Parents' expectations of public schooling in the Northern Province of South Africa

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The social landscape in South Africa has changed drastically since 1990, and more so after 1994. Not only have residential areas become largely mixed but also schools. This is, of course, a result of the abolishing of apartheid-era policies and legislation that enforced racial segregation. However, the phenomenon sketched above was accompanied by parents moving children from public schools to independent schools which immediately mushroomed all over South Africa, particularly in urban areas. It is as if parents have passed a motion of no confidence in the public schooling system. This study determined the extent of parents' expectations in the Northern Province and attempted to come up with measures to help public schools measure up to the expectations of parents, as identified in the research. Also, parents' expectations were assessed against sound educational practices.

Introduction

The South African schooling is in a state of transition. Laws, rules, regulations and policies regarding public schooling have been drafted on an unprecedented scale. The aims of schooling have been and continue to be reshaped. All these endeavours are initiated by the state, with opportunities for public input. The question, however, still remains whether parents are able to make a substantial contribution through this process.

Stone (1988:31) was of the opinion that the fact that schools originated to help parents when civilisation became increasingly differentiated cannot be disputed. People have a right to either undertake the upbringing of their children themselves or delegate this responsibility to others. In arguing for schools to undertake the upbringing of children in the place of or in conjunction with the parents, Barrow (1983:34) asserted that they (schools) provide valuable instruction well, economically and fairly to all.

School education is not to be offered for the school's sake but for the child, family, the community and even the state. It is offered for cultural: as well as socio-economic development of the child. In South Africa, the parent community as well as the pupil population in schools is changing rapidly. The school caters for children from diverse societies in terms of culture, race, moral-religious values and beliefs. Members of 'societies' as described above may not share the same aspirations and therefore may not expect the same from their teachers and schools. Magagula (1996:55) asserted that these social groupings have their own values, beliefs, opinions, preferences and dispositions, which at certain times overlap and at others are at variance with one another. La Belle and Ward (1994:116) argued that in relation to intergroup relations and education, values shape the preferences group members express for particular educational policies and practices.

Meyer, Delagardelle and Middleton (1996:54) rightly indicated that one of the first questions raised whenever school changes are envisaged is '"how will parents react?" This implies that as much as parents' support will not guarantee the success of reform initiatives, the lack of such support can sabotage even the most well-intentioned reforms. This is in effect an assertion to the effect that what parents expect from schools should, where educationally appropriate, be addressed.

Problem formulation

This study proposed to determine the extent of parents' expectations in issues relating to the role of schooling. Further, the study proposed to provide ways and means to address identified deficiencies.

The following questions were to be answered through a scientific investigation:

- To what extent are parents' expectations of schools influenced by culture and the transmission of values?
- What are parents' expectations of public schooling in the present moment in time?
- Which aspects of public schooling are of greater importance to parents in the Northern Province?
- What are the hopes of parents regarding the future of their children that they expect schools to realise?
- What paradigm shifts can be effected in order for expectations of parents from different backgrounds to be reconciled?
- What can be done to enable public schools to meet the most important expectations of parents?

Aim of study

The following were the aims of this study:

- To provide a brief literature study on the school's supplementary role of education by parents;
- To make a differential analysis of the expectations of the various language, religious and cultural groups about public schooling in the Northern Province;
- To examine the influence of legislation aimed at ensuring school desegregation;
- To suggest measures to deal satisfactorily with parents' expectations of public schooling.

Theoretical background: The school's supplementary role

Schooling and adulthood

It is an undisputed fact that the ultimate aim of education is the attainment of adulthood. This includes the aims of both formal and informal education and therefore the education that schools provide. Every child's life is a progress towards adult living.

Rice (1991:75) defines adulthood in terms of the ability of and individual to optimally integrate culture into his/her life, to possess attitudes and behaviour according to society's expectations.

Development and transference of culture

Rambiyana (2001:34) said that each society seeks in various ways to maintain itself and to preserve its continuity. They (societies) engage in activities aimed at development and transference of culture.

The school therefore as part of society; an institution created to further the aims and objectives of society, will be expected to play a major role in this regard. Milon (1985:1133) asserts that schools pass on to new generations that culture which the political and social rulers of the present and past generations prefer. They therefore serve as caretakers, storehouses and communicators of cultural values.

Moral development

Collier, Thomlison and Wilson (1974:6) define morality as a set of general principles or procedures, acceptable or inevitable for any rational person within a society. Morality therefore defines a person 's

behaviour as good or bad, right or wrong.

Morality is something that should be learned and requires effort both on the part of the learner and the educator. In arguing for the school's involvement in moral development Brezinka (1994:168) contends that the school cannot afford to be neutral in this regard, especially in a constitutional democratic state.

Discipline

George (1990:1) defines discipline in schools as "creating and maintaining a learning atmosphere in which teachers can teach, and pupils learn in an environment that encourages respect for teachers, classmates and administrators." In this regard Rambiyana (2001:42) contends that "discipline and the possibility of effective teaching go together."

Slee (1995:27) contends that discipline is not given at birth but has to be learnt. The centrality of the school in this regard cannot be overemphasised. According to Skillen (1997:380) the school is an appropriate place where discipline can be learnt as there is a system of rules that predetermines a child's behaviour and the child is caused not to disrupt. It therefore means that it is through the practice of school discipline that learners become disciplined.

Schooling and employment

One of the reasons as to why parents send their children to schools is their belief that it raises the possibility of employment in the future. Employment denotes material benefits to both the individual and immediate relatives. Rambiyana (2001:46) asserts that in the parents' view, the child's education is as good as the extent to which it ensures 'good' employment.

Corson (1991:53) is of the opinion that schools should be able to provide children with job skills needed for technocratic efficiency. Society mainly relies on schools for the development of job-related skills such as leadership, teamwork, critical thinking, career development and communication.

Citizenship development

McLaughlin (1992:236) defines a good citizen as one who has a certain civil status within a certain community, with rights and privileges exercised based on the rule of law. Such a person will also be able to acknowledge the fact that he/she has a shared destiny with others in the community.

Rambiyana (2001:50) asserts that schools can be effective vehicles for delivering citizenship education. This is so because children spend a lot of time at school and the fact that educators are better placed to detect and correct defective citizenship traits.

Sexuality education

Cassel and Wilson (1989:xxi) see sexuality education as 'education about the human condition, being male or female, feelings, roles, communication as well as sexual functioning."

Rambiyana (2001:57) is of the opinion that the provision of sexuality education can help to reduce incidents of child sexual abuse. Further, it can also limit the spread of HIV-AIDS. Fay and Gordon (1989:215) argue for sexuality education in schools by asserting that this is too important a matter to be left to chance, superstition, myth, peers and the media.

Parents' participation in education

The South African Schools Act allows for parents' participation in education mainly through representation in School Governing Bodies. However, much more is required. Parents need also to know they can be involved in their children's home learning as well as tackling learning problems with educators.

Rambiyana (2001:60) asserts that it is the duty and responsibility of schools to help learners to be effectively involved in education. Schools can achieve this by, among others, being open to such participation themselves.

Schooling and cognitive development

People are born with cognitive potentialities that have to be developed through environmental stimulation. Such stimulation can be incidental or planned. Schools are seen as part of the environment that strives to stimulate intellectual development in a planned manner. In the latter case the process takes place in a manner that is orderly, sequential, integrative and hierarchical. In this regard the school as part of the environment can play an important role in cognitive development.

Van den Aardweg and Van den Aardweg (1989:38) define cognition as knowing in the broadest sense. Further, cognitive development is seen as the continuous and cumulative development of the intellect and proceeds at an individual's tempo.

Meadows (1993:333) assert that "enhancing cognitive development, or facilitating cognitive acquisition, are central concerns of education." School systems are commonly held to be responsible for teaching learners to think effectively and are also commonly accused of failing to do so.

Methodology

Based on the theoretical background provided, a questionnaire was constructed consisting of two parts. In the first part biographical information including gender, academic qualifications, age, religious affiliation and mother tongue had to be provided. In the second part respondents were required to indicate the extent to which they expect schools to be involved in aspects raised in the literature study. The extent of this expectation was to be expressed on a five point Likert type scale.

Respondents were parents and guardians of learners in five public secondary schools in the Province selected on the basis of stratified random sampling. For this purpose the predominant language spoken was used. One school was predominantly English speaking, one predominantly Afrikaans speaking, one was predominantly Northern Sotho speaking, one predominantly Tsonga speaking and one which was predominantly Venda speaking. In order to cater for this difference in the language spoken, the questionnaire was translated into all these languages.

On the whole, 250 questionnaires were distributed through the use of research assistants. Of these 245 were returned: a return of 98%. This is a very high percentage of return. This can be attributed to the fact that research assistants personally delivered questionnaires to respondents and in a number of cases, helped them to complete them. However, only 241 were suitable for use although some were not fully completed. The 4 unused ones left out a sizeable number of items and were therefore discarded. It is also important to note that no less than 234 respondents responded to each item.

The respondents who were able to indicate their gender were 239. Of these 53.1% were males and 46.9% were females. Of these 40.3% were mothers, 42.3% fathers and 17.4% were guardians. Seventeen percent regarded English as their mother tongue, 23.3% Afrikaans, 17.9% Northern Sotho, 17.9% Tsonga, 20% Venda and 3.8% regarded a language other than the above as their mother tongue. Religious affiliation: 82.4% regarded Christianity as their religion whilst 17.6% belonged to other religions. Academic qualifications: 13.8 % had no schooling, 23.8% had between Grade 1 and 10 qualifications, 20% Grade 11–12, 22.9% had an post-school diploma and 19.5% had graduate and post-graduate qualifications. Of the 225 respondents who were able to provide their ages, 23.6% were 39 years and younger, 23.6% were between 40 and 44 years of age, 27.0% were between 45 and 51 years, and 25.8% were 52 years and more. Fifty-six percent of the respondents lived in rural areas whilst 43.3% lived in urban areas.

As a result of the number of question items, which were 42, first and second order factor analyses of the items were employed. The first round yielded ten factors with a variance of 64.022; this means that the question items correlated highly in terms of what they sought to find out from respondents. The second round yielded three dimensions with a variance of 60.839. Again the correlation of the items in each dimension correlated highly. It is with reference to these dimensions that

statistical analysis will be offered in this article.

The three dimensions were then named as follows:

- **Dimension one:** the provision of knowledge and skills to become independent. The dimension is made up of aspects relating to training for work (Question items 03, 12 and 18 as reflected in Table 1), sexuality and related matters (Question items 04, 17, 29, and 35), democratic participation (Question items 05 and 31), and parents' involvement in schools (Question items 06, 13 and 34).

  The average for this dimension was 4.07 with a minimum score of 2.33 and a maximum score of 5.0. The dimension is ranked number 2 in Table 2. This means that, although sexuality matters are generally ranked low, in conjunction with issues pertaining to employment, they cause a middle ranking of the dimension. Curriculum 2005, which is outcomes-based, also places a high premium on skills to become independent.

- **Dimension two:** the acquisition of acceptable moral and ethical values for self-fulfilment. The dimension encompasses issues relating to discipline (Question item 02), parents responsibilities towards education of children (Question item 08), development and transmission of culture (Question items 19, 22, 24 and 39) and those dealing with attributes pertaining to adult living (Question items 28 and 41).

  The mean for the dimension is 3.63 with a minimum score of 1.75 and a maximum of 5.0. The dimension is ranked number 3 in Table 2. This is an indication that parents may not see the school as being a relevant institution for addressing issues related to morality and ethical values.

- **Dimension three:** the development of responsible socio-cultural conduct. The majority of items in this dimension deal with responsible behaviour (question items 01, 09, 10, 11, 15, 16, 21, 23, 25, 26, 27, 30, 32, 33, 36, 38 and 42) whilst the others deal with development in general (question items 07, 14, 20, 37 and 40).

  The mean dimension is 4.60 with a minimum score of 2.27 and a maximum score of 5.0. The dimension is ranked number 1 in Table 2. Of the 42 items making up the questionnaire, 22 are found in this dimension. It should be remembered that issues raised in this study are those that the researcher considered, as supported by the literature, to be the school's responsibility. This high ranking of this dimension is therefore very significant for the purposes of this study. The majority of items in this dimension are also scored very high in Table 1. Development of potential and responsible behaviour is what every parent will expect his/her child to attain.

The responses to each item were analysed and the rank order of all items appears in Table 1.

Summary of findings and conclusions
Findings and conclusions according to variables
Religion
Christians were found to be expecting the school to be involved to a higher extent in the provision of knowledge and skills to become independent compared to those of other religions. This may be an indication that Christianity is less authoritative in the upbringing of children than the other religions.

On the other hand Christians were found to be expecting less school involvement in the acquisition of acceptable moral and ethical values for self-fulfilment than those of other religions. It may be that Christians see themselves as better qualified to carry out this responsibility than schools.

The research also found out that Christians and those of other religions do not differ statistically significantly in the extent to which they expect schools to be involved in the development of responsible socio-cultural conduct.

Place of abode
Those who live in urban areas were found to be expecting lesser school involvement in the acquisition of acceptable moral and ethical values for self-fulfilment as compared to those staying in rural areas. The mixing of cultures in the urban areas might be blurring the picture of what is considered acceptable moral and ethical values. On the other hand, the predominantly monocultural nature of rural areas raises fewer questions in this regard. Departmental officials were found to be holding the same views as rural inhabitants.

Relationship to the child
The research found that fathers and guardians expect more school involvement in the acquisition of acceptable moral and ethical values for self-fulfilment than mothers. Further, of the three groups, guardians were found to expect more school involvement in this area as compared to the rest. This may be a result of the fact that mothers largely expect the family to take a leading role in this regard. There is a belief that mothers are custodians of family values and that they care more about the well being of children than fathers. The fact that guardians are not biological parents may cause them to be frustrated when dealing somebody else's child.

It was also found that the three groups did not differ statistically significantly regarding the extent to which they expect schools to be involved in the development of responsible socio-cultural conduct as well as the acquisition of knowledge and skills to become independent.

Age
Regarding the extent of the school's involvement in the provision of knowledge and skills to become independent the research found that respondents who were 39 years of age and younger hold higher expectations than the other age groups whereas those who are 52 years and older expect less school involvement in the same dimension. The reason may be that, unlike older respondents, younger respondents do not have misgivings concerning individual independence. To the older respondents, independence may be seen as a threat to their authority over children. Attainment of independence is seen as being the aim of education and is part of the principles in Curriculum 2005.

The research also found that respondent who are 52 years and older expect more school involvement in the acquisition of acceptable moral and ethical values for self-fulfilment than the other groups. It may be that older respondents feel there is a general decline in moral and ethical values among children.

Mother tongue
Tsonga-speaking respondents were found to be expecting more school involvement in the provision of knowledge and skills to become independent as compared to other language groups. They are closely followed by Venda-speakers. It is surprising that these African language groups expect more school involvement in matters pertaining to individual independence than Afrikaans- and English speakers. It is generally believed that western-oriented cultures put more store in individual freedom and independence than African cultures.

The research also found that African language speakers expect more school involvement in the acquisition of acceptable moral and ethical values for self-fulfilment as compared to Afrikaans and English language speakers respectively. It may be that Africans are more concerned with morality and ethical values than the other groups.

It was found further that African language speakers expect more school involvement in the development of responsible socio-cultural conduct than the other language groups. This may be in line with a perception that Africans are more traditional and that they rarely change traditional practices.

Academic qualification
Respondents with no schooling were found to be expecting less school involvement in the provision of knowledge and skills to become independent than the other groups. Most probably, the majority of these respondents were among Africans. In this regard Rambiyana (2001:172) is of the opinion that the fact that certain items dealt with

Table 1   Rank order of items pertaining to parents expectations of schooling in the Northern Province

Item	N	Mean	SD	Rank
The extent to which parents expect schools to:				
Q 7 help learners to develop their potential to the full?	239	4.88	0.43	1
Q 42 help learners to become responsible adults?	237	4.84	0.53	2
Q 15 create an environment in which teachers can teach and learners learn?	239	4.84	0.46	2
Q 37 help learners to develop their intellectual potential to the full?	238	4.84	0.48	2
Q 16 instil into learners virtues such as honesty, fairness and justice?	239	4.83	0.54	5
Q 26 help learners to be law-abiding?	240	4.77	0.69	6
Q 10 help in eradicating social evils like alcohol and drug abuse, rape and robbery?	239	4.75	0.69	7
Q 38 instil and maintain a sense of respect for authority in learners?	238	4.74	0.65	8
Q 23 help learners in the choice of careers?	239	4.72	0.76	9
Q 33 teach learners in such a way that they stand a better chance of receiving a liveable wage when they start to work?	239	4.69	0.69	10
Q 21 provide learners with skills and attitudes employers require?	240	4.68	0.72	11
Q 01 be involved in teaching learners the idea of good or bad?	239	4.64	0.82	12
Q 27 help learners to live at peace with others from different racial and cultural backgrounds?	237	4.62	0.73	13
Q 09 teach learners to treat others as equals?	240	4.58	0.88	14
Q 18 link academic education with skills training?	239	4.56	0.78	15
Q 12 equip learners with skills such as technological adeptness, communication and ability to work as a team?	238	4.56	0.72	15
Q 32 help learners to make choices that will benefit the community?	239	4.55	0.80	17
Q 30 enable learners so as to be able to fulfil material needs of both themselves and their dependants in the future?	239	4.52	0.89	18
Q 36 help parents in understanding the role they should play in the education of their children?	238	4.47	0.90	19
Q 40 help learners to accept their social roles?	237	4.43	0.96	20
Q 03 see to it no learner leaves school without some form of 'work' training.	240	4.38	0.97	21
Q 14 help learners to develop physically?	239	4.30	0.98	22
Q 35 teach learners in matters pertaining to HIV-AIDS and venereal diseases?	239	4.27	1.14	23
Q 39 help learners to play a part in adapting their culture to changing circumstances?	238	4.17	1.12	24
Q 11 follow up issues of learner discipline beyond the classroom?	239	4.16	1.11	25
Q 25 help learners to treat different cultures as being equal in their daily dealings?	240	4.13	1.19	26
Q 41 help learners in developing the ability to resist community for the sake of conformity only?	234	4.11	1.16	27
Q 20 transmit to learners values beliefs and customs of their parents?	240	4.09	1.27	28
Q 13 be open to parents' participation in drafting the school policy?	238	4.08	1.11	29
Q 19 teach the mother tongue as a subject school level?	238	4.02	1.29	30
Q 06 work together with parents in matters concerning school administration?	240	4.00	1.11	31
Q 05 help learners to develop a questioning attitude in matters pertaining to the state?	240	3.98	1.09	32
Q 34 be open to parents' involvement in the design of the school curriculum?	235	3.93	1.17	33
Q 31 provide learners with knowledge of democratic principles?	237	3.92	1.17	34
Q 17 teach learners about sexual development of their bodies?	239	3.82	1.31	35
Q 29 teach female learners about the use of contraceptives?	238	3.68	1.43	36
Q 22 engage learners in folktales, traditional music and dances?	238	3.62	1.42	37
Q 24 make learners aware of cultural artefacts like weapons, implements and kinds of dwellings?	240	3.62	1.34	37
Q 02 use corporal punishment as one of the ways of maintaining discipline?	239	3.56	1.48	39
Q 04 give learners the knowledge concerning the use of condoms?	240	3.56	1.50	39
Q 28 encourage learners to participate in political activities of the state?	239	2.98	1.47	41
Q 08 leave all other activities except that of teaching to parents?	239	2.82	1.49	42

Table 2   Rank order of the three dimensions

	Dimension	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Rank
1.	The provision of knowledge and skills to become independent	232	2.33	5.00	4.07	0.70	2
2.	The acquisition of acceptable moral and ethical values for self-fulfilment	228	1.75	5.00	3.63	0.80	3
3.	The development of responsible socio-cultural conduct	231	2.27	5.00	4.60	0.43	1

skills relating to employability might not have been identified as such by this group and hence the low scoring of such items.

The research also found that the same group as mentioned above expect greater involvement of the school in the acquisition of acceptable moral and ethical values for self-fulfilment than the other groups.

Number of children in school
The research study found that the number of children respondents have in school has no bearing on the extent to which they expect schools to be involved in the three dimensions. Rambiyana (2001:173) asserts that this is an indication that what parents expect from schools is not influenced by the number of children they have in school.

Number of visits to a school
It was found that those who do not visit their children's school expect greater school involvement in the acquisition of acceptable moral and ethical values for self-fulfilment as compared to the other groups. The same group expect less school involvement in the provision of knowledge and skills to become independent.

The reason for the above state of affairs may be that acquisition of moral and ethical values is an area that tops the hearts of parents compared to the provision of knowledge and skills to become independent. This is probably so because the former has a direct impact on the day-to-day operation of the family.

Findings and conclusions with respect to individual items
Parents were found to be expecting more school involvement in the following areas (see Table 1): those dealing with development of potential (items 07 and 37), those dealing with employment (items 21, 23 and 33) and those dealing with citizenship (items 10, 15, 16, 26, 38 and 42).

Parents were, however found to be expecting less school involvement in the following areas: those dealing with sexuality issues (items 04, 29, and 17), those dealing with parents' involvement in schools (items 06 and 34), those dealing with participation in politics (items 05, 28 and 31), those dealing with cultural transmission and enrichment (items 22 and 24) and the area dealing with discipline (item 02).

With the scourge of HIV-AIDS ravaging our country, it is surprising that items dealing with sexuality have been scored so lowly. This may be an indication that AIDS awareness campaigns have not reached the majority of parents largely because it is targeting the youth.

Further, the low scoring of items dealing with parents' involvement in schools may be indicative of the fact that parents fail to see themselves as educators who should work together with school educators in the provision of education. Also, it may be that they consider school education as a domain for experts.

The low scoring of items dealing with participation in politics may be a result of the fact that, in the Northern Province, the advent of democracy was accompanied by a decline in the respect shown to those in authority including parents. Further, the youth were involved in acts of intimidation, which sometimes degenerated into acts of violence.

Items dealing with cultural transmission and enrichment may have been scored low because parents may consider traditional practices as being backward, unclothed and barbaric. Further, it may be that they (parents) do not see the place of traditional practices in a globalising world.

The case of an item dealing with discipline having been scored lowly may be attributed to the fact that the majority of parents have themselves, during their school days, been subjected to extremely harsh application of corporal punishment.

Recommendations
In view of the above findings and conclusions drawn from the research, the following is recommended:

- The establishment of school-community partnerships. This will make it possible, among other things, to deal with issues relating to sexuality education, public engagement and enrichment.
- Improving the school environment: The school and its activities need to be structured in a manner that encourages open-mindedness, the creation of a community-friendly environment as well as the acquisition of civic knowledge, skills and attitudes. This can be achieved by, among others, encouraging school debates, establishment of parent's centres and through the creation of a democratic school environment.
- Provision of civic education through which civic knowledge, civic skills and civic dispositions can be taught to learners.
- Establishing school and workplace links: Such links can help learners to acquire workplace skills, attitudes and attributes.

Conclusion
South Africa, as a democratic state, subscribes to the principle of public participation in the running of public institutions such as schools. Public participation and support on the other hand, depends on the level of understanding the participants possess on the issue in question. Further, support by local communities is important for the practical implementation of laws, rules and regulations governing education provision.

It is hoped that this research has opened a new window into the understanding of local community expectations on issues raised in this study. Such a window will help schools in the Northern Province in particular to harness the interest that parents have in the education of their children into the development of programmes to ensure that parents are actually capacitated to the level where their participation will be for the common good. Curriculum and methodological issues will also be informed by the findings of this research. It is also hoped that education authorities will be able to develop control and evaluative measures to ensure, as well as to assess, the practical implementation of policies, rules and regulations geared on improving education provision in the province — taking the findings of this study into serious consideration.

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