

Exploring Parental Involvement in Early Childhood Education in Philippines: A Case Study

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Abstract Despite the attempt to increase parental involvement (PI) in school, there is a gap in understanding it from stakeholders' perspectives. This descriptive case study explored PI in early childhood education in Philippines from kindergarten stakeholders' perspectives. This study employed two phases: phase 1 focused on document analysis and phase 2 on the interview of stakeholders, in which purposive sampling technique was used to recruit 65 participants. Data from the two phases went through content and thematic analysis. The findings revealed four themes: 1) meaningful home-school interaction; 2) collective in-school engagement; 3) structured at-home learning support; and 4) refining stakeholders' capacity. These findings underscore the significance of strong PI and the need for crafting policies that will set guidelines for smooth implementation of programs and increase stakeholders' school engagement. This study requires further investigation in understanding PI focusing on the viewpoints of various stakeholders within the different regions of the country to validate its findings.

Keywords: Early childhood education, kindergarten, parental involvement, stakeholders' perspectives

Introduction

Investing in children can create progressive outcomes for the nation. It yields enduring developmental and educational impacts in a country (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund [UNICEF], 2016). Since the foundation of every individual lies in the early childhood stage of life, it is the suitable period of development to start programs to eradicate poverty, develop social consciousness, and educate children (Bartolome, Mamat, & Masnan, 2017).

One way to invest in children and at the same time have the support of all members of the society is through parent involvement. According to Mathekga (2016), there is no definite description of parental involvement. However, in different studies, parent involvement is defined as one of the essential and least lucrative means of improving quality education (Mwai Kimu, 2012). It is viewed as a vital practice in the learning process of children (Echaune, Ndiku, & Sang, 2015). Moreover, it is a crucial part of Early Childhood Education (Kurtulmus, 2016) and may come in many ways in school such as highlighting the importance of education, understanding and participating in school activities, participation in parent-teacher meetings, engaging in extended class visits, and helping their children in homework (Bæck, 2010; Kurtulmus, 2016).

A strong home-school relationship is important not only for children's outcomes during the early childhood years, but its benefits last for a lifetime. According to Sapungan and Sapungan (2014), parents' commitment to their children's learning process gives plenty of opportunities for children to become successful and that parent involvement can assist children for them to take significant roles in society in the future. Thus, if parents and families are actively involved in teaching children, the school can easily make changes and improvements for the learners. As parent involvement

increases, school administrators and educators can also take necessary actions related to quality educational reform.

Stakeholders' Roles on Parental Involvement

Parents' Roles

Parents as one of the stakeholders in school should be recognized more and should be given immense considerations in the educational life of their children (Sapungan & Sapungan, 2014). Parental involvement programs should consider parents because of their knowledge and experiences which is very helpful for children and it affects the decisions they make regarding their children's education (Wong, 2012). Parents can use their talents and share their insights for children's benefit through parental involvement (Majzub & Salim, 2011).

Although parents play a significant role in their children's lives, their importance is not much recognized (Chindanya, 2011). According to Xaba (2015), parental involvement in school is mostly about parents attending meetings, participating in school programs, and other activities requested by the school. With this, parents seem to just follow orders from the school rather than being partners in their children's education (Xaba, 2015). Parents' role according to schools' curriculum is to join in extracurricular activities of the school, assist in their children's development, and participate in school administrative decisions (Cagdas, Ozel, & Konca, 2016; Eva, Hui & Nirmala, 2012).

Teachers' Roles

Teachers are believed to have more respected social and cultural authority than parents (Ng & Yuen, 2015). There are different definitions of parental involvement that evolve from the different perceptions of teachers who are considered to be

the most influential person in the school system (Mathekga, 2016). The teachers role is more on a professional level while parents' role is on assisting and supporting their children (Eva et al., 2012).

According to Dor (2012), teachers must recognize patterns of meaningful learning processes to inspire parents to participate and volunteer in the school. They must understand the capacity of parents on how they can help in their children's schooling (RaziaStanikzai, 2013). According to United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNESCO, 2015), educators are fundamental partners that should be engaged in policymaking. However, Philippine public school teachers are burdened with a lot of work-related activities that hinder them to put effort into parental involvement (Garcia, 2018). As such, teachers should be provided with conferences and trainings on parental involvement (Dor, 2012; Regional Educational Laboratory (REL), 2015). Based on the study of Rouse (2012), teachers need to be empowered because family-centered practices are professional support that helps families to be empowered.

The Role of Schools

School is a social field where teachers, students, and parents interact and follow a set of rules and regulations (Almonte-Acosta, 2015). It is a significant factor in parental involvement because it vitally affects how parents engage themselves in the education of their children (Chindanya, 2011). It serves two primary purposes: 1) improve partnership with families to encourage children's development; and 2) stimulate children to learn (Kristoffersson, Gu & Zhang, 2013).

Schools may establish projects other than programs initiated by the government (Mutch & Collins, 2012) wherein programs in school are governed by the aims of the nation's

law and national curriculum (Kristoffersson et al., 2013). It prepares children for future work (Gül & Aslan, 2016) and engages families and communities based on the capacities they have (Almonte-Acosta, 2015). Schools should reinforce community linkages for the benefit of their students and their families (Mutch & Collins, 2012), thus, making the school as the strongest predictor of parental involvement (Stavrinides & Nikiforou, 2013).

The Role of School Administrators

School administrators should provide activities where parents can be involved (Majzub & Salim, 2011) and be responsible for the development of activities for the improvement of the school (Department of Education (DepEd), 2016). It is also the school administrators' role to be responsible for communicating important decisions in school to teachers, students, school staffs, and parents (Cobano-Delgado, 2015). According to Heath, Maghrabi and Carr (2015), principals' roles are to find new ways on improving parental involvement and developing two-way communication in school.

If school administrators have meaningful regular communication with stakeholders, they become more capacitated in solving problems of schools (Poynton, Makela, & Haddad, 2014). Therefore, leadership is the key to making a harmonious partnership in schools which includes providing opportunities for everyone to be a leader, prioritizing engagement on the school's vision and mission, and appreciating respectful communication among stakeholders (Mutch & Collins, 2012).

Policies on Parental Involvement

Enhancing the capabilities of families and school staff must be built upon the policies and programs for parental involvement (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). Hence, parental

involvement must be on high priority in educational policies and agenda (Hourani, Stringer & Baker, 2012). Countries with high recognition of family engagement have government legislation policies on parental involvement (Kannapathi, 2012). For example, Xaba (2015) underscored that in the 1987 Education Act of Zimbabwe law, the state mandates teacher education institutions to provide ample attention to parental involvement in their curriculum. In Australia, policies on parental involvement depend on the guidelines set by the government and non-government school authorities in every state and territory authorities. In Estonia and Finland, laws were established to support a child's development and parental involvement. These are Law on Pre-School Child Institutions and National Curriculum of Pre-School Education; and National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care (Kikas et al., 2011). In China, a Committee on Home-School Cooperation was created to encourage parental involvement that will improve the quality of education (Eva et al., 2012). In Hong Kong, Education Ordinance was created by the Legislative Council to include parents, teachers and alumni in the school governance (Ng & Yuen, 2015). In Turkey, the General Law of National Education 20th article states that children's holistic development should be supported and assisted for children to attain good habits (Hakyemez, 2015).

In the Philippines, the Child and Youth Welfare Code of the Philippines (PD 603) is a law that identifies children as the best asset of the country. It promotes and enhances the welfare of Filipino children together with the support from their parents or guardians. Another law is the RA 10410 or the Early Years Act of 2013 defines zero to eight years old as critical stage of children's educational development. RA 10157 or the Kindergarten Act mandates all five year old Filipino children to enter kindergarten

classes, and DepEd Order No. 40 series of 2012 or the Child Protection Policy eliminates all forms of abuses to persons below 18 years old (UNESCO, 2015).

Several countries including the Philippines are taking necessary steps to enhance parental involvement by developing different policies related to it. At present, however, there are no existing laws in place or even programs established that specifically addresses parental involvement in our country (Garcia, 2018).

Status of Parental Involvement in the Philippine Education System

There are movements made in the country that advocate parental involvement. The Philippine Education for All came up with an acceleration plan which recommends the expansion of ECCD programs in every *barangay* to utilize organizations such as local Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) and community members, accentuate the significance of basic education, and highlight the importance of Early Childhood Education (UNESCO, 2015). It also recommends strengthening schools through empowering communities, promoting collective school and parent/community governance, and giving sufficient resources and budget.

The positive relationship between parents and schools produce progressive effects on children, families, schools, communities, and nation. However, even if there are attempts to increase parental involvement, there is a gap in stakeholders' understanding of parental involvement. Thus, the present study intended to explore the domains that can contribute to the development of a contextualized parental involvement framework.

Framework of the Study

Figure 1 illustrates the framework of this study. This framework served as a guide to the researchers in investigating the concepts presented in the study.

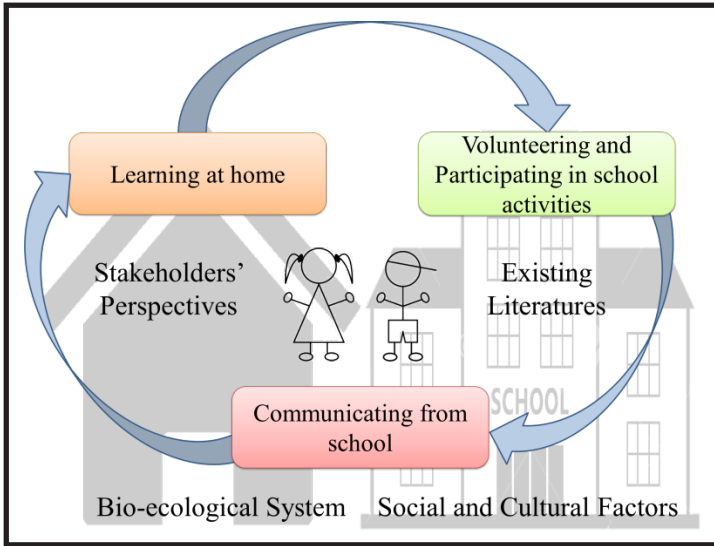


Figure 1. Framework of the study.

Children are the most significant assets of the society. In this framework, children are positioned at the core of the illustration to point out that they are the beneficiaries and also the primary reason for having parental involvement. Around the children are the main environments in children's life – home and school. Home is the place where parents and children have interactions. The culture, socio-economic status, and background of each family shape children together with other environmental systems. On the other hand, the teaching and learning process happens in school. The formation of a harmonious relationship between teachers and parents also occurs in school. However, there are some practices and policies implemented in schools that hinder the

holistic development of the child such as lack of programs and services for home-school engagement and insufficient human resource.

Bronfenbrenner's Bio-Ecological system describes the connection between the home and school. In this theory, there are environmental systems that influence how parents and other stakeholders participate, communicate, and support the education of children (Stavrinides & Nikiforou, 2013). Moreover, there are social and cultural factors that affect how people behave and think. With this, children's behavior is influenced by the environment as described by Bronfenbrenner's Bio-ecological system and the relationships that occur on it as addressed by the social and cultural factors.

To view the relationship between home and school, Epstein typology of parental involvement as cited by Bartolome and colleagues (2017) was used to develop aspects that the present study explores in the existing literature. These include home-school communication, volunteering, and participating in school activities, and learning at home. Epstein's theory discusses how stakeholders (parents, teachers, school administrators, community helpers, and government officials) in each environmental setting influence the learning and development of a child. Stakeholders' influences may be separate from one another or be put together in developing children's spiritual, social, physical, and intellectual aspects. The relationship among them in children's learning and their connections reveal the individual and institutional factors needed in developing a framework or model for parental involvement (Bartolome et al., 2017).

Purposes of the Research

This descriptive case study aimed to explore parental involvement in early childhood education in the Philippines from kindergarten stakeholders' perspectives. Specifically,

the study aimed to describe the stakeholders' perspectives on parental involvement in school.

Methodology

This study used descriptive case study in exploring parental involvement in early childhood education in the Philippines from kindergarten stakeholders' perspectives. Descriptive case study was applied to understand parental involvement from the perspectives of different stakeholders in school.

Study Context and the Participants

The cases of this study included kindergarten schools in Manila. Purposive sampling was used to select school-cases. Creswell (2014) defines purposeful sampling as a procedure where researchers intentionally choose cases that are knowledgeable about the central phenomenon of the study. The study employed two-tiers of purposive sampling. First, sampling of schools was done based on the size and performance of the schools across the six districts of Manila. Second, purposive sampling was again employed to select participants in each school-case who were interviewed in this study. Participants were chosen based on their involvement in public kindergarten schools in Manila. Stakeholder-participants included kindergarten parents, kindergarten teachers, school principals, and government officials.

Table 1 shows information of the stakeholder-participants per district.

Table 1.
Summary of Stakeholder-Participants.

Districts	Parents	Teachers	Principals	Total per District
1	4	4	1	12
2	4	4	2	14
3	5	4	2	14

4	4	4	2	14
5	6	4	2	16
6	5	4	2	15
Total	28	24	11	63
Government Officials		2	Grand total	65

Instruments

Documents for Analysis

In the first phase of this study, document analysis was used to review and examine documents. Documents that were systematically evaluated are published journals, books, official reports from Early Childhood Education organizations, and internationally and locally unpublished thesis and dissertations.

Semi-structured Interview

A semi-structured interview protocol was developed for the different stakeholders which included 21 open-ended questions for parents, 24 for teachers, 20 for school principals, and 12 for government officials. The interview questions were validated by experts and translated from English to the Filipino language by a Filipino language professor. Questions for each stakeholder are parallel and were asked in the same order.

A letter for the school division superintendent of Manila was obtained to have necessary permits to conduct the study. An initial interview was conducted in a school in Manila to try-out the interview questions. Data gathered from the initial interview were explored, transcribed, and analyzed. The interview protocol was modified based on the experts' comments and initial try-out. Sample questions are provided below:

How does your child's school encourage you to be involved in doing your child's homework?

Why do you communicate with your child's school/teacher?

What factors hinder you to be involved in your child's education at school?

Does your child's school conduct parent training/education? How often do they conduct these trainings? Do you attend these trainings?

How can your child's school parental involvement practices be improved?

Data Collection and Analysis

This study went through two phases. In the first phase, document analysis was used to review and examine pertinent literature and documents in the study. Documents were retrieved from online resources, libraries, and government files. It also went through content analysis to identify emerging themes that were used in developing interview protocols. Content analysis is a systematic technique of summarizing content into valid categories using certain rules that will explain the data (Kocyigit, 2015).

In the second phase, a semi-structured interview was developed for the different stakeholders. Interviews were conducted on the specified venues of the principals and teachers. The researchers asked each participant to sign the consent form for the use voice recorder in the conduct of the interview and were permitted by the participants. The duration of the interview ranges from 10 to 30 minutes per participant. After each interview, participants listened to the audio record and verified its contents.

Data gathered from the interview underwent two rounds of analysis. First, the data was transcribed manually. Second, a computer program – Atlas.ti was used.

For anonymity, symbols for each participant were used in analyzing the data. After this, emerging themes from the interview data underwent peer evaluation and members checking using a researcher-made validation tool.

Validity in this study focused on four stages as shown in Table 2. Through the different processes, the instruments, data, and findings of this study were validated.

Table 2.
Establishing Validity of the Study.

Part of the Study	Method of Validity	Instruments Used	People Involved
Development of instruments	Experts' validation	Self-constructed instrument validation tool	ECE experts, Filipino linguist expert
Data Collection	Informal members checking	Audio recorder	All participants
Data Analysis	Triangulation	Interview data from stakeholders, data from document analysis & interview	Researchers
Findings	Formal members checking Peer evaluation	Self-constructed instrument validation tool	Selected participants, ECE experts, Research professors, Kindergarten teachers & parents

Findings

From the codes that emerged in the interview of the different stakeholders, sub-themes were formed. These sub-themes were then categorized to form themes. The four themes are 1)

meaningful home-school interaction; 2) collective in-school engagement; 3) structured at-home learning support; and 4) refining stakeholders' capacity. Below is the summary of the generated themes.

Table 3.
Generated Themes and Descriptions.

Generated Themes	Sample verbatim transcripts	Sub-themes	General Description of the themes
Theme 1: Meaningful Home-School Interaction	“parents and teachers are friends” (D1 C1; D5 P1) “their children do every day in school” (D2 P1)	Concerns in communicating Purpose of communication Types of communication Disadvantages in communicating Parent-Teacher relationship	Different ways on how parents interact with the teachers and the school, and vice versa. It also includes their reasons and considerations in communicating with each other.
Theme 2: Collective In-school Engagement	“invited to join the clean-up drive” (D6 PR1) “implementing guidelines, rights and limitations of parents” (D4 PR2)	School-based parental involvement Hindrances in PI Concern in PI Mapping PI in SIP Community Involvement Policy and Evaluation	Movements done by the parents, teachers, school, and other stakeholders that positively affect the holistic development of children in school.
Theme 3: Structured At-home Learning Support	“parents to have part in their children’s learning” (D1 PR1) have “follow-up at home” (D2 T1)	Learning at home activities Considerations in home-based learning Homework Family-Child relationship	Activities done by the parents, teachers, and school at home or in response to home or family activities that affects the holistic development of children.

Generated Themes	Sample verbatim transcripts	Sub-themes	General Description of the themes
Theme 4: Refining Stakeholders' Capacity	"make a way to encourage parents" (D1 P3) "have leadership, and strong hold" (D2 T4) "not just the existence of one" (D2 P1)	Roles of Parents Parent Organizations Consideration in Parental Involvement Relationship of Stakeholders	The qualities, roles, and perspectives of different stakeholders that equally contributes in parental involvement in school.

Findings show that there are three types of parental involvement that emerged from the interview among stakeholders. These are home-school interaction, in-school engagement, and structured home learning support. These three types of parental involvement are significant as they describe the varied ways stakeholders communicate with each other; the movements, interactions, and decisions they make which positively affects children; and the activities they do at home and in school that has an influence on the holistic development of young learners. These themes also include how school offered platforms in which parents and other members of the community collectively perform their duties in and out of the school, and be engaged with parental involvement programs. The last theme that emerged – refining stakeholders' capacity identifies the qualities, roles and perspectives of stakeholders that contribute in parental involvement in school. In these activities and programs, stakeholders' capacity is being employed, underpinned, and refined in each form of engagement.

Discussion

A vital aspect of the educational outcomes of students comes from the harmonious relationship between the families and the school. Partnership, cooperation, trust, and respect among home and school, parents, and teachers comprise meaningful parental involvement (Jabar, 2010; Kikas et al., 2011; Mapp & Kuttner, 2013) and a high degree of parental involvement will benefit all stakeholders (Kannapathi, 2012).

Parental involvement has momentous influence from kindergarten and continues later in life (Kikas et al., 2011; Mapp & Kuttner, 2013; Sapungan & Sapungan, 2014). Parent-participants specified that they understand the important roles of teachers in the lives of their children. They have high respect for teachers and believed that teachers are helpful to their children.

One method that the school can do is to reach out to parents through parent organization. In the Philippines, parent groups are organized by parents, schools, and teachers following the Department of Education policies. Division Order (DO) 98 series of 1998 which was amended in 1999 specifies the guidelines governing PTA (Parent-Teacher Association) on the school level according to one participant - a parent officer. This was used from the 1999 up to the present time.

Furthermore, communication is one of the significant elements in understanding families and in supporting a strong partnership with stakeholders (Jackson, 2010; Wong, 2012). There are important aspects of communication such as reciprocal communication between teachers and parents to avoid misinterpretation (Mathekga, 2016), mutual trust and respect (Heath et al., 2015), allowing parents and teachers to share their views in helping students and school,

and support for children's learning at home and in school (RaziaStanikzai, 2013).

Likewise, home learning improved children's high cognitive functioning and social-emotional skills and it strengthened school-community involvement (Baker & Rimm-Kaufman, 2014). The most used form of learning at home activity in the Philippine public elementary schools is homework. It is a venue for "parents to have a part in their children's learning" (D1 PR1) that is "related to the lessons taught" (D5 PR2). Assignments are given by the teachers in school, usually written in an assignment notebook or marked in children's textbooks or worksheets which are attached in their notebooks.

Most of the Filipinos view parental involvement as a routine activity of cleaning the classroom and the school premises, maintenance and repair of furniture, and beautification of the school (Garcia, 2018). Parent aid and PTA have also been a strong indicator of volunteerism in schools especially in the kindergarten classroom based on the interviews conducted. DepEd also crafted policies on PTA wherein "implementing guidelines, rights and limitations of parents" (D4 PR2) were written. Moreover, some schools in Manila started that they have their own programs to encourage the participation of parents and the community where their school belongs.

In this study, the voices of stakeholders in the school system were explored. Stakeholder-participants stated their willingness to become a part of children's learning, support programs of the school, and consider the welfare of the children. Stakeholders' perspectives are necessary for any school because it can provide positive and sustainable outcomes for the children, parents, teachers, and schools. Children can develop holistically and achieve success in life if people surrounding them have mutual responsibilities.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study used a descriptive case study to explore parental involvement in early childhood education in the Philippines. Parental involvement is a very broad concept that is different from one study to another and is interpreted by various researchers based on the context where their study is conducted, through their experiences, results of researches, and existing theories. In this study, parental involvement is defined as partaking of families in the learning and holistic development of children at home and in school.

A lot of researches were conducted showing the positive effects of family engagement in school but unfortunately, most are not considered in the improvement education system. Most countries have no policies specifically intended for parental involvement including our country – the Philippines. Often, parental involvement is attached to other policies like child protection, family welfare, and basic education. Thus, this study emphasizes the need for crafting policies on parental involvement that will set guidelines for the smooth implementation of programs and reinforce stakeholders' role for school engagements.

Based on the findings of this study, four themes emerged regarding parental involvement in the Philippines. Three out of the four themes are types of parental involvement. Thus, the scope and context of each form of parental involvement in this study are different from Epstein. The scope and context of parental involvement in Epstein's theory is based on identified school activities. However, in this study, the different types of parental involvement were developed based on the data gathered from the interview of the different stakeholders in the school system.

Furthermore, in connection with Bronfenbrenner's Bio-ecological theory, result of this study also shows that

there is an interaction that happens in a children's environment that shapes their development. Thus, the school as a part of children's environment is a strong catalyst for influencing positive experiences for their holistic development. It was believed that the school can be the government's gateway to notify families about policies and distribute resources for them. At the same time, the school is a venue for families to voice-out their needs and problems to the government. The rationale for this belief is based on DepEd' School Improvement Plan in which community involvement is a part of the plan where parental involvement programs can be included. Schools should develop a home-school parental involvement framework that values the importance of the voices of every stakeholder in the school system to reinforce and empower partnership.

This study encourages schools to highlight a variety of opportunities for stakeholders to be involved so that they can see the essence and worth of each other. This may result in developing mechanisms for home-school learning activities and programs that will connect learning from school to the homes of their students and providing a continuous flow of actions of stakeholders for the development of children. The effective implementation of parental involvement entails the contribution of parents, teachers, principals, and government officials. They must feel that it is their responsibility to be involved in the process. The implication of this study highlights that effective implementation of parental involvement entails the contribution of all stakeholders. Hence, the result of this study adds to the discussion regarding parental involvement practices in the Philippines and some theoretical models in early childhood education.

The study was limited to a purposive sample of kindergarten parents, teachers, and school principals in Manila, and some government officials. These participants may not accurately represent all the stakeholders with

differing socio-economic status, family background, and regional culture. This study requires further investigation within the different regions of the country. Finally, more researches should be conducted in understanding parental involvement focusing on the viewpoints of various stakeholders to validate the findings.



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