

PERSPECTIVES OF COMMUNITY OPINION LEADERS ON EPSTEIN'S THEORETICAL LENS OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN PRESCHOOLERS' EDUCATION

¹GICHANA ELKANAH MOCHACHE, ²DR. ODONGO BENSON CHARLES,
³DR. MWEBI BENARD

^{1,2,3}JARAMOGI OGINGA ODINGA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Abstract: Growing body of literature suggests that Epstein's theory lens of Parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, and decision making and collaborating with the Community has little bearing on preschoolers' education. The purpose of the study was to explore Perspectives of community opinion leaders on application of Epstein's theoretical lens of Parental involvement in Pre-schoolers education in Kenya. Objectives of the study was to find out the perspectives of Community Opinion Leaders on Epstein's theoretical lens of Parental involvement in preschoolers' education. The study employed concurrent triangulation research design of the mixed methods research. The study employed Epstein's theory (1987) and a conceptual framework. The units of analysis were 65 public primary schools. The target populations were 6 Community opinion leaders. Purposive sampling techniques were used in the study. The study employed in-depth interview to obtain data for study. Reliability of the instruments was ascertained by piloting outside the sub-county while validity was ascertained by expert judgment of the supervisors. Data was analyzed by qualitatively by thematic analysis. Findings of the study generally revealed that the community opinion leaders had varying perspectives on the application of Epstein's theoretical lens of parental involvement in preschoolers learning. However, most of the community opinion leaders were of the view that proper home learning environment for pre-schoolers was not being provided. It was concluded that preschoolers' home parenting and learning and parental involvement in preschoolers' education were in jeopardy. The study recommended parents to rethink their learning roles of preschoolers at home. This study would be significant to all the stakeholders of education. A study on effective parental home determinants of preschoolers learning would expound the understanding of the present study.

Keywords: Community opinion leaders, Epstein's theoretical lens, preschoolers' education.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the study:

Epstein's theoretical lens of parental involvement in preschoolers' education entails: Parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, and decision making and collaborating with the Community (Epstein, 2016; Epstein, Sanders, Simon, Salinas, Jansorn, and Voorhis, 2002). First, Parenting according to them means assisting families with parenting skills, family support, understanding child and adolescent development, and setting home conditions to support learning at each age and grade level. It also assists schools in understanding families' backgrounds, cultures, and goals for

International Journal of Novel Research in Education and LearningVol. 5, Issue 2, pp: (107-144), Month: March - April 2018, Available at: www.noveltyjournals.com

children. Parenting according to the theory helps all families establish home environments to support children as students, suggests home conditions that support learning at each grade level- Workshops, videotapes, computerized phone messages on parenting and child rearing at each age and grade level ,Parent education and other courses or training for parents, family support programs to assist families with health, nutrition, and other services, home visits at transition points to pre-school, elementary, middle, and high school; Neighborhood meetings to help families understand schools and to help schools understand families.

Secondly, communicating with families about school programs and student progress, that there should be a two-way communication channel between school and home. This involves designing effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and children's progress, Conferences with every parent at least once a year, with follow-ups as needed; Language translators to assist families as needed; Weekly or monthly folders of student work sent home for review and comments; Parent/student pickup of report card, with conferences on improving grades; Regular schedule of useful notices, memos, phone calls, newsletters, and other communications; Clear information on choosing schools or courses, programs, and activities within schools; Clear information on all school policies, programs, reforms, and transitions.

Thirdly, Volunteering involves improving recruitment, training, activities, and schedules to involve families as volunteers and as audiences at the school or in other locations to enable educators to work with volunteers who support students and the school. According to the theory, it means Recruiting and organizing parent help and support, school and classroom volunteer program to help teachers, administrators, students, and other parents, Parent room or family centre for volunteer work, meetings, resources for families, Annual postcard survey to identify all available talents, times, and locations of volunteers, Class parent, telephone tree, or other structures to provide all families with needed information and Parent patrols or other activities to aid safety and operation of school programs.

Fourthly, learning at Home involves families with their children in academic learning at home, including homework, goal setting, and other curriculum-related activities and encouraging teachers to design homework that enables students to share and discuss interesting tasks. Provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning, information for families on skills required for students in all subjects at each grade, Information on homework policies and how to monitor and discuss schoolwork at home, Information on how to assist students to improve skills on various class and school assessments, regular schedule of homework that requires students to discuss and interact with families on what they are learning in class, Calendars with activities for parents and students at home, Family math, science, and reading activities at school, holiday learning activities, Family participation in setting student goals each year and in planning for college or work.

Fifthly, decision-Making involves including families as participants in school decisions, governance, and advocacy activities through school councils or improvement teams, committees, and parent organizations. According to the theory, it means including parents in school decisions, developing parent leaders and representatives' active parent teacher meetings or other parent organizations, advisory councils, or committees (e.g., curriculum, safety, personnel) for parent leadership and participation, Independent advocacy groups to lobby and work for school reform and improvements, sub county-level councils and committees for family and community involvement, Information on school or local elections for school representatives and networks to link all families with parent representatives. lastly, Collaborating with the Community means Coordinating resources and services for families, students, and the school with community groups, including businesses, agencies, cultural and civic organizations, and colleges or Universities and enable all to contribute service to the community. Identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development, Information for students and families on community health, cultural, recreational, social support, and other programs or services ,information on community activities that link to learning skills and talents, including holiday programs for students, Service integration through partnerships involving school; civic, counselling, cultural, health, recreation, and other agencies and organizations; and businesses, Service to the community by students, families, and schools (e.g., recycling, art, music, drama, and other activities for seniors or others) and Participation of alumni in school programs for students.

Over the past 50 years, the roles of parents and teachers in the pre-schooler's learning outcomes have changed. In the twentieth century, teachers were perceived as experts and there was no need for parental involvement in their children's

education (Porter, 2002). However today, educational theories have consistently shown that parents are collaborative partners of equal status with teachers (Fan and Chen, 2001). Hence, enhancing parental involvement has featured as a central component in major educational policies and reforms worldwide, for example in North America and the United Kingdom, the positive relationship between parental involvement and their pre-schooler's learning outcomes is consistently supported (Mattingly, Prislun, McKenzie, Rodriguez and Kayzar, 2002).

Wendy (1997) categorised parental involvement into three: behavioural, Cognitive/intellectual and personal involvement. Behavioural involvement includes parental participation in activities such as attending school meetings, cognitive/intellectual involvement shows the extent parents expose their children to intellectually stimulating activities e.g. going to the library, while personal involvement is concerned with knowing about and keeping abreast of what is going on with the child at school. Moreover as observed by Desforges and Abouchaar (2003), among the forms parental involvement takes are contact with schools to share information; participation in school events; participation in the work of the school and participation in school governance among others. These submissions support the Epstein's (1995) six types of parental involvement (parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making and collaborating with the community) which are further elaborated by Hatchuel Tabernik and Associates (2004).

In spite of much research on the effects of parental involvement on academic achievement, Epstein and Sanders (2006) assert that many teachers and administrators in USA still see themselves as individual leaders of their classrooms and schools. The study further indicate that to a large extent it is the schools that played a large role in ensuring whether parents participate in their children's education or not (Christenson and Sheridan, 2001). This study further reported that parents' work schedules which conflict with school events, financial and time constraints were the major obstacles to effective communication between teachers and parents.

While the research evidence is less than conclusive, years of practice, wisdom, theory, and related areas of research strongly suggest that parental involvement in children's formal schooling is vital for their academic success and personal development (Howard Family Research Project, 2007; Shumow and Miller, 2001). Also according to the Department of Education (2004) in the United States, studies have shown that students with involved parents are more likely to earn higher grades, attend school regularly, graduate and go on to postsecondary education irrespective of their socio-economic status. These findings concurs with those of Sanders and Sheldon, (2009) who maintained that schools become successful when a strong and positive relationship among students, parents, teachers and the community has been established. However, other studies contradict this fact by showing that there is no connection between parental involvement and children's academic achievement (Bronstein, Ginsberg and Herrera, 2005; cited in Hill & Tyson, 2009). Hence the current study will investigate on the Application of Epstein's theoretical lens to parental involvement in the education of pre-schoolers in Kenya

In Ghana, the standard of education, especially in the lower primary schools has assumed a downward trend in recent times. The documentary evidence on parental involvement in Ghana is not encouraging. Some of the studies have shown that most parents do not show interest in their children's school work (Casley-Hayford, 2000; Minor, 2006; Pryor and Ampiah, 2003a, 2003b). The revelations from these studies point to the fact that the dismal performance of Ghanaian students could be partly due to parents' neglecting attitude towards the education of their children. This situation calls for the need to encourage parents to actively engage in the education of their children.

In Nigeria, Research suggests that pupils, parents, teachers and head teachers as well as schools benefit from increased parental involvement. As reported by Olsen and Fuller (2010), parental involvement activities that are effectively planned and well implemented resulted in substantial benefits to children, parents, teachers and schools. As for children, they achieved more, regardless of ethnic or racial background, socioeconomic status, or parents' education level. The study further indicated that children of more involved parents were found to have higher self-esteem; more self-disciplined and showed higher aspirations and motivation towards school.

At independence in 1963, the government of Kenya recognized education as a basic right and a powerful tool for national development. Over the years the government has addressed challenges facing the Education sector through commissions, Committees and Task Forces with the sole purpose of providing quality and relevant education to its citizenry at all levels of learning. The Government through Sessional Paper No. 1(2005), committed itself to develop policies that would ensure accelerated industrial and technological development. In this regard, the introduction of FPE in January 2003 led to

significant educational achievements. Enrolments in public primary schools increased significantly from 5.9 million in 2002 to 6.9 million in 2003; representing a Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) of 99% (102% girls; 97% boys). Despite these enrolments, primary education continues to experience a number of challenges, such as overstretched facilities and diminished support by communities because most parents are under the impression that it is the Government’s exclusive responsibility to provide all the necessary resources to support the primary education.

However in Kenya, available studies indicates that a large proportion of primary pupils who enrol in standard one education do not complete the primary cycle within the prescribed eight-year period and a significant number do not complete primary education at all (Cheruiyot, 2005). Out of the total enrolment in standard one, only 47% of girls and 48% of boys complete the primary cycle. Repetition rate is as high as 15% and transition rate is poor especially for girls with only 27% proceeding to secondary level of education (Kathuri, 2005). This scenario has been attributed to, among other factors, lack of parental concern with their children’s education or excessive parental control and demands for superior achievement and poor foundation in lower primary schools and pre-schools (Cheruiyot, 2005). In addition, other studies have indicated that parents who show little or no interest in their children’s education have children who are frequently absent from school, perform poorly, repeat classes and drop out of school (Gitonga, 1997).

The involvement of parents in the education of their children has attracted a lot of attention over the last three decades, and this subject continues to be of interest to most researchers. Throughout the 1990s, a large number of studies (Bogenschneider, 1997; Eccles, Jacobs, and Harold, 1990; Epstein, 1991, 92; Grolnick, Benjet, Kurowski, and Apostoleris, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997, Muller, 1998; Schneider and Coleman, 1993; Smith, 1992; Useem, 1992) have contributed to the effects of parental involvement on children’s academic achievement. However limited studies have attempted to investigate on the Application of Epstein’s theoretical lens to parental involvement in the education of pre-schoolers in Kenya, which is the focus of the current study. In Manga sub-county where the study will be done, the available statistics at Nyamira director of education office (2015) show worrying trends of the extent to which parents participated in their children’s learning:

Table 1.1: General parental involvement trends in three divisions in Manga Sub-County

Parental Involvement	Division A			Division B			Division C		
	Total number of parents	Actual number of parents		Total number of parents	Actual number of parents		Total number of parents	Actual number of parents	
	TNO	NO	%	TNO	NO	%	TNO	NO	%
Parenting	1338	347	26	1505	129	9	1163	124	11
Communicating	1338	304	23	1505	108	7	1163	134	12
Volunteering	1338	112	8	1505	170	11	1163	176	13
Learning at home	1338	376	28	1505	254	17	1163	267	23

Source: County Director of Education Office Statistics (Nyamira County, 2015)

To ensure that parents are involved in their children’s learning, studies in many parts of the world indicates that many countries now have legislation to ensure that parents are involved in their children’s education more than before (Naidoo, 2005; Friedman, 2011). However, in Kenya there is no such legislation and there are limited studies showing the extent to which the six Types of Parental Involvement parenting, communicating, volunteering, and learning at home, decision making and collaborating with the community affect preschoolers’ education.

1.2 Statement of the Problem:

Growing body of literature suggests that Epstein’s theoretical lens of parental involvement do not have a positive influence on children’s learning and accomplishment in school. For decades the researchers have had inconsistent findings on how and to what extent Epstein’s theoretical lens of parental involvement influences pre-schoolers’ education. To date it is not clear on the part of stakeholders of education which forms of parental involvement has a greater influence on pre-schoolers’ education. Generally, it is not clear how the stakeholders of education view Epstein’s theoretical lens of parental involvement in preschoolers’ education. It is against this backdrop that the current study explored the Perspectives of selected Stakeholders on application of Epstein’s theoretical lens of Parental involvement in Pre-schoolers education in Kenya.

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1.3 Purpose of the Study:

The purpose of the study was to explore Perspectives of Community opinion leaders on Epstein's theoretical lens of Parental involvement in Pre-schoolers education in Kenya.

1.4 Objectives of the Study:

The study was guided by the following objective:

To find out the perspectives of Community Opinion Leaders on Epstein's theoretical lens of Parental Involvement in preschoolers' education.

1.5 Research Questions:

The study was guided by the following research question:

How do community opinion leaders perceive Epstein's theoretical lens of Parental involvement in preschoolers' education?

1.6 Significance of the Study:

The study was significant in the following respects:

The study findings may provide useful information to scholars on extent to which stakeholders perceive Epstein's theoretical lens of parental involvement in preschoolers education. Preschool administrators and teachers may make use of the findings to encourage parents to get involved in their children's education right from pre-school level by introducing school regulations and policies that may ensure that parents participate in their children's educational matters by ensuring that parents sign their children's diary and that home work has been properly done by the child. Policy makers in the Ministry of Education may make use of the findings to make policies that would encourage programs that may enable parents gain knowledge on the importance of their involvement in their children's education, with an aim of improving children's performance in school.

1.7 Scope of the Study:

The study scope was within Manga Sub-County in Nyamira County, Kenya. The study focused on parental involvement as a conjecturer of learning outcomes. The researcher focused on home parenting environment, home to school communication, parental volunteering services and learning at home. The researcher used mixed research method that used both quantitative and qualitative approach using concurrent research design. The study was anchored on Epstein's theory (1987) of parental involvement, its' application on the learning preschoolers.

1.8 Limitations of the Study:

The following were the limitations of the study:

- i. The study was purely qualitative in nature; therefore its findings may not be generalized to any other area of study having similar or related title.
- ii. The study was limited to Manga Sub-County in Nyamira County, Kenya and therefore the findings might not be generalized to the entire Nyamira County as well as the entire Kenya. However, since Manga Sub-County is a typical example of areas with parental involvement in pre-schools, the findings will be useful for reference on matters related to the Application of Epstein's theoretical lens to parental involvement in the education of pre-schoolers in Kenya.
- iii. The illiteracy levels of some parents were a limitation, certain parents were not able to read and write. This limitation was overcome by translating the questionnaire from Ekegusii to English.

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1.9 Assumptions of the Study:

The study was based on the following assumptions:

- i. That pre-school parents know Epstein's theoretical lens of Parental Involvement in preschoolers' education.
- ii. That Community opinion leaders know and have got perspectives on Epstein's theoretical lens of Parental Involvement in preschoolers' education.

1.10 Theoretical framework:

The study adopted the overlapping spheres of influence theory proposed by Epstein (1987). This theory looks at the interrelationship between the school, family, and the community. The connection between schools, families, and communities were observed from different angles and viewpoints (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This theory is a coordination of sociological, educational, and psychological views on social organizations, and also studies about how educational outcomes are impacted by the environments of the family, school, and community (Epstein, 1987, 1992). Recognizing the interdependency of the key environments or agents that socialize and educate children, one cardinal axiom of this theory is that certain objectives of which pre-schooler's learning outcome is no exception, have the mutual interest of each of these agents or environments and are best attained via their concerted partnership and underpinning. This perspective is represented by three spheres: schools, family and community and their Connection are determined by the attitudes, perspectives, perceptions and practices of the people within each environment (Epstein, 1992).

Epstein (1996) proposed a framework of parental involvement that includes six main types of activities that connect families, schools, and communities. Epstein's framework of six major types of parental involvement is among the most useful tools developed by the field thus far for defining parental involvement practices and linking them with various learning outcomes. This widely accepted framework guides to help educators develop comprehensive family school partnerships. The six types of parental involvement include: parenting (helping families with childrearing and parenting skills), communicating (developing effective home-school communication), volunteering (creating ways that families can become involved in activities at the school), learning at home (supporting learning activities in the home that reinforce school curricula), decision-making (including families as decision-makers through school-sites councils, committees) and collaborating with the community (matching community services with family needs and serving the community (Epstein, 1995). Each type of involvement encompasses a variety of practices to be undertaken by teachers, parents, and students and is theoretically linked with a variety of distinct outcomes for students, teachers, and parents as well but this study will deal with the first four Epstein's theoretical parental styles of involvement thus (parenting, communicating, volunteering and learning at home).

In line with the above discussed theories-the ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and the overlapping spheres of influence (Epstein, 1987) about the influence of the Environment in shaping the life of the individual, it is assumed that parental involvement in the education of their children leads to tremendous dividends in the educational achievements of their children. It should be noted that although both theories talk about the development of the child, the theory of overlapping spheres of influence provide a more specific approach to a pre-schooler's learning outcome. According to Epstein (2009) there are many reasons for developing and establishing a partnership between school, family and community. The main reason for such a partnership is to aid students in succeeding at school. Other reasons are, for example, to improve school climate and school programs, to advance parental skills and leadership, to assist families to connect with others in the school and the community, as well as to assist teachers with their work. All these reasons emphasise the importance for parents to play an active role in their children's education and to keep a strong and positive relationship with schools.

In Epstein's opinion, schools, families and community share responsibilities for the socialisation of the child. Therefore, the theory of overlapping spheres of influence posits that the work of the most effective families and schools overlap and they share goals and missions. Although some practices of school and family are conducted separately, there are some important things that need to be done conjointly by these contexts, reflecting the shared responsibilities of parents and educators. Concepts of family-like school and school-like family are used to stress that the family needs to recognize that the child is a learner to whom the importance of school, homework and learning in general needs to be pointed out, while the school is to make every child feel special, accepted and included as it is within the family. Similar principles go also for the community level and it is interaction with both families and schools.

1.11 Conceptual Framework:

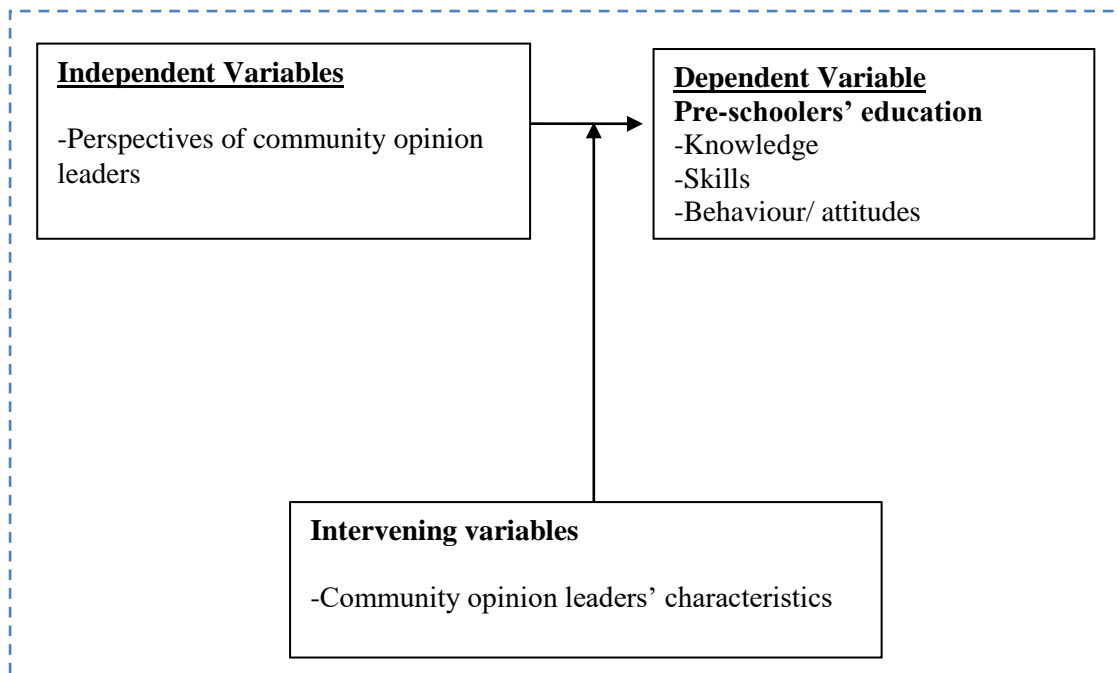


Figure 1.1: Figure Showing Parental Involvement on pre-schoolers learning outcome.

The independent variables are perspectives of community opinion leaders while the dependent variable is preschoolers' education which entails knowledge, skills and behaviour and attitudes. Basing the conceptual framework on Epstein's (1987) theoretical model, the framework contains six important factors with regards to parental involvement which includes: parenting, communicating, volunteering, and learning at home, decision making and collaborating with the community. Parenting pertains to helping all families understand the development of both the child and the adolescent. It also helps establishing a supportive home environment for children as pre-schoolers. Communicating refers to how best to design and conduct an effective two-way communication that is school-to-home and home-to-school, about school programs and their children's progress. Volunteering applies to recruiting and organising help and support from parents for school programs and pre-schoolers' activities. Learning at home pertains to providing ideas and information to parents about how they can best assist their children with homework and curricular related decisions and activities. The main focus of these four factors is to promote quality learning outcomes. The conceptual framework also shows that there are intervening variables which are perceived to influence the perspectives of community opinion leaders in the application of Epstein's theoretical lens of Parental involvement in the pre-schoolers education. These characteristics include-Gender, educational qualifications, experience with preschoolers.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Perspectives of Community opinion leaders on Epstein's Theoretical lens of Parental involvement in preschoolers education:

According to the Project Appleseed (2007) which followed Epstein's theoretical model of parent/school/community relationships (1995), this level of parental involvement aims at helping all families establish home environments that support children as learners. This involves establishing appropriate guidelines for their children; talk with them at home about their interests, activities and their friends, and explain their hopes and goals to their children. Epstein and Sheldon (2005) have further mentioned some of the benefits associated with this level of parental involvement. For pupils, respect for parents is created, and the awareness that family supervision is on-going becomes obvious. Positive personal qualities, behaviour, beliefs, and family values develop. Management of time for home chores, homework and other activities becomes possible. Awareness of the importance of school is created and attendance improves.

A study was conducted in USA by Christine (2012) to examine parental interactions with their children and its influence on child receptive and expressive language ability. The sample for this study was comprised of 72 kindergarten children. Data was gathered during three visits to the home environment. Parents and their children were asked to participate in three semi-structured literacy activities: a book reading, play session, and writing task. Parent-child literacy interactions were observed and audio taped. Data were coded and analysed using analysis of variance and regression. Findings revealed that parents varied their behaviour with their young children across the three literacy tasks. Specifically, parents used labelling, generalizing, and fostering child autonomy differently during the three tasks. Overall, parents were most interactive with their children during the play activity. In addition, specific parent behaviour features predicted child language ability even after controlling for SES. The study further revealed that the quantity and variety of parent language and how parents fostered child autonomy positively predicted child expressive and receptive language skills. However, this study did not examine parental engagement through the eyes of parents, teachers and children in pre-schools rather than through the eyes of parents only but the current study obtained data from pre-school lead teachers, parents and ECDE Divisional educational officers.

Anders *et al* (2011) conducted a study in Germany which examined parents' reports of their involvement and their children's mathematics achievement. The study findings revealed that literacy learning at home was positively related to children's initial mathematic scores at age 3 but not to growth or change in mathematic over time. Ironically, this study suggested that family involvement in reading activities at home was more strongly related to young children's mathematic scores than to family involvement in mathematic activities at home. The study further found that a composite measure of parents' efforts to teach complex mathematic and literacy activities (for example, printing letters, numbers, and words; reading words) was positively related to French- and English-speaking preschool children's scores on researcher-created object-counting and number-recognition tasks. While this study provides a wealth of finding, the study did not address pre-schoolers' learning outcomes and the levels of parental involvement according to Epstein's (1995) theoretical model that includes: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, which the current study attempted to address.

Fan and Williams (2010) conducted a study in UK that showed greater parental involvement leads to teachers having better relationships with parents and pupils, fewer behavioural problems, a reduced workload and a more positive attitude towards teaching. Kgaffe (2001) Tan and Goldberg (2009) have also supported these findings by indicating that through parental involvement, teachers get support and appreciation from parents, broaden their perspectives and increase their sensitivity to varied parent circumstances, gain knowledge and understanding of children's homes, families and out-of-school activities. Teachers also receive higher ratings from parents, in other words, teachers who work at improving parental involvement are considered better teachers than those who remain cut off from the families of the pupils that they teach. Conversely the current study did explore the application of home learning and how it predicts the learning outcomes of pre-schoolers.

In USA Hinojosa, S (2014) did a study on the Role of Gender, Preschool, and the Home Learning Environment. The sample consisted of 83 parent-child dyads. Hierarchical multiple regression analyses were run to determine whether environmental factors predicted academic enablers at the beginning and end of kindergarten. Findings indicated the home learning environment predicted kindergarten students' levels of academic enablers at the beginning of the year, such that those with educationally enriched home environments displayed higher levels of academic enablers, regardless of gender. This influence was not maintained over the kindergarten year. While the current study was conducted in USA and based on home Learning Environment and students' levels of academic. On the other hand the current study was conducted in Kenya and based on parental involvement on pre-schoolers learning outcomes.

Van-Voorhis (2001) quasi-experimental study of 253 in a suburban middle school compared interactive homework assignments with non-interactive assignments in terms of their effects on family involvement in homework, student homework completion and accuracy, student science achievement, and student attitudes toward science. The study showed that well-designed, teacher-generated homework assignments in science can help students practice skills, prepare for class, participate in learning activities, and develop responsibility, as well as promote parent-child group said their families were sometimes, frequently, or always involved in science homework assignments. By contrast, more than 80% of students in the non-interactive group said their families were never, rarely, or sometimes involved in science homework assignments over the 18 weeks of the study relationships and develop better parent-teacher communication. While Van Voorhis, study was quasi-experimental study conducted among suburban middle school. The current study on the other hand used mixed method and was conducted among preschools using questionnaires interview and documentary analysis to collect data.

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Chavkin, Gonzalez and Rader (2002) evaluation on home-school program instituted in a Texas-Mexico border district in Lyford, Texas. In this district 95% of the students are Hispanic, many have parents who are migrant workers, and all students qualify for free and reduced lunches. Sample included teachers, parents, and students from elementary and middle school students. The study found that school students showed significant gains in reading and mathematics achievement. High school students showed significant improvement in mathematics, reading, and writing. Attendance also increased while discipline problems decreased in the district. While the current study was based on parental involvement on reading and mathematics achievement, the current study will be based on parental involvement and children general achievement.

Nermeen, Heather, and Elizabeth (2010) did a study on parent involvement and Children's Academic and Social Development in Elementary School. Data was obtained from the 1364 Early Childcare and Youth Development centres to investigate children's trajectories of academic and social development across first, third and fifth grade. Hierarchical linear modelling was used to examine within- and between-child associations among maternal- and teacher-reports of parent involvement and children's standardized achievement scores, social skills, and problem behaviours. The findings suggested that within-child improvements in parent involvement predict declines in problem behaviours and improvements in social skills but do not predict changes in achievement. Between-child analyses demonstrated that children with highly involved parents had enhanced social functioning and fewer behaviour problems. While Nermeen, et al did a study on parent involvement among early Childcare and Youth Development centres. The current study was conducted among pre-schools in Manga Sub-County.

Mattingly, Prislina, McKenzie, Rodriguez and Kayzar (2002) in Canada reviewed 41 studies, mostly of parental involvement programs in kindergarten through twelfth grade. The programs in the studies varied greatly, with an average of 3.4 intervention components; most programs included learning at home activities (79 per cent) and/or supportive parenting (60 per cent). The study findings indicated that the general measure of parent involvement was not strongly linked to students' overall achievement; however, there was a positive relationship between parental involvement and children's reading literacy. The importance of the child's home environment and his or her learning at home is also emphasised by the Australian Council of State Schools Organisation (ACSSO) (2006), which observes that families have the biggest influence on the child's development, and that learning language and social discourse occurs at home in non-formal ways by talking across the breakfast table, chatting on a bus ride, or reading a bedtime story ways during the first years and it actually continues virtually all the time even as the child gets older and demands to be independent. These findings are supported by those of Brannon (2008) that found that parent and child interactions were significantly correlated with child adjustment, positive self-esteem development in pupils and their emotional adjustment. Moreover, parental involvement in well-designed interactive home learning activities (that is, specially made up home packages for parents and pupils to work together) improves pupils' performance, their enthusiasm in specific subject areas and behaviour and this is regardless of the family, racial or cultural background or the parent's formal education (Epstein and Van Voorhis, 2001; Jones, 2001).

Richardson (2009) conducted study in America of 827 African American eighth graders to find how students perceive their family support for academic achievement. Parental involvement positively influences their behaviour (Sanders and Sheldon, 2009). The improved behaviour in turn positively and significantly influences their school grades. Melhuish, Sylva, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford and Taggart (2001) further discovered that parental involvement in children's learning leads to higher performance, greater cognitive competence, greater problem solving skills, greater school enjoyment, better school attendance and fewer behavioural problems at school. Further, Richardson (2009) claims that better behaviour, among students, is one of the major benefits of parental involvement. This study concluded that parental involvement in children's learning does not only affect learning outcomes but also influences learning motivation, attention, task persistence, receptive vocabulary skills, and less problems in the classroom. While the predominantly American findings in the field of parental involvement are of great benefit, it reflects a context quite different from Kenya's. Hence the current study attempted to provide literature and findings that may help in the development of policies and practices in the Kenyan situation that will reflect the children, families, schools and communities in the local environment.

In Canada, Senechal and Lefevre (2002) conducted a descriptive study of 168 kindergarten and first-grade children to establish the influence of parental engagement with their children in reading books and writing activities at home on their children's learning outcomes. First, children's exposure to books at home related positively to their vocabulary and listening comprehension skills in kindergarten and grade 1. These skills, in turn, directly related to children's reading ability in grade 3. Second, parents' involvement in teaching specific reading and writing skills at home related directly to other early literacy skills, predicted rates of word reading at the end of first grade, and related positively to children's reading ability at the end of third grade. The study findings finally indicated that different reading-related activities at home, starting in the early years had a positive effect on specific kinds of reading readiness skills at the preschool level and had direct and indirect long-term links to reading abilities through third grade. However, the current study further established the relationship between the first four Epstein's levels of parental involvement on pre-schoolers' learning outcomes which the study did not address.

The study conducted by Harper and Pelletier, (2010) in Canada rated how parents were involved in their kindergarteners' education. The measures of the study were based on teachers' views of parents' behaviours. The study also raised questions about whether teachers followed the common practice of asking parents to be involved only if their children had poor or failing skills. Adding these parents to others who were highly involved could produce null effects, such as those found in this study, if parents of both high- and low-ability students are purposely highly engaged with their children about mathematics. However, the current study adopted a concurrent mixed method where both qualitative and quantitative data was gathered through questionnaires, interview schedules and document analysis.

Kingsley (2011) conducted a study to analyse the link between parental school involvement and the academic achievement of young students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds in Ghana. The sample for the study was drawn from some selected schools in the central region of Ghana where students between 15 and 20 of age were used. A questionnaire was used to collect the data for the study. This instrument asked for specific information regarding the living condition of the students. The demographic variables that were assembled for the study were age, gender, family structure, parental education, and parental occupation. The data collected for the study was analysed by using diverse statistical methods. Descriptive statistics was used to present an overall picture of the responses provided by the students. Bivariate correlation was used to test for linear relationships between parental involvement and academic achievement. The results of the partial correlation revealed that there was a positive relationship between mothers' school involvement and their children's academic achievement where the correlation coefficient was 0.287 and $p < 0.01$. However, the study does not address the relationship between the levels of parental involvement and academic achievement basing on Epstein's (1995) theoretical model that contains six important factors with regards to parental involvement which includes: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making and collaborating with the community which the current study addressed.

In Nigeria, Bukola and Peter (2013) conducted a study to establish the level of parents' involvement in primary school and academic achievement. The study adopted the descriptive survey approach. The population for the study comprised all public primary school teachers in Ondo west local government area. 30 public primary schools were selected using purposive sampling technique on the criteria that the schools were located within urban area of the local government and that the schools had been established for over five years ago. In each of the schools, 10 teachers were selected using the simple random sampling technique of the ballot system. In all, a total of 300 public primary school teachers were selected as sample for this study. One instrument titled "questionnaire on parents' involvement in primary school education" was used. The likert scale response type was adopted for the instrument. The response sets used were never (n), rarely (r), occasionally (o) and frequently (f). To ensure face and content validity of the instrument, it was given to three lecturers in the field of early childhood education and primary education studies. It was also given to two long serving public primary school teachers. After corrections had been effected, 20 copies of the instrument were administered outside the local government used for this study in order to test its reliability level. The data collected through the 20 copies was analysed using the cronbach alpha technique, and the instrument yielded. Findings from the study revealed that the level of parents' involvement in primary school education in the areas of provision of instructional materials, curriculum implementation and administration was low. Although the current study established the levels of parental involvement, it further explored the extent to which pre-schoolers' learning at home predicts the learning outcomes at school.

Monadjem (2003) conducted a study in Swaziland that was to develop an effective parental involvement program for urban high schools. The study found that parenting activities that were of benefit to the children included, parental supervision and provision of a home environment that enables children to become responsible, self-confident, self-reliant persons with socially acceptable behaviour and who are able to learn. The study further indicated that parenting moderates the impact of parent involvement by influencing the extent of the parent-child interaction. The study also reported that schools should encourage parental involvement by organising programs that offer family support to assist families with child rearing skills, health and nutrition, and giving tips for creating conditions that sustain learning at each stage and grade level. The most basic involvement of parents is meeting children's need for food, clothing, shelter and medical care (Bridgemohan, 2002). Home visits to help families of pupils understand schools as well as enable schools understand families are essential (Epstein & Sheldon, 2005). The current study further sought to establish the extent to which various levels of parental involvements predicts the children's learning outcomes. The present study did dwell on the application of Epstein's theoretical lens on parental involvement on pre-schoolers education learning outcomes.

Lemmer (2007) conducted a study in South Africa that observed that parental involvement has been limited to financing schools and volunteering. She noted that although parental involvement is linked to school success, parental participation is not significant in many schools in South Africa. She reported that many developing countries including South Africa, tend to give parents increased roles in governing schools; while relatively few parents are actively involved in their children's reading. Similarly, a study involving 21 parents who were serving in the school governing bodies, 5 school principals and 1 headman conducted in the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa reported very low levels of parental and community involvement (Msila, 2012). Msila reported that parents were of the opinion that teachers had the necessary skills to lead schools without parents' support. On the other hand, the school principals concurred that parental involvement would improve learners' performance and school success in general. However, these studies, did not explore Epstein's parental levels of involvement on pre-schoolers learning outcomes which the current study seeks to establish.

Using Somalia parents, Leila (2015) conducted a study on the influence of Somalia Parental Involvement on their children's Education: Case Studies of Two Urban Public Schools in the United States of America. The purpose of the study was to determine the views of Somali parents and teachers regarding effective parental involvement in the education of Somali- American school children. Epstein's Overlapping Spheres of Influence Framework (2002) provides the conceptual grounding and starting point to answer this study's guiding question, which was: "What are the factors that shape how school personnel and Somali families view effective parental involvement in the education of Somali children?" Data collection was driven by case study methodology. Furthermore, the data were triangulated from face-to-face interviews in English and Somali using 26 respondents (fourteen Somali parents, ten teachers and two school administrators); document analysis, and observation of the interactions of the school administrative staff with parents as well as attendance of a Parent Night event.

The study found that when children brought home their schoolwork, and when teachers and other school personnel offer school-based solutions that address barriers blocking effective parental support for students, the children's academic success greatly improved. However, this study used a small sample compared to the current study's sample of 6 ECDE lead teachers, 6 head teachers, 354 Pre-school parents and 3 ECDE Divisional Coordinators. The current study further sought to establish the extent to which various levels of parental involvements influences the children's education learning outcomes.

Chindanya (2011) conducted a qualitative study in Zimbabwe that sought to establish how parents in a materially poor rural district of Zaka were involved in their children's education. Barriers to their involvement were investigated with the view to overcoming or mitigating them for the benefit of the affected primary school pupils. The attribution theory was used not only to substantially explain the status of parental involvement, but also to generate strategies to promote parents' participation in their children's school education. Observation, semi-structured interviews (for school heads), focus group interviews (for parents) and the open-ended questionnaire (for teachers) were used in this qualitative study covering ten primary schools. Respondents were selected through the use of chain reference sampling and sampling by case. This research differs from the current study in that attribution theory was used to explain the status of parental involvement while the present study sought to look at the application of Epstein's theoretical lens on parental involvement in the education of pre-schoolers in Kenya.

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Vol. 5, Issue 2, pp: (107-144), Month: March - April 2018, Available at: www.noveltyjournals.com

Nyarko (2007) carried out a study in Ghana on parental involvement in adolescents' educational achievement. The sample of the study was 239 students from diverse socio – economic backgrounds between the ages of 15–20 and their teachers. The researcher used a correlational research design. Questionnaires used were of 5 point Likert scale ranging from 1 almost never to 5 very often. A simple regression was used to find out the predictors of parental home and school involvement and achievement of the adolescents. The results indicated a positive and a significant correlation between mothers and fathers' home involvement and the academic achievement of the adolescents. The study highlighted the importance of parental involvement in academic achievement and school success. The researcher used a correlational research design however the current study adopted mixed method approach. The sample consisted between the ages of 15–20 however the current study used preschool children who are mainly below 6 years.

Muindi (2010) conducted a survey study in Kenya to determine the various factors that were associated with the performance of students at the end of the school cycle. The survey in particular examined the children's personal, home and school profiles and how they supported and hindered learning. A total of 7931 pupils were interviewed in 328 primary schools in 76 districts countrywide. The study indicated that only 17% of fathers and 36% of mothers in Nairobi helped their children with homework. This showed that more than 60% of parents were not taking a close interest in their children's homework. However, the KNEC survey only established the extent to which parents were involved in their children's homework while the current study hinged to unravel the first four levels of Epstein's parental involvement on children's learning outcome which the current study strived to establish.

A cross-sectional survey using structured and semi-structured interviews was conducted among pupils and parents in Kengeleni division in Mombasa district to explore socio-cultural and economic factors that influence parental participation in pupils' homework and, consequently, propose recommendations for homework policy formulation by Ndegwa, William and Ombech (2007). A total of 117 randomly selected parents were interviewed. These were the parents' representatives of pre-school, Class 1, Class 2 and Class 3. The study established that although parental willingness to be involved in pupils' homework was high, this involvement was hampered by many socio-economic factors, including illiteracy and low income.

On many occasions, homework was not only incomplete, but also not done, and the pupils were consequently punished for this. The majority of the parents on the other hand had low levels of formal schooling. A significant 90 per cent (104) of them had undergone formal education while the remaining 10.3 per cent (12) indicated informal education. This parenting environment was perceived to influence parental involvement. This study however assessed parental participation in pupils' homework using qualitative approach unlike the current study that used both qualitative and quantitative approaches.

Kimathi (2014) conducted a study in Kenya on the effects of parental involvement on reading achievement among lower primary school children. The study used a descriptive research design and was guided by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's model of parental involvement, complemented by Grolnick's theory of parental involvement. Structured interviews were used to collect data from 137 parents who were randomly selected from both public and private primary schools. The study found that most of the parents had low levels of role construction regarding their involvement in their children's reading at home. Teachers' invitation for parental involvement was found to be very low although the study established a significant relationship using a Chi-square test between teacher invitation and parental involvement in the modelling, cognitive and behavioural.

The study also found significant relationships between parents' role construction and their involvement in the modelling, cognitive and behavioural dimensions. However the current study adopted the overlapping spheres of influence theory proposed by Epstein (1987) and the study employed concurrent triangulation mixed research design. The study used cluster random, simple random and purposive sampling techniques in obtaining the required sample size. Instead of chi-square the current study used, Pearson Product Moment Correlation Co-efficient and regressions analysis to establish the relationship between variables.

Bitengo (2009) conducted a study in Kenya on paternal involvement in children's education: an implication of children's performance at preschool in Gucha district Kenya. The purpose of the study was to establish the level of fathers' involvement in their children's education in relation to children's performance at preschool with a special focus on the factors that influence this involvement. Two divisions in Gucha sub-county were purposively selected, one to represent

the urban set up, and the other to represent a rural set up. Sixteen preschools were purposively selected from the two divisions to represent the public and private and the rural and urban pre-schools. Pearson Product Moment Correlation Co-efficient, ANOVA and Chi Square were utilized to establish whether there were any significant relationships or differences in means between variables. Findings revealed that fathers' involvement in their children's education was significantly related to children's performance at preschool, where $r=0.19$ with a p-value of 0.029. There was a significant difference in means of father involvement between fathers of different academic levels where $F=25.149$ at 2 degrees of freedom with a P-value of 0.000. There was a significant difference in means of father involvement between fathers of different occupations where $F=6.291$ at 5 degrees of freedom with a P-value of 0.000. Fathers' involvement in their children's education was also significantly related to the type of school the child attended where $\chi^2=25.330$ at 2 degrees of freedom. The study concluded that there was a positive relationship between the levels of parental involvement and children's performance at preschool. However the current study used both parental involvements (father and mother) unlike to this study which only used fathers' involvement. The study also used simple random, cluster and purposive sampling techniques to obtain the sample size for the study.

The study conducted in Kenya by Buchman (2000) to examine how Family structure, parents' perceptions and child labour determined school enrolment, the study findings indicated a positive relationship between the school climate and family involvement. A positive school climate that encouraged family involvement was found to improve parents' perceptions of the school. Positive family and community involvement were found to be the key components of successful schools that lead to higher achievement, improved behaviour and greater overall support for schools (NMSA, 2003). These findings are supported by Brown and Beckett (2007) who also indicated that community connectedness promotes constructive outcomes for young adolescents such as better grades, peer relationships, leadership and conflict resolution skills. Given the available literature focus on the advantages of school, family, and community connections, developing trusting relationships, sharing power with parents and community members, working with diverse families, and connecting with community resources, there is need to have a study in a broader context examining the extent to which various forms of parental involvement predicts pre-schoolers' learning outcomes. From the studies done in Kenya, Africa, and other parts of the world on the influence of parental involvement on academic achievement of children, the available literature reveal inconsistent findings about the extent parental involvement predicts academic achievement. Owing to these, there is need for a study to ascertain these contradicting findings.

In Kenya, According to Odhiambo (2005), the home parenting environment is as important as what goes on in the school. Important factors include how much parents read to young children, how much TV children are allowed to watch and how often pupils change schools. Achievement gap is not only about what goes on once pupils get into the classroom. It's also about what happens to them before and after school. Parents and teachers have a crucial role to play to make sure that every child becomes a high achiever. Parental influence has been identified as an important factor affecting pupil achievement. Results indicate that parent education and encouragement are strongly related to improved pupil achievement.

Existing Gaps in the Literature review:

There is ample evidence that Parental involvement in the learning activities at home has been identified as one of the most productive ways of promoting and enhancing the educational achievement of children (Muindi, 2010). More recent reviewed studies show that parent/family involvement at home and school has significant effect on children's learning (Jeffries, 2012). However, studies done in Kenya, Africa, and other parts of the world on the influence of parental involvement on academic achievement of children reveal inconsistent findings about the extent to which parental involvement predicts academic achievement. Owing to these shortcomings, there is need for a study to ascertain these contradicting findings.

While there is a wealth of research and literature available on parent involvement/engagement in recent years, there are still areas of emphases in which we have limited knowledge. There is limited amount of research and literature situated in the Kenyan context. While the predominantly American and developed country's literature in the field is of great benefit, it reflects a context quite different from Kenyan's. Hence the current study attempted to provide literature and findings that may help in the development of policies and practices in the Kenyan situation that will reflect the children, families, schools and communities in the local environment.

A second significant gap is the limited studies that examine parental engagement through the eyes of parents, teachers and children in pre-schools rather than through the eyes of educators. So much of the research and literature that is available gives educators' accounts and perceptions of the school landscape, and of parents' position in relation to their involvement in their children's academic achievement (Nermeen, Heather, and Elizabeth, 2010). It tends to be research on parents, rather than research with parents, teachers and children especially during the formative years of a child's development. What might be learned if we heard parents' stories of their children's schooling experiences and their stories of their own experiences as parents in relation to the school landscape? What might become foregrounded from this research that is currently not being attended to in the literature or in the field?

Another gap in the field of parental involvement surrounds the benefits of parental engagement to parents, learners and teachers basing the study on Epstein's (1995) theoretical model that contains six important factors with regards to parental involvement which includes: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making and collaborating with the community. There are limited studies done to establish what these benefits might be, how they might occur, or how parents, families, and communities may be strengthened by them which the current study attempts to establish.

Given the available literature focus on the advantages of school, family, and community connections, developing trusting relationships, sharing power with parents and community members, working with diverse families, and connecting with community resources (Harper and Pelletier, 2010; Hinojosa (2014)). There was need to have a study in a broader context examining the influence of parental involvement as a predictor of learning outcomes in pre-schools in Manga Sub-County, Kenya.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design:

A research design is the structure, scheme, outline or plan that is used to generate answers to research problems (Orodho, 2003). It provides a structure that shows how various parts of research project work together in addressing the central research questions. In addressing the research questions, the study adopted concurrent triangulation research design. Concurrent mixed methods procedures involved converging or merging quantitative and qualitative data in order to provide a comprehensive analysis of the research problem. In this design, the researcher collected both qualitative and quantitative data at the same time and then integrated the information in the interpretation of the overall results (Denscombe 2008; Creswell 2009; Creswell and Zhang 2009; Creswell and Plano Clark 2011).

The combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches occurred at different stages of the research process, such as formulation of research questions, data collection and data analysis (Bryman 2006; Teddlie and Tashakkori 2009; Creswell and Plano Clark 2011). This approach to research enabled the study to gather adequate information that provided a better understanding of a research problem and answering the entire research questions than using either qualitative or quantitative research approach alone (Creswell and Plano Clark 2011). This design is more appropriate because it increases the overall strength of a study by enhancing the validity and trustworthiness of data collected (Denscombe 2010). In handling qualitative data, the design has the capacity of collecting data concerning the current status of the problem in which the researcher has no direct control of the independent variables because the manifestation had already occurred (Denscombe 2008).

The design was also more appropriate because it allowed the researcher to gather information from a large number of cases through questionnaires and interviews. With quantitative data, the design allows for the study to discover the predictive relationship and the degree of association among variables (Creswell and Zhang 2009). The choice of the design was based on its ability to explore the relationships among variables that could not be manipulated experimentally (Orodho, 2009). Therefore it was more suitable because the study attempted to examine parental involvement in the education of Pre-schoolers in Kenya. Figure 2 below shows how the researcher collected and analysed data using convergent parallel design.

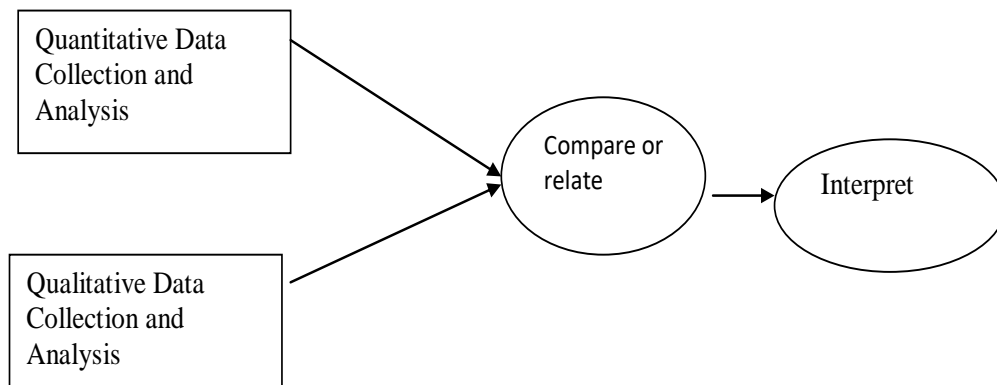


Figure 2: Convergent parallel designs (diagram)

Convergent parallel design was best used to develop more complete understanding of the research problem by obtaining different but complementary data for validation purposes.

3.2 The Locale of the Study:

This research study was conducted out in Manga Sub-County, Nyamira County, Kenya. According to Manga Sub-County, Nyamira County education office, statistics on parental involvement on their pre-schoolers’ education did show that only 15.7% were involved in pre-schoolers’ education (SCDE, 2015). This showed a worrying trend on the extent to which parents in Manga Sub-County participated in their children’s learning. Manga sub-county was curved out of Masaba Sub-County in 2008. The sub-county covers an approximate area of 115.5 square Kilometres with a population of 105,850, indicating high population density. The sub-county borders Nyamira to the East, Masaba North to the North, Kisii Central to the north-west and Marani to the West. It has its headquarters at the Manga shopping centre .Manga sub-county has three divisions namely Kemera, Magombo and Manga. The sub-county has 15 locations and 23 sub-locations. The population of the people in the county mostly are the Abagusii people and other communities are also living there. The sub-county lies at the latitude -0⁰s, 45⁰ s and longitude 35⁰E, 00 E(Appendix M). Levels of poverty are high where children engage in tea picking to supplement family income. Due to this poverty index and involvement of children in various forms of child labour, the access to education is consequently hampered. It is against this background information that Manga sub-county was selected for this study.

The economic mainstay for Manga sub-county is agriculture, livestock and poultry keeping. Therefore, 70% of the population is employed in agricultural activities with very low incomes. Despite the fact that most households in the sub-county depend on agriculture as the main source of livelihood, the sector faces a number of constraints which, unless removed will continue to work against poverty reduction efforts. Some of these include the high incidences of HIV/AIDS which has led to the loss of life and depletion and diversion of badly needed family incomes, un-economical subdivision of land due to the high population pressure, low agricultural productivity, unaffordable input prices that discourage farmers from investing in agriculture and unstable cash crop prices. This situation is further aggravated by landlessness among women and youth, and mismanagement and near collapse of cooperative societies especially coffee and pyrethrum and poor agricultural produce marketing.

The low level of human resource development is one of the causes of poverty in the sub-county. For most people, the cost of education is too high therefore the level of literacy is quite low. This coupled with the fact that further education and training are hampered by the limited number of institutions and low quality of education acquired from them, means that the population particularly the labour force is not well equipped to compete effectively in the local job market and therefore the ability to secure remunerative jobs or other income generating opportunities (GDP, 2002-2008).

3.3 Target Population:

A population refers to an entire group of individuals, events or objects having a common observable characteristic (Mugenda and Mugenda, 2003). The units of analysis for this study were 65 Public Pre-schools. The target population were 6 Community Opinion Leaders.

3.4 Sample size and Sampling procedures:

3.4.1 Sample size:

Sampling is the procedure a researcher uses to gather people, places or things to study. It is the process of selecting a number of individuals or objects from a population such that the selected group contains elements representative of the characteristics found in the entire group (Orodho and Kombo, 2002). Kothari (2006) asserts that sample size should neither be excessively large nor too small. It should be optimum. Budgetary constraints must invariably be taken into consideration when a sample size is decided.

The units of analysis were 65 Public Pre-schools. Therefore, the study populations were 6 community opinion leaders. Purposive sampling technique was used to pick out a sample of 6 community opinion leaders.

. Purposive sampling technique is a form of non-probability sampling in which decisions concerning the individuals to be included in the sample are taken by the researcher based upon a variety of criteria which may include specialist knowledge of the research issue, or capacity and willingness' to participate in the research (Orodho, 2005). This technique is applicable to the present study because the researcher strongly believed that the respondents had the desired information related to the study.

3.5 Data Collection Methods:

3.5.1 In-depth interview guide:

Interviews involve conversations that were used to gain personal information, knowledge, attitudes or opinions from a list of prepared questions asked to each participant in the same manner. In-depth interview were appropriate for the study because the language level of the respondents can be adjusted, interviewer may answer questions and make clarifications, the researcher would prompt and probe deeper into the given situation, the interviewer was able to probe or ask more detailed questions situations and not adhere only to the interview guide and the researcher could explain or rephrase the questions if respondents were unclear about the questions. Six in-depth interviews were conducted namely: In-depth Interview for 3 ECDE divisional coordinators (IIFECDECs), In-depth Interview for denominational Leader (IIFDL), In-depth Interview for County women representative (IIFCWR) and In-depth Interview for Area Chief (IIFAC).

3.5.1.1 In-depth Interview for ECDE divisional coordinators (IIFECDECs):

Face to face IIFECDECs was done to solicit responses from each of the 3 respondents. For purposes of collecting data, ECDE divisional Coordinators were identified as ECDEDC1, ECDEDC2 and ECDEDC3 respectively. A few guiding questions covering the objectives of the study formed the basis of the conversation. They were purposely selected into the study because they were directly involved in the management of quality issues at school level especially the implementation of inclusive education as envisioned by the Government. In-depth interview was more appropriate for the study because the researcher has control over the topics. The questions had a common format, which made it easier to be focus, analyze, code and compare data. The interview was carried in the respective places preferred by the respondents and took between 30 minutes to an hour. Recording of the conversation was done by jotting down the key points of the conversation and the same was transcribed the same day to avoid forgetfulness.

3.5.1.2 In-depth Interview for denominational Leader (IIFDL):

A face to face IIFDL was done to solicit responses from the main denomination in the area. A few guiding questions covering the objectives of the study formed the basis of the conversation. The denominational leader (DL) with help of other school administrators ensure good upbringing of the learners and make certain that learners develop holistically. The leader was chosen purposively for the study to represent the community since they were strongly believed to be able to give views on how Epstein's theory of parental involvement in the education of preschoolers. In-depth interview was more appropriate for the study because the researcher has control over the topics. The questions had a common format, which made it easier to be focus, analyze, code and compare data. The interview was carried in the respective office of the denominational leader and took between 30 minutes to an hour. Recording of the conversation was done by jotting down the key points of the conversation and the same was transcribed the same day to avoid forgetfulness.

3.5.1.3 In-depth Interview for County women representative (IIFCWR):

A face to face IIFCWR was done to solicit responses from the county women representative. A few guiding questions covering the objectives of the study formed the basis of the conversation. The County women representative (CWR) with help of other school administrators ensure good upbringing of the learners and make certain that learners develop holistically. The leader was chosen purposively for the study to represent the community since they were strongly believed to be able to give views on how Epstein's theory of parental involvement in the education of preschoolers. In-depth interview was more appropriate for the study because the researcher has control over the topics. The questions had a common format, which made it easier to be focus, analyze, code and compare data. The interview was carried in the respective office of the women representative at county and took between 30 minutes to an hour. Recording of the conversation was done by jotting down the key points of the conversation and the same was transcribed the same day to avoid forgetfulness.

3.5.1.4 In-depth Interview for Area Chief (IIFAC):

A face to face IIFAC was done to solicit responses from the senior most chief in Manga sub-county. A few guiding questions covering the objectives of the study formed the basis of the conversation. The area chief (AC) with help of other school administrators ensure good upbringing of the learners and make certain that learners develop holistically. The leader was chosen purposively for the study to represent the community since they were strongly believed to be able to give views on how Epstein's theory of parental involvement in the education of preschoolers. In-depth interview was more appropriate for the study because the researcher has control over the topics. The questions had a common format, which made it easier to be focus, analyze, code and compare data. The interview was carried in the respective office of the area chief and it took between 30 minutes to an hour. Recording of the conversation was done by jotting down the key points of the conversation and the same was transcribed the same day to avoid forgetfulness.

3.6 Validity of Research Instruments:

Validity of research instrument refers to the extent to which a test or instrument measures what it is intended or supposed to measure (Mbwesa, 2006). This study adopted the triangulation approach so as to measure the validity of the instruments. Triangulation is a powerful way of demonstrating concurrent validity in both qualitative and quantitative research (Campbell and Fiske 1959). In other words, the study used multiple methods of data collection: interviews, questionnaires as well as document analysis. By so doing, areas that had been overlooked by one method was strengthened and checked by the other.

The cross-checking of data through multiple method approach made the data collected valid. This is in line with Cresswell (2009) who contends that the use of multi-model technique to data collection averts the possibility of having invalid and unreliable data. To ensure that the data that gathered measures what the study purported to measure, the research study further adopted content validity. Here the research instrument was scrutinised by the two supervisors to assert that the instrument logically appeared to reflect accurately what it purported to measure and covered what it was intended to cover (Mbwesa, 2006). The two supervisors read through the questions that were used in the study. The ones that were not correct were rephrased and others modified. This helped the researcher to ensure that there was content validity of the instruments.

3.7 Reliability of Research Instruments:

Reliability according to Gall and Borg, (2007) refers to the degree to which similar results would be arrived at by other researchers if they used the same procedures.

3.7.1 Trustworthiness of qualitative data:

Validity and reliability of qualitative data was ascertained through Lincoln and Guba (1985) qualitative paradigm: Credibility; Transferability; dependability; and conformability.

Credibility:

The goal of internal validity or credibility is to show that the study was conducted in a manner as to ensure that the participants were accurately identified and described. The credibility of the study will be achieved by:

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- a. Collecting data over a long period of time (3 months) to enable a researcher to overcome his biases and perceptions
- b. The researcher checked with informants whether the conclusions and interpretations will be accurate.
- c. The researcher recorded data mechanically through audio-tapes.

Transferability:

External validity or transferability is the extent to which results of the study will be generalized to the population from which the sample was drawn or other similar contexts. Transferability of the study was achieved through:

- a. Providing a detailed accurate focus of the study including the conceptual framework.
- b. Providing a description of the methodology.
- c. Describing data collection and analysis methods.

Dependability:

Dependability or external reliability refers to the extent to which a study can be replicated. It is the degree to which a procedure yields the same results each time and in each way it is measured. The researcher took the following measures to ensure the dependability of the results:

- a. Provide a detailed description of the process of inquiring to induce the methodological steps
- b. Provide products of the research process through data presentation, interpretation and recommendations
- c. Provide an audit trail including the audiotapes field notes and interview transcripts.

Conformability:

Conformability, objectivity or internal reliability is the situation in which two or more people perceive the same meaning from the same categories (Field, 1980). The main concern is that the researcher develops meanings and categories not based on his/her own bias, but seen in the data by others. It was achieved by:

- a. Working with well trained research assistants if need be to ensure that they perceive the same meanings from the data (Lecompte and Preissle, 1993).
- b. Discussing and sharing meanings, categories that emerge from the study with his /her colleagues to determine if they perceive the same meanings
- c. Publishing the thesis in a journal to be scrutinized by experts.

3.8 Data Collection Procedures:

The researcher first got introductory letter to carry out the study from the Director of Post Graduate Studies of Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University of Science and Technology which enabled him to apply for a research permit from the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation. This permit enabled the researcher to get permission from the County Commissioner and the Director of Education Nyamira County and the District Education Officer in Manga sub-county to carry out the study in the area. Respondents were informed on the importance of the study and were assured both verbally and in written form of confidential treatment of information provided.

3.9 Qualitative data Analysis:

Data analysis process involved summarizing large quantities of raw data, categorizing, rearranging and ordering data. This was started by editing the data collected so that what had little relevance was ignored (Mbwesa, 2006). The study had quantitative and qualitative data. Then the data was organized according to the objectives that guided the study.

Qualitative data involved a quick impressionistic summary that ushered in thematic analysis. Qualitative data was reflectively analysed starting from the time it was collected in the actual field (Creswell, 2009; Gall *et al.*, 2007; Maxwell, 2005). This enabled the researcher to discover important sources and information that may be overlooked in the design. This was achieved in three ways: Having consultative meetings or sessions with respondents and supervisors,

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having field note summaries and having data summary sheets (Drew, Hardman & Hosp, 2008). The recorded interviews were transcribed and notes were read and analysed. Field notes were analysed and interpreted in readiness for coding in relation to the answers of the structured questions.

Creswell (2009) defines coding as, "...the process of organizing the material into chunks or segments of texts before bringing meaning to information...segmenting sentences...or images into categories..." Transcripts were read carefully. They were then coded into themes in relation to the research questions and information collected (Gerstenfeld and Berger, 2011). Then a list of all topics was made and sorted according to similarities and differences using highlighters of colours. The topics were later abbreviated as codes and the codes written near the related text in word document. Then these topics were turned into categories – major topics, unique topics, leftovers and emerging themes. Finally, the information assembled according to category and a preliminary analysis was made (adapted from Creswell, 2009). The categories were developed from both the data and research questions based on theory and determined at the formulation of the research instrument. The sub-themes were mostly developed from the data. The data from questionnaires, interviews and document analysis were also sorted according to themes.

Above all, the overlapping spheres of influence theory proposed by Epstein (1987) was used as the basis for analysing and for discussing the findings and chatting possible interventions for the future. Therefore, interpretational analysis largely examined carefully so as to find constructs, themes and patterns that were useful in understanding the phenomenon under study. Above all, the researcher tried by all means to make sense of the meanings that the respondents attached to the phenomenon just like argued by Cohen et al., (2007). This was a challenging task but through reading books and consulting the two supervisors, a meaningful analysis was made.

The study also followed the principles of thematic analysis as proposed by Braun and Clarke, (2006). According to Braun and Clarke (2006) thematic analysis is a method for identifying and analysing patterns (themes) contained by data. It simply organizes and describes data set in details. Furthermore, thematic analysis interprets various aspects of research. Thematic analysis was appropriate for this study because it is not grounded in any particular theoretical framework and can hence be applied across a broad range of qualitative approaches, making it flexible. In carrying out thematic analysis, the study followed suggested procedures to ensure rigor in data analysis which is grouped in six phases as presented in Table 3.1

Table 3.1: Phases of thematic analysis

Phase	Description of process
1.Familiarising yourself with data	Transcribing data by reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2.Generalizing initial codes	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3.Searching for themes	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4.Reviewing themes	Checking if themes work in relation to coded extracts and the entire data set (level 2) generating a thematic map of the analysis.
5.Defining and naming themes	On-going analysis to refine the specific of each theme, and overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme
6.Producing the report	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back the analysis to the research question and literature, producing scholarly report of the analysis

Extracted from Braun and Clarke (2006)

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Tables 3.2 and 3.3 show the themes and codes, verbatim quotation, themes and codes on home-to-school communications and pre-schoolers’ education reflective on the four objectives.

Table 3.2: Verbatim Quotation, Themes and codes on parenting environment and pre-schoolers’ learning outcomes

Themes/ Subthemes	Extracts from the interviews
Parent-child dialogue	<i>Parent involvement in a child’s education is consistently and positively influences a child’s academic performance. When a parent discusses with the child on his/her academic performance, the parent is able to find out areas of weakness that needs adjustments [PFGD1] When talking to the child, the parents learn many things about the child, the child open up about his/her academic progress and this help the parent to know how to come in, when assisting the child for good academic performance. Therefore, there should be good rapport and relationship between the parent and the child to permit free talking between the two [PSLT, 5]</i>
Parental emotional support	<i>Parents should be encouraged to provide peaceful home environment for their children; they should talk, discuss and deliberate on the school matters with their children. In doing this, they are able to find out how their children socialize in school including whom they interact with. This will also help the parent to know their children better [PFGD 10].</i>
Parental guidance	<i>We as parents have the duty to set rules and provide good parenting style for our children. Notwithstanding strictness, children should always be guided by rules to keep their behaviour and discipline in check. This will always make them be alert and concerned with their environment and in the long run, will have a positive influence on their academic performance [PFGD 8].</i>
Parental physical involvement	<i>Raising of the child to a responsible member of the society is not only a responsibility of the teacher but also for the parents, especially when the child is at home. To this, they are able to monitor the child’s behaviour and provide correct punitive or corrective measure in case of child’s indiscipline behaviour [PSLT 6].</i>

Table 3.3: Verbatim Quotation, Themes and codes on Home-to-School communications and pre-schoolers’ Learning Outcomes

Themes/ Subthemes	Extracts from the interviews
Parental positive participation	<i>Many parents understand the need to keep their children in school and so would not wait for our call to remind them of their responsibility of fee payment. This has really helped us in planning and running of our operations and in the end, the bigger beneficiary is the child would always be in school for good academic performance [PSLT, 5]</i>
Attending PA meetings	<i>Most of the parents came for the PA meetings and to feel part of the school operations. In doing this, they are able to monitor what takes place in the school and check the academic performance of the child” [ECDECI]</i>
Monitoring pupils’ class work	<i>I more often than not call my child’s teacher to check on the academic performance of the child, the teacher is more willing to disclose the academic progress of the child and because of this we are able to discuss with the teacher on how to help the child [Focus Group Discussion 1]</i>
Monitoring pupils’ social development	<i>We like being asked by the parents on child’s social development, inquiring on matters concerning his or her interactions and the friends that the child socialises with. This would give us easy time in monitoring and checking the child behaviour and discuss with the parents on how to correct the child in case of indiscipline issues [PSLT, 6]</i>
Provision of solution to a child’s developmental challenges	<i>Parents and teachers are two of the most important contributors to a student’s educational success. When parents and teachers communicate well with one another, they are able to tackle the learner’s weaknesses and support him/her learning together. As such, communication between home and school is vital [PSLT, 2].</i>
Parent-teacher updates	<i>We like parents who update us on the child’s activities while at home especially when the school break for holidays because we will be able to monitor the child’s behaviour while away from us. This is very crucial for the child’s holistic development. [PSLT 2]</i>
Teacher-parent good rapport	<i>“Good communication and good rapport between the parent and the teachers creates a good atmosphere for learners to achieve well in academics. Parents that visit their children’s schools for a one on one talk with the teacher on education welfare of their</i>

	<i>children is able to identify the weak areas in parental upbringing and make adjustment for good academic performance” [PSLT, 4] ‘Parents who communicate regularly with teachers are able to understand the problems their children face in various subjects and are in a position to find the best ways to help their children which enhances their overall performance’ [ECDEC 2]</i>
School visit	<i>“When the parents visit a school for a face to face talk, he or she is able to see for him or herself the progress of their children and will make a decision on the best way to relate with the learner and collaborate with the teacher for good academic outcome of the learner. Although, there are some mode of communication that may not have much effect on academic progress of the learner, such as when the parent communicate through letters or using phone calls’ [PFGD, 12]</i>

3.10 Logistical and Ethical Considerations:

After approval of the research proposal by the supervisors, the researcher sought permission from the Director of Post Graduate Studies of Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University of Science and Technology to carry out the study. This enabled the researcher to apply for a research permit from the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation. This enabled the researcher to get permission from the County Commissioner and the Director of Education Nyamira County. Before data collection, the researcher explained to all expected respondents the purpose of the study and acquired their permission to participate in the study by writing an introductory letter explaining details of the aim and the procedure for the research. In any study involving people, ethical considerations are vital in protecting sampled participants from any potential harm, stress, anxiety and myriad negative consequences for participating in a research (Robson, 2011).

Ethical requirements were observed during the research designing, conducting, recording and reporting research findings. This study was conducted with full human rights protection through ensuring that the dignity, rights, safety and wellbeing of research participants. Only eligible subjects were asked to participate in the study. The researcher explained the purposes of the study, the research procedures, benefits and length of time of the study to all participants. The subjects who agreed to participate were informed and assured that the data would be kept strictly confidential. They were informed that they had a right to withdraw from this project at any time without prejudice and for any reason. They were also asked to sign a consent form. Given the importance of informed consent, the researchers provided consent information to all sampled participants or their representatives in a language that is understandable and clear. Typically, informed consent was documented and was approved by the two supervisors. One copy was given to the individual signing the form and another copy was kept by the researcher. The basic elements of a consent form included: An explanation of the purpose of the study, the reason that they were selected, the amount of time that they were involved and their responsibilities during the research. During data collection stage, the respondents were guided with an aim of seeking their volunteerism in the study.

Emphasis was made on confidentiality as the respondents from the involved institutions were coded instead of reflecting their names. The researcher not collected personal details like names and telephone numbers in order to ensure non-disclosure of identity. No one else had access to responses of respondents except the researcher and his assistants. The data collected was strictly used only for the study and not any other purpose. Above all, this study was conducted in line with research ethics whereby respondents were respected.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Perspectives of community opinion leaders on Epstein’s theoretical lens of Parental Involvement in preschoolers’ education:

The research question responded to was:

How do Community opinion leaders’ perceive the application of Epstein’s theoretical lens of Parental Involvement in preschoolers’ education?

When asked about the importance of home parenting, one of the community opinion leader s asserted that:

parental educational involvement of families as activities that parents conduct at home and in early childhood settings to directly or indirectly support their child's learning. Involvement at the preschool level has a number of lifelong benefits,

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such as establishing the importance of education and developing a network of helpful connections. Parental involvement at this critical point provides the child with a springboard that makes them move to the next level of education with a more tranquil transition (IIFCWR).

When probed further to explain the benefits of the connection between home and the school, the community opinion leader attested further that:

Parents who are involved in their child's education create a connection between the home and school. Those who participate along with their child are privy to the many aspects of their child's day. At home, they are able to replicate and extend activities that their child experiences in school. An astute parent will pick up where the school left off and have an intuitive sense for what their child may need to work on to increase his competency and confidence. Ideas gleaned from the classroom give the parent inspiration for home activities that coincide with classroom tasks (DL)

It is clear from this qualitative data that parents involved in their child's education develop home to school and school to home communication that was proposed by Epstein. Education according to these respondents has got long term benefits and creates a suitable relationship between parents and teachers.

When asked to give their views about need for parental visits at school, another community opinion leader impeccably reported that:

.....Back in the old days, if your parent showed up to school it usually meant you were in trouble. But for kids whose parents regularly involve themselves in school activities, parental visits are a positive adjunct to the child's day. Teachers and school staff appreciate assistance with a myriad of duties that many parents can easily fulfil while also adding a new face to the mix. On a deeper level, involvement in this capacity shows your child and your child's teacher that you view education as an important aspect of life - one worth participating in. Involved parents learn the names of various children in their child's class. They have a sense of who their child's friends are, who may be causing them trouble and how their own child is getting along in the group. (IIFWR).

It can be deduced that learning how to share, cooperate, take turns and persevere within a safe learning environment, guided by professionals who have the children's best interests at heart. This is especially important for the first child, who may not be used to sharing with their siblings at home - while it can be a difficult lesson, it's so crucial to learn it early.

Asked on the critical need of going to school as a parent, another community opinion leader contended that:

Early childhood education is just the beginning of your child's educational career. Involving yourself in a classroom setting allows you to get a peek into the world of young children. You may wonder why your child cannot draw shapes like Jennifer or speak as clearly as James. Taking the time to objectively determine where your child stands in his development is a key factor in getting to know and appreciate your child for who he is. Discover his strengths, interests and areas that need refining. If your child is struggling with certain aspects of his education, it is an ideal time to discuss concerns with your child's teacher or doctor (ECDEC 2)

On the benefits of having a close watch on a child's education, ECDEC 1 affirmed that:

Establishing a social network is one benefit of parental involvement that should not be underestimated. Parents of other children of similar age provide solace, sources of information and family connections that can be lifelong. Kids are apt to become friends with parents who are on a friendly basis. Social connections between children provide security when transitions, such as kindergarten, occur. A child may be more willing to join a group or activity if he has a friend willing to participate. Parents who are involved in their child's schooling can oil the social cogs for their children by demonstrating friendly openings.

The perspectives of these community opinion leaders were that a child is able to develop both physically and socially and is able to identify a career one can pursue in life by the things the kids do at school. A parent only needs to visit and know the things that interest the child; you reinforce them even at home. A parent is able to know the friends of his/ her children at school. Socialization with people other than the child's family in a safe environment is an essential foundational element to the preschoolers. It is important to introduce our children to other children and support their transition into their own friendship groups since it helps children overcome shyness and gain self-confidence. If we leave this too long, we actually hinder their social development.

On the importance of early childhood learning to preschoolers, a community opinion leader further attested that:

Early childhood education is beneficial for children ages 3, 4 and 5. It's also often referred to as preschool, pre-kindergarten, day care, nursery school or early education. No matter the name, each serves the same purpose: to prepare young children for their transition into elementary school. Sending your preschool-age child to one of these early childhood education programs can make a positive impact on her and give her a head start toward a bright future.....(ECDEC 1)

Commenting on the same subject, one of the divisional ECDE Coordinators affirmed that:

The capacity of your child's brain to soak up new learning peaks when your child is 3 years old, according to Ready to Learn A,B,C,D.... At this point in your child's life, she has the highest potential for learning new things. While attending an early childhood education program, your child will improve her language and motor skills, while developing the learning and cognitive skills necessary to move on to primary school,.....(ECDEC 3).

The community opinion leaders are of the view that preschool centres are very critical at children's tender age. Preschoolers need to have well defined programmes and activities that are of interest to young ones. During preschool years, children explore at every opportunity to discover new experiences, new friends and new environments. Their minds are so lively and imaginative. As early childhood educators we need to balance this zest with the ability to listen, follow directions, attend to tasks and participate in group activities to develop the critical life skill of concentration.

These findings were supported by Gesare (2012) which pointed that various preschool activities that parents participate included; meeting attendance, communication with the school and volunteering influenced the academic performance of preschoolers. Parents were also seen to cultivate the desired behaviour of their children through either punishment, rewards and other methods of disciplining children to ensure that they become better performers in school and in life.

When asked about the health benefits of a childhood programme, ECDEC 3, had this to say:

Attending a quality early childhood education program can benefit your child's health as well. Approximately 60 to 70 percent of preschool-age children attend an early childhood programor child care. Studies show that being provided with quality care in ECDE programs can positively influence your child's learning and development. In addition, your child's socio-emotional development is less likely to be adversely affected, with a decreased chance of needing behavioral or mental health care once a child enters primary school.

ECDEC 2 coordinator being probed on the benefits of an ECDE programme reported thus:

One of the many benefits of your child receiving an early childhood education is the opportunity to participate in early childhood screening. This screening is provided for 3- to 5-year-olds and tests things like health, cognitive development, speech, vision, hearing, coordination, emotional skills and social skills, notes Education.com. Screenings can identify any development or health issues that need to be taken into consideration, to prevent learning delays. Children aren't the only ones that benefit from early childhood education programs, parents also benefit because an early childhood centre can act as a baby care centre for parents.....parents can use this time.....and have a higher income and better standards of living (ECDEC 2).

Some of the main points that can be seen at a glance is grasping the value of learning and education by setting an example as role models and by providing actual experiences. While parents will always be the most important influence on a child's early life, introducing them to a preschool environment provides them with a new perspective on the importance of education that will remain with them throughout their schooling journey. It also demonstrates that you value their education highly.

Asked on how early childhood education affects preschoolers education on the basis of Epstein's theory, one of the divisional coordinators of ECDE said that:

Experts say the first 8 years of life is the most critical period of human development. During this time, the brain undergoes its most dramatic growth and development. Children acquire the ability to think, speak, learn and reason. By age 6, they have acquired skills, expectancies and notions about their little world and the people in their lives. They are in

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tune with culture oriented attitudes as their personality patterns emerge. This is also a time when mental stimulation, nutrition, and emotional attachment all work together to shape their identity, coping skills, intelligence and problem solving abilities needed to help them grow into healthy, intelligent and positively adjusted adolescents and adults(ECDECI).

The coordinator also commented further that:

By the age of three, the brains of children are more than two and a half times more active than the brains of adults - and they stay that way throughout the first decade of life...”(ECDEC 1)

The coordinator also added that:

Early childhood education can impact a child's academic success and reduce incidences of crime and delinquency, Children enrolled in early childhood education programs may also receive direct benefits in behaviour, thought processes, socialization and learning capacity. Early education can increase cognitive skills in children..... Children who attend preschool showed more cognitive improvement than their peers without preschool (ECDECI).

When asked why the society should be concerned with ECDE, an ECDE Coordinator asserted that:

What is not in doubt is that children are an important part of society. They require a healthy, safe and nurturing environment with sufficient op-opportunities to stimulate and sustain their emotional, social, cognitive and spiritual development. Without an enabling environment at this formative stage of rapid and critical development, they face challenges in school at later stages and find it difficult to develop into well-rounded individuals as adults (ECDE 2).

When the coordinator was asked about the importance of preschoolers’ peers at school, the coordinator contended that:

Babies as young as six months old will smile and babble at each other. By age 2, toddlers will engage in parallel play, sitting by side but playing separately. Preschool children begin to form small social groups and friendships by age 4, although the groups and relationships are likely to be more fluid than those of older children. Your child learns a lot about behavior by imitating others, including members of her playgroup or preschool class (ECDECI).

Early-years lessons should contain themes and values that are broadly desirable as opposed to culturally specific. They should include sharing, helping friends, saying sorry and forgiving each other, making amends, accepting each other, team work, taking turns and being polite. In the classroom, activities can easily be developed to include turn-taking and sharing, and encourage polite and co-operative behaviour, but the teacher needs to provide support and encouragement. For parents, letting children talk politely with shop assistants and people in lifts and restaurants is a positive way to keep the context real for them. Also, encouraging positive behaviour when playing with friends or asking for something supports the process enormously(ECDEC2).

.....Children don’t learn these behaviours automatically, yet they are an essential part of being a well-rounded adult. Starting early and reinforcing this behaviour in and out of the classroom will yield positive benefits in the future(DL).

The coordinator also added that:

Children learn words from the people around them. Some children hear as few as 56 utterances and hour, while others hear over 700. Children who come from homes where there is little conversation benefit from being grouped with children who are more vocal. However, if your child already has a good vocabulary, peers with equal or better abilities will help him increase it.

This view was also supported by another respondent:

It is heart warming that most parents, even in the absence of material wealth, remain keen on securing the best future for their children..aaah by working together as leaders, parents and youth, our future can be secured by investing in this country’s greatest resource – our children. We can no longer consign them to the fringes of life - learning beneath trees, hungry, disheveled, orphaned, lonely, disease ridden and unloved. It’s therefore my fervent dream that, with your support, these models of best practice articulated here will be replicated across Kenya (CWR).

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In the same vein of thought, a coordinator said:

Children who have a large vocabulary and who are good communicators seem to be more accepted by their peers in a preschool or playgroup setting. Some emerge as leaders who usually have a group of friends who want to play with them. Other factors that influence a child's popularity include her ability to regulate emotional outbursts, pay attention to others and to divide her time between classmates. Silly behaviour, admired by classmates, can sometimes create problems for you or her teachers (ECDEC 1).

Another respondent shared the same sentiments thus:

When your child interacts well with other children in a preschool or playgroup setting, he can practice skills shown to him by adults, such as counting out items and writing pretend letters to others. He identifies being at school as a pleasant opportunity to see friends and to have fun. He has learned which behaviors will attract friends to him and which ones are likely to drive her friends away. Regular contact with peers in a group setting reduces the stress for both of you on his first day of kindergarten (DL3)

It's now universally acknowledged that the environment that we grow in, the warmth, care, attention and the responsiveness that we get as children determines our overall well being in adulthood... Hii ndio masomo tunataka kwa watoto wetu(this is the kind of education we recommend for our children) (AC) .

The respondent also added:

.....Long ago, African children were raised by and belonged to a community much wider than immediate family – an entire village if you may. But the hustles and individualistic tendencies of modern life have thrust the care of child entirely on their parents. This becomes a major challenge when, for one reason or other, parents are incapable of providing a suitable and holistic environment for nurturing children (AC)

In conclusion community opinion leaders were encouraging Holistic Development at preschool level both at home and at school. The approach taken to build a strong foundation for a child's emotional, social, physical and mental development, which will prepare them for a lifetime. Early childhood educators are trained in identifying areas where support is needed for each child and building programs and activities around these. Their peers are also extremely important in this regard, as preschoolers are usually helpful, cooperative and inclusive.

“There is increased understanding by families and communities that the future depends on the healthy development of their children and that this can only be achieved if they collectively play a pivotal role in them.” (AC).

When asked to talk about investing in preschooler education, an ECDE Coordinator asserted:

Investing in the child's development in their formative years is critical. This, however, goes beyond mere classroom learning. What is paramount is the use of approaches, both at home and in school, that ensure the holistic development to nurture an all around child.Yet children only smile when they are happy, fed, clothed, healthy, protected and loved. In this happy state, they play, learn and grow up into reliable and productive members of society. Like a seedling, their formative years are the most significant of their lives, for they determine who they will become as adults (ECDEC 1).

Asked on planning of ECDE Programme, he contended that:

The reality is that there is little planning to achieve age-appropriate ECDE services. Neither are there efforts to increase enrollment in preschools and ensure high retention and successful transition to primary schools. In short, the quality and sustainability of many ECDE initiatives in the country is bleak and weak. The most critical period of human development is in the first 8 years of life. During this time the brain undergoes its most dramatic growth and development and children acquire the ability to think, speak, reason and learn(ECDE 3).

When requested to comment on how the home environment is supposed to be:

.....most homes are broken, there is also child abuse and our children are unable to enjoy love and protection, food, clothing, shelter, medical care, sanitation and access to ECDE centres among many other basic needs and rights. While the Kenyan Government has made commendable efforts in the implementation of the Free Primary Education Programme thereby increasing enrolment of children in primary schools to unprecedented levels, preschools can provide the right environment for our children. (CWR).

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Asked to comment on child abuse, the respondent remarked:

..... *Child abuse revolves around neglect, child labour, defilement, forced marriage, sodomy, rape and the physical beating or infliction of pain among others. Children undergo abuse in physical or psychological ways. There are also cases where parents deny their children an education or enroll them late. These issues relate to child rights and when taking our children to ECDE Centre it is like they are being addressed (CWR).*

Asked to comment on the right environment for preschoolers, an ECDEC 3 had this to say:

Preschools provide the right environment for children's education....Given that the foundations of good health, personality and intellectual development are established during the early childhood years, this is precisely the time when children need the most care and support. Compared to the other stages of human development, early childhood (defined as the age between birth and eight years) is a period of great mental elasticity and environmental adaptation can best be natured in preschools. Unfortunately, this means that environmental deficiencies and negative experiences are more likely to cause "faulty" development with serious re-percussions later in life. Consequently, early childhood interventions programmes after the age of eight years may be too late and ineffectual, leading to educational wastage in terms of dropout, repetition and failure rates in primary and secondary school.

When asked to explain the specific ways of involving the community in preschoolers' education, an ECDE coordinator elaborated thus:

Community mobilization and sensitization on Child Rights and ECD issues to en-trench local ownership of the programme Initiating holistic interventions aimed at developing a 'complete' child, such as nutrition and health by creating support Services Provision of appropriate services for children below three years of age. Supporting the infrastructural development for the ECD Centres, Investing in income generating activities and mobilizing members of the community to become fully involved in ECD activities for sustainability (ECDEC 2).

Another coordinator added that:

.....*Awareness creation and capacity building for community leaders, volunteers and teachers on issues surrounding ECD, Identifying and making use of existing local resources, ideas and social networks to enhance ECD, Putting in place sustainability measures to ensure that the ECD programme continues without external support and Working on factors hindering smooth and successful transition of children from Home to ECD Centres and to primary schools(ECDEC3)*

Requested to elaborate the best ECDE practices for preschoolers, an ECDE Coordinator said thus:

The best ECDE practices include the pursuit of holistic child development, use of appropriate and effective teaching and learning methods, community resource mobilisation and integration of sustainability strategies in ECDE. Holistic child development initiatives are best interlinked so that each enriches and is strengthened by the other group of learners and a teacher with a piece of chalk in hand. In most rural settings, this could be under a tree or a poorly roofed room; the teacher is likely to be an untrained individual, with time on their hands but not sufficient skill, pay or motivation. In such scenarios, the child's early environmental experiences are hostile with caregivers are unable to inculcate crucial knowledge, skills and attitudes to children. Consequently, holistic child development – said to be anchored in the child's language and mental, physical, social, moral, spiritual, emotional and aesthetic development and perceptions - is impaired. As a result, and sadly so, an all-rounded and well developed adult does not emerge from the child (ECDEC2).

Another coordinator remarked:

Typically, parents take their children to educational centres to learn... have this holistic development which include music, brainstorming, cooperative learning, physical skills, mental skills ...and emotional development. Yet for all their curiosity, a child's attention span is exasperatingly short, and they could be off and skipping Play is the first and most important mode of instruction for young learners. When properly thought out and directed, play helps children to develop self confidence and learn to collaborate with others to solve problems. (ECDEC1).

From these statements it can be inferred that pre-schoolers learning at home, perform well. These findings concurred with Odhiambo (2005) who also found that home parenting environment was as important as what goes on in the school. The study further found that parents and teachers have a crucial role to play to make sure that every child becomes a high

achiever. Parental influence has been identified as an important factor affecting pupil achievement. Similarly, Bitengo (2009) revealed that fathers' involvement in their children's education was significantly related to children's performance at preschool.

When requested to comment on the best practice at preschool level, an ECDE coordinator remarked thus:

Every parent knows this. Young children, when they can, feed nearly all the time. This is the right thing because at his stage, their bodies and brains are growing exponentially - like beanstalks. Unfortunately, due to unfavourable socio-economic conditions among many Kenyan families and communities, a healthy meal for many a school-going child is a pipedream. Sadly, without proper nutrition, their growth is impaired, reducing their ability to concentrate and learn effectively in school. KCDF and their partners, therefore, initiated school feeding programmes supported either by donors or the parents and guardians of children in ECDE centres (ECDEC2).

Commenting on the same theme of ECDE best practice, a respondent said:

The church ensures that all schools teach Christian Education to the children in addition to reading, numeracy and writing. The curriculum included, but is not limited to, Pastoral Programme Instruction and Christian Religious Education that are taught directly and are on the timetable; daily Bible lessons that teach memory verses, songs and Biblical stories; outreach programmes involving children, vocational Bible study and camp meetings; moral uprightness and train children importance of Christian values; prayers every day; and counselling sessions regularly to assist in good character formation. This makes it necessary to employ Christians particularly born again Christians. The languages used in teaching is vernacular, English and Kiswahili. However, English and Kiswahili are given prominence; English is the most common language in use followed by Kiswahili with vernacular rarely used (DL3).

When probed on suitable home or school environment that they recommend for preschoolers, ECDE Coordinators remarked:

By providing Day Care Centres.....the reality is that mothers, the principle care-givers for children below the age of three years in most traditional societies, also deal with many other household chores leaving little or no time to dedicate to the young ones. This necessitates provision of day care centres to ensure that children receive care as their mothers engage in other economic and social activities..... Creating a child friendly space (ECDEC 3).

On the concern of having a good environment for preschoolers, an ECDE Coordinator reported that:

No we are going inclusive education way....Caring for the Orphaned and Vulnerable While the number of orphaned and vulnerable children is on the rise – mainly as a result of HIV/AIDS – care and support systems remain weak because of dwindling social networks in families and communities. Tragedy is that some children are orphaned quite young, making them miserable and vulnerable to abuse. From lack of adequate food, psychological support and care and access to school, their world crumbles at a critical stage of their development leaving them with – in the absence of proper intervention - lifelong scars (ECDEC1).

Teachers also want their students to reflect on their lessons, but with young children especially, this is a learned skill. At home, Setting aside a few minutes at the end of a lesson to ask children what they liked best, or what helped them, is always a good idea. It is most beneficial when followed up with 'Why?'. For very young children, providing them with pictorial prompts that illustrate feelings – fun, exciting, interesting, easy, hard and boring,.... – can often help elicit responses. Using crafts or activity books to prompt reactions is also useful. Reflection will later build into self-reflection if the habit is reinforced, enabling children to recognise the value in the activities we set them (CWR).

For very young children, providing them with pictorial prompts that illustrate feelings – fun, exciting, interesting, easy, hard and boring, etc. – can often help elicit responses. Using crafts or activity books to prompt reactions is also useful. Reflection will later build into self-reflection if the habit is re-enforced, enabling children to recognize the value in the activities we set them at home (DL).

Valuing difference and diversity are crucial to a child's early development. Early childhood education serves to guide children to appreciate and accept differences and become well-rounded contributors to society. It is important that children understand that everyone is unique and special in their own way with their own culture, beliefs and ethnicity. Preschool is so much more than playing. While the basic educational benefits of preschool such as literacy and numeracy are tangible, the advances children achieve towards becoming well-rounded individuals are truly invaluable

On parental volunteering services at school, the community opinion leaders had this to say:

.....Parents and teachers can both share valuable insights into a child's personality. Teachers can pass on information about how the child copes with a classroom environment, and additional strengths and skills which they have uncovered through various activities. Teachers can keep parents informed about the syllabus, including themes, which can be easy to reinforce at home. Parents can easily present the theme of helping friends, for example, by introducing a book, cartoon or song on the topic, role-playing with toys, or setting up a play date with another child (ECDEC3)

It's most effective when teachers and parents speak to each other face-to-face, but occasionally emailing parents with brief feedback can help maintain the relationship, and encourage a more meaningful exchange of views. Keeping the lines of communication open for queries or information from parents helps make the relationship more equitable, so that the information isn't going one way, as often happens (DL)

..... one of the most important ways to develop and maintain a good parent-teacher relationship is simply by showing appreciation for each other. If a child sees a parent and teacher thanking each other, the co-operative aspect is reinforced. It's also valuable to have your child thank the teacher, and for a teacher to thank the children for coming (AC).

5. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary of perspectives of community opinion leaders on Epstein's theoretical lens of Parental Involvement in preschoolers' education:

The purpose of the study was to explore the perspectives of selected stakeholders on Epstein's theoretical lens to parental involvement in Pre-schoolers education in Kenya. The research question of the study was:

How do the Community Opinion Leaders perceive Epstein's theoretical lens of Parental Involvement in preschoolers' education?

Based on the fact that community opinion leaders had perspectives on Epstein's theoretical lens of Parental Involvement in preschoolers' education, this study found out that:

Socialization with people other than the child's family in a safe environment is an essential foundational element to the preschoolers. It is important to introduce our children to other children and support their transition into their own friendship groups since it helps children overcome shyness and gain self-confidence. If we leave this too long, we actually hinder their social development.

Learning how to share, cooperate, take turns and persevere within a safe learning environment, guided by professionals who have the children's best interests at heart. This is especially important for the first child, who may not be used to sharing with their siblings at home - while it can be a difficult lesson, it's so crucial to learn it early.

Encouraging Holistic Development at preschool level both at home and at school. The approach taken to build a strong foundation for a child's emotional, social, physical and mental development, which will prepare them for a lifetime. Early childhood educators are trained in identifying areas where support is needed for each child and building programs and activities around these. Their peers are also extremely important in this regard, as preschoolers are usually helpful, cooperative and inclusive.

Grasping the value of learning and education by setting an example as role models and by providing actual experiences. While parents will always be the most important influence on a child's early life, introducing them to a preschool environment provides them with a new perspective on the importance of education that will remain with them throughout their schooling journey. It also demonstrates that you value their education highly.

Teaching the value of respect for others at home and at school. This is not limited to people and belongings, but can also mean respect for their environment, both immediate and global. There is no better place to learn this virtue than in a hectic preschool environment, where everything is shared and civility and manners are both taught and learned organically.

Demonstrating and instilling the importance of teamwork that can teach respect for the opinions of others, listening, cooperation and equality. Many preschool activities are centered around teamwork for this very reason; a person who learns how to work in a team at an early age will ultimately be more socially attuned and more employable!

It is important that early childhood educators and parents work together to develop resilience in children as early as possible. By creating a consistent, secure and fair social environment, with clear expectations and predictable consequences, children can develop skills in managing themselves and their emotions. It's a teacher's job to provide a challenging environment where children can learn through first hand experiences. They may experience bumps, bruises or losing a game from time-to-time, but this is the foundation for building coping strategies for greater challenges in life.

During preschool years, children explore at every opportunity to discover new experiences, new friends and new environments. Their minds are so lively and imaginative. As early childhood educators we need to balance this zest with the ability to listen, follow directions, attend to tasks and participate in group activities to develop the critical life skill of concentration.

Every day as adults, we encounter situations where our patience is tested. Children need opportunities to be involved in an abundance of social experiences, where they can explore and practice the social skill of patience. By teaching through examples, role modeling and social experiences, children are able to develop their patience and learn to wait for their turn. Examples from the preschool setting include sharing a teacher's attention, a toy, the playground or waiting in line for a game.

Community opinion leaders were of a strong sense of wellbeing to provide children with confidence, optimism and self-esteem which will encourage children to explore their talents, skills and interests. Positive interactions with other children and teachers will promote a positive, healthy and secure view of themselves that will allow them to approach situations and problems confidently throughout their lives.

Valuing difference and diversity are crucial to a child's early development. Early childhood education serves to guide children to appreciate and accept differences and become well-rounded contributors to society. It is important that children understand that everyone is unique and special in their own way with their own culture, beliefs and ethnicity. Preschool is so much more than playing. While the basic educational benefits of preschool such as literacy and numeracy are tangible, the advances children achieve towards becoming well-rounded individuals are truly invaluable.

5.2 Conclusion of the study findings on perspectives of community opinion leaders on Epstein's theoretical lens of Parental Involvement in preschoolers' education:

The community opinion leaders had varying perception on the application of Epstein's theoretical lens of parental involvement in preschoolers learning-home parenting of preschoolers, home to school and school to home communication, volunteering services, learning at home and collaborating in of community resources and services, and parents being involved in decision making of the preschoolers. However most of the community opinion leaders were of the view that home learning environmental was not being provided.

5.3 Recommendations on Perspectives of Community opinion leaders on Epstein's theoretical lens of Parental Involvement in preschoolers' education:

In light of the findings that community opinion leaders viewed that no proper preschoolers learning was going on at home, this study recommends that:

The school community should be made aware by the government on the importance of supporting their pre-school children in terms of providing for them basic needs, their support when doing school work activities and counter signing their school work. This helps in monitoring the progress of the child closely.

The school community should be encouraged through various programs on participation in education welfare of their preschool learners. Awareness programs for parents should be organized informing them on the benefit of their participation in education activities for their children.

The ministry of education should formulate appropriate educational policies that address the best practices that should be executed by community opinion leaders at preschools.

The county Government should also consider equipping public ECDE Centres with relevant and adequate learning and teaching materials, employing qualified ECDE teachers to implement the best practices in public ECDE Centres

5.4. Suggestion for further study

The following areas have been suggested for further studies:

- i. A study on effective parental home determinants of preschoolers learning would expound the understanding of the present study.
- ii. A study on factors influencing parental decisions making in preschoolers education in Kenya.
- iii. A study on modern home parenting styles of preschoolers in Kenya.

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