

Full Length Research

Parental Involvement in Preschool Education in Ahanta-Nzema District in Ghana with Emphasis on the Position of Illiterate Parents

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This paper presented parental involvement in children's education with emphasis on the position of illiterate parents in the Ahanta-Nzema district in the country Ghana. Research indicates that parental involvement in children's education matters. It matters for their realization, drive and welfare at school. Over the last few decades, parents and teachers are doing their best to collaborate intensely as partners in education. In order to establish these partnerships, the primacy is placed on teachers and schools as they are the qualified partners. Research has proven that illiterate parents tend to be faced with many difficulties when one tries to get them involved in their children's education. The paper used a survey approach through self-administered questionnaires, and analysis was done through the quantitative approach) which tested the hypothesis of this work. This study highlights home and parent characteristics that relate to socio-economic status and illiterates parents. Remarkably, the research findings on the involvement of illiterate parents appeared to be limited, in contrast with the results of our literature search on the topic of parental involvement in children's education in general, which tends to be very intensive. The paper however found some good measures that could foster the involvement of illiterate parents in their children's education.

KEY WORDS: Parental Involvement, School Achievement, Educational Collaboration, Illiterate Parents, Ahanta-Nzema, Preschool child

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INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

The country Ghana is situated along the Guinea Coast and it is bounded by the present day Togo to the East, Cote d'Ivoire to the West, and Burkina Faso to the North with its large coastal stripe being inhabited by the Gulf of Guinea (Buah, 2006). Ghana lays roughly between

Longitudes 1degree East and 3 degree West along the Atlantic Coast which was carved out in stages by the middle of the 19th century by European colonial powers until the present frontiers emerged (Buah, 2006).

In most parts of Africa, the word education tends to denote formal instruction in European brand of schools. In referring to educated people in Africa and therefore Ghana, it is primarily centered on people who had the opportunity of being to school. Anyone who has learnt

some form of informal instruction being that of trade inter alia is regarded as uneducated. In Africa, education is always seen as an important facet of human life and it is therefore seen as an obligation on the part of the family especially the kinsmen, father or the mother to ensure that any school going-age child must be a full participant of it (Buah, 2006).

Parental involvement in preschool education plays a major role for the early childhood learner concerning their achievement, motivation and well-being at school. In the past few decades parental involvement in children's education has received extensive attention from many researchers and has also become a key component in school and government policy concerning family education programs.

Hill & Taylor (2011) avers that parental school involvement has positive impact on school related outcomes for children. Scholars in this area of study have demonstrated an association between higher levels of parental school involvement and greater academic outcome for preschool children. For preschool child, parental school involvement is associated with early school success, including academic, language skills and social competence.

The purpose of this study was to identify good practices in the relation between parental involvement and preschooler's achievement. This paper did focus on the effect of parental involvement on preschool education with emphasis on the position of illiterate parents as well as focusing on developing competencies and professional standards for parental involvement promotion in preschool education. Preschool child's ability to express their thoughts verbally and to understand verbal language tended to be higher when their parents had obtained a certain level of education, income, literacy skills, and reported positive school experiences (Weigel, Martion, & Bennet, 2006). Thus, the level of education obtained by preschooler's guardians, the years spent in educating oneself, parents readiness to teach their preschool child, do have an adverse impact on the child's later academic achievement.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Not much attention has been given to parental involvement pertaining to preschool children with emphasis on the illiterate parents. In Africa, especially those of Sub-Saharan Africa, illiterate parents are not given the needed attention when it comes to School Based Parental Involvement (SBPI) and Home Based Parental Involvement (HBPI). In order to achieve these goals, the study attempted to answer the following research objectives.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To investigate the existing research literature on the relation between parental involvement and children's school achievement?
2. To determine if socioeconomic characteristics have an impact on the preschool child as identified from the existing research literature?
3. To explore the level of involvement of illiterate parents and their children's school achievement?

RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

Ho1. There is a significant relationship between parental involvement and preschool children's later achievement.

Ho2. There is a significant relation between socio-economic characteristics that exists between good parental involvement practices and children's school achievement.

Ho3. There is no significant relation between involvement of illiterate parents and their children's school achievement.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Parental Involvement and Children's School Achievement

Parental involvement has been proven by a number of research studies done on parental involvement in education which emphasizes that the involvement of parents in their children's education is very important (Mahmood et al, 2013). The suggestion made from the literature studied is that there is a relation between parental involvement and success, high academic achievement and greater problem solving skills (Sénéchal, 2006). The literature did reveal that parental involvement is becoming one of the most essential measures of discipline both within and out of the school. It is seen as a preventative measure specifically in the early grades of school and contributes towards better attendance as well as fewer behavioral problems at school (Lynch, J. (2009).

The Involvement of Illiterate Parents and Their Children's School Achievement

The fundamental component in the problem of functional illiteracy as in that of poverty is that the illiterate poor lack ability to express themselves as well as to communicate with others (Cooter, 2006). In looking at

families where parents experience difficulties in reading and writing, there is a danger of low literacy being passed on from one generation to another (Cooter, 2006). Some researchers like Dearing et al (2008) aver that the importance of literacy development stretches far beyond children's school achievements (Dearing et al. 2008; Cooter, 2006; Lynch, 2009).

Patall et al., (2010) also contend that well-developed literacy facility is an imperative condition for children's development in other intellectual and social areas. Difficulties pertaining to literacy could lead to problems in social, economic and community settings when it comes to high dropout rates and juvenile delinquency. Dearing et al., (2008) opines that the present society is more and more demanding when people's literacy skills are concerned, thus the costs of literacy problems for society are likely to surge. The notion of intergenerational illiteracy draws attention to the involvement of illiterate parents in their children's school development (Cooter, 2006). There has been however, extensive research pertaining to parental involvement and school achievement, with research-findings being in line with involvement of illiterate parents appearing to be minimum. UNESCO report indicates that throughout the world about 800 million people are not sufficiently able to read and write. That is about 15% of the world's population, whereby for the African situation figures show a high adult illiteracy rate (Houtkoop, 2002).

Cooter (2006) further reveals a number of mechanisms that could be responsible for intergenerational illiteracy being lack of strong language, little interaction between parent and child, and lack of quality print materials like books and newspapers. Cooter (2006) in addition to that makes a connection between a poor language development and poverty. Rodriguez-Brown, (2011) found that among poor families' parents speak less and with less variation to their children than parents with a higher socio-economic status. From research on the relation between home literacy and children's language learning, Rodriguez-Brown (2011) conclude that there are four facets which ought to be considered being the opportunity for children to be exposed to literacy (e.g. reading parents), the quality of reading instruction by parents, cooperation between parents' and child (role agreement) and the socio-emotional quality of the parent-child relation. The implementation of Millennium Development Goal (MDG), the authorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965) and its reauthorization in 2002 (no child left behind act), several family education programs have been implemented, and schools have been encouraged to see parents as partners in the child's education.

Duch (2005) did present an evaluation of some of the two-generation programs being Comprehensive Child Development Program, Even Start Family Literacy Program, Head Start Family Service Centers, New

Chance and New Hope. In these programs parental involvement in learning is emphasized often through empowerment strategies, preschool programs and welfare programs (Anderson-Butcher, 2004). This model therefore presents schools not only as places for education, but places where childcare, learning and family service comes together. In looking at specific position of illiterate parents, research shows that intervention that comes with adults in adult literacy programs is not always very successful. Cooter (2006) found that annually 50-75% of the adults (adult education) enrolled in adult literacy programs drop out within the first month. One of the explanations could be that low income earners must hold several minimum-wage jobs to support their families. This therefore prevents them from finding time to learn at this stage of their lives.

In looking at the involvement of illiterate parents, their children's school achievement as well as good practices, Cooter (2006) provides a number of strategies which teachers could use to help illiterate parents succeed in helping their children to become strong readers. The emphasis is on what parents can do, not on what parents are not able to do. On the classroom level teachers could instruct parents on homework assignments and what is expected of parents in their role of homework assistance. Schools could promote and teach parents in a number of ways which could be dialogic reading whereby the child leads the conversation around the pictures of a book. The use and application of strategies to improve the length of children's sentences, the use of complete sentences when speaking to the child, the use of books the children can handle, and the effective play with their children and spending more time communicating with them, and the use of toys as mediator of natural language use. In aid of the specific group of illiterate and low literate parents teachers in preschool education could play an important role (Donkor, 2010). One cannot expect parents who lack the basic skills of reading to provide books as means of education or to judge whether or not a learning moment occurs while looking at a picture book with their child (Zeece, 2005).

Teachers could provide reading workshops for (illiterate) parents in whom they could point out skills which parents could use to support their children's reading development by pointing to words, speaking about illustrations and labeling. Drajea (2015) contends that after parent's participating in workshops around topics such as motivation, perseverance, responsibility, initiative, cooperation, and problem solving their children spend more time doing homework, spend less time watching television and spend more time together with their parents. Schools could help illiterate parents by showing what a rich language environment looks like, provide reading instruction through modeling and coaching, tell parents in what way they could talk to their

children about books, explain to parents how they could select good books, give library instruction, stimulate parents to enroll in adult literacy programs, visit parents and their children at home so as for parents and teachers get to know each other better. When illiterate parents inform teachers about their home situation teachers tends to be able to initiate and sustain a better connection between home and school (Drajea, 2015).

By addressing the first research objective, the paper found strong evidence of positive influence of parental involvement in children's education on school achievement, learning motivation, perseverance and social behavior of children. The most determinative factor in parental involvement is 'good parenthood in the home situation' and 'parents' beliefs in and high expectations of their children's success in school (Kocyigita, 2015). It is however quite difficult to draw more precise conclusions when it comes to parental involvement issues. The definition of parental involvement used in this paper is not explicit and many intertwining factors have to be taken into account as the nature and intensity of parental involvement in children's education differs and takes place under different environments. There has been positive correlation between parental involvement and verbal and reading achievements in contrast with the negative correlation between parental involvement and mathematics achievement. There has been an incredible research done on parental involvement during the last two decades, whereby it has become acceptable to hold teachers and parents jointly responsible for the education of children, both at home and in the school situation. The issue of mutual trust and equality happens to be an important element concerning this type of educational

partnership, however, the establishment of mutual trust and equality is not always self-evident. There have always been differences when it comes to the issue of power, skill and when the background appears to play a startling role. From the research literature the paper found that good practices are featured by inviting parents, communicating with parents, empowering teachers and parents, adapting the structure of the school organization and reformulating and implementing school-wide policy in this matter.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Epstein's theory of overlapping sphere was used as a guide to this research whereby it contends that there are three major factors which tend to influence children's development and learning. These happen to be that of the school, the family and the community. Epstein further contends that these three features do not merely outstandingly influence child outcomes but they equally interact (Epstein's, 2001).

Epstein (2001) further avers that parental involvement could be in line with traditional framing which is envisioned as parents being the supporters of school fundraising initiatives and events (Ma, Shen,& Krenn, 2014). This tends to be a one directional interaction that offers an incomplete account of the ways that parents participate in their children's learning (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). The development of a more complex understanding of parental involvement was pursued by the Coleman Report which placed emphasis on the fact that student achievement is strongly linked with parental involvement (Jeynes, 2012).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Ira Gordon (1979) did developed one of the first conceptual frameworks of parent involvement after he did examine the role of parental involvement in Head Start. He explored the different scopes of parent involvement (Gordon, 1979). Gordon (1979) further created a model of parent involvement which did include three separate phases being parent impact model, school impact model, and community impact model. The parent impact model explored the role of the family and home on students. The school impact model did examine the role of families within the school, which did include volunteering and serving on advisory councils. The community impact model consisted of parent involvement in all other ways, including helping children at home to being an active member of the community.

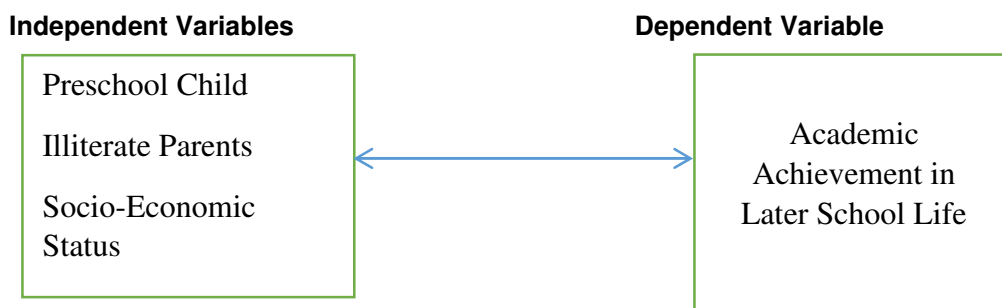


Figure 1

METHODOLOGY

In the words of Kothari (2004), research instruments are tools the researcher uses in collecting data. The study employed an interview as well as the use of questionnaires to achieve its objectives since the usefulness of interviews has long been recognized in the field of social science research. The paper did focus on mixed method which provided detailed description of individuals and events in their natural settings, therefore interviewing 'usually' thought of as a key factor in research design (Alshenqeeti, 2014).

The paper selected 12 public schools that are based in Ahanta-Nzema local district. The respondents were 50 parents who sought assistance from their relations who happens to know how to read and write and 15 preschool instructors. The researchers therefore took into consideration the parents (mothers) level of education (since mothers are the significant caregivers of the child) being "no formal education", primary level to secondary level of the parent's education. In this part of the world especially that of Ahanta-Nzema in the Western Region of Ghana, fathers are considered to be invincible caregivers of the preschool child. The method used in collecting the data was self-administered and interviews, as the researchers gave the needed assistance to the illiterate parents.

DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION

Research Objective 1. To investigate the existing research literature on the relation between parental involvement and children's school achievement?

a. Predictors (Constant), Is there a relationship between parental involvement and children's school achievement?

b. Dependent Variable: How do you rate preschool child's academic performance? $P < 0.000 (0.000 < 0.05)$.

R0: There is a significant relationship that exists between parental involvement and preschool child's later academic achievement.

CONCLUSION: Since the value of P is less than 0.05 being $(0.000 < 0.05)$, the paper can therefore reject the Null hypothesis (R0) and accept Alternative hypothesis (R1), which gives an indication that there is a significant relationship between parental involvement in preschool education and the educational performance of the child in later life. From the few literature reviewed, it is certain that children tends to perform better in their early childhood learning centers since that era happens to be

the formative years of their life with their parents playing adequate role.

CONCLUSION: In addressing the first objective, the study found that there is strong evidence pertaining to positive influence when it comes to parental involvement in preschool child, learning motivation, and behavioral pattern of preschooler. The most determinative factor when it comes to parental involvement happens to be good parenting at home and the beliefs of parent's high expectations of the preschool child's achievement in later academic life. It is however quite difficult to draw a precise conclusion since definition used in the research is almost invariably unambiguous with its antecedent intertwining factors that have to be taken into account since the nature and strength of parental involvement in preschool child differs and takes place under different conditions.

Research Objective 2. To determine if socioeconomic characteristics have an impact on the preschool child as identified from the existing research literature?

Multiple Regressions: 0.351;

R Square; 0.123

Adjusted R Square; 0.177

Standard Error; 20.05493

a. Predictors: (Constant), Educational Attainment of the Respondents.

b. Dependent Variable: What was the age that compelled you to send the child to Early Childhood Educational Centre: $P < 0.000 (0.000 < 0.05)$.

R0: The socio-economic characteristics do have a significant impact on the early childhood education.

CONCLUSION: Since the value of P is less than 0.05 being $(0.000 < 0.05)$, the paper can reject the Null hypothesis (R0) and accept Alternative hypothesis (R1), thus implying that the socio-economic characteristics do have an impact on the preschool child. Many scholarly works have demonstrated that the negative correlations between poverty and child achievement are stronger than those associated with ethnicity and gender (Senechal, 2006).

The exposure pertaining to parental involvement is increasingly becoming crucial in that most parents do not accept the fact that their children in those formative years should experience early childhood education. Above all, illiterates parents often have that great fear of sending their child in that crawling/toddler state to school since they tend to perceive those children as too fragile. These are beliefs belonging to the era of antiquity that has to

be discarded. Parental involvement however, has a tremendous impact on early childhood education.

Specific Objective 3: To explore the level of involvement of illiterate parents and their children's school achievement.

Multiple R; 0.007

R Square; 0.000

Adjusted R Square; -0.006

Standard Error; 1.12814

a. Predictors (Constant), exploring the level of involvement of illiterate parents and their children's school achievement?

b. How do you assess their involvement?
 $P > 0.934 (0.934 > 0.05)$

R0. No significant relationship exists between illiterate parents and the preschool learner's educational performance.

R1. There exists a significant relationship between the preschool child's performance and that of the illiterates' parents.

CONCLUSION

From the above analysis, P value tends to be greater than 0.05 giving this indicator ($0.934 > 0.05$) that, the paper can therefore accept the Null hypothesis (R0) and reject the Alternative hypothesis (R1), thus bringing to an end that there is no significant relationship between the preschool child and the illiterate parents. This tends to imply the fact that a child's parents if uneducated do not mean he/she cannot make an adequate impact on the early learning child lessons. In this part of our world and before the introduction of formal education by the colonial powers, Africans had their own method of educating themselves, an example being the Arabic form of education that was introduced before the pre-colonial era and Kiswahili and Hausa being the lingua franca that served as a means of communication in the West African Region.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This paper reported on a study which was conducted at Ahanta-Nzema District locality in order to have an insight pertaining to parental involvement and preschooler's achievement in later academic life, to identify good practices in line with preschool education, and to emphasize on the position of illiterate parents. The paper

did found strong positive evidence from the literature based parental involvement and school performance, motivation in line with learning practices, as well as socio-economy that impact positively on the preschool child. However, the most decisive issues when it comes to parents involvement happens to be that of good parenting at home as well as the belief of parents in high expectations of their children's academic achievement in school. The numerous definitions adduced in parental involvement research work tends to be highly vague and so many factors have to be taken into account since parental involvement in preschoolers education differ from one terrain to another since they almost invariably operate under different conditions. Parental involvement literature attests to the fact that there is a correlation between parental involvement and the preschool child (Jeynes, 2012).

The results obtained from the research done at Ahanta-Nzema district did indicate that differences between parents should be taken into account when enhancing parent's involvement. The paper did concentrate on illiterates parents with emphasis on the mothers in which the study estimated on illiterate's parents. The study found that lack of strong language and reading skills, little interaction between children-parents and the inability of parent's to assist the preschooler in reading and writing tends to have negative impact on the preschool learner.

Preschool instructors and schools tend to play a major role when it comes to dealing with illiterate parents since they have to stimulate the involvement of illiterate's parents in the preschool child's education. The paper also contends that teachers must focus on good parental practices by fostering on parental involvement of illiterate parents. Teachers must primarily focus on what illiterate parents can do and not what they are unable to do. Good practices when it comes to parental involvement must be activities which establish a link between the home and the school.

Teachers could therefore assist illiterate parents on how a school learning environment looks like and groom them on how they could help their children in their literacy development and skills as well as the development of their social and intellectual skills. In effect, it will be acceptable for teachers and schools to build a good relationship with parents so as to get parents involved in their children's education as parental involvement happens to be the primary force for children's academic achievement. The involvement of illiterate parents in preschool child education will certainly erode intergenerational illiteracy.

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