Teachers' Perspectives of Parents in Rural African Communities

Bukola Oyinloye
University of York

Teachers' perspectives of their pupils' parents are a critical element of the relationship between schools, families, and communities. However, in various rural African communities, teachers' views of parents' perspectives and practices around schooling are primarily ones of deficit rather than strength. This paper deepens this literature by offering insight into teachers' perspectives in two rural communities in Nigeria. Using an ethnographic approach and applying concepts from the capability approach, this paper explores teachers' perceptions of parents' values in relation to their children's schooling (parental functionings) and their views of the extent to which parents are able to pursue these functionings. The findings resonate with the existing deficit perspectives in the literature. In addition, the findings expand the literature by revealing an empathetic dimension to these deficit perspectives, suggesting that current evidence around teachers' uniformly deficit perspectives of parents offers only a partial view. Illuminating the empathy that underpins teachers' perspectives offers the possibility of finding common ground between schools and families which may widen opportunities for forging or deepening positive parent-teacher relationships which support children's social, emotional, and academic development.

Keywords: rural Africa, home-school partnerships, parental agency

Introduction

The relationship between homes and schools is believed to be one of the most important factors for children's academic, social, and emotional development (Epstein et al., 2002). Underpinning this relationship are the perspectives that school teachers have of families (e.g., parents) and the perspectives that parents hold of schools, with the former contributing to the ways in which schools seek to engage with parents. Within the vast global literature on parental involvement in schooling, the majority from industrialized contexts, there is evidence of contentious bidirectional views (Oyinloye, 2021a). However, the literature highlights the prevalence of normative, dominant, white, middle-class assumptions about schooling which the perspectives and practices of certain non-dominant groups such as minorities, immigrants, and parents from low socio-economic backgrounds are measured against (Oyinloye, 2021a). These

assumptions persist even in light of the evidence of school-level barriers faced by such groups (Kim, 2009). In Africa, the limited literature available suggests that similar assumptions persist (e.g., Hartell et al., 2016; Tusiime et al., 2016). In relation to non-dominant groups such as rural Africans or those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, these assumptions manifest in teachers' deficit views about what parents think of formal schooling, and how they engage with it.

This paper contributes to this growing literature by further exploring the perspectives that teachers hold of parents in the rural communities in which they teach. Specifically, it examines: (1) what teachers perceive as parents' value on behalf of their children; and (2) why they hold such values, (3) the extent to which teachers believe parents are able to act on these values, and (4) the various influences that shape teachers' perspectives on parents. This paper is structured as follows. The first section begins with a synthesis of key literature from anglophone Africa which sheds light on how teachers perceive parents, and an introduction of the 'capabilitarian' concepts upon which this paper draws. The second section presents the broader context of the study. The third part explains the study's methods, including ethics and analysis. The fourth section presents the findings while the fifth and final section discusses the findings and their implications.

Literature Review

Various studies, particularly from rural or lower-income urban communities in sub-Saharan Africa with the majority from South Africa, suggest that teachers' views of parents' perspectives and practices around the schooling of their children in Africa are primarily one of parental deficit (e.g., Hartell et al., 2016; Makgopa & Mokhele, 2013; Mbokodi & Singh, 2011; Mukwambo, 2019).

In South Africa, parents' articulation of constraints around their participation in School Governing Bodies (SGBs) – a legal requirement of South African schools composed of parents, school heads, educators, non-teaching staff, and students – were represented as complaints. On school involvement, including through SGBs, teachers, school heads, and learners were critical of parents in rural and lower-income communities who did not understand their roles, responsibilities, and expectations (Hartell et al., 2016; Makgopa & Mokhele, 2013; Mncube, 2007); were non-literate or minimally formally educated (Hartell et al., 2016; Mbokodi & Singh, 2011; Mncube, 2007; Singh et al., 2004); lived (Lemmer & van Wyk, 2004) or worked (Triegaardt & van Diermen, 2021) far from school; or lacked time (Bojuwoye, 2009; Lemmer & van Wyk, 2004; Triegaardt & van Diermen, 2021), school linguistic competence (Michael et al., 2012; Mncube, 2007; Singh et al., 2004), and participation skills (Lemmer & van Wyk, 2004; Mbokodi & Singh, 2011). Many of these factors are perceived by teachers as underpinned by social issues such as parents' low socio-economic status (e.g., Singh et al., 2004;

Triegaardt & van Diermen, 2021) and family structure and dynamics (Triegaardt & van Diermen, 2021).

Studies from outside South Africa demonstrate similar deficit views. In Zimbabwe, teachers reported that parents' lack of interest in schooling limited teachers' own educational efforts for children (Mukwambo, 2019). In Kenya and Ghana, some teachers believed non-literate, rural parents were 'ignorant' of the value of schooling (see Serpell's (1993) on ignorant conservatism), with some suggesting that children's uncleanliness reflected parents' lack of enforcement of hygiene at home (Buckler, 2012). In another study from Kenya, teachers did not consider parents sufficiently competent to contribute to classroom learning activities (e.g., telling stories, teaching a skill, etc.) or to the organization of extra-curricular sports and cultural events (Kimu & Steyn, 2013). In a rural Rwandan study of home literacy environments, a father's perception of his role in schooling, i.e., to buy children books, was interpreted by the researcher as a lack of concern for learning (Tusiime et al., 2016). While in rural Tanzania, parents' preference for 'family education' due to their frustrations around children's repeated failures in school, despite significant time spent in school and on exam preparations, was uncritically interpreted as a lack of valuing of education (Haule, 2021, p. 10).

Deficit depictions of parents in relation to their perspectives and practices around schooling have also been linked to those about broader parenting (e.g., Tusiime et al., 2016). For instance, Kenyan teachers reported that children who had behavioral and academic challenges had parents who were poor and generally uninvolved (Kimu & Steyn, 2013). In contrast, a South African study of parents in a peri-urban community concluded that "many parents did not seem to understand their role as parents" [even as it acknowledged that] eighty percent of parents […]constantly spoke about their different domestic problems" (Singh et al., 2004, p. 303). Alluding to the influence of culture, Ghanaian school administrators admonished parents whom they thought preferred to spend money on parties, weddings, and funerals while neglecting food, school fees, and supplies (Donkor, 2010). In northern Nigeria, teachers, local officials, and other community members of school management committees felt parents – particularly those with children out-of-school or with fledgling attendance in rural areas and who had little or no literacy or numeracy abilities themselves – had no value for schooling and were, thus, ignorant and unenlightened (Cameron et al., 2018; Dunne et al., 2013; Little & Lewis, 2012; Pinnock, 2012). In a seminal study from rural Zambia, officials believed parents who involved children in economic activities, e.g., fishing and farming, rather than schooling sabotaged their children's future (Serpell, 1993). Although deficit views in the literature are usually perpetuated by non-parents, they are sometimes perpetuated by researchers, as the studies from South Africa, Rwanda, and Tanzania demonstrate (Haule, 2021; Singh et al., 2004; Tusiime et al., 2016).

Despite some acknowledgment of the influence of prevailing socio-economic, social, and cultural factors, the existing literature suggests that teachers believe parents should be able to overlook or overcome these factors by remaining uncritically positive in their evaluation of schooling. Moreover, it suggests that teachers believe parents should persist against all odds to become involved in the way that schools prescribe. Thus, little is known about what teachers perceive parents actually value and why, and what parents are perceived to be able to do. Moreover, there is a limited understanding of what influences these perceptions. This paper, therefore, contributes to the literature by offering some new insights into teachers' perceptions of what parents value in relation to the schooling of their children and how teachers make sense of these values and actions.

Conceptual framework
This paper draws on key concepts within the capability approach. The approach was developed by economist philosopher Amartya Sen in the late 1980s to broaden human capital views of human development. For him, these ideas focused too narrowly on increasing gross domestic product (GDP), personal wealth, industrialization, or technological advancement. Rather, Sen argued development should "expand the real freedoms that people enjoy" (Sen, 1999, p. 3) where such freedom facilitates (as a means) and is the outcome (the end) of development processes. Among the core concepts are capability, functioning, and agency. Capability is the freedom to pursue or achieve what one values being or doing, where those valued beings and doings, or functionings, constitute one's wellbeing (Alkire, 2005; Sen, 1985). Capabilities refer to the combinations of *functionings* that constitute a person's current state of being and doing. Valued *functionings* are typically distinguished from realized ones, where the former is what people can be or do and the latter is what people are being or doing (or what they have managed to achieve). Embedded within the concept of capability are two concepts: freedoms (the opportunities or options one values); and agency (the ability to pursue or achieve the opportunities one chooses) (Alkire, 2005). Some choices include trade-offs, where some options are pursued because one's current circumstances prevents the pursuit of the options one truly values (Khader, 2013). Agents, may pursue valued goals that contribute primarily to others' wellbeing even if the goals also contribute to theirs. A parent may, for example, choose and pursue parental goals, which are goals on behalf of their child[ren], to achieve the functioning of the child being educated, a functioning which primarily contributes to the child's wellbeing in terms of the child's future educational outcomes and secondarily to parents' wellbeing through the pride associated with being the parent of an 'educated child'. Agents have agency freedom (the ability to choose which goal(s) to pursue) and agency achievement, the extent to which they succeed in the pursuit of their chosen goals (Sen, 2009).

Parental agency is thus conceived here as a parents' actions to bring about parental goals and the concept may be further specified depending on the domain in which the goals lie, e.g., schooling. Accordingly, parental capabilities are parents' freedom to pursue or achieve valued beings and doings on behalf of their children (i.e., parental *functionings*). Parental capabilities and functionings, therefore, contribute directly to child wellbeing, and less directly to parent wellbeing. Moreover, parental functionings are distinguished from parents' functionings, i.e., what a parent themself values being or doing to primarily constitute their own wellbeing. In this paper, the concept of parental functionings is employed to conceptualize what teachers believe parents value being or doing to constitute their children's wellbeing in relation to schooling. Moreover, the concepts of parental capabilities and parental agency are used to highlight the freedom and agency parents have to pursue their parental functionings.

Study Context
This paper draws from a broader qualitative ethnographic study exploring the perspectives and practices of parents on schooling. The study was carried out in two rural, Muslim Yorùbá communities in the North central geographical zone of Nigeria and the community-level information seen in this section has been provided by or observed in communities. The community level data cited in this section has been drawn from the fieldwork.

The Nigerian pre-tertiary formal schooling system comprises of universal basic education (one year of early childhood, six years of primary, and three years of junior secondary education) and three years of senior secondary schooling, a 1-6-3-3 structure. Universal basic education (UBE) is free by Federal policy, but states charge a variety of fees including entrance, term, and end of term fees along with significant secondary terminal examination costs. Unsurprisingly, UBE implementation is fraught with challenges such as gross underestimation of enrolment, shortages of certified teachers, and significant underfunding (Bolaji et al. 2016). The broader study from which this paper is drawn lies within this prevailing schooling context and sought to explore the perspectives and practices of parents on the formal basic schooling of their children, as well as the views of teachers. This paper draws from the findings around this latter aim.

The two communities (henceforth comm A and comm B) and schools of the broader study were selected with the help of two gatekeepers (referred to as key contacts), one a former colleague. The communities were selected because they were small (less than 1,000 inhabitants) and contained a public primary school (school A and school B), rendering them information rich and well-positioned to help fulfill the broader research aims. Both communities are geographically but also ethnically, religiously, and, for comm A, familiarly affiliated (Bray, 2003); however, although comm A is located within one boundary, comm B is a constellation of villages grouped together as comm B. Comm B is also more rural

than comm A, with the latter somewhat peri-urban. In Comm A, men's occupation is primarily in transportation (local and commercial taxi and large vehicle drivers) though more recent economic challenges have led some older fathers to supplement their livelihoods with farming. The women are primarily engaged in small-scale off-farm micro-enterprises or the farming and sale of vegetables, locust beans, yams, plantains, soya beans, cashew nuts, and cassava grains. In Comm B, men are predominantly farmers though a few combined this with other work. Comm B operates a market day every five days to sell commodities to buyers from near and from afar. Both children and women participate in the market day. Additionally, Comm B women engage in farming and, like comm A, sell condiments and ingredients like cooked food, snacks, and food provisions.

The comm A primary school (school A) was established during the expansion of primary schooling in the mid-1970s when universal primary education (UPE) was introduced to Southwest Nigeria. The school is located within a large compound which also consists of a junior and senior secondary school (J/SSS), established in 2003, whose principal was of the other key contact who introduced the author to both schools. This other key contact also participated in the interviews. At the time of the study, school A was experiencing a number of challenges. The fieldwork for the study occurred over two phases: an extended five-month phase in late 2018-2019, and a month-long follow-up in late 2019, some eight months thereafter. During the main fieldwork period from 2018-2019, the school's population appeared to be diminishing. No official enrolment data was obtainable for the academic year. Although enrolment was verbally estimated to be above 100, attendance during the two weeks of observation in the early part of 2019 averaged about 60 per day. Moreover, the school A headteacher retired at the end of 2018 and his replacement – who arrived in January 2019 – departed early in the summer of 2019. By the time of the follow-up, the situation appeared to have changed. A new headteacher had begun, the population was growing – one day, I counted 96 learners – and there were more teachers in the school, including trainee/student teachers, most of whom were from comm A.

Comm B has one public primary school (school B) and one public J/SSS across the road. Like school A, school B was founded during the introduction of UPE while the J/SSS was founded more recently in 2013. Both the primary and J/SSS serve the various villages of comm B. While school B's enrolment for the 2018-2019 academic year was reportedly nearly 200 (according to the headteacher), average attendance for a few weeks in early 2019 revealed just over half of enrolled students actually attended. The lowest attendance observed, 78, occurred on a Friday, the Muslim weekly day of prayer. According to school B's headteacher, children's market day absenteeism had markedly improved as she had firmly told parents that the school would not accept it.

It was difficult to know the teacher population of each school due to the fluctuating patterns of teacher attendance, particularly during the main fieldwork period. From the field notes, apart from the headteacher transitions at school A, the school had all teachers except for Primary one. School B had no teachers for primary one, two, and five. Except for one teacher in each school, all other teachers were Muslim, most were women, all were Yorùbá, and apart from a few local teachers in school B who were married to comm B men, most lived outside of the community in a big town from which they commuted. Both schools were located at different ends of the big town though school B was a longer commute from the big town and, due to the paucity of transportation available sometimes, a more challenging one. Without seeking to reduce the above ethnographic detail, the following table summarizes some of the main features of each of the two communities:

Table 1
Key characteristics of studied communities

	Comm A	Comm B
Population (estimated)	<1000	<1000
religion	Islam; handful of Christians	Islam; some traditional religion
Geography	single 'bounded' community; peri-urban	set of villages; rural
Men's primary occupation	transportation	farming
women's primary occupation	off-farm micro-enterprises	off-farm micro-enterprises
schools	primary; junior secondary and senior secondary (combined)	primary; junior secondary and senior secondary (combined)
Primary school enrolment 2018/2019 (estimate)	>100	>200
primary school attendance 2018/2019 (average from obs)	~60	~109

Source: self-elaborated.

Methodology
Qualitative researchers study social phenomena in their natural settings and seek to "make sense of or interpret" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017, p. 10). Such phenomena according to the meanings' participants ascribe to them. Philosophically, this is consistent with a constructivist paradigm that views reality as diverse, multiple mental constructions based on the experiences and social interactions in specific local settings (Lincoln et al., 2017). Underpinned by this philosophical position, the study adopted a qualitative approach to explore and understand the meanings teachers make of their knowledge of the schooling perspectives and practices of their pupils' parents (Creswell, 2014). This study used

semi-structured interviews as the primary qualitative method. Interviews are defined by Rubin & Rubin (2012) as (gently) guided discussions with a *conversational partner*, one respected and trusted as a reliable source of information on the topic of interest. Interviews range on a continuum from no structure to completely structured where the greater the structure, the more predetermined the interview questions (Qu & Dumay, 2011). However, even the most structured interviews may allow for flexibility, or the modification of subsequent questions in the direction of the conversation (see Rubin & Rubin's (2012) *responsive interviewing).*

The study also drew from ethnography – a deliberate, systematic way to learn about participants' social and cultural lives (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010) – and employed ethnographic interviews as well as participant observations (Atkinson & Hammersley, 2007). Ethnographic interviews are qualitative interviews embedded within an ethnographic approach. As such, as Munz (2017) suggests, ethnographic interviews often occur as part of participant observations, within participants' naturalistic settings, in spontaneous ways, and between researchers and participants who typically already have some form of relationship. Ethnographic interviews may also occur with groups spontaneously, may be planned in advance (with an existing group), or may be more focused (i.e., with a group whose members may or may not be familiar with each other) (O'Reilly, 2012). In this study, ethnographic interviews and informal or situational conversations (Munz, 2017) occurred with teachers and school administrators in transit as well as within the school settings in each community. In this paper, I use the term 'interaction' (see De Fina & Perrino's (2011) *interactional encounter*) to refer to the qualitative and ethnographic interview processes between teachers and me, which fall within the 'structure' continuum, the spatial continuum (e.g., from the open, dynamic and often transitory public spaces on the roads to the more private, usually static, confidential offices of the headteachers (Neale, 2017)).

Participant observation is the process of learning about people's worlds by exposure to or involvement in their routine activities within the research setting (Schensul & LeCompte, 2013). It includes being present and interacting with participants during an activity or event (Schensul & LeCompte, 2013) and standing back, taking notice, and making notes (O'Reilly, 2012). With teachers, I observed and participated while we sat under the gathering tree in their school compounds; while waiting for the staff or other transport at designated locations in the main town; while hitchhiking or hopping on and off cars; during school assemblies; and while substituting, when requested, for an absent teacher. The criticality of notetaking combined with the often-transitory nature of such participant observations resulted in notetaking in transit on my mobile phone (this way of notetaking had been pre-empted and had thus been ethically approved).

Given the ethnographic approach, these diverse forms of interactions, participations, and observations occurred with participants multiple times over the two phases of fieldwork, with subsequent interactions building on previous ones. Though the slightly more structured interactions were never scheduled in advance given the exigencies of the school day, they were confirmed with teachers on the day they would occur, and typically held during the morning or lunch break. One pivotal yet spontaneous group interaction occurred during the main fieldwork, and I observed that the group setting encouraged teachers to speak freely and feed off each other. Therefore, all interactions with teachers during the follow-up fieldwork occurred in groups. Although all teachers spoke and understood English to varying degrees, our interactions were conducted entirely in the local language to increase understanding, enrich the breadth of responses, and deepen overall trust. Given teachers were operating in an official space, I obtained their informed consent on signed forms, providing each with a photocopy of their signed form.

In all, 23 different teachers (9 male, 14 female) participated in the individual and group interactions from both schools during the extended (17 teachers) and follow-up (10 teachers, 4 from extended) periods of fieldwork. The other key contact (the school A J/SSS principal) was amongst those interviewed given he previously led school B and could offer a comparative view of both schools and communities. As previously noted, the other key contact introduced the author to both schools, and the heads of these schools authorized the author to approach their teachers for interviews. All but one teacher approached agreed to be interviewed due to fears of being recorded. Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the author's institution. The table below specifies the number of teachers and staff across all interactions (school A's custodian has also been included).

At each phase, more female than male teachers were interviewed, a reflection of the school's teacher demographic. Except for the custodian, all teachers held the required Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) qualification. The longest serving teacher across both schools, the school B primary, two teachers had been serving at the school for 17 years and lived in a town some minutes from the school. During fieldwork, four school A teachers lived locally, either within comm A or in a nearby town a few minutes away. At school B, two teachers lived in a nearby town, including the headteacher. The rest of the teachers lived in the main town. Except for one female teacher in each of school A and school B, all teachers were Muslim, and the majority lived in polygynous households.

Table 2
Number of teachers in individual / group interactions

	School A						School B		
	Teachers		Other staff*		Other teachers**		Teachers		Total
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	
Fieldwork	3	4	1	-	4	1	1	4	18
Follow-up	-	5	-	-	-	-	1	4	10
Total	3	9	1	0	4	1	2	8	28

*custodian; **second key contact and colleagues (2M, 1F), plus another J*

As part of its decolonizing methodological approach, the study obtained ethical approval from the author's institution in the United Kingdom as well as the Nigerian Federal Ministry of Health, and embedded participants' epistemologies within the overall ethics framework (Oyinloye, 2021b). Transcription was conducted after each period of fieldwork. A thematic analytical approach was used to identify themes that "represent some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82). A theme, moreover, consists of one or more group(s) of codes: terms or phrases which capture the essence of parts of the data (Braun & Clarke 2013). The next section presents the findings according to the three purposes of this paper: teachers' views on parents' values in relation to their children's schooling; teachers' perceptions of parents' ability to pursue these values, particularly schooling; and the influences that shape teachers' perceptions. The findings are primarily from data generated during the main fieldwork phase.

Findings
Parental and parents' functionings
Teachers across both schools elicited varied but nuanced perspectives around what they believed the parents in their school-communities value. Though the fervency with which functionings were evoked differed, some similar themes were identified in both schools. Teachers in both schools were vociferous about parents they believed were uninterested in their children's schooling. 11 of the 17 teachers in both schools emphasized this view during fieldwork. However, teachers often balanced their views about parents' lack of interest in schooling with views about what they thought parents were, instead, interested in and valued.

Farming, handiwork and celebrations
At school B, the greatest among other values was farming and every school B teacher mentioned this during our interaction. Regarding the extent to which she tries to engage with parents at school B, the primary 3 teacher surmised:

…one will do it more than that of the town. Being that because those rural people now, you know that they have, they have, their own work is that of the farm. Ehnn? Ehnnn! And the majority of parents are these, they want that, they prefer that their children be at the farm, to be doing farm work more than they should be coming to school.

At school A, parents' valuing (and prioritizing) farming was mentioned within the context of the cashew rush – the intense period of cashew harvest in February and March when families went to farms to pick cashews to dry and sell its nuts up the value chain. The following was part of an exchange during a morning assembly at the height of the cashew season at school A:

> Assistant Head: [to the children] Be washing your clothes, it's not good like this! You're too dirty! Look at how you are?!

> Teacher 1: The parents of some, they don't have time.

> Assistant Head: Ah ha! You're now saying their mother has gone to the cashew nut farm, their father has gone to the cashew nut farm, will they not find someone at home there? Please, the children will now, will now be looking like thing, and you'll be bringing them! When they wake up, they'll carry the sticks used for cashew nut farming!

> Teacher 2: They can't do anything for the children, what is happening?!

Parents' highly valuing cashew nut farming was reiterated by school A teachers during casual conversations under the school gathering tree. This occurred particularly when mothers walked through the school compound with long sticks (used to tip cashews off their branches), either coming or going from the cashew nut farm, sometimes with a school-aged child in tow. Although observations revealed that comm B simultaneously experienced a cashew rush, perhaps because of the high-intensity farming experienced throughout the year, school B teachers did not single it out as a parental functioning in the way that school A teachers did.

While less frequently mentioned than farming, teachers also believed parents' interest in schooling was subverted by their interest in informal apprenticeships, or what was commonly called handiwork. Three school B teachers mentioned this, including the headteacher. At school A, handiwork was mentioned by only two of eight individual teacher interactions during fieldwork but with a salience that betrayed the frequency of its mention. Emphasizing the extent of the practice in comm A, the primary 5 teacher noted, "that thing is very common in this environment!"

Alongside farming and handiwork, school B teachers perceived that parents valued expending resources on cultural and communal events or celebrations. While no school A teacher mentioned such celebrations explicitly during our individual interactions, during a morning assembly, teachers severely reproached and punished nearly the entire primary six class who had skipped school the previous Friday to attend a celebration, bemoaning parents' leniency and general lacklustre attitudes toward schooling as the reason for children's temerity for such an act.

Polygyny, early marriages and mothers' struggles
In addition to farming, handiwork, and attending/spending on celebrations, teachers across both schools mentioned two additional functionings of parents deemed uninterested in schooling: polygyny (for themselves) and early marriages (for children). Early marriage was evoked by multiple school B teachers as a general disposition in comm B for boys and girls as early as upper primary school. At school A, it was evoked by the primary 2 teacher as a practice for girls and as a result of poverty where highly economically disadvantaged mothers, particularly those in polygynous households, thought it better for their teenage girl child to be married to someone who could better materially provide. Interlinked with this view was the perception that fathers were uninterested in schooling yet prided their ability to assemble wives (and, as a result, children) for whom they provided little. This view was espoused multiple times – by four of eight teachers – and with a fervency akin to that with which school B teachers asserted parents' valuing and prioritizing farming over education. Given polygyny is a norm within the Muslim Yorùbá communities (as both a cultural and legal religious practice), teachers presented the assemblage of wives as problematic not because of their disapproval of it, but because they felt some men abused the practice and married more wives than they could provide for, which rendered husbands unable and usually uninterested in bearing the responsibilities of the household. As such, these teachers felt mothers disproportionately bore the weight of the responsibility for their children within the household, and their struggles were exacerbated by their meagre livelihoods.

The school A primary 2 teacher was vocal about the constraints' mothers faced. For her, although comm A mothers were generally interested in schooling, their life contexts severely constrained their capability to pursue the schooling that they valued for their children:

> You know all those times that, the person who had one wife, who had two wives, who had one child, who had two children, the power was carrying it [i.e., they could provide for their family]. Now, that the children are many, that the wives are many… the woman just faces the responsibilities of her children…the woman with the responsibilities of her children is it!

> And how many jobs can we women do that we can take care of children?! The power is not carrying it, it's that the power is not carrying it…

As the quote alludes, teachers perceived comm A mothers to be particularly disadvantaged given the greater degree of polygyny in their community. Attempts to quantify the number of wives comm A men resulted in estimates ranging from two to five to many. Such was the perceived extent of a father's abdication of their household responsibilities that one female teacher from school A J/SSS remarked, "there are no husbands….there are only children!" During the same interaction a male teacher from the same secondary school retorted, "Women are the men in this community, men are the women!" Similar sentiments about mothers' struggles occurred at school B, with the primary 6 teacher noting:

> On the farm [i.e., in the rural areas] sometimes, it's the women who struggle that their children become 'educated'. It's the women who… the women… [are] trying. Those women, they want their children to go to school but there is usually no power [i.e., means] there. There is no power."

During the follow-up fieldwork, some eight months after the initial fieldwork, the school B headteacher noted that on the farm "what men value is that they gather together four or five wives. There's nothing concerning them about [schooling]. It's for them to be feeling proud that I also have five of your type [i.e., women or wives] at home.". However, unlike school A, fewer school B teachers mentioned the extent of polygyny suggesting that the extent of polygyny in comm B is less than that of comm A. This possibility is supported by the demographic data of parent participants in the broader study which found 23 wives in 10 comm A households (an average of 2.3) and 14 wives in eight comm B households (an average of 1.75). In addition to polygyny, As a functioning for fathers in the communities, polygyny is amongst the sources of fathers' reported lack of interest in schooling. Two male teachers (one at school A and another at school A J/SSS) attributed comm A fathers' apparent lack of interest in children's schooling relative to mothers to the fathers' livelihoods as transporters resulting in their physical absence from home for significant periods of time.

Despite teachers' general characterization of fathers as lacking interest in schooling, during fieldwork, the school B headteacher noted some exceptions in comm B saying, "the rural people are [generally] not interested in schooling, [but] there are a few who are good among them [who] want to learn." No such exceptions were mentioned by school A teachers, although the principal of the comm A J/SSS distinguished between the "serious" and collectively minded comm B fathers and the more individualistic comm A fathers. In his view, the deeper poverty experienced in comm B is evidenced by the continual erection of

new homes in comm A, and he highlighted the irony of the serious but poor comm B fathers and the unserious but less poor comm A fathers. The highlighting of such exceptions across both communities demonstrates that teachers also believe schooling is a significant parental functioning for some parents although achieving this functioning is subject to the influence of the wider social and cultural environment, socio-economic status, and gender. Across both schools, analysis of teachers' perspectives identified other parental functionings like sending children to elementary Islamic schooling to learn how to recite the Quran before or after school and sending children to hawk goods to support the household economy.

Figure 1 illustrates the various parental (PF) and parents' functionings (F) across both communities. The middle of the Venn diagram highlights the values perceived by teachers to be held across both comm A and comm B, while the right and left sections of the diagram highlight those only mentioned by teachers in either school.

Figure 1
Teachers' views on parental and parents' functionings
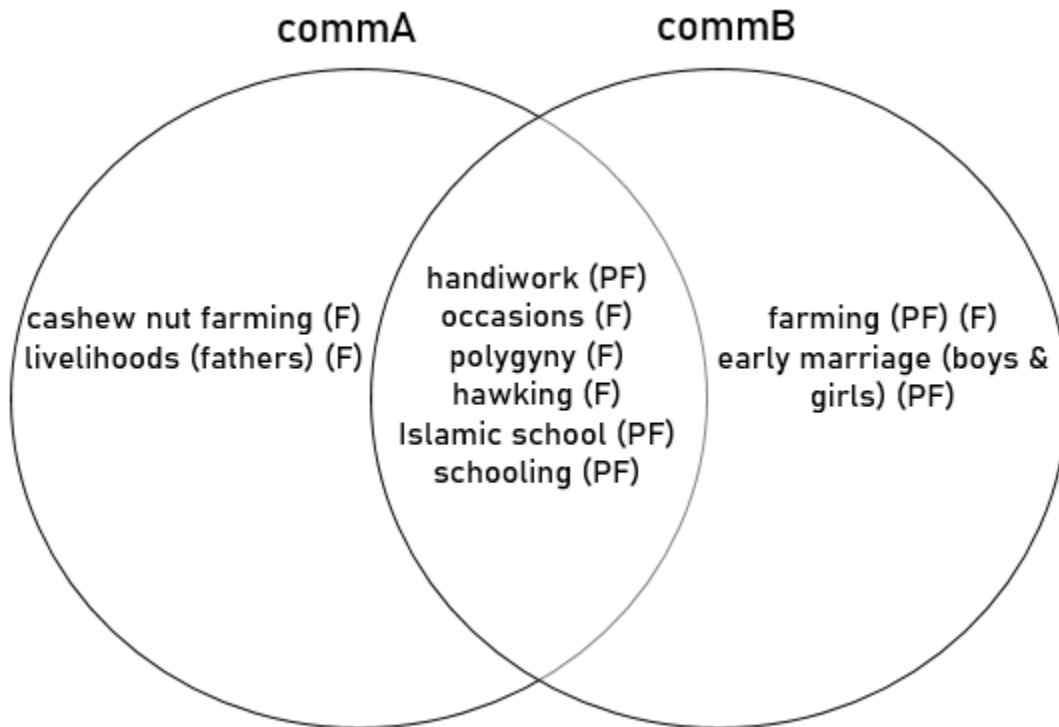
Source: self-elaborated.

Parental agency

Evident within these perceptions is a sense of the extent to which teachers perceive parents are able to exercise agency in the pursuit of their functionings. Parents were perceived to be better able to choose to pursue and meaningfully achieve their diverse non-schooling functionings. In contrast, parental agency was perceived to be limited around schooling, particularly in relation to teachers' specific schooling expectations such as school-based activities (e.g., participation in school governance bodies, attendance at parent-teacher association meetings, provision of children's fees and school supplies) and home activities (e.g., involvement in homework and reviewing children's books). For homework, although teachers recognized that the majority of their parent population had never attended school, they believed parents could still exercise parental agency by asking older children to help check children's homework or by setting aside time and instructing the children to review work after school. For such learning-specific activities, though parents had not gone to school themselves, teachers believed parents could still exercise parental agency indirectly by not only providing a conducive learning environment, but also by soliciting intermediaries who had the capabilities to directly exercise the required action.

The findings suggest that teachers believe parental functionings overall (both schooling and non-schooling) are determined by the intersection of parents' dispositions as rural people who live on the farm, while their parental agency (particularly in relation to schooling) is determined by the resources available to them within a broader context of broader economic, social and political structures.

Moreover, further interactions with teachers highlighted their perceptions that economic constraints compelled parents who do value schooling to adapt their parental functionings based on a realistic assessment of what parents believed their children are likely to achieve. For teachers, this was the primary reason that drove parents' enrolment of children in handiwork across both communities, and while some parents were believed to pursue this for their children instead of further schooling after the completion of primary school, others were believed to pursue it in addition to schooling with the hope that either pathway may eventually lead to success for their child. Teachers, thus, perceived three reasons for parents' perspectives and practices: constrained parental agency (the partial pursuit and, thus, achievement of chosen, valued [schooling] options); forced trade-offs (the pursuit of other, often lesser valued [non-schooling] options due to parents' socio-economic circumstances); and a lack of interest or faith in schooling (complete disbelief in the promises of schooling).

Discussion and conclusion

This paper has examined teachers' varied perspectives on what parents value and do in relation to formal schooling in two rural Nigerian communities. It revealed that teachers in the two schools largely believe parents do not value schooling because of their dispositions towards other functionings such as farming, handiwork, occasions, and early marriage among other values. The plethora of perceived non-schooling values reported in these communities echo the deficit tropes in the literature of rural people's limited knowledge or understanding of schooling discussed at the beginning of this paper.

The findings also revealed that teachers acknowledged some parents do value schooling but were constrained in their ability to choose and pursue relevant practices to achieve it on behalf of their children. This view uncovered teachers' gendered perspectives in two ways. First, fathers across both communities (though to a greater extent, in comm A) were perceived to highly value polygyny which constrains mothers' capabilities to secure children's schooling by heightening mothers' poverty due to the reduction in the share of household resources. Second, female teachers who themselves were in polygynous households particularly excoriated polygynous fathers whom they believed abdicated their household responsibilities, thereby leaving their wives to solely cater for their children's educational and other needs. Except the single female Christian teacher in each school, all other female teachers in schools A and B were Muslim and lived in polygynous households. As such, their lived experiences underpinned their strongly held perceptions of the connection between polygyny and mothers' constrained agency. This second gendered dimension of teachers' perspectives moreover highlights the empathetic aspect of teachers' perspectives and challenges the existing dominant deficit views in the literature.

As seen earlier in the literature, other studies have connected teachers' views of parents' constrained choices with parents' difficult life contexts such as poverty and household dynamics (e.g., Kimu & Steyn, 2013; Singh et al., 2004; Triegaardt & van Diermen, 2021). However, only a few scholars have demonstrated teachers' identification of these linkages (e.g., Buckler, 2012; Donkor, 2010; Kimu & Steyn, 2013) or connected parents' constraints with polygyny (Donkor, 2010). Where such intersections are identified, as with Donkor (2010), there is little attempt to further interrogate them or link teachers' perceptions with teachers' own lives. Such nuances are absent in the extant literature which appears to largely assume that teachers, particularly rural ones, have little in common with parents in rural school-communities, even if they live near or around such communities. An exception is Buckler (2012) who suggests that teachers' own rural backgrounds facilitate empathy with rural lives and that teachers who hold close personal relationships with school-communities have functionings that align with those school-communities. However, the findings of this paper suggest that this empathy is deepened when teachers' personal life experiences

resonate with those of parents in their school-communities (and where teachers are aware of these) whether or not teachers have similar rural backgrounds or close personal relationships with the communities. In this way, even where teachers may perpetuate deficit views of parents, these views are simultaneously underpinned by empathy which arises from teachers' ability to metaphorically walk a mile in parents' shoes. Such empathy, or the capacity to find some common ground, is critical for the forging or deepening of positive parent-teacher relationships which support children's social, emotional, and academic development.

The paper's ethnographic data, analysed using the capability approach, demonstrates the varied and nuanced perceptions teachers in rural African schools hold of the parents of their pupils. These perceptions are, in turn, strongly influenced by teachers' perceptions of rurality, personal life experiences, accumulated knowledge of school-communities, and the prevailing macroeconomic condition whose effects are felt not only by parents but also by teachers. Parents' elucidation of constraints relative to schooling in the literature and in this paper suggest a greater need to interrogate how normative schooling expectations interact with rural parents' lives in context, and how these everyday lives influence parents' perspectives as well as actions around schooling.

Bukola Oyinloye *is a Research Associate at the University of York. Her research spans equity and diversity in HE; family-school partnerships; education and adolescence in Africa; global education systems and governance; global childhoods and youth; informal apprenticeships; ethics; indigenous epistemologies; and school leadership and management.*

References

Alkire, S. (2005). Capability and functionings: Definition & justification (Briefing Note). *Human Development and Capability Association* [HCDA].

Atkinson, P., & Hammersley, M. (2007). *Ethnography: Principles in practice* (3rd ed.). Routledge.

Bojuwoye, O. (2009). Home-school partnership – a study of opinions of selected parents and teachers in Kwazulu Natal Province, South Africa. *Research Papers in Education, 24*(4), 461-475.

Bolaji, S. D., Campbell-Evans, G., & Gray, J. (2016). Universal basic education policy implementation in Nigeria. *KJEP*, 13(2), pp. 137-158.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), pp. 77-101.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2013). *Successful qualitative research: a practical guide for beginners*. SAGE Publications, Inc.

Bray, M. (2003). Community initiatives in education: Goals, dimensions and linkages with governments. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 33(1), pp. 31-45.

Buckler, A. (2012). *Understanding the professional lives of female teachers in rural sub-Saharan African schools: A capability perspective* (39228) [Doctoral dissertation]. http://oro.open.ac.uk/39228/

Cameron, S., Gelander, G. P., Jagmag, M., Jasper, P., Doyle, A., Laufer, H., Harb, J., Hebbar, M., & Barbone, L. (2018). Teacher Development Programme endline evaluation (Volume I). Education Data, Research & Evaluation in Nigeria [EDOREN].

Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches (4th ed.).* SAGE Publications, Inc.

De Fina, A., & Perrino, S. (2011). Introduction: Interviews vs. 'natural' contexts: A false dilemma. *Language in Society*, *40*(1), 1-11.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2017). Introduction: The discipline and practice of qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (5th ed.) (pp. 1-26). SAGE Publications, Inc.

Donkor, A. K. (2010). Parental involvement in education in Ghana: The case of a private elementary school. *International Journal about Parents in Education*, *4*(1), 23-38.

Dunne, M., Humphreys, S., Dauda, M., Kaibo J., & Garuba, A. (2013). *Adamawa State primary education research: Access, quality and outcomes, with specific reference to gender. Adamawa State Primary Education Board.* Sussex Research Online: Sussex Research Online. http://sro.sussex.ac.uk/id/eprint/46059/1/Adamawa_Primary_Education_Research-final_report.pdf

Hartell, C., Dippenaar, H., Moen, M., & Dladla, T. (2016). Principals' perceptions and experiences of the role parents play in school governing bodies in rural areas. *Africa Education Review, 13*(1), 120-134.

Haule, K. (2021). Role-perception as a factor for parental involvement in primary school children's schooling: Comparative analysis from Moshi municipality and Meatu district in Tanzania. *Papers in Education and Development, 39*(1), 1-14.

Khader, S. J. (2013). Identifying adaptive preferences in practice: Lessons from postcolonial feminisms. *Journal of Global Ethics, 9*(3), 311-327.

Kim, Y. (2009). Minority parental involvement and school barriers: Moving the focus away from deficiencies of parents. *Educational Research Review, 4*(2009), 80-102.

Kimu, A. M., & Steyn, G. M. (2013). Applying the Epstein model to investigate parent involvement in public primary schools in Kenya. *Journal of Asian and African Studies, 48*(5), 607-622.

LeCompte, M. D. & Schensul, J. J. (2010). *Designing and conducting ethnographic research: An introduction* (2nd ed.). Altamira Press.

Lemmer, E. M., & van Wyk, N. (2004). Schools reaching out: Comprehensive parent involvement in South African primary schools. *Africa Education Review, 1*(2), 259-278.

Lincoln, Y. S., Lynham, S. A., & Guba, E. G. (2017). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences, revisited. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (5th ed.) (pp. 108-150). SAGE Publications, Inc.

Little, D., & Lewis, I. (2012). *Impact of support to SBMCs: stakeholders' views of change* (Report No. 423). ESSPIN.

Makgopa, M., & Mokhele, M. (2013). Teachers' perceptions on parental involvement: A case study of two South African schools. *Journal of Educational and Social Research, 3*(3), 219-225.

Mbokodi, S.M., & Singh, P. (2011). Parental partnerships in the governance of schools in the Black townships of Port Elizabeth. *Perspectives in Education, 29*(4), 38-48.

Michael, S., Wolhuter, C. C., & Wyk, N. v. (2012). The management of parental involvement in multicultural schools in South Africa: A case study. CEPS Journal, 2(1), 57-82.

Mncube, V. S. (2007). Social justice, policy and parents' understanding of their voice in School Governing Bodies in South Africa. *Journal of Educational Administration and History, 39*(2), 129-143.

Mukwambo, P. (2019). Human development and perceptions of secondary education in rural Africa: A Zimbabwean case study. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education, 51*(6), 806-823.

Munz, E. A. (2017). Ethnographic interviews. In M. Allen (Ed.), *The SAGE encyclopedia of communication research methods* (pp.455-457). SAGE Publications, Inc. https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781483381411.n168

Neale, B. (2017). *Generating Data in Qualitative Longitudinal Research: A methodological review.* Timescapes Archive. https://timescapes-archive.leeds.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/47/2020/07/Generating-Data-in-QL-research-Timescapes-Working-Paper-8.pdf

O'Reilly, K. (2012). *Ethnographic methods* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Oyinloye, B. (2021). *Parents' perspectives and practices around the schooling of children in rural Northern Nigeria* (Doctoral dissertation). https://oro.open.ac.uk/80376/

Oyinloye, B. (2021). Towards an Ọmọlúàbí code of research ethics: Applying a situated, participant-centred virtue ethics framework to fieldwork with disadvantaged populations in diverse cultural settings. *Research Ethics, 17*(4), 401–422. https://doi.org/10.1177/17470161211010863

Pinnock, H. (2012). *Performance analysis of SBMC data 2010–2011* (Report No. 424). ESSPIN.

Qu, S., & Dumay, J. (2011). The qualitative research interview. *Qualitative Research in Accounting & Management, 8*(3), 238-264.

Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. S. (2012). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications, Inc.

Schensul, J. J. & LeCompte, M. (2013). *Essential ethnographic methods: A mixed methods approach* (2nd ed.). AltaMira Press.

Sen, A. (1985). Well-Being, agency and freedom: The Dewey Lectures 1984. *The Journal of Philosophy, 82*(4), 169-221.

Sen, A. (1999). *Development as freedom*. Oxford University Press.

Sen, A. (2009). *The idea of justice*. Penguin Books.

Serpell, R. (1993). *The Significance of Schooling*. Cambridge University Press.

Singh, P., Mbokodi, S. M., & Msila, M. T. (2004). Black parental involvement in education. *South African Journal of Education*, *24*(4), 301–307.

Triegaardt, P. K., & Diermen, E. v. (2021). School management strategies to improve parental involvement: Insights from school principals in Southern Tshwane primary schools. *Journal of Social Science Research*, *17*, 78-90. https://doi.org/10.24297/jssr.v17i.8796

Tusiime, M., Friedlander, E., & Malik, S. (2016). The literacy ecology of four Rwandan Children. In E. Friedlander & C. Goldenberg (Eds.), *Literacy boost in Rwanda: Impact evaluation of a 2-year randomized control trial* (pp. 122-164). Stanford University.