

Chapter 1

Introduction

The main subject of this work is parent involvement in early childhood years. It is attempted to revisit the latest discussions on parent involvement across different contexts including several parts of the world. There needs to be an update on the latest developments and perspectives on this topic as it is a dynamic and evolving concept like most concepts used in social and educational sciences. However, there is a lack of resources to address this topic with a comprehensive view wrapped up and covered in a thorough work. Mainly, other books have provided some practices from different contexts. But we must go beyond presenting mini and unrelated studies on the topic and provide a global perspective on parent involvement with an updated and contemporary approach and redefined concepts to raise further debates and contribute to future research and practices. Therefore, it is critical to give an overview of the latest studies with an updated lens from the expert authors in the field. Global perspectives do not only mean Anglo-Saxon perspectives and practices but provide contextual evidence and approaches from different continents and relevant educational systems. Lately, Nordic perspectives in early childhood education have received attention from the research community and other stakeholders in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). Therefore, this monograph extends the coverage of the topic with special emphasis on the Norwegian context to provide detailed information to the audience. For example, the authors provide information about the historical and current parent involvement practices in Norway. Similarly, in many works related to this topic, several contexts have been underestimated by the authors, including African and Middle Eastern or Far Eastern geographies. However, the authors try to cover the studies and development from these areas as well.

Consistent with the aforementioned objectives, there is a clear need to update the knowledge and information about the overview of parental involvement in ECEC as it has not been done for over a decade. To fill this gap and address the need to be contextual, it is attempted to deliver the updated literature review on the subject and provide a multidimensional perspective across different contexts, cultures, and ages with an extensive

focus on the Norwegian context. This monograph contributes to the existing literature also by attempting to redefine the concepts according to contemporary usage enlightened by the latest research and practice in the field. This will help the further studies become more conscience and on target as thorough up-to-date thorough definitions not only functions as guidance but also serve the awareness of research community

Definition of key terms

It is important to shed light on the key terms and how they have been defined in the related literature of any subject. As one of the aims of this scholarly work is to diminish the ambiguities, particularly in the usage of the terms and concepts, it is of great significance to start the introduction with the definitions. As such the phenomenon of parental involvement in education could be understood without paving the way for academic confusion or ambiguity. In addition to that, it is an attempt to give a clear understanding of the key terms since they could be used with different meanings in other sectors than early childhood education.

Parenting

Although parenting has been a practice since the existence of human beings, it has been evolved as other social concepts across different contexts and lately described and outlined by researchers. Several studies have defined parenting as the rearing of children by providing them with the care, love, and guidance they require to survive and thrive (Arafat, et al., 2020; Kahraman, Yilmaz Irmak & Basokcu, 2017). While some early years education scholars consider parenting as ‘a general child-rearing pattern that characterizes parents’ behaviors toward their child’ (Sahithya, Manohari, Vijaya, 2019), others regard it as ‘the patterns of a child’s training moulded by the normative interaction of parents and how they respond to child’s performance’ (Arafat, et al., 2020). Although parenting is predominantly considered to be a socio-cultural phenomenon influenced and shaped by the chronosystem, the socio-economic status of the family, and the values and culture of the surrounding community, there is a solid consensus among ECEC scholars and practitioners on the significant role of parents in children’s lives. As such, researchers have developed four main types

of parenting styles namely: authoritative, neglectful, authoritarian, and permissive (Arafat, et al., 20; Kahraman, et al., 2017).

In this monograph, “Parenting is considered as the ability and willingness of an adult to give necessary support to a child to develop and thrive physically, emotionally, socially, and intellectually”. Per se, responsible parenting has an important role that begins from conception to adulthood and is determined by various factors ranging from biological to policy levels. In this scholarly work, we consider parenting to include a *constellation of attitudes towards the child that parent(s) have to communicate to the child to create an emotional climate in which their (parents’) behaviors are expressed and sometimes, conveyed.*

Parental involvement

The social concepts that are used to depict any social dynamic are subject to have different meanings across contexts and cultures. Consistent with that notion, ‘parental involvement’ is not consistently and similarly defined, as well. Some authors and researchers have described it as practices that represent different parental behaviors; others considered it narrowly by considering parental practices such as parental aspirations of and expectations towards their child’s academic achievement (Flores Martin, 2022; Ndijuye & Tandika, 2022a) while others have seen it as a form of parental communication with their children about school-related behaviors (Kim, 2022). However, some researchers consider it in a broader sense including parental participation in school activities, their communications with school authorities and teachers about their children’s development, and how, when, and why they set rules at home that are educationally and developmentally productive (Tekin, 2011).

Another aspect of parent involvement is being multidimensional as asserted by several researchers. They claimed in their studies that involvement is a multidimensional construct that consists of parental behaviors, expectations, and beliefs on children’s education at home and in school (Boonk, et al., 2018; Epstein & Boone, 2022; Kim, 2020; Tekin, 2011). As seen, there are mainly two domains of practicing parental involvement home- and school or education-related in a broader context. These constructs may include parental support for children’s learning at home such as involvement and monitoring of schoolwork and visiting museums which aims at improving children’s academic performance and developing social

relationship skills (Kim, 2022). According to this view, when parents are involved in school-based activities such as regular communication with teachers and attendance at school-organized events could maximize their understanding of children's performance in school and overall development (Epstein & Boone, 2022). So, the basic aim is always to improve the child's life concerning education and development. Both areas have, of course, different domains as will be discussed in this monograph further in detail.

One of the main objectives of this monograph is to attempt to provide a contemporary and comprehensive definition of the terms when required. Hence, in this monograph, parental involvement is broadly defined as

“Participation of parents in children’s lives in school where they (parents) demonstrate behaviors and actions that represent involvement in their child’s education such as involvement with the school, effective communication with their children, and active involvement in children’s educational activities at home. Parental involvement in the cognitive-intellectual aspect is shown as parents demonstrate and promote their children’s understandings and behaviors which foster children’s development and mastery of knowledge, skills, and attitudes. It ranges from helping with homework to participation in educational events and experiences taking place outside of the school. Personal involvement of parents should also refer to realizing and knowing about, and closely following up almost everything going on with the child in school and at home and any other milieu that has impact on the child’s learning and development.”

Parental engagement

It is seen that “parental engagement” as a concept, has also been used widely in the related literature. Of course, there have been several attempts to identify this concept. For example, Goodall and Montgomery (2014) define parental engagement as ‘parents’ engagement in their children’s learning at home, at school, and in the wider community’. It involves a discussion between parents, practitioners, schools, and other stakeholders by focusing on how families can build on what they already do to support their children’s learning and development by providing a highly needed supportive home learning environment. Furthermore, Schneider and Arnot (2018) defined parental engagement as a process that reflects a two-way

interaction between school and home in fostering a mutual exchange of values and knowledge. This process should be characterized by placing more emphasis on reciprocity, empowerment, empathy, change, and opportunities for both parents and the school (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014; Schneider & Arnot, 2018).

We attempt to reduce the ambiguity of using the related terms in this monograph. Hereby, we provide a clear and contemporary definition of it.

“Parental engagement refers to the activities and efforts in a context where educators enter a community to create with parents a shared school landscape in which their (teachers and parents’) shared knowledge and values inform decision making and determination of agendas. Ultimately, they co-work to achieve the intended outcomes of their efforts for children, families, the community, and the school”.

This definition sets a clear demarcation of whether parents are involved in their children’s education or engaged in their learning and development.

Parental Cooperation

As one of the aims of this monograph is to review the literature and practice across different contexts in extension to the Nordic and particularly Norwegian context, it is critical to look at the relevant terminology employed by them. Hence, in Norway and similarly in Denmark, a different concept, namely parental cooperation (foreldresamarbeid) has been in use to address what is generally covered by parental involvement in children’s early years. In such a conceptualization, home, and early childhood/ school settings are in cooperation with the parents and other guardians in children’s development and well-being within the institutions where they participate the most (Rasmussen, 1985). This understanding of engagement with parents is utilized in Norwegian steering documents through the concepts of collaboration and understanding (Sadownik & Skoglund, 2021). Parental cooperation can come in different forms and levels (individual and institutional) and has a number of elements that influence parental cooperation:

- Staff backgrounds
- Types of institutions
- Parents’ backgrounds
- Children’s backgrounds

- Societal ideologies
- Pedagogical practices
(Rasmussen, 1985, p. 21)

The Norwegian framework plan for kindergartens uses *foreldresamarbeid* cooperation between home in kindergarten when engagement and involvement with parents are discussed (UDIR, 2017). In this monograph, parental involvement is used concurrently with parental engagements and cooperation in recognition that different contexts utilize various terminologies to refer to a similar concept. At this point, it is important to mention that there is particular attention to parental involvement in the Norwegian context to shed light on the situation where this monograph was produced.

Rationale for parent involvement in ECEC

This section introduces the rationale of parental involvement in early childhood education and care (ECEC) settings across contexts, cultures, and countries. It delineates the existing rationale of parental involvement given their traditional role of children's first teachers with funds of knowledge to be passed to the next generation, the compensatory and complementary role of home contexts whenever there are deficits caused by poor quality school or the vice versa in improving learning attainments. Further, this section argues that in some contexts, parental involvement is part of the program or a compulsory requirement for program funding. In the ECEC settings, parental involvement is regarded as one of the basic children's and human rights. Also, the section argues that the parental involvement is one of the basic requirements by most of the ECEC policies which is linked to education for sustainability.

One of the rationales for investing in early childhood education and care is to adequately prepare children for formal schooling and eventual holistic child development (Black et al., 2017; UNESCO, 2007). In recent years, parental involvement in children's development and learning has increasingly gained the attention of researchers, policymakers, and practitioners (Hornby & Blackwell, 2018; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). This is because parents, as children's first teachers, should be closely involved in their learning and development (Tekin, 2016). Available recent empirical evidence from developing countries indicates that children are entering schools with limited essential social, emotional, academic, language, and physical skills

which would have helped them to maximize in-school resources (Ndijuye & Tandika, 2022b; SACMEQ, 2020).

While research findings have consistently indicated that parents with higher SES are more involved in their children's learning and development than those with lower SES (Ip, et al., 2016), the beneficial implications of parental involvement are extremely vital for children from lower SES families (Ndijuye, 2020; Tamis-LeMonda, et al., 2019). For instance, analyzing data from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) Study of Early Childcare and Youth Development, El Nokali, Bachmann, and Votruba-Drzal (2010) found that children with highly involved parents had enhanced social functioning and fewer behavior problems.

In developing countries with limited educational resources and less supportive home learning environments, parental involvement has been proven vital in supporting children's learning and development (Ip et al., 2016; Tandika and Ndijuye, 2019). Addressing the extent to which the level of fathers' involvement in children's learning and development among naturalized citizens and local majorities in Tanzania, Ndijuye and Tandika (2022a) found that the more parents are involved the higher the learning attainments of their children. The involvement of parents complemented existing learning and developmental gaps due to limited educational resources and lower family socio-economic status.

Most of the studies on parental involvement in children's learning and development have tended to put more focus on mothers especially maternal education and or family socioeconomic status (Troller-Renfree et al., 2022). It has been just recently that more studies have paid satisfactory attention to paternal (father) involvement (Ndijuye & Tandika, 2022a; Tekin, 2012; Troller-Renfree et al., 2022) which has proved to be quite significant in influencing children's development, especially during the early years (Knoester, Petts & Pragg, 2019). Nevertheless, parental involvement in children's development and learning has proved to be vital in improving learning outcomes (Ihmeideh, et al., 2020), and overall child developmental outcomes (Knoester, Petts & Pragg, 2019).

In some contexts, parental involvements are set as elements for programs (McWayne, et al., 2012). For example, the Head Start program in the United States aims to promote school preparedness for children from birth to age five from low-income families (Gestwicki, 2007). The program enhances children's cognitive, social, and emotional development by providing a learning environment that supports children's growth in many areas such

as language, literacy, and social and emotional development. To achieve the set goals, Head Start emphasizes the role of parents as their child's first and most important teacher (US Department of Education, 2003). The basis for Head Start is the assumption that the transition from home to preschool to grade one comes with diverse developmental challenges such as successful engagement with school peers, building relationships, achieve expected learning outcomes (Deming, 2009).

In other cases, parental involvement is part of the requirements for program funding (Pölkki & Vornanen, 2016; Uusimäki, et al., 2019). In Finland, for instance, as part of the funding requirement, parents are involved in their children's education through the provision of home care allowances for children below 3 years of age, and half-day school attendance for preschool-aged children (Pölkki & Vornanen, 2016). This program is said to have allowed the active participation of even parents from low-middle-income households (Uusimäki, et al., 2019) and has minimized the marginalization of these parents in the labor market (Pölkki & Vornanen, 2016).

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989) establishes parental involvement in children's education as one of the basic human rights. Specifically, article 18 states that *'Both parents share responsibility for bringing up their children and should always consider what is best for each child. Governments should help parents by providing services to support them, especially if both parents work'* article 30 states that *'Children have the right to learn and use the language and customs of their families, whether or not these are shared by the majority of the people in the country where they live, as long as this does not harm others.'* Jointly read, the two articles require governments, various organizations, and institutions such as schools, to involve parents in their operations to better the lives of young children.

Connected to the above, available evidence has consistently indicated a linear relationship between parental involvement in children's education and the sustainability of education and knowledge (Tekin 2019; UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2020). Involvements of parents have proved to be vital in creating children's knowledge beyond schools (Leal Filho, et al., 2018), empowering children with the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes to address the interconnected global challenges such as socio-economic inequality and poverty (Vasconcelos & Orion, 2021) climate change, and environmental degradation (Leal Filho, et al., 2018; Vasconcelos & Orion,

2021). For sustainability purposes, it's justifiable to involve parents in children's learning and development.

Further, parental involvement has been linked to education beyond schools (Janzen & Petersen, 2020). Education beyond school has been associated with improved children's learning attainments (Janzen & Petersen, 2020; OECD, 2023), improved discipline and reduced truancy, and children's personal, and socioemotional development (OECD, 2023). Given the current global scientific and technological changes, children need to be equipped with skills, knowledge, and attitudes that will make them cope, fit, and be as competitive as possible in the global workforce market (UNESCO, 2007). Education beyond school is more practically feasible in developing countries where a considerable number of children either miss educational opportunities or drop halfway (UIS, 2021). Education beyond school as a concept is linked to lifelong learning – which is a more practical approach to modern education and healthy living (Nørgard, 2021).

Surrounding Communities and other establishments such as non-governmental organizations, religious organizations, and sports and cultural organizations play a significant role in parental involvement in children's learning and development (Lesneskie & Block, 2016). Going out to religious or sports and cultural events in which children had exposure to and interactions with different people have reportedly been associated with improved language and socioemotional skills (Saracostti, et al., 2019; Yamauchi, et al., 2017). Poor relationships between and within communities and other establishments beyond school are said to lead to children developing such undesirable behaviors as violence and poor communication skills (Lesneskie & Block, 2016).

Communities around families and children have been linked to the provision of social platforms that enhance the acquisition and development of various socioemotional skills (Park & Holloway, 2017). Development of socioemotional skills among preschool children has been linked to future academic and non-academic skills essential to succeed in school and beyond (Weiland & Yoshikawa, 2013). For immigrant children and their families, community organizations such as local and international NGOs have been vital in providing even basic services when they are integrating into a host community (Murphy, Yoshikawa & Wuermli, 2018). In some countries, communities and NGOs provide social services such as health, preschool education, and meeting places for children from poor households and immigrants (Ndijuye & Tandika, 2022b).

While parenting and parenting styles have changed over time, in early childhood settings, the concept of parents as children's first teachers and funds of knowledge is still more practical and applicable (Berger, 1991; Gezani, 2009). Parenting and parental involvement have been evolving, in contexts, cultures, and societies (Gezani, 2009; Zhao & Yu, 2016). It has sequentially shifted from biological statutes to bread-supplying to moral guidance to role-modeling to nurturance (Antony-Newman, 2019; Keskiner, 2015). Due to these role changes, even research on parenting and parental involvement has been changing, regarded, and indexed differently across contexts, time, and cultures (Gezani, 2009; Kiskiner, 2015; Zhao & Yu, 2016). However, there is a consensus among ECEC researchers that across contexts, times, and cultures, parents were and are still regarded as funds of knowledge and, hence should be actively involved in their children's learning and development (Antony-Newman, 2019; Gezani, 2014; Keskiner, 2015; Zhao & Yu, 2016).

In most developed and some developing countries existing educational policies do require direct or indirect parental involvement in ECEC (Tekin, 2011). For instance, acknowledging the importance of parental involvement in children's learning and development, Turkey put into place educational policies that are implemented through various programs and projects that encourage families to participate in school-related activities. One of these projects and programs is the Mother-Child Education Foundation (MCEF) which considers parents as the main component of education and assumes that obtaining better educational results requires the full cooperation of parents (Hakyemez-Paul, Pihlaja & Silvennoinen 2018). Policy support for parent involvement in ECEC is also evident in Jordanian context (Ihmeideh & Tekin, 2022). More to the point, in Tanzania, the official policy is to strengthen the partnership between the government and other stakeholders – including ECEC parents. For instance, policy statement 3.7.4. states that *'the Government shall expand the scope and strengthen successful participation of different stakeholders in education and training sector at all levels'* (URT, 2014). In the United Kingdom, the official policy stance is to foster best practices that improve *"learning at home, school-home and home-school communication, in-school activities, decision-making (e.g. being a parent governor), and collaborating with the community"* (UK Department for Education, 2011). All these findings indicate the importance of parental involvement in children's development and learning from existing educational policy contexts.