



Listening from the Margins: A Phenomenological Inquiry into Parents' Lived Experiences of School Involvement in Rural Philippine Communities

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Abstract

The majority of people think that parents' involvement in their child's schooling is significant. However, most frameworks discuss involvement in terms of school-centered standards that do not account for what parents actually go through, especially in rural and underserved areas. This study used Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to understand what parents in small towns in the Philippines really thought about the activities their kids engaged in at school. Parents of school-aged children enrolled in public schools were purposely selected and interviewed in depth, with the interview partly structured. The organized IPA methods were used to examine the data and understand how parents make sense of their involvement in school situations shaped by cultural norms, socio-economic factors, and the way power operates in the school. Three main themes emerged from the results: being seen but not acknowledged, having an educational role despite limitations, and wanting a real connection. These themes show that parental involvement is not just a list of things that can be seen. It is also an emotional and social experience. According to the study, schools and families need to work together in more open and fluid ways, recognizing parents as important partners in their child's education.

Keywords

Parental involvement, academic performance, phenomenological approach, school support

INTRODUCTION

For a long time, parents' involvement in their kids' school, health, and learning has been tied. In every school system, parents are told to visit school events, help their children learn at home, and work with teachers. Studies have shown, however, that school rules that rely on the school's power over parents' real-life situations often make it hard for parents to participate (Jacobs, 2024; Yulianti et al., 2022). Power relationships, cultural norms, and the financial position of the parents' family all shape their experiences, which in turn shape how they think and act about their involvement.

Because they are in poverty, live in remote areas, lack easy access to many school supplies, and have many other responsibilities, parents in rural areas of the Philippines have challenges for their children's education. Studies in under-resourced and underserved areas show that parents' lack of participation is not always due to a lack of eagerness, but rather to structural and contextual barriers (Manilal & Jairam, 2023; Careemdeen, 2024). Through meetings, programs, and information campaigns, schools aim to involve parents. However, these chances do not always lead to real involvement or shared decision-making (Levinthal et al., 2021).

Families' involvement in school has been widely studied through formal structures, school-led projects, and teacher perspectives (Jacobs, 2024; Yulianti et al., 2022). However, these studies do not always show how parents actually feel about involvement—how they understand their roles, handle silence, and make sense of their involvement with schools (Ebrahim et al., 202). This difference is evident in rural areas, where parents' views on education are often not taken into account.

To fill that gap, this study uses a phenomenological approach to examine parents' real-life memories of their children's school experiences in the countryside of the Philippines. The study interviews parents to understand what participation means to them and to incorporate a more human-centered view of school-family relationships that considers context and concerns about fairness (Marongwe & Mutesasira, 2024).

Statement of the Problem

Parents' participation in their children's schooling is generally seen as an important factor. To improve community-school partnerships, schools often ask parents to participate in events, meetings, and decision-making. As a result, most models of family involvement are based on school-centered standards that stress attendance and obedience. This may not fully reflect how parents actually feel about participation, especially in rural and underrepresented areas. Some of the problems that parents in rural areas of the Philippines face when working with schools include limited resources, socioeconomic issues, and cultural norms that affect how they interact with teachers and school officials. Despite their efforts to support their children's education, parents' opinions are not always heard in educational research, and it is still unclear how they feel about being involved, whether through inclusion, silence, or exclusion. The majority of research on parental participation has focused on government structures, school initiatives, or educators' perspectives. Our understanding of how parents feel about school involvement is limited because there are few phenomenological studies of parents' experiences in rural Philippine settings. Here, this study aims to fill knowledge gaps by exploring parents' experiences with school participation in rural Philippine communities from a phenomenological perspective.

Research Questions

1. In what ways do parents in rural places talk about being involved in their children's schooling every day?
2. Based on how parents connect with teachers and how the school is organized, what do they think "school involvement" means?
3. Should parents feel included, ignored, or left out of school events and decisions?
4. How do problems and restrictions affect parents' involvement in school in rural Philippine areas?
5. What do parents need to do to participate in their children's education effectively?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Design

This project utilized Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), a qualitative research method. You can study how people make sense of significant events in their lives through Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). This method focuses on interpretation, external factors, and the making of meaning. Phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography are the main ideas underpinning this study. It lets the researcher get a good look at what the subjects really went through while still recognizing how the researcher shaped those experiences.

Locale

People living in different rural areas of the Philippines for the study faced different social and economic problems and had limited access to learning tools. These areas were also far from schools. The selection of these settings was intentional to highlight family situations that are not usually examined in educational research.

Participants

Eleven individuals who were parents or primary caregivers of school-aged children in rural areas attending public schools were invited to participate in the research. People with direct experience of getting active in school were identified through purposive sampling.

Parents had to live in a rural area, demonstrate involvement in their child's school, and be ready to have in-depth conversations to be qualified. By following the rules of the Interpretative Phenomenological Study (IPA), a small sample was selected to allow the idiographic study to be more in-depth.

Data Collection

Data was gathered through in-depth discussions. Interview guides with open-ended questions were used to get people to talk about their school experiences, their relationships with teachers, the problems they had, and how important they thought it was to be parents. The people being interviewed picked the words they wanted to use. With their permission, the talks were then recorded on tape and typed up word-for-word.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained before data collection. The people who took part in the study were told about the study's goals and that they could quit at any time. With the help of pseudonyms and safe data management methods, privacy was maintained.

Data Analysis

The data analysis followed the standard IPA process, which includes a close reading of the recordings, making initial notes, identifying themes that emerge, grouping themes within individual cases, and finding patterns across multiple cases. Self-reflexivity was used throughout the analysis, and an audit trail was maintained to enhance the study's reliability.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The interview data were analyzed, and three main themes emerged that describe how parents in rural Philippine towns actually feel about their kids' school activities.

Theme 1: **Being there but not being seen**

Parents said that, even though they attended school events and meetings, they did not feel they had a say or any power. People often saw involvement as simply following the school's wishes rather than really working together. People learned to be quiet as a way to respect authority and keep themselves safe.

Some quotes from people that show what this experience was like:

"When I go to meetings, I have to, but most of the time I listen. My views are not really wanted; just to be there, please, " said Participant 3.

"We just nod when teachers talk... we don't say anything because we don't want to seem rude, even if we have questions, " said Participants 1 and 2.

"I want to talk sometimes, but I'm shy, " said Participant 8.

"I am just a mom from the country, so I do not think my thoughts matter, " added Participant 1.

These stories show that having parents at school does not always mean that they are recognized or heard.

Theme 2: **Carrying educational responsibility while being limited**

Parents saw their children's participation as a moral duty that required sacrifice. Parents were determined to support their children's schooling, even though they were having trouble with money, getting to school, or working under challenging conditions. A lot of this engagement happened at home, where schools could not see it.

Participants shared the following stories:

"I help my kid at night even when I am tired from work," said Participant 11.

"As moms, this is our job," according to Participants 4 and 5.

"I have to work some days, so I cannot always go to school events."

"However, that does not mean I do not care about how my child does in school," Participant 8

"Our house is a long way from the school," said by many.

"It is hard to get to school, but I always tell my kid to study because that is the only thing I can do for them," said Participant 7.

These quotes show that parents are involved in their kids' lives by making sacrifices and sticking with something, not by being present at school events.

Theme 3. **Wanting a real relationship with the school**

Parents said they really wanted ties with schools based on equal respect and understanding. They wanted to be seen as partners who know a lot about their kids and wanted schools to be places where conversation is open, safe, and welcomes everyone.

Parents talked about this wish in the following passages:

"I want teachers to hear us too, because we know our kids better than they do," said Participants 6 and 4.

"We will not be afraid to speak up if schools are nice to us and make things clear," said Participant 9.

"One day, I hope parents will not feel small when they walk into school and will instead feel like they belong there," said Participants 3 and 10.

These stories show that parents want relationships between schools and families that are welcoming, respectful, and work together.

The study's results show that parental participation is more of a real, social, and emotionally grounded experience than a set of tasks seen at school. Critics of standard parental participation frameworks say they prioritize attendance and compliance over speech and relationships (Jacobs, 2024; Yulianti et al., 2022). Parents' experiences of being present but not being recognized are similar. Such methods risk excluding parents whose participation does not align with the school's expectations.

Studies show that involvement in poor and rural areas often happens through home-based support and mental work rather than obvious school participation (Manilal & Jairam, 2023; Morales-Alexander, 2021). This fits with what parents say about sacrifice and duty. It is important to remember that parental participation must be understood in the context of socio-economic and cultural factors (Marongwe & Mutesasira, 2024), as these results challenge the idea that rural parents are weak.

It is similar to what other authors have said about how school-family ties should be more joint and relational rather than hierarchical (Ebrahim et al., 2023; Eden et al., 2024): parents want a genuine partnership. Being involved becomes a shared duty that helps kids learn and keeps the family's honor when parents are heard and seen as partners.

Conclusion and Recommendations

According to this study, parental involvement in rural Philippine communities is important and has an effect, even though it may not be evident in official school settings. A phenomenological study shows how parental involvement really feels, which supports teaching methods that are understanding, welcoming, and tailored to each family's unique situation.

It is suggested that schools create open spaces for discussion that value family views and recognize home-based support as an acceptable way to get involved. Policies on education should be flexible enough to account for the unique features of rural areas, and teacher-training programs should emphasize regionally appropriate methods for involving families. Further study could examine similar situations involving minority groups in other places, or it could combine teachers' views with those of parents.

Conflict of Interest

The author declared no conflict of interest, whether financial, professional, or personal, that influenced the conduct, findings, or reporting of this study.

Funding

The author funded this study.

Author Contribution

All author contributed to the overall conduct and writing of this study.

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