were identified for further review, as they covered a range of topics, themes, and keywords central to the study.

4.3 Data screening

The authors conducted data screening using various publications, including books, book chapters, conference proceedings, and journals. The screening was conducted according to the inclusion criteria and the types of documents to be excluded. The titles and keywords of the publications were examined to determine their relevance to the topic of parental involvement in completing mathematics homework in South African rural primary schools. The initial literature search resulted in the collection of 240 documents, which include duplicate and irrelevant documents. However, through screening and the application of the inclusion criteria, 18 documents qualified for review (Table 1).

Table 1

Sources identified for analysis

Author(S) and Year of Publication	*Type*	*Publisher*	*Design and Sample Size*
Mudzielwana and Mulovhedzi (2020)	Journal	Gender & Behaviour	Qualitative (N=24)
Fiskerstrand (2022)	Journal	Educational Research Review	Quantitative (N=169)
Musengamana (2023)	Journal	Open Access Library Journal	Qualitative (N=24)
Silinskas and Kikas (2019)	Journal	Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research	Qualitative (N=932)
Hill, Witherspoon, and Bartz (2018)	Journal	The Journal of Educational Research	Qualitative (N=280)
Williams and Williams (2020)	Journal	Education	Qualitative (N=389)
Fadiji and Reddy (2023)	Journal	Frontiers In Psychology	Qualitative (N=20,829)
Wang and Li (2023)	Journal	British Journal of Educational Psychology	Qualitative (N=43)
Alreshidi, Alsharif, and Kandeel (2022)	Journal	*Education And Urban Society*	Qualitative (N=61,406)
Vale and Graven (2022)	Research Report	*Mathematics Education Research Group of Australasia*	Qualitative (N=25)

Geduld (2024)	Journal	Cogent Education,	Qualitative (N=8)
O'keeffe, Clarke, McDonald, and Comber (2023)	Journal	British Journal of Sociology Of Education	Qualitative (N=8)
Vale and Graven (2020)	Conference Paper	Inclusive Memory Conference	Qualitative (N=53)
Ndwandwe (2023)	Journal	Research In Social Sciences And Technology	Qualitative (N=24)
Sibanda (2021)	Journal	South African Journal of Education	Qualitative (N=12)
Ndebele (2018)	Journal	South African Journal of Education	Qualitative (N=8)
Mekgwe and Maseko (2023)	Journal	Studies In Learning and Teaching	Qualitative (N=9)
Sengonoul (2022)	Journal	Pegem Journal of Education and Instruction	Qualitative (N=18)

5 Findings

5.1 Structural class oppression and the impact of socio-economic status

Parental involvement in mathematics homework in South African rural schools must be understood within the broader architecture of class domination and neoliberal dispossession. The persistent economic precarity of the working class, especially in historically marginalised rural communities, constrains parental support for children's learning. As Geduld (2024) and Ndwandwe (2023) demonstrate, low-income parents are structurally forced into exploitative labour arrangements, often multiple jobs with long hours that leave little room for involvement in their children's academic work. This is not a matter of individual neglect, but a predictable outcome of capitalist systems that extract labour while withholding social support. Ndebele (2018), and Mekgwe and Maseko (2023) further show how the entrenchment of poverty, unemployment, and racialised inequalities rooted in colonial land dispossession continues to affect rural Black families, diminishing their capacity to participate in their children's education. Sengonul (2022), and Williams and Williams (2020) provide critical insight into how structural deprivation fosters internalised educational inferiority and reduced expectations, outcomes of a society that reproduces class stratification through unequal schooling systems. Caro (2018) and Grandly (2022) rightfully foreground how systemic economic exclusion obstructs classroom engagement, sustaining intergenerational cycles of educational dispossession. These are not "barriers" in isolation; they are manifestations of a larger political economy of neglect and marginalisation.

5.2 Alienation and communication breakdown in capitalist schooling systems

The communication gap between parents and schools is not simply a logistical issue; it is a symptom of more profound alienation under an education system designed to privilege middle-class norms. Mekgwe and Maseko (2023) expose how rural parents are often made to feel like outsiders in their children's education due to a schooling culture that centres elite languages, pedagogies, and attitudes. Grandly (2022) adds that lower levels of formal education among parents, often the direct consequence of apartheid-era exclusion, result in asymmetrical power relations between teachers and parents, creating spaces of intimidation rather than collaboration. The imposition of English as the dominant language of instruction and school communication, as Jay, Rose, and Simmons (2018) argue, functions as a gatekeeping mechanism that silences working-class, Black, and rural voices, delegitimising home languages and alienating caregivers from engaging meaningfully in mathematics education. What is needed is not merely "improved communication," but a radical restructuring of schooling practices to recognise and integrate the cultural and linguistic wealth of oppressed communities.

5.3 Undermining parental agency through neoliberal education

The notion of "parental responsibility" in education is often weaponised by neoliberal discourse to deflect attention from systemic underfunding and social abandonment. While studies like Sibanda (2021), and Williams and Williams (2020) affirm that parents play vital roles in supporting learning, far-left analysis insists that these roles cannot be fulfilled without structural support. The state's failure to provide accessible adult education, childcare support, or dignified working conditions undermines parents' ability to engage. Research by Maarman and Lamont-Mbawuli (2017) and Bachman et al. (2021) shows that many parents, especially those enduring the triple burden of race, gender, and class oppression, feel disempowered by their limited educational backgrounds. The onus placed on parents to "do more" with fewer resources, less time, and limited support must be understood as a continuation of neoliberal policies that privatise responsibility and commodify education. This systemic failure disproportionately impacts mothers and women caregivers, reinforcing gendered expectations within capitalist patriarchy.

5.4 Curriculum alienation and the commodification of homework

The obstacles to mathematics homework completion cannot be separated from the colonial logic embedded in South Africa's curriculum. Fiskerstrand (2022), and Vale and Graven (2022) reveal how outdated pedagogies and curriculum changes, developed without community consultation, create confusion and resistance among both parents and learners. The curriculum often centres

Western epistemologies, with little attention to contextually relevant examples or Indigenous knowledge systems, making it unintelligible to rural learners and caregivers. Teachers themselves, often underpaid and poorly trained due to state neglect, sometimes assign homework with unclear instructions (Sibanda, 2021), further marginalising parents who already struggle with comprehension. As Caro (2018) and Tamboto et al. (2021) show, these issues are intensified by shifts in teaching methodology and digital learning expectations, which exclude families lacking access to technology and the internet, a fundamental right in a democratic society. This undermines not just mathematics learning but the dignity of working-class families.

5.5 Deficit of mathematics content knowledge as structural violence

Rather than pathologising parents for "lacking knowledge," it is imperative to situate the widespread absence of mathematical literacy within a history of epistemic exclusion and systemic educational inequality. Mudzielwana and Mulovhedzi (2020) and Mekgwe and Maseko (2023) point to an educational system that has failed to uplift the mathematical literacy of the broader population, particularly Black rural communities. This failure is a form of structural violence, denying people the tools to participate fully in their children's education. Parents who were historically denied quality education now face the burden of navigating a complex curriculum with no institutional support. As Tamboto et al. (2021) note, curriculum reform without corresponding support for parents deepens exclusion. Schools, therefore, must take collective responsibility by decommodifying knowledge and offering community-based learning hubs or popular education workshops that empower parents to reclaim educational spaces.

5.6 Cultural erasure and the coloniality of schooling

Cultural and contextual influences on parental involvement must be framed within a broader analysis of coloniality and capitalist cultural domination. As Mekgwe and Maseko (2023) and Mudzielwana and Mulovhedzi (2020) argue, many African communities embrace collective responsibility for education, rooted in Ubuntu and Indigenous pedagogies. However, schools governed by Westernised bureaucracies often dismiss these traditions, enforcing individualistic, nuclear-family-based expectations for parental involvement. Sibanda (2021) and Fadiji and Reddy (2022) highlight that cultural values, especially in working-class Black households, are often misinterpreted as "a lack of interest" by educators unfamiliar with communal child-rearing practices. Far from being deficits, these practices offer an alternative vision for a liberatory education rooted in solidarity, care, and community ownership. Schools must

reject Eurocentric educational norms and embrace culturally sustaining pedagogies that centre African ways of knowing.

5.7 Resource inequality as educational apartheid

The persistent lack of educational resources in rural communities reflects the unbroken legacy of apartheid spatial planning and capitalist neglect. As Geduld (2024), and Mekgwe and Maseko (2023) demonstrate, families in rural South Africa are often deprived of the most basic materials needed for effective learning, including textbooks, internet access, and electricity. This is not coincidental, it is the outcome of deliberate underinvestment in public education and infrastructure for the poor. Bempechat (2019) and Huscroft-D'Angelo et al. (2022) provide evidence that access to learning tools dramatically improves educational outcomes. However, the state continues to treat education as a commodity, accessible only to those with purchasing power. As Hill et al. (2018) demonstrate, the material deprivation experienced by many families constitutes a form of economic violence that undermines learners' right to education. A far-left approach demands the socialisation of education resources, universal access to Wi-Fi, free learning materials, and community-based tutoring initiatives as a matter of justice, not charity.

6 Discussion

The systematic review reveals that barriers to parental involvement in mathematics homework are not merely interpersonal or incidental; they are structural. Socio-economic status is not just a background variable; it is a direct product of centuries of dispossession, colonial expropriation, and capitalist underdevelopment that continue to determine who has access to educational success. As highlighted by Mekgwe and Maseko (2023), parents living in economic precarity are systematically deprived of time, resources, and capacity to participate meaningfully in their children's schooling. This is not a failure of individual willpower, it is the outcome of a rigged system. The widespread breakdown in communication between schools and families reflects more than logistical misalignment; it is indicative of a schooling system that still alienates and excludes working-class Black families (Maseko & Mekgwe, 2023). Schools often operate within bureaucratic and cultural logics that treat parents as passive recipients rather than co-educators. This asymmetry marginalises those without formal education or economic capital, reinforcing the myth that parental involvement is a personal duty, when it is a collective educational right.

Parents' struggles with mathematics content, often labelled "math anxiety" or "low education levels," must be reframed as the legacy of an anti-Black and anti-poor schooling system that has, for generations, undereducated the rural majority (Sibanda, 2021; Paun, 2024). Curriculum reforms imposed from above, without

democratic consultation, compound this alienation, making both learners and parents feel disempowered. The practice of parents doing homework for children is not mere overreach; it is a desperate, and ultimately harmful, survival strategy in a hostile system. Resource deprivation is not a neutral or accidental condition. It is the predictable outcome of neoliberal austerity and rural neglect. As Ndwandwe (2023) shows, access to after-school programs, technology, and libraries dramatically enhances parental involvement. However, rural communities are routinely denied such investments, exposing the state's complicity in educational inequality. Where community support does exist, it is often due to grassroots resilience rather than institutional support.

Cultural and contextual differences, too often treated as barriers, should be reimagined as assets. Williams and Williams (2020) argue that mainstream schooling fails to recognise the cultural wealth of Black and working-class families. Rather than demanding parents assimilate into middle-class norms of education, schools must transform their practices to affirm and include diverse worldviews and learning traditions. To this end, the findings of this review confirm that parental involvement cannot be advanced by technocratic fixes or isolated "awareness" campaigns. What is needed is a radical rethinking of education as a site of justice, solidarity, and collective struggle. Collaboration between teachers, families, and communities must be grounded in mutual respect, political empowerment, and structural transformation, not charity or compliance.

Conclusions

This systematic review aimed to identify and analyse the underlying barriers to parental involvement in mathematics homework within rural South African primary schools. In doing so, it moves beyond simplistic explanations and technocratic solutions, instead offering a critical reading of how educational inequality is reproduced through systemic marginalisation. Although much of the existing literature examines general parental involvement in education, few studies specifically address mathematics in the Intermediate Phase, revealing a knowledge gap that mirrors broader patterns of neglect in rural educational research. Across the eighteen studies reviewed from 2018 to 2024, seven core themes emerged. These themes point not to individual failures, but to structural violence: poverty, exclusionary communication practices, lack of culturally responsive pedagogy, and an absence of institutional support. The findings demonstrate that when schools fail to recognise the social and economic realities of rural life, they perpetuate the very inequalities they claim to address. To overcome these barriers, schools and policymakers must reject neoliberal narratives that place the burden of educational success solely on individual families. Instead, they must invest in building radically inclusive educational

ecosystems, ones that affirm the dignity, knowledge, and potential of marginalised communities. Only through such structural transformation can parental involvement in mathematics education move from being a privilege of the few to a right of the many.

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