Parental Involvement in The Lens of Kindergarten Children

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Abstract

Children's perspectives are not often considered in decision-making in schools, but their individual and collective interests are of equal importance in home-school collaboration. This descriptive qualitative study explored parental involvement in early childhood education in the Philippines from the lens of kindergarten children. This study used document analysis and interview to gather data in which 22 kindergarten children was purposively chosen. Data were analysed using content and thematic analysis. The findings revealed two themes: 1) parents' collective in-school engagement and communication; and 2) structural at-home learning support. The result underscores the significance of children's views on how their parents and family participates in their learning, both in school and at-home. Thus, the considerations, activities, and policies made in relation to parental involvement will directly or indirectly benefit and protect children. This study needs further exploration to understand parental involvement on the perspective of children and distinguish its positive effects for improving the education system.

Keywords: Children's Perspectives, Early Childhood Education, Home-School Collaboration, Kindergarten, Parental Involvement

INTRODUCTION

Forms of parental involvement and engagement in the activities of their children vary from one country to another and are subject to cultural contexts (Blair, 2016). In some Western countries and other Asian countries like the Philippines, home-school partnership is initiated by the school (Fatin Aliana, Mohd Noorazam, & Nor Hashima, 2010).

According to Bartolome and Mamat (2020b), regardless of cultural context, parents have the main responsibility in the education of their children. Their influences have great effect on children's education. On the other hand, schools have significant influence in building a strong and healthy community. Collaboration of home and school contributes to the holistic development and success of children. Children must be guided and supported to enable them to gain awareness of themselves, the needs of others, and how to live in a society (Bartolome & Mamat, 2020a).

Children are the primary recipient of the efforts done by the various stakeholders in the school system. Several sources show that children do have individual and collective interests and priorities in home-school collaboration (Edwards & David, 1997). However, their views are not often considered. Young children have their opinion on things that are happening around them. They interpreted their parents and teachers" actions in school as they perceived it. Thus, the considerations, activities, and policies made in relation to parental involvement will directly or indirectly benefit and protect children. Home-school

collaboration produces positive effects to all stakeholders in the school system. Seeing it from the lens of kindergarten children is what the present study wants to explore.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This descriptive case study aimed to explore parental involvement in early childhood education in the Philippines from kindergarten children's perspectives. Specifically, the study aimed to describe the children's perspectives on parental involvement in school and at-home.

LITERATURE REVIEW

UNICEF (2012) emphasizes the rights of the children to express themselves in many ways. Thus, their views are important aspect in every decision that adults surrounding them makes. Adults working with children can get significant information from children's perspectives (National Children's Bureau, 2016).

A case study conducted by Rungduin and Reyes (2016) show that kindergarten children in the Philippines have self-control; can understand the concept of good and bad; are able to describe their feelings; are aware of their surroundings; and care for their classmates. Additionally, results of their study indicate that these characteristics are collective attributes which make Filipino children unique based on their cultural context. Researchers conclude that Filipino children's maturity stems from their contexts and social realities.

Listening to children's views is increasingly given attention in different research studies in the last two decades (Harcourt & Einarsdottir, 2011). Researchers are interested about knowing children's views, knowledge, and opinions from children themselves. Essence and meanings of a concept can come from different perspectives and that includes children's perspectives as well. However, some criticize how children's views are used in research studies.

The article of Harcourt and Einarsdottir (2011) aims to consolidate exemplary research on children as part of partnership in education. These include studies from Australia, Iceland, Italy, Northern Ireland, Sweden, and United Kingdom. It concludes that children are viewed as "beings" rather than "becomings". Likewise, the study of Peters and Kelly (2011) on exploring multiple ways of understanding children's perspectives stressed that it is important to honor children's perspectives as part of their rights. However, innovative ethical practices should be observed, and data gathered should be interpreted authentically.

In Jeffries's (2012) research, parent involvement comprises of home-based and school-based activities and home-school conferencing among Head start schools in Florida USA. In this study, children's views and experiences are important in providing parents insights on materials to be used in learning at home.

Similarly, from the journal article of Tang et al. (2011), insights from young children's schools in Singapore towards parental involvement practices were investigated. It revealed that stakeholders" views and beliefs made sustainable outputs. Transitions from views to practices of this research were similar to the process of the present study.

These research studies imply that children have the capacity to communicate their perspectives on how they understand their life and their environment. Children with their social and cultural exposure are uniquely different from adults (Norozi & Moen, 2016). Hence children are "worthy of investigation in their own right" (Harcourt & Einarsdottir, 2011).

Children view parent-teacher conferences as an instrument for more effective communication even outside the school. Communication of teacher with students is of equal importance with communicating of teachers with their students' parents (Lazaros, 2016). Students can also be part of parent-teacher meetings because it is an avenue to present their

work-samples. According to Nilsson et al. (2015), as children grow, their ability to share their experiences and relate these experiences to their current situation is strengthened.

As children learn and grow, parents must also learn how to have a successful parental involvement (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). Therefore, children's views must be taken into consideration in developing parental involvement program, framework, and policies to consider what really matters for them as the present study employs.

A research study that values children's views give recognition to the worth of children in the society and has significance to the study of home-school partnership (Edwards & David, 1997). Children are considered as a crucial aspect in improving learning and they help in shaping policies for a responsive educational system (UNESCO, 2015).

METHODOLOGY

This study collected and examined data using descriptive case study in exploring parental involvement in early childhood education in the Philippines from kindergarten children's perspectives. Descriptive case study constructs meaning rather than discovering it (Merriam, 2009). Hence, it was applied to understand parental involvement from the perspectives of kindergarten children.

Purposive sampling was used to select kindergarten children that were included in this study. Creswell (2014) defined a purposeful sampling as a procedure where researchers intentionally choose participants who are knowledgeable about the central phenomenon, or the key concept explored in the study. According to Patton (as cited in Merriam, 2009), the used of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich participants for study in depth which researchers can understand issues on the purpose of the inquiry.

Children-participants were mostly five years old except for one who is six-year-old from the time the study is conducted. Children, being the most important asset of the nation need to be heard. Their perspectives on parental involvement gave important facts and insights for this study. Children included in the study were enrolled in kindergarten class in Manila.

The study underwent two phases - Phase 1 document analysis and phase 2 interview. On the first phase, printed and electronic documents were scrutinized and interpreted to develop valuable understanding for the development of interview protocol. During the second phase, one-on-one interview were conducted to determine information that was not directly observed and to understand their perspectives. An interview is an instrument to gather data through verbal interaction of the researcher and participant about research-relevant information (Merriam, 2009; Puvenesvary et al., 2008).

In the interview, each children-participant was asked using the prepared questions. The questions were validated by experts and finalized after their comments and suggestions were incorporated. There were 10 interview questions as shown in Table I. These questions were translated to Filipino by an expert in the language for the better understanding of the kindergarten children.

Table 1: Interview Questions

1. Do you have an everyday conversation with your parents regarding your day in school? How does your parent do it?
2. Does your parent help you with your homework? How about with other schoolwork?
3. If your parents want to talk to your teachers, how do they do it?
4. If your teacher wants to talk to your parents, how does she do it?
5. Does your teacher and parents have good relationship? Why do you say so?
6. Why do you think parents communicate with teachers?

7. Does your school use any digital means to communicate with your parents? What are these?
8. Besides communicating with your teacher, does your mother/father do other things to help your school? What are these?
9. Does your school conduct parent meeting? Do your parents attend these meetings?
10. Does your school conduct event wherein parents are involved? What are these?

This study went through 6 steps of data analysis defined by Creswell (2014). These are:

Step 1. Preparing the data for analysis

Documents gathered underwent content analysis to acquire emerging themes for the development of interview protocols. Content analysis is a systematic technique of summarizing content into valid categories using certain rules that will explain the data (Kocyigit, 2015; Merriam, 2009; Puvenesvary et al., 2008).

Also, interview questions were pilot tested. The interview protocol was revised based on the result of the pilot testing and experts" validation.

Step 2. Exploring the data

During the interview of children from 6 schools in Manila, data was transcribed. However, saturation was not attained. Saturation was defined by Merriam (2009) as "a point that no new information, insights, or understandings are forthcoming." Thus, the researcher had to interview more children-participants in other schools not included on the first round of interview. All audio interviews were transcribed in word document in the computer.

Step 3. Analyzing the data

There were 17 pages of transcribed data from 22 kindergarten children that were manually analyzed during the first run and by the used of Atlas.ti on the second run. Atlas.ti is a software program for qualitative data analysis.

Step 4. Representing the analysis

For anonymity, symbols for each participant were used in analyzing the data. Each participant has D and a number that represent where their school is located. Then, it is followed by C and a number. Quotations in the findings used these symbols for citation.

Step 5. Interpreting the analysis

Codes emerged from the analysis of data were used to develop different sub-themes. Then, themes were made from these sub-themes. Descriptions for each theme were also constructed.

Step 6. Validating the data and interpretation

Validation of the results utilized experts' evaluation Peer review was done to established trustworthiness in this study. According to Merriam (2009), peer review is a consultation with experts about the procedures of the study, congruency with the findings to the raw data and tentative interpretations.

Since the study has children-participants, consent was asked from Division of City Schools Manila, school administrators, kindergarten teachers, and parents of the children. The consent form includes explanation on the nature of the study, purpose, procedures and their

roles. This study collected personal information from the children-participants, took photos and voice recorded during the interview but with direct consent from their parents and teachers.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

From the codes that emerged in the interview of kindergarten children, sub-themes were formed. These sub-themes were then categorized to form themes. The two themes in this study are parents" collective in-school engagement and communication: and structural at-home learning support. Table II shows the summary of the generated themes and its descriptions.

Table 2: Generated themes and its descriptions

Generated Themes	Sample verbatim transcripts	Sub-themes	General Description of the themes
Theme 1: Parents" collective in-school engagement and communication	D2 C1: Nagtutulungan sila. Kasi pag ung mommy ko… ung mommy ko nag-cle-cleaner kaya sa tingin ko po magbest friends sila ni teacher. *They help one another. My mommy cleans (the classroom) that's why I think they are (teacher) best friends.* D1 C4: pag may meeting lang pumupunta. *They (parents) come only (in school) during meetings.* D2 C2: she didn"t talk to teacher. She will just wait for me. D1 C1: opo, magkasundo po sila ni teacher. Pag wala pong pasok tinetext po ni teacher si mama o kaya si tita. *Yes, they (parent & teacher) are in good terms. If there are no classes, my teacher will send a text to mama or my aunt.*	assistance in school activities attendance in meetings limitations of parents neglecting to participate in school parent-teacher communication	Movements done by the parents / families that positively affect the holistic development of children in school.
Theme 2: Structural at-home learning	D2 C1: Pag gumagawa po ko ng homework tinutulungan ako ng parents ko. Naglalaro kapag Friday, Saturday, tsaka Sunday.	collaboration of family	Activities done by the parents at home in

support	*My parents help me in doing my homework. We play every Friday, Saturday, and Sunday.*	members	response to home or family activities that affects the holistic development of children.
	D4 C4: ah si ate, si tatay tapos si mama. *My sister, father, and mama (help me).*	importance maternal involvement	
	D6 C2: opo, sa gabi po pagdating ni mama. Si mama lang nagtuturo sa kin. *Yes, when my mama arrives at night (after work). My mama is the only one helping me.*	effects of no parent-child conversation	
	D1 C3: Inaaway nya ko eh. Pumapasok kasi sya. Bawal daw ako mag-ipad. Sinasabi nya lang assignment. Ako lang mag-isa gumagawa. Si tita lang kasama ko maglaro sa ipad ng games. She (mother) fights me. Because she goes to work. I am forbidden to use ipad. She will just say do my assignment. I do my assignment alone. My aunt plays game with me in the ipad.		

Findings show that children have accumulated views on how their parents and other family members involve in their learning both in school and at home. Participation of parents/families on different school activities and various home learning engagements gives positive effects on the holistic development of children. 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 great extent of parental involvement will benefit all stakeholders (Kannapathi, 2012). With this, young children had their opinion on things that are happening around them. They interpreted their parents" actions in school as they perceived it. Several children believed that their parents and teachers are friends or have harmonious relationship. They viewed their parents as a "help in school programs" (D4 C4) "assist teachers" (D2 C1) and "present in school activities such as recognition programs" (D6 C3).

Meaningful home-school interaction plays a vital role in parental involvement. It is one of the significant elements in understanding families and supporting strong partnership with stakeholders (Jackson, 2010; Wong, 2012). However, there were limitations on how parents involved themselves in school. According to children-participants:

D1 C4: During meetings, my (child) mother comes. She (mother) doesn't come inside our classroom while we (kindergarten class) are studying. Parents are not allowed to stay in our classroom while we have classes; they just stay in the waiting area.

D5 C3: Parents should come in the meeting because teacher will tell them what to do (school activities).

Some children viewed their parents as responsible for their actions and know how to follow rules. Parents in the eyes of their children attended religiously in meetings and patiently waited for their moment to communicate with teachers.

On the other hand, teachers need to continuously innovate means of communicating with parents (Lazaros, 2016). However, there were concerns that affect how parents and teachers communicate with each other. One-way and limited communication (Hourani et al., 2012) lack of communication (Kristoffersson et al., 2013) communication gaps (Jackson, 2010) and confrontational communication (Poynton et al., 2014) negatively affects parental involvement and results to atmosphere of distrust in school. Selected children also observed

how their parents neglect to participate in school activities and disregard communicating with their teacher. Kindergarten children specified that:

> *D2 C2: She (child's mother) doesn't talk to teacher. She will just wait for me (child) in the gate. He (child's father) doesn't come here (in school), he just goes to work over and over again. He said he needs to get a lot of money so he can buy everything.*

> *D3 C1: My (child) mother doesn't come here in school. My father also doesn't come here because they (parents) don't like to come even if they don't have a work.*

> *D6 C2: She (child's mother) doesn't help teacher in our classroom because she has to work. Only the parents of my classmates help teacher.*

Certain children see how their parents prioritize work over their schooling. There were also parents who preferred not to participate in school activities even in the absence of work. In school, some children noticed how their parents participate in school activities, communicated with their teacher, followed set limitations of schools, and the reason why their parents were not attending and participating in school.

Thus, relationships between parents, teachers, and school were affected if there are no clear means of communications. Since gaps may arise in between parents and schools, principals and teachers should choose suitable approach of communication (Palts & Kalmus, 2015) and constantly encourage parental involvement (Heath et al., 2015).

Also, if parents and teachers developed a routine of open communication, harmonious relationship will arise and eventually results to students" achievement. This rapport was echoed to the answers of a kindergarten child that:

> *D1 C1: Yes, mommy and teacher are friends. If we (kindergarten class) don't have classes, teacher is texting mama or tita (aunt in Filipino). They (child's teacher and mother) share stories and laugh at each other.*

Parent-child connection may affect how children behave in and out of their homes. Due to the fast-changing needs of the society, both parents work. Some still made efforts to be involved in their child"s schooling, while others struggle or neglect to be engaged.

Structural at home learning support was seen as a determinant of children"s success. It improved children high cognitive functioning and social-emotional skills (Baker & RimmKaufman, 2014) and it strengthened school-community involvement (Mental Health in Schools Program and Policy Analysis, 2011).

Since home is the first school of children and parents are their first teachers, children appreciated the help of their siblings, parents, relatives, and yaya in their studies at home according to some children-participants. Yaya is a Filipino term for house helper who also takes care of children in the absence of the parents. Young children's older brothers and sisters taught their young siblings how to read and write and assist in homework. Their yaya also helped them in school undertakings and their parents checked it when they arrived from work.

One way to bond with children at home and at the same time is educational, is through doing homework. Homework is important to children's learning, and it bridges school and home. Its significance was reflected on the statements of most of the kindergarten children-participants. Some children revealed that his mother is even texting his teacher about his homework.

Researchers were now giving attention to the connection of homework and students' achievement (Gonida & Cortina, 2014). Some countries promoted homework because it is taken as part of children's education. Based on the data of The Hechinger Report (2015), Hong Kong has the highest rank among 64 countries in the correlation of homework to greater student performance. In their country, parents viewed homework as an explanation to learning materials, part of daily routine, and checking on their children's lesson (Tam & Chan, 2010).

Home-based learning programs and activities are limited in the Philippines. Filipino parents are more focus in their child's education through homework and review during examination time (Orillosa & Magno, 2013). Therefore, home-based learning programs and activities must be structured and facilitated by schools to bridge the transition from home to school and vice versa.

Moreover, DepEd made a memorandum number 392 in 2010 that guides all public elementary school pupils in giving homework. In this order, teachers were advised to limit assignments especially during weekends for students to have quality time with their families. In 2016, DepEd memorandum was legalized and broadened through the No Homework on Weekends policy. It was enacted in all (both public and private) elementary and secondary schools in the country. This act frees the teacher and students from the "rigors of school during weekends".

On the other hand, to promote children's welfare, the government also implemented policies and guidelines for the safety of the children. The Philippine constitution together with the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), promote non-violence and maltreatment to children. Likewise, DO number 40 series of 2012 or also known as DepEd Child Protection Policy is a guideline on protecting children in school violence, exploitations, and other kinds of abuses including bullying.

DepEd Order 40 explained the different forms of abuses, bullying, and corporal punishment. It included the duties and responsibilities of the DepEd government officials, school heads, school personnel, parents and the students. It only shows that parent, school personnel and the government exerted effort for safety and security of the children.

Kindergarten children viewed the significance of developing their independence as they grow. People surrounding them should recognized policies for their welfare and consider their emotion. They believed that their parents must attend school activities and their school must set rules for them and their parents to follow. Chan (2012) stated that children's perspectives are influenced by the people surrounding them such parents, teachers, and adults. It is a representation of their experiences, socialization with their peers and adults, and understanding of the world.

Most of the research in home-school partnership focus on the views of parents and teachers, and have assumed that the views of these people can represent children's views. Though, in reality it is not the situation. According to Santos (2021), valuing the children and their perspectives, articulating the roles of teachers and parents, and incorporating them into the curriculum can greatly help children. With this, research needs to place children as active participants in parental involvement policy and practice discussions (Edwards & David, 1997).

CONCLUSION AND RECCOMMENDATION

This study used a descriptive case study to explore children's perspectives about parental involvement. Based on findings of this study, children perceived parental involvement as parents helping in school, families assisting in homework, attending school activities, and some noted non-participation and negligence of parents. Their welfare and needs should be considered in any programs in schools. Decisions made by adult stakeholders in school should likewise consider children. Policies set by the government such as child protection and corporal punishment must be executed both in school and at home.

There are a lot of research on parental involvement from the lens of parents and teachers. However, there is a dearth on considering children's views. Kindergarten is given importance by the researcher since it is the start of every child's learning journey. Thus, children's perspectives are needed in the development of programs and activities on parental involvement. In return, these activities/programs will benefit the most important asset and future of the nation – the children. This study proposes a connection of their perspectives to the various forms of home-school engagements.

Based on the findings of the study, two themes emerged regarding parental involvement in the Philippines. These are parents" collective in-school engagement and communication; and structural at-home learning. These themes highlight the various modality and forms on how parents/families can be involved in the education of children regardless of the environment. There was school engagement wherein there were activities done by the teachers and at-home learning support done by the parents that positively affects the holistic development of children in school. Parents alone cannot do everything and so with the teachers. Their partnership should be developed and sustained.

In the situation like pandemic, teachers can support parents on how to guide their children at home. Ensuring that routines are still established, communications are open, and play is present. Parents should realize the value of early learning and their crucial role in the lives of their children. Findings also revealed the importance of collaboration among family members. It includes creating a shared responsibility among older members of the family in caring and teaching younger members.

The implication of this study highlights that children are affected with the actions done by the people surrounding him/her. School engagement and home learning support should be implemented continuously by parents, families, teachers, and school. Everybody must feel that it is their responsibility to be involved in the development and learning of children.

Parental involvement must be understood with depth, in context of one country, and on different perspectives of stakeholders in the school system (including children) so that it can comprehensively contribute to education and holistic development of children.

This study was limited to a purposive sample of kindergarten children in Manila in which it may not accurately represent the views of Filipino children in general. This study requires further exploration within other regions of the country to validate its findings.

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