

Parental involvement in ECE in Samoa: What is the impact on educational achievement?

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The establishment of Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Samoa has been a significant educational development for the first stage of children's school life. In this research, a mixed methodology approach using quantitative and qualitative approaches was employed whereby quantitative data was collected and qualitative data provided further explanation. Findings from quantitative data indicated parents' contributions to preschool education whereas qualitative data focused on parents' and ECE principals' views on parental involvement. The findings revealed that the majority of teachers believed parents' support should take place outside the classroom. Some tensions were evident between parents' and teachers' perceptions and this paper concluded that there needed to be more consultation between parents, ECE principal, and teachers to establish mutual understanding acceptable to all in supporting children's early years of education.

Keywords: Early Childhood Education (ECE); Talanoa and Nofo; Samoa; MESC; NCECES; parental involvement

INTRODUCTION

This article reports on a study to investigate whether parents' involvement in ECE development in Samoa contributes to children's educational achievement. Specifically, the study aimed to understand whether parents' willingness to assist children's movement from the home to school ensures a smooth transition and provides the best educational results for the child.

ECE in Samoa is operated by a non-government agency with assistance from the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture (MESC), which includes resources and training workshops. However, teachers' salaries and facilities are the responsibility of ECE centres. The operational budget for ECE centres is minimal.

The MESC *Education Statistical Digest* (2019) stated "that in all literacies, students are performing well below expected competencies" (p. 31). Children that are supported in the home and school during ECE years demonstrate better achievement at the upper level (Chohan & Khan, 2010; Rade, 2020). Research shows that children are successful when parents continue to support them and have a positive influence on learning and

literacy (Maka, 2018) by assisting school activities, attending Parents' Day, and collaborating with teachers. Internationally, ECE is the beginning of formal education for children in society, nurturing children's enjoyment of learning (Amoah et al., 2013; Fagbeminiyi, 2011). In ECE, teachers draw on the basic tenets of child development theories about learning. Although the home is a child's first classroom, they are introduced to the world of school and science in formal classrooms where exposure and engagement is extended in the preschool by experienced teachers (Dere, 2019; Faamatuainu, 2016). In fact, children who start ECE at an early age find it hard to adjust to their new environment (Peterson & Elam, 2020). ECE centres need parents' assistance to be with the child for the first day or the first week of school (Mahmood, 2013, Viliamu & Esera, 2019). The teacher's role is to work together with parents to ensure that the child is assimilated into the new environment. Fagbeminiyi (2011) argued that this is crucial as "the more parents are involved with their children, the more positive learning and general life outcomes occur" (p. 46). Viliamu and Esera (2019) note that children achieve better academic results when parents provide ongoing support in the home and at school. Therefore, parental involvement in ECE is vital and is highly recommended for primary and secondary education as well. Indisputably, parental involvement provides positive outcomes and is "an effective strategy to enhance student success" and contributes tremendously to "academic performance in students" (Bower & Griffin, 2011, p. 2).

This ECE study conducted in Samoa was assisted by the MESC, the National Council of Early Childhood Education in Samoa (NCECES) and the Faculty of Education (FOE) of the National University of Samoa (NUS).

CONTEXT

ECE was privately established in Samoa in 1968 by two mission organisations, the Protestant Church and Malua Theological College (NCECES, 1996). In 1969, the Protestant Church and its New Zealand counterpart assisted in the training of ECE, in which trainees graduated after two years (NCECES, 1996). Samoa's educational system did not recognise ECE until the mid-1970s; its focus from 1962 to 1976 being on educational developments in primary and secondary education. In 1970, the Samoa government's educational vision encompassed ECE "as a private undertaking, and community initiative" (EFA, 2016, p. 19). ECE was officially accepted in Samoa with Cabinet approval in 1976. While ECE was recognised as part of Samoa's education system (MESC, 2016, p. 19), its daily operations continued to be managed by the NCECES, a non-profit organisation.

In 1962, Samoa, as a newly independent state, continued to mimic the New Zealand educational system in its educational structure, coordination and administration. According to Tuia (2013), "the western educational system continues to influence the educational organisation of Samoa" (p. 37). The attempts by Samoan educators to transform Western teaching and learning into the Samoan context has changed the landscape of education developments, including ECE.

The Education Sector Plan (ESP) in Samoa (2019) stated that, "parents [should] comply with the Education Amendment Act 2019, which makes attendance at school compulsory from four years old" (p. 31). This ensured parents prioritised their children's education by placing them in ECE centres. While MESC's *Education Statistical Digest* (2019) recorded an increase in the number of ECE centres in Samoa, it

also documented that educational awareness was needed to target “parents and the community to promote the importance of early childhood development and education” (p. 18), recognising parental involvement is vital for promoting ECE for children to advance in the educational system and to eventually assist the country’s further development. This is explored through a brief review of the relevant international literature and Samoan research (Bugeja, 1998; Kurtulmus, 2016; Viliamu & Esera, 2019).

LITERATURE

In order for the education system in Samoa to achieve its goal of quality education for all, stakeholders such as the MESC, NCECES, and FOE NUS should collaborate to provide appropriate educational support to enhance children’s learning (MESC, 2019). The study reported in this article, however, focuses on parents’ roles as educational stakeholders once children enter school. Children’s education is extremely important and parents play a large part in ensuring educational success, especially in the home where they monitor and assist children’s learning. Compton, Jack and McDowell (2018) argued “that parents who display higher levels of involvement will have children who perform better academically” (p. 1). Involvement of parents in children’s education increases their capacity to learn, self-motivation, self-confidence and interest. Research pointed to parental involvement as correlating with “parental aspirations for their children’s academic achievement, parents’ communication with their children about education and school matters, parents’ participation in school activities, parents’ communication with teachers about their children, and parental supervision at home” (Fan, 2011, p. 29).

Children’s education and their relationship with parents at ECE are vital in many ways. Parents assist with teaching and modelling appropriate learning strategies for children before entering ECE centres. MESC indicated that parents are encouraged to place their children in ECE schools for exposure and interaction with children their age, participation and active engagement with teachers and other pre-schoolers.

Significantly, as indicated in previous research, “parents’ involvement during parents’ day, meetings, and excursions are crucial for all partners in the learning process” (Faamatuainu, 2016, p. 47). Such practices, Faamatuainu (2016) espoused, are popular in Samoa, where parents display great interest in children’s education. According to Viliamu & Esera (2019), “parents share the responsibility of helping children learn” (p. 110) not only in the home but also in school. In addition, “principal and teachers discussed the importance of parental and community involvement” (p. 110) as an opportunity for parents to hear and share children’s educational progress with teachers and the principal. Kurtulmus (2016) notes that parents’ roles in children’s education included “participating in extended class visits and helping class activities” (p. 1150). Parents’ involvement at home and school help children’s “positive engagement with peers, adults, and learning” (Kurtulmus, 2016, p. 1150). Subsequently, parental support provides a constructive outlook for literacy and numeracy, because Samoans continue to struggle with literacy and numeracy at all levels.

Although ECE teaching and learning is new to some children, parents’ involvement in assisting teachers ensure children’s smooth transition from the home to school. Viliamu and Esera (2019) reiterated that teachers and principals need to discuss the importance

of parents' involvement in children's education. Parental involvement sustains children's learning in school and consolidates relationships with teachers and parents in sharing responsibility for children's learning.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The research was conducted within the context of Samoan culture, which guides social, cultural and educational values. In conducting research in Samoa, permission was first sought from work superiors at the NUS, MESC and NCECES.

An ethical process requesting participants involvement had to be satisfied. This was conducted by the University Research Ethical Committee (UREC) NUS as well as NCECES. Although NUS is the sole owner of the research, seeking NCECES approval for focus group sessions with ECE principals and parents was essential. Data collection started soon after ethical approval was granted by NUS and NCECES.

METHODOLOGY

The research utilised an explanatory and interpretivist methodological approach that incorporated quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection and analyses (Creswell & Tashakkori, 2007; Tashakkori & Teddie, 2009). These approaches focused on active and interactive experiences that contributed to the enhancement of practice and communication. The explanatory approach explained, clarified and interpreted information after gathering "quantitative data and then collecting qualitative data to help explain or elaborate on the quantitative results" (Subedi, 2011, p. 572). According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011), "interpretivists draw on a range of methods, tools and techniques to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under investigation" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 3). As such, investigation focused on gathering quantitative and qualitative data pertaining to parental involvement in ECE developments in Samoa. In fact, for the findings to be concise and meaningful, pragmatism provided "a more . . . practical solutions" (Rahman & Zakaria, 2008, p.111).

The research question was: What is the nature and scope of parental involvement in ECE in Samoa?

Statistical data using a survey questionnaire was collected from preschool teachers and concerned their observations of parental involvement in children's education. The teachers were consulted on how to collect the information in relation to the research aim. Qualitative data in the form of interview transcripts were gathered from preschool principals, parents and MESC officers using focus group sessions to assess the relationship between parents and school principals as well as the support and resources of stakeholders.

Graff (2017) explained that "descriptive statistics summarised data to allow researchers to better understand the data trend" (p. 62). The researchers acquired quantitative results before utilising qualitative data to fully describe the meaning and significance of the final results of data analysis. This approach also supported pragmatism which centred on addressing problems logically and practically rather than using theory or abstract principles. Morgan (2007) contended that pragmatism provided researchers with the freedom to choose what is "right and wrong" (p. 9) based on what best represented

individuals' social, cultural, educational and political interests and values. This is consistent with Kaushik and Walsh's (2019) explanation that "pragmatism is based on the proposition that researchers should use the philosophical and/or methodological approach that works best from the analysis of the research problem being investigated" (p. 2). Therefore, pragmatism is a coherent mixture of data collection and analysis because of its flexibility and connectivity to the different research approaches (Creswell & Clark, 2011). Kaushik and Walsh (2019) further explained that "pragmatism is a paradigm that claims to bridge the gap between the scientific method and structuralist orientation of older approaches and the naturalistic methods and freewheeling orientation of newer approaches" (p. 2). This latter point led to the adaptation of the *talanoa* and *nofo* research methodology.

The *talanoa* and *nofo* are indigenous qualitative research methodologies that represent the social, cultural, educational and political values and interests of the researchers and participants. Due to the nature of the research that took place in a dominant cultural environment where researchers and participants were involved, the Samoan cultural principles of *talanoa* and *nofo* were employed as suitable for the context. In order to carry out *talanoa* and *nofo* in the Samoan culture, both parties must display respect (*faaaloalo*), sacred relationship (*va tapuia*), mutual respect (*va fealoai*), behaviour accorded to others (*ava fatafata*) and reciprocity (*feavatai/fetausiai*) (Tuia, 2013, p. 7). The essence of these cultural principles or values in the Samoan culture makes *talanoa* and *nofo* culturally appropriate in the Samoan setting. In light of this, high chiefs and significant adults' interactions with individuals without chiefly titles and others is different. It is important for untitled young men and women as well as children to be seated when conversing with chiefs and significant adults in adherence to the cultural principles of *talanoa* and *nofo*.

Methods of data collection

Quantitative data collection utilised a survey questionnaire (Young, 2016) to seek ECE teacher participants' views about parents' contributions to children's education and areas teachers believed parents should assist with. It included community involvement, supervised excursion, fundraising, monitoring children's activities during interval, making/cooking meals, and providing transport (see Table 1). Teachers had to select from the choices of response as to which was the most popular for community support. Similarly, with parental assistance in the classroom, teachers chose from areas such as: talk and explain to children; tell stories and discuss; read to children; and monitor new words/phrases/ideas.

Table 1: Questions on community involvement and parental assistance

Community Involvement
Questions
Do you involve the community in your school?
How do parents get involved?
Parental Involvement
Question
How can parents assist young children?

The qualitative method of data collection used the *talanoa* and *nofo* (Tuia, 2013) involving parents and preschool principals. The *talanoa* described by Vaioleti (2006) is a conversation or talk between two individuals or more that share opinions or thoughts in formal or informal setting. *Nofo* offered by Tuia (2013) is known as sitting, a cultural protocol and part of the Samoan culture to sit and talk. Whether on formal or informal settings in Samoa, untitled men, women, children, and teens do not *talanoa* and *nofo* with matais, church pastors and significant adults in the village. Individuals must show respect in the way *talanoa* is conducted by using appropriate, respectful dialogue when conversing with dignitaries in the village. The utilisation of *talanoa* and *nofo* in focus group discussions provided in-depth information pertaining to parents' responsibilities of children's educational situations.

There were 25 parents and 25 preschool principals in the focus groups. The total number of 50 parents and preschool principals were divided into five groups of 10 each. This was done to ensure that the *talanoa* and *nofo* sessions were viable options to gather in specific locations as participants were quite dispersed and lived in locations far from one another. This was similar to soliciting views of parents by preschool teachers in Vanuatu (Ministry of Education Vanuatu, 2014; Tuia et al., 2021). Rankin and Then (2015) noted that "focus groups are generally used to gather in-depth knowledge about attitudes, perceptions, beliefs and opinions of individuals regarding a specific topic" (p. 16). As such, focus group discussion provided information to clarify conflicting issues pertinent to the topic. During focus groups of *talanoa* and *nofo*, parents and ECE principals offered their perceptions of how parents should assist with children's education. This information was recorded, written and later analysed.

Data analysis

The quantitative analysis was based on the Excel Microsoft application of SPSS to sort data into pie graphs and provide calculation of the percentages of parents' involvement in ECE activities at ECE centres. To achieve quality, SPSS created, developed and articulated statistical descriptions that best represented the research question. In SPSS analysis, the survey questionnaire was first coded and a number given to represent each question that participants had responded to. Churchill, Denny and Patman (2013) stated "quantitative data are usually coded to take the form of numbers rather than text" (p. 1) to ensure the data is clearly set out and the SPSS device can be read, sorted and analysed. The completion of the coded exercise was followed by entering data into SPSS which sorted, analysed and transformed the data into descriptive statistics and, thereafter, the researchers decided on the type of graphs to display.

Qualitative data analysis was conducted through the cyclic and typology analysis methods advocated by Sarantakos (2005) and Neuman (2014). The information from participants were tracked through patterns deduced in the data, which identified consistent behaviours, events or information. After pattern classification, these were explicated by "moving from description of empirical data to interpretation" (Sarantakos, 2013, p. 314). The cyclical process of analysis in conjunction with typology was related to qualitative research of *talanoa* and *nofo*. Therefore, Neuman's (2014) typology method of analytic comparison was employed to support, identify and corroborate various views from participants. The analytic comparison accompanied participants' newly found similarities in meanings and opinions on parental involvement. After going through the cyclical process, the raw data was then sorted into recurring themes which guided the findings and the discussion that followed.

The merging of quantitative and qualitative data into one form of description utilised Creswell & Tashakkori's (2007) method of explanatory, interpretivist and pragmatic methodologies. In this way, the qualitative data helped to explore, clarify and articulate quantitative data to better understand research results.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings provided a comprehensive account of participants' responses to the questions pertaining to parental involvement of ECE developments in Samoa. The discussion of findings begins with those from the quantitative data then qualitative data.

Key findings from the survey

The graph below indicated participants' observation of parents' contribution towards community activities in ECE centres that participated. As shown in Figure 1, parents in preschools were predominantly involved in supervising excursions, then fund raising activities and then monitoring children's activities during interval. Others pointed to parents' support in cooking and providing transportation for children. The least popular activity was recording time children entered and left school.

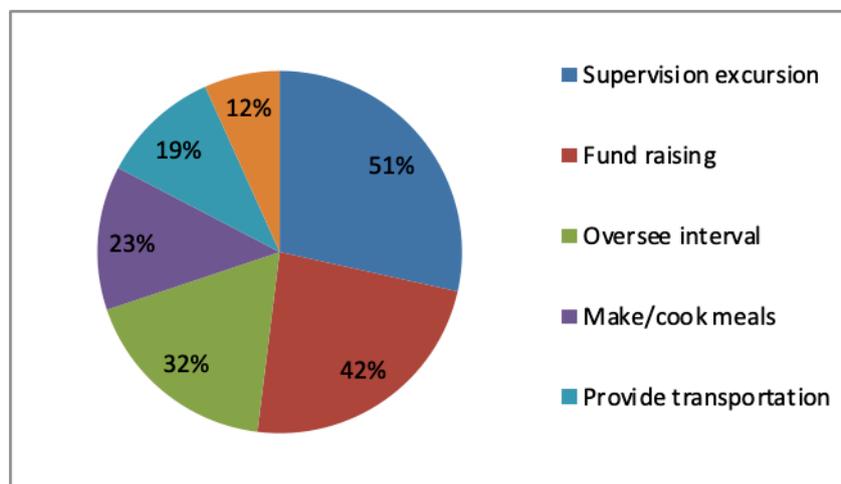


Figure 1: Community activities

Participants were also surveyed on how they perceived parents' involvement with children's educational activities. Figure 2 shows that parents were mostly involved with talking and explaining things to children. The second highest category was telling and discussing stories with children. This followed reading to children and monitoring new words/phrases and ideas.

The quantitative findings on community activities and parental assistance showed activities of interest and assistance that were popular with parents. As indicated in the community activities data, teachers responded that parents contributed greatly to supervising excursion. Second was fund raising to assist ECE developments for children's programmes. The third popular one was to oversee or monitor children's activities during interval. Other community activities, such as cooking, providing

transportation and noting children entering and leaving preschool, were measures to support children's health and safety. Teacher participants' responses to parental assistance in the classroom emphasized talk and explaining to children as the most popular while telling stories and discussion was considered of second importance.

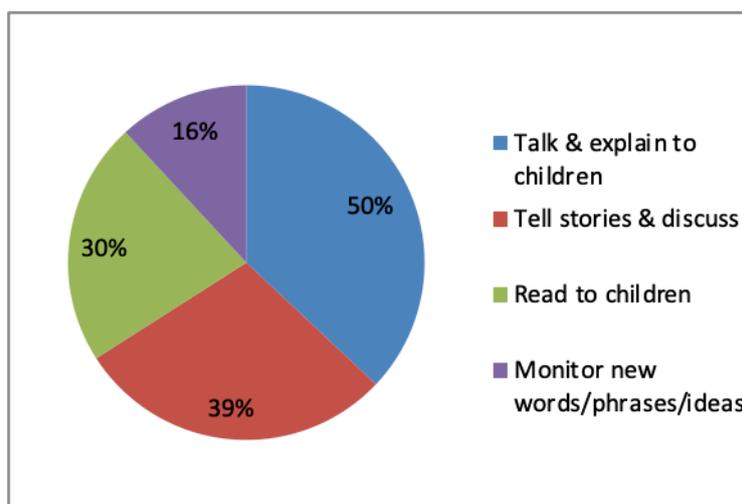


Figure 2. Parental assistance

Parents reading and monitoring children's work all contributed to children's learning progress at ECE. The data presented by the pie graph in Figure 2 provides results on parents' involvement in children's education in ECE centres. Parents eagerness to participate and contribute to ECE centres' activities demonstrated their strong support for teachers and children. Mainly, parents' involvement in children's early years of education supported Haggerty et al.'s (2006) findings that "parents contributed to the education programme as parent help, and were encouraged to document children's learning in the crèche and at home, thereby deepening understanding about children and their learning" (p. viii). Haggerty et al. (2006) advocated the idea of quality learning for children in ECE where "teachers and parents/*whānau* worked together to enhance children's learning and wellbeing" (p. vii). Passiatore et al. (2013) argued that children in ECE centres performed well when parents are involved in their educational activities, and that safeguards the "child's wellbeing, social orientation, emotionality and learning" (p. 145).

Key findings from focus groups

Parents' perspectives from focus groups

The qualitative focus group *talanoa* and *nofo* with ECE centre principals and parents indicated thought-provoking findings of parents' involvement in children's education. Parents saw their role as home teachers and helping with school activities, such as reading, field trips, cooking and assisting where needed.

ECE parents stated they felt useful because they contributed to the teachers' work as well as giving them encouragement. "Parents assist by offering advice and support to teachers facing problems whether it is supervision or assisting with children's learning activities in the ECE centre" (SAFParent/1). Through the teachers aim to do better and

do their job well, SAFParent/2 explained that “as parents, we can be very useful in preschool and we can help with what is needed”.

Similarly, SAFParent/3 reiterated that parents “need to be in the school because some children are afraid and want parents until they get used to the new school environment”. Once the child becomes familiar with the environment, they lose fear and feel a sense of trust and freedom in their newly found surroundings. In fact, what contributes more to a child’s freedom to think, speak and share is dependent on the teachers’ interactions with the children in and outside of the classroom. “Teachers must mingle with the children during class so that children are able to understand what they are learning from time to time” (FALParent/4). The teachers’ role in children’s lives and interactions in school create a feeling of welcome, the provision of appropriate teaching and learning materials and an affirmative environment contributes to a positive attitude that motivates children to attend and enjoy learning. “My child loves going to school because of the teacher and also the chance to mingle with other children” (SAFParent/5). Based on these parents’ observations of children, teachers play a pivotal role in children’s continuous interest to attend school, which is significant in the early stages of a child’s education. Furthermore, parents also indicated interesting responses of children’s school experience as attested to by SOGParent/7 and SAFparent/6:

My daughter talks a lot and enjoys writing, reading and speaking. These are the activities that they do at school, writing and reading, playing and drawing. (SOGPA/7)

My child likes going to school because of the trampoline. It is another incentive the school has invested in to motivate children to attend and engage in play. (SAFPA/6)

Children’s participation in different activities, as explained by parents, showed that different school resources and materials available for teaching and learning are motivational for children.

However, FALParent/8 suggested that it is not only about teachers, school resources and materials but “parents should also prepare the child before going to school. They shouldn’t hit the child if he/she is sleeping but ensure that they are treated with love, care and respect”. These caring methods prime the child for school and protect the child from harm. Parents know best about their children’s well-being, and participation in children’s education at ECE can bring positive educational influence to their educational development. Some ECE centre principals support parents’ involvement in children’s education inside and outside the classroom.

Parent participants’ responses indicated their enthusiasm to be part of children’s learning experience in ECE. For parents, there was a need to bridge the gap between the home and school to ensure children were supported and monitored physically, mentally and socially. Parents were interested in a more active role in children’s preschool life, and teachers must accept that parents genuinely wanted to be part of children’s growth and development.

The findings from this research based on parents support clearly showed significant developments in children’s education, social, physical and mental wellbeing. Research findings coincided with those of Rade (2020) and highlight that the parents’ roles in children’s ECE learning is crucial. In addition:

[A] good relationship with parents has many advantages, as it has a positive impact on teacher morale and school climate, the behaviour of children, as well as parental confidence and interest in the education of their children. (p. 2833)

This proposition is supported by Kocyigit (2014) who argued “parents, teachers, and other adults around a child have an important mission in the process of developing the child’s readiness for primary school” (p. 1872). Furthermore, the Ministry of Education Vanuatu (2014) emphasised the importance of the relationship between the teacher and parent: “parents are to give support to the teachers by reinforcing and spending quality time with their children to develop their literacy and numeracy skills” (p. 17). Studies conducted on the topic of parents’ involvement and teacher relationship with parents has proven to be an advantage for children in ECE centres. The child succeeds in education due to the provision of support from parents in the home and ECE centres. As Haggerty et al. (2006) explained, teachers and parents should work collaboratively to map out children’s education, social and mental interests which all contribute to children’s success in school. For instance, “teachers and parents discussed their aspirations and centre philosophy together, and teachers included parents in assessment, planning and curriculum discussion” (p. viii).

Principals’ perspectives from focus groups

Parents are children's first teachers in everyday interactions and their education depend on parents’ ongoing support throughout their lives. “Parents as children’s first teachers should be part of children’s learning inside and outside the classroom” (Participant FALPrincipal/2). The importance of parents’ involvement in children’s education oversees what goes on in the home and ECE centres.

Furthermore, FALPrincipal/1 explained, “parents should be part of children’s learning as they are children’s first teachers. When children finish school, parents assist with their schoolwork”. However, other principals insisted that parents are unwelcome into ECE centres because they interfered with teachers’ work.

According to SAOPrincipal/3, “parents are not allowed in our school compound. We let them stay in school for the first week of the term because the children are new”. Participants believed that parents’ involvement should be limited to the home as the ECE centre is the teacher’s prerogative. Another participant echoed similar sentiment and indicated that parents should have faith in the teachers and principal to look after their children. “I don’t want parents to come into the classroom and the school compound during school hours because we have schedules for the week and throughout the term” (Participant SAOPrincipal/5). The issue raised by these participants contradicted the value of parental involvement in both the home and school, insisting that parents’ roles were in the homes. One principal, FALPrincipal/43, mentioned a child that would “cry and want to be with the parent”, while participant SOGPrincipal/4 claimed that “some parents have no patience if they see or hear something unpleasant from the teacher”. These problems raised by participants could disrupt teachers and principals in their daily duties. It demonstrated that participants undermined parents’ involvement in the school due to their own personal and professional motives.

Not all ECE principals agreed with parents being allowed into the preschool compound during preschool hours. The main concern raised by principals was the disruption parents’ cause to children’s and teachers’ work. Concerns were raised when parents disagreed with teachers’ style of teaching, language use and voice pitch. However,

others felt that parents should be permitted into preschools, but their support be limited to outdoor activities. Most ECE principals strongly felt that parents' involvement with children's education is at home. In fact, some believed that was the only avenue to avoid unwanted confrontations between teachers and parents.

Summary of key themes

The themes that emerged from data analysis were parents' contributions, ECE developments, and differences between teachers and parents. Themes responded to the research question on "What is the nature and scope of parental involvement in ECEs in Samoa?" Themes helped to clarify the current situation as stated by the quantitative data regarding parents' assistance and community involvement in ECE developments. The qualitative findings indicated that many preschool activities relied on and sought assistance from parents. However, some principals were not convinced and were reluctant to entertain the idea of accepting parents into the ECE compound. They argued that parents could contribute to their children's education from home. Many ECE centres do not have a steady operational budget for day-to-day activities. The money received from MESOC only covered resources and not teachers' salaries. However, some ECE centres depended on their communities for financial assistance towards preschool facilities and playground. It is where many parents play a critical role in fundraising to support preschools. Therefore, it could be seen that parents' contribution to ECE developments benefited not just the children but the teachers and principals if their differences could be set aside to focus more on children's learning development.

DISCUSSION

The research question: What is the nature and scope of parental involvement in ECE in Samoa? was answered by revealing a number of interrelated aspects: parents' contribution; stakeholder responses to ECE developments; and resolving tensions between teachers and parents about the scope and level of parental involvement. Although various interrelated aspects responded to the research question, parents' responses reflected their willingness to be involved in their children's preschool experience. As Fagbeminiyi (2011) explained "a child's growth and development is nurtured by the overlapping support of parents, family, community, and child learning opportunities, as most effective for successful outcomes" (p. 46). Therefore, parents should be accepted and acknowledged in children's preschool years.

Parent's support, as represented by Figure 2, for children's education was viewed as a relevant component to effective learning. During parents' *talanoa* and *nofo* sessions, their aspirations for children included a wide range of learning experiences that would progress them to the next level of education. From the findings, parents showed a deep desire to be involved in the activities of the ECE centres and to provide their children with the needed support.

The data revealed the importance of parents' roles in children's education and should be supported by ECE. Chowdhury et al. (2019) reiterated "preprimary education becomes more effective when parents as well as community become involved with preschool activities" (p. 1). Parents' involvement in children's education in the early years of schooling is crucial worldwide. Tomlin (2008) espoused working collectively to raise a child. According to Maiai (1957), "a Samoan child's education was carried out in the

home through the help of parents and immediate family members, such as children's upbringing based on the ethos of the people" (p. 166). In Samoa, as the quantitative results showed (Figure 1), parents were involved with supervision of children.

This is reflected in the theme of ECE developments regarding resources, facilities and qualified teachers to sustain quality teaching and learning. For parents, their involvement in preschool contributed to the development of resources, facilities' maintenance and supported teachers to complete higher qualification. In this way parents felt useful to serve children's education, achieve their goals and the teachers' goals. Fagbeminiyi (2011) considered parents' roles as essential and their involvement in "school decision making" (p. 47) would promote a "more positive learning and general life outcomes" (p. 46). Furthermore, research by Faamatuainu (2016), Fagbeminiyi (2011) and Compton et al (2018) supported parental involvement in children's preschool education as beneficial and supported higher levels.

Parents engagement and assistance of children in preschools has contributed greatly to the development of ECE in Samoa. It has also helped ECE teachers and principals with workload in the classroom while parents take care of outside work. Driessen, Slegers and Smit (2005) argued that "greater parent involvement has a positive influence on the climate of the school and the school's orientation towards its immediate surroundings" (p. 6). Therefore, ECE parents working collaboratively with the community would contribute in terms of positive progress for preschools.

Nevertheless, in the school compound, there could be tensions between parents and preschool facilitators. Teachers' and parents' differences were a concern for principals as parents could hinder, distract or obstruct teachers' work during class activities. As a result, children would not focus or engage in planned activities and parents could take offence if teachers disciplined their children. The qualitative data from the *talanoa* and *nofo* indicated some principals felt parents' involvement in preschools should be limited to outside the classroom whereas others proffered parents to help children at home.

However, parents strongly believed that they could contribute positively to children's education with school activities. The quantitative data illustrated many school activities parents were involved in. Compton et al. (2018) interpreted this as "parental aspirations for their children's academic achievement, parents' communication with their children about education and school matters, parents' participation in school activities, parents communication with teachers about their children" (p. 5). A more interactive approach for parents and teachers would ensure that children are not perceived as a contentious issue but should be viewed as what would achieve the best learning results for children.

In addition, supportive parents offered children assistance at preschool and home if requested. Teachers could concentrate on assisting children to rapidly assimilate learning in their new environment if parents assisted in other areas and activities. Therefore, it is crucial for parents to be part of their child's educational life at home and in school and both parents and teachers should have mutual understanding as it would determine the best way forward for the child to succeed in education.

CONCLUSION

Despite the differences between some ECE principals and parents in Samoa, parents' inclination to support children remained constant. Moreover, preschool is a milestone for children as their first time away from home and, therefore, parental participation

seemed appropriate. Parents' contribution to children's preschool years provided greater succour to ECE developments with different preschool activities and learning opportunities. Principals in ECE centres indicated the importance of parents' involvement in preschool in relation to children's safety. However, most ECE centres in Samoa have very little physical and human resources and relied very much on local donors and financial assistance from MESCS as well as parents' assistance. Some ECE teachers received minimum wages and the survival of the school relied on the number of children enrolled each year. For some ECE centres, parents are always scouting for resources and support that are sustainable for children's preschool activities. ECE principals, however, encounter problems with parents in preschools. Nevertheless, other principals have welcomed parents' contribution. ECE principals concerned with parents' hindering teachers' work could hold constructive consultation. Parents and teachers should understand where to draw the line when it comes to their respective boundaries and set clear demarcations of roles. Therefore, having close collaboration and understanding amongst teachers and parents would eventually contribute greatly to children's education. Moreover, ECE developments can be successful if educational contributors including parents, MESCS, NUS, NCECES and donors all work together for the children's future.

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