

An exploratory study of Early Childhood Development teacher attitudes towards parent involvement in Early Childhood Development centres in Athlone

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COMPULSORY DECLARATION

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

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Plagiarism declaration

I, Hannatu Aishatu Abdu, declare that the work that gave rise to this thesis is my own original work. The works of scholars were used and such works have been clearly referenced. This work has neither been submitted, nor is being submitted concurrently to any other institution for any degree.

Signature: _____

Hannatu Aishatu Abdu

Date: _____

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Abstract

This study aimed to explore early childhood development teacher attitudes towards parent involvement in early childhood development centres. The researcher aimed to gain an understanding of how ECD teachers describe their roles within the ECD centres, their perception of parent involvement in ECD centres, the ways in which ECD teachers involve parents within the ECD centre, to know the factors influencing parent involvement within the ECD centres and teachers needs for further support in parent involvement. The study was undertaken in Athlone with the aim to using the results to highlight areas that need improvement within ECD centres.

The research adopted the qualitative, exploratory approach using a semi-structured interview guide. The interviews were face-to-face and the study involved twenty ECD teachers. A purposive sampling technique was used to select the research participants. Ten ECD centres were involved and from each centre two ECD teachers were part of interview. Once the data collection phase was completed, the researcher used Tesch's (1990) analysis model to organize the data.

My findings suggest that although ECD teachers are passionate about their profession, certain factors such as children's cultural differences, multiple responsibilities of ECD teachers and poor salary and conditions of service pose as major challenges ECD teachers face. This study also shows that parent involvement in ECD centres has remained unsatisfactory for various reasons, including distances between the home and ECD centre, nonchalant attitudes among parents, work commitments, grandparents as caregivers, social and economic reasons, single parenting and domestic violence to mention a few.

The research findings revealed that ECD teachers have an understanding of parent involvement in ECD. The study also found out that parent involvement is low within the ECD centres and as a result some ECD teachers expressed a sense of disappointment. In spite of these challenges, ECD teachers still attempt to involve parents within the ECD centre. There are various ways in which ECD teachers try to engage parents: face to face meetings, written notes, fundraising, decision-making and workshops.

Evidence from the study confirms that older parents tend to show more commitment and support within the ECD centre as compared to younger parents. The findings suggest that in order to improve parent involvement, parents need to have a positive attitude towards the activities in the ECD centre. Parent involvement workshops should be regularly organized for ECD teachers and parents. The study recommends that the wider community, non-profit organisations and government should initiate parent involvement programmes that will aid in promoting parent participation within ECD centres.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter provides insight into the research topic: An exploratory study of Early Childhood Development (ECD) teacher attitudes towards parent involvement in Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres in Athlone. This chapter provides the background to the study, the statement of the problem and the significance of the study. The research topic, questions and objectives are outlined, key concepts informing the study are clarified and a discussion on the ethical considerations and reflexivity is presented. At the end of this chapter, the structure of this entire report is set out.

1.1 Background to the study

According to the Department of Social Development and UNICEF (2006) the early childhood years is a period when children acquire skills that lay the foundation for lifelong learning. These skills include the acquisition of language, perceptual motor skills required for reading and writing, basic numeracy skills, problem solving capacity, a love for learning and maintaining relationships. The early years have been recognized as the ideal time for instilling values such as human rights, appreciation for diversity, tolerance and social justice.

In South Africa, about 84% of young children do not have access to formal Early Childhood Development (ECD) provision and rely on their parents or primary caregivers for stimulation and development (UNICEF, 2007:17). The Department of Education, Department of Social Development, Department of Health and UNICEF (2005:23) shows that 50% of young children's early childhood development takes place at household level through the intervention of parents, grandparents, extended family members, older siblings and other caregivers. This shows that children spend more time with parents or caregivers than with ECD teachers, during a crucial development stage of their lives. This situation confirms that parents are the first teachers and role models for young children, and gives parents a strong influence over the child's development during this critical stage.

Parent involvement in ECD has long been considered a key component for positive child development, positive attitude and behaviour and student achievement. This is because strong links between a child's home and the ECD centre promote developmental opportunities. Jones,

White, Aeby and Benson (2010) argue that the nature and quality of home-ECD centre collaboration and the extent of parent involvement is determined by parents, ECD teachers and other adults. ECD teachers have both the ability and professional responsibility to facilitate ECD centre-home collaboration. In other words, teachers are central to supporting parent involvement in the development of young children.

Kotaman, 2008 in Şad and Gürbüztürk, 2013 revealed that engaging parents in the education process of a child can lead to positive academic achievement, increased school attendance, better social adaptation and fewer disciplinary problems. Swick and McKnight's study (1989) showed that there is low parent involvement and the role of parents in ECD centre has received little attention. Teachers' reluctance to adopt practices for involving parents can result from lack of training as well as conflicting perceptions and expectations of parent participation by both parents and ECD teachers (Reynolds, 1992).

I have found that there has not been many studies of ECD teachers' attitudes toward parent involvement in ECD centres in South Africa. Acknowledging the views of ECD teachers will go long way in improving the ECD centres especially the ones serving less privileged communities within South Africa. Although ECD has gained much recognition in South Africa, the extent of parent involvement in ECD is not yet known. In light of this, the aim of this study is to explore teacher attitudes towards parental involvement in ECD centres. In doing so, the literature on parent involvement in early childhood development will be expanded.

1.2 Significance of the study

In recent times, the belief that cognitive development is the responsibility of the ECD teacher has changed. This view has brought to light that teachers are more effective when they gain support from parents (Bridgemohan, 2001). This shift is attributed to research undertaken in the last two decades on the value of parent involvement. A review of literature suggests that parent involvement in ECD produces positive outcomes for preschool learners. On this note, collaboration between ECD centres and parents has been associated with learning achievement, low dropout rates (Keith, Keith, Troutman, Bickley, Trivette and Singh, 2001), a decline in behaviour problems (Comer, 2001), and academic persistence (Estrada, Arsenio, Hess and Holloway, 2001 in Bridgemohan, 2001).

The Harvard Family Research Project (2006) concludes that supportive parenting is important because it facilitates positive developmental outcomes in every young child. Positive early interventions are building blocks for the future positive development of the child, which will also be evident in the schooling years. I believe that this study is beneficial if there is a broader understanding of the experiences of ECD teachers and parents as first teachers and role models for these children. This understanding would include developing a realization of parents need for support to face the challenges which they face.

By providing insight on ECD teacher attitudes towards parent involvement in ECD centres, this study offers strategies through which parent involvement at ECD centres can be enhanced. The study is also significant because the findings could be used for a range of purposes such as supporting parent engagement, helping policy makers, identifying appropriate curricula support, choosing topics for parenting workshops and measuring the child's progress at the ECD centre. The recommendations provided will help ECD teachers and parents because when information is shared with parents, they are able to acquire the information they will need to help their children's transition to school and programmes that improve child development.

It is the intention of the research to ensure that key role players, Government and Non-Profit Organisations but most importantly, parents and ECD teachers are empowered with the knowledge to act collectively in addressing the challenges associated with parent involvement in ECD centres.

1.3 Research topic

An exploratory study of early childhood development teacher attitudes towards parent involvement in early childhood development centres in Athlone, Cape Town.

1.4 Main research questions

The study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- How do ECD teachers perceive their roles within the ECD centres?
- How do ECD teachers understand and describe the role of parents in ECD centres?

- How do ECD teachers involve parents within ECD centres?
- What factors influence parent involvement within the ECD centres?
- What strategies and ideas do ECD teachers have that might enhance parent involvement in ECD centres?

1.5 Research objectives

To answer the above research questions, the research objectives of this study are:

- To have an understanding of how ECD teachers perceive their roles within the ECD centres.
- To find out how ECD teachers understand and describe the role of parents in ECD centres.
- To investigate how ECD teachers involve parents within ECD centres.
- To explore factors influencing parent involvement within the ECD centres.
- To establish what strategies and ideas ECD teachers have that might enhance parent involvement in ECD centres.

1.6 Clarification of key concepts

Parent

According to the Department of Education (1996:5) a parent “is any person legally entitled to the custody of a learner or the person who undertakes to fulfil the obligation of a person referred to in paragraphs (a) and (b) towards the learner’s education at school”. It is important to note that due to the changes that have occurred over time the term parent is in a continual state of flux, thus the definition varies as society changes. In this study the term ‘parent’ is used broadly and refers to the person who has care, custody and control over the child.

Early Childhood Development centres

An “ECD centre is any building or premise maintained or used for the care of children. ECD centres include: a playgroup, crèche, aftercare centre, pre-school and nursery schools” (City of Cape Town, 2003:2).

Teacher

A teacher is “any person who educates or trains other persons or who provides professional educational services at any public school, departmental office or any education centre” (Department of Education, 1996:1). The term includes both formally and informally trained individuals providing an educational service in an ECD centre.

Early Childhood Development

Early Childhood Development (referred to as ECD) is “a comprehensive approach to policies and programmes for children from birth to nine years of age with the active participation of their parents and caregivers”. Its purpose is to protect the rights of children to develop to their full cognitive, emotional, social and physical potential (Department of Education, 2001:9).

Parent Involvement in Early Childhood Development

This is regarded as “an integral part of good practice in early childhood services. This involves establishing a good relationship between the parents and the service providers, based on a shared sense of purpose and mutual respect” (French, 2001: 2).

1.7 Ethical considerations

According to De Vos, Strydom, Fouche and Delpont (2011) researchers within the Social Sciences field need to understand that ethical issues are pervasive and complex, and so information should not be obtained at the expense of human beings. There are certain research guidelines that had to be followed so as to avoid harming the participants. The researcher acknowledged the importance of safeguarding the interests of each research participant by observing the following ethics:

1.7.1 Voluntary, informed consent

Participants were requested to voluntarily participate in the study. In the letter of introduction (See Appendix A) information about the research study was provided. This is supported by De Vos et al., (2011) who pointed out that informed consent from participants means that adequate

information about the research, the procedure to be followed during the research and the advantages and disadvantages of the study is provided.

Adequate information on the study was provided which enabled participants to give their voluntary consent which is defined as ‘a reasoned judgment about whether or not they want to participate’ (Denscombe, 2010:332). Each participant signed a consent form (See Appendix B) ‘as a way of formally recording the agreement to participate and confirming that the participants had been informed about the nature of the research’ (Denscombe, 2010:332). During the data collection, permission was sought from the participants to record the interviews. The participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the research at any stage if they felt they needed to do so (Babbie and Mouton, 2001; Rubin and Babbie, 2011).

1.7.2 Confidentiality and anonymity

In this study confidentiality management occurred at three stages: pre-interview, during the interview and post-interview. Before the interviews, the informed consent form containing assurances of confidentiality was drafted and sent out to the participants. The findings of the study does not contain any information that could be used to identify participants. At the beginning of every interview I assured the participants that the information shared would only be accessible to the external examiner, academic supervisor and the researcher. The ECD teachers were guaranteed that the information they shared was not going to affect them in their present place of work (De Vos et al., 2011; Babbie and Mouton, 2001).

Once the interviews were completed, I also upheld the principles of confidentiality and anonymity by not disclosing any identifiable information about the participants. For this reason in Chapter Four I referred to each participant as R (meaning Respondent). Furthermore, all findings were reported ensuring the anonymity of all participants.

1.7.3 Action and competence of the researcher

Researchers are ethically obliged to ensure that they are competent, honest and adequately skilled to undertake the study (William, 2006 cited in DeVos, Strydom Fouche and Delpont, 2011). In 2012, the researcher successfully completed a research course and completed her project at the Honours level. Babbie (2007) adds that even well-intended and well-planned

research can fail or can produce invalid results if the researcher is not adequately qualified and equipped and if there is no adequate supervision of the project. This study has been supported by my supervisor who is highly competent in the area of research, and he guided my research work throughout the research process.

1.7.4 Debriefing of respondents

Debriefing of respondents is important as it assists both the participant and the researcher to work through the research experience and to also minimize possible harm during the interview (Strydom, 2011 in De Vos, Strydom, Fouche and Delpont, 2011). The participants were given the opportunity during and after each interview to ask questions and highlight areas that needed clarification. This gave the participants an opportunity to debrief and have closure in their participation in the research.

1.7.5 Report of findings

The researcher has an obligation to report the findings scientifically without manipulating the information gathered (Strydom, 2011 in De Vos, Strydom, Fouche and Delpont, 2011). The researcher will provide feedback of the study to the ECD centres that participated in the research.

1.8 Reflexivity

I experienced some degree of anxiety at the beginning of the first interview. As the interviews progressed this feeling diminished and my confidence grew. Having read extensively about the research topic, I tried not to influence what the participants had to say during the interviews. The questions asked were those on the interview schedule, and in cases where the responses of the participants had to be probed, this was done in a manner that did not put words into their mouths. During the interviews, most of the participants showed a certain degree of disappointment with levels of parent involvement. In order not to lose the focus of the study the researcher made a conscious effort not to take sides. The researcher therefore had to take care not to allow personal feelings and thoughts on the matter to influence the participants. In addition, carrying out research in an unfamiliar venue posed a challenge especially when it came to gaining the trust of the participants and their acceptance of the researcher.

1.9 Outline of the research

This research report is made up of five chapters. A brief introduction to each chapter is given:

Chapter One: Introduction

Chapter One has discussed the background of the study; the statement of the problem; the significance of the study; the research topic, questions and objectives; clarification of key concepts; ethical considerations; reflexivity and provides a structure of the whole report.

Chapter Two: Literature review

This chapter presents a review of all literature related to the theories that underpin the study and significant aspects on ECD teacher attitudes towards parent involvement in early childhood development centres. The chapter is divided into the following headings: location of study; theoretical approaches and models; early childhood development policy framework and legislation; and certain aspects of parent involvement in ECD centres.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Chapter Three discusses the way and manner in which the study was carried out. A detailed discussion is presented on the research design, gaining entry, sampling, data collection, data analysis and data verification as well as discussions on the limitations of the research process.

Chapter Four: Presentation and discussion of research findings

Chapter Four discusses the findings of the study derived from the major themes and categories which emerged from the data collected and which are linked to the research objectives. Two significant tables were included in this chapter a profile of all the research participants and the framework for analysis. The presentation of findings has a flow where findings were presented after which direct quotes of participants are provided.

Chapter Five: Conclusions and recommendations

The final chapter presents the main conclusions and recommendations of the study. The chapter deals with the conclusions drawn from the research findings and set out recommendations for

ECD centres, parents of the young children attending the ECD centres and other key role players as well as recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a review of the literature relevant to the research topic and research objectives. It begins with a socio-economic profile of the Athlone community and is followed with a presentation of theoretical frameworks, and the ECD policy framework and legislation underpinning the study. Although much has been published in the field of ECD in South Africa, the aspect of ECD teacher attitudes towards parent involvement within ECD centres has received little attention. The body of literature reviewed in this chapter was continuously modified since the researcher was determined to present a conceptual framework that incorporated issues around ECD teacher attitudes towards parent involvement within the ECD centre.

2.2 Methodology of literature search and review

According to Grinnell and Unrau (2008) a literature review creates a foundation based on existing related knowledge. The researcher consulted secondary sources to inform the literature review. The literature sources included: lecture notes, journal articles, online policy documents, newspapers and books, past research reports and government publications. Some of the books, past reports and government publications were sourced from the University of Cape Town main library, while some articles and newspapers were sourced from the internet. The researcher mainly consulted online policy documents and government publications for information. Studies from other countries relating to this field of study were retrieved and consulted.

2.3 Location of study

2.3.1 Athlone community

Athlone is located approximately 9km west of Cape Town International Airport. It forms part of the historical Cape Flats (Bergman, nd). There are more than 236,000 people residing in Athlone, about 28.37% are aged 18-34, and 26.53% of whom are aged 35-54 (City of Cape Town, 2011:2). Approximately 62% are coloured and 30.9% of the adult population has completed Grade 12 and 8.63% have obtained a certificate or diploma together with a Grade 12 pass (City of Cape Town, 2011:3). 82.58% of residents speak English, whilst 15.18% speak Afrikaans as

first language. 87.97% of the economically-active population in Athlone are employed and primarily hold positions as clerks, technicians, professionals, and service and sales workers (City of Cape Town, 2011:4).

In Athlone 12,204 people are not economically active (City of Cape Town, 2011:4). According to the City of Cape Town (2011:2) 36.03% of households earn an annual income of between R19,201 and R76,800. Another 37.44% of households earn an annual income between R76,801 and R307,200. The Athlone railway station, which forms part of the Cape Flats line, together with the well-established bus and taxi routes, facilitates access to employment and economic opportunities for residents (Bergman, nd). Athlone is predominantly a residential area, however it includes established industrial and commercial nodes, namely the Athlone CBD and Athlone Industrial 1 and 2. There are also several ECD centres, schools and sports fields, a stadium and community centre in Athlone (Bergman, nd).

2.4 Theoretical frameworks

This study could be viewed through a wide range of theoretical lenses but this study will draw on Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems perspective, Epstein's theory of parent involvement and Role theory. The following section gives an overview of the selected theoretical frameworks.

2.4.1 Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems perspective

The framework for this study is rooted in the ecological system theory of Bronfenbrenner. This theory is based on the principle of interconnectedness within settings and the link between settings that affect individual development. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979:21)

“The ecology of human development involves the scientific study of the progressive, mutual accommodation between an active growing human being and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives”.

This process is affected by relations between these settings and by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The ecological environment, according to this theory, consists of a set of nested structures, each inside the next, like a set of Russian dolls as Keyes (2002) describes it. The figure below illustrates this:

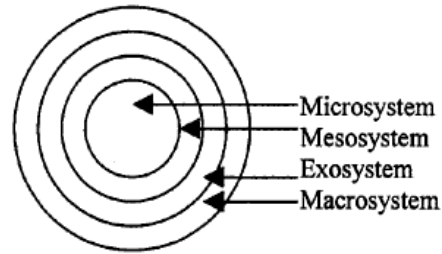


Figure 1: Bronfenbrenner's ecological model

Source: Keyes (2002)

Bronfenbrenner (1979) describes the principle of interconnectedness within settings and the link between these settings. According to Bronfenbrenner, the definition of developmental ecology is not limited to a single setting. He argues that these settings are systems that affect individual development and he defined them as: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem. The microsystem (at the inner circle) is a pattern of events and interpersonal relations which a child experiences the home, ECD centre and community. The microsystem comprises of interrelationships among two or more settings which the child actively participates in. The next circle (the meso-system), represents the relationship between the settings in which the young child participates (for example, home and ECD centre).

Bronfenbrenner (1979:25) described the exosystem (third circle) as

“One or more settings that do not involve the developing person as an active participant, but in which events occur that affect what happens in the setting containing the developing person”.

An example of an exosystem would be a parent's workplace, where parent activities and experiences can indirectly affect the development of the child. The macro-system refers to the values embedded in the larger social context and the influences that class, ethnic and cultural differences have on children (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). For instance, poverty is regarded as one of the major challenges South Africans are faced with. Statistics South Africa (2010:3) shows that 61% of children lived below the poverty line with a per capita income below R522 per month.

2.4.2 Epstein's theory of parent involvement

According to Epstein (2009) the connection between ECD centre, parents and community could either positively enhance children's learning, social and emotional development or could have a negative impact on the children. As Epstein (1996) notes the ECD centre, parents and communities share responsibilities for the socialization of the child. There are three important contexts in which children develop: the family, ECD centre and community. Epstein's (2009) theory of overlapping spheres further emphasizes the importance of ECD centres, parents and communities working together to meet the needs of children. In this context Sanders and Epstein (1998) argue that partnership between ECD centres, parents and communities can create safer ECD centre environments, strengthen parenting skills, encourage community services and improve academic skills.

This theory calls for a holistic approach in promoting parent involvement in ECD. In South Africa, the National Integrated Plan for Early Childhood Development's holistic approach was strengthened by the Children's Act No 38 of 2005. In the National Integrated Plan for Early Childhood Development the term 'integration' is used to describe the approach 'where services and programmes are provided in a comprehensive and interwoven manner that aims at ensuring the holistic development of children' (Department of Education, Department of Social Development, Department of Health and UNICEF, 2005:7).

Epstein (2009) has contributed significantly to parent involvement theory, through her six dimension model of parent involvement-namely: parenting, communication, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making and collaborating with the community. This model encourages and trains ECD teachers in cooperating with parents in the development of their children. This is an important step in creating a meaningful link between the parents and the ECD centre. This study has adopted four components of Epstein's types of parent involvement and they will be briefly discussed based on their applicability in ECD centres.

Parenting: According to Epstein (2009) parenting activities such as: counting, reading, stories telling, out-door and in-door games within the ECD centre assist parents with child-rearing skills and setting home conditions that can support the child's development. For instance ECD centres can introduce a range of activities that will help parents to play significant roles in their

children's lives. Epstein (2009) further showed that the quality of activities that goes on in the home strongly correlates with young children's academic learning and development.

Communication: ECD programmes should be driven towards establishing regular and meaningful communication between home and the ECD centre. As mentioned earlier, creating home-ECD centre partnerships enhances parent involvement which is critical to children's learning success. Parents might feel empowered when ECD centres create welcoming outreach activities and programmes for parents (Epstein 1996 cited in Bridgemohan, 2001).

Learning at home: According to Epstein (1996) when ECD teachers work together with parents, children tend to succeed not only in early development but throughout their lives. Parents and teachers need specific information and training to foster constructive parent involvement in children's development (Epstein, 2009).

Decision-making: Epstein (2009) also showed that effective programmes can encourage parents to become actively involved in the governance structure of the ECD centre. This involvement helps to develop positive partnerships between parents and ECD teachers. Epstein revealed that four roles played by parents can contribute to children's learning: parents as (1) teachers (2) supporters (3) advocates and (4) decision-makers.

2.4.3 Role theory

Howard (1992) defines a role 'as an expected pattern or set of behaviours associated with a particular position or status'. The focus of this theory is primarily on roles in the family and work domains, which are considered to be the two most central institutions in people's lives. Howard (1992) further explains that roles become personalized for individuals. For example, not all parents are subject to the same expectations and they all do not enact the parental role in the same way. The theory also suggests that parent's roles, beliefs and behaviours are influenced by personal ideals. These ideals are also influenced by the personal observations and interactions with others who also hold responsibilities related to children's development (Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Sandler, Whetsel, Green, Wilkins and Closson, 2004).

Hoover-Dempsey et al., (2004) further explain that roles are also characterized by their focus on goals held by the group and its individual members. These goals include socialisation of the

child, instilling appropriate behaviour, learning specific subject matter, and development of children's unique talents and interests. Parents play a major role in the socialisation of children and they must know these roles and demonstrate them effectively and efficiently (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2004:27).

I aligned this study with Role Theory because parents and ECD teachers have to develop a balanced strategy that is appropriate for a child's development. However, it is not possible for ECD teachers to come up with one "best" strategy, because the beliefs and expectations of parents vary. The aim of this research study is to help parents overcome some of the obstacles that hinder them in being involved in the development of their children, especially within the ECD centres.

Kieff and Wellhousen (2000) argue that ECD teachers may view their role as parent-focused, ECD-focused or partnership-focused. The parent-focused view evolved out of the parent cooperative movement. In that movement, ECD teachers and parents work side by side, empowering parents and giving parents teaching roles. According to Keyes (2002) this strategy is most prevalent in early childhood programmes. The ECD centre-focused role, on the other hand, reflects ECD teachers who believe in an effective separation of roles and functions between home and the ECD centre. Keyes (2002) adds that the partnership focus where parent and ECD centre work together is a more recent construct, evolving as literature began to point to the significant benefits that accrue to children, parents and ECD teachers as a result of the partnership.

2.5 Policy frameworks and legislation

Since ECD in South Africa has gained much recognition over the past few years, a number of policies and initiatives have been set in place to address the needs of young children. This section will briefly outline some of them.

The ratification by South Africa of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1995 has been influential in the way children's rights are reflected in the South African Constitution (Act 108 of 1996). The international event that was instrumental in bringing about change was the World Conference on Education for All in 1990. Focusing on the principle that

learning begins at birth, this conference emphasised the need to expand ECD programmes to include family and community interventions, especially for disadvantaged and disabled children. The 1990 World Summit for Children further synthesized the principles and concerns of children and urged the world's societies to work for children's enhanced development.

The framework emanating from these international events provided the vision, values and principles on which ECD has been contextualised and catered for in South Africa. The government has come up with legislation and policies which aim to ensure that the well-being and development of children is given top priority. Some of these programmes have recognised the importance of development around ECD and are discussed below.

2.5.1 The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa

Government's responsibility in the field of ECD flows from its constitutional duty to protect the rights of young children as well as their right to basic nutrition, health care and education. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996 is the supreme law of the land. The Constitution affirms the democratic values of human dignity, equality and freedom. The Bill of Rights forms part of the Constitution and enshrines the rights of all South Africans. The Bill of Rights is committed to providing a welfare system that entitles children to access to a number of socio-economic rights. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (RSA, 1996) in Section 28 of the Bill of Rights provides, among others, that:

1. Every child has the right (a) To a name and nationality from birth; (b) To parental care, or to appropriate alternative care when removed from the family environment; (c) To basic nutrition, shelter, basic health care and social services; and (d) To be protected from maltreatment, neglect, abuse or degradation.
2. A child's best interest is of paramount importance in every matter concerning the child.

A debate about whether the right to education includes the provision of services to support ECD has been on-going. According to Dawes, Biersteker and Louw (2006:15) "either way ECD falls directly within the right to basic education, ECD facilitates children's realisation to this right".

2.5.2 The South African Children's Act

In order to give effect to the rights of children as contained in the Constitution, the Children's Act (No. 38 of 2005) was passed. One of its aims was to define parent responsibilities and rights. It goes a step further to ensure the protection of children's rights, which would lead to a corresponding improvement in other aspects of their lives. It is neither desirable nor possible to protect children's rights in isolation from their parents and communities (Department of Justice, 2005). The Act notes that it is necessary to effect changes to existing laws, especially the ones relating to children, in order to give them the critical protection they need.

One of the Act's general principles states that, "all proceedings, actions and decisions in a matter concerning a child must recognise a child's need for development and to engage in play and other recreational activities appropriate to the child's age" (Department of Justice, 2005:20). The Act therefore is committed to providing structures, services and means for promoting and monitoring the physical, psychological, intellectual, emotional and social development of the child. The researcher noted that the Children's Act does not state how parents should contribute to the development of South African children. Yet for effective early childhood development programmes to take root, parents need to be involved in their children's development. However, the nature of this involvement is not clear.

Chapter 8 of the Children's Act (No 38 of 2005) contains a number of provisions relating to prevention and early intervention programmes. The regulations within this chapter state that the provincial Member of Executive Council (MEC) must make funds available for early intervention and prevention services which involve and promote the involvement of parents, caregivers and children.

2.5.3 The National Integrated Plan for Early Childhood Development (NIP-ECD)

The National Integrated Plan for Early Childhood Development presented an integrated implementation plan for children between 0-4 years. It was a response to the 'fragmented and uncoordinated service provision in the ECD sector' where different departments addressed children's needs using sector-specific legislation (Department of Education, Department of Social Development, Department of Health and UNICEF, 2005:6). The aim and vision of the plan is to 'create an environment where all children in South Africa are able to access a range of

safe and quality ECD programmes’ (Department of Education, Department of Social Development, Department of Health and UNICEF, 2005:11). It recognises the role of the non-profit sector in ECD as initiators of most early learning facilities and programmes in the country.

The NIP-ECD also recognises the community and informal ECD settings as places of care, particularly for the “poor and vulnerable children from birth to four” (Department of Education, Department of Social Development, Department of Health and UNICEF, 2005:13). The main principles guiding the NIP-ECD are: redress and equity, holding that government should act as the “key agent for levelling the playing fields for the historically disadvantaged majority of children...by increasing access to ECD programmes ... [and] improving the quality of such programmes...” (Department of Education, Department of Social Development, Department of Health and UNICEF, 2005:7).

The document regards parents as ‘the first and main providers’ of children’s care and stimulation. For this reason the plan advocates family programmes that will promote the participation of parents in their children’s development and well-being. The plan not only draws together divergent departments, but it also has a target of over 3 million poor children and promotes multi-service approach. It recognizes several approaches to developing young children including: direct services for children, training ECD teachers and educating parents, promoting community development and building public awareness.

2.6 ECD teachers understanding and description of parent involvement in ECD

Parent involvement is defined as the “participation of parents in regular, two-way and meaningful communication between the home and ECD centre activities that ensure that (a) parents play an integral role in assisting the child’s learning; (b) parents are fully included in decision-making and on advisory committees to assist in the development of the child” (Patrikakou, 2008:1). Scholars and researchers such as Epstein and Comer describe the relationship between parents and teachers as a “partnership”. According to the American Heritage Dictionary (2006) cited in Jacobs (2008:7), a partnership is ‘a relationship between individuals or groups that is characterized by mutual cooperation and responsibility for the achievement of a specific goal’.

Jacobs's (2008) study shows that many teachers described their relationship with parents as 'good' or 'positive' and reported few negative interactions with parents. Furthermore, she observed that a number of teachers try to set the terms for their relationship with parents, but despite these efforts sometimes it does not work that way. Her study shows that teachers often tell parents about their 'open door policy'. This implies that teachers encourage parents to visit their classroom at any time. It further implies that teachers welcome communication with parents. But she noted that in reality, if one looks deeper, teachers also have strategies for managing their interactions with parents. Jacobs (2008) further suggests that we look more closely at the teachers' side of these interactions and understand how they try to structure their relationship with parents.

Lareau (2000) in Jacobs (2008) argues that much of the so-called parent involvement is not in reality a partnership, but is carried out more like 'a professional client relationship where the power is unevenly distributed'. Beveridge (2004) cited in Jacobs (2008:125) contends that, 'despite the principle of equality that is implicit in the idea of parent partnership, in practice the parent experience is rarely one of equal status'. Jacobs (2008) argues that one reason that teachers may try to negotiate their interactions with parents is their own consideration of themselves as professionals. In other cases the parents regard the teacher as the professional. Addi-Racah and Arviv-Elyasiv in Jacobs (2008) report that when parents are empowered the teacher's sense of professionalism can be called into question.

According to Jacobson (2009:37 cited in Wright, 2009) more than 80% of teachers reported that in order to be effective, they must be able to work well with parents. However, teachers also indicated that this communication with and involvement of parents is the greatest challenge they face. In their qualitative study of teacher perceptions on parent involvement, Barge and Loges (in Wright, 2009) found teacher responses tended to fall into these themes: communication with teachers, participation in the child's ECD programme and the child's life in general. Baker's study (1997) also indicates that teachers were most concerned with support, communication, parental insight, homework help and expectations. Her report also states that most teachers wanted parents to support them in their effort to educate their children. They indicated strongly that they had asked parents to support them as professionals who have their child's best interest

at heart. The teachers strongly believed that children's development should be central to parent involvement.

It is evident in Jacobson's (2009) study that teachers from all levels acknowledge the need to improve parent involvement and the idea of better communication appears to be paramount. The communication desired by teachers is reciprocal and should be equal in terms of power-sharing and responsibility.

2.7 The level of parent involvement in ECD centres

The previous segment shows that parents and teachers are expected to collaborate to ensure that children receive appropriate care and that their development is enhanced. Though this partnership is seen as important, Burden (1995) argues that parents are often passive participants and rarely take part in making decisions about ECD programmes (Burden, 1995 in Mukuna and Indoshi, 2012). For instance, the parent role in early childhood curriculum development involves parents helping teachers to prepare an anti-bias curriculum. The anti-bias curriculum has the outcome of "creating secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships that value diversity among people" that brings about social change, and to ensure that the curriculum provides for all areas of the child's development through an integrated approach (Bicultural inclusion support services, nd: 1). The other roles include making decisions, assisting teachers in instructional and non-instructional activities, passively participating in non-educational activities, attending special events and receiving progress reports about children. It should be child-centred, ensuring children learn in a good hygienic and spacious environment (Hurlock, 2012 cited in Mukuna and Indoshi, 2012). Hurlock (2012) further adds that parents should provide play materials for teachers to use. They should also ensure the schedule gives enough time to learn and rest. As Epstein (1996) argues, parents should be involved as classroom assistants and as organisers of ECD events.

2.8 Factors influencing parent involvement in Early Childhood Development

2.8.1 Beliefs and expectations

According to Patrikakou (2008) parent and teacher beliefs and expectations are crucial to shaping the home-ECD centre relationship. She further adds that beliefs about individuals and group characteristics drive our choices and behaviours and are crucial in shaping relationships. Therefore, ECD centres need to create a positive, welcoming climate with opportunities for parents to be involved. Wright (2009) argues that one reason for the lack of parent involvement can be attributed to how teachers relate to parents. He says that often teachers are guilty of using words that are incomprehensible to parents. As a result of this miscommunication, many teachers have at times lost the respect and support of parents (Baker, 2001 in Wright, 2009). For instance in Wright's (2009) work, some parents reported that teachers often come across as "teacherish" because of the use of complicated educational language. This type of language runs the risk of making formal relationships difficult between teachers and parents (Rich, 1987). This idea was especially prevalent among minority parents. They are often times intimidated by school staff and the institutional structure of many schools. Minority parents often feel apprehensive about approaching school personnel, especially if they have previously had a negative experience with school (Chavkin, 1989).

At times, barriers to parent involvement can be caused by the type of contact initiated by teachers. Conflict often arises when teachers contact parents only when their child is exhibiting academic or behaviour problems. Epstein (2001) linked this kind of reactionary parent contact to high rates of student absences, creation of negative attitudes towards schools, and low ratings of the school by the parents.

2.8.2 Cultural differences

In recent years with the increasing cultural diversity of families, the home and ECD centre environment may hold different beliefs about the appropriate degree and nature of parent involvement (Gaitan, 2004 in Patrikakou, 2008). The culture of the parents often affects how they wish to be involved in their child's development. On the other hand, involvement also has to do with whether or not the ECD centre chooses to embrace the culture of parents (Pena, 2000

cited in Patrikakou, 2008). Many parents are reluctant to voice concerns due to their cultural belief that the teacher is the authoritative figure in their child's education. Some parents also fear questions or criticism that might put their child at a disadvantage in the classroom.

2.8.3 The child's development

Parent involvement in the ECD centre can positively influence a child's development. According to Patrikakou (2008), young children whose parents actively participate in early childhood development programmes not only display progress in academic, social and emotional learning, but also engage in less risky and delinquent behaviour later in life. She further adds that when young children enter adolescence, parents and teachers often misinterpret the adolescents' desire for autonomy as a developmental barrier to parent involvement. The same situation is seen in Erikson's stages of development for children between two to four years of age who want to explore their surroundings. According to Stevens (1983), toddlers at this time develop a sense of autonomy-a sense of being able to handle many problems on their own. But if caregivers demand too much and refuse to let children perform tasks of which they are capable, children may instead develop low self-esteem and doubt their own ability to handle problems.

2.8.4 Parent perspective

Time and life demands: Time seems to be a major barrier impeding parents from participating in ECD activities or assisting their children's ECD work at home. With the increase in single-parent households and the dramatic change in the work force with regard to mothers of school-aged children time has become a valuable commodity for parents who struggle to make ends meet (Patrikakou, 2008). A parent often cannot participate in ECD activities due to work commitments, family responsibilities or other time restrictions. According to the Department of Labour (2005:3) the broad labour force for women increased by 59% from 1995 to 2005. This indicates that a high proportion of women in South Africa have entered the labour market. In addition, there is a sharp rise in the number of female-headed households in diverse cultural settings. Single parents are also less likely to be involved in their children's development experiences because they do not find it easy playing dual roles (Arnold, Zeljo, Doctoroff, and Ortiz, 2008).

According to Kohl, Lenga, and McMahon (2000) single parents have access to fewer resources that are needed for parent involvement, such as time, money and social support. Many families do not have child care resources or a live-in care giver. In South Africa, a number of children are left to informal networks for childcare or childcare is delegated to family members. As evidently shown above, more South African parents participate in one form of work or the other and as a result little time is devoted to the child's life (Orgill, 2010).

Social and Economic Reasons: In her studies, Epstein (1996) found that differences in social situations and economic status can provide barriers to parent involvement. Unless the ECD centres specifically organise opportunities to involve single parents and parents who stay far from the ECD centre, they are usually less involved within the centre. ECD centres in affluent communities tend to have more positive parent involvement (Wright, 2009).

Parent's Social Economic Status (SES) has been established as a significant predictor of parent involvement. Christenson and Reschly (2010) found that low ECD involvement tended to be higher among parents with low socio-economic status. However, other studies suggest that SES is not consistently related to the levels of parent involvement. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) and Davis-Kean in Christenson and Reschly (2010) theorize that the relationship between socio-economic status and parent involvement is based on the resources available to parents, teachers and ECD centres to create opportunities for parent involvement. Socio-economic status can impact on the time and energy parents are able to devote to ECD centre involvement. Parents with low socio-economic status may be more likely than parents with middle or high incomes to consider their child's teacher as the expert in their child's development (Crozier, 1999).

In South Africa more than 55% of children are in households living under the ultra-poverty line of R800 or less a month. This amounts to 10 million children in total (UNICEF, 2007:4). Closely linked to this income indicator is unemployment. The South Africa Survey (2010:209) estimates that 36% of children reside in households where no adults are employed. The official unemployment rate was 25% in 2009 (South Africa Survey 2010:209).

2.9 Strategies that can enhance parent involvement in ECD centres

According to the National Planning Commission, National Development Plan (2011:264) “ECD is critical for ensuring that children reach their full potential and parents and teachers are the key stakeholders in ECD, especially at the implementation stage”. Parents are the primary caregivers of their children and central figures at the heart of their children’s lives (Faruhar, 2003 in Mukuna and Indoshi, 2012). There are steps that ECD centres can take to establish and maintain their relationship with parents, and there are responsibilities that parents can take to enhance this relationship with the ECD teachers.

2.9.1 Micro level recommendations

According to Patrikakou (2008) one framework ECD centres can apply is the “P’s philosophy” of parent involvement when they develop their planning on ECD centre-parent relations:

Partnership as a priority: ECD centres with mission statements that highlight the importance of ECD centre-home relationships clearly communicate their commitment to including parents as collaborators in the development of their children. Patrikakou (2008) argues that effective implementation of the mission statement requires the necessary courses and training to support ECD teachers to put parent involvement into practice. She further strongly believes that ECD centres should find ways to systemically recognize and reward positive parent-teacher partnership efforts.

Planned effort: Effective ECD centre-home partnerships need to be carefully planned and implemented. According to Patrikakou (2008), at the beginning of a child’s ECD years parent needs and views of their involvement within the ECD centres must be assessed. Such an assessment accomplishes two goals: (a) it helps teachers plan parent outreach efforts more effectively (b) it conveys to parents the important message that their perspective is valued and will be used within ECD centres.

Proactive and persistent communication: ECD centres should regularly inform parents about classroom routines (such as nap time, outdoor games, indoor activities, snack time, reading time and storytelling time) and provide parents with ideas on how they can participate effectively in the early years of the child. The Harvard Family Research Project (2006) believes that ECD

teachers should approach parent involvement in ‘overlapping and multiple ways’. Using a variety of approaches and follow-up communications can increase the number of parents to reach. This maintains the flow of information that can lead to a child’s improved academic and social performance (Patrikakou (2008).

For example, ECD teachers can help promote parent workshops and parent-child groups within the ECD centre. In order to develop home-ECD centre relationships, teachers should communicate frequently with parents about their children’s development and also provide opportunities for parents to visit the classrooms. Once ECD centres provide such openness to parents, parents are able to take responsibility for their children’s learning outside the ECD centres by providing materials and ideas which parents can use at home and within the community.

Programme monitoring: Teacher-parent partnership activities can be improved when they are systematically evaluated. Throughout the school year, as part of the ECD centre plan teachers need to examine the effectiveness of the strategies and materials they use, ask for the parents’ feedback and adjust their practices accordingly. In this way, activities can be fine-tuned continuously and will have greater potential for yielding positive results in ECD. Patrikakou (2008) suggests that an end-of-year evaluation will provide closure for the year’s efforts and valuable insights for next year’s planning.

2.9.2 Macro level recommendations

Investing in parent involvement projects: Policy makers should consider increasing early childhood development initiatives that emphasis parent involvement within the ECD centre. The Harvard Family Research Project (2006) argues that ECD projects should promote professional training, higher education and community partnerships that demonstrate how ECD teachers can create multiple avenues for parent involvement within the ECD centres. For example, the Incredible Years programme has successfully been able to develop training modules for parents and teachers in order to promote the ECD centre-home relationships in the United States (Harvard Family Research Project, 2006).

Supporting ECD programmes within communities: Communities need to be aware that parent involvement in ECD plays a significant role in promoting ECD. As such communities should be conscientized on the importance of the role parents play during the early years of the child and that parents would require resources and support that would enable them play a role in the child's early years. The Harvard Family Research Project (2006) observed that ECD centres can work together to promote opportunities for parent involvement within the community. This means the community should provide that enabling platform for parent involvement. In South Africa, Afrika Tikkun, South African Education and Environment Project (SAEP), the Centre for Early Childhood Development and the Early Learning Resource Unit are examples of community based projects that have promoted parent involvement in early learning programmes.

Best practices for parent involvement in ECD: Policy makers can develop systems and mechanisms that ensure parent involvement is realised. For instance, the Harvard Family Research Project (2006) proposes that standards can be put into place to guarantee that ECD teachers are well paid and trained so they are able to initiate progressive parent involvement practices within the ECD centres. The report also emphasises that policies can mandate employers to allow parents of young children to take time off from work so that they are able to participate in their children's cognitive environment and development experiences.

Sponsor dialogue about research on parent involvement in ECD: The Harvard Family Research Project (2006) report suggests that policymakers should bring together researchers, ECD heads, ECD teachers and parents. These groups can come together to discuss research findings specifically as they relate to parents as well as to address issues such as translating the learning about parent involvement into curriculum, guidelines for practice and evaluation tools. These stakeholders can also suggest new directions for research. For example, ECD research in South Africa can begin to look more into parent involvement.

2.10 Summary

This literature review chapter has provided background on the location of the study, analysed three major theoretical models and further discussed several international and national ECD policy frameworks. The discussion of the literature was informed by and related to the objectives of the study.

In Chapter Three the methods used in this research study is thoroughly discussed. This chapter is focussing on the research design, sampling techniques, tools and approaches used for the data collection, the data analysis and limitations of the study.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the research design and methodology used in this study. The research design, gaining entry, sampling, data collection, data analysis, data verification and limitations of the study are presented.

3.2 Research design

According to Babbie and Mouton (2001), research design is a layout of how the researcher intends to carry out the research process in order to find answers to the research questions and to guide the research process.

The aim of this study was to explore ECD teacher attitudes towards parent involvement in ECD centres. Thus a qualitative research approach was used to explore the views and perceptions of the ECD teachers in Athlone. De Vos, Strydom, Fouche and Delport (2005:240) define qualitative research as a “multi-perspective approach to social interaction, aimed at making sense of, or interpreting or reconstructing this interaction in terms of the meanings that the research subjects attach to it”. The goal of the researcher in using this paradigm was to describe and understand the participants rather than explaining their behaviour (Babbie and Mouton, 2001). An exploratory study is carried out for several reasons and one of them is to satisfy a researcher’s curiosity and the desire for better understanding of a certain social phenomena (Babbie and Mouton, 2001). In adopting a qualitative design for this study, the participants were interviewed in their own natural setting, rather than under artificially created conditions.

The main activity of the research study involved carrying out in-depth interviews with twenty participants. The interviews were carried out in English, which in most cases is the participants’ second language. The qualitative approach allows for questions that are unstructured and open-ended, which helps the researcher obtain information in a comprehensive manner. The design also allows for in-depth information to be gathered from the research participants. Bryman (2008:385) describes this as the “goal of seeking to probe beneath surface appearances”, as a result opening up unique and salient perspectives not anticipated by the research questions.

During the data collection process I noticed that a number of concerns came up which the participants expressed during the interviews. This enabled the study to produce clear and distinctive issues around ECD and parent involvement within ECD centres. This is vital seeing that few studies have been conducted on ECD teacher attitudes towards parent involvement in ECD. In addition, DeVos, Strydom, Fouche and Delpont (2011) describe interviews as “conversation with a purpose”. This is used to determine individual perceptions, opinions and understanding.

3.3 Gaining entry

Through my academic supervisor I was able to get a list of the early childhood development centres in Athlone from the Centre for Early Childhood Development database. The list had the contact details (such as ECD centre name, telephone number, principal name and address) of all the ECD centres. The Centre for Early Childhood Development over the years has established strong relationships with these ECD centres. To gain access to my participants, I wrote a letter of introduction (See Appendix A). After contacting the ECD centre heads, I was given permission to interview two teachers at each centre. Considering that the ECD centre is a place where children are looked after the ECD centre authority had to ensure the safety of the children by firstly having an introductory letter where I stated the purpose of my visit.

3.4 Sampling

This research study used purposive, non-probability sampling. The purposive sampling technique is referred to as a process of selecting sample participants based on specific reasons associated with answering a study’s questions, selecting a small number of cases that will yield the most information about a particular phenomenon (Teddlie and Yu, 2007). This study targeted teachers in ECD centres enabling the researcher to explore ECD teacher attitudes toward parent involvement within ECD centres. This technique was chosen because the research questions had to be answered by participants that had the experience of working with young children and parents on a daily basis. It is important that the participants were carefully and deliberately selected so as to acquire relevant and in-depth information. Denscombe (2010) refers to this as hand-picked for the research on the basis of relevance and knowledge.

3.5 Data collection

3.5.1 Data collection process

The researcher conducted individual, face-to-face interviews with twenty (20) participants. A profile of the participants is presented in Chapter Four. The interviews ranged from 20 minutes to more than an hour. Sixteen of the interviews were conducted in the principal's office and the remaining four took place in the waiting areas of the ECD centre. These locations were determined by the participants. According to Gubrium, Holstein, Marvasti and McKinney (2012:209) "the place of the interview should be convenient to the participants, private and familiar to him or her. The venue for the interview should be place where the participant feels comfortable and secure".

The researcher's approach was to allow the participants to decide a convenient date, time and place for the interviews, considering that they had to take time away from the children. Bearing that in mind Gubrium, Holstein, Marvasti and McKinney (2012) argue that the guiding principle in determining the location, date and time of the interview should be equity because the researcher is the "taker" while the participant is the "giver". Hence the researcher must be flexible and willing to adapt to the preferences of the participant.

At the start of every interview the participant and I found a comfortable area, after which I tried to form a good rapport by asking how the participant was doing and how work was going. Gubrium, Holstein, Marvasti and McKinney (2012) report that once there is a connection participants are unlikely to withhold their inner feelings. During such conversations some participants became visibly more comfortable and relaxed. I further stated the purpose and the relevance of the study and also thanked them again for making time to be part of the interview process. During all the interviews, at the end of each theme I confirmed the responses of the participants. This was to ensure that there was no misunderstanding of information between the participant and myself.

3.5.2 Data collection instrument

In collecting data from the participants, I used a semi-structured interview schedule (See Appendix C). This interview schedule guided the researcher and the participants during the

interviews. There were instances where I deviated from the sequence of questions in order to allow for the flow of information. According to DeVos, Strydom, Fouche and Delpont (2005:296) semi structured interviews are

“Especially suitable where one is particularly interested in complexity or process, or where an issue is controversial or personal... In this relationship, the participant can be perceived as the expert on the subject and should be allowed maximum opportunity to tell his or her story”.

By using the semi-structured interview guide to collect data I was able to explore the topic more openly, allowing the participants to express their opinions and ideas in their own words and in their time. The data collection instrument allowed the researcher to establish a conversational style with the participant. The interview schedule was carefully compiled by the researcher with the assistance of her academic supervisor and was done in a manner so that the research objectives corresponded with the interview schedule. The interview schedule was segmented into five themes derived from the research objectives. Each theme had a number of open-ended questions. It is important to note that before going to the field, I had the opportunity to rehearse the interview schedule with my academic supervisor. This exercise helped me to develop my interview technique, and to become familiar with the schedule.

3.5.3 Data collection apparatus

Data was collected with the aid of a voice recorder. Permission was sought from all participants before the digital device was used during the interviews. The digital voice recorder was used to capture all the verbal information allowing the researcher to focus on the non-verbal cues (such as facial expressions and body language) and to establish a rapport rather than concentrating on taking notes (Greeff, 2011). During all the interviews, there was a free-flow of communication between the participant and the researcher.

3.6 Data analysis

In qualitative research, data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the data collected (Schwandt, 2007 in DeVos, Strydom, Fouche and Delpont, 2011). The data collected for this study was analysed using Tesch’s eight step approach (Tesch, 1990 in DeVos et al., 1998:343-344). The researcher adhered to the following eight steps:

Step 1: All twenty in-depth interviews were audio recorded to ensure the information gathered was stored for data processing. The recorded interviews were transcribed onto my personal computer and the data was also kept on a disk. The researcher read through each of the transcripts carefully and gained an overall picture of the data collected. It is important to note that the researcher also obtained written documentation from the participants (See Appendix D) and also followed the same process for the analysis of this data.

Step 2: The researcher selected and read one transcript with the view to understand the participant's responses in relation to the objectives of the study. Once the themes were identified I started to make notes on the margins next to relevant texts.

Step 3: The researcher continued to make notes on the margins of several interviews from the transcripts. The themes were grouped under major topics that aligned with the research objectives and five themes emerged.

Step 4: Lists were compiled to identify the categories under each of the five themes. Where Tesch (1990) makes use of abbreviated codes to identify the topics, I colour coded the text and clearly read the transcriptions of all the interviews carried out. This process is critical for one cannot analyse the data unless one reads it thoroughly (Dey, 1993).

Step 5: The researcher then typed out all the colour coded text from each of the transcripts under the heading of the relevant themes and categories.

Step 6: The researchers then finalised the themes and categories that emerged from the transcripts.

Step 7: Once all relevant data belonging to each category was assembled, the data was ready for analysis. A preliminary table was used to record the main themes and categories and was used as a framework for discussing the findings. I made comparisons and contrasts of the participants responses contained in the data. Similarly, the data collected was compared with literature contained within Chapter Two. According to Mange (1995) this process of double-checking highlights possible contradictions in participant's responses which enhance a better understanding of the issue.

Step 8: The final step I compared the themes, categories and sub-categories identified in the transcripts and in addition I looked for possible missing or incomplete data.

3.7 Data verification

Verification is the process of checking, confirming, making sure and being certain of the trustworthiness of the research process (Creswell, 1997; Kvale, 1989). In quantitative research, validity and reliability are two terms that are applicable in verifying findings. Due to the difficulty in applying these terms in qualitative research, Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed that the key criterion of good qualitative research is found in the notion of trustworthiness - neutrality of its findings or decisions. Lincoln and Guba (1985) both put forward four constructs, which they believe reflect the assumptions of trustworthiness.

3.7.1 Credibility

Credibility makes the researchers ask themselves if the findings ‘ring true’, and if there is compatibility between the realities that exist in the minds of respondents and those that are attributed to them (Babbie and Mouton, 2001). In order to ensure accuracy, a digital recorder was used during the interviews to ensure that the findings were consistent with what the participants reported. Furthermore, within this study credibility was supported by an in-depth literature review.

3.7.2 Transferability

Transferability refers to the extent to which the findings can be used in other contexts or with other participants (Babbie and Mouton, 2001). Transferability will not be discussed as this study sought the experiences and opinions of the respondents and does not intend to generalise the findings.

3.7.3 Dependability

In Babbie and Mouton (2001:278) dependability is a situation where a research is able to “provide its audience with evidence that if it were to be repeated with the same or similar respondents in the same context, its findings would be similar”. Shenton (2004:71) argues that “in order to address the dependability issue more directly, the processes within the study should

be reported in detail, thereby enabling a future researcher to repeat the work...” This report outlined the methodology in detail and also highlighted how data was analysed and therefore replication with similar results should be possible.

3.7.4 Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the degree to which the findings are the product of the focus of the inquiry and not of the biases of the researcher (Babbie and Mouton, 2001). In addressing this, I was aware of my biases and in presenting the research findings I linked the findings to the literature to ensure objectivity.

3.8 Limitations of the study

In this study the researcher faced certain limitations pertaining to the design and methodology of the study. The limitations of the study are discussed in relation to the research design, data collection apparatus, data collection instrument, data capturing, the competence of the researcher and language barrier.

3.8.1 Research design

The study is embedded in the qualitative paradigm which has been criticized for being over reliant on the subjectivity of participants (Babbie and Mouton, 2007). However, since the aim of this study was to gain an understanding of ECD teacher attitudes towards parent involvement within the ECD centres, it was the most appropriate paradigm to adopt for this study.

3.8.2 Data collection apparatus

The use of the digital voice recorder during the interview posed a challenge. Some of the participants were initially not comfortable with the digital voice recorder, and this aroused some anxiety. The researcher was able to help participants disregard the digital recorder and this allowed her to be attentive in hearing what the participants were saying without worrying that important information would be missed. It also allowed the researcher time to observe the non-verbal cues of the participants.

3.8.3 Data collection instrument

It has been argued that using interviews to collect data is expensive and time consuming. I had to travel to the ten ECD centres and by the end of the time allocated for the interviews I had incurred some unanticipated expenses. The semi-structured interview allowed for the collection of a greater volume of information and so I had limited control over time. Five interviews ran over time and impacted on the other scheduled interviews. Two interviews had to be postponed to another date. With all the unforeseen contingencies I still managed to interview all twenty participants.

3.8.4 Data capturing

The transcription process was difficult because some of the participants' audio responses were not clear and so I had to go over them several times. Raw data generated from this study was obtained from twenty in-depth interviews, this may seem voluminous. However, in adopting Tesch's (1990) eight step of data analysis, I was able to complete this process competently.

3.8.5 Competence of the researcher

As the researcher I needed to guard against distorting the direction of the interview. With the high level of support from my supervisor I dispelled any anxieties that I had with regards to this research process.

3.8.6 Language barrier

As earlier mentioned, this study was conducted in English. There were times that the participants struggled to express themselves in English. The researcher acknowledged that her lack of understanding of the Afrikaans language was a stumbling block because it would have been easier for the participants to express themselves better. However, the interviews were completed without any loss of understanding due to language.

3.9 Summary

This chapter presents a detailed description of the research design and methodology chosen for this study including the sampling type and process, data collection methods and research instrument. A description of the data analysis and data verification processes was presented and the chapter concluded with describing the limitations of the study. The next chapter presents and discusses the research findings informed by the objectives of the study.

Chapter 4: Presentation and discussion of findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and discusses the findings of this study that set out to explore ECD teacher attitudes towards parent involvement within ECD centres. The findings are presented in two parts: the first part presents the profiles of the participants; and the second part presents findings using the broad themes as headings. The chapter concludes by summarizing what has been presented and discussed.

4.2 Profile of participants

To gain an understanding of the participants involved in this study, this section provides a profile of the participants. For purposes of confidentiality pseudonyms are used in place of participants' names. Table I outlines the profile of the participants involved in this study. The table shows that some of the participants have attended a parent involvement workshop. Some of the ECD teachers had more than five years of work experience in ECD. The table also indicates that the majority of the participants have obtained a South Africa National Qualification Framework, ECD qualification.

Table I: Profile of participants

The following table provides a profile of the participants.

Participant	Highest qualification	Number of years in ECD experience	Has attended a parent involvement workshop	Number of children enrolled at ECD centre	Name of ECD centre	Years working in present ECD centre
1	Grade 12 and NQF Level 2	17	Yes	60	Marion	17
2	NQF Level 4	6	No	28	Marion	6
3	Grade 9 and NQF Level 4	33	Yes	45	Silvertown Educare Centre	30
4	Grade 12 and NQF Level 6	3	Yes	19	Kidz Daycare	2
5	Grade 12	18	Yes	52	Kidz Daycare	7
6	NQF Level 6	23	Yes	32	Silvertown Educare Centre	6
7	Grade 12	3	Yes	24	Bethany Daycare	3
8	Grade 10	4	Yes	25	Bethany Daycare	4
9	Diploma	23	Yes	27	Bridges Play Centre	17
10	NQF Level 5	4	No	25	Bridges Play Centre	4
11	Grade 12	35	Yes	10	Early Learning Centre	35
12	Grade 7	29	Yes	26	Early Learning Centre	29
13	Diploma and NQF Level 5	20	Yes	29	Ma'Roof Islamic Educare	20
14	Diploma and NQF Level 6	20	Yes	21	Ma'Roof Islamic Educare	20
15	Grade 10	20	No	22	Build a Better Society	20
16	Grade 12 and NQF Level 5	7	No	19	Build a Better Society	7
17	NQF Level 5	18	No	11	Toddlers College	14
18	NQF Level 4	4	No	15	Toddlers College	2
19	NQF Level 4	18	No	13	Little Children Nursery School	4
20	NQF Level 4	3	Yes	15	Little Children Nursery School	3

4.3 Framework for analysis of findings

The framework for analysis was developed using the main research questions as well as the information gathered during the interviews. The general themes were derived from this. The categories were identified under each of the main themes during the process of data analysis. Table II below presents the framework for analysis and discussion which the researcher developed.

Table II: Framework for analysis

Number of Themes	Themes	Categories
4.3.1	Understanding how ECD teachers perceive their roles within the ECD centres	Passion Multi-tasking Cultural differences Income level and conditions of service of ECD teachers
4.3.2	How ECD teachers understand and describe the role of parents in ECD centres	Partnership Good relationship and open door policy Level of parent involvement within ECD centres
4.3.3	How ECD teachers involve parents within ECD centres	Communication Parent-teacher meetings Poor attendance at parent-teacher meetings Fundraising events Decision-making Parent workshops
4.3.4	Factors influencing parent involvement within the ECD centres	Beliefs and expectations Distance between the home and ECD centre Parent's nonchalant attitudes Work commitments and life demands Grandparents as caregivers Social and economic reasons Single parents Domestic violence The child's development Commitment levels between older and younger parents
4.3.5	Strategies and ideas ECD teachers have that might enhance parent involvement in ECD centres	A change of attitude among parents Partnership between ECD teachers, parents and other role players Parent networks Workshops for ECD teachers and parents

Presentation and discussion of findings

The findings from this study are presented using the main themes as headings.

4.3.1 Understanding how ECD teachers perceive their roles within the ECD centres

It is important to have a clear picture of how ECD teachers describe themselves within their field of specialization. The ECD teachers responses are sub-grouped under the following headings: passion; multi-tasking; cultural differences; and income level and conditions of service of ECD teachers.

Passion

Although being an ECD teacher is a demanding career that requires intense dedication when dealing with younger children, the researcher noticed that all the participants talked passionately about their work. During the interviews, it was evident that the children keep the teachers motivated in spite of the difficulties they face.

“I love to wake up in the morning and come here every day because it’s what I love to do, I’ve never worked anywhere else, I’ve only worked with the children that is why now I am....am currently yeah increasing my studies so that I can further learn about how to deal with the children otherwise its good for me. This is where I want to be” [R-15].

“Been a teacher here it...I love the job and I love the job I do because I love children and working with them is very nice there are those times when.... (She stammered) when you feel you can do more and ahem....but beside that I love teaching and being a teacher has really given me a real inside as to how children’s minds work and how to deal with children in certain aspects and its fun for me but yeah....it’s fun because you have to jump around you have to dance you have to do all those other things with the children and they can be very enjoyable” [R-10].

One participant passionately reported that she found her job rewarding because she watched how the children develop.

“Well for me it is something... it is a rewarding profession that I think once you’ve started teaching the children things you can see how they master certain skills. There is nothing to compare with this and ahem.....when you see their faces, their faces light-up with knowing that they have achieved something nothing compares to that...” [R-11].

Carbonneau Vallerand, Fernet and Guay (2008:2), define passion as “a strong inclination or desire towards an activity that someone likes and finds important and in which one invests time and energy”. They further postulate that a constant engagement in an activity can result in the person highly valuing that activity regardless of the surrounding challenges. For instance teachers who are passionate about their job do not only regard teaching as a profession but see teaching as an essential part of their lives.

One participant shared the same sentiment, and she felt that working in a community ECD centre was her own way of giving back to the Athlone community.

“This is a passion for me so it’s more of an obligation to the community and to also find pleasure in your work” [R-4].

Multi-tasking

In describing their roles and responsibilities within the ECD centres, ECD teachers believe that they are more than teachers to the children. The participants’ responses show that ECD teachers serve multiple responsibilities to children and parents.

“You learn how to get along with them daily and you teach them and plus you are their second mother” [R-12].

“...you know you become their mother for the day and they are mostly with you so you need to.... (She repeated) to treat them like your own children at home...” [R-18].

“We are like their second parents...” [R-15].

Aside from having to shoulder the responsibility of caring for children, the ECD teachers sometimes also have to meet the emotional needs of parents. This is what this participant had to say:

“Last year we had two parents that use to come and talk to me like the one’s child ahem.....she’s very hyper active and she was very disappointed and she was telling me that I get so depressed because the child wants to do this and wanna do that and I mean the same situation.....I could advise her on what to do but I... make it easier on yourself because I could relate to her and the other one was suffering from depression and she use to come in here on a Monday morning especially on a Monday and cry and I will just let her cry and.....she talks about what is bothering her but also because I could relate because I also suffer from depression and ahem.... I always try ahem....just have that

relationship where parents feel comfortable that if they need to talk to me they can” [R-13].

Some participants revealed that some parents leave them with the responsibility of having to cater to the child’s physical, social and cognitive development within the ECD centre.

“For them it’s about sending the child to crèche seeing that the fee is paid they must learn there so that they can go to school” [R-13].

“...they think their job is finished when they send their children to the crèche or to early childhood development centres that it’s now up to teacher” [R-18].

“...like I had one child here she was one of the Xhosa speaking children and the parents said the child couldn’t speak a word in English right so I just sent her a message home in the child’s message book saying if they could speak English because I know the parents speak a bit of English so I tell her at least even if it is 5 to 10 minutes of her time every day just to speak to the child because.....and then she sent me a message back to say that hmmm.....but that is why she is sending the child here because she wants the child to learn English and so mine response back was but it is a two way so you know” [R-5].

One participant felt that young parents had a greater tendency of neglecting their responsibility.

“The problem here is the kind of parents we have in the area. They are very young so it’s almost like they leave everything up to us you understand what am saying. It’s like they just don’t care because they are mostly young and how will you teach a child to be a mother? So they leave everything up to the teacher even if the child is sick they will just come drop off the child for us and even if they need to have the child with them they will just come drop the child here and just say here is the medicine so...it’s.....it’s quite difficult...”[R-12].

According to Cruz (nd) the teaching profession has substantially changed. He further adds that society has become more complex and so the role of an ECD teacher has taken on a new dimension and meaning. The role of ECD teachers encompasses many duties and responsibilities within the home and ECD centre. For instance, ECD teachers are expected to serve as curriculum specialists, health care providers, family counsellors, programme managers, child development expert, child advocate and nutrition specialist to mention a few (Cruz, nd). With such high demands Cruz (nd) observed that ECD teachers sometimes face challenges in meeting their professional obligations.

Cultural differences

The majority of the participants described their job as being difficult because the children all came from diverse social, economic and religious backgrounds. When describing what it is like being an ECD teacher, the participants reported:

“Well I’ll say it’s difficult because you’ve children from different backgrounds, cultures and races” [R-6].

“It’s very challenging because you’ve....we’ve got different types of kids” [R-18].

“it’s very challenging because ahem.....like we have 95% of Muslim children so you would basically expect that the Muslim ethics would be all the same right throughout but because they have different parents and so we are faced with that problem majorly because the children are been brought up differently. I would say is very challenging but it’s very rewarding because they keep your mind just occupied you know you sometimes forget about your personal issues” [R-20].

“Being a teacher in a centre like this is like hmmm...is a challenge because you work with different children firstly and then you work with the adults” [R-3].

According to Gaitan (2008) the parent and ECD teacher may hold different beliefs about the appropriate degree and nature of parent involvement (Gaitan, 2004 in Patrikakou, 2008). The economic status and culture of parents often affects how they wish to be involved in the child’s early development. Furthermore, parent involvement has to do with whether or not the school chooses to embrace the culture of parents (Pena, 2000 cited in Patrikakou, 2008). It is evident that having to deal with young children from different backgrounds can pose a huge challenge to the ECD teachers because they have to be flexible in their everyday interactions and activities with these children. ECD teachers may occasionally have to deal with their differences with parents which sometimes threaten the ECD teacher-parent relationship.

Income level and conditions of service of ECD teachers

In addition to the demanding nature of their job, some participants noted that the ECD profession was not a highly paid and financially rewarding profession. Considering the economic and social challenges within Athlone, some participants believed that most of the community-based ECD centres within the community are more interested in the child’s development rather than making a financial gain at the end of the day.

“I say if you are in this for the money then you are in the wrong game because you need to have the passion for the job. It doesn’t pay a big salary and you can’t get rich even though this is my business but I don’t drive a flashy car I can’t just do what I want to because there’s needs kids have and have to be met” [R-20].

“It’s not an easy job if you are someone here for the money if you are just here for the money then in a while it gonna get tight because you are gonna get different attitudes different characters of the children...” [R-15].

“...if you are in it for the money then you are in the wrong place you have to have the passion like the other teachers use to complain about the salary and this and that and whatever and I tell them when I started working at the ECD centre they paid me 250 a month and I always tell them you won’t see the reward now but later I can proudly say I can see the rewards it wasn’t about the money but what difference I could make in peoples’ lives” [R-18].

According to Biersteker (2008), the issue of salaries and service conditions for ECD teachers needs to be addressed. In June 2011 over 2000 ECD teachers participated in a protest demanding a living wage in Pretoria, South Africa (Sitole 2011:1). Sitole (2011:1) also reported that over 60% of South African ECD teachers live below the poverty line. In 2008 it was found that the average salary for principals was R 2255 and R 1530 for ECD teachers in the Western Cape (Biersteker and Picken, 2013:15). The same report also pointed out that there are more than 10,000 teachers in the same situation providing basic care for children up to nine years of age.

In South Africa, about 44% community-based ECD centres are unregistered (Department of Basic Education, Department of Social Development and UNICEF, 2010:23). Furthermore, the majority of ECD centres serve poor communities and they keep their fees low. Ingersoll (2001) argues that the daily difficulties teachers face includes: physical stress, inadequate support, a child’s discipline problems and low income. Ingersoll (2001) added that such harsh conditions make a number of teachers choose leave the profession, which implies that those who stay in their position must feel a deep and genuine love for the work.

4.3.2 How ECD teachers understand and describe the role of parents in ECD centres

The responses of the participants are discussed under three sub-headings: partnership, good relationship and open door policy and level of parent involvement within the ECD centres.

Partnership

All the participants gave a clear and lucid definition of parent involvement in ECD, showing that they had a clear understanding of the term ‘parent involvement’. According to Bridgemohan’s (2001) study ECD teachers understanding of parent involvement were limited to supporting the child’s school work, payment of fees and monitoring the child’s progress. In this study the researcher found more than what Bridgemohan reported over a decade ago. Participants were asked to define parent involvement in ECD, below are some selected responses:

“Parent involvement is.....where the parents are involved with the school, with the teachers and with their kids. We have a motor that says that the parent is the first teacher so automatically parents think oh we pay the school fees and we leave everything for you...Involvement means at home as well engage them” [R-20].

“Parental involvement is when the parent is actively involved with the child’s education. So when the parent is involved the parent then knows what is happening at the centre, we call it like the triangle with the parent, the teacher and the child” [R-8].

“Well I understand that parents should know what is happening in the classroom first of all, they should know what their children are learning, what the children will be learning, what the children has achieved and also what they can do to help their children but also what they can do to help the school and how they can assist in....fundraising.....ah...and how they can help the teacher achieve certain goals with their child basically yeah that it is” [R-11].

The ECD teachers also believe that parents and teachers need to partner with one another in the child’s interest. When asked the question ‘who should initiate parent involvement’, participants commented as follows:

“Both actually it most come from both sides because the parents and the teachers are there to guide the child” [R-6].

“I think it can go both ways because that’s why I said it should be about partnership...” [R-10].

“I think it’s both. Both the school and the parent should have that kind of communication going between each other the parent will come to school to first find out what is happening at the school and the school on the other hand should inform the parents on this is what we are doing, this is what we need from you and from there the parent will know what.... (She repeatedly said) steps to follow to expect from the school also” [R-11].

One participant had a different notion about parent involvement within the ECD centre.

“You see I don’t think so because the levels of chaos where parents will influence what the child does and how the child reacts. You see they might want to know what you as a teacher is doing but you see that child will be going to the parent all the time and he is not going to listening to the teacher” [R-2].

The responses above show that the roles of parents and ECD teachers are uniformly understood. Most participants argue that parent and ECD teacher need to complement each other’s efforts.

Lareau in Jacobs (2008) argues that parent involvement is not in reality a ‘partnership’, but it is carried out more like a professional-client relationship where the power is unevenly distributed. Beveridge (2008) cited in Jacobs (2008:125) also contends that “despite the principle of equality that is implicit in the idea of parent partnership, in practice the parental experience is rarely one of equal status”. According to Jacobs (2008) one reason why ECD teachers do not try to negotiate their interactions with parents is because ECD teachers consider themselves as professionals in the ECD field. In other cases the parents regard the ECD teacher as the professional in ECD. Addi-Racah and Arviv-Elyasiv (quoted by Jacobs, 2008) believe that when parents are empowered ECD teachers’ sense of professionalism could be called into question.

Good relationship and open door policy

All the participants reported that they had a good professional relationship with parents and they also tried to maintain an open-door policy where parents are able to speak to ECD teachers about the child’s development. Participants reported on their relationship with parents:

“We’ve got a very good relationship they know exactly where they stand with me, my likes and my dislikes I make it known to them when we have meetings I bring it under their attention and we will send it out in newsletters because I feel that we as parents need to take responsibility and ahem...so we have an understanding very professional understanding.....” [R-18].

“I try and keep it on a.....on a professional level ahem..... Like I would say I have an open and good relationship and I try to keep it that way just to ensure that there no problems no negative vibes from their side because if there is a problem and we don't communicate there will be a problem so am trying to have that open relationship” [R-19].

“Okay I have a good relationship with my parents okay with our new parents we are still building up that relationship but with all my parents I have very.....a relatively good relationship. Some of them on a personal level where we can really chat and share experiences or concerns or whatever and even though I am on sometimes on a good relationship it doesn't stop me from telling the exactly what is wrong with the child and tell them what to do and all of that” [R-20].

“I think a very good one ahem....I always tell them that I have an open door policy if you have any problem with the teacher like we have a policy if they have a problem with the teacher come talk” [R-13].

Yeah with some parents we have a good relationship and with others we don't, like we had parents who don't want their children to be dirty [R-8].

The participants argued that by maintaining a good professional relationship with parents, they are most likely avoiding events that might jeopardize the development of the child. The findings confirm Jacobs's (2008) study where many teachers described their relationship with parents as 'good' or 'positive'. One of her findings indicated that teachers try to set the terms for their relationship with parents, but despite these efforts sometimes it did not work. Jacobs (2008) showed that many teachers often tell parents about their open-door policy. This implies that ECD teachers welcome communication with parents at any time. But she notes that in reality, if one looks deeper, teachers also have strategies for managing their interactions with parents. Jacobs (2008) suggests the need to look more closely at the ECD teachers' side of these interactions and understand how they try to structure their relationship with parents. According to Jacobson (2005 quoted by Wright 2009), teachers feel that in order to be effective, they must be able to work well with parents. However, they also indicate communicating with and involving parents is the challenges ECD teacher face.

Level of parent involvement within ECD centres

Some participants showed a sense of disappointment when they expressed their concerns about parents' low level of commitment and involvement within the ECD centres. When asked if they

felt that parents were doing enough in helping with the development of the child within the ECD centres, ECD teachers responded as follows:

“Nope, Nope, Nope parents could do so much more... and they really lack putting in effort and interest like we had our fund raising over the weekend we could count on our hands how many parents were here most of the people that supported the function was from the staff family and friends” [R-19].

“We feel that you don’t always have parent involvement like out of the 80 to 80 something children we’ve got we might get 20 parents that really make time or make the effort to pick up the phone to found out from the teacher how is my child progressing or even if we have meetings a few that will come will find out the progress of their children and be available even with fundraisings we had one on Saturday (She paused) it was like so disappointment because we have 85 children but we could count the amount of children that were here and our parents that were here and at the end of the day the actually parents that we wanted to be here turned out not to be here” [R-18].

“It is something that is lacking and something that could be improved but that’s something really difficult” [R-5].

“I don’t wanna say parents are not interested or not involved in their children’s lives or in their development but they are also not involved as they should be” [R-13].

ECD teachers felt that parents had a nonchalant attitude towards the development of their children especially in the ECD centres. One participant pointed out that it is possible that some parents may have a different perception of parent involvement within the ECD centre. Some participants reported that parents think that their involvement begins once the child commences primary school, but they said that should not be the case.

“...that is how I feel because it doesn’t start at primary school it starts from here and some parents you know lose that concept they think that when the child is at an ECD centre you don’t need to be involved you don’t need to do that extra it’s our duty as teachers to discipline them, to do this and do that, it’s not theirs” [R-18].

Although Wright (2009) stated that parent involvement decreases from elementary to middle school and further declines as the child moves through school, but the above findings show that even at the early development phase of a child it is possible to experience low parent involvement as well.

4.3.3 How ECD teachers involve parents within ECD centres

This section gives an overview of how ECD teachers engage parents within the ECD centre.

Communication

ECD teachers send out written documents like circulars, letters and notices, message books and end-of-term progress reports to parents on a regular basis. By doing so, parents are informed about the activities and events at the ECD centre. The ECD teachers and parents also communicate telephonically.

“Like when you write a message to the parent, the parent will respond to that. That’s the good thing because we have the message books and parent write too. That’s how we communicate with each other and like when we have every school meetings too. And the parents also phone on a daily bases like if they want to find out about any problem with the child. And as a teacher you also phone the parent and tell them any queries you have and that’s how we sort out things until things are fine as well” [R-2].

““We will from our side we’ll have our meetings, our one-on-one meetings for correspondence to communicate let’s say to parents...we give them let’s say reports for the year to explain to them this is the progress of the child okay. Yes they can come in any time they like we have phone calls during the day, they have the teachers’ cell phone numbers, and they’re on WhatsApp with one another” [R-8].

One participant reported that at the beginning of every year parent-teacher meetings are organized for parents so that they are aware of their expectations within the year.

“I have my first meeting in the beginning of the year and then I speak to them about the challenges and expectations for the year” [R-20].

ECD teachers emphasized that they have a host of notices going out to parents on a regular basis. In some ECD centres, every child had a file that contained information that was meant for the parent. It is expected of parents to read and sign, acknowledging that they are aware of the messages been sent. When the files come back without a signature, it shows that the parent either read but forgot to sign or the parent never had the time to go through the child’s bag. Three participants were displeased as they reported this:

“...majority of our books don’t even get signed” [R-5].

“Here we have the parent involvement file yeah so the file goes out every Thursdays...we use the parent involvement sheet for them to sign and then it comes back to us that’s how we communicate with our parents...I think everybody is using imaginary ink because I just don’t see any signatures” [R-20].

“...we sometimes find the letters in the children’s bag we find the receipts in their bag...” [R-18].

Parent-teacher meetings

The participants regarded the parent-teacher meetings as necessary because such forums are used to discuss important issues affecting the ECD centre. According to the ECD teachers, parents are expected to attend such meetings because the discussions that arise during such meetings directly affects all the children attending the ECD centre.

“They are involved mostly in the school meetings you see. You see during the PTA meetings we always allow them say what they want to say” [R-1].

“That’s why they have the PTA meetings so after the PTA meeting you can feel free to talk to the teacher and ask how the child is doing” [R-6].

One participant revealed that after the general meeting, the ECD centre usually organises one-on-one sessions with the ECD teacher and parent.

“...we will from our side we’ll have our meetings, our one-on-one meetings for correspondence to communicate let’s say to parents” [R-8].

The face-to-face meetings are highly satisfying to parents because their questions about their children are answered immediately (Coldron and Bolton, 1999 cited in Marsh and Willis, 1999).

Poor attendance at parent-teacher meetings

Some participants indicated that although a small number of parents attended the parent-teacher meetings, the majority of parents failed to make time to be part of such meetings. The majority of participants reported poor attendance at meetings and social functions among parents. Here are some remarks:

“Not really because.....ahem..... you see like during meetings a lot people don't come for meetings. That will promote the development of the centre and the children but they don't attend” [R-6].

“...like we had our fund raising over the weekend we could count on our hands many parents were here most of the people that supported the function was from the staff, family and friends and we spread the word and on the day we counted at the end of the day we were like we might have had our own little get together because it was mostly our friends and family that we invited. They are not offering any assistance as to how they will help the centre where their children is at”.

“With our first meeting early this year I was very disappointed...” [R-5].

Participant 5 also further reported.

“So our attendance of parents during meetings is very poor, it wasn't even half of my parents that were present and then.....but on the flip side the majority of them did not even have the decency to write a message or to phone and say listen I am working and I won't make it so can we reschedule or can you make time for me I'll really love to hear what happened during the meeting” [R-5].

Although most of the participants concurred that there was a problem of poor attendance to parent-teacher meetings they all indicated making attempts to address the problem. One participant complained that during the parent-teacher meetings, parents usually contribute little or nothing. This makes communication difficult for such ECD teachers. This is what she reported:

“...in PTA meetings they won't really ask questions they will seat there and listen to me doing all the talking they won't ask or suggest anything. I will stand there and talk to them for 20 minutes about whatever issues and they will just sit there and look at me and I will ask is there any questions and they will just look and say nothing... so it's really difficult because you don't know where you stand with them.” [R-13].

Coldron and Bolton (in Marsh and Willis, 1999) believe that the face-to-face interaction between parents and ECD teachers help in making communication more effective. According to Bredekamp (1992), communicating with the parents is an appropriate practice in early childhood programmes. Bredekamp (1992) observed that when ECD teachers contact parents the discussions seem to be based on the needs of the ECD centre-for example meetings may focus on general and ECD fees issues. She states that if the parent-teacher meetings are always based on these usual routines then it is possible that the parents may lose interest in such meetings. So

therefore, ECD teachers need to be flexible, especially when drawing up their parent-teacher meeting agendas.

Fundraising events

Fundraising was another activity in which the ECD teachers involved parents. During fundraisings ECD teachers allow parents to be part and parcel of the process.

“They are allowed and invited during our fund-raising events” [R-1].

“They basically handle the fund-raising that will take place” [R-5].

“Ah...like when we have fund-raisings when we want people to contribute like we get people that helps with....like night events like when we have fund-raising” [R-10].

The majority of ECD centres I visited serve less privileged children residing within and outside Athlone. The fee charges in such ECD centres are usually low and so fundraising is an avenue for ECD centres to raise money so that they are able to meet some of their needs. These needs could include: purchase stationery, sport equipment, renovations and utensils for the children’s meals to mention a few.

“...we suppose to raise funds because the school always needs money you know like the photocopying machine is broke, our toilets are broke you know these things cost big money...” [R-20].

One participant indicated that parents do not show interest in how funds are raised and spent within the ECD centre.

“We were supposed to have fundraising like once a term but because parents were not willing to commit... each parent should then pay a 30 rand extra every month for 10 months and you know everybody opted for that (She took a deep sigh) it was like only a handful of parents that said teacher Zainab can’t we still have a fund raising” [R-20].

Mukuna and Indoshi (2012:268) revealed that “the general impression is that when parents are willing to raise funds then they will be put to good use”. Most parents, however, pay fees and are not willing to be involved in how the funds will be used by the schools. Parents need to monitor and evaluate progress in the ECD centre on how the funds raised are spent for better development of their young children.

Decision-making

The participants said their respective ECD centres had governing boards that are in charge of making decisions for the ECD centre. The governing bodies within the ECD centre are established in accordance with the South Africa Non-Profit Organisation Act No. 71 of 1997. The governing body is made up of parents, ECD teachers and ECD heads. When participants were asked if parents were involved in the governing board of the ECD centre, the ECD teachers responded as follows:

“We allow people to volunteer and then we allow them make some decisions like fundraising, we need their inputs as parents so that we are not imposing on them. They also advice on how much is spent into what things that will help in the development of the centre and their children” [R-4].

“Ahem...we have selected a....school committee okay in our AGM which we call them ah...and we have recurred parents” [R-14].

One participant complained that the ECD centre did not have a functioning governing body because parents have failed to commit to the decision-making body of the ECD centre.

“That is exactly what am talking about there is no governing body because parents don’t want to commit so that’s why am saying ahem....I gave them the option that we need the governing body in place but.....but....parents don’t want to commit so what do you do? So now I have to take decisions...” [R-20].

It was revealed that the governing board of some ECD centres comprised of parents who no longer had children within the ECD centre.

“Both most of the parents in the board are parents that don’t have children in the school any more” [R-10].

“Currently we have a committee and basically those are parents whose children where here long ago and they have already left but they are still available to us” [R-18].

Although these ECD centres give parents the opportunity to be part of the governing body on a volunteer basis, it is obvious that some parents lack commitment and consistency in attending such meetings.

“Some parents are involved there but after a while they just like drop off” [R- 2].

The ECD teachers maintained that parents make decisions on the board but the reality is different. For instance, in cases where the governing body takes unilateral decisions that have a direct impact on the daily lives of parents then parents are likely to lose interest. According to the DG Murray Trust confluence of ideas and practice report (nd) parents are often appointed as members onto the governing body merely as a formality, and the Constitution is drawn up to achieve NPO status. The report further states that governing bodies do not operate efficiently because body members are not able to offer time and commitment.

Comer’s School Development Programme is a model that emphasizes parent involvement in decision-making in order to enhance the educational process of children and improve the ECD centres as a whole (Comer and Haynes, 1991 in Bridgemohan, 2001). The programme is a three-tier model which constitutes: (a) parent participation of the school planning and management team; (b) helping in the classroom or sponsoring and (c) supporting ECD programmes, and general participation (Haynes and Ben-Avie, 1996 in Bridgemohan, 2001).

Parent workshops

Two participants reported that their ECD centres had initiated parent workshops for parents and ECD teachers. These workshops were free and informative.

“For us to make this parent involvement thing really work, we are preparing a workshop for parent involvement by the end of May” [R-15].

“...in my first meeting I covered all of that I told them that it is important that we understand the stages of development and the areas that we need to look at and concerns that we have and obviously it’s impossible to cover everything in one evening but I basically touched on the most important things....things that we know that our kids need to develop and I don’t think some of our parents are aware that there are stages of development I think it’s more of oh my child can talk, oh my child can sing and my child can play with other children and that kind of thing but I don’t think they are aware of the specific stages of development as in social development, emotional but I covered...” [R-20].

4.3.4 Factors influencing parent involvement within the ECD centres

This section aims to explore factors influencing parent involvement within the ECD centre. The participants identified a number of issues that can either encourage or hinder parent involvement within the ECD centre. These factors are discussed below.

Beliefs and expectations

Two participants reported that an open, warm and friendly relationship between the ECD teacher and parent can go a long way in getting parents involved in the activities of the ECD centre.

“...we’ve got like a family unity here...ahem...am here for you 24/7 when you need me and I think because we are offering that to our parents that am your friend, am your child’s educator okay am your child’s mother during the day am the nurse, am the doctor when you are not around and I think we as parents if we are comfortable if am comfortable with you in my space am gonna be very relaxed and willing to.....your positive energy is going to want me to have you around too” [R-14].

“I think it’s the warmth, the excitement, it’s the.....it’s the welcoming of the teacher yes! I think that’s it because... (She paused) the friendliness also yes. I think it’s the friendliness of the teacher they warmth and the welcome that is in here also and also knowing that.....ahem.....our aim.....what is our aim of been here for you” [R-15].

As mentioned earlier, parent and ECD teacher beliefs and expectations are crucial to shaping the home-ECD centre relationship. Patrikakou (2008:3) argues that “beliefs about individuals and group characteristics drive our choices and behaviours and are crucial in shaping relationships and partnerships”. Wright (2009) adds that one major reason why ECD teachers lack support from parents is how teachers relate to parents. For instance, when ECD teachers indicate to parents that they are the professionals in the area of early childhood development within the centre then parents are likely to withdraw from the ECD centre.

Distance between the home and ECD centre

A number of the children attending ECD centres in Athlone travel daily by bus because the children reside far from the ECD centres. The ECD centres within Athlone also cater for young children from neighbouring communities like Khayelitsha, Langa and Crossroads, extending for children living as far as 30 kilometers away.

“The children are from the Athlone community including Guguletu, Langa, Nyanga, Crossroads you know even as far as Khayelitsha” [R-5].

One hindrance to parent involvement is the long distance parents have to travel before getting to the ECD centres. It is probable that there are interested parents who want to be part of the ECD centre but because of limited mobility and distance, they would rather stay at home.

“She’s told me that if she’s got a car she will come and volunteer but because she is out in Guguletu and so she has a little one so it’s a bit difficult so she’s very interested in the children and in the centre” [R-5].

One other participant reported

“You see during our meeting only a few of them come and I mean most of them that don’t usually come live around but they still don’t come to meetings. The people that live far are the ones that come so you see the ones that should have complain for transport are usually here for the meetings. It just shows that some people are not just interested” [R-6].

According to the annual report for the City of Cape Town (2006:11) over 60% of the South Africans rely on public transport such as railways, buses and taxis. The same report adds that a large number of the urban poor who live on the outskirts of Cape Town have limited access to transportation and have low choices with regard to the mode of transport most suited to their access and mobility needs.

Parent’s nonchalant attitude

A number of participants reacted negatively towards parent involvement within ECD centres. Due to parents’ low interest rate within the ECD centre most participants reported that parents have a nonchalant attitude towards the child’s development within the ECD centre.

“You see during our meeting only a few of them come and I mean most of them that don’t usually come live around but they still don’t come to meetings. The people that live far are the ones that come so you see the ones that should have complain for transport are usually here for the meetings. It just shows that some people are not just interested. It just shows that some people are not just interested. Look like I say we have one meeting for the year and we’ve got over 80 children not up to half of the parents come” [R-6].

“...parents are not interested or not involved in their children’s lives” [R-13].

“It is so annoying when parents think that all we do here is play and play...they really lack putting in effort and interest” [R-19].

Work commitments and life demands

The majority of the ECD teachers reported that communicating with parents is difficult because the majority of parents are engaged in their daily jobs. They also stated that parents seem not to have the time to assist their children with home learning activities, or to closely monitor the development of the child.

“...may be some that are working that they can't come at the time when you need them to come” [R-11].

“...most parents come in the morning their mind is set to get to work so they don't have time for all the nonsense. I think society today doesn't have the time and because we have working parents life is a rat race, therefore the development phases of children is lacking behind it's a major concern. It's everybody working so that's the excuse there's no time” [R-20].

“It could be that they are busy they are working and they don't always have the time to come to the centre”[R-8].

A parent often cannot participate in ECD activities due to work commitments, family responsibilities or other time restrictions. From 1995 to 2005 the broad labour force for women increased by 59% (Department of Labour, 2005:3). This indicates that a high proportion of women in South Africa have entered the labour market. Patrikakou (2008) argues that time seems to be a major barrier that prevents parents from participating in ECD activities or even in assisting their children with ECD activities within the home. Parents often report lack of time or schedule conflict as their two most challenging barriers of involvement and they view that parent's activities at ECD centres are fixed during inconvenient times.

Barbour (2008) suggests that ECD centres should be flexible in planning ECD events so that opportunities may increase parent involvement within the centre. This may require special efforts to keep in touch with parents, such as an evening phone calls, parent-teacher dialogue journals, arrangement of transportation, and events scheduled on Saturdays.

Some participants noted that some parents are beginning to expose their young children to devices like the iPad, cell phones, computer games and television. In most cases these devices might not cause harm but when they become a habit in the child's life then parents need to control it. The participants perceived that such devices can be distractions to young children. These devices may sometimes keep the mind of the child busy thereby allowing the parent focus on office work and domestic chores. Some participants believe that children need to be equally engaged in physical activities.

“I think today the type of generation we have is the television, your iPad, the whatever electronically things are available because parents buy kids those kind of things to keep them busy. There is no involvement physically or the patience on the one on one you can do everything in your house to teach children different things to develop them better you know little things allowing children to play in the sand its fine muscles...it's easier you just spending a lot of money once and there is no effort from your side once you put the child in front of the laptop he is content for the rest of the day” [R-20].

“You get the parents that don't make that time because they leave the child to just seat in front of the television or computer that is your....it keeps you quiet and keep you out of my way and that is what I tell our parents we can easily see the children that is use to sitting in front of the television watching this and that and whatever because we can see what is happening at home” [R-18].

One participant noted that some parents' level of involvement at the ECD centre had declined over time due to having more than one child. She observed that parents raising one child are likely to pay attention to a child's development. We can draw from this participant's response:

“...you get a mom who has one child obviously her life revolves around him and you can see the difference because there will be maybe that constant communication because she got only one child and then I think.....like I've got a parent here we say shame why are they been lackadaisical with this child now because the eldest daughter was here by me and the son was here by me and now the little sibling is by me but they are totally different like she will come without lunch or she will sometimes come the hair is not been brushed compared to the other two so I think sometimes parents...ahem....a parent to more than one child and I think they start losing that interest or that perfection they have stopped been the perfect parents” [R-20].

Grandparents as caregivers

Some participants reported that some parents have now left the responsibility of been a parent to the grandparent. This situation makes it difficult for the ECD centre to engage the parent in the centre.

“...you know like some grannies do look after some of the children because the parents are working and so the grannies do they caring while the parents work” [R-16].

“We have the type of parents where grannies must take responsibility...I said to you earlier those are the ones that the grannies must teach them. I feel that the grannies don't always have the time and energy especially when they come to two or three year olds so.....they want to explore and they want to know and grandma cannot do all those things” [R-18].

“You know kids are having kids and they go back to matric and the ma looks after the baby. We have an incidence on the road here the girl went back to school now at the beginning of march because she's matric and she had a baby in January so her mother is looking after the child so what is...what is....what does the mother know about you know...developmental stages, what's gonna happen to the child when you've passed the responsibility.....now what kind of mother are you going to be now if you are already passing the responsibility so you see there is...” [R-20].

Sometimes grandparents do not have the required physical strength that will aid in a child's physical development. Currently, many parents depend heavily on their own parents for help and support. The grandparents may take care of the children, but they are unable to fulfil certain obligations such as attending parent-teacher meetings and social events organised for parents within the ECD centre.

Grandparents sometimes take the responsibility for child care, thereby making some parents less involved in the ECD centre. For instance one participant reported that ECD teachers sometimes communicate with the grandparents instead of the parent (who enrolled the child).

“And sometimes we ask grandmothers not to interfere you know in...we would like to do the work that we are doing and then we will call and speak to the mother. If there is a problem mother please come to the centre and discuss the problem hmm...don't send your mother like...the granny because it was the mother who enrolled the child at the school not the granny if it was the granny that enrolled the child then we will deal with the granny we don't deal with the mother because we don't know the kind of relationship at their homes because things can get complicated” [R-8].

According to Statistics South Africa (2011:10), about 8% of children in South Africa lived in a skip-generation household with their grandparents. Turner (2005) observed that grandparents usually take up the responsibility of being parents to grandchildren because some parents are faced with certain emotional, psychological or physical problems. In South Africa, Mathambo and Gibbs (2008) reported that grandparents who receive pensions are often breadwinners in their families. Children in the care of grandparents may receive inappropriate care because grandparent's physical, emotional and social capacities are declining (Ansell and Young, 2005).

Social and economic reasons

Most ECD teachers in this study strongly believed that parent involvement is lacking due to social and economic challenges people face.

“Yeah like I said I know they are struggling a lot of them are struggling financially say they can't cope but so.....how they cope with their problems is my issue for me” [R-13].

“Okay the main reason lies on the financial.....its financially wise ne...” [R-16].

“...financially they won't be able to participate...” [R-4].

From the above finding it is evident that the socio-economic status of parents influences involvement within the ECD centre. As noted earlier, Christenson and Reschly (2010) reported low parent involvement among families with low socio-economic status. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) and Davis-Kean in Christenson and Reschly (2010) theorize that the relationship between socio-economic status and parent involvement is based on the resources available to the parent and ECD teacher. Socio-economic status of an individual can impact the time and energy parents are able to devote to being involved in the home and ECD centre.

Single parents

Some participants reported that single parents are not involved in their children's development especially within the ECD centre. As single parents, juggling parenthood and work commitments sometimes limits parent involvement in the ECD centre.

“Secondly you see some of the children have only one parent in their live so this one parent usual does not come for meeting frequently because the parent can be busy trying to

get things done at work or their family you see. There are times when a parent will tell me teacher Rain I really want to come but I had to attend to an urgent thing” [R-3].

“We have like single parents you know (She coughed) where the mom maybe working alone and no support from the father...”[R-18].

As discussed earlier, there has been a rapid change in the demography of South African society. Parent involvement in ECD centres appears to be influenced by demographics such as socio-economic status and marital status.

Epstein (1996) observed that single parents who are employed outside the home are less involved than married couples in the ECD centre. Labour migration and poverty have significantly contributed to South Africa’s weak family structures. This has led to children not growing up with biological parents. About 33,5% of children live with both their parents, approximately 39% live with only their mothers and less than 4% of children live with their fathers (Statistics South Africa, 2011:6-7).

Domestic violence

Some participants believed that parents are sometimes faced with physical and emotional violence which hinders their participation within the ECD centre. In an attempt to avoid talking about family problems, participants reported that some parents would rather stay at home than attend parent-teacher meetings at the ECD centre. When participants were asked what they think hinders parents from been involved within the ECD centre, these were some responses:

“It can be that there are problems at home that are keeping them away because they now have to fix whatever is going wrong” [R-4].

“May be....yeah maybe some of them have circumstances at home like may be abuse and they are even scared to even talk. May be they’ve got a daddy that is always hurting now some of the parents are too afraid to come forward to speak about it” [R-6].

“But I think it’s something that they are probably facing at home and then now they think they are ganna say what they are facing at home to us you know by getting them involved” [R-15].

“...it might be that some parents are not.....some kids do not come out of a stable home” [R-17].

According to Statistics South Africa (2012) domestic violence offences are difficult to capture in the household survey because of their sensitivity and as a result they are normally under-reported. The Medical Research Council (2009:1) reported in its study that about 40% of women in South Africa have been victims of domestic violence. The report also states that almost all children are subject to physical violence at home.

The child's development

Some participants argued that one key factor that encouraged parents to be part of the ECD centre is an improvement in the children's well-being, especially in their physical and cognitive development. These development advances make parents interested in what the ECD teachers do to create such a positive impact in the children's lives.

"Yes! Like I've got this little girl in my class she just started walking now they were quiet.....they were a bit scared but now she has come nicely they are satisfied with the development so far. And they are very impressed and she not crying anymore. That's the changes and people are satisfied as how the child is developed" [R-12].

"I think it is when they see how the children are developing, because the more they see their children develop the more they want to know what's up. Because when they come here some children have not been exposed to any crèche or pre-school so when they see what is happening here and how work is been sent...you see they are able to see what the children are doing in school. You see for the fact that they get to see what we are doing in school and we send them home, they become more interested in what activities the children are doing because they sometimes notice some positive changes that pushes them to know what they must do to help their children's home work. I think for me is a personal issue between the parents and the child cos some parents want to know what their child is doing, they want to know is my child progressing, what is my child doing, is the child learning" [R-2].

"The child's growth I will say like a report so they will know that their children is growing and developing very well. And they will be happy to be involved" [R-7].

A participant pointed out that a child is able to develop well when the parents encourage them to do certain things on their own.

"Like you find parents that say oh I don't want to give the child crayons because they are going to write on the walls then teach them to clean up their mess. I've told the parents when the kids play here we don't clean up after them unless now it is a real mess if you

write on the table I will give you the little sponge and show you and I'll put some handy andy on the table and you will clean up your mess, that's cleaning up your mess. When the kids play with the toys I tell the teachers you don't pack it up they played let them pack up that's cleaning up and completing the cycle and they will say we don't understand and that's because you don't help yourself by helping the child to clean up after himself don't you pack up everything while he just stand there that's not how it works you know because parents will say but they don't wanna pick up stuff at home why because they know mommy is picking it up for them or daddy is picking it up that is the problems we are facing... "[R-20].

The participant (R-20) claimed that from her observations young children usually strive for autonomy and independence. She believes that parents sometimes need to acknowledge the child's need for freedom by allowing the child to explore and take control of their surrounding environment.

A child's development can be positively influenced especially when the parent engages in the activities of the ECD centre. According to Patrikakou (2008:2)

'Young children whose parents actively participated in early childhood development programmes not only display an edge in academic, social and emotional learning, but also engage in less risky and delinquent behaviours later in life'.

Building on Erikson's work, Stevens (1983) contends that very young children develop a sense of autonomy-a sense of being able to handle problems on their own without help coming from any adult. It is important to note that if caregivers do not allow children to perform tasks for which they are capable, they may instead develop shame and doubt about their ability to handle problems.

Commitment levels between older and younger parents

In this study, some participants observed that the commitment and interest level between older and younger parents differ. Two participants claimed that older parents tend to make out time to be with their children at home and in the ECD centre.

"...like I've said we've got a lot of young parents so the young parents are like....some of them are like I don't care attitude I won't say that for all the parents because the older parents I know that is not the case. You see I work with these kinda of parents like the older parents take more interested" [R-2].

“...the young parents I find them a bit more resistant you know....they don't really get involved like the way the older and matured parents they know because of the children been so advanced and the education and this so they miss out in quiet a beat so now they try to show interest because you can see that they are trying to know where have I missed out. So I find older parents are a bit more involved they show more involvement yeah!” [R-14].

4.3.5 Strategies and ideas ECD teachers have that might enhance parent involvement in ECD centres.

The following key issues were considered essential in promoting parent involvement within the ECD centres.

A change of attitude among parents

Although ECD teachers commended the efforts of some parent within the ECD centre, they also wished for more parents to show commitment and interest in the activities of the ECD centre. This idea was expressed among some participants.

“Parents should learn how to make their children feel surprise about what they have done. Like oh Casey that's lovely is that what you did? It is beautiful. They should pay attention to what the children have done” [R-2].

“I expect the parents to....to listen to what I say but to take note because sometimes you pick up these things when they so...when they are so young and when they are older its gonna but much more difficult to deal with those things especially were they are learning is involved or affected. Take them to parks, help them to do this and that, seat with them and ask them things about shapes and colours or something or whatever. You've gotten seat more with them”[R-7].

“But I mean you have to engage constantly you need to have conversation with the child. They learn how to think and how to reason but if you don't do that how is your child gonna learn?” [R-13].

One participant emphasised the fact that parents have to take interest in their children considering the social conditions surrounding the Athlone community. She summed it up by saying:

“...you must build up that type of relationship with your child otherwise how are you gonna know what they are struggling with if you don't know what your child is doing and because of the community where we live in you need to know (she emphasized) what goes on in your child's life. There's a lot of shooting, gangsterism, there's drugs” [R-13].

Some participants felt that parent involvement in ECD should not be negotiable. The ECD teachers strongly believed that the parents either do what is right by helping and engaging in their children's lives or they do otherwise and later live with the consequences. According to Landry (2008:1) "children's development of the cognitive and social skills needed for later success in school may be best supported by a parenting style known as responsive parenting". Responsible parenting is necessary for every child's cognitive and social development, which enables them transition into formal school (Landry, 2008).

Partnership between ECD teachers, parents and other role players

The findings also showed that although teachers regarded ECD teacher-parent relationships as very important, the reality is that such a relationship is often lacking at ECD centres. Each ECD teacher expressed a need for partnership as a way of promoting parent involvement within the ECD centres. When teachers were asked about their role in improving parent involvement, this is what some participants said:

"If I could communicate with the parents every day I will do that really and inform them on how their child is developing during the day that is something that I will like to do....ahem....the important thing is that there must be communication between the parent and the teacher. So that both can know where the child is at and what they can do to help the child out basically yeah" [R-11].

"We are simply stimulating and the parents are encouraging and they are assisting and you can see the progress but then if they don't do the encouragement and then we won't see it you know so it is important (She paused to attend to something) so it is important that we encourage our parents to be part and parcel of the whole package..." [R-18].

Parent involvement is defined as the

"Participation of parents in regular, two-way and meaningful communication between the home and ECD centre activities that ensure that (a) parents play an integral role in assisting the child's learning; (b) parents are fully included in decision making and on advisory committees to assist in the development of the child" (Patrikakou, 2008:1).

Epstein (1996) and Comer (2001) describe the relationship between parent and teacher as a "partnership". According to the American Heritage Dictionary (2006) cited in Jacobs (2008:7), a partnership is 'a relationship between individuals or groups that is characterized by mutual cooperation and responsibility for the achievement of a specific goal'.

The majority of the participants believed that the responsibility for promoting parent involvement does not lie with the ECD teachers and parents alone, other stakeholders (such as government, schools, and the Athlone community) have a role to play. In fact, most of the participants emphasized that the community has a role to play in promoting parent involvement in ECD centres.

“No I think the community has a role too to play here. They can also get involved by having something for the whole community like getting everybody involved like this person or that person has this or that responsibility and everybody comes together and create one big thing. Like this is a community crèche ne so it’s for the community” [R-6].

“So I think the community has a big role to play and also I feel that the community needs to stand together and you know may be raise a petition to say look this is for our kids, this is for our kids future let us stand together as a community you know go forth and show our kids a better future you know....I mean these kids needs to go out there one day and they are looking at the community like is the right way to live and to do things like the way people are doing things now. So I think community has a big role to play yes” [R-17].

The response below proposed that social institutions such as: schools and health facilities should also create platforms where young people and young prospective parents are provided with information regarding their role in ECD and within the ECD centre.

“...that the hospitals educate pregnant mummies not just about them been pregnant but also about the developmental stages that they need to know up until 4 years old. I think it needs to start at school because our younger generation is educated enough it’s not about oh am having a baby a cute little girl that’s not where it stops then you only want to take responsibility...it goes back to school as well because they are teaching children to have safe sex, they are teaching children to go on contraceptives so why not teach children to be good parents” [R-20].

One participant also suggested that the social media could be used to improve parent involvement in ECD centres.

“I think TV plays a.....broader ahem....communication plays a role when they put on such programmes....so I find that media plays a role you know even the newspapers should have articles on parent involvement...” [R-20].

This finding is supported by Epstein (1996) who reported that the term “community” referred to the environment where a child’s home and ECD centre is located and a place that impacts the child’s learning and development (Epstein, 1996 in Bridgemohan, 2001). According to Swap (in

Bridgemohan, 2001:43-44), 'parents are viewed as assets and resources which are fundamental components of children's successes'. An important principle of this model is that the ECD centre, parent and community must have a shared sense of mission about success for all children. These combined efforts and resources of a community are essential in discovering and implementing effective programmes that will address some ECD challenges (Swap, 1992 cited in Bridgemohan, 2001).

Parent networks

The participants also believed that the parent-ECD teacher partnership can exist between parents (parent-parent partnership). The participants argued that parents need to be supportive of one another. Some ECD teachers said that social networks should be introduced in every ECD centre. In order for parents to feel part of the system, ECD teachers think that parents within all ECD centres need to cooperate with one another. They further added that when parents share their life experiences other parents are able to learn and become even more involved in the activities of the ECD centre.

"The parents can also create a social network where they can get to know each other and know how they can help each other" [R-2].

"So we need the involving parents to encourage parents that are not involved you know. ...So I think there should be more social networks between parents because they get to hear similar experiences from parents and so they get to see that oh if this parent could manage then I too can do the same" [R-4].

According to Sheldon (2002:311) 'prior research on parent involvement has characterised parents as relatively isolated individuals who interact with their own child and their child's teacher'. Sheldon's study suggests the importance of studying parents as social actors. For Sheldon (2002:311) 'parents are members of social groups and networks and may be influenced through their interaction with other parents and adults'. Social networks act as a channel of communication that help people identify human and material resources they need (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Social networks have also been viewed as "social capital, a resource that enhances children's education" (Sheldon, 2002:304). Coleman in Sheldon (2002) believes that social capital is

important in children's cognitive and physical development and it is a resource found within social relationships parents maintain with other adults.

Workshops for ECD teachers and parents

The participants believe that parent workshops will go a long way to improving the low level of parent involvement within ECD centres. The urgent need for workshops was a universal finding:

"...so maybe to have parent workshops you know and just not only to....teach them but to also encourage them, to motivate them on ways on how to involve them in the child's life even if they are very busy or things are going wrong at home or even maybe they can use that as an escape you know. They shouldn't see it as a time to relax because my child is at the crèche. So I'll say little workshops will go a long way in making the difference..." [R-4].

"Okay like I've said if I can get them into workshops that will be good and may be some of them we don't know but I think some of them are not that educated so that's why I think they will need a workshop or two to get all of them involved....all parents" [R-6].

"I think we needin this area we need and I have raised the....the topic already we need parenting skills workshops, we need social workers that can go out in the area and assist our parents and have workshops with them" [R-13].

"Because one do need the backup of the principal and the community as well let's say there is workshops out there for the parents and the teacher, it cannot be limited to teachers alone but to parents as well and to even involve the child too. Let's say for instance.....but I think even the extend families if possible you know like some grannies do look after some of the children because the parents are working and so the grannies do they caring while the parents work" [R-16].

As noted earlier the socio-economic conditions in Athlone have raised concerns among residents.

One participant argues that such workshops will help in improving the community as a whole.

"You see some parents don't enjoy such trainings but I think they really need this especially in a community like ours. With these programmes provided, parents should also make the conscious effort in acknowledging their children's works" [R-2].

4.4 Summary

This chapter has presented a profile of all the participants, and a framework for discussing the research findings and the study findings. Most of the ECD teachers who participated in this study were passionate and committed to teaching young children in their respective ECD centres. A number of factors that influence parent involvement were identified and discussed. The findings revealed that although ECD teachers struggled with parent involvement, they had ways in which they communicated with the parents.

Some participants indicated that they had organised parent involvement workshops at the ECD centre. Bearing that in mind, the participants feel that for them to be able to achieve their aspiration of improving parent involvement, they will need to introduce innovative activities within the ECD centre. The ECD teachers revealed that workshops needed to be organized for parents and ECD teachers so they are able to contribute significantly to the child's physical, cognitive and social development. In addition, parents also needed to make the conscious effort to communicate with ECD teachers and other parents. Most importantly, parents need to constantly interact with their children and engage them in early childhood development activities that can enhance the child's development. The ECD teachers expressed a desire for more support from the community.

The findings of this study were supported by the literature reviewed in Chapter Two. Based on these research findings, Chapter Five draws several conclusions and recommendations arising from this research study.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and recommendations

Introduction

This chapter covers the conclusions and recommendations based on the findings and analysis in Chapter Four. The first part of this chapter highlights the main conclusions and thereafter key recommendations are provided.

The conclusions were drawn from the five themes that emerged from the responses. These are the ECD teachers perception of their role and responsibility within the ECD centre; ECD teachers understanding of parent involvement in ECD centres; the ways ECD teachers engage parents within the ECD centre; key factors influencing parent involvement in ECD centres; and strategies and ideas ECD teachers have that might improve parent involvement in ECD centres.

Arising out of these conclusions, this study presents recommendations to the various stakeholders such as parent, ECD teacher, community and government who play significant roles in parent involvement in ECD centres. These conclusions and recommendations are outlined in 5.1 and 5.2 below.

5.1 Main conclusions

Objective 1: To have an understanding of how ECD teachers perceive their roles within the ECD centres.

The main conclusions drawn are:

- ECD teachers are passionate about their profession within the ECD centre.
- The ECD teachers support children as they develop from the time they start at the ECD centre to the time when they transition into formal schooling.
- The duties and responsibilities of an ECD teacher are numerous. The job requires them to play multiple roles such as parent, nurse, doctor, nurturer, guardian and friend to the child within the ECD centre.
- Caring and teaching young children from different social, economic and cultural backgrounds is a challenging task for ECD teachers.

- The ECD profession is characterised by low pay and poor conditions of services despite the fact that it requires a lot of skills, time and resources.

Objective 2: To find out how ECD teachers understand and describe the role of parents in ECD centres.

The main conclusions drawn are:

- ECD teachers had a good understanding of parent involvement in ECD centres.
- ECD teachers and parents should initiate parent involvement within an ECD centre.
- The early development of young children should be a shared responsibility between the parent and ECD teacher.
- Parents should be aware of the activities within the ECD centre and the teachers should also know what activities the parent is doing with the child at home.
- The ECD teacher and parent should have open communication between them.
- Parents must be able to come to the ECD centre to hear about the development of their children.
- ECD teachers wished to maintain a good and professional relationship with the parents within the ECD centre.
- Parent involvement in ECD centres has remained relatively low. The ECD teachers perceive that parents are disinterested and apathetic towards the early development of their children especially within the ECD centres because when parents are given the opportunity to participate, few parents utilize such opportunities.

Objective 3: To investigate how ECD teachers involve parents within ECD centres.

The main conclusions drawn are:

- The ECD teachers communicate with parents through phone calls, text messages, letters, notices, message books and newsletters, to mention a few.
- ECD teachers also involve parents through the following: board meetings, fundraising, excursions, workshops and parent-teacher meetings.

- Despite ECD teachers efforts at informing parents about the social events and parent-teacher meetings the attendance is always poor.

Objective 4: To explore factors influencing parent involvement within the ECD centres.

The main conclusions drawn are:

- Parents show an interest in the ECD centre when they notice any significant change in their children's physical, social and cognitive development.
- The warmth and friendliness parents receive from ECD teachers helps to positively influence how parents are involved in the ECD centre. A welcoming and friendly atmosphere within the ECD centre helps promote parent involvement.
- Older parents are more likely to be committed and interested than younger parents in the activities that affect their children within the ECD centres.
- It is more difficult for parents working outside the home to attend parent activities within the ECD centre.
- Lack of mobility and long distance between ECD centres and parent homes prevents parents from being involved at the ECD centres.
- A grandparent acting as a parent to a young child is one reason why some biological parents do not show interest in the activities of the ECD centres.
- Poverty inhibits active parent involvement at ECD centres because parents prioritise seeking employment over participation at ECD centres.
- Single parents play a dual role in the lives of their children. This makes it difficult for such parents to be able to make time to be at every gathering within the ECD centre.

Objective 5: To establish what strategies and ideas ECD teachers have that might enhance parent involvement in ECD centres.

The main conclusions drawn are:

- Effective parent involvement will require parents and ECD teachers to make a conscious effort to cooperate.

- ECD teachers could design parent involvement programmes that cater for the needs of parents. For instance, educational workshops dealing with specific topics that assist parents and teachers with parenting and teaching skills.
- Parent social networks should be introduced in ECD centres. ECD teachers strongly believe that having such networks will enable parents to engage with ECD teachers on early childhood development issues. Parents will be able to share and learn from each other and this can improve the level of parent involvement within the ECD centre.
- The community and social institutions such as schools, religious institutions and community centres should be supportive of parent involvement programmes.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings, a range of recommendations is provided. The recommendations are presented in four sections: recommendations to ECD teachers, recommendations to parents, recommendations to government and non-profit organisations and recommendations for further research.

5.2.1 Recommendations to ECD teachers

The recommendations to the ECD teachers are:

- ECD teachers should be responsible for initiating and organising education programmes for parents who have children at the ECD centre. Relevant issues such as literacy, reading, numeracy, discipline, time management, nutrition, listening and talking to children and other information pertaining to the child's development could be covered.
- ECD teachers should communicate with parents on a regular basis. The ECD centre management needs to develop strategies that reach out to all parents. For example telephone calls or home visits to families are a positive start.
- ECD teachers should organize activities for parents at different times of the day and weekends to include as many parents as possible.
- Social events for parents will go a long way in helping them build support networks with other parents and ECD teachers.

- ECD teachers can encourage parents to participate in adult learning initiatives that help build parent involvement.
- The ECD centre and community can come together to make the public aware of the importance of parent involvement.

5.2.2 Recommendations to parents

The recommendations to the parents are:

- Parents should actively show interest in their children's experience within the home and ECD centre.
- Parents should talk to ECD teachers regularly when they drop off and collect their children. Where this is not possible parents should make appointments to meet with the ECD teacher.
- Parents should inform ECD teachers about their children's progress at home and share concerns they have about their children's learning and development with the ECD teachers.
- Where parents have free time, they can avail themselves on a volunteer basis at the ECD centre.
- Parents must be supportive of other parents, coming together and sharing their parenting experiences.

5.2.3 Recommendations to Government and Non-Profit Organisations

The recommendations to Government and Non-Profit Organisations are:

- ECD teachers should be trained in how to involve parents at the ECD centre.
- Schools, community and religious institutions should share information on parent involvement especially among youth. By so doing young people are made aware of what is expected of them once they become parents.
- The Non-Profit Organizations and Faith Based Organizations should invest substantially in the development of underdeveloped ECD centres. Empowering ECD teachers and parents with skills will go a long way in offering opportunities that can develop the capabilities of children from less privileged communities.

5.2.4 Recommendations for further research

For further research the researcher recommends that:

Future studies should be carried out with parents so as to gain insight into parent attitudes toward their involvement with the ECD centre. At the end of this study one thing remains clear-ECD teachers generally have an understanding of what parent involvement in ECD entails, but the same cannot be said about parents who may lack the same clarity. If this is the case, the efforts of ECD teachers may be jeopardised and this needs further investigation.

This study revealed that the level of parent commitment and involvement among young parents within the ECD centre is very low. This finding may give rise to uncertainties and for this reason further study is recommended for a better understanding of the factors contributing to the limited involvement of young parents at ECD centres.

5.3 Summary

This exploratory study investigated ECD teacher attitudes towards parent involvement in ECD centres. This study adopted a qualitative approach using a semi-structured interview schedule to gather data. ECD teachers generally perceived parent involvement negatively because they strongly believed that parent participation in the ECD centre needed improvement. It was interesting to note that in spite of the challenges ECD teachers faced, they still found value in their profession. When describing their role in ECD centres, ECD teachers expressed so much passion.

All the ECD teachers showed that they communicated with the parents through various means. The findings of the study also revealed that participants had a good understanding of parent involvement in ECD centres. The participants indicated a number of factors that influence parent involvement within the ECD centres.

This study has generated an understanding of how ECD teachers perceive their role in the ECD centres and their attitudes towards parent involvement in ECD and has also opened up areas that might require further investigation.

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Appendices

Appendix A-Letter of introduction

18th March, 2014

Dear Sir/Ma'am,

LETTER OF REQUEST FOR AN INTERVIEW

I am Hannatu Aishatu Abdu, a Masters student studying Social Development at the University of Cape Town. My research topic is an exploratory study of Early Childhood Development Teacher attitudes towards Parent Involvement in Early Childhood Development Centres in Athlone.

I am undertaking this study as part of my degree. My supervisor is Associate Professor Eric Atmore and he is supervising this thesis. This study is for academic purposes.

Bearing in mind your busy schedule, I am writing to request an interview session with you. The interview would last for about one hour and I am committed to sharing the research finding with you.

I would really appreciate your support.

Thank you in anticipation

Yours' Faithfully,

Hannatu Aishatu Abdu

Student number: ABDHAN003

Appendix B-Consent form

University of Cape Town
Department of Social Development

RESEARCH TOPIC

An exploratory study of Early Childhood Development teachers' attitude towards parent involvement in Early Childhood Development centres in Athlone, Cape Town.

The research objectives are as follows:

- To have an understanding of how ECD teachers perceive their roles within the ECD centres.
- To find out how ECD teachers' understand and describe the role of parents in ECD centres.
- To investigate how teachers involve parents within ECD centres.
- To explore the factors influencing parent involvement within the ECD centres.
- To establish what strategies and idea ECD teachers have that might enhance parent involvement in ECD centres.

Participant's involvement:

I voluntarily agree to participate in this research project. The objectives and nature of the study have been clearly explained to me and an opportunity availed for me to ask questions I might have.

I understand that I am under no obligation to participate in the research and can decide to withdraw at any stage.

I agree to this interview being used for research purposes and on the condition that my privacy is respected.

Name of participant:

Name of researcher:

Signature:

Signature:

Date

Date:

Appendix C-Interview schedule

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

Department of Social Development

INTRODUCTION

- Self-introduction: Name; school where the student attends and field of study.
- Research project: ECD teacher attitudes towards parent involvement in ECD centres in Athlone.
- Ethical considerations: Voice recording; voluntary participation; confidentiality
- Time required: Interview is likely to last 60 minutes.
- Potential importance of the study: The finding of the study might add value to ECD centres but readers should be mindful of the fact that the researcher does not have any influence over the implementation of the research findings.

Objective I and II: To have an understanding of how ECD teachers perceive their roles within the ECD centres. To find out how ECD teachers' understand and describe the role of parents in ECD centres.

1. Describe what it is like being a teacher at this early childhood development centre.
2. What do you understand by the term 'parent involvement'?
3. Who should initiate parent involvement-the ECD centre or parents?
4. Do you think that parents should be part of their children's early development within the ECD centre?
5. Are parents doing enough in helping with the early development of their children within the ECD centre?

Objective III: To investigate how ECD teachers involve parents within ECD centres

6. What is your relationship with the parents of the children?
7. Are parents involved within the centre?
8. If yes, how are parents involved?

9. Do you think that parents are provided with adequate opportunities for participating within the ECD centre?
10. Are parents included in the governance of the ECD centre? If, yes how?
11. Are parents able to speak to you about their children's physical and emotional well-being?

Objective IV: To explore the factors influencing parent involvement within ECD centres

12. What factors do you think influence parent involvement within the ECD centre?
13. Are there challenges you think parents are faced with which hinder their participation within the ECD centre?
14. If there are challenges can you please mention them and explain how you think these factors stand as a stumbling block in ensuring parent involvement within the ECD centre?

Objective V: To establish what strategies and ideas ECD teachers have that might enhance parent involvement in ECD centres

15. What role do you see yourself playing in promoting parent involvement within the ECD centre you work?
16. Do you think parent involvement within the ECD centres needs to improve?
17. If yes, what needs to change for parents' to be more involved in the development of their children within the ECD centres?
18. Can you please tell me if you think parent involvement can be improved by parents and teachers alone?
19. If no, what roles do you think other stakeholders have to play?

Appendix D-Biographic details

Please would you answer the questions in the table below to provide information about yourself?
You can write in the spaces provided. If there are questions you do not want to respond to, just leave it blank.

PERSONAL INFORMATION

Pseudonym name: _____

PROFESSIONAL INFORMATION

Highest qualification: _____

Years of ECD teaching experience: _____

Have you attended any workshop or course on parent involvement? _____

Number of children under ECD teacher's care: _____

Name of current ECD centre: _____

How long have you worked at this centre? _____