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**PARENTAL PARTICIPATION IN KENYAN
KINDERGARTEN**

*A qualitative study on teachers' reflections on parental participation and
children's stay in the kindergarten*

Master's thesis in Early Childhood Education

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Abstract

To reiterate Toni Buchan's own words, 'a generation of parents has grown up in an era where there is someone (or something) available to do most things for you' (Buchan, 2013, p. 61). This research study draws from today's reality that most households in urban Kenya today engage the services of domestic workers/ house-helpers. It is estimated that nearly 2 million households in the country's capital, Nairobi, alone hire domestic help (Kidula, 2014). Their roles include not only helping with household chores, but also taking care of children. Parental participation in school-related activities has significantly dropped. For instance, among other duties, the house-helpers drop off and pick up children from the kindergarten, assist with homework, sign the children's diaries (daily journals), and sometimes, on behalf of the parents, they attend activities organized by the preschool. Consequently, most parents leave the education of their children to the teachers, as they sometimes see themselves inadequately prepared to deal with the demands of school and school-related activities. Sometimes the parents do not get involved because they do not know how to, except to meet financial obligations of their children's schooling.

This study, therefore, sought to find out, through interviews, observation and personal experience, how parental participation is understood, and how the relationship between the parent and the teacher can potentially influence the child's stay in the kindergarten. The study draws from a Kenyan context and highlights kindergarten teachers' reflections and experiences with parental participation.

Ethical principles of anonymity and confidentiality were upheld throughout the entire research process, and necessary permission and authorization were sought and granted.

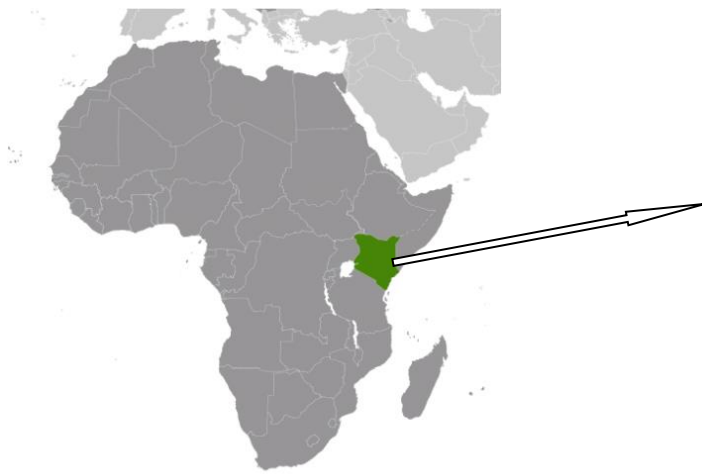
Map of Kenya



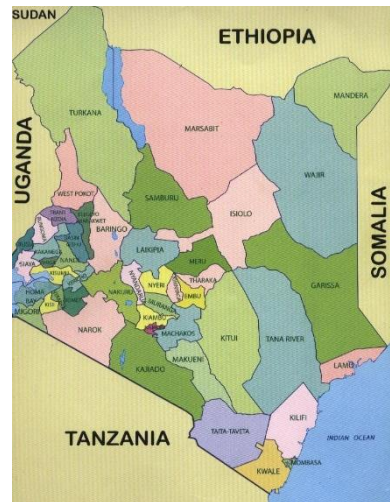
The National Flag



The Coat of Arms



Map of Africa



Map of Kenya with the 47 counties

Kenya at a glance

**photos from Google*

Dedication

I dedicate this Master's thesis to my parents who have worked tirelessly to ensure that my siblings and I have a good educational background. I hope I have made you proud.

Acknowledgement

First and foremost, I thank the Almighty God who has given me life and strength throughout my study period here in Norway.

I am deeply grateful to my family for the support they have given me, especially when I had to travel away from home. Their prayers and moral support have given me the strength and courage to face the unknown. I am also grateful for the friends whom I found here in Norway and have now become family. Thank you all for welcoming me into your lives and for helping me adjust to the new environment, and as such, I have successfully completed the course of my study.

Special thanks to my diligent supervisor, Dr. Kris Kalkman, who took it upon himself to follow up with me on the progress of my work, even when there seemed to be no progress. The feedback was critical and at times tough, but very constructive and helpful in shaping this thesis into what it is now. Thank you for your thorough guidance, for believing in me and for pushing me to give my best.

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Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

In my experience as a preschool teacher intern, and in reference to my own childhood, most parents view parental participation as mainly involving paying school fees and assisting children with their homework. Anything beyond that, such as being members of school committees is deemed unnecessary and probably a reserve for certain parents, not everyone. Teachers, on the other hand, have other reflections on the concept. The teachers anticipate that parents will involve themselves more in the school as they do at home, for example, join them in class trips. However, most kindergartens do not have laid-out policies on how to involve parents in school activities and the children's education. Moreover, the concept of parental participation itself may lead many to think of it as being a task mainly for parents, as the name suggests; and education is seen as a task for the experts, the teachers. This goes to indicate that parents and teachers have different roles which they play *separately* in the education of the *same* children. And so, the two groups, parents and teachers, quite rightly in their own right, assume that their roles are independent of each other. Is this how it should be? As the Swahili saying goes; '*Fahali wawili wapiganapo, ni nyasi ndizo huumia*'. This loosely translates to; 'When two bulls fight, it is the grass that gets hurt'. As far as parental participation goes, this saying can be interpreted thus; that whatever decisions and actions the parents and teachers ('bulls') take, and the relationship between these two parties, have an effect on the children ('grass'). This demonstrates the need for the creation of a partnership between the parents and teachers to promote the child's wellbeing in the kindergarten and school-related activities. This is what I refer to when I speak of parental participation.

In regard to this, I make special reference to Charlotte Palludan's (2007) article '*Two Tones: The Core of Inequality in Kindergarten?*' about issues that may have been taken for granted in the kindergarten. And it is my strong assumption that parental participation may be one of these taken-for-granted concepts in the kindergarten. Hence, the main aim of my study is to increase awareness and shed more light on parental participation in the preschool as I highlight what preschool teachers think about parental participation, and their experiences thereof with the concept. This I do by exploring the teachers' reflections on parental participation, and establishing how the relationship between parents and teachers is fundamental to the promotion of parental participation. In doing so, I will also establish the possible influence this relationship may have on the child's stay in the preschool.

The theme of focus in this study is parental participation (sometimes referred to as parental involvement) in the kindergarten. With other research questions in mind, the main research question for this study is: *How do teachers reflect on parental participation and in what manner can the parent-teacher relationship influence children's stay in the kindergarten?*

Chapter 2: BACKGROUND

2.1 Briefly about Kenya as a country

Kenya is an East Africa country with a population of 50,410,740 people as at January 27, 2018, according to the United Nations estimates. The country's capital, Nairobi, hosts about 5 million people. Kenya lies directly on the equator which gives it a tropical climate and is bordered by Uganda (to the west), Sudan (to the northwest), Ethiopia (to the north), Somalia (to the northeast), and Tanzania (to the south). Kenya's diversity is seen in the numerous cultures and tribes that are represented in and by its 47 counties. Politically, Kenya has had a fairly stable political environment compared to most African countries, for example South Sudan, Congo and Somalia to which Kenya has played peacemaker several times, and even hosts refugees from such countries. The country has had 10 vice presidents and 4 presidents since its independence from the British government on 12th December 1963. The last general elections which were held in August 2017 were highly disputed that it led to the presidential election results being cancelled by the Supreme Court and a repeat election being held in December 2017.

2.2 On Early Childhood Education in Kenya

There were 33,121 Early Childhood Development Education (ECDE) centres in Kenya in 2006, with about 1.67 million children enrolled in these centres at the time (UNESCO, 2010). To show the government's commitment to provision of childcare services and rights to children, Kenya has ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children (UNCRC), and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (commonly referred to as the African Charter).

The first institutionalized preschool education system in Kenya can be traced back to the 1940s, when the colonial government established centres to serve mainly European and Asian children (Githinji & Kanga, 2011; Mbugua, 2004). At the same time, the colonial government also established early childhood care centres for Kenyan children whose parents were working on the tea, coffee, and sugar plantations so that these children could have someone to look after them whilst their parents worked out in the fields. In addition, Africans, and Kenyans in this case, who participated in the 2nd World War 'came in touch with the European brand of education' (Githinji & Kanga, 2011, p. 131). They had seen how the Europeans set up preschool education for their children and decided to copy their system when they came back to their own countries after the war. This was also made largely

possible by the economic boom after World War II where more jobs were created in the urban areas which saw many people move from the rural areas to urban centres. This also meant that parents could better provide for their families, and children (ibid.). The rural areas were not left behind for long.

In the 1950s, feeding centres were established by missionaries to cater for children whose parents were involved in the fight for freedom from the colonial government, known as the Mau Mau movement (ibid. p. 132). This led to the declaration of a state of emergency until Kenya achieved independence in 1963. Missionaries have played a crucial role in the development and growth of early childhood education in Kenya ever since. They are also known to have set up one of the earliest schools in Kenya at the coastal region in Rabai, Mombasa, and then moved to the country's interior by and by following the expansion of the railway line from Mombasa to Uganda (Mbugua, 2004).

2.3 Child-rearing views in Kenya

For a long time, child-rearing in Kenya was viewed as the responsibility of the mother or other women (aunts, older sisters) in the child's life. The father was the sole provider of the family while the mother's job was to 'make the home', which included bringing up the child and teaching them values and skills for everyday life. For instance, the mother was expected to be the one to check the child's homework and speak with the child's teacher, and to attend to any school-related activities concerning the child as the need arose. The father's role was to pay school fees and provide other basic needs like food. But with the changing times and the women becoming more involved in economic activities, this view has changed. The responsibility of bringing up the child is taken up by both parents/genders. Mothers can now also pay school fees for their children and fathers have become more involved in the children's schoolwork. In general, the parenting style was, in the past, more of an authoritarian nature, where the parents' word was final and rules were to be followed without question. Today, varied styles of parenting have emerged where children can question rules and negotiate with the parents to reach a compromise. More on this relationship between adults and children will be discussed further under theoretical framework.

2.4 Names used to refer to Early Childhood Education in Kenya

Unlike the Norwegian setting where early childhood care institutions for children 5 years and below are referred to by just one term 'barnehage', various terms have been used to refer to institutions offering education and childcare services to children in Kenya (Githinji & Kanga,

2011). For instance, in different parts of the country you will come across terms like *ECDE pre-primary, nursery, preschool, baby class, baby care, pre-unit, day care, kindergarten* and even *loipi* (which means ‘shade’ in the Samburu language to refer to the gathering of children under the shade of a tree to receive early childhood education services in the northern parts of the country). Attempts have, however, been made by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MOEST) and the National Centre for Early Childhood Education (NACECE) to harmonize these names (ibid.). The new education system which was introduced in January 2018 refers to Early Childhood Education thus: Pre-primary I (for 4-year-old children) and Pre-primary II (for 5-year-old children). Both pre-primary I and Pre-primary II are referred to as ‘Kindergarten’. As mentioned earlier, children below 4 years will be under the care of caregivers in what is referred to as ‘Playgroups’ where no formal learning takes place as is the case in the kindergarten. However, as experienced in almost every situation where something new is introduced, I reckon that it will take quite a while before people (teachers and parents included) become used to the new names/terms and to the new system in general. As a result, throughout this paper, there may be use of the terms ‘school’, ‘preschool’ and ‘kindergarten’ interchangeably.

2.5 Policy on parental participation in Kenya

There is no clear policy on parental participation in the preschool in Kenya. It is also quite ambiguous how teachers and parents can work together to form a partnership which encourages parental participation. The National Early Childhood Development Policy Framework developed by the Ministry of Education in 2006, broadly defines what role the parents need to play to facilitate the provision of quality services in the Early Childhood Education and Care centres (ECECs) (Ministry of Education, 2006, p. 7). The roles given in this document are, among others, (ibid. p.7-8):

- a) Primary care, health and nutrition providers.
- b) Primary role of socializing children and inculcating life principles and spiritual and moral values for character development.
- c) Provide enabling environment for the child’s growth and development.
- d) Provide early stimulation for the future development of the child.
- e) Provide learning and play materials.
- f) Link children to services

As implied by some of the roles mentioned above, parents cannot fully and effectively perform these roles on their own. They need help and collaboration from other stakeholders, including health officials and education practitioners, that is, teachers in the kindergartens which their children attend. This highlights the need for parents to be actively involved in the preschool and to create and maintain a good working relationship with the teachers of their children. And this involvement can be in three forms, as will be discussed later.

Teachers in the preschool, on the other hand, according to the Early Childhood Development Service Standards Guidelines for Kenya should offer, among others (Ministry of Education, 2006, p. 2):

- a) Opportunities to develop fine motor skills.
- b) Encouragement of language through talking, being read to, singing.
- c) Activities that will develop a sense of mastery.
- d) Opportunities to learn co-operation, helping, sharing.
- e) Experimentation with pre-writing and pre-reading skills.

As is in the case of parents, teachers too cannot do their job effectively on their own. They require the participation of parents in performing some of the roles listed above and ensuring that children achieve maximum benefits from the preschool setting. This goes to emphasize the importance of having a good working relationship with the home, i.e. parents. In addition, the two documents are limited in two ways; one, they are broadly framed; and two, they do not show a direct link or relationship between the teachers and the parents. This supports the need for more consideration to be given to parental participation by promoting teacher-parent cooperation and partnership; hence this research study.

Chapter 3: PREVIOUS RESEARCH

This chapter reviews previous research on parental participation. I would like to point out that most of the research, however, is based on primary school education and I use the research to find out how it is relevant to preschool. As a result, the term ‘school’ may appear in parts of this section. In addition, it is worth noting that there is little research that has been done on parental participation in the Kenyan preschool context, and so most of the literature reviewed is from outside Kenya, mostly European.

3.1 Defining parental participation

Different researchers have attempted to define the concept of parental participation and how the definitions can be related to the Kenyan situation. To begin with, Hernandez (cited in Njeru & Mora, 2015, p. 368) defines parental involvement as referring to ‘activities by parents, both in home and school, that are intended to support and promote students’ school performance and well-being’. Bakker & Denessen (2007, p. 189) refer to Laura Desimone’s definition that ‘parental involvement can be understood as being a set of group-specific actions, beliefs and attitudes’. They go on to explain that ‘parental involvement refers to parent behaviours related to the child’s school or schooling (directly or indirectly) that can be observed as manifestations of their commitment to their child’s educational affairs’ (p. 189). Furthermore, El Nokali, Bachman & Votruba-Drzal (2010) conceptualize parental participation as ‘parents’ behaviours in home and school settings meant to support their children's educational progress’ (p. 2) .

I give direct quotes here to illustrate that all the four definitions given above have three things in common; parents, child, school. In other words, parental participation has a lot to do with the actions of the parents towards and/or with the child, whether at home or school, which are geared towards enabling the child to thrive in school/preschool or school-related activities as the definitions above suggest. The Kenyan preschool main mandate is to instil and strengthen academic skills in children and prepare them for primary school. Parent participation/involvement, therefore, should include all those activities that are geared towards helping the child to acquire school-readiness skills, both in the home and school-setting. In addition, the use of words such as ‘well-being’, ‘progress’ and ‘commitment’ in defining parental participation imply that parental participation is not a one-time thing, but a continuous process. And this process can be sustained through the development of successful relationship between the parents and the teachers as illustrated in the next section.

3.2 How the relationship between parents and teachers influences parental participation

It is through the family that the child will learn how to relate with other people and how to form relationships and friendships even outside the family (Blatchford, p. 57; Ihmeideh & Oliemat, p. 181; Patrikakou & Weissberg). It is therefore important that parents/families form a good working relationship with others, especially with the teachers who are taking care of their children, because the children are watching (Buchan, 2013). Probably unknown to many, the child provides a ‘window’ through which the teacher gets acquainted with what happens at home, the experiences the child is going through, and even the child’s relationships (Buchan, 2013, p. 58). Ingerid Bø (2011) can be read as agreeing with this point when she writes that ‘barnet er det primære bånd mellom hjem og barnehage’ (p. 50).

To facilitate the existence of such a bond, thus, there is, therefore, need ‘for schools and homes to form meaningful partnerships’ (Baker, Kessler-Sklar, Piotrkowski, & Parker, 1999, p. 368), and to develop ‘open, honest and successful relationships’ with each other (Buchan, 2013, p. 58). This is emphasized by Ihmeideh & Oliemat (2015) as they talk of ‘the urgent need to establish a strong relationship [...] and to build positive and respectful partnerships...between home and kindergarten’ (p. 181). This is particularly important because, in most countries (Kenya included), the child (over the age of 3) spends most hours of the day in the preschool under the care of the teacher (or caregiver in the playgroup) who technically becomes ‘*in loco parentis*’, a Latin term which translates to ‘in the place of a parent’ (Buchan, 2013, p. 58). As such, parents will prefer to entrust their children to the care of someone who takes a genuine interest in the wellbeing of their children, and is concerned about the child’s holistic development, without judgment or prejudice.

This ability to put one’s self in another’s shoe and show discreet and genuine concern and interest, and not just show power or merely doing one’s job/duties can be referred to as empathic sensitivity (Buchan, 2013, p. 59). She goes on to say that having this knowledge of a child’s home experiences should work towards improving the teacher’s relationship with the child and guiding the teacher into making the preschool learning environment to suit the child’s needs as much as possible. Forming such a healthy relationship with parents and families opens the door, past the window, to a child’s home setting and home experiences. This provides a basis for planning learning activities at school, as well as working together with parents in providing appropriate learning experiences at home, relevant to the child’s age and level of development. As a concluding remark, it is evident that the relationship

between teachers and parents is a fundamental premise on which parental participation is built. And preschool policies have a role to play in the creation of this partnership between teachers and parents, as discussed in the next section.

3.3 ECEC policies and their impact on parental participation

As demonstrated in the Kenya ECD Policy Guidelines (Ministry of Education, 2006), the separate roles of teachers and parents are given in form of ‘do’s’ and ‘don’ts’ but they do not give the ‘how’, and so it remains unclear on how parents and teachers are to work together to form a working partnership. In addition, the way the guidelines are formulated tend to imply that there are two groups of people; one group which knows everything, and another group which knows ‘almost nothing’ and as such should be ‘taught’. This influences parent-teacher relationship in that it would imply that teachers are viewed as experts and parents are viewed and treated as unqualified and less knowledgeable on matters pertaining to their own children, what Hughes & Mac Naughton (2000) referred to as *othering*. According to them, othering involves regarding parental knowledge of the child as subordinate or inferior to professional knowledge. In other words, in such practice, it is assumed that what the parents know concerning their children is inadequate, thereby ‘creating a need for staff to teach parents correct child-rearing that is critical to positive teacher–parent relationships’ (Hughes & Mac Naughton, 2000 p. 244). (Buchan, 2013, p. 60) suggests that the danger of this kind of practice is that if parents are regarded as inadequate or unimportant, it may cause them to withdraw, distance themselves and feel disempowered. On the contrary, if parents feel their participation will yield results, ‘it provides both a sense of responsibility and ownership [...] and a sense of empowerment’ (ibid. p. 63).

3.4 Manifestations of parental participation in Kenyan preschool

The literature reviewed points to 3 general forms/dimensions/types of family involvement, namely; home-based involvement, school-based involvement, and home-school conferencing/community-based involvement (Ihmeideh & Oliemat, 2015, p. 183; Kikas, Peets, & Niilo, 2011, p. 1080).

3.4.1 Home-based involvement

Home-based involvement includes all ‘parental behaviours promoting children’s learning at home’ (Kikas et al., 2011, p. 1080). The family’s role does not stop when the child begins to attend kindergarten, as most families (even in Kenya) may misconstrue. But as researchers have found out, ‘learning that occurs at home is as important as learning at school’ (Baker et

al., 1999, p. 367). Assisting children in doing their homework is one of the most visible and direct ways in which parents can be involved in their children's learning, especially in Kenya. This allows 'parents [...] to know what the child was learning as well as giving teachers an opportunity to hear from parents about their children's learning' (Ogoye-Ndegwa, Mengich, & Abidha, 2007 p. 118). Other ways include, but not limited to, providing playing and learning materials at home, reading stories to and with the child, signing the child's journal (they are called 'diaries' in Kenya), providing space and time for learning activities, talking with the child about how their day at the kindergarten was, allowing time for play and eventually playing with the child, among others (Ihmeideh & Oliemat, 2015; Kikas et al., 2011; Patrikakou & Weissberg, 2000).

3.4.2 School-based involvement

This form of involvement refers to the ways in which the parents are involved in the preschool. It 'includes activities and behaviours that parents engage with their children at school' (Kikas et al., 2011, p. 1080). This dimension of involvement is based on the premise that 'parents become involved [...] when they feel that schools want them involved' (Samaras & Wilson, 1999, p. 502). According to Kikas et al. (2011), Ihmeideh & Oliemat (2015) and Patrikakou & Weissberg (2000), school-based involvement includes activities such as meeting with other parents, reading stories to children in the classrooms, taking part in school career days where the parents come and talk to children about different careers, volunteering in cleaning the classroom or making meals, as well as being part of the school's governing bodies; known as School Management Committees as given in the Kenya Education Act of 1968. Njeru & Mora (2015) cite the use of the Kenya School Report Card (SRC) as one way to potentially enhance school-based involvement. This is a tool used in primary schools to encourage parents to know more about their children's teachers and the school in general, its activities and management practices.

3.4.3 Home-school conferencing

The third dimension of family involvement requires a direct connection between the home and the kindergarten, otherwise known as home-school conferencing. It indulges 'parent-teacher communication on educationally important topics related to the specific child' (Kikas et al., 2011, p. 1080). This dimension requires teachers to actively reach out to parents, and parents to speak with teachers, to discuss matters which affect the child's learning and wellbeing, both at home and in school. This would imply a two-way communication process because the home and the school are the child's basic places where he spends his time and

learns about himself and the world around him. This may not always be the case. Most times the communication flows in one direction, that is, from the teachers to the parents, from school to home. This reflects Hughes & Mac Naughton's (2000) concept of *othering* of parents. Kikas et al. (2011) recognize this point and suggest that the parents may in turn become passive as the teachers may project themselves, intentionally or unintentionally, as the custodians of knowledge about the child. Baker et al. (1999, p. 368) suggest a continuous communication process where the teachers and the parents support and keep each other informed of their respective activities.

The three forms of parental participation coincide with the three models of parental participation as given by Ira Gordon's theory of parental involvement, namely; the Parent or Family Impact Model, The School Impact Model, and the Community Impact Model, respectively (Kimu, 2012, p. 33).

Chapter 4: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter focuses on the notion that this study is inspired by ecological system theory, and social constructionism. There is an old saying in most African countries, Kenya included, that ‘it takes a village to raise a child’. This is largely true because of the fact that it is almost impossible for a child to get everything they need for healthy growth and development solely within the confines of the home setting. Therefore, other key players which include teachers/school come in. This is supported by the reality that provision of childcare, in Africa and beyond, is no longer considered the duty of only the mother as was in the past, but is now considered as ‘a collective enterprise rather than a parental prerogative [...] and a shared management, caretaking and socially distributed support’ (Nsamenang 2010, p. 43).

4.1 Ecological systems and social realities

This shared management can be viewed as an equivalent of the two independent microsystems, the home and the preschool, coming together to form part of the child’s mesosystem as seen through the ecological systems theory lens. Kenyan mothers, compared to the past, are now considered an important part of the country’s economy and many go back to work soon after giving birth. Hence, they need the support from family members as well as childcare institutions and services such as nannies and the kindergarten. Although all this is good and welcome, sometimes the childcare institutions may have perceptions on certain concepts of child development that are different from the parents’ own (Nsamenang, 2010). As a result, most parents take time to know the values that a preschool promotes and believes in before enrolling their children.

For parental participation to be viewed as a social construct indicates that its meaning and the experience individuals have with it varies from one social context to another, because, as Berger & Luckmann (1966) have established, reality is socially constructed. This implies that the way preschool teachers experience parental participation is *their* reality, which may be different from the way another group, for example parents themselves, experience it, and so this will become the parents’ reality. These independent perceptions of this concept of parental participation by teachers and parents point to the two-sided nature of reality as being both subjective and objective (ibid). Subjective reality refers to an individual’s unique understanding of what is real, while objective reality is when we regard something that exists outside and independent of us as real (ibid). This realization, therefore, makes the definition

of parental participation ambiguous, complex and even unclear in some instances, and so is its implication in real life situations. Stelios Georgiou (1996) is of the same opinion (p. 193).

Berger & Luckman (1966) view knowledge as being socially distributed. They say that through social action and interaction knowledge becomes ‘possessed differently by different individuals and varies among types of individuals’. This implies that, for example, the way a teacher experiences and understands parental participation may be different from the way a parent experiences and understands it. And if by chance a child is asked to talk about how they view their parents’ involvement in their preschool, they may have a different view. As a result, the teacher, the parent, and the child have different knowledge and experience of the same concept of parental participation. In the same manner, two teachers in the same preschool may have different views and experience with the same concept. This goes to demonstrate that it was necessary to establish how the preschool teachers in Kenya define parental participation and their experience with the concept, based on this social constructionist lens, because ‘one needs to know exactly what something is before one can say what it can do’ (Georgiou, 1996, p. 193).

4.2 Creating meaning out of parental participation

Georgiou’s words above are of importance because for the preschool to require participation of the parents, the parents themselves should be able to understand what their participation entails before they can effectively engage in it. In the same manner, the teachers themselves need to develop an understanding surrounding what parental participation could and should cover in order to correctly engage and facilitate the parents and establish a successful relationship. In a nutshell, due to the nature of parental participation as a social product created through social interaction, it would therefore be essential that parents and teachers (including policy makers) *together* construct and define parental participation. This potentially allows them to read from the proverbial ‘same book’; that is, to achieve the same understanding of the concept parental participation in the preschool.

4.3 Children, childhood and adults-children relationships

In this section, I talk more about the child-rearing practices that I introduced earlier. I draw attention to views on children and childhood, giving special attention to the African context in general, and eventually narrow down to Kenya. I present how these views on children and childhood, in turn, influence the children’s relationships with the adults around them, parents and teachers included. To begin with, just like parental participation, the two concepts,

children and childhood are social constructs. This implies that we have different ideas about what they are, and so their meaning/interpretation is dependent on time, space and place (Wells, 2015, p. 34). Wells goes on to say that childhood experiences are shaped by race, class and gender (ibid. p. 22). For instance, American and European childhoods were seen in the colonial period as protected and sheltered with an authoritarian childrearing practice (ibid. p. 20, 28). But over time, there has been a shift in how childhood is viewed and children are now raised using a more ‘management’ approach, where children are given opportunity to have their voice heard (ibid.). On African childhood there is little documentation, and the available literature focuses mostly on child labour. In addition, childhood in the colonial period was organized according to race, whereby the childhood of the colonialists was radically different from the childhood of Africans (Wells, 2015). This resounds with what I mentioned in the history of early childhood education in Kenya in the introduction part of this thesis. I mentioned that in the colonial period, preschools were set up for European and Asian children, while African children had their own experiences outside preschool set-ups. Some of the older African children joined their parents in the field and worked with them. In this way, childhood was shaped by class and race as Karen Wells (2015) noted.

In contemporary Africa there exist contradicting views on children and childhood. On one hand, the global saying ‘children are to be seen, not heard’ holds some weight. That is to say, children are not always consulted in decisions that directly affect them, and they are expected to agree with the adult’s decisions concerning them without raising questions, hence making the saying true. For instance, while growing up, childhood for me and my siblings meant no questioning the adults; you do as you are told. We would, for example, eat whatever was placed before us, no negotiation, no compromise. On the other hand, today there is some negotiation that goes on between the adult and the child. This is fuelled by increased awareness and advocacy for children’s rights all over the world, one of which is freedom of expression. For instance, if the child does not want to eat a certain type of food, the adult promises a reward and they both reach a compromise. In my sister’s words (who is also a parent), the adult prioritizes ‘being friends with the child’, over being the parent first.

4.4 Summary

As a conclusion to this part, these two views of childhood (the ‘no negotiation’ and the ‘being friends’ views) can be observed, to some extent, in the Kenyan society today, as understood through Charlotte Palludan’s (2007) concept of positioning. In other words, children and adults can position themselves as equal subjects where they both have control (being friends);

in the same breath, children are seen by adults as vulnerable beings, needing protection and guidance and so they end up being positioned as objects (no negotiation). These two views became quite evident in the interview where the informants noted that, for example, engaging the children in physical activities was important for the children's own growth and development (hence 'no negotiation/objects' view). An example is revealed when one of the informants, Tr. Jane, said that the parents expected their children 'to be treated special'. If the children did not want to take part in the physical activities, they (the children) would tell the parents to talk with the teachers so that they are exempted from such activities. This demonstrates a 'being friends' view where the parent and the child position themselves as equal subjects, a notion which was uncommon in the past as I demonstrated with the example of my own childhood. In summary, just as childhood is a social construct which is shaped by time and social context, so is the relationship between children and adults. Lastly, how childhood and children are viewed, and how children position themselves or are positioned by others, will influence the way adults relate with them, as has been demonstrated.

Chapter 5: METHODOLOGY

Gaining insight into the ways people experience *their* situation requires that we seek their views, and not just assume that we know what they feel, despite the order in which the events occur, or whether or not we took part in those events. It therefore requires that we go out into their world, observe and listen without presumptions; with an open mind. This chapter presents this study's methodological framework which was used to investigate preschool teachers' experiences with parental participation in the preschool. First, I present my take on qualitative research and how this has been understood and applied throughout this study. Here I will argue why a phenomenological approach was chosen for investigating teachers' views surrounding parental participation in the preschool. Secondly, I will talk about the choice and use of semi structured interviews as the primary tool for data collection. I will also present the preschool of study and the informants. Moreover, I will describe the actual interview situation, and finally, in the third part I present my ethical research framework. First things first, why choose this qualitative research method?

5.1 Qualitative research method

Qualitative research methods open the path to finding out about people's experiences by giving the participants opportunity to share their world, and their views about their world, with the researcher. Vanderstoep & Johnston, (2009) give 5 qualitative methods used in qualitative research; ethnography, phenomenology, case study, textual analysis and applied research. This study employed the phenomenological approach because it recognizes that 'det er [...] ikke nok å kartlegge konkrete, ytre forhold' (Bø, 2011, p. 44). This implies that what we observe on the outside may not always be a true representation of what actually happens within a given context. Therefore, the researcher needs to step into the informants' world and get the 'sine qua non of an experience' as Vanderstoep & Johnston (2009) put it; that is, how the people involved have experienced a particular phenomenon. In this study, the phenomenological approach would enable me to find out how kindergarten teachers experience/have experienced parental participation, and working with parents. In Roseanne's own words, 'If you ask me, I'm gonna tell you.' (in Patton, 2002, p. 348). It is a simple statement yet very true and practical. It is not enough to just assume what people's experiences are, even if we are part of those experiences. We must learn to see *their* world from *their* point of view. With the phenomenological approach in mind, let us now look at the tool used for data collection in this study

5.2 Data collection tool: semi-structured interview

Data collection tools in qualitative research are chosen based on the type of information needed and they can be used across the research methods mentioned. Patton (2002) and Vanderstoep & Johnston (2009) give the following ways of collecting qualitative data; interviews, observations, focus groups, autoethnography and documents. My main data collection tool was through conducting semi structured interviews to gain knowledge and insight into the teachers' experience with parental participation in the preschool in which they work. Kvale (1996, p. 124) says that a semi-structured interview has specific themes to be covered as well as carefully selected questions which are prepared beforehand in an interview guide, as I had done. On the other hand, it is also open to change of sequence and modification of the questions 'in order to follow up the answers given [...] by the subjects' (ibid.). In addition, I conducted observations prior to the interviews. By combining the observations with the interviews, I was able to 'capture how those being interviewed view their world [...] and the complexities of their individual perceptions and experiences' (Patton, 2002, p. 348). He also supports the use of multiple strategies in interviewing and says that by no means are interview strategies mutually exclusive (ibid.). They can be strategically used together to produce more comprehensive results. Many people think that conducting an interview is a simple task. It, however, requires a set of conversational skills, knowledge and experience (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Vanderstoep & Johnston, 2009). In other words, 'the skills of interviewing are learned through the practice of interviewing' (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 277).

5.3 The preschool and the informants

The preschool of study was selected for two main reasons; one, I was working there until the time I received the scholarship to further my education, and therefore, I am well acquainted with the institution and the people there; and two, the preschool is located in an urban setting, and as was highlighted in the introductory remarks, the study seeks information on parental participation in preschools in urban Kenya, and so it was well fitting. The preschool was started about 5 years ago and is situated in one of the well-to-do estates of the capital city of Nairobi. Despite the fact that its fees are quite affordable to most middle-class parents as compared to most preschools in the area, it has considerably low numbers of children. It has 2 vehicles which transport children to and from the preschool at a cost for those parents who prefer it. Some children are picked up and dropped off by parents or their nannies/house-helps. Out of the 3 preschool teachers available, I was able to interview 2 of them. The two

informants are trained preschool teachers who have had experience with both the old and the new systems of education. They both have more than 5 years teaching experience, have been working in the preschool since its inception, and they both hold diplomas in Early Childhood Education. In addition, they are mothers with children who are in or have gone through preschool, and this adds to their knowledge and experience about parental participation in kindergarten. It is, however, important to note that it is their experience as *teachers*, and not as *parents*, that the researcher was after. This will become evident in the findings and discussion section.

5.4 The interview

This next part will describe the actual interview situation. (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015) ask: ‘if you want to know how people understand their world and their lives, why not talk with them?’ (p. 1) . As mentioned earlier, I knew the respondents from before and so I went to visit them in the kindergarten days before the actual interview, just to talk and tell them in brief about my intentions, and we caught up with each other since we had not met for over a year. It was quite challenging to find time that was convenient for everyone because they are the only teachers in their classes and so they could not leave the children on their own. In addition, the first day we planned to hold the interview, there was heavy political tension throughout the country, and so we postponed the interview to the following day because there was uncertainty about the outcome of the political event that was happening on that day. We, consequently, met on a Wednesday afternoon, when the children were sleeping and so we could talk for an hour or so. The respondents were very eager and excited to help me with my research, and they made it clear that they were glad to be of help. They had even thought that there would be video and picture taking, but I explained to them the privacy issues to be addressed and they understood.

However, we took pictures after the interview just for memories because it will be a while before we meet again. As a show of appreciation and according to their suggestion, I brought lunch with me and we ate together during the interview. We sat in the quiet room where the children were sleeping. They sat next to each other while I sat facing them. Before I switched on the recorder, I informed them that I would be using a sound recorder to which they agreed (they had imagined it would be video recording, so they were a little disappointed). I talked about my topic and the purpose of the study, anonymity and confidentiality issues, use and access to the data collected, as well as their freedom to withdraw or not answer any question should they choose not to. Then I switched on the sound recorder, put it on the table and we

conducted the interview, which was like a dialogue ‘[...] where probing, new aspects [...] find their place’ (Flick, 2011, p. 12).

After the interview I helped the teachers with taking care of the children. For instance, when the children woke up I helped them to put on their shoes and I also helped in serving them snacks.

5.5 Ethical issues

In this section, I will highlight the ethical guidelines that were observed throughout the interview inquiry and I will shed light on the quality of the study by looking at its validity and reliability. To begin with, the four main points of ethical guidelines as given by (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 277) are focused on informed consent, confidentiality, consequences and the role of the researcher.

5.5.1 Informed consent, confidentiality and consequences

Informed consent ‘entails informing the research participants about the overall purpose of the investigation [...] and obtaining their voluntary participation’ (ibid. p.93). Guided by Murphy and Dingwall’s (in Flick, 2011, p. 216) principles of *autonomy* (respect for participants’ values and decision) and *beneficence* (with the aim of producing positive and tangible benefits), I informed the principal of the kindergarten about my research study and he gave me permission. I also spoke with the participants about my study and they were eager to help. At the beginning of the interview, I explained the general purpose of the interview to the informants, and I assured them of anonymity. I asked if it was okay to use a sound recorder to which they agreed, and assured them that I was the only one who would have access to the recorded interview. In the same manner, I did not take their pictures or video during the interview as they had anticipated. In so doing, the principle of *confidentiality* and *anonymity* was held throughout the research process, including during analysis and presentation of data. The research study would, as much as possible, avoid any negative *consequence* to the participants. On the contrary, the finished work would be made available to the preschool at the request of the principal who noted that the research would indeed be a good thing for the preschool in improving knowledge about parental participation in the preschool. The fourth point of ethical issue of the role of the researcher is discussed in the next part.

5.5.2 Researcher's position

Since the researcher is the primary instrument for obtaining knowledge in qualitative research (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 277), I have been the primary instrument by recognizing that the entire interview process is largely dependent on my 'the practical skills and personal judgements (ibid. p.20). Put in another way, being a primary instrument in the research process involves the ability of the researcher to 'make choices that weigh ethical versus scientific concerns in a study' (ibid. p.97). This was, however, not an easy task because I had close interpersonal relationship with the informants and as (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 97) argue, the danger of having such close ties may lead to inability to 'maintain professional distance but instead [...] going native'. It was not easy but it was possible and I pulled through.

In addition, a good researcher is aware of his own baggage, that is, biases, assumptions and experiences related to the topic of study, through a process known as reflexivity. Reflexivity involves the researcher being aware of their subjectivity concerning the topic of study through deliberate self-reflection, and how this subjectivity may have an influence on the research process (Patton, 2002, p. 87). Through reflexivity I recognized my experiences with parental participation as a preschool teacher intern, as well as from observing my siblings who have had preschool children at different points. I consciously laid these presumptions aside in order to effectively understand the participants' experiences from *their* perspective.

5.6 Quality of the study

Quality in qualitative research entails the trustworthiness, the strength and the transferability of knowledge (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 277). These characteristics are embodied in, among others, the everyday use of concepts of reliability and validity on which I focus.

5.6.1 Validity

Validity is a term we commonly use in our everyday conversations. For example, when we tell someone that they do not have a valid point, we most often refer to the fact that the point/argument being presented has no ground and is irrelevant or does not support the theme under discussion. In social sciences, validity refers to whether a study has investigated what it intended to investigate, meaning that it is well-grounded and it convincingly reflects the theme under investigation (ibid. p.282). In light of this, my study is valid because, as the findings will show, it has explored the concept of parental participation in the preschool as experienced by preschool teachers in Kenya, as was intended.

5.6.2 Reliability

Reliability, on the other hand, refers to ‘the consistency and trustworthiness of research findings’ (Ibid. p.281). It also deals with the ability of the findings to be reproduced by other researchers and at a different time span. The theme of this study, parental participation, is a social construct, which implies that its meaning and the individuals’ experiences with it may vary over time, space and context. For example, if the preschool teachers who were interviewed in this study were to be interviewed again at a different time, and probably they would be working in a different preschool(s), their experiences with parental participation may not be the same as what was recorded in this study. This may also be due to the fact that human behaviour changes, just as our response to and interpretation of experiences do. In addition, interviews may lead to a change in behaviour/practice by informing action (Patton, 2002, p. 10). It would, therefore, be more relevant to look at the reliability of this study in terms of how consistent the research findings are with the data collected in relation to the theme of study, parental participation in the preschool, based on the time and the place the study was conducted. In this regard, this study can be qualified as reliable. This study is also reliable because it sought, through interviews with *preschool teachers*, the experiences of *preschool teachers* with parental participation, which is consistent with the research question. As a result, the findings of this study would be useful to preschool teachers and parents of preschool children, in enhancing parental participation in the preschool in order to achieve the benefits that were highlighted.

In this part of ethical issues, I also highlight the relevant authorities from which permission to conduct research was requested and received. The research would not contain or reveal any sensitive information about the respondents, otherwise we would need to submit a request to the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) but this was not necessary. I collected my data in Kenya, and so there was need to seek for permission to carry out research in Kenya. Consequently, I obtained a research permit from the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI), the government body which is concerned with all research activities conducted in Kenya. I also obtained permission from the County Government of Nairobi (the county in which the research was conducted), and from the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, Kenya. (see appendices). In addition, I obtained permission from the principal of the kindergarten of study, and from the respondents.

5.7 Interpretation and Analysis of data

‘Qualitative analysis transforms data into findings’ (Patton, 2002, p. 432). . He continues to argue that there is no single formula to this transformation. This transformation process involves making sense of the raw data collected, and as such, there are approaches/tools which can help in this process as given by various researchers such as Patton (2002) and (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). In this section, I will talk about the approach that was used to analyse the transcribed interviews.

5.7.1 Data analysis approach

As mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, there is no strict rule to govern the analysis of qualitative data. The approaches and tools that are given by researchers are supposed to act as guidelines and give direction on how to analyse one’s data. This is basically due to the fact that ‘each qualitative study is unique (and so) the analytical approach used will be unique’ (Patton, 2002, p. 433). As mentioned elsewhere, in qualitative research, the researcher is the main instrument for collecting data, and as such ‘the integrity of the researcher [...] is the decisive factor’ in every step of the research process, including analysis of data (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 97). That is to say, how the data will be analysed is highly dependent on the researcher’s characteristics, skills and intellect (Patton, 2002, p. 433).

I chose to focus on how the interviewees used language to express their experience with parental participation in the preschool because ‘the interview process occurs through speech, and the interview products are presented in words’ (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 249). This method of analysis, also called *meaning categorization*, allows one to explore the meaning of statements, words, and metaphors used by the interviewees in the context of the research question. The method was also more appropriate because I conducted the interviews in my home country and, therefore, I was familiar with the contextual use of the language. For example, in one instance, the teachers mentioned that some parents ask that their children should ‘be treated like eggs’. I am familiar with the use of such a metaphor which implies that children are seen as vulnerable and in need of special care and protection, and as such the parents in this scenario require the teachers to ‘pamper their children’, Tr. Jane noted. In conclusion, analysis focusing on language is preferable because, as discussed earlier, parental participation is a social construct and therefore its meaning and the experiences thereof are contextual.

5.8 Organising the data

After identifying the data analysis approach to use, it was important to organise the collected data and put it in a way that will make the analysis process smooth and organised. This section reviews the transcription process of the recorded data and how the data was coded. The interview recording was 37 minutes 26 seconds long, and the process of transcribing took about 8 hours and the end-result was a 15-page transcription. Afterwards, there was need to organise the data through coding/categorization. According to Strauss & Corbin, open coding refers to ‘the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing and categorizing data’ (cited in Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 227). In other words, I read through the transcription and identified words/statement which portrayed similar ideas and put them in categories which I wrote on the side of the transcription paper. Put in another way, this process of data analysis involved looking at the localised interviews in order to make a general conclusion about the concept of parental participation in the preschool as experienced by preschool teachers, through the process of induction. This process of inductive analysis enabled me ‘to identify patterns and formulate potential explanations of these patterns’ (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 224). The categories are as illustrated below:

Category	Sub-category
Meaning of parental participation	Teachers’ perspective Parents’ understanding
Relationships in the preschool	Parents’ expectations Teachers’ expectations Relationships between adults and children
Teachers’ experience with parental participation	
Forms of parental participation manifested	
Importance of parental participation	Effect of participation/advantages Effect of non-participation

Chapter 6: PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

In this chapter, I will now present my findings from the analysed data. The findings will be presented under the five different categories that were highlighted in the previous section. The categories are: meaning of parental participation, preschool teachers' experiences, forms of parental participation, relationships in the preschool, and importance of parental participation. After my presentation of findings, I have chosen to initiate my discussion of these in the next chapter, by making a more elaborate use of my presented literature and theoretical framework. First, I will present the findings.

6.1 Finding 1: Meaning of parental participation

Based on the social and the phenomenological nature of the concept parental participation, it was only right that I should, first and foremost, seek the teachers' understanding of the concept. This is their reality and as Berger & Luckmann (1966) stated, reality is socially constructed. In addition, the teachers and the parents may perceive the concept of parental participation differently, as A. Bame Nsamenang (2010) indicated. I, therefore, sought the teachers' understanding on two fronts; one, what the teachers themselves understand with the concept parental participation; and two, how the parents understand their participation according to the teachers.

6.1.2 The teachers' understanding

When asked 'how do you understand the concept parental participation/involvement in the kindergarten?', the teachers were taken aback for a moment. One of them asked me to repeat the question, and also to elaborate, which I did. This goes to illustrate the taken-for-granted nature of parental participation. That is to say, it is a phenomenon which is experienced every day and yet we rarely take time to stop and think about it. It is not that the teachers did not know what parental participation is. Rather, it was difficult for them to put the definition in words. After pondering over it, the words to define parental participation started to flow. For instance, Tr. Mary said that 'to me [...] it is how well or how not well the parents are involved in their children's learning/education'. She goes on to say that parental participation goes beyond paying school fees for the children and meeting with the school administration. She also suggests that parents could join them during outdoor play activities. Tr. Jane, on the other hand, brings a holistic approach to the concept of parental participation and says it involves 'all the eight aspects of development' and goes on to give examples. In one example she talks of how the teachers teach spiritual values in school and expect that this will continue

when the child goes home. She however notes that this sometimes is a challenge because not all parents are Christian.

6.1.3 The parents' understanding (from the teachers' perspective)

I recognize that it would have been best if I had sought the views of the children's parents to best understand their take on parental participation, but I was unable to do so. However, in my talks with my sisters who are parents and have/have had children in preschool, I got a few insights which I can factor in at this point. In their view, parental participation entails paying fees, picking up and dropping the children, talking to the teacher about the child's day/progress, buy learning materials, helping the child with homework, and ensuring the child is well-fed.

Back to my informants' take on how they think the parents of their preschool understand parental participation; the resounding answer was: 'they don't know'. The two informants went on to explain that some of the parents know what is expected of them, while most of them do not. They were also quick to add that if the parents do not know what to do, they (the teachers) explain to them. One of the main reasons as to why this is the case, according to the teachers, is that most of the parents are first-time parents, that is, it is the first time that they have children in preschool, and so they may not be fully aware of what is expected of them. The teachers also note that the parents acknowledge that they do not know what role to play, and they sometimes ask the teachers who are more than willing to give guidance. And so, after a while, the parents get to know what their participation entail. Another thing, the teachers implied that the parents understood their participation as mainly involving paying fees and buying books for the children. These two ways coincide with my sisters' take on parental participation.

6.2 Finding 2: Preschool teachers' experience

The term parental participation may mislead one to think that it is all about the parents. On the contrary, there are other crucial components to this concept, and these include the teachers, as has been established above. Therefore, parental participation in the preschool has a lot to with how parents and teachers work together to form a meaningful partnership which various researchers have brought to our attention (Baker et al., 1999; Bakker & Denessen, 2007; Bø, 2011). In this study, the teachers had a lot to say concerning their experience working with the parents. To describe this experience, they used phrases such as; 'it has been very hectic', 'very difficult to handle', 'there are so many challenges we face', and 'it's a bit

hard’. One of the informants even added ‘but the grace of God is sufficient’ which triggered laughter across the room. But we understood what she meant.

6.3 Finding 3: Forms of parental participation manifested in the preschool

Based on the three forms of parental participation that were discussed earlier, I have grouped the examples of how parental participation manifests itself in the preschool of study under these three categories as follows;

Home-based	School-based	Home-school conferencing
Playing together with the child	Buying books and writing materials	Administrative Parents-Teachers’ meetings
Helping with homework	Playing together	Follow up on progress
Providing playing materials	Fun days	Calling the parents and discussing
	Buy play materials	Working closely with teachers
	Making learning environment attractive	Parents give advice
	Visiting the school	Paying school fees

6.4 Finding 4: Relationships in the preschool

Before talking about the relationships in the preschool, there is need to talk about the expectations that both the parents and the teachers have of each other. When parents bring their children to the preschool, most of them have certain expectations of what the preschool should offer and what kind of contribution the teachers should make to their children’s lives. Teachers, too, on the other hand, may have certain expectations, for example, what kind of children they will meet and how the day will go. These expectations/perceptions may influence the relationship between teachers and parents, and between teachers and the children (Hurst, 1996; Patrikakou & Weissberg, 2000).

To begin with, the informants used terms such as ‘offloading’, ‘advantage’, ‘value’ and ‘interesting’ to describe the expectations that the parents have of the preschool. In other words, the parents, according to the informants, view the preschool as a place where their children will be taken care of and ‘they know that their children are going to enjoy’, as explained by Tr. Mary. It was also noted that ‘Playgroup’ was a relief especially to parents who do not have house-helps, or that the house-helps could now be engaged in other chores at home. Another expectation of the parents was that the teachers would treat the children the same way the parents treat them at home, especially when the children were first-borns, and

the mothers were first-time mothers. The parents regarded the children as fragile and vulnerable, and according to Tr. Jane, 'they have been carried like eggs'. On the flipside, the teachers mention that it would be easier for them if the parents complemented their efforts at home. For instance, when they teach something, the parents should make the effort of reinforcing it at home. The teachers also purport that the parents expect them to 'pamper' their children, but this is a challenge because they (the teachers) have many children to attend to.

6.5 Finding 5: Importance of parental participation

Before we encourage someone to indulge in something, it is only fair that we make known the benefits that can be derived from such involvement. In the same manner, I cannot talk about parental participation without mentioning why it is an important concept which should not be taken for granted. From the undertaken study, it was evident that the teachers, and by extension the children, felt the effect of the parents' involvement as well as the effects of non-involvement. The informants repeatedly used the word 'easy' when referring to situations where the parents' elaborate participation was felt, and the word 'hectic' where they experienced less participation of the parents. For instance, they pointed out that when the parents are actively involved, it was easier to identify if there was a problem at home which directly affected the child. A concrete example was given by Tr. Mary who narrated how she noticed a change in a child's behaviour. The child was an active and jovial child, but all of a sudden, he became withdrawn and even a little aggressive. When the teacher noticed this, she called the parent (mother) to find out what could be going on. The parent explained that she had been away from home for some days and probably that was why the child was acting up; because of the mother's absence. And therefore, the teacher understood what was going on with the child and how best to deal with the situation.

Another positive effect of parental participation as experienced by the informants was that working together with the parents enabled them (the teachers) to know more about the children and therefore understand their behaviours, personalities and character. Tr. Jane gave an example and narrated thus; that the parent would tell the teacher 'you know teacher my kid goes (to the toilet) during this time, and if you want to know if this kid wants to go to the toilet, he reacts in this way'. And the teacher understood that 'okay, if he reacts in this way it means that he needs this', she acknowledged.

On the other hand, she continued, if there was no communication about the child between the parents and the teachers, 'it will be upon me as a teacher to make all the decisions by myself'. She goes on to explain that 'maybe the conclusion that I will make by the end of the day is totally different from the conclusion the parent will do at home'. Hence, she describes it as a hectic experience where the parents are less involved. In agreement, Tr. Mary noted a situation where such non-involvement is seen to lower the self-esteem of the children. She gave an example where parents and children were invited to the school for fun days where the parents, teachers and the children play together the whole day. And some parents did not show up, and so the children were brought to the fun days by the house-helpers, or by older siblings. And when these children see their friends with their parents, they may feel sad, she added.

Chapter 7: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Now I will discuss the findings above based on the theoretical framework presented and the literature reviewed. I will present the discussion by dividing the research question into two parts, namely; the kindergarten teachers' reflections on parental participation; and two, the influence of the parent-teacher relationship. Discussion on findings 1, 2 and 3 will answer the first part of the research question; and discussion on findings 4 and 5 will answer the second part.

7.1 1st part: The kindergarten teachers' reflections on parental participation

7.1.1 Discussion on finding 1: Meaning of parental participation

It has already been established that parental participation, as a social construct, conveys different meaning to different people in different social contexts (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). This is quite evident in the teachers' descriptions of the concept, as well as on how teachers' think the parents understand parental participation. This points to the social construction of reality and the social distribution of knowledge as given by Berger & Luckmann (1966). That is to say, even though both parents and teachers may appear to be located in the same reality, their understanding of events unfolding and meanings given to these may differ considerably. In other words, the teachers' understanding of parental participation is their reality, and the parents' understanding of the same is their reality. This is illustrated by Tr. Mary who said that 'Yes they pay the school fees. How about the classwork? How about [...] outdoors? How are they participating?'. Kimu & Steyn (2013) and A. M. Kimu (2012) seem to agree with this line of thinking when they point out in their studies that most parents limit their participation to financial obligations. But from Tr. Mary's point of view, parental participation goes beyond the obligation to pay school fees, as the parents understood it. Tr. Jane, in agreement, talked about how the parents sometimes failed to complement the teachers' efforts at home, for example in instilling values taught to children at school. Working together in ensuring continuity both at home and at school is reiterated by Baker et al. (1999, p. 368) who indicate that in doing so, both the teacher and the parents become 'active participants in the education of children'.

These differing understandings of the concept of parental participation point out that reality is dialectic, that is, objective reality and subjective reality, as suggested by Berger & Luckmann (1966, p. 152). Subjective reality, in this case, refers to how the teachers and the parents

create their own individual reality and understanding of parental participation, independent of each other. Objective reality requires then that the parents and the teachers ‘not only take on the [...] attitudes of [each] other, but in the same process take on their world (ibid.). Consequently, the symmetry/balance between objective and subjective reality keeps changing, and therefore, it must continuously be produced and reproduced (ibid. p.154). Thus, the creation of a shared reality could be beneficial in this case, as proposed by Echterhoff et. al. (2009). They express that shared reality refers to a situation where two individuals experience the same inner state/feeling (commonality) about a specific target or phenomenon. This state of being in agreement goes beyond overt (observable) behaviour, and is achieved majorly through communication (ibid. p. 498). Toni Buchan (2013, p. 63) agrees with this notion and adds that ‘taking a moment to find common ground of understanding [...] can generate good intention and break down barriers of distrust and apathy’. She also points out that no two families are the same. Therefore, there is need to find a common ground to accommodate such parents and request their involvement in a way that they can contribute, without feeling embarrassed or left out. In other words, parents and teachers should work together towards achieving a common understanding of parental participation in order for each party to fully perform their role.

In my view, this discrepancy in the understanding of parental participation by and among teachers and parents may also be as a result of lack of clear guidelines and policies on parental participation in the preschool. The guidelines, as given in the National Early Childhood Development Policy Framework (majorly for parents and other stakeholders) and the Early Childhood Development Service Standards Guidelines for Kenya (majorly for institutions) (Ministry of Education, 2006), define roles for parents and roles for teachers separately. This was illustrated in the background chapter. The two documents are separate entities which give broad and vague guidelines, with no mention of how the two groups could work together to form a partnership. In addition, the documents are not readily available to all parents. This means that most parents may not even know that such documents exist. I demonstrated this lack of knowledge by asking my two sisters to whom I have made reference earlier in this chapter. They both said they have never heard of such a document. And this proves the necessity that parents need to know what their participation entails before they are asked to ‘participate’.

Moreover, in Tr. Mary’s definition of parental participation, we get the three main components that were suggested in the attempts by various researchers to define the concept.

She said, ‘it is how [...] the parents are involved [...] in their children’s education’. This description reveals the three aspects, namely, the child, parents and education (school). It is therefore important to note that parental participation does not include only the parents, as the concept may imply. Rather, teachers/school and the children are important for the concept to be successfully realized. This is illustrated by Patrikakao & Weissberg (2000) when they talk about the interaction between two microsystems, the home and the school, as constituting the child’s mesosystem. They further argue that events outside the mesosystem such as change in school policies (Exosystem) may cause change in the interaction/relationship between home and the school, which in turn ‘may have a great impact on the child’ (ibid. p. 105). Furthermore, parents, teachers and the children stand to benefit from the parents’ participation, as demonstrated by various researchers (Hurst, 1996; Buchan, 2013; Hughes & Mac Naughton, 2000; Ihmeideh & Oliemat, 2015; Kimu, 2012). In this way, parental participation involves more than just the parents.

7.1.2 Discussion on finding 2: preschool teachers’ experience

The use of terms such as ‘hectic’ and ‘challenging’ indicates that it has not been all smooth sailing working with the parents. This may be due to various reasons, some of which the informants themselves identified and explained. One major reason for the rough ride, according to the informants, was the fact that most of the parents were first-time parents. The informants explained that when these parents bring their children to the preschool, they normally have no idea of what is expected of them, or sometimes what to expect. The teachers went on to say that this causes the parents to expect the teachers to treat the child exactly how the child is treated at home by the parents. The informants used the word ‘pamper’, to point to how the parents expected their children to be treated. This tends to imply that the children are positioned as vulnerable and weak, needing protection. As a matter of fact, Tr. Jane notes that the children ‘have been carried like eggs’. The use of such a metaphor indicates that such positioning of children may not actually be a good thing as far as the teachers are concerned. They explained that after being in the preschool for a while, there are certain tasks that a child can do by themselves, for instance tying their shoes, but the parents may not realise it, because according to them (the parents), the child is still ‘a baby’, as the teachers put it. This may cause friction between the child, the teacher and the parent, which however could be easily resolved through continuous communication because ‘through ongoing communication, parents and teachers will be well informed about each other’s activities and, therefore, able to enhance and support each other’s efforts’ (Baker et al., 1999,

p. 368). Tr. Mary confirmed this and stated that ‘when you try to explain to them [...] your kid is able to do this [...] then they get the knowledge and they get to understand what is happening’. Tr. Jane affirmed this statement with a resounding ‘Yes’. Tr. Mary went on to say that through such communication there was improved relationship between the parents and the teachers.

However, from the gathered data, it seemed like there was *othering* of parents, a term Hughes & Mac Naughton (2000) used to denote a kind of a binary relationship between parents and teachers where one party (the teachers) has monopoly of knowledge to share with the other party (parents). This was seen in the way the teachers expressed how they convey information to parents. The teachers often said, ‘we explain to them’. On one hand, such viewing of the parents may be seen as necessary especially in the case where there are a lot of first-time parents who may need to be informed and guided on what their participation entails. It may also be practiced because, in this case, the parents themselves acknowledged that they did not know how to play their role and so requested the help of the teachers. However, parents are not completely ignorant. Hughes & Mac Naughton (2000, p. 256) argue that parental knowledge is substantive, no matter how little it may seem they know. They suggest that a collaborative partnership between teachers and parents should be created through ‘seeking consensus about their (the parents’) knowledge of young children and designing programmes that reflect this consensus’ (ibid. p. 247). If a consensus is not reached, the teachers, and the preschool as a whole, could be viewed as authoritarian while the parents could become passive (Kikas et al., 2011, p. 1079). And if the parents become passive and they withdraw from engaging in school-related activities, either at home or at school, it translates to decreased parental participation. As such, it can be concluded that the experiences teachers have while working with the parents may influence the relationship between the teachers and the parents, which in turn influences the parents’ participation.

7.1.3 Discussion on finding 3: forms of parental participation manifested in the preschool

There were other practical ways which the teachers mentioned, but which do not necessarily fall exclusively into any of the three categories highlighted. They have a lot to do with the parents complementing the teachers’ efforts in inculcating skills and values in the children. For instance, toileting, feeding themselves, dressing, and social skills like sharing. The teachers said that, for example, most of the children cannot feed themselves when they first join the preschool. With time, with the help and encouragement of the teacher, the children

acquire the skill and learn to feed themselves. At this stage, the teachers ask the parents to allow the children to feed themselves at home so that ‘the process will continue at home at the same time in school’, as Tr. Jane narrated. She emphasised the point and said that ‘if there is [...] communication between the parent and the teacher, the parent will also try to instil the same thing that is being taught to the child in school’. Such ways show how the home and the preschool are eventually connected.

As demonstrated above, it would be unwise to conclude that the three forms of involvement (homebased, school-based and home-school conferencing) are the *only* definite ways through which parents can be involved in their children’s kindergarten. They vary from one culture/society to another, depending on that society’s needs and what works for it. Kimu (2012, p. 28) seems to support this and says that ‘a school’s strengths and backgrounds are the main determinant of its practices’. That is to say, every school needs to identify and practice that which works for it. The contribution of the less obvious ways of participation/involvement such as reinforcing feeding skills may be important in some schools while it may be overlooked in others. The importance given to these ways may also vary depending on the age and the class the child is in. Nevertheless, the three highlighted forms do give an in-depth overview of forms which family involvement in the kindergarten can take, and as such their contribution to helping us understand the concept of parental participation cannot be trivialised. In addition, the three dimensions are not exclusively independent on their own. In most cases they overlap with one another. For example, for parents to know how best to help the children with their homework (home-based involvement), they would have to be in constant communication with the child’s teacher on the child’s progress and areas of weakness (home-school conferencing), so as to offer the best possible help at home. This goes to point to a predominant relationship between parental participation and a child’s academic achievement and overall wellbeing in various levels of learning, including in the preschool, as supported by extensive research (Bakker & Denessen, 2007; El Nokali et al., 2010; Kimu & Steyn, 2013; McNeal Jr, 2014; Njeru & Mora, 2015; Samaras & Wilson, 1999; Topor, Keane, Shelton, & Calkins, 2010).

7.2 2nd part: The influence of the parent-teacher relationship

7.2.1 Discussion on finding 4: relationships in the preschool

Patrikakou & Weissberg (2000) suggest that parents' perception of the kindergarten as well as the expectations they have of the kindergarten, strongly influence the degree to which they would be involved in the kindergarten, just as much as it would influence the teachers' practices (p.105). In addition, the expectations that teachers and parents have of each other have an influence on their relationship with each other, as well as on the relationship the teacher has with the child. Ingerid Bø (2011) terms the relationship between the adult and the child as a primary bond; and the relationship between the parent and the teacher as a supportive supplementary bond. The latter bond is created when the teacher acknowledges and supports the parents' efforts, and the parents support the work of the teacher. This type of bond was seen as both existent and non-existent at the same time. It was existent in that when the teachers felt that the parents were not supporting their efforts, they would talk with them and explain the situation to them, and the parents would get on board with the teachers. But at times, the parents allowed the children to 'manipulate' them into agreeing with the children rather than the teacher.

An example given was that when a child did not want to engage in physical activities, they told the parents that it made them tired and they don't like it, and so the parents asked the teacher to exempt the child from physical activities. This indicates two points; one, that the existence of this supplementary bond (the relationship between teacher and parent) is an ongoing process, and not a onetime action, and therefore should be consciously and continually cultivated by both the teachers and the parents. Secondly, we see in the given example how the child positions himself as an equal subject and negotiates with the parent (being friends), while at the same time the parents view the child as vulnerable and should be protected, according to Charlotte Palludan's (2007) concept of positioning. The two types of positioning are not entirely wrong, neither are they entirely right. That is, they should be applied in moderation. As much as the child has rights and freedoms, the parents also have a right to exercise their rights as parents. Parents should use their own discretion in determining when to be friends with the child and when to close the doors of negotiation.

As was illustrated in the literature review, the relationship between parents and teachers is a core foundation of parental participation in the preschool. That is to say, for parental participation to be effective, there needs to exist a good relationship between the parents and

the teachers. In my own words, parental participation is the relationship between teachers and parents.

To facilitate such a relationship, Njeru & Mora (2015) suggest that the Kenya School Report Card (SRC) could successfully be used by parents as a tool through which they learn more about school activities and experience improved relationships with the teachers of their children. SRC is a project introduced in 2009 by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MOEST) to ensure quality service delivery to children in public primary schools through accountability and performance strategies outlined in 10 assessment categories (Ministry of Education, 2012, 2017). In relation to parents-teachers' partnership, one of the achievements of the SRC as reviewed in 2017 was increased parent-teacher relation where the committee reported that 'parents now know their children's class teachers' (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 4). The project, however, is limited by the fact that it was originally designed broadly for primary schools. It is also more concerned with the leadership of schools, service delivery and management of resources, and gives little direct attention to the pupils/children. Yet, on the other hand, it can still be used in preschools since preschools are, to a great extent, considered as part of primary/basic education. However, one of its greatest strengths that is relevant to the preschool section is in its mandate to 'synchronize key education stakeholders', which include parents and teachers (ibid. p.1). Thus, it may be used to enhance the partnership between parents and teachers.

7.2.3 Discussion on finding 5: importance of parental participation

In addition to the benefits of parental participation that were identified by the informants, other benefits which were identified from the reviewed literature include improved socio-emotional competency and self-esteem of the child; smooth transition between home and preschool and between preschool and primary school; improved teachers' morale and motivation; and parents' increased confidence in themselves and in their role as parents, both at home and at school (Hurst, 1996; Buchan, 2013; Hughes & Mac Naughton, 2000; Ihmeideh & Oliemat, 2015). This demonstrates the great impact that parental participation has not only on the children, but on the teachers and the parents as well. Tr. Jane mentioned that if the parents were involved from as early as playgroup years (around 3 years of age), it prepared the children for formal learning and 'makes the transition from playgroup to other learning areas easy'. This is particularly true because as the children go out into the world, they meet new unfamiliar situations and people (Buchan, 2013, p. 57). Buchan goes on to

demonstrate that the presence and participation of the family in the child's everyday life at the kindergarten, and the consequent relationship between parents and teachers, can give a sense of security to child. The child knows that he is not alone, and that the people he is emotionally attached to also show interest in his new social and physical environment. This is quite reassuring and builds confidence in the child. As Victoria Hurst explains it, 'without this connection between home and school, schooling can become cut off from the child's deepest and most influential experiences and practitioners can find the door to the child's motivation for learning closing in their faces' (Hurst, 1996, p. 96).

To be able to find out what is going on in a child's life at home, and to understand a child's behaviour and character requires constant communication between the parents and the teachers, and the importance of such communication has been discussed in the previous sections. When Tr. Mary noticed the change in the child's behaviour, this opened her eyes into what could have been going on at home. Hence, Toni Buchan's (2013) concept of the child as a 'window' to the child's home life comes into play. As indicated in the narration by Tr. Mary, the picture of what was really happening at home was incomplete, until the teacher spoke with the mother of the child. In this case, whilst the child acted as a window, the parent acted as a door which provided an opportunity to get the full picture of the situation. The point here is the child should not be used as the final source of information by the teachers when trying to understand the child's world; but rather, the parents should be involved as much as possible hence, the significant role of parental participation. Another thing, inasmuch as parental participation enables the teachers to know more about the child, it also enables the parents to know more about their children, as the parents exchange information with the teachers. This was seen when the teachers talked about teaching the children certain skills like feeding themselves in school, and when the children went home, the teachers would ask the parents to reinforce the learnt skills.

7.3 How can the parent-teacher relationship influence the children's stay in the kindergarten?

Throughout this thesis, I have demonstrated that parental participation is fundamentally based on the relationship between the parents and the teachers. This relationship has been given a lot of focus because as Buchan (2013) says, the children are observing those around them to inform their relationships and actions. They use the adults as a point of reference. In other words, the children will respond to those around them in the same manner they see those closest to them relating to these people. It is with this in mind that parents and teachers of

young children should strive to create a good working relationship which the children can emulate even in their dealings with other children and adults around them. The teachers made mention of one way to improve their relationship with the parents. They expressed their desire for the parents to join them in outdoor play activities from time to time within the preschool. Such involvement can potentially create Bø's (2011) concept of a *flerfibret* relationship between the parents and the teachers, where parents and teachers relate with each other in various roles, other than in the classroom. This in turn can potentially encourage more parents to be involved in preschool activities, thereby greatly improving parent-teacher relationship as well as the children's relationships with others. To support this claim, Toni Buchan reiterates that 'the important social referencing task of modelling effective relationship behaviour for our youngest children is frequently narrowed to the interface between [...] parents and [...] childcare practitioners' (Buchan, 2013, p. 61). She goes on to explain that children need the adults around them to exhibit functional relationships for them (the children) to see, practice and model. Such a relationship between parents and teachers provides 'a frame for a child's future understanding of how relationships work' (ibid. p. 62). And when the child has good relationships with those around him (teachers and other children included), he is more likely to thrive and have a successful stay in that environment (the kindergarten). In this way, the relationship between parents and the teachers can influence the children's stay in the kindergarten.

Chapter 8: LESSONS LEARNED: IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It has been an incredible journey to find out the experiences of preschool teachers with parental participation and their influence on children's stay in the kindergarten. The findings shaped my own views and increased my knowledge concerning parental participation. From my findings discussed above, I deduce the following; one, there was a general lack of adequate knowledge of what home-based involvement entails. It seemed like the teachers did not know much of what parents do at home, or should do at home, as part of the whole concept of parental participation. This, however, could be because it was the *teachers'* experiences that were sought, not the *parents'* own experiences with parental participation. Therefore, the teachers could only talk of what they are aware of. This could also indicate the need for improved communication between the teachers and the parents, between the home and the preschool, so that the two parties are on the same page regarding parental participation. The communication should, as much as possible, be two-way and mutual, where both parties feel needed and welcome, especially the parents, since parental participation is mostly, not entirely, about them.

Secondly, the whole process of involving the parents would be a lot smoother if the parents themselves knew what their participation is all about. Parents should be constantly made aware of what is expected of them. I say constantly because, as I demonstrated, reality is not constant, just as the nature of parental participation being a social product makes its meaning non-static. This can be done by making parental participation policy guidelines available to parents right from the start, and making reference to the guidelines from time to time within the school term. There should also be more room for discussion between parents and teachers about the parents' participation. Teachers and preschools in general, should try to encourage parents to participate and find more ways to engage the parents.

Thirdly, it became clear from the data collected that the position of the child in the family influences the parents' involvement in the child's learning and kindergarten as a whole. This was evident when Tr. Jane noted that the first-born children were treated like 'eggs' and pampered at home, and the parents expected the same treatment for them at the preschool; whereas if the children 'are second-born, third-born [...] they are not being treated in that manner', in Tr. Jane's words. This could imply that, as the children grow older and move to the next class, parents become less involved and less concerned with the child's school

activities (Kimu, 2012, p. 154). This could be due to many reasons such as; the parents get other children and so their attention is divided; the parents indulge in more economic activities; or the parents feel that they are 'expected to delegate responsibility for their children's education to the school' (ibid.). This last point, as Kimu (2012) established, is mainly due to the fact that primary education is free and the parents feel that the government has 'relieved them from the burden of paying school fees' (ibid. p.94). And as it has been discussed earlier, Kenyan parents generally equate their participation to paying school fees and meeting financial costs (ibid. p.4,34); hence their tendency to withdraw their participation as the children move to the next class. This, however, need not be so. Based on the benefits of parental participation that have been highlighted, parents should be encouraged to take interest in their child's learning, irrespective of the child's position in the family (firstborn or not), and irrespective of the class in which the child.

Closely in line with the previous point, due to the fact that most parents of the preschool of study are first-time parents, knowledge on what is expected of them by the school was quite limited, as seen in the way the teachers emphatically reiterated the need for them (the teachers) to explain a lot of things to the parents. This could prove burdensome to the teachers if they have to explain to every new parent about their participation, because parents enrol their children in the preschool at different times of the month or term. It would be helpful and time-saving if there existed a handbook or guidelines or a policy on parental participation which outlines what parental participation entails and what is required of the parents (and probably the teachers) which can be given to the parents, and which the teachers have access to. Such a guideline would ensure consistency and continuity in case the preschool gets new teachers/new management. It would probably be even wiser if there existed a national guideline on parental participation, in case the children were moved to another school, and so parental participation would be consistent despite change in schools. However, it is important to remember that parental participation is a social construct, and hence its meaning may differ from one part of the country to another. Therefore, such a national guideline, if it were to exist, should provide room for adjustments to meet the needs of the society/community in which it would be implemented.

In addition, policies regarding the provision of early childhood education and care services, need to be formulated and made available in such a way that they are unambiguous and flexible enough to allow parents and teachers to come up with practical ways of working together for the best interest of the child. This can be done by involving representatives from

the Parents-Teachers Associations which will ensure that both parents and teachers are represented in the drafting of such vital policies. This demonstrates a show of trust and respect which in turn provides a sense of responsibility, ownership and empowerment especially on the part of parents (Buchan, 2013, p. 60). This will also work towards curbing the issue of ‘othering’ of parents because as Toni Buchan noted, the teacher’s and the policy makers’ ‘place in the children’s world is borrowed for a short period of their life, whereas their parents will remain with them for all of their lives’ (ibid. p.65). After such policies have been drafted and passed into law, they should be made readily available to all concerned parties, especially the parents. This will ensure that parents can access these documents if and when need be, and that they keep abreast with the latest developments as when they occur. Important to note in the drafting of such policies is that different preschools have different needs, strengths, backgrounds and characteristics, as noted by Kimu (2012, pp. 5,28). Therefore, there is no one correct model of parental participation which *should* be applied in all the preschools. Policies should, hence, reflect the current needs and situation of the preschools in which they are to be implemented.

Still in line with this, (Kimu & Steyn, 2013) in their study discovered that teachers did not undergo any form of training on parental participation, and as a result, they did not know how best to involve the parents and work together with them. I have worked as a preschool teacher trainer, and I can say that the curriculum which we use to train the teachers does not include extensive/clear training on parental participation. As a result, the teachers have no point of reference when it comes to matters involving parental participation. This may have been the case with the teachers who were interviewed. Thus, formal training on parental participation could be highly beneficial to teachers as they set out to formulate plans and activities in which to involve the parents.

The fifth point is that parental participation is largely influenced by the relationship between the teachers and the parents. Therefore, if the parents and teachers communicate constantly and deliberately work together to create a partnership, this potentially increases parental participation in the preschool. Even Tr. Mary notes, ‘it is good to keep the good relationship between the parent and the teacher’. Consequently, research reveals various parental participation models which can be used to create a partnership between teachers and parents, and in turn promote parental participation in schools (Kimu & Steyn, 2013, p. 609). For instance, Njeru and Mora (2015) talk of the Kenya School Report Card system which could be used to foster partnership between parents and preschools, as was discussed earlier.

Similarly, Baker et al. (1999, pp. 368-369) talk about a partnership model where the teachers provide parents with information regarding the school and child's progress, and they as well get acquainted with what the parents do outside the school that supports the child's progress in preschool. One way of getting familiar with the parent's activities outside the preschool is through the teacher visiting the child's home, what Ingerid Bø (2011) classifies under supplementary bond (p. 50). According to Gordon's theory of involvement, home visits are classified under the Parent or Family Impact Model (Kimu, 2012, p. 33). The aim of the model is to help parents adjust to the changing dynamics of the society 'in order to raise socially acceptable and academically successful children' (ibid.). However, the model assumes that teachers 'know it all' and the parents are to be educated by the teachers on how to parent their children and support their children's education. This may not be taken well by the parents, and as such, should be applied with caution, because, to begin with, home visits are a rare phenomenon in the Kenyan society. It is expected that the parents should visit the preschool and engage in some activities in the preschool, and not vice versa.

For example, Tr. Mary talked about the notion of parents coming to the preschool and said, 'I wish they could be coming we play together with the children'. There is no mention of the teachers visiting the children's homes, or even suggesting it. This implies the existence of a one-role relationship, that is, the teacher has only one relationship with the parent: professional teacher-parent relationship. Bø (2011, p. 54) terms such a relationship as 'unipleks/enfibret'. The opposite is a 'multipleks/flerfibret' relationship where the parties involved play more than one role. For instance, the teacher and the parent could become friends, and so the teacher plays the role of both a teacher and a friend. The latter bond/relationship is potentially enhanced by communication as discussed by Baker et al. who say 'two-way communication and the exchange of information between parents and the teachers' is essential and thus necessary for promoting cooperation and making the partnership work (Baker et al., 1999, p. 368) . So, the preschool should practice what works best for all its members.

Last but not least, to maximumly engage the parents' participation, the parents must be made to feel that their participation is necessary and important, and not something that teachers (and the children) can do without. Buchan (2013) confirms this and says that 'teachers need to begin to see parents as allies [...] and the relative experts of knowledge about their own child, and treat them as such' (p. 63). AM Kimu (2012, pp. 13,33) in his thesis dissertation, supports this and says that some parents would become more involved if they thought that

‘such involvement is part of the work of being a parent’, and if they are treated as ‘equal partners in their children’s education’. This implies that parents should not be treated parents as ‘others’ in their own children’s learning, but they are made to feel wanted and valuable. Patrikakao & Weissberg (2000) agree and write that ‘the more parents perceived their child’s teacher as valuing their contribution to their child’s education [...] the higher the parents’ involvement was both at home and at school (p. 104).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The main theme of my research study has been ‘parental participation’ with special focus on the kindergarten. The research question was: How do kindergarten teachers reflect on parental participation and in what manner can the parent-teacher relationship influence children’s stay in the kindergarten? The research has given insight on parental participation from a Kenyan perspective; but the results and recommendations can successfully be applied in any society, as need be. Based on the findings, I have made a discussion on kindergarten teachers’ reflections on and experience with parental participation. I have discussed how parental participation is understood by teachers and by parents, from the teachers’ perspective. This meaning of parental participation has been discussed from a social constructionist view (as a social construct), and ecological systems view (as a concept in the mesosystem). Moreover, I have talked about how parental participation manifests itself in the preschool of study (forms of parental participation). It was also fundamental to highlight the importance of parental participation, and to whom it is important (parents, teachers and the children). Lastly, I have discussed relationships between adults and children (the concept of positioning). In addition, I have established how parental participation is influenced by the relationship between the parents and the teachers, which in turn influences the children’s stay in the kindergarten. In doing so, I have successfully answered my research question.

The aim of this study was to increase awareness on parental participation and its importance thereof. I firmly believe that both teachers and parents of young children will find this study useful in their efforts to work together in creating a successful partnership to promote parental participation in the kindergarten. It is important for both parents and teachers to appreciate each other’s role and complement each other’s efforts in the education of young children. This creates a sense of stability and security in the children, as well as a sense of ownership and responsibility in the adults (parents and teachers), as was established. In addition, the research findings can also be considered by policy makers when drafting policies regarding parental participation in ensuring that all stakeholders (especially parents) are represented, and that their views are taken into account. It is urgent that such a policy be formulated and set in motion so that both parents and teachers know what parental participation entails, how it should be practiced, and the roles to be played by those involved.

Furthermore, in recognizing the benefits that parental participation brings with it, parental participation can no longer be taken-for-granted. Teachers and preschools in general, should

come up with ways to encourage parents to participate more, both at home and in school. On the other hand, parents should, once more, rise to the occasion and actively involve themselves in their children's learning, and not leave tasks such as helping children with their homework to the house-helpers (or technology).

Consequently, this study potentially paves way for more research on parental participation, with focus on the parents' own experiences with parental participation; from the parents' perspective. From the findings we see that home-based activities are conspicuously less known, as identified by the teachers. Therefore, seeking the parents' perspective could greatly shed more light on what parents do at home to support their children's learning and wellbeing in the kindergarten. Such a research would also help us get insight into the parents' understanding of parental participation and the meaning they create out of it. Probably seeking the children's view on what parental participation means to them could also be enlightening. This is because the actions by the teachers and the parents, and the consequent relationship, impacts on the children, directly or indirectly, as has been demonstrated.

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APPENDICES


Appendix 1: Authorization from NACOSTI

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT:
MS. MAUREEN AMONDI KANDANGO
of NORWEGIAN UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE
AND TECHNOLOGY, 0-40100 Kisumu, has
been permitted to conduct research in
Nairobi County

Permit No : NACOSTI/P/18/18962/20818
Date Of Issue : 26th January, 2018
Fee Received : Ksh 1000

on the topic: **PARENTAL PARTICIPATION**
IN THE KINDERGARTEN

for the period ending:
26th January, 2019




Maureen Kandango
Applicant's
Signature


J.P. Kalerwa
.....
Director General
National Commission for Science,
Technology & Innovation

CONDITIONS

1. The License is valid for the proposed research, research site specified period.
2. Both the Licence and any rights thereunder are non-transferable.
3. Upon request of the Commission, the Licensee shall submit a progress report.
4. The Licensee shall report to the County Director of Education and County Governor in the area of research before commencement of the research.
5. Excavation, filming and collection of specimens are subject to further permissions from relevant Government agencies.
6. This Licence does not give authority to transfer research materials.
7. The Licensee shall submit two (2) hard copies and upload a soft copy of their final report.
8. The Commission reserves the right to modify the conditions of this Licence including its cancellation without prior notice.



REPUBLIC OF KENYA



National Commission for Science,
Technology and Innovation

RESEARCH CLEARANCE
PERMIT

Serial No.A **17266**

CONDITIONS: see back page

Appendix 2: Authorization from the Ministry of Education



Republic of Kenya
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
STATE DEPARTMENT OF BASIC EDUCATION

Telegrams: "SCHOOLING", Nairobi
Telephone: Nairobi 020 2453699
Email: rcenairobi@gmail.com
cdenairobi@gmail.com

REGIONAL COORDINATOR OF EDUCATION
NAIROBI REGION
NYAYO HOUSE
P.O. Box 74629 - 00200
NAIROBI

When replying please quote

Ref: RCE/NRB/GEN/1 VOL. 1

DATE: 5th February, 2018

Maureen Amondi Kandango
Norwegian University of Science and Technology
NORWAY

RE: RESEARCH AUTHORIZATION

We are in receipt of a letter from the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation regarding research authorization in Nairobi County on "Parental participation in the kindergarten".

This office has no objection and authority is hereby granted for a period ending **26th January, 2019** as indicated in the request letter.

Kindly inform the Sub County Director of Education of the Sub County you intend to visit.


DRUSCILLA M. MOSI
FOR: REGIONAL COORDINATOR OF EDUCATION
NAIROBI

C.C

Director General/CEO
Nation Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation
NAIROBI

Appendix 3: Authorization from the County Government of Nairobi



NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION

Telephone: +254-20-2213471,
2241349,3310571,2219420
Fax: +254-20-318245,318249
Email: dg@nacosti.go.ke
Website: www.nacosti.go.ke
When replying please quote

NACOSTI, Upper Kabete
Off Wariyaki Way
P.O. Box 30623-00100
NAIROBI-KENYA

Ref No. **NACOSTI/P/18/18962/20818**

Date: **26th January, 2018**

Maureen Amondi Kandango
Norwegian University Of Science And Technology
NORWAY.

RE: RESEARCH AUTHORIZATION

Following your application for authority to carry out research on "*Parental participation in the kindergarten*" I am pleased to inform you that you have been authorized to undertake research in **Nairobi County** for the period ending **26th January, 2019.**

You are advised to report to **the County Commissioner and the County Director of Education, Nairobi County** before embarking on the research project.

Kindly note that, as an applicant who has been licensed under the Science, Technology and Innovation Act, 2013 to conduct research in Kenya, you shall deposit a **copy** of the final research report to the Commission within **one year** of completion. The soft copy of the same should be submitted through the Online Research Information System.

G.P. Kalerwa

**GODFREY P. KALERWA MSc., MBA, MKIM
FOR: DIRECTOR-GENERAL/CEO**

Copy to:

The County Commissioner
Nairobi County.

**COUNTY COMMISSIONER
NAIROBI COUNTY
P. O. Box 30124-00100, NBI
TEL: 341666**

The County Director of Education
Nairobi County.

Appendix 4: Interview Guide

INTRODUCTION

Introduce myself, talk about ethical considerations, purpose and theme of the study, thank the informant/s for taking their time to talk with me.

A: Introductory questions

- i. How long have you worked as a kindergarten teacher?
- ii. Can you tell me about your educational background on early childhood education?
- iii. How many children are there in your class?

MAIN THEME

B: Teachers and parental involvement

1. How do you understand the concept ‘parental participation/ involvement in the kindergarten’?
2. As a kindergarten teacher, what has been your experience working with the children’s parents?

C: Parents and parental involvement

3. How do parents view the kindergarten?
4. How do parents understand their role within the kindergarten?
5. What expectations do parents have of the kindergarten concerning their children?

D: Home and kindergarten

6. How are the home and the kindergarten connected?
7. What can parents and kindergarten teachers do to create and sustain this connection?
8. Can you talk about some of the experiences that children are exposed to at home which are significant for their wellbeing in the kindergarten?
9. In what ways does the kindergarten involve parents in the promotion of the wellbeing of the child in this kindergarten?
10. What does the kindergarten do to encourage parental participation?

E: Hypothetical situation

11. Think for a moment about 2 separate children in your class; child A's parent/s is/are actively involved in the kindergarten's activities, and child B's parent/s is/are less involved. (pause). Can you talk about your experience working with these two children? (pause and listen). Suppose these two children both came to school without finishing their homework, or without their diaries being signed by the parent/s for about a week, what would go through your head? (pause and listen). And so how would you respond?
12. Do you have any individual concrete experiences with these two children (or any other children) that you would like to share with me?

CONCLUSION

In your opinion, what more can be done to encourage increased parental participation/ involvement in the kindergarten?

Are there other ways, in your opinion, that parents can be involved in the kindergarten?

Our main theme has been parental participation in the kindergarten. Is there something you would like to add concerning this?

****Thank you for your time and cooperation****