ENSURING QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PROVISION: THE INDISPENSABLE ROLE OF PARENTS IN THE EFFUTU MUNICIPALITY OF GHANA

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ABSTRACT: *There is a notion that children are the hope of the future of a society. This has led to Early Childhood Education becoming the focus of debate at all levels of government. However, the benefits emanating from Early Childhood Education cannot be realized on its own without a key component of the indispensable role parents play. Consequently, this ethnographic research employed a focus group interview to collect data from 14 participants from the Effutu Municipality to answer the research questions formulated to guide the study. The study found that if parents actively involve themselves in the education of their children, it can build a rapport between them and the school to be informed about what goes on in the school about their children so they can continue at home. This can increase their children's happiness at school, and possibly encourage them to participate in school activities. However, the study found that the parents were faced with challenges ranging from financial constraint and their lack of education to wrongly prioritizing their children's education which potentially prevented them from living up to their parental expectation. From the findings, it is recommended that parents should re-orient their perception and attitude towards early childhood education and consider it to be a critical stage in their children's educational ladder and subsequent general development as human beings. They should also visit their children's schools whenever need be, and they should have time for their children and be interested in their education.*

KEYWORDS: provision, quality, early childhood education, parents, role

INTRODUCTION

The notion that children are the hope of the future of a society, especially in the 21st century (UNESCO, 2004) has attracted attention of the subject of early education for young children (Bredekamp, Knuth, Kunesh & Shulman,1992). Internationally, ECE has become a major issue, a centre piece of debate at all levels of government (UNESCO, 2004), and a topic of concern to experts and the public alike (Sollars, 2020). Nance (2009, citing the National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC]) indicates that early childhood period is the most critical period of a person's life. This is because it is the time the individual develops socially, emotionally and intellectually including brain development. The early years experiences that arguably ensures a proper brain development (which is known to be controlling human behaviour, [Woodhead, 2006 citing Begley, 1996] as indicated earlier, and which eventually leads to the social, emotional and intellectual development) are those ECE provides. Slutsky and Pistorova (2010) again point out

that experiences through ECE provide a foundation for a better future outcome. Heckman and Masterov (2007) further, claim that a well-planned early childhood programme stimulates improvements in education, health, social capital and equality. It also provides both short and long-term benefits for the children participating in the programmes (Sollars, 2020). Tayler, Thorpe, Cloney and Wilson (2008) also maintain that the early experiences equally affect later adult life and productivity because it is able to equip the individual with the requisite skills.

Evans et al. (2000) explain further that successful ECE brightens the chances of future employment and economic productivity. Their reason is that the skills developed through its experience form the basis for future learning and labour market success (Abosede, 2017). Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs (MCWA) (2004) explains that children's success in school, to a large extent, determines their success in their future lives as adults. It determines whether they will be able to go to college and even the type of college they will attend, the professions they will enter in, and how much they are likely to receive as remuneration. This implies that early childhood programmes can yield rich benefits to children, not only individually and immediately, but also socially and economically over a life-time in terms of the children's ability to contribute to family, community and the nation in which they find themselves (Oppong Frimpong, 2017).

In spite of the documented benefits of ECE, Lowenstein (2011) cautions against the overemphasis on ECE participation without stressing on the quality of it. Sylva et al. (2011) reiterate that in discussing ECE provision, quality must be stressed as very important factor in sustaining the positive effects and impact of early year's education on the future development of children. To them therefore, positive effect of early education can be assured if importance is placed on quality provision (Ishimine et aI., 2010; Ishimine, 2009; Mashburn et aI., 2008; Sylva et aI., 2011, 2004). To buttress the point that it is not just the provision of any ECE, instead the quality of it, Sylva et al. (2011) have indicated that attendance at low QECE led to fewer long-term benefits in cognitive and social development, whereas attendance at medium to high QECE led to significantly greater gains in cognitive and social development. They reported "In fact, for some cognitive and social behavioural outcomes, attending a low QECE was no better than children remaining at home" (p. 110). To them, therefore, ECE should be of quality to be able to achieve lasting benefits to those who participate in it and the society at large. From the research evidence in the literature, it can be inferred that quality is of great importance in the provision of ECE to ensure the overall improvement of children's development (Sollars, 2020; Oppong Frimpong, 2017). The benefits emanating from QECE notwithstanding, QECE cannot materialise on its own and that a key component to ensuring quality ECE provision is the indispensable role of parents (Li, Li, Devlieghere & Vandenbroeck, 2020; Krieg & Curtis, 2017; Correia & Marques-Pinto, 2016).

Arguably, and as presented in **Figure 1**, three parties are involved in providing QECE: the government (represented by headteachers and ECE coordinators) providing the facilities and supervision, teachers who use the TLMs and facilities provided by the government, and parents who live with the children and provide their basic needs. Therefore, parental involvement in preparing children for their education is a crucial component in QECE provision (Almajdalawi & Atoum, 2019; Correia & Marques-Pinto, 2016). Parental involvement refers to a situation where parents get themselves actively involved in what goes on in the schools of their wards. By their

active involvement, parents offer to engage in any activity in the school; communicate with teachers and other staff of the school, support their children's school work/activities at home, participate in Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meetings and any other events of the school.
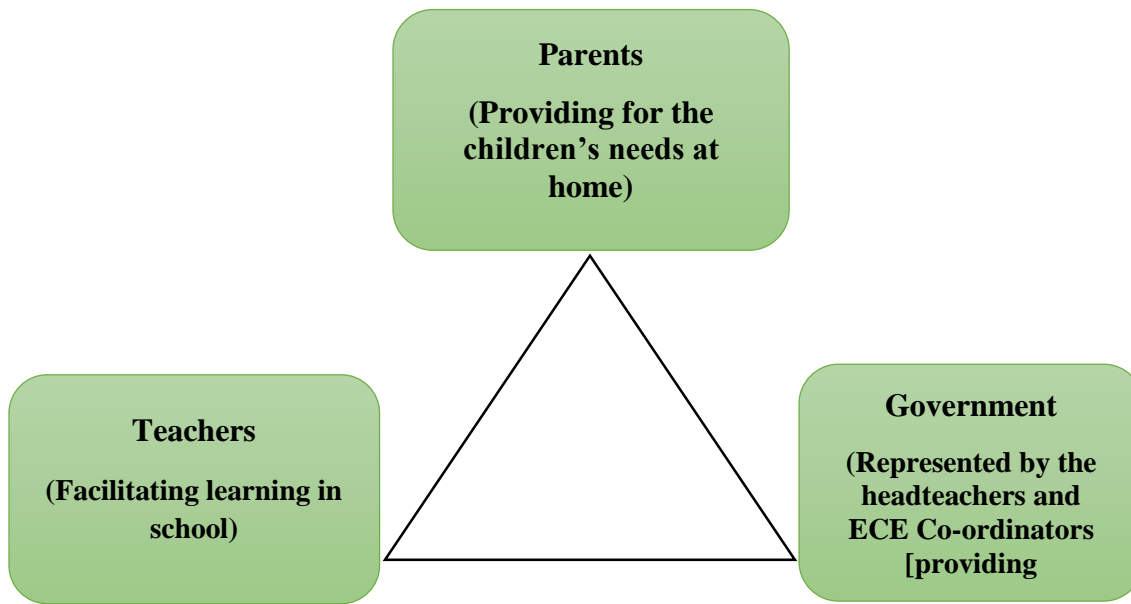

Figure 1: *Parties involved in ECE provision*

According to Howes et al. (2008), a parent's ability to interact effectively with the school (teachers and headteacher) contributes to achieving QECE provision. When cordial relationships exist between parents and teachers (Li & Vandenbroeck, 2020), such that they are able to communicate and share ideas about the learner, it leads to improvement for the learner (Carl, 2007). Children whose parents participate in activities in the school of the children have improved academic outcomes (Powell, Son, File, & Juan, 2010).

Rennie (1996, cited in AI-Hassan, 2006, p. 44) identified parents as the child's "first, and continuing, educators" and argued that, since the home is the first stage for the child's development and experiences, parental involvement informs schools about a child's likes, dislikes and general behaviour, and enables them to provide individualized support that ensures the best possible learning outcomes and development for the child at school. Parental involvement and interaction between the home and school also increases a parent's skills and information, putting parents in a better position to assist their children in school-related activities at home (Almajdalawi & Atoum, 2019). Through interaction with teachers, parents learn about a school's academic, social and behavioural expectations for their children, and these can be encouraged by the parents at home (Hill & Taylor, 2004). The opposite can be very true in an instance where parents are not involving themselves in the activities of the school.

Another aspect is that, QECE programs are expected, among other things, to prepare the individual child for basic education. Giving this backdrop, parents' involvement and their responsibility

therefore becomes a crucial component in the preparation of the individual for the basic education (Correia & Marques-Pinto, 2016). By this, parents prepare their children for school by providing them with the necessary skills during the early years for a possible, continuation from schools. Parents are therefore able to influence the educational programs and practices considered best for their children (Hilado, Kallemeyn & Phillips, 2013) and a growing body of research has indicated the positive impact parental involvement in the activities of the school of their children can have on the children's brain development (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000; Kirp, 2007; Urdang, 2008), School readiness (Kirp, 2007; Ritchie & Willer, 2008), and their overall early development. (Olds, Sadler, & Kitzman, 2007). The teacher's interaction, therefore is expected to be extended to parents due to the positive benefits it can have on the optimal development of the children.

To Howes and colleagues (2008), the parent's personal ability to interact effectively with teachers contributes to achieving QECE provision. It has been established that when parents get involved in the education of their children and therefore create a cordial relationship between them and teachers such that they are able to communicate and share ideas about the learner, it leads to improvement for the learner (Carl, 2007). Children whose parents participate in activities in the school of the child have improved academic outcomes (eg. mathematics) in the school (Powell, et al., 2010). Success in children's academic and language skills as well as social competence, through research, is associated with positive parental school involvement (Hill, 2001; Hill & Craft, 2003). Research has also shown that children whose parents involve themselves in the school activities of their children and interact positively with the teachers earn better grades, are more likely to graduate and have higher rate of enrolment for post-secondary education (Henderson et al. 2007, cited in Smith, 2014).

Hall et al. (2005) and Swick (2006) point out that cordial relationship between parents and the early childhood centre improved emotional development of the child. They therefore stress the importance of parental involvement in the provision of quality ECE. Thus, the extent to which a parent is involved in the activities of a school of the child; and how often interaction goes on between the home and the school also increases the parent's skills and information. This puts parents in a better position to assist their children in school related activities at home (Morabito, Carosin & Vandenbroeck, 2017). Through parental involvement in the activities of the school, they get to know of the school's expectations for the child, in terms of academic, social and behavioural; and this is encouraged to be enforced by the parents at home (Hill & Taylor, 2004). Due to the importance of interaction between the school and the home and the need for parents to be actively involved in the education of their young children, a Family Engagement in Education Act has been established in the Illinois, USA in 2011 to fully integrate parents into the provision of their young children's education (Hilado et aI., 2013). The aim of the study was to establish the role of parents in ensuring quality early childhood education provision of their children.

Thus, establishing policies that spell out what parents are supposed to do to foster relationship between them and the school and encouraging them to be responsible cannot be over emphasized. Parental involvement in the school activities expose them to what they are expected to do, how they are to do it and the benefits that are likely to accrue from their active involvement. Conducting research in this all-important area should be the focus of researchers.

Given the arguments advanced already about the need for parental involvement in the provision of education for their children, one would have expected parents to appreciate this important role of theirs and therefore actively involve themselves in the provision of education for their children. This however didn't appear to be the case, particularly within the Effutu Municipality. The problem is that, the researcher's interaction with some teachers of the early grade level, and personal observation during internship supervision in other areas of the country seem to suggest that parent don't involve themselves in the education of their children, especially in the school.

Additionally, studies available to the researcher suggest a paucity of research in this area. More importantly, the concentration of those researches is on parental school involvement at the primary school and beyond and not at the early childhood level. Perhaps, children at the early childhood centres are only starting and so concentration should be giving to those who are advanced on the educational ladder. It is on these premises that this study is purported to augment the paucity of literature on parental school involvement, particularly at the early childhood level, and to document the extent to which parents are involving themselves or otherwise in the education of their children. The study is equally aimed at providing evidence, through research, to establish the level of parental involvement in the education of the children in the school.

Research question
The following research questions were formulated to guide the study:
1.   How does parental involvement bring about quality ECE provision?
2.   What are the challenges confronting parents in the discharge of their duties?

METHODOLOGY

The design
The interpretivist paradigm which "assumes a relativist ontology (there are multiple realities), a subjectivist epistemology (researcher and respondent co-create understandings), and a naturalistic (in the natural world) set of methodological procedures" (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008; p. 32) is espoused in this study. Interpretivism underpins qualitative research. Qualitative researchers contend that "reality is socially constructed" (Mertens, 2005; p.12) and context-bound (Silverman, 2001) as such, there can be multiple realities (Guba, 1990, cited in Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

Interpretive paradigm was useful for studying the participants in detail and it also made it possible to understand the context or setting in which the participants spoke (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). Also, the voices of participants were directly heard and therefore, the knowledge produced was specified for direct application to specific local situations and the individuals (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

The research design employed in this was ethnography which studies actions, social interactions and perceptions within groups, organisations, and communities. With the current study aiming at getting rich and complete insights into participants views and actions to address a range of research

questions as they apply to them, the choice of this design was appropriate. It enabled the researcher to generate rich and detailed information about how parental involvement bring about quality ECE provision, what parents are expected to do and the challenges confronting them in the discharge of their duties as parents (Reeves, Kuper & Hodges, 2008).

Population and Sampling procedures
The study was conducted in Effutu Municipality in the Central Region of Ghana. The municipality as zoned under four cardinal points. A circuit was selected from each point and two schools were selected from each circuit. The techniques for sampling participants for this study included simple random, convenience and purposive sampling. Purposive sampling was deliberately used by the researcher in selecting participants for the study because it was preconceived that the participants had some information about the problem under investigation (Gay & Airasian, 2000). The justification for the use of this procedure was based on the fact that the participants were selected based on their anticipated experience with the phenomenon to provide the needed information (Creswell & Plano Clark (2007).

As argued earlier, the researcher was of the opinion that QECE could be provided through the combined efforts of stakeholders such as headteachers, teachers and parents. As such, issues and solutions to the problems associated with providing quality ECE can be better addressed from their perspectives. In view of this, purposive sampling technique was used in this study to select participants who had and could provide important information that answered the study's research questions (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). This procedure was used to identify and select the level of education for the study (i. e. ECE) and the major stakeholders for ECE provision (parent, teachers and headteachers).

Again, simple random sampling which is a method of sampling in which each unit (e.g., persons, cases) in the accessible population has the same likelihood of being selected and selection of an individual does not in way affect the selection of another was used to select the schools for the study (Gay & Airasian, 2000). With this technique, a school was selected from each circuit and one of the ECE teachers was selected from each school. The researcher indicates that the use of the simple random sampling enabled the study to obtain a representative sample across the whole municipality for this study (Teddlie & Yu, 2007).

Convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling technique where participants are selected due to their convenient, availability and proximity to the researcher (Gay & Airasian, 2000). This procedure was used to select two parents from each of the schools, as they brought their children to school. It is important to mention that the convenience sampling technique was employed to select parents after they have been purposively identified as having information about the phenomenon under investigation. The total number of participants for the study (sample size), was 14, consisting of four headteachers, four ECE teachers and six parents. It is important to note that instead of the eight parents to be selected from the four schools, two of the parents declined their participation, at the 11th hour, so they were not included in the study. Thus, the sample size 14 instead of 16.

The decision to select eight parents for the study as against four headteachers and four teachers stems from the fact that the study focused mainly on parents, yet there are other players (teachers and headteachers) who together with the parents ensure ECE provision. In view of this, the views from the none parents could be used to corroborate and or contradict what the parents would say. The researcher agrees with Onwuegbuzie and Collins (2007, citing Sandelowski, 1995) and indicates that the sample size for the qualitative data was not so small to leave out some important information from participants due to the smaller number. Moreover, the participants selected for the interview arguably, included the key stakeholders as far as providing ECE in Ghana is concerned.

Instruments for data collection and data collection procedures
The approach of data collection for the study was focus group interview. This approach was used by the researcher to deeply probe into the parental involvement in the ECE provision. The semi-structured interview, which facilitated the focus group discussion, was based on the main research questions formulated for the study and it was intended to elicited views and opinions from the participants. The focus group interview created opportunity for the participants to freely express their views regarding the phenomenon under study and the semi-structured nature allowed the interviewer some leeway to ask further questions in the course of the interview in reaction to what were considered as significant response (Bryman, 2008). The use of focus group interview for this study is argued to be appropriate because it allowed the participants to discuss their deeper thoughts about a phenomenon (Cohen et al., 2011). Again, focus group interview offered the researcher the opportunity to probe for clarification and detailed information from the participants (Bryman, 2008).

With the ethnographic design employed for the study which aimed at unravelling the actions, social interactions and the perceptions regarding how parents were involving themselves in the education of their early childhood learners and the focus group data collection procedure, four social groups were created (i.e the headteachers group, the teachers, parents who were fluent in the English language and those used the local dialect). These groupings were considered appropriate for convenience sake. Arguably, members of these groups had similar work schedules and characteristics so they were giving the opportunity to meet together initially to agree on how they were going to subsequently meet for the focus group interview.

The interview data were collected in such a way not to interfere with the participants normal work schedules. Consequently, participants were asked to suggest convenient dates and times for the data collection. This arrangement was adhered to by both the researcher and the participants. The purpose of the study was announced to the participants at the commencement of every interview session by the researcher. This was followed by a brief description of the ethical considerations, in the form of confidentiality, anonymity, and consent for the research. The researcher laid emphasis on the fact that the respondents' participation in the study was purely voluntary. As such, they could withdraw from the study any time they so wished and the fact that the interview session was going to be recorded. Each participant was then given the consent form and the participant information sheet and they signed the consent form after they had given their consent to participate in the study. At the end of every interview session, the researcher played the audio-recorded

interview to the participants and where a participant was not ready to listen to the recorded interview due to limited time, another date was arranged for that. Alternatively, where a participant was not satisfied after listening to the audio, the researcher edited the voice as directed by the participant.

Although the interview was conducted in English, where a participant did not understand or could not express himself/herself well using the English language, the interview was done in a local dialect Fanti. Three of the interviews were conducted in Fanti. Is it important to note that there was no need for an interpreter during the focus group sessions because the researcher understood the Fanti dialect. Each social group had a minimum interaction of four sessions/times with the researcher and each interview session took about 30 minutes.

To be able to carefully observe and take note of certain contextual elements that could happen in the course of the focus group discussion, as required in ethnography, the researcher kept field notes. This permitted the researcher to secure some information that may be forgotten or distorted in the course of data collection (Bryman, 2004). These notes kept track of opinions expressed by participants during the interview sessions.

Data analysis and interpretation
The data analysis included immersing myself in the data to become familiar with it, generating patterns and themes, identifying various relationships between the data, making meaning from the codes and themes generated, reviewing the various relationships identified between the data and writing them up (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis which provides a technique for breaking up text to unearth the themes salient in them was used for the qualitative data analysis. This was done in conjunction with content analysis, which looked for similarities and differences that enabled the researcher to generate themes through reading and re-reading of transcripts.

Presentation and Discussion of Findings
The data presented in this study were guided by the formulated research questions restated as: How does parental involvement bring about quality ECE provision? and What are the challenges confronting parents in the discharge of their duties? The data consisted of the translation and transcription of participants' interviews. In order to respect the confidentiality and anonymity of respondents, numbers have been used for each of the respondents. In all, 14 interviews were transcribed but, as explained earlier, 3 were translated before they were transcribed. The identification of participants is made up of Arabic numerals and English alphabets. The English alphabet which is capital (**R**) refers to respondent. The Arabic numeral (1, 3,5,6, etc.) refers to the position of the respondent and the small letter(s) represent the designation of the respondent (whether a parent teacher or headteacher) so for example, a participant with the label (**R5t**) means that participant was fifth on the row with a designation as a teacher.

RQ 1: How does parental involvement/responsibility bring about quality ECE provision?

The education of children is thought of to be the responsibility of both the school and the home so through interaction with the school, there will be free flow of information between the school and

the home. However, where there is a conflict, the communication gap will be blocked so there will not be free flow of information between and among the parties (e.g. teachers and parents). As argued earlier, parental involvement and how responsible they are to a very large extent determines the quality an ECE provision can be. With respect to how responsible parents were participants' comments regarding parental responsibility in QECE provision are presented below. One respondent said that:

I have to provide food and books for my child. ...if a child has no books, the child will not able to learn in class .... Again, if a child comes to school hungry without been fed, the child will not be able to learn with a sound mind (**R1p**).

Another participant said:
parents should be ready to *buy the books and other things for their children, some of the parents think it is free education and therefore the government must supply everything* (**R4t**)

Arguably, a child's education is the responsibility of both his/her home and school and should be facilitated by a free flow of information between these parties. A teacher argued:
lf for example, parents are able to interact with teachers and through the interaction provide we *the teachers in the school with information on what goes on in the house ... then it will promote quality education for the child.* (**R7t**).

Another parent also expanded on this:
the interaction between the teacher and the children and the teacher and parents will help the teacher to know if the child or the parent is facing any problem. (**R12p**)

Additionally, participants Identified parental involvement as important for building a connection and mutual understanding between the school and the home. For example, **R10ht** pointed out that:
if parents involve themselves, there will be free flow of information and where there are challenges, we can quickly come together and be able to resolve them.

A teacher commented on the need for parents to bring their children to school:
... if you are to bring your child to school every morning, it will at least help you to have a *rapport with the teachers ... At times, you the parent may also have issues or problems about the child at home and* so *when that tete-a-tete is given,* we *have* a *holistic idea about the pupils* we *are handling and then* we *know where and how to help.* (**R5t**)

A parent revealed that:
through sending my *child to school ... the teachers were able to prompt* me *on some issues concerning the child the teachers thought will not help the child. And when it happens like that,* we *both try to find* a *solution to the problems concerning the child.* (**R14t**)

Another parent added, similarly, that:
this relationship between teachers and parent help you the parent to get

to know and ask about what is going on in the school about your child. (**R2p**)

Conflict, however, can inhibit interaction between school and home. According to **R8ht**:
when misunderstanding arises *and it* is *not solved properly, all the relationship will cut by itself, ... the communication gap will be closed and when there* is ... a *problem with the child, who will you talk to because you are at war with the parents?*

The responses suggest that parental responsibility in QECE provision is vital. If a parent does not provide food, for example, his/her child's empty stomach will make the child absentminded in class. If the child cannot write, because he/she does not have the writing materials, then he/she may be inactive in class. These responses advocate positive involvement between parents and teachers as a source of mutual understanding between those parties (Powell et al., 2010). By coming together, as argued, they will be able to share ideas and explain issues or differences, and this will, in turn, further develop their connection. Additionally, parental involvement through their rapport between them and the school enables parents to advise teachers about how they want their child to be trained (Howes et al., 2008). As **R3p** asserted, the involvement creates *"...a platform for us the parents to bring our minds on board concerning how* we *think our children should be brought up".*

Implicit in the responses is the view that parents will have satisfaction from knowing what is going on in the school and about their children's performances through interaction with the teachers. **R2p** captures this particularly well:
Through the interaction with the teachers, I get to know the truth of what is happening and this gives me *satisfaction to be rest assured that the child is receiving the quality of education I intend for her.*

This kind of information can bring parents joy, if their children are performing satisfactorily, from knowing that their efforts as parents are not in vain. On the other hand, if parents find out that their children are not doing well, this may prompt them to take steps to help their children to improve their academic performance and general development. Parents have been identified as the first and continuing educators for their children. Consequently, schools and homes must interact through every avenue possible, whether using orientation sections or simply by meeting when children are brought to school in the morning. Through this involvement, parents learn the role they should fulfil in their children's education. Conflict and misunderstandings between the school and home can be reduced and a good rapport produced for the benefit of the child.

As argued earlier, parental involvement and how responsible they are, to a very large extent, determine the quality an ECE provision can be (Li, Li, Devlieghere & Vandenbroeck, 2020; Krieg & Curtis, 2017). The reason is that if parents know what to do and they are committed to doing it, for example, sending their children to school daily and buying the necessary materials for their children, it will make the children happy at school and possibly encourage them to participate in whatever activity that goes on in the school (Hill & Taylor, 2004).

The impression from the responses is that, the role of the parent in QECE provision cannot be over

emphasised because the children go to school from home. Therefore, if the parent does not provide food, for example, for the child and the child goes to school on an empty stomach, it will lead to the child being absent minded in class. Also, if the child is not able to write while others are writing because he/she does not have the writing materials, then the child may be inactive in class. Moreover, if parents are able to visit the school of their children and ask of their performance, it will help the parents to know what they can do and therefore plan what should be done for their children (Early et al., 2007; Greenway, 2011). In effect, all these will add up to the quality of the provision (Sylva et al., 2011)

Participants' responses seemed to suggest that parents' involvement informs them about school activities and about their children's academic performance and social involvement. Furthermore, it has been established that, when parents involve themselves with teachers such that they are able to communicate and share ideas about the learner, it leads to improvement for the child (Carl, 2007). Perhaps, through this involvement, parents are informed about the strengths or weakness of their children (Laere, Houtte & Vandenbroeck, 2018), which can then be addressed further at home, ensuring continuity between their children's work at school and at home.

The findings further suggest that the import of the parent in QECE provision cannot be overemphasized because children go to school from their homes (Hill & Taylor, 2004). Thus, parents are considered an integral part of QECE provision on the basis that a child's education is developed in both home and school life (Greenway, 2011). Reggio Emilia educators emphasise that schools should have a welcome area in which teachers interact with parents when they bring their children in the morning or pick them up at the end of the school day (Edwards et al., 1998). Through this interaction, teachers can show parents notes or photos of the children's activities for that day.

RQ 2: What are the challenges preventing parents from performing their functions?

The importance of parental involvement and their responsibility in the provision of QECE for their children has been indisputably established. Nonetheless, parents are not living up their responsibilities (e. g. providing for their children and interacting with the school of their children), according to the findings from this study. As to why there were not living up to their responsibilities, some of the participants (teachers and headteachers) had these to say:
I don't know whether it is out of poverty or ignorance, the parents in this area don't provide proper food and uniforms for their children (**R9t**)
In our area, most at times when you ask the parents to buy something, they are not ready to do it... they are rather interested in funerals and those kind of things (**R6t**)

the parents think education it is free. It is free education so everything is free. If you ask the child to go and buy the books, the child will go and come back to tell you my mother said that I should come and tell you she is not around. (**R8ht**)

parents of these children are not coming up with the support they have to give the children and they don't have time for their own children. (**R11ht**)

It can be gathered from the responses that some parents are not living up to their responsibilities and so the schools are not getting the support of the parents in providing the ECE that is needed for the learners. From these responses, it can be inferred and argued that parents are not being responsible and ready to help the children. It can equally be argued that parents are not irresponsible as such but it is because some of them think the government is supposed to provide and that is why they sit back waiting for the government to provide.

When the views of the parents were sought as to whether they had any challenges involving themselves in the education of their children, some of them had these to say:

*I don't work around. My workplace is far from where I live so by the time I come home, I am already tired. (**R2p**)*

*Me, I didn't go to school so I don't know anything about what the children I learning so I ask the elder siblings of the younger one to help him when they come home. It is only the home work I am not able to help them but I try to buy the things they need for school for them. (**R13p**)*

*I have to pay attention to those who are at the upper class and JHS. I think that is more important so that by the time she gets to the JHS she will also get the support the elder ones are getting. (**R12p**)*

*I am a market woman so I have to leave home very early in the morning and by the time I come back, am already tired so I go to bed in no time. (**R1p**)*

*I have seen that the children at the kindergarten don't learn much. They do play and singing but the one at the Senior High school is preparing for the University so I have to support so that when he grows up, he can give support to this one who is now starting school. (**R3p**)*

Responses of the parents seem to be corroborated by that of the teachers and headteachers, pointing to the fact that there are challenges parents face in involving themselves in the education of their children and in providing the necessary support for their children's education. The challenges of these parents appear to be different one from another and they centre on lack of education of the parents themselves, the kind of work they do and distance from work resorting to tiredness after work, and seemingly prioritizing the education of those at the higher level at the expense of those at the early childhood level.

Arguably, if attention is paid to those at the upper and JHS levels leaving those at the early childhood level which is the foundational stage, the foundation is likely to be weak in terms of all that the child will learn and the child can encounter more difficulty by the time he/she gets to the upper class. One would have expected that the responses of the parents would have been as expressed by a respondent (**R14p**).

As for me, I don't have any challenge. I help my children. Although I am not educated, I have contracted a teacher who teaches my children when they come home. I make sure I have time for them. Their education is very important to me. **(R14)**

Perhaps, participant **(R14)** has come to terms with the fact that the uneducated situation will not prevent her from giving the needed assistance and involving herself in the education of her children. Going to the extent of contracting somebody to teach the children at home quite clearly indicates the commitment of this parent to the education of her children, including the one at the early childhood level. Arguably, this parent might have money to support her wishes unlike the other parents who might not have been that fortunate. Nevertheless, it should also be pointed out that much as it is good to work so as to feed the children and provide for their education, if time is not made for the children, these efforts can be fruitless.

Whatever be the case, it is the quality of the provision and for that matter, the children who suffer the consequence (UNESCO, 2015). This is because it takes the full complement of the home and the school to provide quality ECE so if parents send their children away pretending they are not available, parents don't have time to provide personal care for their children and what not, then the provision will be done from one source (the school) and this has the potency of affecting the quality of the delivery (Laere, Houtte & Vandenbroeck, 2018; Knobloch & Whittington, 2002).

Justification for the study
This research has been able to establish a documentary evidence of the level of parental involvement of their children's education at the early grade. It has been established through this study that a parent's educational background may not necessarily be a barrier to him/her being actively involved in the provision of his/her children's education. Thus, reference can be made to this document when considering parental involvement, particularly in the Effutu Municipality. The ethnographic research design employed in the study is also worthy of mention, as reference can be made to it in further researches.

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded from the study that parental engagement plays a key role in determining the quality of an ECE provision. If parents commit themselves to supporting their children's education, it can increase their children's happiness at school and possibly encourage them to participate in school activities. On the other hand, the children can be absentminded in class and in school if they are hungry. Without books to write in, they may be inactive in class. If parents are able to visit their children's schools and ask about their children's performances, they can better gauge and plan how to support their children. These elements all impact on the quality of ECE provision. Nevertheless, the parents were faced with challenges hindering and potentially preventing them from living up to their expectation as parents. Those this study has been able to establish are lack of education on the part of the parents and wrong prioritization of their children's education. The parents were equally constrained financially.

Recommendations

The findings of the study have warranted these recommendations that, parents, as a matter of urgency, should prioritize and provide for all the physiological needs of their children to enable the children to feel satisfied and to concentrate on their studies whilst at school. They should make it a habit to escort their children to school and to pick them up after school. This will enable the parents to have contact with teachers in the course of these undertakings. Moreover, parents should visit their children's schools occasionally and question anything they do not understand and need explanation about their children's ECE provision. They should accept all invitations from their children's schools and take part in activities like PTA meetings and open days organized by the schools. Further, they should have time for their children and be interested in their education. Parents should engage their children in conversations about their school day when the children come home and assist and/or supervise their children while they do their homework (if any has been given). Above all, parents should have re-orientation of their perception and attitude towards early childhood education and consider it to be a critical stage in their children's educational ladder and subsequent general development as human beings.

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