

Chapter 4

Parental involvement across ages and societies

Although many systemic programs are relatively new, as a concept, parent involvement has a long history starting from prehistorical times. It is also uncommon to see many related works providing information about parent involvement and its history in different geographies than the western parts. This chapter details the development of parenting and parental involvement in children's development and learning. It takes a historical route to trace through various global civilizations how parenting and parental involvement as both roles and responsibilities have changed over time. It traces parenting and parental involvements from the Greco-Roman era, ancient Egyptian parenting, Confucius-influenced Asian parenting, and the sub-Saharan experiences to modern-day approaches to parenting across countries and cultures.

As a concept, parental involvement is as old as humankind (Berger, 1991). Since prehistorical times, parents are reported to have been closely and distantly involved in their children's education and development (ibid). During this time, parents taught children survival skills such as observance of societal rules and regulations, gathering wild food, and hunting (Gezani, 2009). During the Greco-Roman era, regulations were put in place to govern how children were taught to read, write, argue, fight, and swim. Children were considered to be the future, hence must be handled with care and be equipped with all necessary socio-cultural and military skills (Berger, 1991). Parents had the right to choose schools, sessions, and specific lessons they wanted their children to learn (Hiatt-Michael, 2012; Gezani, 2009). During this time, the main argument among the then scholars was 'who is a child's first teacher between a mother and father' (Hiatt-Michael, 2012).

Among the ancient Egyptians, parental involvement was part of the then 'school curriculum' (Hiatt-Michael, 2012). Children were to learn such skills as farming, hunting, and military to fit into the societal norms and culture (Gezani, 2009). Parents could regularly visit learning areas – which could be literary equated to nowadays' schools, to see 'for themselves' how their children were learning (ibid). However, parents had no power over

what and how children were learning school management, or educational policies and legislation. In ancient China, parental involvement took various forms including school visits, physical communication with teachers, and payment of school fees for their children (Zhao & Yu, 2016). Guided by Confucian pragmatism, Chinese parents are known as highly involved figures or tiger parents who prioritize children's education and academic success beyond anything else (Li & Qiu, 2018). Their involvements are said to be the result of deeply rooted beliefs in filial piety, collective culture, and values attached to education (Li & Qiu, 2018; Zhao & Yu, 2016).



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In the sub-Saharan region, while parental involvement is one of the least documented research areas and little is known about it, nevertheless, available reports indicate that parents have been involved in their children's learning and development over time immemorial (Ndijuye & Tandika, 2022a). Generally, while this region is quite large and diverse socio-economically and culturally, still has some common features which can be termed 'typical African'. One of them is how parents are involved in their children's learning and development (Ndijuye & Tandika, 2022b). The ancient sub-Saharan children received an education that would enable them

to cope and master their environment – survival education (Ndijuye & Tandika, 2022a).

These skills were provided by parents in collaboration with selected community members to prepare children for their future roles as adults (Ndijuye, 2017). However, there was no written curriculum nor educational policies and guidelines to guide the process. Colonial sub-Saharan was characterized by the imposition of formal education which solely did not intend to serve the interests of the local community, but rather of the colonial master. As such, parental involvement was rather minimal or non-existent (Mtahabwa, 2011). The post-colonial sub-Saharan experienced a massive expansion of education and formulation of new educational policies and guidelines which included more involvement of parents (Mtahabwa, 2011; Nikiema, 2011). However, their involvements varied across countries, rural-urban divides, and even the gender of the child (Tefera, Admas & Mulatie, 2015; SACMEQ, 2020).

The modern parental involvement in ECEC while rooted in ancient times, took its current shape at the beginning of the 20th century in the United States of America when educational centers were mostly within college or suburban towns. Schools welcomed primarily stay-at-home mothers to serve as teaching assistants or paraprofessionals in the classrooms and take physical care of the facility (Gestwicki, 2007). However, parental involvement gained momentum across the United States and all over the world when it became a prerequisite requirement for program funding and an integral part of programs (Darling-Hammond & Noguera, 2007). A major milestone in US parental involvement was in 2002 when the bill No Child is Left Behind was signed into law (Domina, 2005). Specific legislation of this law required schools to establish specific parental involvement programs and develop written policies on how to engage parents (Dee & Jacob, 2011).

In other Western contexts, parental involvement gained special empirical and policy attention in the early 1960s in the United Kingdom with its reports-based approach (Caroll-Meehan, 2021), Germany which approached it with ‘parental cooperation or Erziehungs- und Bildungspartnerschaft’ (Knör, 2021). In the UK, various governmental reports on parental involvement have been formed and decisions have been made based on these reports. These reports range from the 1967 Plowden which established that ‘all schools should have a program for contact with children’s homes’ to the most recent 2016 white paper report on educational excellence everywhere which technically established that every British parent has a stake

in the quality of the education system and schools; because every parent wants the best for their child. However, parents have not always been at the heart of the system, and they have not always had the information they need to challenge it.

In Germany, the constitution, or the Social Code – Services for Children and Young People (Sozialgesetzbuch, SGB VIII – Kinder- und Jugendhilfe) has explicitly provided the legal framework for parental involvement. It is part of the teacher education and school curriculum in all of the German states (Knör, 2021). However, while there is some increasing interest in the effective strategies, practical approaches, and implications of parental involvement on children's learning and development, still there is limited empirical evidence so far carried out from Germany. This leads to most of the policy and practical decisions being made based on international studies, such as the Head Start Project (Friedrich, 2011; Knör, 2021).

Among specific disadvantaged groups such as immigrants and refugees, available evidence has consistently singled them out as the most misunderstood and less involved than any other single group regardless of where they happen to be (Antony-Newman, 2019; Dee & Jacob, 2011). In the Western world where there is reportedly the largest group of immigrants, studies about the involvement of parents from this group started to emerge as early as the 1970s (Antony-Newman, 2019). Most of these studies focused on the involvement of immigrant parents from other Western countries and the former USSR (Klein, 2008; Theodorou, 2008), Latino (Jeynes, 2017), and to a lesser extent from Asia especially Chinese and Indian parents (Dyson, 2001). One notable observation on studies of immigrant parental involvement is their predominant focus on maternal involvement than any other group of adults (Andrews 2013; Plunkett et al. 2009; Sibley & Dearing 2014).

In the global south, there were drastic changes in parental involvement in sub-Saharan Africa following the 1990s liberalization policies. During this time, the provision of education was by both public and private sectors – relatively rich parents sent their children to better-resourced private schools, while children from poor households were enrolled in under-resourced public schools (Robledo & Gove, 2019; UIS, 2020). In South Africa for instance, the post-apartheid education policy considered parental involvement as one of the cornerstones for children's holistic development (Gezani, 2009). The 1995 Education and Training in democratic South Africa White Paper (ibid) instructed schools to not only involve parents

but to regularly consult them on various matters about their children's development and learning (Tefera, et al., 2015).

