

ENHANCING PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT CENTRES

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ABSTRACT

The discontinuation of government subsidies led to ECD centre privatisation and the rise of community-driven ECD ones, raising concerns about teaching quality and staff qualifications. The study aimed to create a framework for enhancing parental involvement by incorporating insights from both parents and teachers. Theoretical perspectives by Goodall and Montgomery, Vincent, and Bryk highlighted parenting's significance, socio-economic influence on parental agency, and the need for trust between parents and teachers. The researchers selected two early childhood development centres and asked teachers and parents to participate. Qualitative research methods, including narrative inquiry, vignettes, participatory reflection and action research, and thematic analysis, were used to gather and analyse data from parents and teachers. The findings informed the development of the author's Framework for the Enhancement of Parental Involvement in Childhood (EPIC), incorporating the key elements identified in previous research, namely parental agency, relational trust, and parental involvement. Parental agency is a characteristic that can be strengthened when teachers provide encouragement and insight into how to engage the child in a meaningful and developmentally appropriate manner. This research led to the design of a framework for enhancing parental involvement by considering the perspectives of both parents and teachers. It is particularly applicable to the pre-primary and foundation phases of preparatory schools where parental involvement is significant. It also benefits the training of prospective teachers, especially those specialising in Early Childhood Education.

Keywords: Early Childhood Development; Parental agency; Relational trust; Framework

INTRODUCTION

Parental involvement must be enhanced to improve parental agency and build a partnership between parents and teachers in early childhood development centres that cater for children between the ages of birth to four years. The best period to positively influence a child's development is within the first one thousand days of their life. The early childhood development sector is essential to a child's development, as it safeguards the child's well-being (Banerjee et al. 2019). Parental agency and relational trust must be formed between parents and teachers to ensure the child's optimal development. Parents and teachers can only develop a partnership through trust-building actions, which lead to relational trust between the two parties. Parents and teachers must develop relational trust to have a partnership that benefits a child's development (Bryk 2003). It has been postulated that parental involvement is successful when seen as a collaboration between the parents and teachers (Bunijevac 2017). Parents and teachers are likely to understand each other's goals for the child and, therefore, work more easily together to develop the young child after establishing relational trust (Bryk 2003).

LITERATURE OVERVIEW

Parental involvement is a complex concept that requires in-depth perspectives. Antipkina and Ledlow (2020) described parental involvement as the continuum of parenting that represents both high and low levels of involvement, while Wilder (2014) characterised parental involvement as parent-child communication, checking of homework activities, education expectations, communication with the school and teacher, participation with the school, reading, personal attitudes and parenting styles. While an interest in the child's life may be seen as involvement, it should extend to participating in activities with the child to build a quality parent-child relationship (Hara and Burke 1998). According to Berthelsen and Walker (2008), parental involvement is uniquely affected by the parents' beliefs of how involved they should be and their confidence to become involved in their children's lives. Parents are also affected by their self-efficacy beliefs about how effective they will be in helping their children's cognitive development.

Parental engagement can be defined as the beliefs and attitudes of parents who support their children through activities that aid their development (Weiss et al. 2014). Parents can engage with their children by reading to them, playing with them, having open dialogue and creating a positive learning environment for the child. Such a positive environment also impacts the communication between the parent and teacher (Diana et al. 2021).

The South Australian Department for Education (Department of Education 2021) defines parental engagement as parents knowing what their child is learning at school and identifying how education can also be brought into the home. Parents are also responsible for helping the teacher to know and understand their child so that they can help the child thrive at school. Parents engaged in their child's learning are more likely to have children motivated to thrive in the school environment and have greater confidence and stronger relationships (Wittkowski, Garrett, Calam, & Weisberg, 2017).

Parental engagement is necessary to ensure developmental learning in a child's life. It cannot be ticked off as completed, as it consistently evolves through the parenting continuum. Teachers and schools face an uphill battle to encourage parents to become engaged in their child's learning, as many parents either do not realise their value in their child's learning or expect teachers to take the lead with their child's

Early childhood development

According to the Department of Social Development (2006), early childhood development can be viewed as the inclusive approach to "programmes and policies for children from birth to nine years of age with the active participation of their parents." The South African National Curriculum Framework for Early Childhood Education defines ECD as the advances in the physical, emotional, moral, mental, spiritual and social aspects of development in a child between birth and nine years of age (Department of Basic Education 2015).

Parent-teacher partnership

Many factors have a positive influence on the teacher and parent. The behaviours and characteristics of both the teacher and the parent, for example, are important factors in this relationship (Grace and Gerdes 2019). If a teacher's and a parent's characteristics clash too much, then the relationship will not be conducive to the child's optimal development. Efforts made by teachers to speak to parents and discuss the learner's needs affect parental engagement positively. If parents are sent messages encouraging participation, they may be more inclined to engage due to the good parent-teacher relationship. Another factor that may influence the quality of the parent-teacher relationship is the school's policy regarding the frequency and type of contact that a parent and teacher should have (Grace and Gerdes 2019). When teachers provide parents with necessary information about the child's development, the parents are better equipped to become involved in the child's development. A parent receiving such

information may feel that they are included, and therefore needed, in the child's positive development. A parent's aspirations for the child are just as important as the teacher's expectations of the child within the classroom. Parents and teachers should emphasise the child's efforts within the learning environment instead of the outcome, increasing the child's self-efficacy and positively influencing their development (Flynn 2007).

Enhancing parental involvement

In order for schools to succeed in raising the levels of parental engagement in their child's learning, more research is needed. Such research will inform schools, teachers, and parents about parental involvement and how to encourage parents to be more involved with their children. Parental involvement is a concept that has been focused on for some time. Janssen and Vandenberg's study (2018) found that child-centred learning lies at the centre of parental involvement. They also found that parental involvement served to monitor a child's developmental progress and provided parenting support from the teachers at the ECD centre. Parental involvement can be regarded as both instrumental and democratic. While instrumental parental involvement refers to fostering a child's learning and development, democratic parental involvement refers to conversations about how children can realise their early developmental goals through activities. The parent-teacher partnership benefits the child's overall development and the parent's social and emotional well-being. Teachers may support parents when a heavy burden is experienced, for example, by providing opportunities for the parent to become part of the community and receive the support of others in similar circumstances (Janssen and Vanderbroeck 2018).

Finnish teachers emphasise the value of parental involvement and the difficulties in building it. Research by Heikka, Kahila and Suhonen (2020) found that individual compatibility was mentioned over fifty times in their interviews. Language and cultural barriers were evident as some of the most difficult issues for parents and teachers to overcome for an optimal partnership, as were factors such as teacher attitude, administrative obstacles, regulations and unclear purpose of an ECE centre. Teachers also felt they were "bothering" parents when asking for their involvement, as parents paid to send their children to a development centre. Teachers often view these issues as external to themselves instead of reflecting on their own practices (Heikka et al. 2020).

Teacher training

While family involvement has been well investigated, many researchers agree that teachers feel unprepared to develop and sustain meaningful relationships with parents (Epstein and Sanders 2006; Hiatt-Michael 2001). Although new teachers often feel superior to parents because of their knowledge of early childhood education, they also think they have received inadequate preparation to work with diverse families. New teachers have pre-existing role expectations about how structured their interactions with parents should be. Recent research suggests that teachers in training should learn how to collaborate with families to maximise resources for early childhood learning (Allen et al. 2007; Kyle et al. 2002). Regular two-way communication is vital for active family-school connections, and a teacher's commitment to this communication is paramount to how this is implemented in a school (Amatea, Micon and McCarthy 2012).

For teachers to succeed in creating an optimal environment for parental involvement, they must make good use of the expertise in each family by reaching out to families and offering support. Teachers must do this while maintaining a balance with their classroom duties. It was found that teachers are motivated by their knowledge of the benefits of parental involvement and how this impacts a child's education. When teachers are exposed to parental involvement coursework, they enter the workplace confidently, supporting parental involvement. After such coursework, teachers are better equipped to engage in multiple types of parental involvement (Brown, Hilukiluah, and Kambonde 2014).

Research has long confirmed the importance of family engagement for the benefit of the child's social, behavioural, academic and emotional development. However, teachers are still not being adequately trained in facilitating family engagement. This inadequacy in training has long been discussed, but little has changed (Chavkin and Williams 1988; Epstein and Sanders 2006; Weiss et al. 2014). Teachers are greatly affected by their own preconceptions about family engagement; therefore, they must be helped to understand their role in working with families. Teachers need to understand how a parent can positively support a child's development and look past their own judgements about the parent's ability (Sheridan et al. 2019).

For parent-teacher relationships to improve, teachers must know how to communicate effectively, plan in collaboration with parents and create a sense of continuity between home and school. Many teachers do not realise their role in inspiring such involvement by promoting activities leading to better parent and child engagement. Numerous teachers still report that despite some training being brought into programmes, they feel unprepared to work with

families. Training interventions such as field experience have been introduced in training programmes, but there has been little systematic research to evaluate training effects based on the method through which the training was delivered (Sheridan et al. 2019).

Parental agency

Agency has been previously understood as a person's rational, purposeful and goal-orientated behaviours. However, a person's emotionality also influences their agency at any given moment. Vincent (Vincent 2001). addressed parental agency as the parent's role in the child's development and education. Parental agency is important for supporting children who exhibit problematic behaviour, such as social and emotional development difficulties, regulating impulses and self-regulation in different situations. It is an important goal to have parental agency within the parent-teacher partnership to ensure the partnership's success. Parental agency leads to a successful relationship between educational partners and also promotes the child's welfare and development in the early childhood centre. In the scope of this research, parental agency will encompass parents' obligation towards their child's development by engaging with relevant role players (Rautamies et al 2021).

Relational trust

Cranston (2011) described relational trust as the extent to which respect for each group's expectations and obligations towards one another is evident. Principals in this study described relational trust as a fixed social condition that serves as the foundation for adult relationships and professional learning communities. Relational trust can be considered the glue that binds teachers and parents to the joint purpose of promoting child development. Relational trust can be defined as the interactive exchanges that occur in a group setting (El Education 2021), and in this research, it is viewed as an integral part of the development of parental agency while enhancing parental involvement. For this study, relational trust will be seen as the glue that holds parents and teachers together to maintain effective communication for the child's benefit.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Goodall and Montgomery (2014), Vincent (2001), and Bryk (2003) developed the theoretical basis utilised for this research investigation. Goodall and Montgomery explored parenting as a continual and ever-changing idea. According to these writers, parenting takes place on several levels, which might lead to optimum parental participation in the child's development. Parents

are most involved in their child's development when they have formed a relationship with the school. Parents are more prepared to participate in their child's growth as a result of their contact with the instructor. Vincent addressed the question of parental agency, proposing that the parent's socio-economic status defines three degrees of agency. Regardless of these levels, Vincent considered the parent as the child's first educator, with significant responsibility for the child's beneficial development. Bryk addressed relational trust in the classroom setting. They viewed administrators, teachers, and parents as mutually reliant. Relational trust is only developed via repeated encounters between the parent and the teacher.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research approach involving two early childhood education centres where both teachers and parents were invited to participate. Nine teachers were engaged in developing ideas and plans to address identified issues through participatory reflection and action research. This research method was chosen to enhance teachers' professional practice by creating a framework that fosters a positive relationship between teachers and parents, ultimately benefiting the child.

In addition, seven parents took part in individual interviews with the researcher. Vignettes were shared during these interviews to gain deeper insights into the parents' perspectives on parental involvement. The parent participants were asked to share their narratives regarding their relationship with their child's teacher and to provide suggestions on how teachers can improve relationships among parents.

In adherence to ethical considerations, researchers obtained clearance from the Ethics Committee at the University of Pretoria's Faculty of Education. The study followed the guidelines of informed consent and confidentiality. Additionally, written research permission was granted by the Gauteng Department of Social Development. Participants were fully informed about the study's purpose and demonstrated informed consent by signing a consent form before data collection commenced. Confidentiality, privacy, and anonymity were ensured by using pseudonyms/codes for personal information. Participants were referred to by their pseudonym from the moment of transcribing the interview to ensure that their names were protected at all times. The parent pseudonyms can be viewed under the heading: Demographics.

Research analysis

Narrative analysis was used to analyse the data collected from the participants within the research study. An in-depth understanding of the data is developed through complete immersion in the data by slowly reading and rereading the transcripts until the themes are evident (Cowger and Tritz 2021). Through the immersion in data, the following themes of parental agency and relational trust will be discussed.

FINDINGS

This section presents the findings relating to parental agency and relational trust from interviews and participatory workshops with parents and teachers. Participants shared insights on parental involvement, discussing its advantages, disadvantages, and suggestions for enhancement.

Demographics

Tables 1 and 2 present the demographic details of the parents and the teachers.

Parent Participants

Table 1: Demographics, parent and teacher participants

	Parent Code	Ethnicity	Number of children	Ages of a child(ren)	Employment
1	Parent A	African	1	3 years	Non-disclosure
2	Parent B	African	2	3 and 8 years	Mining Industry
3	Parent C	White	2	2 and 4 years	Engineer
4	Parent D	African	3	3, 5, 9 years	Internal Auditor
5	Parent E	African	2	3 and 22 years	Product Manager
6	Parent F	White	1	3 years	Manager
7	Parent G	Indian	1	3 years	Manager

Source: Author (2023)

Table 2: Demographics, teacher participants

Code	Ethnicity of teachers	Age of teacher participants	Teaching Experience
School Z			
Teacher 1	White	60	21 years
Teacher 2	African	44	16 years
Teacher 3	Indian	34	3 years
Teacher 4	White	32	9 years
School Y			
Teacher 5	White	42	18 years
Teacher 6	White	32	9 years
Teacher 7	Indian	26	3 years
Teacher 8	White	31	8 years
Teacher 9	Indian	31	8 years
School Z			
Teacher 1	White	60	21 years
Teacher 2	African	44	16 years
Teacher 3	Indian	34	3 years
Teacher 4	White	32	9 years
School Y			
Teacher 5	White	42	18 years
Teacher 6	White	32	9 years
Teacher 7	Indian	26	3 years
Teacher 8	White	31	8 years
Teacher 9	Indian	31	8 years
School Z			
Teacher 1	White	60	21 years
Teacher 2	African	44	16 years
Teacher 3	Indian	34	3 years
Teacher 4	White	32	9 years
School Y			
Teacher 5	White	42	18 years
Teacher 6	White	32	9 years
Teacher 7	Indian	26	3 years
Teacher 8	White	31	8 years
Teacher 9	Indian	31	8 years

Source: Author (2023)***Parental Agency***

Parent participants shared their views on parental agency by reflecting on a vignette. After listening to the vignette (read by the researcher), the parents were asked to think about the parent's behaviour in the story and share their views. The parents could openly share their opinions on the vignette without concerns about how they may be implicated. The parents' reflections led to the following data:

Parents A, C, E, and G

Parents A, C, E, and G all had similar opinions about the vignette that was shared with them. They all disagreed with the lifestyle described in the vignette:

“The child is in school for too long, and the parents should find alternative working arrangements. The parents delegate too much responsibility to raise their child to the school” (Parent A).

“I think it's a nice situation. Good recommendations came from the teacher and one-on-one time is not always possible” (Parent C).

“The parents need to devote more time to the child's development ... Learning doesn't need to be formal at home, and I agree with what the teacher told them” (Parent E).

“The teacher provided appropriate activities, but the parents need to be more involved. The parents need to work in partnership with the teacher to benefit the child” (Parent G).

Parents A and G took a similar view of the vignette; they agreed that the hypothetical parents should re-evaluate their career choices and spend more time with their family. They also felt they would encourage these parents to work with the teacher to ensure positive development.

While Parents C and E agreed with Parents A and G that the hypothetical parents were not handling the situation correctly, they also felt that it was a fair and realistic scenario in which the parents felt there was insufficient time during the week. They both thought that the activity ideas from the teacher were appropriate and well-suited to their individual needs. Parents C and E would encourage the parents in this scenario to communicate more with the teacher about their challenges to receive adequate support. Parent E stated that she could relate to the vignette and appreciated the reminder from this hypothetical story that she could engage with her child through daily routine activities.

Parent B

Parent B pointed out that parenting was a subjective experience and that something might work for one family but not for another:

“Parenting is a highly subjective experience, and involvement is relative; however, they should be more engaging with their child” (Parent B).

Parent B acknowledged that families differed and that it was necessary to be an engaging parent. While parental agency might be a relative experience, there should be some responsibility for the parent to be engaged to benefit the young child. Parent B's opinion of the vignette was that the parents should be more involved and communicate more with the teacher to help their child.

Parent D

Like Parent E, Parent D also agreed with the parents in the vignette that it was difficult to complete learning activities with the child during the busy week and even on the weekends when they were catching up on chores:

“I agree with the parents. It is very hard to fit formal learning time with my child during the week ... but the teacher had good suggestions about including the child in the daily chores” (Parent D).

The parent reflected on the recommendations made by the teacher in the vignette and how she could include her child in daily chores like cooking and cleaning. Teachers should remember that parents are busy and unable to help their children develop formally. Teachers should, therefore, make realistic suggestions to the parent about engagement to benefit the child's development. Parent D agreed with the story. She appreciated that the teacher gave the parents in the vignette alternative developmental activities as opposed to formal ones.

Parent F

Parent F appreciated the teacher's guidance of the parents in the story. She expressed dissatisfaction with how the parents chose to engage with their child:

“The teacher gave appropriate support. The parents need to involve the child more in the daily lives and not only buy educational toys” (Parent F).

Parent F felt that it was important to note that not every activity done with a child had to be formal or one-on-one. The child could also take part in daily life. She wanted the parents in the story to engage with their children more through daily interactions. Parent F noted that the teacher could have told the parents what the meeting was about beforehand so that they would be prepared for it.

DISCUSSION

The teacher participants and the parents held similar views about relational trust. They felt it was a delicate characteristic to manage and, therefore, took time to develop. Many teachers also indicated that trust was initially assumed and had to be developed continually through consistent communication with and feedback to the parent. While trust between a parent and teacher sometimes develops naturally and quickly, it could also take time to develop and might require intentional action by the teacher. Starr (2017) mentioned that for teachers to secure relational trust with parents, they should ensure that their first contact with the parent was positive, where communication was straightforward and linguistic and cultural differences were accommodated as far as possible.

Teacher participants felt that their trust in the parents was expressed verbally through constructive conversations. They validated the parents' experiences and provided resources when necessary to assist the parents in areas where they might not feel comfortable. They also felt that trust and respect were communicated in the way they created a positive environment for their children and showed genuine care for the children. Starr (2017) indicated that teachers should provide a list of skills the children had to develop throughout the year. This list gave the parents a development roadmap that might encourage them to help their child develop these skills in the home environment. Teachers could also set up a classroom volunteer schedule for parents to sign up to assist in the classroom and experience the classroom environment with their children. This experience would help build the relationship between parent and child. While the teacher participants at School Y mentioned that they did try to involve parents in the school by creating inclusive activities, neither School Z nor Y had such a parent volunteer schedule for parents to help in the classroom. As Starr (2017) indicated, this could significantly increase relational trust and parent agency.

The goal of enhancing parental involvement for greater parental agency and relational trust is to consider the varying perspectives of parental involvement and the relationship between the parent and teacher. This relationship is often a subjective experience but one with commonality. All participants agreed that communication from the teacher, which promotes relational trust, aids their engagement with their young child.

Teachers viewed parental agency as parents taking responsibility for their child's development and actively participating in developmentally appropriate activities. Relational trust can be regarded as the cornerstone of a successful parent-teacher relationship. The data examined showed that parents and teachers shared similar information and feelings regarding

their role in their child's development, as Bryk (2003) research also found in the case of personal regard between the parent and teacher.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the research on enhancing parental involvement for greater parental agency and relational trust was a success and yielded many insightful results. Parental agency is a characteristic that can be strengthened when teachers provide encouragement and insight into how to engage the child in a meaningful and developmentally appropriate manner. Parent participants in this research study agreed it is helpful when teachers provide ideas, as parents may not know the best way to help their children. When teachers provide regular feedback to parents, they feel empowered in their decisions and activities in the home environment. These decisions and activities assist with increasing parental agency, as Vincent suggested.

Bryk shared many great insights into the concept of relational trust and its multifaceted concept encompassing respect, personal regard, core competency and personal integrity. It is a major factor in parents feeling they can approach the teacher to discuss concerns about their developing child. Teachers should be mindful when meeting the parents at the start of a school year, as this is where they set their boundaries and establish relational trust with the parents. Teachers should create an environment where communication is fluid, active and open. Parents desire a transparent relationship with the teacher whereby difficulties are discussed immediately instead of waiting for an official meeting time.

Framework for parental involvement

Using the elements of parental agency by Vincent, relational trust by Bryk and parental involvement by Goodall and Montgomery alongside the findings discovered in this research study, a framework named the Framework for the Enhancement of Parental Involvement in Childhood (EPIC) was created. The EPIC framework is designed to be a sliding scale that allows increases in the elements of parental agency, relational trust, and involvement to lead to increases in overall parental engagement with a young child. The term childhood is used as it is a recommendation that this framework should be applied to more instances of parental involvement within the education sector than only the early childhood years.

At the lower end of the EPIC framework, the elements of parental involvement, parental agency and relational trust are severely lacking. This means that there is poor parental

involvement with children's school and teachers, as well as their schooling, such as an interest in what they are learning, as well as a lack of parental support during homework activities.

Parental agency is also low as the parents do not show an interest in the child's developmental well-being through their lack of engagement in developmentally appropriate activities (Vincent 2001). The relational trust between the parent and the teacher is non-existent as there is no evidence of either the parent or the teacher communicating with each other for the child's benefit; both parties are seemingly closed off to one another as little to no communication occurs other than exchanging pleasantries. The parent and teacher are not communicating their concerns or positive information about the child. Thus, the parent is at the bottom of the EPIC framework. Because the teacher is the first contact for the parent with regard to their child's development, the teacher needs to adjust their communication to help the parent become more involved by helping them understand their role in their child's development. While the parent may seem closed off to the teacher, this may be due to their own experiences in education; thus, it is the role of the teacher to help reassure the parent that they want the best for their child (Bryk 2003). The teachers' actions need to be intentional and noticeable by the parents so that there may be a noticeable effect of parental agency.

On the second level of the EPIC framework, there is some evidence of parental involvement; however, neither parental agency nor relational trust lacks consistency in being effective. Due to their interdependence, parental agency and relational trust may also be equally low in relation to parental involvement. The teacher should intentionally deploy activities that encourage relational trust, such as speaking to the parent in non-formal situations and sending regular updates about their child, focusing on the positive as far as possible (Bryk 2003). Once a better sense of relational trust has been established, the teacher can invite the parent to see the developmental activities done in the classroom (Vincent 2001). In this instance, the teacher can also help the parent understand their child's main developmental goals and provide examples of activities they can do with their child.

On the third level of the sliding scale, there is more harmony between the three elements, indicating that there may be enhanced parental involvement occurring in the home, which lends itself to an improved sense of parental agency and relational trust. However, there remains much room for growth as the teacher seeks to further develop parental agency and relational trust to benefit the child's development. The teacher should reflect on the practices to which the parent responds well and then utilise more similar tools to increase the parental agency and relational trust the parent experiences. The teacher may provide the parent with an overview of their child's developmental focus points and some activities they may complete

together at home (Vincent 2001). As found within the research, the teacher should also share ideas of how the parent can engage with their child through daily activities such as chores within the home. The teacher can engage with the parent on a weekly or bi-weekly basis in the form of short, informal updates regarding the child's progress (Bryk 2003).

Lastly, at the top of the EPIC framework, a prosperous relationship between the teacher and the parent can be seen as the parent exhibits high levels of parental agency with their child and relational trust with the teacher. While the relationship is optimal, neither the teacher nor the parent should become complacent within the relationship; instead, they should be continuously working together to benefit the young child. This stage should be the goal for all teachers to achieve this state with the parents of the children within their classroom.

Figure 1 conceptualises the EPIC framework, depicting key features. The sliding scale effect can be viewed to understand the information discussed.

Recommendations for the EPIC framework

The findings of this research lead to several recommendations and implications that range from communication, application, workshops, further research and higher education training. These recommendations are discussed below.

Open communication

The strongest recommendation arising from this research is that parents and teachers should operate on an open communication basis where certain boundaries are set and adhered to without prejudicing the benefit to the child. Open communication has been seen as a major influencer in the enhancement of parental involvement (Waterford.org, 2018). Communication between the parent and the teacher is not always obvious; it may be simply a friendly smile and a welcoming demeanour that makes the parent feel comfortable when entering the child's classroom.

Workshops for current ECD teachers

For the enhancement of parental involvement to be effective in ECD, current teachers should receive professional development training on this topic in which the Bishop-Kapp EPIC framework is explained as well as the important role they can play in helping parents to become engaged in their child's development. Such a workshop could instruct the teachers on the theories of Goodall and Montgomery (2014), Vincent (2001) and Bryk and Schneider (2003). This will help bridge the gap between what is known and what is unknown about parental involvement.

Recommendations for policy

The Bishop-Kapp EPIC framework can also be applied in the Foundation Phase sector of a primary school as parental involvement is still vital to the child's development there. First, a research study can take place where the researcher assesses the current levels of parental involvement in the Foundation Phase at a school and then hosts a participatory action and reflection workshop with the teachers where these strategies may be discussed. The function shift of ECD to the Department of Education could use this EPIC framework as an action plan for ensuring that all teachers will be trained in understanding the importance of forming partnerships with parents in the optimal development of young children.

Recommendations for Higher Education and Training

It is recommended that the Bishop-Kapp EPIC framework be used in training prospective teachers, especially Foundation Phase teachers. This will help develop a new culture and attitude towards parental involvement as teachers become aware at an early stage that they have a responsibility for helping parents become involved in their children's development. With the

The Framework for the Enhancement of Parental Involvement in Childhood (The EPIC Framework)

Parental involvement that has been enhanced through parental agency and relational trust.

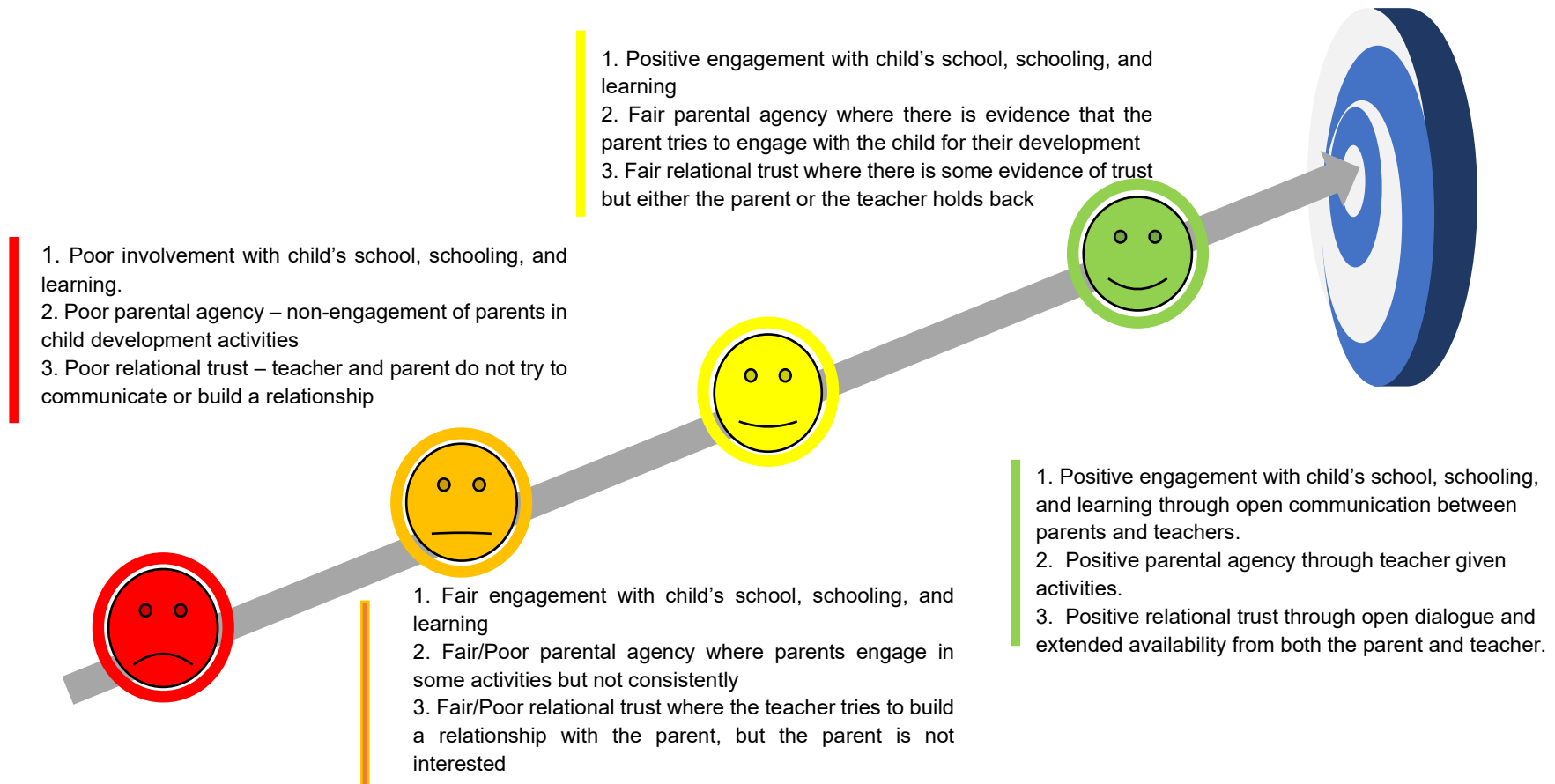


Figure 1: The Framework for the Enhancement of Parental Involvement in Childhood

Source: author (2023)

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“Minimum Requirements for Qualifications for Early Childhood Development Educators” (DHET, 2017), all universities would be introducing the diploma in ECCE or the degree in ECCE. The content of this research, especially the comprehensive EPIC framework will form a useful tool in the module regarding parental and community relationship building in the early years.

It has become an urgent matter to ensure that all ECD teachers begin to realise their role in the life of young children. If Early Childhood Education is to be the “great equaliser” and can bridge the poverty gap in South Africa, enhancing parental involvement in ECD centres has become essential and needs to be recognised by the stakeholders in ECD as high-priority. The EPIC framework has the potential to ensure transformation of the Early Childhood Development Sector in South Africa.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The researchers obtained ethical clearance from the University of Pretoria to conduct this study. The Research Ethics Committee granted ethical clearance for the research on the 2nd of June 2023. The researchers also obtained ethical clearance from the Department of Education, who provided written permission for the research to be conducted in the Pretoria area in the Gauteng province. Early Childhood Centres were approached and details of the research were provided, however, the centres selected chose not to participate. The researcher then enquired at schools who have Early Childhood Education classes as part of the school. These schools granted permission to approach teachers and parents. All participants were provided with an overview of the research aim and were given the option to participate or not. All those whom participated in this study did so with full understanding of the aims of the research and their rights within the data collection phase. The researcher still holds signed consent forms from all participants. They were made aware that the information shared could be published in a journal.

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