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CONSTRAINTS INHIBITING ZIMBABWEAN PARENTS' ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT IN THEIR CHILDREN'S PRESCHOOL EDUCATION IN THE BUBI DISTRICT

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Abstract
Poor paternal participation in parenting children aged 0 to 6 has been demonstrated in considerable studies. Such absence of paternal roles during the early development could adversely affect general development of the children at later years. Given these reasons, this study explored the constraints inhibiting Zimbabwean parents' active involvement in their children's preschool education in the Bubi district of Zimbabwe. The study is based on the principles of interconnectedness within settings and the linkages between settings that affect individual development. The study focused on the immediate, being the microsystems. The interpretive paradigm and the qualitative approach were employed to explore the constraints inhibiting Zimbabwean parents' active involvement in their children's preschool education in the Bubi District. Purposive sampling was used to select a small sample of two Heads of schools, four Early Childhood Development teachers and sixteen parents; these were from two schools in the Bubi district of Matabeleland, North Province of Zimbabwe. The results showed that low socio-economic factors, lack of awareness, values and attitude among others are attributed to non-participation of fathers in the development of zero to six aged children. We therefore recommend that there should be provision of statutory instruments that clearly state the role of the parents.
Keywords: Parents' involvement; preschool Children; Education; Childhood Development

Introduction
Children develop in an environmental context of a shared responsibility by the family and society where the family and society have a huge influence on the child's education and development. Children learn from three contexts, which are the school, community and the family (Mathwasa & Okeke, 2016). Theoretically, the systematic relationship between child and parents has been by ecological theoretical framework. The ecological model holds that stakeholders need to ensure that children have needed experiences during development (lwrmarylou, 2005). This translates to the fact that all interested stakeholders in early childhood development programmes need to identify whether the ECD centres are of high quality to allow every child to develop to his/her full potential in order to meet the need of development (lwrmarylou, 2005). Conversely, the ecological systems theory encourages stakeholders to go beyond the ECD learning centres, especially when working with children below six years. The ecological theory calls for ECD programmes to uphold quality, responding to the needs of all young children, thinking about all children's experiences throughout the day.

The ecological systems model is child-centred because it begins with a focus on the proximal development experiences of his or her environment. The ecological systems model observes the child's environment as the "the engines of development". It emphasizes that the quality of

relationships between different settings are critical because they influence the child's development (Chan Lee & Choy, 2009). Literature remarked that in the child's environment, there are cultural values and beliefs that may have a negative impact on growth, development, and early stimulation opportunities (Chan Lee & Choy, 2009). Stakeholders should aim at these environments so that they become compassionate to the needs of ECD children, allowing them to fit in, and become engaging citizens of their society.

Parents involve themselves in parenting by sending their children to early childhood development centres, assist in provision of indoor and outdoor play materials, involve themselves in fund raising activities, advocating for children's issues, initiating and participating in feeding schemes, building and maintain infrastructure, ensuring that children are immunised, provide basic needs (Connor & Wheeler, 2009). The need to involve parents in children's development has been demonstrated but some constraining reasons have also been noted. For example, Mawere, Thomas and Nyaruwata (2015) noted that factors that strain parental involvement in ECD include lack of knowledge of the pedagogical principles and the stages of child development, these deter some parents to establish a partnership with their children's school. Jafarow (2015) revealed that factors affecting parental involvement in education can be divided into various categories, for example, parent related factors, school related and student. Parental involvement can also be affected by several socio-political factors, such as socioeconomic conditions and parents' negative school experience (LaRoeque et al., 2011).

Researchers' experience has shown that parents' involvement in the education and development of children under six years in Bubi District is either minimal or absent. This deviation is due to the fact that the mothers who used to be always available for the traditional practices of child care and development of the children have become 'working mothers', taking up formal employment outside the home. They are losing direct involvement with immediate care, education and supervision of the younger children. Chinhara (2015) indicates that parents play a major role in providing structures and supporting caregivers as well as learning materials for the young learners. Moyo et al. (2012) also chronicle the importance of parental involvement in their study on Factors that Affect the Implementation of Early Childhood Development Programmes in Zimbabwe.

Historically, Zimbabwean ECD is has been described as community-based initiative, meaning that we cannot separate the ECD programmes from the community (Nziramasanga, 1999). Parents are rarely involved in ECD programmes, the major reason being that teachers do not know how to involve the parents (Mawere, Thomas and Nyaruwata, 2015). The rationale of parental involvement in early childhood development of children below six years has been highlighted in a number of studies (Charles 2010; Mishra 2012; Stephinah 2014; Jennings & Bosch 2011; Galindo 2012). In Zimbabwe introduced SI106/2005, administrative circulars 14/2004 and 12/2005 as legal framework to govern the running of the ECD programme. Reynolds and Ou (2011) stated that some schools do not understand the roles of parental involvement in development of children. In the same vein, Mawere, Thomas, and Nyaruwata, (2015) concluded that the major reason for lack of parental involvement is the poor teachers of knowledge regarding contributions of parents in children's development. Contrary to that, Okeke (2014) explains that teachers have the greatest influence on whether parents become welcomed or involved in schools. Therefore, there is a need to explore constraints inhibiting Zimbabwean parents' active involvement in their children's preschool education in the Bubi District.

Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on Coleman's social capital theory, developed in 1988 (Coleman, 1988). Social capital theory has been an indispensible research tool for researchers investigating the relationships within families and their impact on the human capital development of children (Akcomak, 2011; Razmi & Bazzazan, 2012). The social capital of the family suggested that the relationships and norms shape the quality and quantity of social interactions within the family. Coleman places families' centre-stage as a primordial organisation that has its origins in the relationships established by childbirth. He identifies social capital as a resource within the family that inheres in the structure of inter-generational relationships, especially among parents as well as between parents and their children. This notion of social capital was applied by the researchers in the investigation of constraints inhibiting Zimbabwean parents' active involvement in their children's preschool education in the Bubi District. As the social capital draws attention to the effects and consequences of human sociability and connectedness and their relations to the individual and social structure. The current researchers, therefore, drew from this important theoretical perspective in order to offer explanations to the constraints inhibiting Zimbabwean parents' active involvement in their children's preschool education in the Bubi District.

Objectives

This study is targeted to explore constraints inhibiting Zimbabwean parents' active involvement in their children's preschool education in the Bubi District.

Research Question

What are the constraints inhibiting Zimbabwean parents' active involvement in their children's preschool education in the Bubi District?

METHOD

Design

This study followed a qualitative research approach with attention on a case study design. Qualitative researchers tend to collect data in the field, at the site where participants experience the issue or problem under study (Creswell, 2014).

Location of the Study

The study area was in the rural community of Bubi District in Matabeleland North Region in Zimbabwe. Once the proposal was approved a comprehensive discourse on the dynamics of the study site and its impacts on parents' experiences with involvement in the education development of children under six years and its implications for childhood education provisioning was undertaken.

Sample

Purposive sampling has been used to come up with a sample because it enables respondents who have particular specific characteristics which are relevant to the topic of the research to be selected on the basis of these characteristics (Creswell, 2014). Babbie (2013) mentions that in purposive sampling the units to be observed are selected on the basis of the researchers' judgement about which ones are most useful or representative. Two schools have been used for this study, a total of twenty-two people were part of the study, that is, two heads, four teachers, two from each school, and sixteen parents, that is, eight from each school. Interviewed families ranged from the nuclear family, divorced, single as well as polygamous families who are facing so many challenges in the education and development of young children.

Table 1. Demographic information of the participants (School Head) in School

School Head	School A	School B
Gender	Female	Male
Age	55	49
Qualifications	Diploma in Education and Bed Primary	Diploma in Education and Bed Primary
Teaching experience	35 years	18 years
Years as head of school	15 years	8 years
Years in the present school	10 years	5 years
Area that you live in	Local-community	School cottage

Table 2. Demographic information of the participants (Teachers)

School A	Teacher A	Teacher B
Gender	Female	Female
Age	45 years	50 years
Qualifications	Diploma in ECD	Para-professional
Teaching experience	10 years	8 years
Marital status	Married	Married
No of children	4	7
Area that you live in	Local	Local

Table 3. Demographic information of the parents (participants) in school A

PARENTS	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Gender	Female	Female	Male	Male	Female	Female	Female	Female
Age	40	35	30	37	50	60	55	48
Marital status	Married	Single	Married	Married	Widow	Married	Married	Single
No of children	3	1	4	3	5	6	5	2
Breadwinner	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
No of people in the family	5	6	4	3	7	5	4	5

Table 4. Demographic information of the parents (participants) in school B

Parents	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Gender	Male	Male	Male	Female	Female	Female	Female	Female
Age	47	35	34	45	50	49	46	52
Marital status	Single	Married	Single	Married	Married	Single	Divorced	Married
No of children	2	1	3	2	4	1	4	5
Breadwinner	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
No of people in the family	5	4	5	5	6	7	3	5

Instruments for data collection

This study was conducted through the use of focus group discussion for parents, semi-structured interviews for ECD teachers, and the Head of the schools and document analysis. The researcher opted to use the focus group discussion as one method for this study because it is useful to obtain detailed information about personal and group feelings, perceptions and opinions, they can save time and money compared to individual interviews and they can also provide a broader range of information.

Data collection procedures

Face to face interviews were planned, organized and conducted by the researcher to gather information from the participants. With the interviews, the researcher sought to establish and understand parents' experiences with involvement in the educational development of children below six years of age. An interview guide was prepared and used to keep the interview focused. These interviews involved open ended questions which were intended to elicit stakeholders' views on their experiences about the parental involvement in the development of children. Interviews lasted between 40-60 minutes and were recorded with participants' consent.

Data analysis procedures

Following the recommendations of Creswell (2014), data was organized and prepared by transcribing the information gathered. The researchers then looked at all the transcribed data in an effort to get a general sense of the information and an opportunity to reflect on its overall meaning such as the impression of the overall depth, credibility and use of the information. A general overview of the results of the coding process for all the individual cases were presented. Selected themes were repeatedly read and interpreted precisely with reference to a particular question asked and answered by the participants during the interview. The researchers then create groups or categories allocating similar sentences or words to categories, in order to discover patterns. Such patterns bring out themes that must be supported by groups.

Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations in this study focused on the following principles: confidentiality, informed consent and gaining entry, respecting the right to privacy, voluntary participation, avoiding harm to participants, and anonymity (Sotuku & Duku, 2015). The researchers received ethical clearance from the University of Fort Hare and asked for permission from Matabeleland North Provincial Department of Education to conduct the research.

RESULT

The result showed that socio-economic factors, poor communication between the school and the home, school heads' limited knowledge of the concept, teachers' limited education on parental involvement, parents' limited education on their roles, negative teacher attitude, negative parental attitude, culture, lack of clear government policies on parental involvement, and lack of clear school policy. The results are specifically presented below:

Socio-economic factors

It came out during interviews that most families are very poor, hence, they experience a lot of challenges when it comes to the payment of fees and levies for their children. It was also noted that some of the children stay with their grandparents.

Poor communication between the school and the home

Communication involves designing effective ways in which school reaches home and home to school about school activities and children's learning programmes. From the interview discussions it clearly came out that there was no consistency in communication from the school side, as was cited: **"**when children started learning beginning of the year the teachers used to write small notes if they needed something or wanted us at school, of late they tell us using children." In most cases children forget what they been told by their teachers. "This shows that teachers have no respect for us or they are telling us through the children is not very important".

School heads' limited knowledge of the concept

From the interview discussions of all groups it came out that everyone looked up to the head of the school to be more knowledgeable in all school matters, including parental involvement of teachers. The school head should direct all activities, as indicated, **"**we strongly depend on the advice we get from school heads. Anything concerning the education and development of our children." This explanation given indicates that the school head is expected to have all the necessary knowledge in order to handle school issues properly, including parental involvement.

Teachers' limited education on parental involvement

From the four teachers interviewed, only one had an idea of the concept. However, she clearly indicated that it was difficult for her to introduce parental involvement further than infrastructural development and cooking for the children because she was not sure how the head of the school was going to react to that. The other three teachers agreed that they had limited knowledge of the concept of parental involvement. One teacher was brave to mention that during their training there was no mention of this concept; hence, she assumed that it was the business of the school head, not them as teachers. This means that the teachers also strongly feel that involving parents in the education development of children was the role of the head of school.

Parents' limited education on their roles

From the interview responses it also clearly came out that parents' limited knowledge was a big barrier when it came to how far they should be involved in the education and development of their children, especially at this tender age. It was indicated that "we are supposed to build classrooms and provide learning materials and end there, the rest is the duty of the teacher who is trained and paid for that job". It was also supported this view by saying "if the teacher is not doing her work it is the duty of the head of the school to see to it that it is done because they are both paid to do so." From such responses, it is very clear that parents have limited knowledge on the subject. However, among the parents there was a handful of parents that were willing to do more than they have been doing, provided the school was willing to incorporate them in the learning of their children.

Negative teacher attitude

Teachers' negative attitudes emerged during the research period as a contributing barrier in parental involvement in the education and development of their children below the age of six years. Some teachers looked down upon the parents because they regarded them as uneducated; this was evidenced by the comments they uttered/made. They felt parental involvement should be limited to physical needs only. One expressed "involving parents in schooling activities will distort what we are teaching, considering the level of their education".

Parents also indicated that teachers have an attitude towards them when it comes to classroom activities. One parent expressed that **"***teachers' negative attitude convinced them that they are not welcome into classroom activities." A*s parents, "we *feel we should leave classroom issues to* the *teachers because they are trained yet us as parents we are not.* "Comments from the parents clearly show that there is no good relationship between the teachers and parents who are supposed be the first teachers of their children.

Negative parental attitude
Heads of schools expressed the view that some parents had negative attitude towards school activities. This attitude manifested in a number of ways, according to the heads of schools. The following were some of the ways:
- not attending school meetings;
- consultation day or open day;
- Some to an extent of not putting an effort to pay just something towards the education of their children. When explaining these issues, you could tell that the heads of school were annoyed when parents do not play their part, as expected by the schools.

Narratively, below are some of the extracts from eleven of the twenty participants in the study where work emerged as the main factor inhibiting main from actively participating in the early social development of their children. For instance, most of the time according to my understanding, we work and support and the only job is to provide money, but during these days children like their fathers. Children if they are under age it's too difficult to small it's difficult to handle them. Mothers are one's who have patience with the small children. They listen to their mother (F1). Fathers work most of the time. Some children does not stay with their fathers, some fathers do not worry about their children as long as they support them financially (F4). You see, I cannot tell what happens but most of the time according to our understanding we are the people (fathers) that provides, we work, we support we taught that the only job for us is to provide money and all that stuff to the children, we don't think to parent the children is our job, but during these days let me not lie we do help a lot because the children like their fathers more than their mothers (F5). Well, social and moral issues like it is more acceptable that women take on that role and fathers tend to lose focus, they forget that they also have to play a role in the child's life and also the way we grew up where the mothers take more charge (F6). In most cases fathers are breadwinners and it may be a question of time. I am lucky that I work from 8 to 15h00 while some parents have to leave early, 5h00 and return late at night, so I think it is just a question of time (F7).

Culture
Culture also seemed to be a barrier towards parental involvement in the education and development of children. From the interview discussion it emerged that there are some activities that should only be done by women. One man declared that in the Ndebele culture cooking is for women. Strange enough, the women were also in agreement of that statement and further added by saying that also includes indoor cleaning.

Lack of clear school policy
On school policy, the heads of schools mentioned that for them to craft such policies they should be guided by government policies.

DISCUSSION

Interviewed families ranged from the nuclear family, divorced, single as well as polygamous families who are facing so many challenges in the education and development of young children. It was raised during interview time that most families are very poor; hence, they experience a lot of challenges when it comes to payment of fees for their children. It was also noted that some of the children stay with their grandparents. This implies that some of the parents are failing to meaningfully contribute towards their children's learning. From the parents' views, it appears as if paying fees is the only way they can be involved in their children's education and development under the age of six years. This is confirmed by literature (e.g. Gobena, 2018) that parents with a poor socio-economic background are likely to have low levels of education, very low income and, in most cases, no stable jobs. As a result, their self-esteem is very low.

Communication involves designing effective ways or forms of school based to home and home to school about school activities and children's learning programmes. Form the discussion it clearly came out that there was no consistent line of communication from the school side, as was cited by one parent. When parents do not respond to the teacher's request it would appear they are not interested in their children's education and development, yet, in the true sense, they are not aware of the teacher's expectations.

This barrier in communication can be as a result of so many factors or perceptions. For example, when teachers stopped writing letters it could have been assumed that parents were not able to read those letters due to their low level of education. On the other hand, teachers could have stopped because of their tight schedule or they are demotivated by their working environment. The parents did not have much interaction with teachers because they suspected that teachers look down upon them, hence, whatever they might raise will not be taken seriously. The head of school B admitted that they do not have any policy on how and when to communicate with the parents, while the head from school A mentioned that they only communicate with parents when there is need to do so. This implies that communication between the home and the school seemed to be based on needs rather than an essential element of the child's education and development. The discussion revealed that both parties were frustrated by this discord in communication because almost everything was based on assumptions and perceptions.

At ECD level, communication and personal interviews between parents and teachers are very crucial, hence the need for the school to develop a policy that stipulates the times when parents may visit or have dialogue with the school staff (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Such a policy may assist to eradicate negative perceptions and create an environment where the school communicates with parents on regular basis and not only when there are problems to be attended to. This will facilitate a healthy atmosphere for the benefit of the learners in terms of school collaboration and decision making. Also, it could appraise each other about children's performance as well as school activities and vice versa. The heads of the schools and teachers are the key stakeholders in establishing an element of trust and co-operation with parents if meaningful partnership is to be realized.

From the interviews of all groups, it clearly came out that everyone looked up to the head of the school to be more knowledgeable in all school matters, including parental involvement. The school head should direct all activities, as indicated by one parent. Once a school headteacher is expected to be knowledgeable on all the procedures to be employed in order to manage the school more effectively. The teachers mentioned that, even if they know that they

should include parents in the school activities, if the head of the school has no initiative, they are also limited to do anything about it. There is need to educate the school heads on parental involvement through staff development so that the learners, teachers, parents and the entire community can benefit from his/her leadership.

It was noted that among the teachers only one teacher had an idea on parental involvement, however, she lamented that it was very difficult for her to introduce parental involvement further than just building of infrastructure and cooking for the children because she was not sure how the head of the school would react to that. On the other hand, she was not sure if the parents would accept that with open hands. This response seems to indicate that teachers who had just completed their training are aware of this parental involvement because it is now taught at colleges. From the researchers' experience, this is true, considering that the Zimbabwean ECD is community based, hence the need to empower the teachers while on training. According to Zvobgo (1994), through SDCs parents are called upon to bridge the gap between what government could provide and what communities want in their schools. In the same vein, the Minister of Education in September 2011 revealed that government's thrust to provide education for everyone required huge resources, and government has had to rely on parents and communities to play a major role in providing many of the resources that their schools and children need. The teachers were very clear that there is need for staff development for the teachers so that they are instrumental in the involvement of parents in all activities concerning the education and development of children.

From the interview discussion it also clearly came out that parents' limited knowledge was a big barrier when it came to how far they should be involved in the education and development of their children, especially at this tender age (Fitzgerald, 2004). From such responses it is very clear that parents have limited knowledge on the subject. However, among the parents there was a handful of parents that were willing to do more than they have been doing, provided the school was willing to incorporate them. Parents should attend school meetings, participate in the decision making process and support their children's education (Mubanga, 2012). This is also confirmed by Hanni, & Phippen (2010) that most parents felt that parental involvement is very important to them and they would want to see teachers involved, showing or giving them something to do with their children at home.

Teachers' negative attitude was observed during the research period as a contributing barrier in parental involvement in the education and development of their children below the age of six years. Some teachers felt parental involvement should be limited to physical needs only. This translates to the fact that, in this case, parents are not even given any opportunity to say something on the expectations about their children's education, let alone to be asked to help with academic issues.

Parents also indicated that teachers have an attitude towards them when it comes to classroom activities. Another participant concurred by saying "as parents we feel we should leave classroom issues to the teachers because they are trained yet us as parents we are not." This shows that parents have mixed feelings about helping in the school activities. Lemmer & Van Wyk (2004) confirm that the attitudes of schools towards active parental involvement are repeatedly indistinct. Given an opportunity they would definitely assist in the educational development of their children to a larger extent.

Heads of schools expressed that some of them had negative attitude towards school activities. This attitude manifested in a number of ways, such as not attending school meetings,

consultation day or open day, some to an extent of not putting an effort to pay just something towards the education of their children. One head said they do this in confidence because they know that the children will not be returned home because they have not paid anything, this is in line with government policy that children should not be turned away but heads of schools should deal with the parents and leave children to attend lessons.

Culture also seemed to be a barrier towards parental involvement in the education and development of children. It appeared among parents there was a strong feeling that some activities should be done by women not men, for example, never in their culture would a man be seen cooking. In the Ndebele culture one man declared that their culture does not allow them to cook. However, they were also quick to confirm that they can do anything in the school in the interest of their children's education except cooking. Strange enough, women also agreed that cooking and indoor cleaning is women's work and they were willing to do that for their children. From these responses, it is clear that parents need to be educated on their roles in the education and development of their children below the age of six years.

For effective parental involvement in the education and development of children the school heads, teachers as well as parents strongly felt there is a need for the government to craft clear policies on boundaries relating to parental involvement in schools (LaRocque et al, 2011). Fields-Smith (2005) also chronicles that parents respond more frequently in clearly stated demands from the school.

On school policy, the heads of schools mentioned that for them to craft such policies they should be guided by government policies, thus the procedure in government schools, confirmed one head of school.

Conclusion

The present study has peculiar strengths that could be regarded as contributions to knowledge. This study was one of the few qualitative research in Zimbabwe that explored Constraints inhibiting Zimbabwean parents' active involvement in their children's preschool education in the Bubi District which could be seen as a strength. Through its findings, the constraints inhibiting parental involvement were identified. Hopefully, the outcome of the present study (when taken back to the fathers) would help instill in them a desire to become more actively involved in their children's lives. This can be a valuable guide for men to teach their children that they are loved and respected, and it can help ensure that children, especially boys, do not feel the necessity to act out to get their fathers' attention. Involved fathers are likely to be more confident to see their interactions with their children positively. Moreover, this study made an important contribution to existing literature on men's involvement in the early development of their children. Such important contribution to knowledge would continue to enrich the professional development of educators themselves. This is because educators would understand better, various ways to deal with fathers themselves in order to continue to attract their involvement in the early education of their children.

Limitations

Experience has shown that all investigations carried out have weaknesses. The limitation of this study is a small sample that was used of the heads of schools, ECD teachers as well as parents to explore parents' experiences with involvement in the education development of children under six years in the Bubi district of Zimbabwe. Therefore, the present qualitative

findings cannot be generalized to a larger population of heads of schools, ECD teachers and parents.

Recommendations
The research study makes the following recommendations based on the findings;
- ➢ For meaningful parental involvement, which is not only biased to physical needs, the Government should provide policies that give clear boundaries on the part of all stakeholders.
- ➢ When Government policies are in place, the schools should also provide their school policy guided by the state policy; this will facilitate the smooth involvement of parents.
- ➢ Teacher Training Colleges to empower student teachers on parental involvement during their course of training.

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