



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

Research Commons

<http://researchcommons.waikato.ac.nz/>

Research Commons at the University of Waikato

Copyright Statement:

The digital copy of this thesis is protected by the Copyright Act 1994 (New Zealand).

The thesis may be consulted by you, provided you comply with the provisions of the Act and the following conditions of use:

- Any use you make of these documents or images must be for research or private study purposes only, and you may not make them available to any other person.
- Authors control the copyright of their thesis. You will recognise the author's right to be identified as the author of the thesis, and due acknowledgement will be made to the author where appropriate.
- You will obtain the author's permission before publishing any material from the thesis.

Parental Involvement in Early Childhood Learning: Douala, Littoral Region,

Cameroon

A thesis

submitted in fulfilment

of the requirements for the degree

of

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

at

University of Waikato

by

Emela Achu Fenmachi



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

2023

Abstract

This thesis considers the significance of parental involvement in early childhood learning from a sociological, sociocultural and African perspective, which all emphasise the role of the home, community and early learning institutions in children's learning and development. An interpretive paradigm was used to explore parents' and teachers' perspectives about parents' involvement in children's education in a public and private nursery school in Douala, Cameroon. Data were collected through a mixed-method approach, including questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, observations, document portfolio analysis, informal conversations, Zoom, and WhatsApp messages. Questionnaires were developed for all parents in each nursery school. In addition, eight parents and four teachers in each school were interviewed using semi-structured and open-ended questions. Two weeks of observations were made per nursery school. Following face-to-face data collection, participants were contacted via WhatsApp to obtain additional information and clarify ideas.

Analysis revealed two types of parental involvement, home-based and school-based parental involvement. Home-based parental involvement included parental engagement of children in day-to-day home activities to develop their independence skills and responsibility, assisting children to complete homework, and providing educational resources to support school-based learning. School-based involvement was higher with private nursery school families. The private nursery school families attended several events run by the school and parents' input was welcomed and valued through the parent-led forum. Contrastingly, the public nursery school administration offered limited opportunities for parents to participate in school-based activities. Further, due to large class sizes, communication with parents appeared to be one-way; in most cases, parents were responsible for initiating contact. Therefore, parents had limited chances to contribute to the teaching and learning process at school. Teachers of both nursery schools placed little value on the role of parents and other caregivers in supporting and supervising children's learning and participation in the day-to-day activities of the home and therefore missed the opportunity to draw on home-based resources to incorporate this into classroom activities.

Discussing the study findings in relation to the sociocultural and African concepts of child development led to an understanding of the different roles played by all agents involved in child development and learning (family, extended family, community, school and the Government) and how they can partner to enhance children's learning experiences and

wellbeing. It was also noted that the education system propagated more of the colonial culture and language, with little emphasis on indigenous forms of learning. Furthermore, the public nursery school faced challenges in implementing the curriculum goals and objectives. These challenges included large class sizes, higher child-teacher ratios, inadequate learning and teaching materials, and limited study space.

The study recommends a culturally inclusive education framework incorporating children's everyday experiences and practices into the nursery school curriculum to enhance children's learning experiences. This implies educators working in partnership with families to integrate family resources into institutional learning programmes, creating a connection between children's home learning experiences and school-based learning. Furthermore, policies to increase funding for nursery school education will help to provide access to quality early education for all children.

Acknowledgement

My Journey as a PhD student at the University of Waikato was both exciting and challenging. In the beginning, it was a complex process to settle in a new country after leaving behind my husband and children back in South Korea and Cameroon, respectively. Nevertheless, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisors, Associate Professor Sally Peters and Professor Linda Mitchell, for their advice, patience and motivation throughout my studies. Their professional expertise and immense knowledge were helpful throughout my research and writing of this thesis. Completing my studies would not have been possible without their guidance and support. Many thanks to Associate Professor Kathie Crocket for welcoming and guiding me in my early days at the Division of Education until my supervisors were arranged to take over. I also wish to sincerely thank Dr Sonja Arndt, my former supervisor, for her guidance and advice at the start of my studies through to confirmation before she relocated to Australia. I appreciate the efforts of Associate Professor Chris Eames and Dr Laura Gurney for their encouragement and insightful comments during my confirmation and on my progress reports. Many thanks go to my PhD colleagues and other faculty staff at the Division of Education, my academic liaison librarians and the library staff for organising educational workshops that were useful to my thesis writing. I also appreciate the workshops and seminars organised by the postgraduate research office and the Centre for tertiary teaching and learning.

I express my deepest gratitude to the Ministry of Basic Education in Cameroon for permitting me to carry out my research, to my research participants the children, parents, teachers and school administration of the private and public nursery school. I am grateful for their time, cooperation, support and the beautiful ideas they shared with me during and after the data collection period.

I am also grateful for the love and support from my family members, my husband Joseph Tata for his love, care and financial support and my two children, Ariel Faith Tata and Ivan Tata, for the sacrifice and patience throughout my study. To the rest of my family members and in-laws, I say thank you.

Finally, I appreciate the support of my church family at Crossroad Church Pukete, for welcoming me into the church family and making my early days in New Zealand comfortable.

Dedication

This study is wholeheartedly dedicated to my husband, Joseph Tata, my two children, Ariel Faith Tata and Ivan Tata and to my mum Nashi Gladys Achu of blessed memory. Finally, to God Almighty for his guidance and protection.

Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgement	iv
Dedication	v
List of Figures	xii
List of Tables	xiv
Chapter 1 Introduction and Study Outline	1
1.1 Background to the Study	1
1.2 Researcher's Interest	2
1.3 The Context	3
1.3.1 Brief Historical Analysis of Cameroon	3
1.3.2 The Research Problem	9
1.4 Overview of Theoretical Framework	10
1.5 Research questions	10
1.6 Overview of Research Methodology	10
1.7 Objectives of the Study	11
1.8 Aims and Significance of the Study	12
1.9 Thesis Structure	15
1.10 Chapter Summary	16
Chapter 2 History and Context of the Cameroon Education System	17
2.1 Context of the Cameroon Education System	17
2.2 Language	18
2.3 The Educational Sector in Cameroon	18
2.4 Teacher Training for Nursery and Primary School	19
2.5 The Anglophone Crisis and Education in Cameroon	21
2.6 Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Cameroon	22
2.6.1 Provision of ECE in Cameroon	23
2.6.2 Access to Early Childhood Education in Cameroon	24
2.7 Early Childhood Education in Douala	26
2.8 The Cameroon Nursery School Curriculum	27
2.8.1 Structure of the Curriculum	27
2.8.2 Domains	28
2.8.3 Learning Outcomes	29
2.8.4 National Core Skills	29
2.8.5 Competences	29
2.8.6 Instructional Strategies	30

2.8.7	Intervention Strategies	30
2.8.8	Assessment	30
2.9	Chapter Summary	32
	Chapter 3 Theoretical Framework	33
3.1	Introduction	33
3.2	Conceptions of Childhood and Child Development	34
3.2.1	New Sociology of Childhood	34
3.2.2	Urie Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Model	37
3.2.3	African Conceptions of Childhood	41
3.2.4	Nsamenang’s Social Ontogenesis Theory	43
3.2.5	Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory	45
3.2.6	Dewey’s Concept of Democracy in Education	47
3.2.7	The Use of Sociocultural and African Theories in this Study	49
3.2.8	Roles and Responsibilities for Child Development from Sociocultural and African Perspectives	50
3.3	Chapter Summary	56
	Chapter 4 Perspectives on Parental Involvement in Early Childhood Learning	57
4.1	Introduction	57
4.2	Early Childhood Education	57
4.3	Parental Involvement in Early Childhood Learning	59
4.4	Factors influencing Parental Involvement in Early Childhood Learning	65
4.4.1	Education	66
4.4.2	Working Conditions, Low Income as well as Single or Separated Parents	66
4.4.3	Parent-teacher Relationships	67
4.4.4	Parents’ Views of Childhood and Involvement in Early Childhood Learning	68
4.4.5	Teachers’ and Administrators’ Views about Parental Involvement in Early Childhood Learning	69
4.5	Chapter Summary	72
	Chapter 5 Methodology	73
5.1	Introduction	73
5.2	Research Questions	74
5.3	Research Design	74
5.4	Interpretive Paradigm	75
5.5	Qualitative Methodology	76
5.6	Case Study Design	79
5.7	Participants	80
5.7.1	Access to Study Participants	81

5.7.2	Study Site and Research Participants	82
5.8	Methods for Data Collection	93
5.8.1	Questionnaires	94
5.8.2	Interviews	95
5.8.3	Observations	96
5.8.4	Informal Conversations and the Review of Document Portfolios	98
5.9	Data Analysis	99
5.9.1	Analysis of Interviews, Observation Data, Informal Conversations and Review of Document Portfolios	99
5.9.2	Analysis of Questionnaires	102
5.10	Safeguarding Quality and Trustworthiness of this Study	102
5.10.1	Credibility	103
5.10.2	Transferability	103
5.10.3	Dependability	104
5.10.4	Confirmability	104
5.11	Ethical Considerations	104
5.11.1	Access to Participants	105
5.11.2	Informed Consent	105
5.11.3	Confidentiality and Anonymity	106
5.11.4	Potential Harm to Participants	107
5.11.5	Rights to Withdraw at any Stage of the Research Project	107
5.11.6	Social and Cultural Considerations	107
5.12	Chapter Summary	108
	Chapter 6 Findings from the Private Nursery School	109
6.1	Introduction	109
6.2	Home-Based Parental Involvement	109
6.2.1	Child Development and Upbringing	110
6.2.2	Homework	117
6.2.3	Extra Educational Materials and Reading at Home	119
6.3	School-Based Parental Involvement	120
6.3.1	Parent-Teacher-Children Activities:	120
6.3.2	Parent-Teacher/School Administration Meetings:	131
6.3.3	Communications and Class Observations	135
6.4	Private School Parents Drop off and Pick-up Routines	136
6.5	Barriers to Parental Involvement in Children’s Learning	141
6.6	Parents’ Beliefs about Parental Involvement in Early Childhood Learning	143
6.7	Teachers’ Beliefs about Parental Involvement in Early Childhood Learning	147

6.7.1	Didactics for Private Nursery School Teachers	150
6.8	School Administration and Teachers' Role in Parents' Participation in Children's Learning	152
6.8.1	Parent School	153
6.8.2	School Events	153
6.8.3	Communication with Families	154
6.8.4	Report Cards	156
6.8.5	Promoting the Use of Traditional Languages by Organising Cultural Week:	165
6.8.6	Home Visits	165
6.9	Case Studies of High and Low Parental Engagement in Children's Learning (Private Nursery School)	166
6.9.1	Case Study of High Parental Engagement in Children's Learning (Private Nursery School): SH's Dad	166
6.9.2	Case Study of Low Parental Engagement in Children's Learning (Private Nursery School): FO's Dad	168
6.9.3	Analysis of Themes Differentiating Case Studies of High and Low Parental Involvement	170
6.10	Chapter Summary	171
Chapter 7 Findings from the Public Nursery School		174
7.1	Introduction	174
7.2	Home-Based Parental Involvement	174
7.2.1	Child Development and Upbringing	174
7.2.2	Home Study	180
7.2.3	Extra Educational Materials and Reading at Home	183
7.3	School-based Parental Involvement	184
7.3.1	End-of-year and Graduation Ceremonies	184
7.3.2	Parent-Teacher Association	185
7.3.3	Communications and Class Observations	190
7.4	Public Nursery School Parents' Drop-off and Pick-up Routines	192
7.5	Barriers to Parental Involvement in Children's Learning	196
7.6	Parents' Beliefs about Parental Involvement in Early Childhood Learning	199
7.7	School Administration and the Teacher's Role in Parents' Participation in Children's Learning	201
7.7.1	School Events	202
7.7.2	Communication with Families	202
7.7.3	The Nursery School Curriculum and Home-school Relationships.	203
7.8	Teachers' Beliefs about Parental Involvement in Early Childhood Learning	212
7.9	Case Studies of High and Low Parental Engagement in Children's Learning (Public Nursery School)	215

7.9.1	Case Study of High Parental Engagement in Children’s Learning (Public Nursery School): PT’s Dad	215
7.9.2	Case Study of Low Parental Engagement in Children’s Learning (Public Nursery School): SE’s Dad	218
7.9.3	Analysis of Themes Differentiating Case Studies of High and Low Parental Involvement	221
7.10	Chapter Summary	222
Chapter 8 Understanding Similarities and Differences in Parental Involvement between the Public and Private Nursery schools		224
8.1	Introduction	224
8.2	Similarities between Private and Public Nursery Schools	224
8.3	Differences between the Private and Public Nursery Schools	226
8.3.1	Age Groups of Parents	226
8.3.2	Marital Status	226
8.3.3	Level of Education	227
8.3.4	Income Levels and Occupation Types	227
8.3.5	Class Size, Teacher-Child Ratios and Class Structure	228
8.3.6	Levels of Parent Engagement	229
8.3.7	Teachers’ Didactics	229
8.3.8	Report Cards	231
8.4	Chapter Summary	231
Chapter 9 Discussion of Findings		233
9.1	Introduction	233
9.2	Discussion of Findings in Relation to Sociological and Sociocultural Concepts, and African Concepts of Child Development	234
9.2.1	Parents’ Beliefs and Practices about Parental Involvement in Early Childhood Learning	240
9.2.2	Barriers to Parental Involvement in Children’s Learning	241
9.2.3	Child Development and Upbringing Methods and their Influence on the Preschool Curriculum	242
9.2.4	Teachers’ Beliefs and Practices and how these Influenced Teachers’ Attitudes towards Parental Involvement in Early Childhood Learning	244
9.2.5	Maize as a Concept for Understanding Childrearing Practices in the African Context	250
9.3	Chapter Summary	253
Chapter 10 Conclusion, Implications and Recommendations		255
10.1	Introduction	255
10.2	Summary of Thesis Arguments	255
10.3	Recommendations for Parental Engagement in Children’s Learning	260

10.4	Implications of Findings	269
10.4.1	Implications for Families	269
10.4.2	Implications for School Administration and Teachers	270
10.4.3	Implications for the Government	271
10.5	Limitations to the Study	272
10.6	Suggestions for Further Studies	273
10.7	Conclusion	274
	References	277
	Appendices	298
	Appendix A: Research Approval Letter from University of Waikato, Division of Education Research Ethics Committee	298
	Appendix B: Information Letter for the Regional Delegation of Basic Education Littoral (Delegation Regional De L'education De Base Du Littoral). Application to conduct study in Douala, Cameroon	299
	Appendix C: Regional Delegation of Basic Education Littoral (Delegation Regional De L'education De Base Du Littoral) Consent Form	302
	Appendix D: Regional Delegation of Basic Education Consent Letter	303
	Appendix E: Information Letter for Principals of English Nursery Schools, Douala, Cameroon	304
	Appendix F: Principals of English Nursery Schools, Douala, Cameroon Consent Form	307
	Appendix G: Principal of Private English Nursery School Consent form	308
	Appendix H: Principal of Public English Nursery School Consent form	309
	Appendix I: Information Letter for Teachers of English Nursery Schools, Douala, Cameroon	310
	Appendix J: Teachers of English Nursery Schools, Douala, Cameroon Consent Form	312
	Appendix K: Sample Consent Form for Teachers of English Nursery School	313
	Appendix L: Parent Letter	314
	Appendix M: Information letter for Parents	315
	Appendix N: Parents' Consent Form	317
	Appendix O: Consent to Interview Form for Parents	318
	Appendix P: Questionnaire for Parents	319
	Appendix Q: Interview Questions for Teachers	323
	Appendix R: Interview Questions for Parents	325
	Appendix S: Observations	327
	Appendix T: Demographic Information for Private and Public Nursery School Teachers	330
	Appendix U: Categorising Parental Involvement in Children's Learning	332

List of Figures

Figure 1-1: Map of German Cameroon	5
Figure 1-2: Map of British and French Cameroon	6
Figure 1-3: Present Day Map of Cameroon.....	7
Figure 1-4: Map of Cameroon, showing Douala 5 Municipal Council.....	8
Figure 3-1: Roles and Responsibilities for Child Development from Sociocultural and African Perspectives	51
Figure 5-1: Research Design	75
Figure 5-2: Parents' Level of Education (n=13).....	87
Figure 5-3: Level of Education for Public School Parents (n=28).....	92
Figure 6-1: Parent Handing Over the Child to an Older Sibling in front of the School Gate	114
Figure 6-2: Examples of Homework and Feedback from Private Nursery School Teachers	119
Figure 6-3: Letter to Parents in Preparation for Science Fair Projects	122
Figure 6-4: Private Nursery School Parents' Response to their Interest in Volunteering in School-based Activities.	123
Figure 6-5: November 2019 Thanksgiving Ceremony, Children of Private Nursery School	125
Figure 6-6: November 2019 Thanksgiving Ceremony, Parents of Private Nursery School and the Fruit Tree (named the ark).....	126
Figure 6-7: November 2019 Thanksgiving Ceremony, Award Giving: Private Nursery School.	126
Figure 6-8: Examples of Awards Given to Children: Private Nursery School	127
Figure 6-9: Thanksgiving Theme Board Designed by Children and Teachers including Thanksgiving Messages: Private Nursery School	128
Figure 6-10: Thanksgiving Messages: Private Nursery School	128
Figure 6-11: November 2019 Thanksgiving Invitation Letter to Private Nursery School Parents	129
Figure 6-12: November 2019 Thanksgiving Programme Schedule: Private Nursery School	130
Figure 6-13: Drop-offs, Private Nursery School	141
Figure 6-14: Amount of Time Spent in Paid Employment per Day.....	142
Figure 6-15: Private Nursery School Classrooms	151
Figure 6-16: Class Activity Illustrated on Classroom Wall including other Play Resources	151
Figure 6-17: Picture of Nursery Two Children using LCD Writing Tablets, Private Nursery School.....	152
Figure 6-18: Number of Private Nursery School Parents using Different Forms of Communication with the School (n=13)	153
Figure 6-19: Private Nursery School Newsletter.....	156
Figure 6-20:Nursery One Report Card, Private Nursery School.....	159
Figure 6-21: Nursery One Progress Report, Private Nursery School.....	161

Figure 6-22: Nursery Two Report Card, Private Nursery School	162
Figure 6-23: Nursery Two Progress Report Card, Private Nursery school.....	164
Figure 7-1: Older Sibling Doing School Drop-offs.....	177
Figure 7-2: Badge to be Presented by Public School Parents During Pick-ups	187
Figure 7-3: PTA Meeting Agenda, Public Nursery School.....	190
Figure 7-4: Drop-offs, Public Nursery School	196
Figure 7-5: Amount of Time Spent in Paid Employment per Day.....	198
Figure 7-6: Number of Public Nursery School Parents using Different Forms of Communication with the School (n=28)	202
Figure 7-7: Public Nursery School Report Card, Nursery One and Two.....	205
Figure 7-8: Class Activity Illustrated on the Blackboard by a Public School Teacher.	209
Figure 7-9: Educational Resources and Some Class Activity Illustrated on the Classroom Wall.	209
Figure 7-10: Nursery One Public School Children Reciting Rhymes with Teacher.....	210
Figure 7-11: Children Playing with Toys While Waiting for Parents to Pick-up	211
Figure 7-12: Children Playing in the School's Only Slide.....	211
Figure 9-1: Child Development and Learning in the Home, Community and Preschool setting.....	237
Figure 9-2: Maize as a Concept for Understanding Childrearing Practices in the African Context.....	251

List of Tables

Table 5-1: Demographic Information of Private Nursery School Families who Responded to the Questionnaires (interviewed parents included).	85
Table 5-2: Pseudonyms and Gender Classification for Private Nursery School Interviewed Parents	87
Table 5-3: Background Information about Observed Private Nursery School Children	88
Table 5-4: Demographic Information of Public Nursery School Families who Responded to the Questionnaires (interviewed parents included).	90
Table 5-5: Pseudonyms and Gender Classification for Public Nursery School Parents Interviewed	93
Table 5-6: Background Information about Observed Public Nursery School Children.....	93
Table 5-7: Research Participants and Activities (Private and Public Nursery school)	99
Table 6-1: Self-management skills Development, Private School Parents	116
Table 6-2: Drop off and Pick-up Routines of Six Private School Parents (Nursery One and Two).....	139
Table 7-1: Self-management Skills Development, Public School Parents.....	179
Table 7-2: Drop off and Pick-up Routines of Six Public School Parent’s (Nursery One and Two).....	194

Chapter 1

Introduction and Study Outline

Parental involvement during the early years is essential in children's development and lays the foundation for success later in life. Parents are their children's first educators, and their role in their children's education is considered to be a process that links the home to the early childhood centre (nursery school in the Cameroon context). Parental involvement, therefore, refers to the involvement of parents in a continuous, mutual and authentic relationship regarding children's learning and their participation in other activities organised by the school. This study explores the role of parent involvement in early childhood learning and its contribution to children's holistic development in Douala, the economic capital of Cameroon. The study aims to generate an understanding of parents' and teachers' conceptions of parental involvement in children's learning, both in the home and in the nursery school. In terms of child upbringing and development, key indigenous practices were examined to see how these practices could be incorporated into the nursery school curriculum. This investigation underscores the importance of parental involvement from a sociocultural perspective, concluding that a mutual relationship between parents and teachers positively impacts children's learning and development.

This chapter presents the background and contextual information for the investigation, and explains the researcher's interests and reasons for carrying out this research project. The chapter also introduces the study context, by providing a brief historical analysis of Cameroon. The following sections outline the research problem and questions, as well as the aims and significance of the study. The chapter concludes by presenting the overall thesis structure.

1.1 Background to the Study

Human beings grow physically, emotionally, socially, cognitively, and spiritually before birth and this continues through their lifespan. According to UNICEF,

Early childhood is a critical stage of development that forms the foundation for children's future well-being and learning. Research has shown that half of a person's intelligence potential is developed by age four and that early childhood interventions can have a lasting effect on intellectual capacity, personality, and social behaviour. (UNICEF, 2016, p. 1)

Early childhood education enhances brain development during the first years of life and has lifelong effects (Garcia et al., 2008). Through interaction and stimulation at home and in early learning institutions, the brain grows and develops through touch, vision, and hearing. Hence, it is crucial to give all children opportunities for learning during their early years. Access to quality early childhood education is beneficial to children and “has both immediate effects upon their cognitive and social development and long-term effects upon their educational achievements and life prospects” (Whitebread, 2012, p. 16). Parental involvement in early childhood education positively influences children’s holistic development, which embodies physical, social, cognitive, emotional and spiritual development. Garcia et al. (2008) emphasise that learning aimed at holistic development in children should focus on social competence, language proficiency, emotional maturity, life skills, and general cognitive competence. Children need support as they develop, and this support comes from their families, educational institutions and the external community around them. Therefore, the family plays a pivotal role in a child’s growth and development (Bronfenbrenner, 1974).

The following section will introduce my background and interest in this study.

1.2 Researcher’s Interest

I was born and raised in Cameroon, where I began my education in nursery school, from which I continued through the education system to university, where I acquired a Bachelor’s degree in Geography. In 2009, after graduating from university, I moved with my husband to South Korea. In 2014, I enrolled in Korea Nazarene University to do a Master’s of Theology in Christian Education, graduating in 2018. During my Master’s, I developed an interest in working with, listening to and teaching children. With this interest in mind, I researched and wrote my Master’s thesis on “Activities that Aim at Children’s Spiritual Formation”, using the Songtan Central Baptist Church English Ministry as a case study. Before I considered writing on this topic, I volunteered to be a teacher on Sundays at the church’s Ministry for Children. I also worked as a multicultural instructor from 2010 until 2018; a role in which I developed knowledge of young Korean children in different kindergartens around South Korea, teaching them about African culture where I could. Exposure to early childhood education in a different context changed my whole idea about and view of children. Working as a multicultural instructor in different kindergartens around Korea, I learned and recognised that children are individuals whose voices and opinions matter. It was fascinating to see the way parents got involved in the learning process, such as attending school meetings, parent education

programmes, and one-on-one counselling sessions with their children's teacher. In some instances, some parents even volunteered to teach an activity that they knew well. During these years, my experience with children, both as a teacher and as a parent, led me to develop an interest in children and the influence parents can have on children's holistic development. This study aims to understand the nature of parents' involvement in their children's learning in Douala, Cameroon. The following section will introduce the context of this study.

1.3 The Context

Cameroon, also known as the Republic of Cameroon, is in Central Africa bordering the Bight of Biafra, between Equatorial Guinea and Nigeria. Cameroon is surrounded by Chad, Central African Republic, Congo, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea and Nigeria. The country spans a total of 475,440 sq. km and is made up of ten administrative regions: the Far North, North, South, East, Centre, West, North West, South West, Adamawa and Littoral regions. The country's climate varies according to the terrain, and ranges from the tropical climate along the coast to the very hot dry climate of the semi-arid north (Central Intelligence Agency, 2019).

1.3.1 Brief Historical Analysis of Cameroon

The name Cameroon can be traced back to 1472 when Portuguese traders arrived at the Wouri River, and discovered that there were a great variety of prawns in this area (Angwafo, 2014). Hence this area became known as "Rio dos Cameroes", meaning "river of prawns". Since then, different colonial masters have given different spellings to the nation's name.

The 1884 Berlin Conference accelerated the European colonisation and partitioning of Africa, at which point Cameroon became a German colony with the spelling Kamerun (Angwafo, 2014). The scramble for resources and partitioning of Africa by European countries took place without regard for linguistic or ethnic considerations. The separation and regrouping of ethnic groups that had different cultural norms and beliefs led to the emergence of ethnic wars and rivalries, which continue to exist even in today's post-colonial Africa. "The Ejagham, for instance, were divided between Cameroon and Nigeria; the Wolof and Serers between Senegal and Gambia; the Banyang also divided between Cameroon and Nigeria, and the Yoruba between Nigeria and (Dahomey) the Benin Republic" (Angwafo, 2014, p. 3). Following the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, Germany's Kamerun was ceded to Britain and France between 1922 and 1945, as divided territories mandated by the League of Nations. The country became unequally partitioned between the French (2/3) and the British (1/3). The part of the country occupied by the British was named British Cameroon, while the part occupied by the

French was called Cameroun or East Cameroon (Angwafo, 2014; Dze-Ngwa, 2014; Langbehn, 2013). French Cameroon (Cameroun) gained independence in 1960 and took on the name Republic of Cameroon. In 1961, part of British Cameroon (British Northern Cameroon) elected to join Nigeria, while the other part (British Southern Cameroon) joined the Republic of Cameroon. This partitioning of British Cameroon led to the formation of two distinct cultures –French and English – in the Federal Republic of Cameroon (Egbe, 2015; Mbaku, 2014). The Federation between French Cameroon and British Southern Cameroon was abolished in 1972, resulting in the formation of a unitary constitution. It was in these circumstances that the country’s name was changed from the Federal Republic of Cameroon to the United Republic of Cameroon by the country’s first president, Amadou Ahidjo. In 1984, President Paul Biya took over from President Ahidjo, and the term “United” was dropped from the country’s name; hence the country is presently known as the Republic of Cameroon (Mbaku, 2014).

Figures 1.1 to 1.3 below show how the map of Cameroon has evolved from the time of German colonial rule, through British and French colonial rule, to the present-day Republic of Cameroon. It shows the expansion and retraction of borders during the different periods of colonial rule.

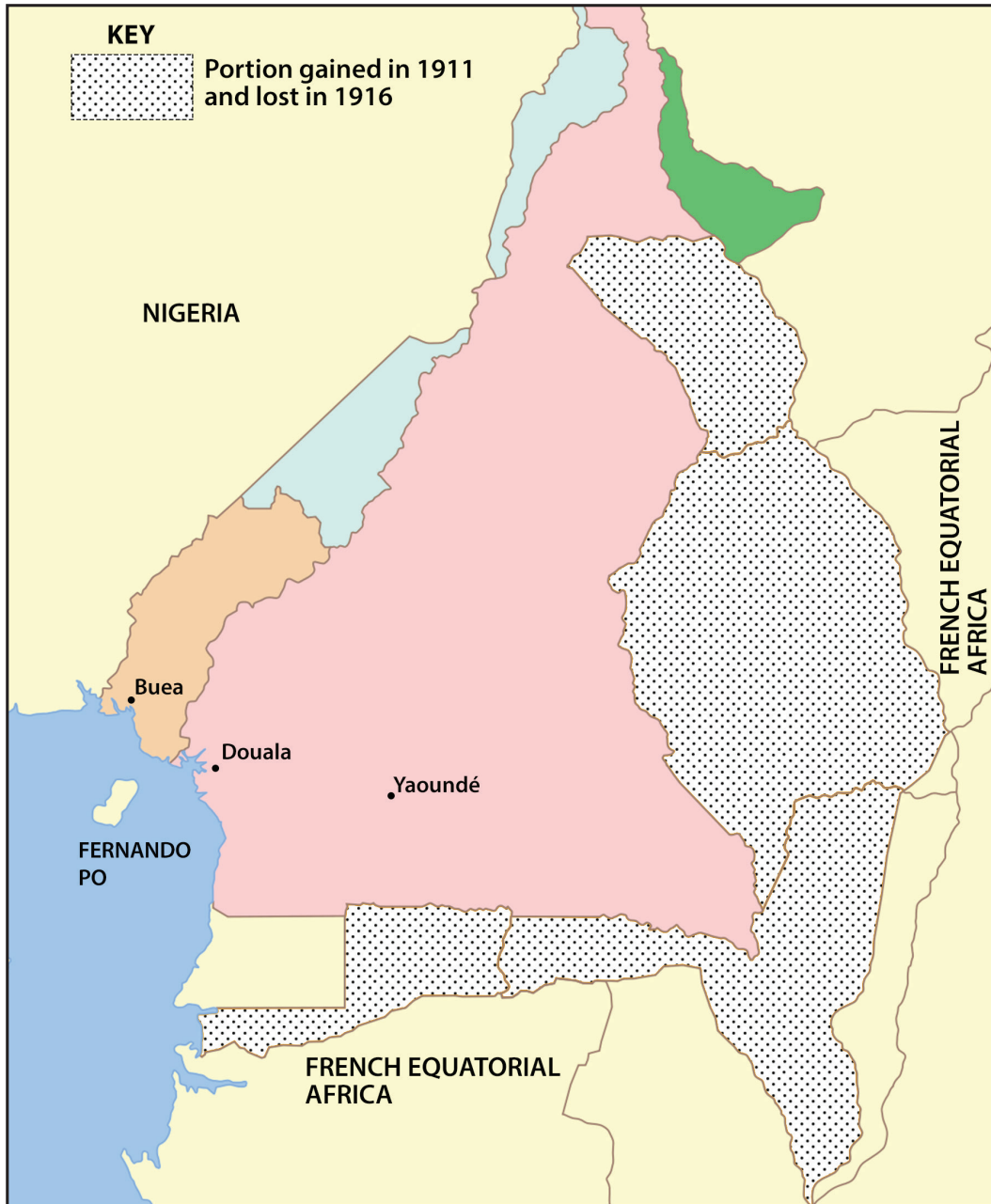


Figure 1-1: Map of German Cameroon

Source: Gwanfogbe (2018). Copyright permission obtained from Spears Media Press LLC.



Figure 1-2: Map of British and French Cameroon

Source: Gwanfogbe (2018). Copyright permission obtained from Spears Media Press LLC.



Figure 1-3: Present Day Map of Cameroon

Source: Gwanfogbe (2018). Copyright permission obtained from Spears Media Press LLC.

This investigation focuses on Douala, which is the economic capital of Cameroon and one of the country's largest cities, with a population of 3,793,000 (Macrotrends, n. d.).¹ The study focuses its investigation on Douala 5, one of Littoral's five districts, as seen in the map below.

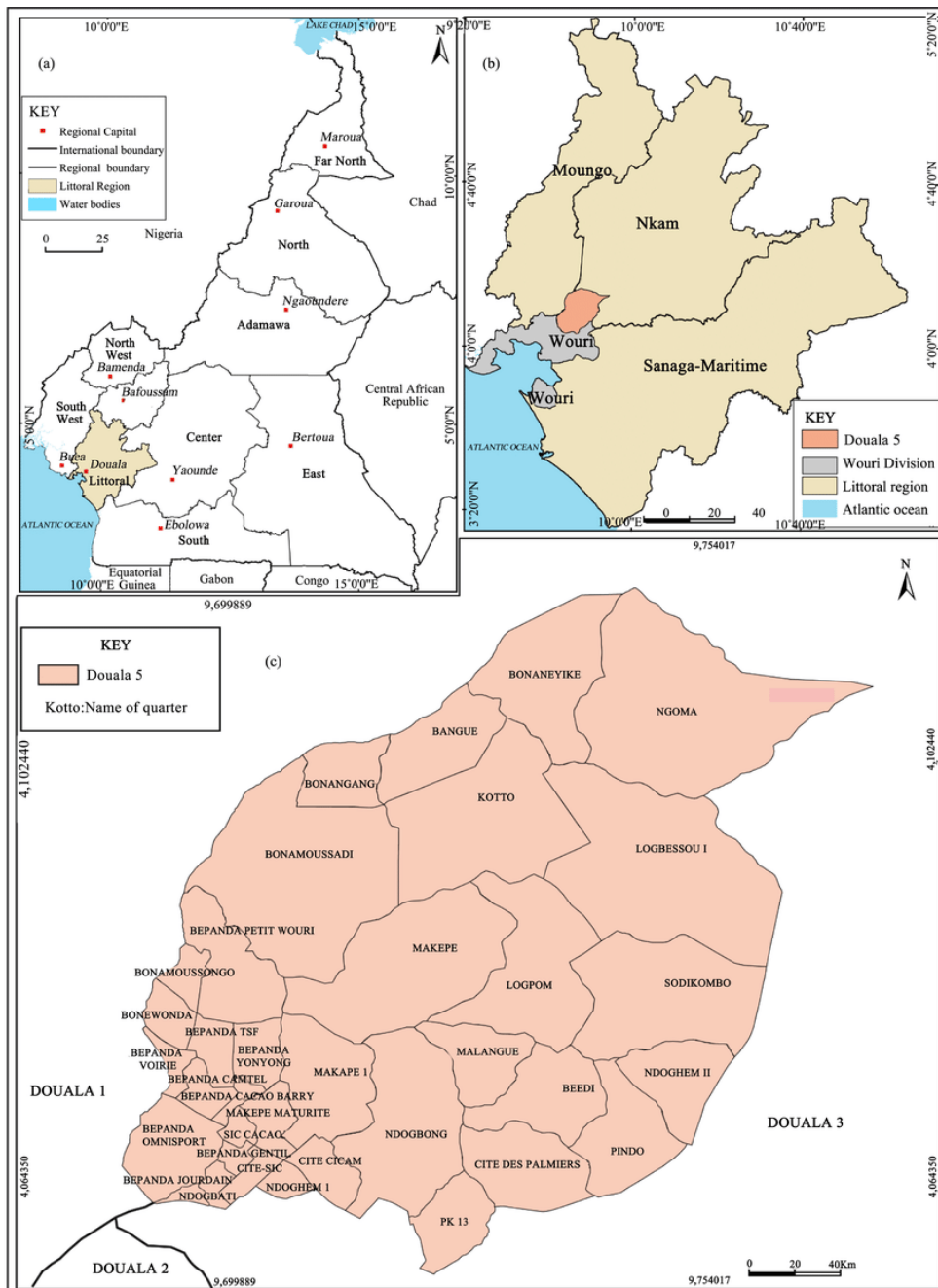


Figure 1-4: Map of Cameroon, showing Douala 5 Municipal Council

Source: Tichafogwe (2018). Licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0).

¹ Cameroon's total population is 26,857,715 (Worldometer, 2020).

The following sections introduce the research problem and questions, and discuss the significance of the research.

1.3.2 The Research Problem

This study explored the role of parental involvement in early childhood learning for children's holistic development in Douala, the economic capital of Cameroon. The importance of early childhood education for children's holistic development need not be overemphasised. However, African Union (2018) reports reveal a lack of investment in this sector and limited access to quality early childhood education services for most of Africa's population. Due to the country's socio-economic conditions, with 39 percent of the country's population living below the poverty line (OCHA, 2019), many families face a lot of challenges. Gender inequality is reinforced by poverty and the cultural belief that the girl child is suitable for the domestic task in preparation for marriage (Ngoran & Ngalim, 2019), meaning, in most cases, the education of the girl child is a lesser priority.

However, there has been a shift towards viewing the education of both boys and girls as being equally important. At the same time, Cameroon has increased its preschool education provision to cater to these changes in perspective and, as such, there has been a move towards ensuring access for all children to preschool education. Yet, the colonisation and partitioning of Africa has its legacy, which in this case is characterised by an education system that has not been responsive to the Cameroon people's social and cultural conditions. Thus, teaching practices have continued to be informed by colonial systems of education, placing little significance on indigenous education and practices (children's everyday experiences at home and in the community) (Nsamenang, 2010b). The current education system neglects the role of parents as key stakeholders in children's education and the influence of the home environment on children's learning. These beliefs and practices might influence the way parental knowledge is understood and pose barriers to approaches in which parents are involved in their children's education. My interest primarily lies in how both teachers and parents conceive parental involvement in children's learning in Douala, Cameroon. The study also sought to assess the nature of parental involvement in the early educational years of children, especially taking into account the social and cultural conditions of the people of this community. In addition to this interest, types of parenting styles common among these parents, who provided support for early childhood learning, were considered.

1.4 Overview of Theoretical Framework

The theories and concepts of childhood and development that informs this study are James and Prout's (2015) sociological views of childhood to understand how children learn and develop in their social and cultural contexts. This study draws on Bronfenbrenner's (1986) bioecological model to understand children's development in the home environment, communities and the wider society. Because context plays a significant role in child development, the social ontogenesis theory (Nsamenang, 2006a), which explains child development views from an African perspective, is crucial to contextualising teachers' and parents' views of childhood and children. Vygotsky's (1978) and Dewey's (1916) views on children's development and learning as impacted by social and cultural interaction helped understand the role of more knowledgeable adults in children's development and learning in this study. The aim is to explore the opportunity to create a new understanding by combining sociological and sociocultural theories of childhood with the African ideologies of child development and upbringing.

1.5 Research questions

Overarching Question

What are parents' and teachers' beliefs and practices about parental involvement in early childhood learning in Douala (Cameroon)?

Sub-Questions

1. What are the opportunities and challenges to parental involvement in early childhood learning?
2. In what ways do parents' cultural backgrounds influence children's care and upbringing, and how are cultural practices and understandings incorporated within the preschool curriculum?
3. What are some of the beliefs and prior experiences teachers bring to their teaching that might influence their attitudes towards parental involvement in early childhood learning?

1.6 Overview of Research Methodology

This study uses the interpretive paradigm to understand how research participants interpret and make sense of the world (Cohen et al., 2018; Croucher & Cronn-Mills, 2015). An interpretive

paradigm is thus helpful in exploring perspectives on child development in the Cameroon context. The investigation design encompasses a qualitative inquiry and a case study approach. The aim is to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon being studied and preserve the multiple realities of the participants using various sources of data-gathering instruments. In this investigation, two nursery schools (one private and one public) are the case studies. Data were obtained through questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, observations, document portfolios and informal conversations. Face-to-face follow-up interviews were conducted, and WhatsApp messaging was used to obtain additional information from research participants.

1.7 Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to understand parents' and teachers' perceptions of parental involvement in ECE by analysing parents' and teachers' views on parental involvement in early childhood learning, as well as the opportunities and barriers to parental involvement in children's learning. The study also examines indigenous child upbringing and development practices to see how these were incorporated into nursery school policy and practice. Parental involvement and the ways in which parents are positioned regarding children's education are varied. In the literature, parental involvement is generally defined as participation in various school-based functions (volunteering, decision-making, parent-teacher communications and meetings) and supporting school-based learning at home (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Epstein, 1995; LaRocque et al., 2011). However, given the role parents play in children's education at school and home (some of which are not directly visible to educators), more attention has been given to the nature and scope of parents' roles in education and how this is defined (Ferlazzo, 2011; Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). For example, Goodall and Montgomery (2014) differentiate parental involvement and parental engagement as a shift from school agency to parents' agency in children's learning at home, school or the community. Thus, parents are not passive recipients but play a central role in children's learning, whether at the nursery school, home or community and are actively contributing and working alongside teachers in the teaching and learning process (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). Parental involvement in this study refers to the roles parents play in enriching their children's learning experience at home and school and the programmes or strategies put in place by educators to ensure parents' participation in children's learning. Focusing on parental involvement will allow the researcher to explore parents' and teachers' conceptions about parental involvement, with parental engagement in children's learning as the goal. The aim is to inform approaches for parental engagement in early learning that are applicable to the Cameroon context,

approaches in which teachers can work alongside not only parents but families as partners, which is a “collective approach to parental engagement”.

1.8 Aims and Significance of the Study

Research has been conducted in many countries and over many years providing evidence of the powerful impacts when education institutions, families, and community groups work as partners with educational aims in mind (Epstein, 1995, 2018; Garcia et al., 2008; Gonzalez et al., 2005; Grindal et al., 2016; Harris & Goodall, 2008; Janssen & Vandebroek, 2018). Such a partnership develops and enhances relationships and communication between educators, families and the community. Epstein (2018) emphasises that children are active participants in the home, school and community, thereby creating links between these settings. Therefore, educators, families and community members need to work together for children’s learning and development. The relationships between these settings need to be two-way and empowering so that actions in one setting reinforce and support those in other settings (Gonzalez et al., 2005; Moll et al., 1992). Furthermore, bioecological and sociocultural theories (Bronfenbrenner, 1981; Vygotsky, 1978) emphasise the role of the individual’s context in their learning and development, thus the importance of family and community engagement in education.

However, very little has been written about Cameroonian parents or the nature of and challenges to parental involvement and child development from a Cameroonian point of view. Among the few studies conducted on parental involvement and child development in Cameroon are the works of Abondo (2019) highlighting paternal involvement in early childhood care and development. Abondo employed a mixed-method approach using demographic and health surveys (DHS), multiple indicator cluster surveys (MICS) and interviews with mothers. Findings from the DHS-MICS narrowly confined paternal involvement as referring to the absence or presence of the father in the family home, concluding that most fathers who lived outside the family home could be considered as not being involved in their children’s education. Contrarily, interviews with mothers revealed different levels of paternal involvement ranging from regular caregiving, physical, material and financial support irrespective of the father's physical presence or absence from the family home. Abondo argued that using the dominant discourse methodology (DHS-MICS) in assessing father-involvement in early childhood care and education is insufficient and called for the use of contextual indicators. Similarly, this study employed a mixed-method approach, with data generated through questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, observations, analyzing document

portfolios, informal conversations, WhatsApp messages and Zoom interviews. These methods enabled rich data to be gathered from participants. Furthermore, in-depth interviews with parents and teachers were used to gain an understanding of parents' and teachers' beliefs on parental involvement and children's upbringing.

In addition, there is a study carried out by Nsamenang (2008), who focused on children's agency and child development characteristics among Nso parents in the northwest region of Cameroon. Nsamenang argued that context is an essential factor to be considered when attempting to understand childcare and development. The study emphasises the concept of peer-mentoring cultures and child-to-child sociability, and the influence on children's development. Nsamenang concluded that children developed as a result of the initiatives they take and through nurturing, mentoring, and social interactions with siblings, peers, parents and other adults in the community. My investigation considered an interface between the sociocultural theories of childhood and African concepts of childhood with the intention that a new understanding of children's development and learning within the family, community and learning institution could be gained.

Other studies on parental involvement in children's education have investigated the role of parents in the acquisition of reading competencies by primary school children living with dyslexia in the South West Region of Cameroon (Francisca, 2021). Francisca (2021) employed questionnaires and interviews to obtain data from five children, five teachers and five parents. The results revealed a positive correlation between parental cooperation with teachers and performance in children's reading with dyslexia. Some of the key recommendations from Francisca's study relevant to this investigation are actions aimed at building solid parent-teacher relationships, such as home-school communications and the inclusion of parents' perspectives in school activities.

Another study conducted by Igbo and Ihejiene (2014) explored the impact of parenting roles on deviant behaviours and academic achievement of secondary school children in Northern Cameroon. The study involved 350 senior secondary school students. It investigated three types of parenting styles: authoritative (responsive, reciprocal, nurturing with clear rules and guidelines), authoritarian (a high level of expectations, low level of nurturance with stringent and non-negotiable rules), and permissive (high on responsiveness and low on demandingness) through questionnaires. The findings indicated that an authoritative parenting style had a significant influence on students' academic achievement, followed by authoritarian and

permissive parenting styles. The authors claim that parents play an essential role in the formation of behaviours, whether normal or deviant behaviours. The study recommends sound parent-teacher relationships and encourages teachers to know students' family backgrounds and expectations in order to understand how to relate to children and their families. Though salient issues on the topic under investigation could emerge by drawing on the perspectives of families and teachers, Igbo and Ihejiene's study is more relevant to this study for reason that it regards the home as the immediate environment where children learn and develop, and considers parents as the first teachers of children.

This investigation explores parents' and teachers' perspectives about parental involvement in early childhood learning in the Cameroon context. The significance of this research project lies in the contributions it could make to Cameroon and similar African contexts. Firstly, this research underscores the importance of the cultural and intercultural ecosystems (English/French educational systems, as well as indigenous culture and practices) and the cultural experiences for children's learning and development in Cameroon and similar contexts. It looked at the relevance of cultural development, especially in children practising local languages and culture in the nursery school setting.

Secondly, this investigation emphasises the significance of parental involvement in early childhood learning from a sociocultural perspective. Bronfenbrenner's (1986) ecological model postures that a cooperative relationship between parents and educators can positively influence children's learning. Similarly, Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory emphasises the role of adults in scaffolding children's learning. Thus, parental involvement in children's learning is valuable for children's holistic development. This study sought to understand parents' and teachers' conceptions about parental involvement in early childhood learning, and to explain relevant parenting approaches for children's holistic development in general.

Thirdly, conceptions of children's and parents' role in early childhood education from the perspectives of parents and teachers are highlighted. To do this, I analysed parents' and teachers' views on child upbringing and parental involvement in early childhood learning, as well as the opportunities and barriers to parental involvement in children's learning. Suggestions on other ways to engage parents in early childhood education are made for a Cameroon context. I also developed recommendations, based on the literature and experiences analysed throughout this investigation, for future practices engaging parents.

In the end, this research, with particular reference to Cameroonian parents and teachers, may contribute to further study in this area and inform practices in the future that explore ways in which the Government, educators and parents might partner to develop a curriculum that will reflect the cultural aspirations of the Cameroonian people. The investigation concludes with recommendations for parental engagement in early learning in Cameroon. Lastly, the study adds a comparative aspect to the international literature from other countries regarding parental involvement and early childhood learning studies and practice.

1.9 Thesis Structure

The thesis comprises ten chapters. The content of each chapter is explained as follows:

Chapter One introduces the study and the researcher's interest. This section also introduces the study context and the significance of the study.

Chapter Two provides detail on education in the Cameroon context, teacher education for nursery and primary school teachers, and the Cameroon nursery school curriculum.

Chapter Three outlines the theoretical frameworks which underpin the investigation, including James and Prout's (2015) new paradigm for the sociology of childhood, Bronfenbrenner's (1986) ecological models and African conceptions of childhood. This chapter also discusses Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theories and Dewey's (1916) concept of democracy in education. The chapter concludes by examining the roles and responsibilities for child development from sociocultural and African perspectives.

Chapter Four provides a critical review of literature on the impact of parental involvement in children's learning, home and school-based parental involvement and barriers to parental involvement in children's education.

Chapter Five presents the research methods and design, the instruments for data collection, the methods of data analysis, how the quality and trustworthiness of the data and analysis were maintained, and the ethical considerations for the study.

Chapters Six and Seven present the findings for both private and public nursery schools and introduce the different ways in which parents were involved in children's learning. These chapters also analyse parents' and teachers' beliefs on parental involvement in their children's education. Finally, the case studies of parents with high and low parental engagement in children's learning are discussed.

Chapter Eight analyses the similarities and differences in parental involvement between the public and private nursery schools.

Chapter Nine discusses the findings presented in chapters six, seven, eight and nine, and interprets the results in relation to the Sociological and Sociocultural Conceptions, Dewey's Concepts of Democracy in Education and African concepts of child development.

Chapter Ten concludes the study by discussing recommendations for parental engagement in children's learning, presents the implications for the various stakeholders: the parents and the external community, school administration and teachers, and the Government. The chapter also addresses the study's limitations and presents recommendations for further study.

1.10 Chapter Summary

In summary, this chapter introduced the study and the researcher's interest. It discussed the study context, including a brief historical analysis of Cameroon's evolution from colonial times to the present. The chapter also presents the research problem and questions, an overview of theories and methodology, the objectives and significance of the study, and the thesis structure. The next chapter introduces the history and context of the Cameroon education system.

Chapter 2

History and Context of the Cameroon Education System

The previous chapter introduced the study background and context. This chapter introduces the history and context of the Cameroon education system, explaining the bicultural system of education that exists in both the Francophone and Anglophone regions of the country. The chapter further outlines the nature and challenges of teacher training for nursery and primary school, and the differences in perspective on teacher training for the English and French systems. Early childhood education (ECE) in Cameroon is discussed. Finally, the Cameroon nursery school curriculum, designed by the Ministry of Education as a guide to teaching and learning in the nursery school, is explored.

2.1 Context of the Cameroon Education System

Cameroon's educational system is unique in that it operates both English and French educational systems. The French system of education dominates in the French-speaking regions and likewise, the English system of education dominates in the English-speaking regions. This said, this dual system of education is different in its structural organisation in primary, secondary and high school education. According to the Ministry of Basic Education (2018a), the official entrance age into nursery school education in Cameroon is four-years-old and should last two years; entrance into primary education for both English and French subsections being six-years-old. Previously, it took six years in the Francophone system to complete primary education and seven years in the Anglophone system. Francophone students spent four years in secondary education, while it took five years for Anglophone students to complete secondary education. Francophone students spent three years in high school education, while Anglophone students spent two years before university entrance (Amin & Awung, 2008). Therefore overall, students will spend one year longer in the Anglophone system than they do in the Francophone system before they enter university. However, structural reforms have reduced the years for primary education for the English subsystem to 6 years, which evens the number of years spent between preschool and high school for English and French-speaking Cameroonians (Tchombe, 2014). Even though this study is based in Douala, a French-speaking region of Cameroon, I focus on nursery school education in the Anglophone system.

2.2 Language

Cameroon has two official languages, English and French, each adopted from its colonial masters (Britain and France) before and after independence in the 1960s. The country is bilingual with many people speaking more than two languages, with a diverse population hailing from the Sudan, Fulbe, Bantu, and Semi-Bantu (Ouandji, 2018) of Africa. According to Simons and Fennig (2018), 279 ethnic languages are presently spoken in Cameroon. After colonisation by the British and French, these indigenous languages were relegated to the background, the colonial masters imposing their native tongue. Even after independence, English and French continued to be official languages. Echu (1999) gives two reasons for this. First, while many indigenous languages existed, a conflict might have developed had one of these indigenous languages been chosen over other indigenous languages. Secondly, before independence, very few of these indigenous languages were well developed or even standardised to be adopted for official purposes. The marginalisation of indigenous languages has constrained the ways in which indigenous cultures and languages can be valued, thus further hampering their development. However, the Government and local village authorities, and families promote the use of the mother tongue of individual communities alongside the use of the official languages with the intention of promoting and preserving local culture and identity. Various associations like PROPELCA (Programme de Recherche Opérationnelle pour l'Enseignement des Langues au Cameroun), SIL-Cameroon, CABTAL (Cameroon Association for Bible Translation and Literacy) and NACALCO (National Association of Cameroonian Language Committees) have been working diligently to promote mother tongue education in Cameroon (Echu, 1999).

Nevertheless, the education system of Cameroon still reflects the colonial heritage of British and French Cameroon. The mastery of languages of colonial administration is conceptualised as an important goal for educational attainment and success later in life. Integration of indigenous education systems and the use of one's mother tongue in education settings is beneficial in preserving the society's culture through the transference of culture and values from one generation to another. This will ensure the development of an education that reflects the needs of the people and a learning process that links to learners' everyday experiences, and helps learners make sense of what they learn (Omolewa, 2007).

2.3 The Educational Sector in Cameroon

Cameroon's educational sector is both Government- and privately-owned, with the majority of the institutions owned by the private sector. The private sector is divided into secular and

denominational private education, which is officially recognised by the Government. Government nursery and primary schools are tuition-free, while private nursery schools charge parents very high fees (Mbaku, 2005). However, even in Government nursery and primary schools, parents are required to pay a parent-teacher levy, money for books and school supplies (UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report, 2021). The Government sometimes supports the private sector through financial aid and grants (Amin & Awung, 2008). The education system of Cameroon is governed by the Education Orientation Law Number 98/004 of April 14 1998, article 17. The law stipulates the different levels of education, which are nursery, primary, secondary, and higher education. The law also reaffirms the bicultural system of education, with English and French subsystems being separate national systems but gives little recognition of indigenous languages. Nursery education is intended to guide the development of children's knowledge, skills and attitudes, and lay the foundation for lifelong learning. Nursery education also prepares children for the first level of primary school education (Ministry of Basic Education, 2018a).

2.4 Teacher Training for Nursery and Primary School

Teacher training refers to education designed to empower teachers with the knowledge and skills to work effectively with students. Teacher training in Cameroon dates as far back as the pre-colonial and colonial periods, where the training of teachers was aimed at teaching the doctrines of the various missionaries and enabling the spread of the culture of the colonial masters. Before colonisation, missionaries opened the first Teacher Training Colleges (TTCs) in the early 19th century to train teachers for the evangelisation of Cameroon, and to serve as community and religious leaders. In the days of British and French Cameroon, the main objective of teacher education was to train teachers for primary education and to spread European culture and their notion of civilisation (Tchombe, 2014). At the time of independence, the country inherited two different colonial cultures that used two different languages, with two different systems of school certification and accreditation (Wohlfahrt, 2018). This dual system of education posed challenges for teacher education and teacher education reforms. For example, teacher training in the Anglophone and Francophone regions of Cameroon was viewed from different perspectives. Anglophone teacher education stressed the professional and institutional training of teachers, while the Francophone teacher education system trusted more in training on the job and teachers becoming professional through competitive examinations (Tchombe, 2014). These challenges resulted in the presidential decree of June 19, 1980, which structured teacher education according to the following levels

and types of education: nursery/primary, secondary general and secondary technical, and vocational.

Further to this, the Higher Teacher Training College (ENS) was organised by decree no. 88/1328 of September 28, 1988, to update and strengthen teacher education in the country. Thus, teachers were to be trained not only as teacher educators for classroom activities but also to provide quality research and produce innovations (Tchombe, 2014). In addition, the 1995 National Education Forum and statute no. 98/004 of April 14, 1998, emphasised that entry into teacher training programmes for both subsystems of education could only be achieved through a competitive entrance examination. These laws offered a new direction for teachers training in Cameroon with respect to the different levels of training and criteria for entry into the teacher training institutions. Recruitment of teachers and the operation of Teacher Training Colleges were respectively temporarily discontinued and closed in 1987/88, due to the above structural reforms (Tchombe, 2014). Teacher Training Colleges were reopened in 1995 to train the nursery/primary school teachers, even though their employment was not guaranteed by the Government (Tchombe, 2014; UNESCO International Bureau of Education, 2006). The decision to temporarily suspend the operation of Teacher Training Colleges and the recruitment of teachers came simultaneously with the Government's decision to abolish school fees for primary school education. The implications of these changes were severe resulting in teacher shortages all over the country, just in the moment when children's enrolments increased. To resolve the problem of the high pupil-teacher ratio (PTR), due to a freeze in civil servant teacher recruitment, the Government in 2000 introduced the Contract Teacher Programme (CTP), whereby teachers were hired on a contract basis (World Bank, 2012). Unfortunately, contract teachers were not guaranteed long-term employment, and their pay was on average 30 percent lower compared to regular civil-servant teachers. This difference in the pay scales, which was neither linked to differences in qualifications nor the quality of work done in the classroom, may have affected teachers' motivation in the long-run and impacted their performance. However, the number of contract teachers recruited remained, as it does today, insufficient to cover the student needs; leaving the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) to recruit unqualified nursery and primary school teachers. Despite these efforts, the case of high pupil-teacher ratios still exists in most government-owned nursery and primary schools.

Today, there are Teacher Training Colleges in almost all 58 divisions of the country. This includes École Normale d'Instituteurs de l'Enseignement Général (ENIEG) for nursery and primary school teachers, higher training colleges for secondary school teachers (École Normale

Supérieure (ENS); a training centre for vocational training teachers (École Normale Supérieure de l'Enseignement Technique (ENSET)); and various university faculties. However, teachers are still often unqualified and lack resources for teaching and learning (Wohlfahrt, 2018). Furthermore, Teacher Training Colleges in Cameroon lack sufficient educational materials, have high pupil-teacher ratios, low staff salaries, and lack adequate training of pre-service teachers (Endeley, 2014; Nsameng, 2006b). The result is teacher graduates with insufficient professional skills, an inadequate understanding of the curriculum and pedagogy, and limited access to seminars and workshops for career development.

The personnel involved in Cameroon's ECE are teachers, community preschool centre (CPC) leaders, special teachers and parents. The last updated report by UNESCO International Bureau of Education (2006) estimated that the total number of teachers in ECE and care for 2003/2004 was 8,882. Of these, 6,097 teachers were in French-language schools, 2,785 were in English-language schools, 3,622 were employed in the public sector and 5,260 were employed in the private sector (UNESCO International Bureau of Education, 2006). Eight out of the ten regions of Cameroon are Francophone regions. Thus, there is a disparity between the number of French-speaking ECE teachers and English-speaking ECE teachers.

Teachers for both nursery and primary school education (for both English and French subsystems) receive training from primary Teacher Training Colleges known in French as ENIEG (Écoles Normales d'Instituteurs de l'Enseignement Général). Nursery and primary teacher colleges are located in the country's ten regions supervised by the Ministry of Education. Entry into the teacher training college is based on a competitive entrance examination. Teacher training lasts three years for holders of the BEPC (Brevet d'Études du Premier Cycle) – the certificate obtained after secondary school – two years for those who already have their Baccalauréat or High School Certificate and one year for first-degree holders. Two years' probation follows this. After completion, a Nursery and Primary Teaching Certificate or Certificat d'Aptitude Pédagogue de l'Enseignement Maternel et Primaire (CAPIEMP) is obtained (Tchombe, 2014; UNESCO International Bureau of Education, 2006).

2.5 The Anglophone Crisis and Education in Cameroon

The Anglophone crisis, which began in October 2016, is a war between the Cameroon Government and separatist groups in the English-speaking regions of Cameroon. British and French Cameroon, as explained in Chapter One, were before independence in 1960, separately governed by Britain and France, and after merged to form the Federal Republic of Cameroon

(in 1961), which is currently known as the Republic of Cameroon, led by President Paul Biya. The Anglophone problem has been a long-standing political issue resulting from Cameroon's history of colonialism (Kouega, 2018). In early October 2016, a group of lawyers and teachers in the English-speaking parts of Cameroon began a protest against the appointment of French-speaking judges in English Cameroon, also known as Southern Cameroon. According to these lawyers and teachers, this was a threat to the common law system operating in Southern Cameroon. Another reason for this outcry was the marginalisation of the English education system and the gradual subjugation of the Anglo-Saxon culture by the French-based system (Kouega, 2018).

Furthermore, Anglophone residents consisting of approximately 20 percent of the country “felt cheated out of key ministerial positions, including defence, finance, public service, external relations, and the directory of civil cabinet at the presidency” (Amin, 2021, p. 97). The Government's reaction was to deploy military forces to frustrate the protest, which escalated to the Anglophone crisis (Amin, 2021). The crisis has had devastating effects on the economy, education and wellbeing of civilians in the Anglophone regions. Crossfire between Government soldiers and separatist fighters has resulted in the loss of lives, civilian casualties, destruction of homes, several kidnappings, including school-aged children and migration to neighbouring countries like Nigeria.

Since 2017, separatist groups have adopted a school boycott strategy in English-speaking Cameroon to mount pressure on the Government. There has been disagreement among the different groups of separatist fighters on how to remove this boycott strategy. Parents, children, school leaders and teachers found violating the school boycott strategy have been subjected to attacks and violence. The Government's reaction has been to place security forces around schools. In some situations, crossfire between separatist fighters and Government security forces has led to casualties causing pain and fear in parents, students and teachers (Akame et al., 2021). Continuous unrest and civil disobedience in the Anglophone regions has disrupted education and the economy of these regions.

2.6 Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Cameroon

The terminology early childhood education, preschool education and nursery school are used interchangeably in this study. These terms refer to education preceding primary school, which children usually enter at six-years-old. Early childhood education, preschool or nursery school education in Cameroon involve activities and programmes designed to ensure quality basic

education for all children and prepare children for primary school (Ministry of Basic Education, 2018a). According to UNESCO (n. d.), early childhood education and care is a preparation for primary school education, in which education is aimed at the holistic development of the child's social, emotional, cognitive and physical needs for the purpose of building a solid and broad foundation for lifelong learning and wellbeing. Education in the early years is an imperative component of future learning, but it is generally neglected in investments and innovations in most African countries (African Union, 2018). To achieve sustained quality early childhood education and development, the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA16-25) proposed a work plan composed of six outcomes, among which are improved quality ECE programs and equitable access to quality ECE programmes (African Union, 2018). This is in line with the United Nations' sustainable development goal 4, aimed at providing all children with access to quality education and lifelong learning opportunities (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2018).

Furthermore, one of the aspirations to be achieved by the African Union's Agenda 2063 (African Union, 2013) is working towards a prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development. This included long-term investments in early childhood development and basic education. A call to action to develop knowledge, human capital, capabilities, and skills to drive innovations for African countries is to ensure universal access to quality early childhood, primary and secondary education. Also, to expand and consolidate gender parity in education. The following subsections will examine ECE provision and access to ECE in Cameroon.

2.6.1 Provision of ECE in Cameroon

Early childhood education is not compulsory but is regarded as the first level of formal education in Cameroon. According to Government regulations, ECE in Cameroon covers children aged 4 to 6-years-old. Children below four are catered to by private ECE institutions. There are three types of ECE services in Cameroon: Government, quasi-Governmental and private institutions (UNESCO International Bureau of Education, 2006). The Government institutions and quasi-Governmental institutions (nursery schools run by the National Social Security Fund) are supported by the Government budget and the investment of social security funds, respectively. They are mainly free, though parents are expected to pay some administrative fees and PTA dues. The private sector is further classified into denominational, secular, informal, and community-based institutions, such as community pre-school centres (CPCs) operated by non-Governmental organisations (NGOs) (UNESCO International Bureau

of Education, 2006). Denominational providers of ECE include the different Christian groups in the country, such as Catholics and Protestants, while private individuals manage secular and informal institutions. To expand access to ECE for all children, the Government, in partnership with NGOs, is creating community preschool centres in rural regions of the country. The ECE curriculum acts as a guide for teachers in both English and French sub-sections of the education system. Decision-making concerning the curriculum in primary and nursery education involves the Education Inspectorate-General, who makes proposals based on contributions from education stakeholders, and the Minister of Education, who formally takes the decisions (UNESCO International Bureau of Education, 2006).

According to the UNESCO International Bureau of Education (2006) report, 3.3 percent of the Ministry of Education's budget is allocated to formal preschool education (private and public). A recent UNICEF (2021) report states that most West and Central African country governments allocated an average of 17 percent of their total budgets to education, which is lower than the percentage (20 percent) required by the African Union's Dakar Commitment on Education for All. In addition, the average spending on pre-primary education was only 4 percent of the total education expenditure, highlighting the critical need for increased investment in this sector and improving access to quality education for all children.

2.6.2 Access to Early Childhood Education in Cameroon

Early childhood education in Cameroon is mainly available in the urban areas, and thus rural children have little opportunity to benefit from early learning programmes. This is primarily due to demography, poverty and regional disparities. In 2007, statistics indicated that 87 percent of poor people live in rural areas. There is also a growing income-gap between regions, and urban and rural areas, with greater levels of poverty in rural areas, and between rich and poor families. Poverty has contributed to low access to education and low retention rates, and the growing dropout rates during the primary education cycle (World Bank, 2014). Long working hours and short maternity leave may prompt some parents who need childcare while they are at work to engage in ECE services in urban areas. Employed women in both private and public sectors in Cameroon are entitled to 14 weeks of maternity leave which can be extended for an additional six weeks if a medical report is presented indicating that the woman has a post-natal illness (Breneman et al., 2006).

There has been an effort to target vulnerable children, such as the 2003-2007 Cameroon/UNICEF cooperation programme for promoting and protecting the rights of young

children to access child care in one of the poorest regions of the country, the Adamawa region. The strategies aimed at expanding ECE in the Adamawa region included parent education in the integrated care of young children and preschool community education to promote preschool attendance. Local NGOs also set up community pre-school centres for underprivileged children so they could gain access to preschool facilities. A preliminary version of the policy document on the School Enrolment of Children in Need of Special Protection Measures (EBMPS) was produced. Parenting programmes were organised through early childhood centres to provide information about parenting to parents and families with children under six years old. These programmes offer information about child development, health and nutrition to parent groups who meet to discuss issues related to their young children, including health, nutritional status and development (UNESCO International Bureau of Education, 2006).

The Global Partnership for Education (2013-2020) indicates that the significant challenges facing education in Cameroon are poor quality, weak governance and accountability across the system leading to the inequitable and inefficient distribution of resources, and persistent disparities related to gender, region of residence and income. To resolve these problems, the Global Partnership for Education has taken specific measures including improving access and equity at all levels of education, improving the quality of learning while focusing on the socio-economic environment, and improving the governance and management of the education sector through focusing on decentralisation.

From my perspective and, of course, this may differ in individual circumstances, it is not a new phenomenon to note that Cameroon, and Africa as a whole in the past, has regarded children as people who need to be told what to do and what to say because they are children. Children are considered to be an age group whose opinion does not count, which is viewed as parental property, and which is more highly valued if the child is a boy-child rather than a girl-child. Girl-children are frequently deprived of primary school education. The pursual of cultural beliefs that place the girl-child in charge of domestic duties in preparation for motherhood is related to the increasing gender disparity that characterises Cameroon society. Furthermore, as a result of poverty, “boys are in some cases privileged when school fees cannot be paid for all” children by parents (OCHA, 2019, p. 5). However, some improvements in addressing gender disparity and enrolment levels have been made during the last 20 years. Johannes and Noula (2011) report that there has been an increase in education of both girls and boys. The female/male parity index (ratio of female to male values) rose from 0.85 in 2003 to 0.9 in 2005 at the primary level of education. Increased enrolment was recorded in preschool education,

and there was an increase in parental interest and involvement in children's learning processes. A report from Plan International (2011) revealed that an increase in children's performance in its centres created awareness in most families of the importance of early stimulation. This has resulted in parents supporting preschools and helping keep the centres clean, healthy and child-friendly. The following section provides an overview of ECE in Douala.

2.7 Early Childhood Education in Douala

This study is mainly concerned with parental involvement in ECE in the capital of the Littoral region of Cameroon, called Douala. Douala is the economic capital of Cameroon, and is situated on the south-eastern shore of the Wouri River estuary, on the Atlantic coast about 130 miles west of Yaoundé, the capital city of Cameroon. Douala is the most populous city in the country and is inhabited by both skilled and unskilled migrants from rural areas in Cameroon and other African countries. The inhabitants of this city are mostly government workers, large and small business owners and workers, and tertiary education students.

Education in Cameroon in general and in Douala in particular dates as far back as the pre-colonial and colonial days. Douala was the main port of entry to the country during the colonial era. After the Germano-Duala [Douala] treaty was signed between the Douala kings and the Germans on July 12, 1884, the Germans set up an educational system to expand the German colonial authority through the use of missions. The colonials imposed the German language on the local people after abolishing local languages, and stating that no other language should be taught or used as a medium of instruction apart from the German language. According to Monteha (2018) “[t]he language policy promoted by the Government marked the beginning of a serious crisis concerning the language of instruction in Cameroon schools which persists today” (p. 222). Tchombe (2014) also affirms that education in Cameroon during the colonial era had a specific mission and teachers were trained to respond to that mission. “Schools in Cameroon during the pre-colonial and colonial eras were responding only to the needs of evangelisation and colonialism rather than education for national development” (Tchombe, 2014, p. 25). After World War I, Cameroon was mandated to Britain and France by the League of Nations. English and French then became the languages of instruction before and after independence.

Access to written information about Douala is a challenge due to the limited availability of written documentation, especially on education. Still, as advertised by Cameroon Travel and Information Guide (n. d.), Douala follows the Cameroon education system. Compared to other

cities and towns in Cameroon, Douala has some of the best public schools, private schools and international schools in the nation and the sub-Saharan region of Central Africa. It is common to find French, English or bilingual schools in Douala, but French schools dominate (Cameroon Travel and Information Guide, n. d.). The following section describes the Cameroon nursery school curriculum.

2.8 The Cameroon Nursery School Curriculum

The Nursery School Curriculum is a working document for teachers which has been designed for the English and French systems of nursery school education, with the intention of moving society towards harmonising the two contrasting systems of education that have existed since independence. Nevertheless, while the learning domains, core skills and competences are similar, the teaching and learning materials, learning methods and assessment tools are different for each of the two subsystems. This further highlights the complexities and challenges faced by policy implementation and the development of these two subsystems of education.

The curriculum contains guides to different learning areas: literacy and communication, science and technology, practical life-skills, arts and crafts, instructional strategies and the expected learning outcomes, and suggestions on how children can be assessed (Ministry of Basic Education, 2018a). In 2013, the Education Sector Strategy Paper recognised preschool education as Cameroon’s first stage of formal education. The curriculum is created following Article 4 of the law of education in Cameroon. The law states that “the general aim of education is to ensure the intellectual, physical, civic, and moral development of the child as well as its economic, sociocultural, political and moral integration in the society” (Ministry of Basic Education, 2018a, p. 24). Nursery school education is usually divided into two sections, Nursery One and Nursery Two. Nursery One is the entry-level for early childhood learning, which children attend mostly from 3 to 4 years old. Nursery Two is the second and final level for early childhood learning, usually attended by children of 5 to 6 years old, after which the child moves to primary school.

2.8.1 Structure of the Curriculum

The nursery school curriculum is based on “IPHIL” (pronounced as “I feel”), which stands for Integrative, Play-based/Project-based, Holistic, Investigative, and Learning-centres designed to reflect the importance of a child’s feelings. Thus, the curriculum users must always use

“IPHIL” to evaluate themselves in order to make sure that their practices fall in line with the learning-teaching process designed by the authors of the curriculum.

The user must always come back to see if he/she can equally “feel” the learning-teaching process in all its dimensions. Once he/she cannot “feel”, measures have to be taken to make sure that this is achieved. Always use “IPHIL” to do an auto-evaluation (Ministry of Basic Education, 2018a, p. 12).

The curriculum recommends that parents and educators collaborate, and make contributions towards the holistic education of children. However, the roles and responsibilities of teachers, parents and the community are not explored in detail in the curriculum document.

According to the curriculum, nursery school learning should be learner-friendly, with the learning areas extracted from the five domains of nursery education. A learner-centred approach defines the teacher’s role as that of a facilitator, and learners as active participants in the learning process. However, this is all dependent on the pupil-teacher ratios, the Ministry’s and school administrators’ attendance to their responsibility to mobilise learning resources, and the teacher’s ability to create and utilise natural/recycled resources for learning.

2.8.2 Domains

Each domain highlights the activities involved, competencies to be developed, weighting and time allocation applied per annum and per week, and considers the children’s holistic development. The domains of learning include: literacy and communication through storytelling, poetry and rhymes, sign language/gestures, reading, writing, and the use of official and indigenous languages.

Science and technological skills include understanding basic mathematical concepts, information and communication technologies (ICTs), sensory and perceptive education, agriculture, science and technology.

Practical life skills include citizenship, character education, environmental education, safety education, health education and nutrition.

Motor skills involve mostly physical education and sports for physical, health, and social development.

Arts and crafts include drawing, colouring, painting, handwork, music and dance.

2.8.3 Learning Outcomes

The expected learning outcomes are described in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes. For instance, in the literacy and communication domain, children are taught to read and write in the official languages, which are English and French. The outcome will be knowledge of using letters and words, and communication skills in English and French. Children will develop a positive attitude towards learning a second language, and an appreciation of national cultures and local languages. The learning outcomes are linked to seven national core skills, as seen below.

2.8.4 National Core Skills

The learning outcomes are linked to seven national core skills. The national core skills are: communication in both English and French; basic knowledge in mathematics, science and technology; practising social and citizenship values; demonstrating autonomy, sense of initiative, creativity and entrepreneurship; use of basic information and communication technology; lifelong learning; and, lastly, practicing physical, sport and artistic activities.

2.8.5 Competences

The curriculum indicates four broad-based competencies: standards for learning and development in the nursery school setting and at home and integration into society. These competencies include:

Intellectual competencies: developing children's ability to explore information, problem-solving skills, acquire logical thinking and a sense of observation, exercise critical judgment, and implement creative and innovative thinking.

Methodological competencies: helping children achieve efficient working methods, exploiting information and communication technologies. Children will be able to organise their learning, solve problems, and arouse their desire to learn and participate in all activities.

Personal and interpersonal competencies: developing the personality in children; children will acquire abilities given their sociocultural integration and individual fulfilment and cooperation with others.

Communication competencies: Enabling the children to communicate in the two official languages (English and French) and at least one national language.

2.8.6 Instructional Strategies

The learning-teaching methods prescribed by the curriculum involve a project-based learning approach that facilitate the connecting of nursery school activities to the child's own world. The approach makes use of two strategies, which are:

Integrated-Theme Learning (ITL): themes are chosen to help learners connect various activities, which run for a month. Examples of themes would be: plants, animals, occupation, travelling, festivities/celebrations, community and the home.

Cooperative Learning (CL): this takes the form of collaborative learning where learners work together in small mixed-ability teams on a structured activity. In this context, children are involved in learning the activities and also in helping their teammates learn the same activities.

The curriculum also advocates a play-based approach to learning where learners explore and engage in unguided child-centred activities that are situated in learning centres around the classroom at the beginning of the day. The aim is to provoke imaginative, manipulative and social skills through voluntary play.

2.8.7 Intervention Strategies

Cameroon encourages Inclusive Education for all learners and focuses on an Individual Education Plan (IEP) to take care of children with special needs to ensure equal opportunity for all children.

2.8.8 Assessment

The curriculum recommends the use of performance, comprehensive and self-assessment strategies regarding the knowledge, skills and attitudes noted in the expected learning outcomes of each learning domain. The curriculum advises that assessment should be carried out to determine children's progress, make decisions about their education, and provide parents with feedback. It suggests that this should be done through observation, daily practical assignments, assessing children's willingness to participate and contribute to the development of projects, and written quizzes. Other assessments are carried out through the use of audio-visuals, photographs, computer-based work, drawings, games, and singing and dancing (Ministry of Basic Education, 2018a).

An analysis of the nursery school curriculum suggests that the document has failed to address various issues relevant to Cameroon society. These include practical examples that would enable teachers to address cultural differences and promote an education that reflects the

people's aspirations, the roles of different stakeholders involved in the teaching and learning process, and lastly, the mobilisation of material resources to ensure quality learning for all children.

Cameroon appears to have taken up from where the former colonial masters left off in terms of language. English and French, as the two official languages, reflect the two colonial powers, Britain and France, that controlled the country before independence in the 1960s. However, over 200 ethnic languages are spoken across the nation, most of which are undocumented. Thus, English and French continue to be the official languages of instruction across the country. The curriculum in communication competencies stresses the need for children to communicate fluently in both English and French, and at least one local language. Of course, English and French are subjects taught in the nursery school, but discretion is exercised with respect to how and which of the numerous local languages will be introduced in educational institutions. In this way, it is left for parents and extended family members to maintain children's cultural identity by teaching them their local language and culture at home.

Planning and decisions concerning the Cameroon nursery school curriculum involve the Education Inspectorate-General, which makes proposals based on contributions from education stakeholders, and the Minister of Basic Education, who formally oversees the decision-making process (UNESCO International Bureau of Education, 2006). A feature that is not specified in the Cameroon nursery school curriculum policy is the inclusion of parents in the planning of the curriculum. Parents have both unique knowledge and particular aspirations for their children, meaning involving them in planning educational methods and instructional strategies for their children's learning would be an aspect of curriculum policy that could be considered when reviewing the Cameroon nursery school curriculum in the near future. The participation of parents, teachers and the wider community in children's learning is thus crucial in the early years.

The document specifies a learner-centred approach through project-based learning, cooperative learning, integrative theme learning and unstructured play. Therefore teaching and learning are based on monthly themes, a project to be developed and presented at the end of the month based on children's understanding of the theme. Nevertheless, the successful implementation of these learning approaches depends on the availability of material resources, classroom size and pupil-teacher ratios, which are not explicitly addressed in the curriculum.

2.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter has explored the Cameroon education system's history and context, discussing the dual system of education (English and French subsystems) that operates in the country's English- and French-speaking regions. The nature of teacher training is also highlighted. Some challenges associated with teacher training, like insufficient teaching materials, high pupil-teacher ratios, low staff salaries and the 1987 ban on the recruitment of teachers, led to severe teacher shortages during that period. Early childhood education in Cameroon was discussed in terms of provision and access, and the efforts made by NGOs in partnership with the Government to expand ECE access for vulnerable children. The chapter concludes by analysing the Cameroon nursery school curriculum, which is designed as a working document for teachers in both the English and French systems of nursery school education.

The following chapter will cover the study's theoretical framework and its underpinning sociological and sociocultural theories, Dewey's concept of democracy in education and African concepts on child development. These theories emphasise children's learning in context, and the roles of capable adults and other caregivers in children's learning and development that are relevant to the current study.

Chapter 3

Theoretical Framework

3.1 Introduction

The aim of this investigation has been to understand parents' and teachers' perspectives on parental involvement in early childhood learning in Douala, Cameroon. Three theoretical approaches have informed the study: sociocultural views of childhood and development, African conceptions of childhood and Dewey's concept of democracy in education. Theories of the sociology of childhood, such as that of James and Prout's (2015) new paradigm for the sociology of childhood, which shows how child development varies from one culture to another, are critical to explaining how children learn and develop in their social and cultural contexts. My research project also draws from Bronfenbrenner's (1986) bioecological model on how the home, schools, extended family and society influence children's development. Sociocultural views of child development all emphasise the importance of context. Therefore, the social ontogenesis theory explaining child development views, from the African perspective, was crucial to contextualising the teachers' and parents' views of children and childhood in the African context. Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural views on children and childhood which explains how children learn new skills and acquire knowledge with guidance and support from knowledgeable adults was useful in explaining child development and learning in this study. In addition, Dewey's concept of democracy in education is relevant to the investigation as Dewey (1916) conceives of learning as a social process involving adults communicating their everyday experiences to children and younger people. Dewey's philosophy also guided how one of the settings in the study was thought about.

The sociocultural and African theoretical frameworks are similar in that they all underscore the role of capable adults and other caregivers in children's learning and development. This research project recognises that children's education takes place at home, in the community and in early childhood centres with the help of educators, parents and other caregivers (Kernen et al., 2011; Lamb, 1992). Thus, the importance of an authentic and two-way relationship between teachers, families and the community, in which the child actively participates, is emphasised. A two-way relationship is possible when teachers are willing to learn and draw from families' skills and resources. Gonzalez et al. (2005) refer to these skills and resources as funds of knowledge which people acquire through daily life experiences within their communities and culture. When teachers approach families to learn and understand these funds of knowledge, families will be encouraged to share with teachers, thereby connecting the

child's classroom experiences with their out-of-school experiences. This theoretical framework chapter begins by reviewing sociological views of childhood, sociocultural and African images of childhood, Dewey's concept of democracy in education, and concludes by examining the benefits of this two-way relationship between teachers and families gaining funds of knowledge beneficial to children's learning.

3.2 Conceptions of Childhood and Child Development

This section discusses the theories and concepts of childhood and development that underpins this study, such as the sociological and sociocultural theories and African conceptions of child development.

3.2.1 New Sociology of Childhood

James and Prout's (2015) construction of childhood acknowledges that the immaturity of children is a biological fact, but that the way this immaturity is viewed and understood varies according to the culture. It is because of the varying nature of childhood across cultures that James and Prout define childhood as a social construct. What is more, they express that "the history of the study of childhood in the social sciences has been marked not by an absence of interest in children ... but by their silence" (James & Prout, 2015, p. 6). This has led to the development of a new paradigm in the study of childhood which aims at giving a voice to children by seeing children as people to be studied in their own right and not as passive subjects or receptacles of adult teaching (Hardman, 2001; James & Prout, 2015). Key features of this new paradigm, according to James and Prout (2015), include:

1. Childhood is understood as a social construction. As such, it provides an interpretive frame for contextualizing the early years of human life. Childhood, as distinct from biological immaturity, is neither a natural nor universal feature of human groups but appears as a specific structural and cultural component of many societies.
2. Childhood is a variable of social analysis. It can never be entirely divorced from other variables such as class, gender, or ethnicity. Comparative and cross-cultural analysis reveals a variety of childhoods rather than a single and universal phenomenon.
3. Children's social relationships and cultures are worthy of study in their own right, independent of the perspective and concerns of adults.

4. Children are and must be seen as active in the construction and determination of their own social lives, the lives of those around them and of the societies in which they live. Children are not just the passive subjects of social structures and processes.
5. Ethnography is a particularly useful methodology for the study of childhood. It allows children a more direct voice and participation in the production of sociological data than is usually possible through experimental or survey styles of research.
6. Childhood is a phenomenon in relation to which the double hermeneutic of the social sciences is acutely present. That is to say, to proclaim a new paradigm of childhood sociology is also to engage in and respond to the process of reconstructing childhood in society. (James & Prout, 2015, p. 7)

James and Prout (2015) remind us that the concept of childhood is not universal but varies from one culture to another. Thus it is essential, when studying children, to pay particular attention to context. Theories of socialisation emphasise the social aspects of childhood and the importance of cultural contexts in children's development rather than biologically determined stages that lead to adulthood. Sociocultural conceptions of childhood explain the ways children learn by social interaction in society (Vygotsky, 1978) bringing to the forefront the role of parents and educational institutions as social agents and their importance in the lives of children and their development.

Traditional orientations, according to Silova et al. (2018), constructed the child as "other" ... "who was expected to develop into a fully human adult through the processes of socialisation and properly applied psychological and pedagogical techniques" (p. 233) a process that was supported in particular by developmental psychology. In this paradigm, children's opinions do not count as much as they should; a situation that is linked to the fact that they are supposed to be told what to do at all moments. This pedagogical approach is contrary to how we understand the concepts that are employed in this investigation, where I consider children to be social beings who are part of a larger social structure or society and who are capable of learning through participation with their family, the external community and other social institutions. Smith (2007) affirms a shift in the traditional orientation from a childhood where children had no voice or visibility to a new paradigm where children are conceived of as social actors and where their participatory rights are recognised in the learning process. Accordingly, Dahlberg

et al. (2013) conceptualised the child as an active co-constructor where the child is not passively involved in their learning process but rather constructs knowledge and makes meaning of the world together with adults and their peers. Bühler-Niederberger (2010) also sees the child as a social actor and takes a new childhood sociological position, “which promotes the enhancement of possibilities for children’s ‘actorship’ and for greater participation of children in important decisions in private and public life” (p. 160).

Further to this discussion, Mitchell (2010) argues that there are three dominant constructions of childhood; the first involves a construction of the child as a dependent within the family, where the preschool child is seen as a personal responsibility of the family except in cases where the family cannot provide. Secondly, the child is seen as a learner within a community of learners, recognising differences among children and emphasising the provision of learning environments responsive to children’s family backgrounds and cultural heritages. Lastly, the child is seen as a citizen within a social community and, as such, is considered a member of a social group and the wider community. This latter construction is similar to Smith’s (2007) and Peter and Kelly’s (2015) views which recognise children as social actors and not passive participants in their interactions with others in society and their educational setting. Smith (2007) argues that children’s participation rights emerged from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which explains that children are not partial but whole human beings with rights and dignity that need to be respected. Children should be encouraged to take on responsibilities and participate in activities so that they gain experience and improve their skills. “Participation rights support a sense of belonging and inclusion but more importantly teach children how they can bring about change” (Smith, 2007, p. 149). The 54 Articles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child can be summarised into three main parts: participation rights which allow children to be viewed as citizens and part of the society, protection rights that safeguard children from all forms of discrimination, humiliation or ill-treatment and, lastly, provision rights which concern children’s accessibility to services and resources like parental care, health and education (Smith, 2013). Smith (2013) argues that the most controversial aspect of the Convention relates to the element of the child’s agency and voice, which implicitly suppose children’s right to participate. The reason why this aspect is controversial is that it is common to view children as vulnerable and in need, rather than as individuals with rights.

Participation rights in the African context focus on children’s rights to express their opinions and be involved in hands-on processes, such as being responsible, aware, motivated, and

engaged (Nsamenang, 2008), which is to say, with rights come responsibilities. African children are significant actors in the family and make progress by their efforts and participating in the family's day-to-day life.

Participation rights provide opportunities to develop agency and autonomy in children (Mashford-Scott & Church, 2011). Smith (2007) also notes that some children may not be interested in participating but would like to be consulted in decision-making concerning them and be listened to both at home and in the educational setting. It is crucial to keep in mind that children are individuals with points of view that need to be listened to and respected, and they should not be regarded as people who lack confidence and experiences or whose viewpoints don't reflect those of adults. A good example of considering children's participatory rights is the recognition of the importance of children's views and perspectives, and the incorporation of these views and perspectives into curriculum development. This study values the sociocultural conceptions of childhood and considers children as social actors in the family and external society. Thus, the role of parents and educators is salient in children's lives as they learn and develop by participating in the community.

The following section looks at Bronfenbrenner's (1981) bioecological model, which illustrates how the environment influences children's development.

3.2.2 Urie Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model

According to Bronfenbrenner (1981):

The ecology of human development involves the scientific study of the progressive, mutual accommodation between an active, growing human being and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives, as this process is affected by relations between these settings, and by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded. (Bronfenbrenner, 1981, p. 21)

From this definition, Bronfenbrenner (1981) stresses that the developing person is not a *tabula rasa* on which the environment makes an impact, but rather that a person grows and actively restructures the environment in which they live. Also, there is a reciprocal relationship between the environment and the developing person. Just as the person restructures and exerts influence on the environment, so too does the environment on the person. Lastly, the environment is not

a single immediate setting but incorporates external influences classified into microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, and macrosystems.

Tudge et al. (2009) acknowledge that Bronfenbrenner's theory of human development is a theory that was in a continuous state of development until he died in 2005. This study utilises Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model, initially known as the ecological model, to focus mainly on the impact of context on the developing human being. Since this study is concerned with the role of parents as well as other agents like external family members and educators in children's learning and development, I will furthermore look into the later developments of the model, which are concerned with proximal processes as well as the Process-Person-Context-Time model (PPCT) (Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

Bronfenbrenner's (1981) ecological model examines different contexts, which are microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, and the macrosystems, and shows how a person's development is affected by changes that occur over time in the environment in which the person lives (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). Bronfenbrenner's ecological model stresses the importance of the environment and social factors in children's development (Rozsahegyi, 2018). "It emphasises the evolving nature and scope of perceived reality as it emerges and expands in the child's awareness and in his [or her] active involvement with the physical and social environment" (Bronfenbrenner, 1981, p. 9). The model shows external influences that affect the family's capacity to promote healthy development in their children (Bronfenbrenner, 1986).

Bronfenbrenner (1981) defines microsystems as "a pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given setting with particular physical and material characteristics" (p. 22). Microsystems involve the complex relations between the developing person and environment which, for example, could refer to family, childcare or educational settings that the child regularly interacts with (Rozsahegyi, 2018). The child develops knowledge, skills and attitudes by interaction with the immediate environment. It is, therefore, important for parents, caregivers or educators to create a friendly and loving environment that can significantly impact the child's holistic development.

The family is one of the several settings in which developmental processes occur. "A mesosystem comprises the interrelations among two or more settings in which the developing person actively participates (such as, for a child, the relations among home, school, and neighbourhood peer group; for an adult, among family, work, and social life)" (Bronfenbrenner, 1981, p. 25). Mesosystems are seen as systems of microsystems that are

extended whenever the developing person moves into a new setting. Events at home affect a child's progress in school, and likewise, events at school influence behaviour at home.

Exosystems are referred to as “one or more settings that do not involve the developing person as an active participant, but in which events occur that affect, or are affected by, what happens in the setting containing the developing person” (Bronfenbrenner, 1981, p. 25). The exosystems explain that the development of children in the family is influenced by what happens in the environments where children spend their time and what happens in the other settings in which their parents, for example, live their lives. These contexts are places where children may rarely go, like their parents' place of work, and the homes of the parents' circle of friends and acquaintances (Bronfenbrenner, 1981).

Bronfenbrenner (1981) defines macrosystems as “consistencies, in the form and content of lower-order systems (micro-, meso-, and exo-) that exist, or could exist, at the level of the subculture or the culture as a whole, along with any belief systems or ideology underlying such consistencies” (p. 26). Macrosystems refers to the broadest social arrangements that, although distant, are related to the developing child. “These [social arrangements] include society's outlooks and value systems about childhood and child-rearing, and how these are manifested in social, legal, economic, health and educational arrangements” (Rozsahegyi, 2018, p. 8). Using Bronfenbrenner's macrosystem, we can reflect on how the society/government can shape or make decisions that impact a child's upbringing and early years education. Therefore, macrosystems may involve societies' laws and regulations on child development, provision of quality education services and the review of policy associated with the inclusion of parents and community perspectives in education. Policies at the macrosystem level that support children's development and parent-teacher relationships may include implementing professional development for in-service teachers, and courses for pre-service teachers on parental involvement and social support for families.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological model shifted to a bioecological model when he emphasised the role of the developing person in the development of their proximal processes. Proximal processes are understood to refer to interactions between the developing person and the environment (person, object or symbol) (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). This is a very relevant aspect to the context of this investigation because children are viewed not as passive but active agents in the development process. Proximal processes are characterised as engines of development and could either promote outcomes of developmental competence or

dysfunction (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000). Thus positive developmental outcomes are more attainable in stable environments amongst people who develop a solid positive relationship than in unstable and disadvantaged backgrounds (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). Therefore, the environments in which the child interacts should ideally be warm and loving, and accommodate the child's needs and interests.

Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998) added that personal characteristics, classified into elements of force, resource and demand, affect the developing person's interaction with the social environment, influencing proximal development processes positively or negatively. Characteristics of force can either be generative or disruptive (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). Generative force characteristics include curiosity, tendency to initiate and engage in activity alone or with others, or responsiveness to initiatives by others that strengthen proximal processes. On the other hand, disruptive force characteristics like impulsiveness, explosiveness, distractibility, aggression and violence negatively influence a person's developmental outcome. Resource characteristics that positively influence development involve abilities, knowledge, skills and experience, while resources that limit development or proximal processes can be physical handicaps, and severe and persistent illnesses (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). Demand characteristics, as described by Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998), are the qualities of the developing person that promote or inhibit reactions from the social environment, for instance, "a fussy versus a happy baby, attractive versus unattractive physical appearance, and hyperactivity and passivity" (p. 812).

Furthermore, proximal processes involving either person-to-person interactions or interactions with objects or symbols occur within the microsystem influenced by other context systems (mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem) (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). The influence of time, which Bronfenbrenner defined as the chronosystem, examines the continuous impact on the person's development due to changes in the environments in which the person is living. For Bronfenbrenner (1986), events in the chronosystem include life transitions which he distinguished into "normative (school entry, puberty, entering the [labour] force, marriage, retirement) and nonnormative (a death or severe illness in the family, divorce, moving, winning the sweepstakes)" (p. 724). Such transitions in life affect developmental changes as well as family processes.

This model is significant to this study as it explains how internal and external factors, as well as life transitions that happen in the family, influence children's development. Parents'

participation in the child's microsystems both at home and at school dramatically influences children's growth and development, supporting mesosystem connections between the two microsystems. If both parents are working and their jobs involve long working hours (exosystem factors), participation in children's learning is limited or almost impossible. A life event in the chronosystem like divorce or separation, death of a parent or loved one has severe effects on the wellbeing and development of a child.

African conceptions of childhood, according to Nsamenang (2010b) and Colonna (2012) are examined in the next section. In this section, I will introduce children's participation in society, peer and mentoring culture, and sibling care as the means of developing skills, competence, agency, autonomy, rights and opportunities.

3.2.3 African Conceptions of Childhood

African conceptions of childhood explain views of children, learning and development in the African context. This section presents child development in the African context according to the views and ideas of Nsamenang (2010b) and Colonna (2012). It should be noted that while the ideas discussed may fit into several African contexts, they may not apply to others. Nsamenang (2010b) argues that early care, education, skills and practices are not only gained from professionals, as African parents, together with their children, also fulfil these role.

African cultures separate the learning of childhood skills from the life stage of parenthood and position sibling caregiving as a domestic task for children to learn as part of their developmental knowledge. In contrast, Western cultures view caring for children as a specialised task of adulthood. (Nsamenang, 2010b, p. 21)

Colonna (2012) confirms that child and sibling caretaking is very common in African countries, and "is a cultural response to the need for mothers to participate in other tasks for the sustenance of the family" (p. 81). In this light, Colonna presents an image of childhood that does not pay attention to what children lack but emphasises their skills, competence, agency, autonomy, rights and opportunities.

Children acquire skills and knowledge as they participate in the daily activities in the home, through ceremonies, direct instructions, observation, and apprenticeship (Garcia et al., 2008). Therefore, it can be understood that African children learn and develop through self-generated efforts by participating actively in the family and the community (Ebrahim, 2012). Parents

assign various tasks to children and assess their progress in relation to how they accomplish these tasks. An important aspect to note about most African cultures is the influence of the external community on children. It is commonly asserted that not only parents of the child have rights of care and responsibility but also other elders in the community. Thus, we see the idea of “peer culture” where the child develops “agency” by learning and carrying out tasks supervised, corrected and mentored by older peers or siblings and not only by their parents (Nsamenang, 2010b).

In 1992, Nsamenang (1992b) conducted a study on the perceptions of parenting among the Nso people of Cameroon and found out that the values that Nso parents attach to their children comprise spiritual, psychological, social and economic dimensions. Spiritually, they see children as a divine gift or ancestral blessing and since the community regards infertility as a taboo, having children gives parents a psychological sense of fulfilment and accomplishment. Such an achievement means a family is free from the social stigma of infertility. The social value of children implies that the position of the married man and woman who have children is of great importance and dignity, meaning their family lineage will not become extinct. Economically, children are seen as an investment when parents grow old (Garcia et al., 2008). The benefits of having children will mean the parents will have someone to help them with chores at home and someone to assist them in their old age, which is especially important in communities that lack well-organised social security services (Nsamenang, 1992).

In terms of discipline, Nsamenang’s (1992b) study found that more fathers than mothers expressed the necessity for enforcing discipline in children through punishment, while mothers believed in the notion of the weaker sex and the protection of the girl child from exploitation and thus employed less punitive forms of discipline. This difference in approach notwithstanding, both mother and father express similar goals and expectations for their children, which are, development of good character, academic progress, success in life and the attainment of parenthood. Despite the influence of urbanisation and modernisation over time, these beliefs continue to be relevant. Thus, parenting roles and parental beliefs vary from culture to culture. It is essential that this investigation is grounded in what is suitable for the Cameroon context so as to provide recommendations that will suit that context.

Nsamenang (2010b) recognises the coexistence of the three different heritages of ECE throughout Africa: Indigenous African heritage, Islamic-Arabic heritage and Western Christian heritages. He argues that generally, Western Christian heritages are actively upheld for ECE,

while the Indigenous African practices are minimised or partially incorporated. Nsamenang calls for a blended eco-cultural approach to ECE in Africa so that education will reach African children in their context. Therefore, ECE in the African context should blend and synergise the strengths of the continent's three significant heritages, indigenous African, Islamic-Arabic and Western Christian heritages, so that they complement each other and respectfully gain from each other. This triangulation is significant to this investigation as the aim of this research project is to find out what parents views are with respect to their involvement in early childhood learning and to make recommendations related to the context of the investigation – education in Cameroon. This will involve bringing together practice from new and already existing external contexts with local knowledge or indigenous African practices to create new approaches to combining the existing heritages rather than completely eradicating the indigenous or the foreign contexts.

Viewing development as a process that is embedded and shaped within specific cultural contexts, ECE programmes “should draw from and build on indigenous traditions, child-rearing practices, and material resources within the local environment in the provision of routine care and developmental stimulation” (Garcia et al., 2008, p. 206). Wadende et al. (2016) asserts that incorporating child care practices into the curriculum is critical for children's success in educational programs. The connections, as presented above, between parents and children in the immediate family, extended family and the community are significant in early childhood learning from an African perspective. Thus, early childhood programmes should be designed to fit African children's daily routines engaging “community participation, especially in child-to-child sociability and peer-mentoring cultures” (Nsamenang, 2010b, p. 26). Therefore, drawing from these authors, ECE and care must be studied within the sociocultural contexts of a particular group of people, by considering the diverse nature of learning and how learning is constructed within that specific group. The following section gives an overview of Nsamenang's (2006a) social ontogenesis theory which explains human development and intelligence indigenous to Africa south of the Sahara.

3.2.4 Nsamenang's Social Ontogenesis Theory

The social ontogenesis theory expands on learning and development through participation within the family and society in the African context. Earlier studies on child development in Africa tested the cross-cultural validity of theories developed “in the West” and searched for universals (Marfo & Serpell, 2014). Thus, there is a need for research that is culturally relevant and practically applicable in the African context (Ebrahim et al., 2018; Marfo & Serpell, 2014;

Nsamenang, 2008). Nsamenang (2006a) suggests that views on development vary from one culture to another, meaning Euro-American ethnocentrism views on development and intelligence cannot apply to all cultures. Nsamenang uses the social ontogenesis theory to explain how the human being learns and develops by participating in the cultural and economic life of the family and society. The social ontogenesis theory aims to present a perspective on human development and intelligence indigenous to Africa south of the Sahara. “The concept of social ontogeny is ‘sociogenesis,’ defined as individual development perceived and explained as a function of social, not biological, factors. Social ontogenetic thinking, thus, does not exclude nature, but assumes that biology undergirds social ontogenesis” (Nsamenang, 2006a, p. 295). Human ontogenesis from an African point of view envisions the human life cycle in three phases of selfhood: spiritual selfhood, social or experiential selfhood and ancestral selfhood.

There is a spiritual selfhood, which begins at conception, or perhaps earlier in an ancestral spirit that reincarnates. It ends with the ceremony to confer a name on a newborn. A social or experiential selfhood continues the cycle from the rite of incorporation or introduction of the child into the human community through naming, to end with biological death. Death is more acceptable in old age. An ancestral selfhood follows biological death. (Nsamenang, 2006a, p. 295)

This study focuses on the second phase of the human cycle, the social or experiential selfhood,²and begins when the child is introduced into the community (Nsamenang, 2006a). Social selfhood develops through seven stages: the period of the newborn; social priming; social apprenticing; social entrée; social internment; adulthood; old age and death. A distinctive developmental task marks each stage. According to Nsamenang (2006a), development in African social thought is defined as the growth of physical, cognitive, social and emotional competencies needed to engage and participate fully in the family and society, such that child development occurs through gradual and systematic social integration. This understanding of child development is opposed to the ideas of developmental psychologists like Piaget (1973), who considered child development as being characterised by pre-established stages that follow a logical sequence from infancy to adulthood. When children engage and participate in cultural activities, they develop their unique identities. In the African perspective, an individual needs

² From this point on, I will refer to ‘social or experiential selfhood’ as just ‘social selfhood’.

to interact with others and assume social responsibility to attain full personhood. This study further develops the idea that the child's life is interconnected and interdependent with that of the family and community, and it is not a separate entity. Similar to the views of Bronfenbrenner (1981), learning can effectively occur with participation and guidance offered by the family, both at home and at the ECE, which, as such, will lead to children's holistic development, and a sense of self and personal identity as Nsamenang (2006a) puts it.

African parents assign roles to their children at an early age. Children, as they grow up, are progressively given different functions according to their social maturity or competence. For instance, my parents used to shower me like a baby until I was four years old when I was taught to shower my own body, and by the time I was eight, I began assisting my mum in showering my younger brother. By the age of 13, I could cook a meal for the whole family to eat while my mum was away carrying out other family responsibilities. For Nsamenang (2006a), cognitive development, from an African perspective, is achieved by social interaction, cultural life, economic activities and daily routines. Parents determine intelligence through social responsibility; which is to say, by how well a child carries out the task that they have been assigned to do.

According to Nsamenang (2006a), socialisation in the African context is not organised to train children for academic pursuits but is intended to teach social competence and shared responsibility within the family system and the ethnic community. The social ontogenesis theory is relevant for this study because it explains child development within the context of this study and emphasises the role of the family and external community in children's social and cognitive development. According to Nsamenang's (2006a) thinking, it can be established that learning begins at home and continues as the child is exposed and introduced to the community. In effect, learning may only be effective through a participatory process involving parents, children and the children's educators.

Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, which emphasises the importance of social context in children's development, is introduced in the next section, which then leads into a discussion of the concepts of children's learning through guided participation by adults.

3.2.5 Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory

Sociocultural theory attempts to explain how children know and understand the world through their activities and communication with others in a continuous learning process. This learning process is not a one-way process but employs a reciprocal relationship in which both the adult

and child together construct knowledge and understanding (Smith, 2013). According to Vygotsky (1978) children's development occurs through interaction between the child and the culture, where the adult acts as a carrier of cultural tools and the child learns how to use these tools. This idea implies that children learn by interacting within society's social and cultural context, which could be their family, the school, or other social institutions. This interaction is one of the key foci in this investigation. Children's minds develop through their own discoveries and inventions, but additional guidance and knowledge from parents and teachers are essential to moving their minds forward (Vygotsky, 1978).

Vygotsky (1978) disagreed with the notion of intelligence tests to determine human intelligence. Vygotsky argues that such conventional tests are inadequate as they only measure the child's actual development level and are incapable of showing what the child can learn beyond this present level. Vygotsky emphasised that with assistance, children can learn beyond their developmental level. A child's development level does not stop when they accomplish particular tasks without help (actual developmental level), but rather their mental development only begins at this point. A child's mental development is better indicated by what they can do with the assistance of adults or in collaboration with more capable peers (potential development level). The distance between the actual developmental level and the level of potential development is what Vygotsky (1978) called the zone of proximal development (ZPD). Thus when children learn by interacting with more experienced adults and peers, they think beyond the level at which they would be able to perform without assistance (Vygotsky, 1978).

Another important aspect of Vygotsky's theory is scaffolding, though he never used the term himself. According to Wood et al. (1976) scaffolding allows children to do as much as they can do by themselves while what they cannot do is supported by the teacher or parents. There are differences in the quality and quantity of scaffolding offered to children. Quantity refers to how high or low the level offered is, and how long it is kept in place. Whereas, quality is concerned with the different ways in which scaffolding is offered, like modelling, directing attention, asking questions, or giving encouragement. In this case, children become participants in the learning process with the adult's help; they can grasp knowledge and understanding, provide assistance, and control their behaviour (Smith, 2013).

Vygotsky's ideas are fundamental, but according to Rogoff (2003) these ideas focus more on schooling and preparation for the use of academic discourse and tools. "The focus on instructional interactions tends to overlook other forms of engagement that are also important

to children's learning" (p. 283). Such interactions may involve daily interactions between children and their parents and natural environments. In this respect, Rogoff proposes the concept of guided participation in cultural activities, which focus on various ways in which "children [can] learn as they participate in and are guided by the values and practices of their cultural communities" (Rogoff, 2003, p. 284). Guided participation extends beyond instructional learning to include children's learning as they observe and participate in the activities of their home environment and communities (Rogoff, 2003). Rogoff emphasised that everyday routine interactions, which are not designed as instruction, provide children with opportunities to learn and gain skills as they interact with parents or other caregivers. Guided participation involves the efforts of children and caregivers in the learning process. Parents or caregivers and children mutually decide on the activities to participate in, or roles children may assume within the community (Rogoff, 2003). Through mutual structuring of children's participation, caregivers may provide or prevent opportunities to participate in or observe activities based on children's level of maturity. This way, children are actively involved in the socialisation process alongside adults in the activities of their communities. Involvement in everyday activities enable children to learn by listening, observing, and then gradually participating until they reach full participation over time. Guided participation, therefore, involves changing involvement in community activities in line with Nsamenang's (2006a) views, where children progress in their learning as they assume new roles and responsibilities within the family and external community.

Vygotsky (1978) and Rogoff (2003) acknowledge the importance of social interaction in children's development and learning as they participate in cultural practices acquiring new skills with guidance from skilled partners. This further illustrates the participatory process demonstrated by the sociocultural theories that this study utilises, indicating that children's learning and development occurs as a shared process within the family and external community, and not as an isolated one.

The following section introduces Dewey's concept of democracy in education and, in the end, concludes by bringing together sociocultural views and African perspectives of child development to gain a new understanding of child development and learning.

3.2.6 Dewey's Concept of Democracy in Education

Dewey's concept of democracy in education conceives of learning as a social process involving adults communicating their everyday experiences to the younger ones through children's

participation in the community (Dewey, 1916). Education provides the means of social continuity in life whereby the social customs of adults are passed down to the younger ones (Dewey, 1916; Saito, 2000). Thus, in a social group, the adults are responsible for initiating the younger ones into the interests, purposes, information, skills and practices of the group so as to ensure that the life of the group continues (Dewey, 1916). Dewey emphasises a learner-centred philosophy of education whereby educators guide children's learning through reorganising and reconstructing the learner's experience (Beckett, 2018). These ideas are relevant to the study context where children are considered agents and participants in society, and focus on the ordinary circumstances of children's everyday life.

Dewey reminds his readers that formal education is essential, but there is a need to balance formal education and informal education which is acquired through experience and interaction with others. Therefore, school life should not be isolated from daily experiences. Children must be able to utilise their experiences outside the school in a complete and free way within the school itself, while at the same time being able to apply what they are learning at school (Dewey, 1915). For Dewey, the school curriculum should go far beyond the concepts of textbooks and have objectives that offer students opportunities, through experience and inquiry to make sense of new ideas, and add to their existing knowledge with curiosity and reflection (Stack & Simpson, 2010). Thus, school institutions should incorporate children's everyday experiences into their curriculum, and in this way connect home life to school life.

Education in a democratic society, according to Dewey, must include the student's out-of-school experience and in-school experience to enable children to be reflective thinkers and to be able to play an active role in the community and societal development (Stack & Simpson, 2010). In addition, a democratic society, of which the school is a fundamental element, should encourage freedom of communication, mutual respect, shared goals and the interests of all stakeholders (Dewey, 1916; Stack & Simpson, 2010). Thus democracy in an early learning setting will mean the school administrators, teachers, children, families, extended family members, and the community should actively participate in the education process (Mitchell, 2019). This means that government action should support the possibility of equal access to education for all children and inclusion of teachers, parents and community perspectives in curriculum development in the early learning setting.

3.2.7 The Use of Sociocultural and African Theories in this Study

The sociocultural and African theories analysed are useful in understanding children's development and learning within their social and cultural context. Bronfenbrenner (1981) emphasised the concept of connections and relationships between different environments that influence development, highlighting the influence of the experiences in the immediate environment and the broader environments that embed the immediate environment. Bronfenbrenner's theory is relevant in understanding how the surrounding environment, including parents, siblings and peers, relatives, educators and the wider society, influence children's development and learning in this study. In addition, Vygotsky (1978) emphasises the process of social interaction where children actively participate in their learning as they learn and acquire new developmental skills with support from skilled adults. Rogoff's (2003) guided participation concepts expanded on Vygotsky's concept of learning through socialisation by emphasising children's learning through listening, observation and participation in the activities of their cultural communities. Rogoff (2003) notes that children are provided learning opportunities both intentionally and unintentionally, and they are gradually exposed to different tasks with guidance from caregivers until they can perform them independently. Vygotsky and Rogoff's views reiterate the importance of learning and development policies that target the needs and aspirations of children, families and their contexts.

Similarly, African concepts of learning emphasise social responsibility and community participation, where children learn and develop within their home and communities, supervised and mentored by parents, older siblings and relatives (Nsamenang, 2006a). Therefore, children assume new roles and responsibilities based on their ability and skill level. Children develop and learn in different contexts, according to James and Prout (2015); thus, the use of African concepts of child development contextualises learning and development in this study. Dewey (1916) shares similar views with African ideas of learning in his emphasis on the role of everyday activities and the influence of the social community on development and learning. Dewey believed education in formal learning institutions could not be separated from everyday experiences; thus, children acquire new skills and develop because their school life is connected to real-life experiences. Together these theories are relevant in understanding parental involvement in children's learning and recognise the links between policy, practice and sociocultural context.

3.2.8 Roles and Responsibilities for Child Development from Sociocultural and African Perspectives

There are many ways of viewing childhood. These views depend on many factors, such as context, culture, historical and political realities. As discussed above, this investigation adopts the sociocultural views of childhood and development and child development from the African perspective. The study aims to explore the opportunity to create a new understanding by combining sociocultural theories of childhood, which recognise children's rights, see children as social actors, and the influence of the family and wider society in children's development, with the African context of community participation and peer mentoring culture.

Figure 3.1 depicts the ideal circumstance of child socialisation described by the sociocultural and African development theories, where the child's learning and development are influenced by the family, extended family, the nursery school and the Government. This combined approach emphasises the cooperation and interaction of the child with their immediate and external environments. Therefore, combining sociocultural and African perspectives, as illustrated in the figure below, will be used to analyse teaching and learning practices (the roles and responsibilities of parents, nursery schools and the Government), and child upbringing practices common among families in this investigation.

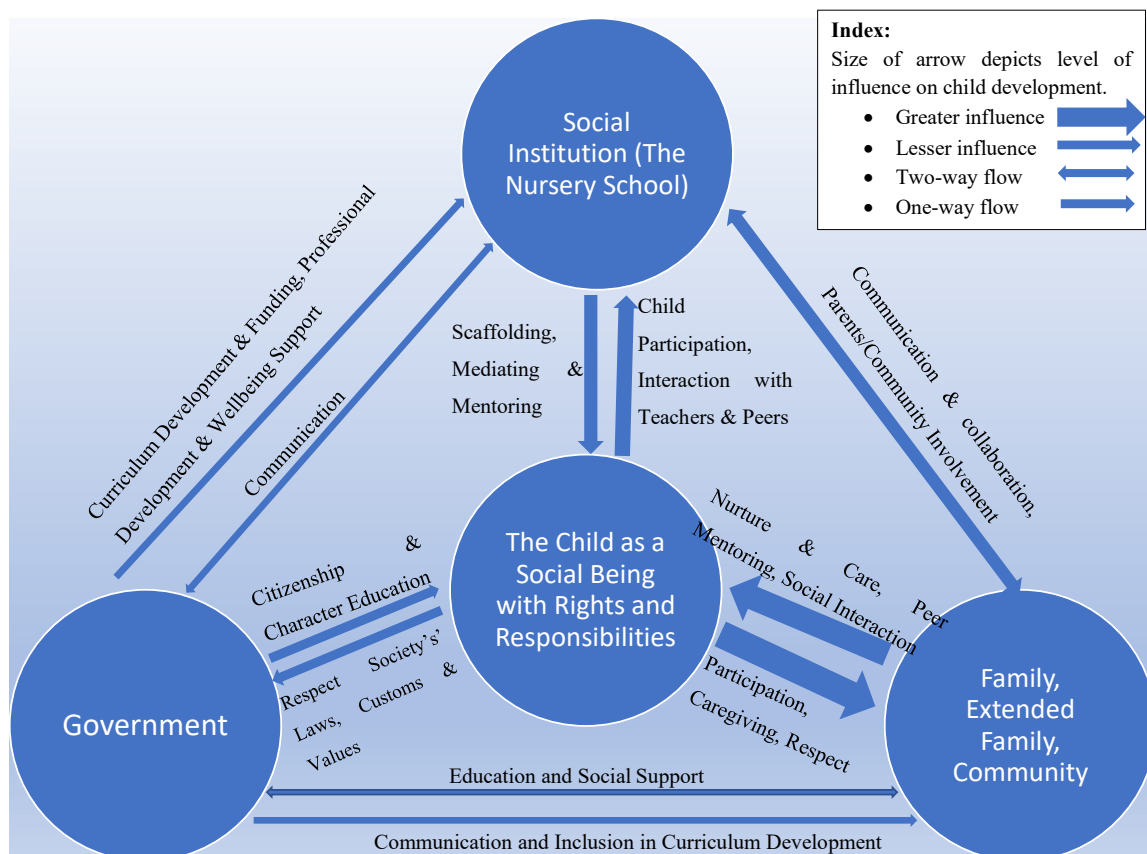


Figure 3-1: Roles and Responsibilities for Child Development from Sociocultural and African Perspectives

Figure 3.1 illustrates the roles and responsibilities of families, the nursery school and the Government (these refer to Bronfenbrenner’s (1996) micro and mesosystems, exosystems and macrosystems) for child development, and suggests a collaborative network between all three stakeholders. The child at the centre of Figure 3.1 is a learner within a community of learners, and an active member who socialises, learns and develops by interacting and taking on responsibilities within the family, extended family, the nursery school and the Government. Despite this, the concepts of childhood vary from one culture to another (James & Prout, 2015), with the home remaining the starting point for children’s learning and development. According to Nsamenang (2010b), children’s upbringing in African countries is carried out collectively, with the immediate family nurturing and caring for the child while the external family and the community provides support. Thus, the family, external family and the community exerts the greatest influence on child development, and are the agents in the most immediate environment where the developing child interacts (Bronfenbrenner, 1981). The nursery school is one of the external influences on child development and contributes to social and cognitive development,

and lifelong learning. The child develops these skills by participating and interacting with teachers and other peers. Through scaffolding offered by parents and teachers, the child performs tasks above their developmental level. This is the context in which children are capable of learning new skills and knowledge with guidance and support from knowledgeable adults, which is defined by Vygotsky (1978) as the Zone of Proximal Development. Constant communication and collaboration are therefore essential between the home and the nursery school, because these are the environments where the child learns and interacts.

Bronfenbrenner (1981) categorises the larger cultural and political systems of a country as being macrosystems. This explains the role of the Government in this investigation and though distant, its influence on child development. Collaboration and communication between families, the nursery school and the Government are essential. This implies the inclusion of parents' and teachers' perspectives in curriculum development, provision of social support services to families, and carrying out projects to ensure the wellbeing of teachers and families. In addition, parent newsletters, education workshops on child development, and parental involvement can be organised by both the nursery schools and the Government. The Government may increase investments in teaching and learning materials to promote an environment for learning and play, and support professional development courses for teachers to ensure quality learning services.

Parent involvement is receiving growing emphasis in early childhood learning. Goodall and Montgomery (2014) differentiate between parental involvement and parental engagement, viewing parental involvement as school-led initiatives that involve parents in the home and school education, while parental engagement refers to a partnership between schools and parents, where parents exercise a greater level of agency. This study, however, will consider parental involvement in children's learning as a starting point for understanding the relationships between educators and parents to understand their views and practices. The study will move beyond parental involvement practices to propose recommendations that consider educators and parents as partners in sharing information and making decisions in the teaching and learning process.

“Fundamentally, when programme staff and families are engaged as partners, they commit to working together on children's behalf” (Shapiro & Harper Browne, 2016, p. 186). It is worth noting that parents have unique knowledge and aspirations for their children. Parents' unique expertise and insights into their children's development are one of the reasons why parents

should be welcomed as collectively competent partners capable of contributing to ECE programmes and their children's development (Garcia et al., 2008; Wolfendale, 2018). Including parents and helping them know more about their children's learning is beneficial. When constructive communication exists between parents and teachers, creating home-school connections, both parties gain a clearer understanding of each other's expectations for children. This is beneficial to parents as they learn how to participate at home to enhance their children's education. Teachers will understand parents' expectations and work towards accomplishing this at school. In a study on promoting parents' involvement in children's learning, Nutbrown (2011) emphasised that "the more parents know about how children's learning developed, the better position they were in to understand what their children were doing and how they might further enhance learning opportunities for them" (Nutbrown, 2011, p. 95). Nutbrown (2011) illustrates the use of the ORIM framework as a means for parents to improve early literacy development by providing *opportunities, recognition, interaction* and a *model* (ORIM) for children. Parents can provide opportunities for children's literacy development by making available resources for reading and writing, encouraging socio-dramatic play, exposure to nursery rhymes and storybooks, and ensuring children's participation in visits or trips that provide opportunities to talk, and read and write. Children may be motivated when parents recognise and appreciate children's milestones in development by praising them when they read a book, displaying their writings or drawings around the house, and sharing their success stories with other family members. Furthermore, it is beneficial when parents spend time with their children, interacting with them, encouraging and supporting them while challenging them to move forward from what they already know.

Parent involvement in children's learning will be effective when parents and child educators build responsive, reciprocal and respectful relationships. Meaningful connections between educators and families will create avenues for information sharing. Educators will learn and understand culturally diverse children and their families, and be more responsive to individual children and families (Shuker & Cherrington, 2016; Souto-Manning & Rabadi-Raol, 2018). Furthermore, all children, families and communities have rich cultural and linguistic assets; meaning, educators should be called to identify, support, and sustain such cultural and linguistic assets, and incorporate these assets into their curriculum. This is an essential aspect to this research project, as it involves an investigation of how the nursery school promotes the use of the ethnic languages of children, alongside Cameroon's official languages, to promote and preserve culture and identity.

Views on parental involvement vary from one culture to another; making it logical that education should draw from parents' knowledge or family resources to facilitate a partnership between parents and teachers (Sebolt, 2018). Smith (2013) stresses that one of the most critical aspects of quality in ECE is communication with and sensitivity to families. Educational practitioners need to recognise the differences in cultural perspectives in families, demonstrate flexibility in their practices and beliefs, and be committed to deal constructively with parental opinions and suggestions (Janssen & Vandebroek, 2018). This is because the family has the most powerful impact on children's outcomes. Thus, there is a need for a reciprocal relationship between the ECE centres and families. Janssen and Vandebroek (2018) also note that parents and educators might have different beliefs and expectations about the teaching and learning process. In this light, an approach which forms a balance in decision-making between parents and educators is necessary to (co-)construct pedagogical practices.

According to Nsamenang (1992a) the history of childcare in Cameroon indicates that mothers balance caregiving, subsistence production, and home keeping. Stemming from a mixture of indigenous traditions and colonial heritages, sibling care and peer culture are still very prominent aspects of the country's education and childcare system. Thus, parents, especially mothers, are only ever available on a part-time basis to provide care or supervise children (Nsamenang, 1992a). Teachers aware of this way of life will develop their pedagogies and practices based on their knowledge of these social contexts and devise techniques to engage these parents in their children's learning. "A cultural pedagogy of relations founded on respect and responsibility requires a deep engagement with the values and practices of the child's cultural context" (Peters et al., 2015, p. 8). Knowledge of the beliefs and lifestyles of families enables constructive promotion of relationships and trust between schools and families, and this positively influences children's learning.

Gonzalez et al. (2005) emphasise that educators should consider the everyday lived experiences of their students. This includes processes of everyday life in the form of daily activities which, in turn, produce accumulated funds of knowledge in the household. Making use of such funds of knowledge is a means of promoting parental involvement in children's learning and fostering respectful relationships between ECE settings and communities (Gonzalez et al., 2005; Sebolt, 2018). Recognising and incorporating children's ways of life, and their social and family backgrounds in educational settings can improve learning outcomes for diverse children (Cooper et al., 2014; Esteban-Guitart et al., 2016; McDevitt, 2016). Furthermore, Esteban-Guitart et al. (2016) explain that Bronfenbrenner's (1996) mesosystem idea is closely

connected to the funds of knowledge concept which explains that learning contexts or ecologies are linked across school, family, and community contexts when they are put into contact with one another. Bronfenbrenner's (1981) idea of the mesosystem provides a framework for thinking about the interconnectivity of the home, school, or a neighbourhood peer-group as two or more settings in which children interact and influence their development. In the context of this study, childcare and upbringing are carried out collectively; the family, extended family, social institutions and the community are involved. The need for this mutually inclusive relationship and connection between the home and the nursery school is essential to enhancing children's learning experiences. Consequently, this will lead to a two-way relationship in which information on the lifestyles and beliefs of the family will become funds of knowledge for the nursery school and *vice versa*. Hedges et al. (2019) add that children's funds of knowledge can be recognised through our learning about their everyday family culture and practices through funds-of-knowledge-focused home visits.

Working with Mexican families through home visits to develop an understanding of households and classrooms, Moll et al. (1992) argue that the idea of funds of knowledge represents a positive view of households because these funds contain cultural and cognitive resources that have great potential utility for classroom instruction. Mitchell and Ouko (2012) conducted a study in New Zealand with Congolese refugee families attempting to understand what funds of knowledge existed in these families. The researchers identified that a large percentage of refugee children in New Zealand are preschool children. They realised the importance of ECE being responsive to families' cultural and integration needs, especially when there is the need for more inclusive practice within ECE settings.

Therefore, a funds of knowledge approach acknowledges that families have knowledge and competencies that are relevant to learning and practice (Gonzalez et al., 2005). Since knowledge from lived experiences is salient to teaching and provides resources for educational change, forming relations of trust through interpersonal communications between teachers and families become logically imperative (Moll, 2014). According to Moll (2014), it is through these relationships that children will no longer be defined solely by what happens in the classroom and rather as persons who partake in broader social life, of which the ECE centre is only one part. These ideas on funds of knowledge are relevant to the current investigation. The study also seeks to understand how teachers encourage parents' participation in children's early learning both at home and at nursery school.

3.3 Chapter Summary

The sociocultural theories and the African concepts of child development that underpin this investigation view children as agents and participants in society. These theories emphasise the role of peers, siblings, parents or caregivers, and the external community when mentoring and supervising children, while enabling them to develop skills and independence. Adapting these concepts to ECE settings, it can be concluded that teachers, parents and the community play a unique role in children's learning and development. In addition, this combined approach using both sociocultural and African concepts will help analyse the role of the Government, nursery schools and parents in children's learning and development in the Cameroon context. Following the conceptions of childhood, which include the use of both theoretical and local community concepts, it is suggested that a two-way relationship between the teachers and families, sharing ideas and gaining funds of knowledge is beneficial in children's learning. A proper understanding of the relationship between teachers and families will be approached in the following chapter, in which perspectives of parental involvement in children's learning will be analysed through a review of relevant literature.

Chapter 4

Perspectives on Parental Involvement in Early Childhood Learning

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed this study's theoretical framework, which included sociocultural and African perspectives on child learning and development, and which defined the child as a social being whose learning and development are supported by their immediate and external environments. This chapter provides an overview of international literature on parental involvement in children's education to gain an understanding of other perspectives on the topic. Additionally, some African research on parental involvement is presented. The chapter begins by discussing the benefits of early childhood learning and the need for quality ECE provision. It builds on the theoretical framework through highlighting the effects of the interaction between the child's immediate environment (home) and external environment (nursery school) by analysing literature on parental involvement in children's learning. The last sections of the chapter examine factors that impact parental involvement in children's learning, including the socio-economic characteristics of families, parent-teacher relationships, and parents' and teachers' beliefs on parental involvement.

4.2 Early Childhood Education

Early childhood education in Cameroon is described as education for children aged three to six years old. Since this is an age when children experience rapid growth and development, it is essential to provide programmes that encourage and enhance children's development. A UNICEF (2019) report emphasises the need for quality education in the early years as this sets children up for success throughout their education. Therefore, there is a need to provide programmes and strategies appropriate for all children. A large body of research evidence has found that quality ECE contributes to the holistic development of children. Nutbrown (2011) argues that quality ECE is crucial in children's later educational achievement, including their emotional, social and physical development. While the word "quality" may have cultural connotations, Nutbrown suggests that quality ECE services could be enhanced through greater collaboration between service providers and families/communities; ensuring a learning environment equipped with resources; a curriculum; health and safety; the role of professionals and responsible adults; observation, assessment, and recording achievement; evaluation and review of services. In line with this thinking, Shonkoff and Phillips (2000) affirm that there is a positive association between the quality of ECE and a child's development. Shonkoff and Phillips note that the early childhood years are a period of extraordinary growth and change.

Therefore, early education is critical to children's physical, socio-emotional, cognitive and linguistic development. In addition, since children's lives are impacted by the quality and continuity of their experiences in ECE centres, improvements in ratios, training, and compensation measures will go a long way to fostering quality learning in these settings.

When analysing the initiatives by Save the Children Rwanda on the expansion of quality ECE services, Dusabe et al. (2019) concluded that quality learning environments at home and early learning settings contribute positively to children's holistic development. Some of the components of a quality learning environment listed by this study include: the provision of age-appropriate teaching and learning resources; curriculum and trained personnel; the construction of ECE classrooms; and collaboration with parents. Thus, providing high-quality opportunities for learning inside and outside the classroom is crucial (Dusabe et al., 2019). Though ECE forms a pillar of future learning and training and provides foundations for skills needed later in life, it is an area that is neglected in terms of policy and investment in most developing countries (Neuman & Okeng'o, 2019; UNESCO, 2014; UNICEF, 2019). UNICEF (2019) recommends increasing investment in the ECE sector in learning and teaching materials, teacher training, curriculum development along with the need to ensure access to quality ECE for all children.

Providing culturally responsive programs incorporating local knowledge, cultures, and values is essential to quality ECE provision. Examining the role of indigenous knowledge in ECE policy and practice in Kenya and Uganda, Okwany (2016) emphasises that ECE policy and practice should move beyond the dominant Western perspectives and consider diverse experiences and practices. The developmental niche framework developed by Super and Harkness (1986) analyses how culture shapes child development. The framework facilitates understanding of the impact of the environment on child development through the interrelationship between the physical and social setting where the child lives, the customs of child care and childrearing and the psychology of caretakers. Child care and everyday routines and practices are embedded in the customs and beliefs of childrearing practices in a specific culture. Understanding children's day-to-day activities, roles and relationships rooted in the customs and beliefs in different settings is helpful in contextualising ECE programs (Nsamenang, 2008; Okwany, 2016; Super & Harkness, 1986; Wadende et al., 2016).

In addition to developing quality early childhood programmes or curricula, parental involvement in ECE can enrich experiences to support children's learning and development.

The following section elaborates more on parental involvement in children's education in the early years.

4.3 Parental Involvement in Early Childhood Learning

Parents play an essential role in children's learning, especially in the early years. Parental involvement in children's learning is demonstrated unconsciously or intentionally since parents are teaching most or all the time as they carry out their daily caretaking functions. Furthermore, integrating a child's home experiences and their school experiences reduces the gap between home and school activities (Wolfendale, 2018). In recent years, current conceptions in early childhood discourses highlight the importance of parents' involvement in improving children's socio-emotional and cognitive development and reinforcing home-school relationships that are beneficial in the early learning years (Grindal et al., 2016; Harris & Goodall, 2008; Janssen & Vandebroek, 2018). Therefore, the main arguments are: that parents have the right to be involved in children's learning and to contribute to decision-making in ECE; parents can be highly effective teachers of their children; parents and teachers have in common a pedagogic role, and a shared responsibility for creating opportunities and enhancing children's learning experiences; and parents and teachers share aspirations for children's progress (Wolfendale, 2018). Writing of childhood in Africa, Nsamenang (2010b) classifies parents as first educators because they notice developmental delays and strengths and possess more first-hand information about their children than educators or professionals do, who spend, relatively speaking, less time with individual children.

Furthermore, children's performance at school is highly influenced by what goes on outside the school gates, whether in the home or the wider community (Hornby & Blackwell, 2018). Children, who engage in conversation with their parents about many topics, possess a lot of background information that becomes invaluable as they encounter new knowledge in the classroom (Rattigan-Rohr, 2012). It is easier for a child to grasp a new concept introduced by a teacher if the parent has already provided the child with anecdotal experience of the function of this concept (Topping, 2018). In this way, parent involvement enhances academic achievement.

As noted earlier, this study acknowledges parental involvement as a starting point for analysing educators' approaches and strategies for parents' participation in children's education. Furthermore, it considers how parents and educators can collaborate as equal partners to support children's learning (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). In addition, the strategies for

parental engagement in children's learning recommended by this study will consider the specific needs of the families involved in the study. Gonzalez et al. (2005) argue that families possess valuable social and intellectual resources that teachers could utilise and incorporate into their pedagogy. One of the ways in which teachers might learn and include home-based knowledge in their pedagogy is through home visits, which would promote mutual and meaningful communication between the home and the ECE setting. In investigating teachers' experiences of home visits in two ECE centres in Auckland, New Zealand, Cooper et al. (2014) found that home visits improve parent-teacher relationships. Parents are more able to freely share and engage in conversations with teachers about their children in the comfort of their family home than they are when they have the same conversations in the context of the school. Epstein (1995, 2018) describes parental involvement as a collaborative relationship between home and school. Epstein's (1995) model has been widely used in the field and consists of six dimensions:

- (1) Parenting: help all families establish home environments to support children as students;
- (2) Communicating: design effective forms of school-to-home communications about school programs and children's progress;
- (3) Volunteering: recruit and organise parent help and support;
- (4) Learning at Home: provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning;
- (5) Decision-making: include parents in school decisions, developing parent leaders and representatives; and
- (6) Collaborating with the community: identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development. (p. 704)

Lau et al. (2012) further investigated Chinese parental involvement practices with ten preschools in Hong Kong and Shenzhen, classifying these practices into home-based and preschool-based involvement. Home-based involvement includes home-based learning and parent-child communication, while during preschool-based participation, parents express their opinions about their children's learning and provide assistance during different preschool activities. This involvement process is vital for parents as they learn other skills that improve their home-based involvement.

Home-based parental involvement involves structured daily-life family routines in which learning occurs through parent-child interactions, peer relationships and interactions with other family members (Nsamenang, 2008; Rogoff, 2003; Rogoff et al., 2018). Rogoff (2003) argues that children learn and acquire skills in cultural communities by observing adult activities from infancy and engaging in community activities. In most African cultures, mothers assign chores and sibling caretaking while emphasising the importance of responsibility and obedience as part of children's development (Nsamenang, 2010a). When children assist in household chores, care for younger siblings, watch adults perform tasks and then perform the task when they can, they develop agency, independence and a sense of responsibility.

Parent involvement in children's education can be linked to improving education programmes and climate, increased retention and increased academic performance (Grindal et al., 2016; Winder & Corter, 2016). Other forms of home-based parental involvement may include constant parent-child communication, providing assistance and follow-up with studies at home, accepting the child's interest and providing prompt responses, thereby creating a warm environment for home learning. Grindal et al.'s (2016) meta-analysis of US centre-based preschool programs brought forth two aspects of parenting behaviours that positively contribute to children's cognitive development: the warmth and responsiveness of parents' interactions with their children and the amount of cognitive stimulation these interactions provide. Thus, if parents consistently respond to their children's communicative actions, this parental behaviour will likely lead to positive cognitive development in early childhood (Grindal et al., 2016). Shapiro and Harper Browne (2016) indicate that "a child's relationships, environments, and experiences can strengthen or inhibit the neural connections and pathways that are forming within the young brain and that facilitate later brain functioning, learning, development, and behaviour" (p. 89). Consequently, responsive parenting, positive relationships with other caregivers or educators, and positive ratings from peers can be associated with academic success, personal agency and acquisition of social skills in young children.

Furthermore, Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2011) conducted a longitudinal mixed-method research study (Effective Pre-School, Primary and Secondary Education for children aged 3-16 years) involving 3000+ children in the UK. The aim was to understand children's learning over time and explore why certain children succeeded academically while others did not. The authors differentiated between the practical and emotional support parents can provide to children to augment their children's educational outcomes. Types of practical support include assisting

with homework, watching educational TV programmes, playing games, reading together, and going on holidays and outings. Emotional support includes discussions on children's feelings about school and activities and talking about their plans for the future. However, in the African context where collective caregiving is practised, practical and emotional support is usually provided by parents, older siblings, or extended family members. In this context, the role of parents, older siblings and extended family members are central to children's everyday learning (Ebrahim, 2012; Nsamenang, 2008; Okwany, 2016).

School-based parental involvement may include parents' participation in early childhood learning activities such as attending meetings, parents contributing to the curriculum, visiting on open days and maintaining parent-teacher communication. A study by Barrera and Warner (2006) identified the following types of parents' involvement in children's learning: volunteer tutoring, field-trip supervision, assisting in the classroom and preparing curriculum resources, working in the nurse's office, and as administrative office assistants or as organisers of ECE events. The educator's role is paramount in creating these avenues for parental involvement in the ECE setting. Rattigan-Rohr (2012) asserts that educators miss many opportunities to improve students' learning when they fail to include parents in the teaching and learning process.

Teachers can promote parental involvement in children's learning in a variety of ways. Winder and Corter (2016) surveyed 215 beginning and 217 graduating ECE diploma program students in Ontario to understand pre-service teachers' prior experiences and education influence their level of preparation to work with families. The authors found that teachers' perception of parents' expertise, perception of family involvement activities and understanding of the barriers to family involvement impact parent-teacher relationships and parents' actual involvement in children's education. They further affirm the positive outcomes associated with family involvement in children's education and emphasise the importance of a collaborative relationship between educators and parents. Shapiro and Harper Browne (2016) emphasise that the best time for educators to partner with parents is during the prenatal and early childhood periods because of the importance of early development. Parenting programmes through home visits and classes for parents can help motivate responsive behaviour in parents. However, these parenting programmes need to be empowering in such a way that both teachers and parents learn and share information about child development, social and emotional growth, and parenting techniques.

Yulianti et al. (2019) explored teachers' perceptions of the support received from school leaders to promote parental involvement in children's learning involving 90 primary teachers in 18 schools in the rural and urban regions of Java, Indonesia. They proposed a transformational leadership approach that encourages school leaders to support teachers in promoting parental involvement. Hornby and Blackwell (2018) further emphasise that school leaders are central to advancing parental involvement. Parental involvement increases when school leaders are welcoming and supportive, motivating teachers to value parent participation in school activities and share and learn from each other. Aspden et al. (2019) emphasise the importance of strong parent-teacher relationships that foster children's development and learning and for the trajectories of their life-long learning. They recommend programmes focusing on partnerships between early learning institutions and families for pre-service teachers and professional development courses for in-service teachers. Educators working with families, extended family members, and the community is what Peters (2019) identifies as a "community approach", which is beneficial for children and learning. Although Aspden et al. (2019) and Peters (2019) study are focused on the New Zealand context, pre-service and in-service teachers' training and readiness to work together with families and external families will benefit children's education in any context, including Cameroon.

Barrera and Warner (2006) emphasise two-way communication between parents and teachers to enhance children's learning and performance. Izzo et al. (1999) carried out a longitudinal study to understand issues around home-school relationships involving 1,205 urban elementary school children in southern New England. The findings in this study support the idea that reciprocal and consistent parent-teacher contact leads to improved children's behaviour and academic performance. Various ways to improve communication and parental involvement can involve school newsletters created by teachers, children and parents in multiple languages and parent awareness workshops using languages used by the community. Communication from the school needs to be tailored to the preferences of the family. Additional value is achieved by including parental inputs to school policy, providing adult basic education and technical training, a parent resource room in each centre, and a parent-resource teacher who oversees parent activities to help foster home-school relationships (Barnard, 2004; Barrera & Warner, 2006).

Another way of involving parents in the early learning years of their children is to focus on child-centred curricula development. Analysing the perspectives of parental involvement in 13

ECE curricular frameworks, Janssen and Vandebroek (2018) argued that curricula should be drawn in child-centred ways, building on what the child brings to the learning environment.

Such an emergent curriculum requires the inclusion of parents as their unique knowledge of the child enables practitioners to develop a more complete picture of children's experiences, interests and (dis)likes and to gain knowledge of children's learning styles and (in)abilities. (Janssen & Vandebroek, 2018, p. 818)

Janssen and Vandebroek (2018) describe this emergent curriculum as a holistic approach to teaching and learning, which acknowledges that children's belonging to a family and community cannot be disconnected from their out-of-home learning experiences. Thus, the home remains the base for early childhood learning and development, implying that the acquisition of knowledge is better fostered out-of-home if the connection between the home and school is maintained.

Janssen and Vandebroek (2018) also consider parental involvement as ensuring a smooth transition from the home to the school setting, which they believe could be done by inviting both parents and children to participate in the adaptation period. They believe this would develop a sense of trust between parents and educators. It is often challenging for parents to entrust education and care to another person, and, as such, their fears need to be heard and addressed. Another method requires educators to provide information to parents on children's developmental characteristics, learning needs and coping strategies to help children deal with the psychological and emotional problems involved in the adaptation stage (Janssen & Vandebroek, 2018). Exploring the transition experiences of Māori children to school, Peters et al. (2015) recommend that teachers work together with families and children, building strong relationships, "sharing information and developing approaches that support successful transitions" (p. 15). Though Peters et al.'s study is concerned with transitions from ECE to school, a collaboration between teachers and parents is equally vital for transitioning from home to the ECE setting.

Providing parenting support is very important because the ECE centre is not just a place for a child to be cared for or taught whilst the parents engage in different activities: it is also an institution where the questions and worries of parents can be addressed. Information sharing is beneficial for both parents and teachers when it comes to learning about the potential of

children. Early childhood centres could also be repositories of information and offer support to parents by offering opportunities for parents to make friends.

4.4 Factors influencing Parental Involvement in Early Childhood Learning

Worth noting is the fact that different cultural and social factors influence parenting. Ways of parental involvement and care vary from culture to culture. According to Jenks (2005), culture is categorised as the whole way of life of a people. Tylor (2016) defines culture as a “complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (p. 10). Thus, human beings from different cultures are characterised by unique sets of knowledge, beliefs and values about aspects of reality that influence their actions. In most African cultures, historically the mother took on the responsibility for the child’s care, participation in education and upbringing. She relied on the assistance of older siblings and relatives to accomplish these tasks, while the father, who was working to provide for the home, was absent from the home and their children’s lives. Therefore, in this context, each family member played different roles in development and upbringing. Nsamenang (2010a) confirms that some African communities are polygamous, such that the wives of a particular husband lived in separate households, meaning because of the distributed network of relationships, the fathers were only occasionally present in the lives of the children of their individual wives. This is opposed to western cultures, where both parents are often actively involved in a child’s upbringing. Economically, the cultivation of commercial crops was limited to men, and women could not access the market due to restrictions imposed by men. Recently, paid work for both men and women, the steady decline of commercial crops, and the rise in the value of food crops have brought significant changes in family life and the role and authority of the African father. The father, usually recognised as the head and central authority of the family, is increasingly becoming simply just another household member.

Various recent studies show that social conditions can limit the levels and kinds of parental involvement in early childhood learning, including: low level of education; low income; children from a single-parent family or children from divorced or separated parents; and parents’ working conditions (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Lau et al., 2012; Li & Fischer, 2017). Parent-teacher relationships and parents’ and teachers’ views on parental involvement are other factors impacting parental involvement. Using Epstein’s framework of overlapping spheres of influence, Hornby and Lafaele (2011) have identified four factors that act as barriers to parental involvement in education in the Western context. These include individual parent and family

factors (parents' beliefs and perceptions of invitations for parental involvement, current life contexts, class, ethnicity and gender); child factors (age, learning difficulties and disabilities, gifts and talents, behavioural problems); parent-teacher factors (differing goals and agendas, differing attitudes, and differing languages used); and societal factors (historical, demographic, political and economic factors).

4.4.1 Education

The level of a parent's education, in most cases, affects the degree of home and school involvement in children's learning. Dickson et al. (2016) found that parental education affected the amount of time allocated towards educational activity, educational environment and consequently educational outcomes. Comparing studies conducted in England, the US and Scandinavian countries, they concluded that in most countries, individuals with higher levels of schooling have children who also attain higher levels of education. Greenberg's (2011) study on the effect of maternal education on a child's education in the US found that when parents are educated, they become aware of the importance of early childhood education and enrol children in quality centre-based care and provide a rich home learning environment. The result is an increase in children's achievement and academic school readiness. On the other hand, children with less-educated parents are disadvantaged. They are less likely to benefit from educational materials and practices that promote school readiness in the home and are less likely to be enrolled in educationally enriching early childhood experiences (Greenberg, 2011). Harris and Goodall's (2008) work on the relationship between parental engagement and children's academic achievement from 20 schools in the UK demonstrates a positive correlation between parental engagement and parents' level of education.

Parents' participation in early childhood learning is essential to children's early learning. This investigation engages with parents of children in ECE and analyses parents' level of education and how their education influences their views and level of participation in children's learning.

4.4.2 Working Conditions, Low Income as well as Single or Separated Parents

A family's socio-economic condition may impact the quality of care and provision of educational resources for the child's learning (Smith et al., 2002). Parents who spend long hours at work may not fully participate in the early learning years of their children as opposed to parents who spend fewer hours at work. "For parents with jobs, whether both parents work and the kind of jobs they have may be issues. When both parents work, there will be less time available for both home-based and school-based PI" (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011, p. 41). A low-

income family or a single parent may be forced to work longer hours to meet certain life conditions. Separated parents may face difficulties affecting the level at which they are able to participate in their children's education (Hornby & Blackwell, 2018). In addition, not all school-based parental involvement activities are equally accessible to parents because certain types of involvement require a greater commitment of time and money than parents are able to make. Investigating middle-class parental engagement in an elementary school in northern California, Posey-Maddox (2013) found that parents who are actively involved in parent-teacher organisations (PTOs) may volunteer hours and invest more resources to build and maintain school programmes and initiatives beneficial to teachers, staff, and students. On the other hand, parents from disadvantaged backgrounds may face more challenges when it comes to volunteering to commit to long hours to ECE and donating money. This latter outcome may be for various reasons, including having fewer monetary resources, less work flexibility, and a greater likelihood of being the parent in a single-parent family.

In addition, Lareau (2011) found that there are higher levels of parental involvement among middle-class parents, while working-class and poor parents were far less engaged. This finding is supported by Harris and Goodall (2008) who state that "middle-class families tend to have culturally supportive social networks, use the vocabulary of teachers, feel entitled to treat teachers as equals and have access to childcare and transportation, all of which facilitate parental engagement in schooling" (p. 280).

4.4.3 Parent-teacher Relationships

Parents and teachers display different attitudes that are deeply rooted in their own historical, economic, educational, ethnic, class and gendered experiences, which may hinder or promote parental involvement (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Teachers may expect parents to discuss children's progress and difficulties and identify ways in which parents can help their children at home. On the other hand, parents' goals might involve the need to discuss their children's progress and any problems, comparing their children with other children in the class, and knowing more about the school and teaching methods used and the teacher's concerns (Bastiani, 1989; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). These differences in parents' and teachers' goals and the agendas they had for children's education may be barriers to effective parental involvement (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Hornby and Blackwell (2018) reported that constraints in parent-teacher relationships could result from the fact that teachers may consider interacting with parents as an afterthought. Furthermore, it may be difficult for some teachers to have an insight into a family life that is unlike theirs.

Investigating educators' beliefs on parental involvement in Maryland public schools, Epstein and Henry Jay (1982) found that some teachers think school-based parental involvement is an excellent strategy to increase home-based parental involvement. In contrast, others doubted parents' expertise in supporting school-related activities at home or if parents wanted to learn more about the school curriculum than they are usually told. Thus, the question is, should teachers be seen as the principal educators of children with parents providing support from home, or should parents be considered the primary educators while the school supplements home learning with specialist expertise (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 1997)? Differing attitudes towards this above question will impact the way both parents and teachers perceive parental involvement.

4.4.4 Parents' Views of Childhood and Involvement in Early Childhood Learning

Parents' belief about their roles in children's education is essential. Hornby and Lafaele (2011) assert that parents who believe the school is responsible for their children's education and that their (the parents') role is only to get their children to school will be less involved in either school-based or home-based parental involvement. The characteristic of the parent is an important factor that influences parental involvement. Grolnick et al. (1997) examined factors influencing parental involvement by surveying 209 mothers and 28 teachers. They found that parents become more involved if they believe they have a role in the teaching and learning process. Hornby and Lafaele (2011) noted that some parents' primary reason for sending their children to preschool is that they see the preschool as a place where their children can be safe while they engage in other activities like work. Hence, they will not see much need to get involved at home or in school activities. Parents also tend to get involved in children's learning when their children are performing well in school or applying their talents, but this can be a barrier in cases where the teacher does not share such views. In addition, when children exhibit disruptive behaviour, their parents are less likely to get involved in their education in order to avoid hearing more complaints (Grolnick et al., 1997; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011).

Parents who believe that their participation and how they raise their children impact their children's development are much more likely to be optimistic about parental involvement than parents who think otherwise (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). In addition, parental involvement is effective when teachers show a positive and facilitating attitude toward involving parents. Contrarily, when parents feel their participation is not valued, it is a barrier to their involvement in children's education. Meshram (2013) says, "understanding the role of parental involvement may lead to increased educational attainment, and improved education may lead to increased

opportunities for the individual and economic progress for the nation” (p. 1692). Ferrara (2009) emphasises that barriers to parent involvement in children’s learning are stronger when educators place little value on the participation of parents. Analysing parents’ perceptions of teachers’ outreach practices and parental involvement in children’s education, Patrikakou and Weissberg (2000) found that parents’ perceptions of involvement opportunities in learning presented by their child’s teacher affect parental involvement both at home and in the ECE setting.

Reiterating, it is essential to note that parents’ views of involvement in children’s education vary from culture to culture. Thus, parents from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds may perceive involvement in early childhood learning differently. Parents from Chinese and Hispanic cultures, for example, may think it is rude to intrude into the life of the school and, thus, prefer to limit their involvement in their children’s education to what they can do at home. However, this attitude is the opposite of that found in most western cultures because these cultures encourage establishing a closer parent-school relationship (Guo, 2018). A study carried out by Wolf (2020) in Ghana reveals that parents’ perceptions of parental involvement are mainly that it should be home-based. This involvement would involve home care, providing for basic needs, feeding and preparing the child for school in the morning and picking them up at the end of the day. Due to work commitments, some parents could drop off their children but never have time to interact with the teachers, while others admitted that they have never been to their child’s school. Nevertheless, African parents’ views on parental involvement have not been well researched; thus this study will provide a further understanding of parents’ perspectives on the subject.

4.4.5 Teachers’ and Administrators’ Views about Parental Involvement in Early Childhood Learning

Teachers’ and administrators’ beliefs about parental involvement influence parents’ actual involvement. Hornby and Lafaele (2011) point out that traditional definitions of parental involvement in children’s learning have been narrow, and educators have often assumed responsibility and power over what education itself entails. In recent years, there has been a shift away from this narrower conception of who should assume responsibility, with parents now being regarded as important contributors to their children’s education. Robinson and Harris (2014) have found that educators acknowledge the importance of parental involvement in children’s education and believe that poor achievement results from parents’ lack of involvement or valuing of education *per se*. Minke et al. (2014) differentiate parental

involvement into those activities that are visible to the teacher (which may include school visits and attending parent-teacher meetings) from those activities that are not immediately visible (support of learning at home). Studying how parent-teacher relationships predict child academic, social, and behavioural outcomes in 175 elementary students, Minke et al. (2014) found that sometimes teachers interpreted a lack of visible involvement (school involvement) as representing a lack of parental support for their children's education, straining parent-teacher relationships. In line with this argument, Huss-Keeler (1997) notes that parents who are actively involved in their children's education in the school setting are perceived by teachers as interested parents. Huss-Keeler (1997) lists barriers to parents participating in their children's learning, including language barriers, cultural differences, differences in understanding parent-teacher roles, and work conflict. Teachers unaware of such barriers often view such parents as not being interested in their children's education. Thus, teachers form a negative attitude towards these parents and perceive them as not interested in children's education, which impedes their willingness to reach out to them. Some teachers view parents with low-income backgrounds as less involved in their children's education for the reason that they delay payment of school fees and cannot provide educational resources, placing a strain on classroom activities which in turn can lead to a delay in teachers being paid their salaries.

Furthermore, differing opinions and perceptions on parental involvement between teachers and parents can create further constraints. For instance, Wolf (2020) found that some parents tend to view their role as that of needing to ensure children are provided with the basic learning needs. On the other hand, teachers expect parents' involvement in children's educational experiences and activities. In this case, positive and more proactive communication with families is necessary for both stakeholders to understand their roles and responsibilities in children's education.

Hughes and Mac Naughton (2000) noted that barriers to parental involvement in children's education stem from teachers' view that parental knowledge is subordinate to their professional knowledge; an attitude that these researchers say can be separated into three themes:

Parental knowledge is inadequate: parents are actual or potential teachers. Here, parents are seen as ignorant about what and how to teach their children and parent involvement programmes rectify this. Parental knowledge is supplementary: parents are collaborators. Here, parents' knowledge of their child allegedly complements staff's professional knowledge, but in reality,

merely supplements it. Parental knowledge is unimportant: parents are absent. Perhaps the simplest and most effective form of ‘othering’ – parents’ voices are absent from much of the literature about parent involvement. (p. 242)

Educators’ negative perceptions of parents impair effective communication between the home and school. A lack of teacher training for home-school communication may be one of the reasons for educators’ attitudes. Research has shown that pre-service teachers receive inadequate training for parental involvement in their education programmes (Ferrara, 2009; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2002; Rattigan-Rohr, 2012). Researching home-school relationships in the early childhood development phase in three primary schools in South Africa, Bridgemohan et al. (2005) found that home-school communications were mostly school directed, with parents having limited opportunities to initiate communication with educators. Bridgemohan et al. (2005) conclude that educators feel pre-service training courses on parental involvement are inapplicable in real-life situations. Thus, training for parental involvement has not fully prepared them to work with parents.

Nevertheless, including parental involvement courses in Teacher Training Colleges is an important factor that may help shape teachers’ beliefs about school and family relationships in ECE. Winder and Corter (2016) advise that “in order to effectively prepare ECE students to work in partnership with families, it is critical that we understand some of the beliefs and prior experiences they bring to their training that might influence their relationships with families” (pp. 133-134). Tichenor’s (1998) study recommends complete training for pre-service teachers on parental involvement by providing field experiences related to parental involvement and working directly with parents. Ferrara (2009) agrees that the provision of structured parent involvement modules over time fully prepares pre-service teachers to employ parent involvement strategies in the classroom. Shuker and Cherrington (2016) add that pre-service teacher education institutions and professional development programmes for in-service teachers should prepare them to work with culturally diverse families. The literature referred to above reveals that teachers’ and administrators’ beliefs about involving parents in children’s learning influence parents’ involvement. However, African teachers’ perspectives on parental involvement and the role of parents in ECE and the voices and perspectives of African parents are largely absent from the literature, creating a gap in our understanding of this topic. Therefore, information on parent involvement in this investigation is not solely based on teachers’ perceptions but also includes parents’ perceptions of parent involvement and their influence on children’s holistic development.

4.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter explored literature on early childhood learning, the types of parental involvement employed in children's learning, and the factors influencing parental involvement in children's education. Quality early childhood services are considered advantageous for overall school readiness and provide "children with strong foundations for future academic achievement and learning" (Dusabe et al., 2019, p. 1). Parents' participation in children's learning, especially at this early stage, is strongly recommended as it contributes to positive learning and the overall development of children. Parental involvement is extensive and involves home-based and school-based participation ranging from providing home learning resources, home-school communication, attending school meetings and forming good parent-teacher relationships. Nevertheless, several factors influence the level at which parents may participate in their children's learning, such as the level of parent's education, working conditions, parent's level of income, parent's relationship status, and parent's views about parental involvement.

Furthermore, teachers' and administrators' beliefs about parents seem to significantly influence parents' attitudes and their level of participation in children's learning. The literature examined in this chapter reviewed the joint efforts of administrators and teachers in creating a warm and friendly climate for families to actively participate in the teaching and learning process. "Close contact and regular communication between the home and the school in early childhood programmes improve the way parents and educators work towards the goal of child development" (Bridgemohan et al., 2005, p. 1). Overall, my review of the literature provides a general picture of what is understood as parental involvement in several contexts and highlights the value of some concepts that may be applicable to parental involvement in the Cameroon context. The review highlights some literature from African studies that emphasise the role of culture in children's learning and development which is useful for understanding parental involvement, including the factors that influence parents' participation in that context. Parental involvement in ECE in the Cameroon context is under-researched. Therefore, the principal aim of this research will be to learn more about parents' and teachers' conceptions about parental involvement in early childhood learning and what happens in practice in Cameroon nursery schools. The study will contribute to the literature by identifying factors influencing multiple facets of parental involvement and suggesting recommendations applicable to Cameroon and other similar contexts.

Chapter 5

Methodology

5.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research design for the investigation. The purpose of the investigation was to analyse parents' and teachers' conceptions of parental involvement in early childhood learning in Douala, Cameroon and to explore other approaches that foster home-school relationships beneficial to children's education. An interpretive paradigm was adopted to enable the development of an understanding of the research participants' views and experiences. The investigation design encompassed a qualitative inquiry and a case study approach whereby data were collected from two nursery schools (one public and one private) through the use of questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, observations, document portfolios and informal conversations. Face-to-face follow-up interviews were conducted and WhatsApp messaging was used to obtain additional information from research participants.

The following sections outline the research questions and a diagrammatic representation of the investigation design (5.2 and 5.3). Section 5.4 discusses the research paradigm for this research project, i.e., the interpretive paradigm. The qualitative research methodology is discussed in section 5.5, followed by the case study research design (5.6). Section 5.7 provides a description of the research participants as well as their demographic information. In sections 5.8 and 5.9, the mixed-methods approach, through which data were generated for this study, is explored and data analysis techniques are discussed. In the last sections (5.10 and 5.11), the trustworthiness of the study is discussed as well as ethical considerations.

5.2 Research Questions

Overarching Question

What are parents' and teachers' beliefs and practices about parental involvement in early childhood learning in Douala (Cameroon)?

Sub-Questions

1. What are the opportunities and challenges to parental involvement in early childhood learning?
2. In what ways do parents' cultural backgrounds influence children's care and upbringing, and how are cultural practices and understandings incorporated within the preschool curriculum?
3. What are some of the beliefs and prior experiences teachers bring to their teaching that might influence their attitudes towards parental involvement in early childhood learning?

5.3 Research Design

This section provides a visual outline of the plan or procedure through which the research data were obtained. Figure 5.1 outlines the logical structure for this investigation, beginning with the main research question followed by an interpretive paradigm that provided the theoretical framework for understanding the participants' lived experiences. The design also includes a qualitative inquiry and a case study approach used in two nurseries to enable an in-depth analysis of parental involvement. The implications for policy and practice are also represented.

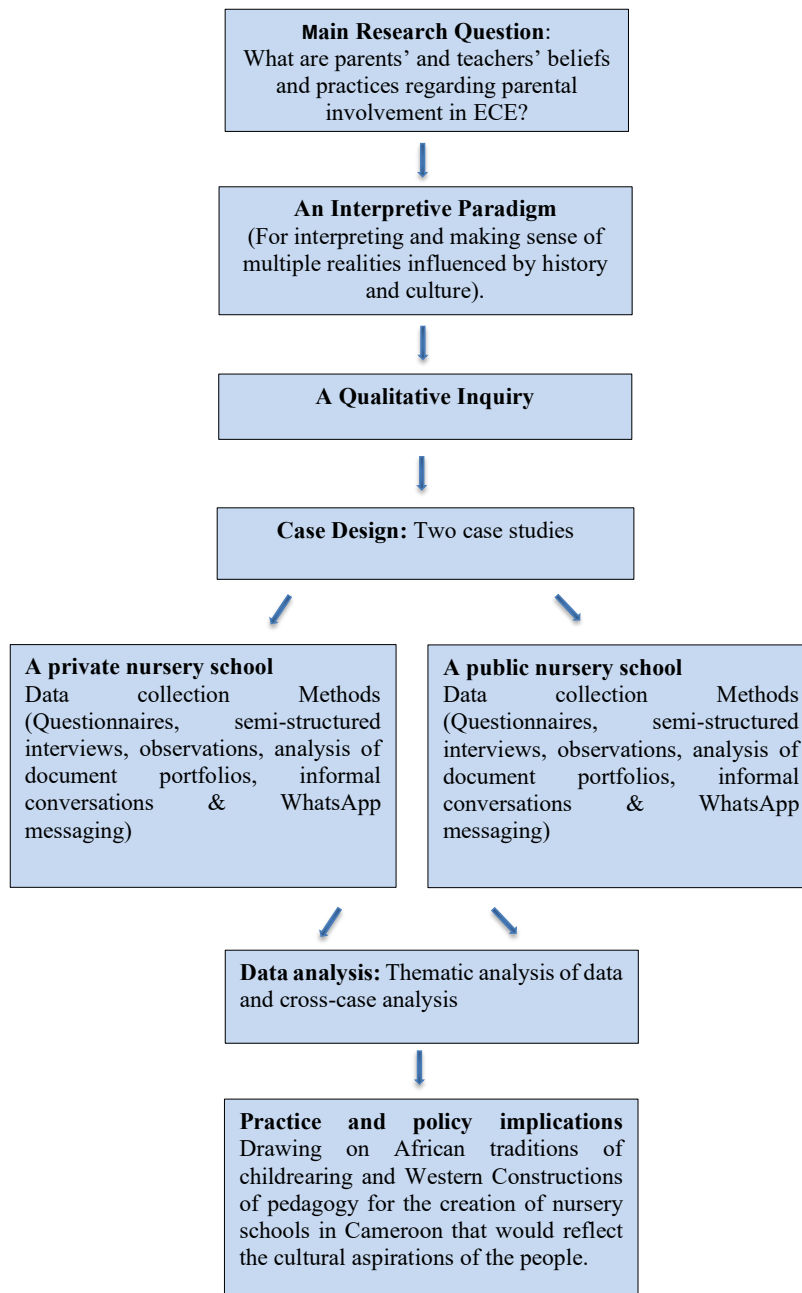


Figure 5-1: Research Design

5.4 Interpretive Paradigm

The theoretical paradigm that underpins this study is the interpretive paradigm. The three principles (ontology, epistemology, and methodology), according to Denzin and Lincoln (2013) combine to form a paradigm or interpretive framework and represent a set of beliefs that guide action or explain how the world is perceived. The concept of varied interpretation is central to the interpretive paradigm (Croucher & Cronn-Mills, 2015). When conducting research, interpretivist researchers search for different meanings using research questions to guide their work. An interpretive paradigm is ideal for studies of the social world because

“realities are multiple and socially constructed and, of course, influenced by history and culture” (Avramidis & Smith, 1999, p. 28).

People have different worldviews shaped by the cultures in which they live and in which they participate. Therefore interpretivists argue that one can only understand how and why people act the way they do by interpreting and making sense of their world views, values and beliefs. Thus, researchers cannot observe from outside social groups but must instead observe from inside by directly engaging and interacting with the people (Mack, 2010). The interpretive paradigm is significantly impacted by hermeneutics (meaning-making and interpretation) and phenomenology (which emphasises the need to consider human beings’ understandings and perceptions of the world) (Cohen et al., 2018; Mack, 2010). People construct reality out of their own experiences. Thus, interpretivists argue that without understanding how people interpret and make sense of their world, we cannot understand why people behave in the way they do or why particular institutions exist and operate in specific ways (Croucher & Cronn-Mills, 2015; Mack, 2010). As a result, interpretivists aim to understand participants' beliefs and cultural practices by obtaining rich information about participants’ daily experiences. Employing this framework, the researcher anticipates encountering participants as unique individuals in that they represent themselves through the use of different authentic meanings and interpretations, resulting in the production of multiple realities. In this case, it is advisable to keep any presuppositions or assumptions in mind before engaging participants and understanding the information obtained and how participants make meanings of their world (Cohen et al., 2018).

This study used the interpretive paradigm for understanding parents’ and teachers’ perceptions of parental involvement in early childhood learning and child upbringing characteristics unique to the participants. This framing enabled me to explore the conceptions of child development within the Cameroon context and gain a deep understanding of how parents collaborate with nursery school teachers to improve children’s learning and participation. Furthermore, I understood how children’s development is influenced by their families, external families, social institutions and the society’s cultures and values.

5.5 Qualitative Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative approach, which involved children, parents and teachers who reside in the city of Douala. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2013),

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world.

Qualitative research consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that

make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level qualitative research involves an interpretive and naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them. (p. 6)

Jarvie (2012) describes qualitative research as an in-depth analysis of an issue, event, entity or process, which explains complex issues that are impossible to explain using experimental or quantitative methods.

Qualitative research includes the views and ideas of participants, cuts across disciplines, fields and subject matter, and can use various methods such as interviews, observations, document portfolios and literature reviews. In qualitative research, the focus is on analysing and making sense of rich data, which is detailed information from participants using in-depth, open-ended and often unstructured interviews with the participants from relatively few selected cases, as a basis for developing theory (Cohen et al., 2018; Murray, 2010). Data collected through qualitative analysis are reviewed for evidence of patterns or themes for the researcher to make meaning of the phenomenon (File, 2017). The researcher can explore deeper meanings using multiple data sources from interviews, observations, discussions and document reviews (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). A mixed-method approach was used to collect data in this investigation, allowing the researcher to explore different perspectives and better understand participants' responses.

“One of the central tenets of qualitative research is the ‘bottom-up approach in which the perspective of research participants is central to the process of data collection, analysis and theory development” (Murray, 2010, p. 78). Roller and Lavrakas (2015) emphasised the importance of context in the data collection process. Whether information is collected through interviews, observations or group discussions, the data and researcher's interpretation depend on the context in which the data were obtained. The researcher must pay attention to the participants' context and how this context influences participants' actions (Maxwell, 2005). In this investigation, knowledge gained about teachers' and parents' conceptions of their involvement in early childhood learning was understood and interpreted according to the Cameroon context. Conclusions cannot be generalised but may be applicable in similar

contexts. Maxwell (2005) notes that claims about generalisation are rarely made in qualitative research because the research project focuses on a small number of participants. However, according to Shenton (2004) and Lincoln and Guba (1985), transferability is possible in conditions where the researcher provides a sufficiently thick description of the phenomenon under investigation, such that it can be understood and related in other situations.

The research design for qualitative research is flexible and during fieldwork can be modified or adapted when necessary (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). In this investigation, interviews and observations were scheduled to suit participants, and participants were free to alter or make alternative schedules when required. I was also patient and open to accepting participants' decisions, especially regarding scheduling interview times and locations. Furthermore, Online and mobile technologies and methods for obtaining data in qualitative research makes the process more flexible and convenient and offer varied ways for participants to respond in detail to research questions (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). Emails and phone calls were used in this research project to schedule interview times, with participants being emailed to ask follow-up questions, especially after one or two face-to-face interactions. After collecting all the data, I maintained constant communication with all research participants, using WhatsApp messages to obtain further information and clarify existing data.

For Roller and Lavrakas (2015), the researcher-participant relationship is essential in qualitative research. Apart from organisational and analytical abilities, the researcher should possess the ability to build close relationships with participants, active listening and observation skills, and the ability to exercise patience and open-mindedness (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). Leavy (2017) adds that researchers can build a rapport with participants through active listening. Making eye-contact, using gestures and probing shows participants that you are actively listening and interested in what they are saying, which helps the researcher collect rich data. During the data collection process, participants understood that I was not there to judge them but to learn and understand their perspectives. So, I actively listened and observed to make meaning of the information gathered. The researcher and participants might share a close relationship in the research space that impacts the research outcomes. The first step to establishing relationships with research participants in this investigation was to approach participants face-to-face, explain the purpose of the research and secure their agreement to participate. Meeting with families, teachers and parents allowed me to build a trusting relationship enabling open information sharing and understanding of each others' views and ideas on parental involvement in children's early learning. Good relationships were

formed with children, especially during observations. I engaged with the children during class observations as a participant-observer, assisting the teachers with their teaching and learning. During one of my class observations at the private nursery school, the nursery-two-teacher had an emergency that required her to leave the class for several hours, resulting in my having to step in and teach during this period.

5.6 Case Study Design

The case study approach can be used to gain an in-depth understanding of an issue, event, or phenomenon of interest. Case study research differs from experimental studies in that it seeks to achieve a more naturalistic understanding of the phenomenon by asking more explanatory “how”, “what”, and “why” questions (Crowe et al., 2011). Essentially, case study research seeks to understand a phenomenon in depth and in its natural context; the researcher does not seek to manipulate or control the variable(s) as in experimental designs (Crowe et al., 2011; Yin, 2009). Merriam (2001) defines case study research as,

A thing, a single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries. I can ‘fence in’ what I am going to study. The case then could be a person, such as a student, a teacher, principal; a programme; a group such as a class, a school, a community; a specific policy; and so on. (p. 27)

The phenomenon being examined here, according to Merriam (2001), must be intrinsically bound to qualify as a case study, and this could be known by asking how finite the data collection will be. For instance, the researcher may set a limit to the number of people interviewed or a limited amount of time for observations. In this investigation, two nursery schools (one private and one public) were the case studies conducted with the intention of understanding parental involvement in children’s learning. Data were collected onsite between November and January (2019) through the use of questionnaires, interviews, observations, informal conversations and document review. Following the main data collection, contact was maintained with all research participants through WhatsApp messaging. As a result of triangulation and member checking, the study gained rich and reliable data from participants that can be applied to similar situations.

Case studies are used to analyse a particular set of issues within their real-life contexts where the boundaries between phenomena and contexts are not clearly evident, with the intention of making use of multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2003). “Thus, case study methodology uses an in-depth examination of single or multiple case studies, which provides a systematic way of

approaching an educational problem, collecting and analysing the data, and reporting the results” (Grauer, 2012, p. 70). Case studies may involve single or multiple cases (Merriam, 2001; Yin, 2009). Yin (2009) further expresses that a single case may incorporate subunits leading to an extensive analysis that enhances the findings of the single case. Case study designs could also be classified into three types: an intrinsic, instrumental or collective case study (Crowe et al., 2011; Stake, 1995). An intrinsic case study is usually undertaken to understand a unique phenomenon, while an instrumental case uses a selected case to gain a broader understanding of an issue. On the other hand, a collective case involves studying more than one or multiple cases simultaneously to gain a deeper understanding of the issue or phenomenon. This research project involved two case studies and a cross-case analysis of two English nursery schools in Douala, the Littoral region of Cameroon.

5.7 Participants

This study made use of purposive sampling to select participants for data collection. Maxwell (2005) defines purposive sampling as “a strategy in which particular settings, persons, or activities are selected deliberately in order to provide information that can’t be gotten as well from other choices” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 88). He argues that careful selection of the times, settings and individual participants is an important decision to make in the selection process for qualitative research. Creswell (2018) confirms that the idea behind qualitative research is to purposefully select participants who will help the researcher resolve the research problem and address the research questions.

The settings were carefully selected. The investigation focussed on two English nursery schools in that part of Douala that is inhabited by English-speaking (Anglophones) and French-speaking (Francophones) Cameroonians. Thus, this area represented the two cultures of Cameroon (English and French). One of the reasons for choosing English nursery schools was my inability to communicate fluently in the French language. Including French nursery schools may have led to translation difficulties and possible misinterpretation of participants’ information. The Regional Delegate of Basic Education recommended the public nursery school. The public nursery school was one of the English public nursery schools in that area which was also a practising nursery school where pre-service teachers carried out teaching practice. In addition, when the school administration and teachers were contacted in the first instance, they were responsive and willing to participate in the study. Similarly, the private nursery school staff and families agreed to participate in the research project and were willing

to provide any information relevant to the investigation. Finally, easy access was granted to both nursery schools, which led to the data collection process being one without challenges.

5.7.1 Access to Study Participants

Access to participants was gained through the Regional Delegation of Basic Education Douala, Littoral Region. While I was in New Zealand, a friend, who is a secondary school teacher, visited the Regional Delegation of Basic Education office in Douala and presented the research approval letter from the University of Waikato, Division of Education Research Ethics Committee, and provided the information letter for the Regional Delegation of Basic Education and the consent form (See Appendix A, B, and C). The delegate responded after three working days and signed the consent letter (Appendix D). After access was gained from the regional delegate, initial contact was made through phone calls and emails to the private and public nursery school administration. I emailed information letters to the principals of both nursery schools (Appendix E), and we agreed that upon my arrival in Cameroon, I would visit the schools to discuss in more depth the purpose and significance of the study, the participants' roles and rights, and to invite all participants to sign consent forms. Upon arrival in Cameroon in November 2019, I first visited the private nursery and spoke to the school head, explaining the purpose of the investigation and the participants' roles. After going through the consent forms, the principal gave both verbal and written consent (Appendix G). She introduced me to the nursery school headteacher, who then took me over to the nursery school section, where I was introduced to the other teachers and children. After distributing the teachers' information letters and consent forms (see Appendix I and J) to each teacher, time was allowed for the teachers to reflect on the aims/purpose of the investigation before signing the consent forms.

On the same day, I visited the public nursery school. My experience of this institution was similar to that of the private nursery school, except for the fact that the headmistress invited all teachers into her office to meet with me. I gave the headmistress and teachers the information letter and consent forms which were signed and returned on the following day (Appendix H and K). On day two of my visit to the private nursery school, all the teachers presented their signed consent forms and arrangements for teacher interviews were made, beginning from that same day. One of the private nursery school teachers advised that since most children are dropped off and picked up by their drivers or the school bus, it was better to put parent information letters, consent forms and questionnaires in an envelope for children to take home. She then placed all these forms (Appendix L to P) in school designed envelopes, to which we added in each envelope, a customised University of Waikato pen. Parents returned the signed

consent forms and completed questionnaires within one to two weeks. Once I had received the consent forms from parents with a signed consent to be interviewed, the parents were contacted to schedule a day, time and place for the interview to take place. Two weeks later, on November 20, 2019, the private nursery school organised its annual thanksgiving ceremony. This was an opportunity for me to meet all the parents to introduce myself and to discuss my research project in greater depth.

On my second visit to the public nursery school, I was able to get all the teachers' verbal and written consent, and schedule interview dates with these teachers. Access to parents was gained with the help of the teachers and headmistress. Similar to the private nursery school, most children are dropped off and picked up by motorbike riders. While the investigation only targeted English-speaking families, it was difficult for me to know which parent or child was from the English-speaking part of the country. So, during drop-offs and pick-ups, I introduced myself to parents with the assistance of the teachers and headmistress, and handed over the information letters, consent forms, questionnaires, and the customised University of Waikato pen to parents. The headmistress and teachers handed over the information letters, consent forms, questionnaires, and pens to the motorbike riders who picked up children after school to pass these items onto parents. Parents responded within one to four weeks. However, in some cases, the information letters, consent forms, questionnaires and pens needed to be resent to some families.

5.7.2 Study Site and Research Participants

Private Nursery School: The private nursery school located in Douala, included children with special needs and employed teachers trained in special education studies. The school included primary and secondary sections in addition to the nursery section. Tuition at this nursery school is estimated at 1,200,000 -1,300,000 Francs CFA/year (including books, uniforms, and parent forum levy), which is approximately 3400 New Zealand Dollars. According to the private nursery school headteacher, the school incorporated the national curriculum and the Montessori curriculum in designing lesson plans for children.

It is unknown if most private nursery schools in Cameroon incorporate Dewey's philosophy, but this private school's philosophy was based on John Dewey's principles of education. In collaboration with families, the school co-constructed educational and life experiences for children to become active members of society. The private nursery school had four primary goals:

“Intellectual Attainment” whereby learning facilitates children’s acquisition of skills in critical thinking, analytical thinking and problem solving, thereby preparing them for leadership.

“Citizenship,” thus the institution’s commitment to basic national values and social skills developing socially acceptable and good citizens.

“Vocational preparation” such that children start preparing for the workplace from an early age in order to be competent in a constantly changing society.

Finally, “Individual development” uses each child’s individual unique skills to maximize their individual potential by providing varied instructional and assessment techniques/strategies which teach social skills as well as improve academic potential (Private Nursery School Website).

Teacher 1 of Private Nursery school described how the school enacted Dewey’s philosophical principles.

Our school is founded on the principles of John Dewey: cooperative learning, community-based approach to learning and learning by doing, hands-on activities..., among others. So, YES, our school has everything to do with John Dewey's educational principles. Cooperative learning: we usually split the class into groups to work on a project or activity. We involve parents whenever possible through parent school, parent-teacher conferences. Community-based learning: each trimester, we work on projects that impact the community. Our science fair and cultural week also help us make learning relevant to our community. Once, the Reception class won a project on recycling wastepaper and sold the Newspaper they made. They worked on composting, grew a garden and shared the proceeds to parents. The year nine class once built a water well to supply potable water to an impoverished community in Douala. Just a few of many examples. Hands-on activities: children centred. We take them on field trips, excursions, they see, touch and work in groups to complete activities. The teacher is just there to guide them. Classroom learning activities involve manipulating materials to understand concepts: movable letters and numbers, reading rods, building blocks, storybooks to mention just these few. (Teacher 1, Private nursery school)

The teacher's description of teaching and learning in the nursery school reiterates the importance of child-centred learning experiences and the role of the teacher as a facilitator in this process.

Background Information about Private Nursery School Teachers: The private nursery school is attached to a primary and secondary school. The private nursery school had four female preschool teachers (two in Nursery One and two in Nursery Two). Two of the teachers were aged between 20 and 30, one was aged between 31 and 40, and the other was in the age group 41 and over. Three of the teachers were Anglophones and one was a Francophone. The teachers were qualified nursery school teachers with a Nursery and Primary Teaching Certificate (CAPIEMP) and an average of 10 years teaching experience. The teachers reported that they had undertaken Montessori training courses for children aged three to six years and professional development courses provided by Cambridge University which guided their teaching. This team of qualified and hardworking teachers possessed an array of ideas and conveyed a depth of thinking that one assumes was derived from their training, professional development and experience. The teachers' level of education and training may have also contributed to their teaching pedagogy (learner-focused), in addition to having an added advantage of a small class with pupil-teacher ratios of 4-1, which allowed for more individual attention.

Background Information about Private Nursery School Families: The age-range of children for the nursery section of the private school was between 3 and 6 years old, but the private nursery school could enrol children younger than three depending on class sizes and pupil-teacher ratios. A total number of 18 children attending the nursery school. All 13 private nursery school parents (some parents had children in Nursery One and Two) took part in the research project, and they all responded to the questionnaires. Table 5.1 illustrates demographic information about private nursery school families who responded to the questionnaires (interviewed parents included). The table shows parental role, age-group of parents filling out the questionnaire (PFQ), age-group of spouses, marital status and parents' cultural and linguistic background. Parents were asked whether they were English-speaking Cameroonians, French-speaking Cameroonians or other language speakers. Parents were classified into English speaking (Anglophone) and French-speaking (Francophone) Cameroonians. None of the parents were other language speakers. Most (8) parents who participated in the study were Anglophones, which was expected because this is an English private nursery school. Still, surprisingly, a significant number (5) of participants were French-speaking parents. Among the

13 participating parents, 12 were married, and only one parent identified as a single parent. None were separated or divorced. The majority of parents filling out the questionnaire for private school parents were mothers (10). Furthermore, the age-group of participating parents and their spouses was between 21 to 41 years old and above, as illustrated in Table 5.1. Most participating parents and their spouses were in the age-group of 31-40 years old. It is noticeable that these are older parents for children between ages 3 and 6 years. This could be due to the parents pursuing their education before childbearing, as the survey showed private school parents' level of education (Figure 5.2) exceeded high school education. Another reason for delayed childbearing may be due to the high full-time employment rates of private nursery school parents, as shown in Figure 6.14.

Table 5-1: Demographic Information of Private Nursery School Families who Responded to the Questionnaires (interviewed parents included).

Parent filling out the questionnaire (PFQ)	Age Group of PFQ	Age Group of Spouse	Marital Status	Background
Father	31-40 years old	31-40 years old	Married	French Speaking Cameroonian
Mother	31-40 years old	41 years and above	Married	French Speaking Cameroonian
Mother	31-40 years old	31-40 years old	Married	French Speaking Cameroonian
Mother	20-30 years old	31-40 years old	Married	English Speaking Cameroonian
Mother	31-40 years old	41 years and above	Married	English Speaking Cameroonian
Mother	41 years and above	N/A	Single	English Speaking Cameroonian
Mother	31-40 years old	20-30 years old	Married	French Speaking Cameroonian
Father	31-40 years old	31-40 years old	Married	English Speaking Cameroonian
Both parents	31-40 years old	31-40 years old	Married	English Speaking Cameroonian
Mother	20-30 years old	41 years and above	Married	French Speaking Cameroonian
Mother	31-40 years old	31-40 years old	Married	English Speaking Cameroonian
Mother	41 years and above	41 years and above	Married	English Speaking Cameroonian

Mother	31-40 years old	31-40 years old	Married	English Speaking Cameroonian
--------	-----------------	-----------------	---------	---------------------------------

Occupation and Income Level: Private school parents who took part in the study reported jobs such as deputy manager, journalist, large scale businesses, teacher, marketer, special needs educator, CEO, chartered accountant, tailor and housewife. The occupation types for private school parents reflected their income levels. Only 12 of the 13 parents responded to this question, with 6 families earning an income over 301000 Francs CFA monthly, 3 families earning between 201,000-300,000 Francs CFA and 3 families reporting 101,000-200,000 Francs CFA as monthly income. According to World Bank (2021) reports, Cameroon is a lower-middle-income country with a gross national income (GNI) per capita of 1,500 USD (approximately 810,750 Francs CFA and 2,078 NZD) in 2019. The monthly income levels reported reflect middle to high-income levels by Cameroon standards. Thus, only families with such income levels could afford the high tuition fees required for their children to attend the private nursery school.

Parents' Level of Education: Figure 5.2 represents the private school parents' level of education, as recorded in the questionnaires. None of the parents' levels of education fell below a high school certificate. The adult literacy rate for Cameroonians aged 15 and above was 71.6 percent in 2018, according to the 2021 UNESCO Institute of Statistics (2021) report. In addition, the total gross enrolment ratio for secondary and tertiary education as of 2016 was 60.06 percent and 12.5 percent, respectively (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2021). Therefore, the educational attainment levels reported by the private nursery school parents were significantly higher.

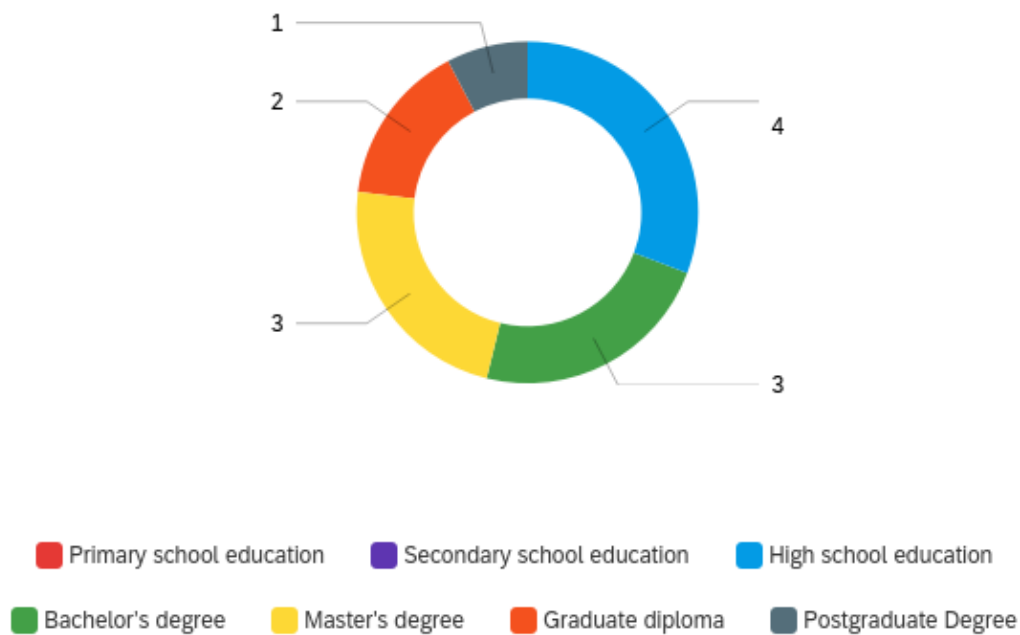


Figure 5-2: Parents' Level of Education (n=13)

Pseudonyms and Gender Classification (Interviewed Parents): A total of eight parents were interviewed. Follow-up interviews depended on parents' availability and involved only four parents. Table 5.2 illustrates interviewed parents' pseudonyms and gender for the private nursery school.

Table 5-2: Pseudonyms and Gender Classification for Private Nursery School Interviewed Parents

Public Nursery school	
Pseudonym	Gender
Parent 1 (KE's mum)	Female
Parent 2 (RA's mum)	Female
Parent 3 (SH's dad)	Male
Parent 4 (WA's mum)	Female
Parent 5 (FO's dad)	Male
Parent 6 (AB's mum)	Female
Parent 7 (FD's dad)	Male
Parent 8 (TC's dad)	Male

Background Information about Observed Children: Six children were observed alongside their teachers and parents. The children observed were the children of interviewed parents. Table 5.3 illustrates the pseudonyms, gender and the nursery school level of the observed children at the private nursery school.

Table 5-3: Background Information about Observed Private Nursery School Children

Private Nursery School Children		
Pseudonym	Gender	Nursery School Level
KE	Female	Nursery 2
RA	Female	Nursery 2
SH	Male	Nursery 2
WA	Female	Nursery 1
FO	Male	Nursery 1
AB	Female	Nursery 1

Public Nursery School: The public nursery school is a bilingual institution with both French and English sections. It had both the Anglophone and Francophone sections controlled by two different headmistresses (principals or school heads), one head was Anglophone, and the other was Francophone. Although the school was partitioned into French and English sections, about 60 percent of the children in the English sections were Francophones. Only English-speaking parents (or families in which one of the parents was an Anglophone) were targeted for the study. The Anglophone headmistress and the Anglophone teachers, complained of limited space and an increasing number of parents who came in to seek admission, mainly due to the ongoing Anglophone crisis in the country (explained earlier in chapter two). Thus, they were asking for more classrooms to be constructed and the employment of more teachers to meet the demand. At the time of data collection, there were over 165 children (over 80 in each room) in the Anglophone section for Nursery One and Two, with just four teachers to take care of these children. Thus, high pupil-teacher ratios of approximately 80-2 were far above the Government required ratios of 30-2.

The tuition fee was approximately 50,000 Francs CFA (135 NZD) per academic year, including PTA levy and books, and it was still a challenge for some parents to pay. As stipulated by the Government, the age range of children for the nursery section falls between 4 to 6 years old, and the public-school teachers use the national curriculum as a guide to prepare their lessons. The Government nursery school's philosophy is summarised in the following points:

To provide children with a secure safe environment for education through play.

To instil in children the spirit of self-esteem and confidence and to prepare the children for primary school.

To provide them with the skills and knowledge they need in life.

To provide opportunities for children to work as a group or team, thereby providing stimulating and challenging ways to learn. (Teacher 2, Public nursery school)

Teacher 2 of the public nursery school further explained that the primary aim of creating the nursery school in 1987 was to meet the needs of Anglophone parents at that time who were in dire need to see their children have a good foundation of English education. During that time, all the schools in that locality were French schools, and the English parents had to rally together to plead to the Government so at least an English nursery school could be established in the area. From 1987 to date, only two English public nursery schools have been created in that area. One of the major dreams of families (according to Teacher 2) was to see the Government open more English schools so that the demand for English education could be met. This was a more severe issue considering the recent high influx of English-speaking parents into Douala escaping from the ongoing political war in the English-speaking parts of the country.

Background Information about Public Nursery School Teachers: This study was carried out in the English section of the public nursery school. All four public nursery school teachers, two in each class (Nursery One and Two) were involved in the research project. The teachers were older than this demographic in the private nursery school, with the age-range falling between 41 years and above. The teachers were all female and originated from the English-speaking region of Cameroon (two each from the North West and South West regions, respectively). The teachers were qualified nursery school teachers with a Nursery and Primary Teaching Certificate (CAPIEMP). No professional development courses were specified, but the teachers reported that they had knowledge in home economics and computer sciences, in addition to that acquired when studying for their Nursery and Primary Teaching Certificates. Furthermore, three of the four teachers reported as having over 20 years of teaching (10 years plus teaching experience as nursery school teachers) and one teacher with more than a decade of teaching experience (5-10 years teaching experience as a nursery school teacher). These teachers had many years of teaching experience, though their approach to teaching was teacher-centred, and they held a one-way view of relationships between the home and the school.

Background Information about Public Nursery School Parents: Twenty-eight parents took part in the research project, and all parents responded to the questionnaires. Parents were asked whether they were English-speaking Cameroonians, French-speaking Cameroonians, or other

language speakers. Most participants (24) were English-speaking Cameroonians and none of the parents were other language speakers. Nevertheless, some bilingual French-speaking families (4) opted to participate in the study by filling out the questionnaire. The questionnaire reveals that 11 out of the 28 participants were single parents, while one parent identified as divorced or separated. Furthermore, half of the parents who filled out the questionnaire (PFQ) were mothers. Only one PFQ was less than 20 years old, and only six were over 41 years old. Most of the parents (21) were between 21 and 40 years. Table 5.4 shows the demographic information of the public nursery school families who responded to the questionnaire (interviewed parents included). The table provides data on parental roles, age-group of parents filling out the questionnaire (PFQ), age-group of spouses, marital status and parents' backgrounds.

Table 5-4: Demographic Information of Public Nursery School Families who Responded to the Questionnaires (interviewed parents included).

Parent filling out the questionnaire (PFQ)	Age Group of PFQ	Age Group of Spouse	Marital Status	Background
Father	31-40 years old	N/A	Single	English-speaking Cameroonian
Mother	20-30 years old	N/A	Single	English-speaking Cameroonian
Mother	41 years and above	41 years and above	Married	English-speaking Cameroonian
Mother	20-30 years old	N/A	Single	English-speaking Cameroonian
Mother	20-30 years old	31-40 years old	Married	English-speaking Cameroonian
Mother	20-30 years old	N/A	Single	English-speaking Cameroonian
Both parents	20-30 years old	41 years and above	Married	English-speaking Cameroonian
Mother	31-40 years old	N/A	Single	English-speaking Cameroonian
Both parents	31-40 years old	20-30 years old	Married	English-speaking Cameroonian
Mother	20-30 years old	41 years and above	Married	English-speaking Cameroonian
Both parents	31-40 years old	31-40 years old	Married	English-speaking Cameroonian
Both parents	20-30 years old	31-40 years old	Married	French-speaking Cameroonian

Mother	41 years and above	41 years and above	Married	English-speaking Cameroonian
Guardian	41 years and above	41 years and above	Married	English-speaking Cameroonian
Father	31-40 years old	31-40 years old	Married	English-speaking Cameroonian
Father	31-40 years old	31-40 years old	Married	French-speaking Cameroonian
Both parents	31-40 years old	31-40 years old	Married	English-speaking Cameroonian
Both parents	Less than 20 years old	41 years and above	Married	English-speaking Cameroonian
Mother	20-30 years old	N/A	Single	English-speaking Cameroonian
Mother	31-40 years old	31-40 years old	Married	English-speaking Cameroonian
Mother	31-40 years old	N/A	Single	French-speaking Cameroonian
Mother	20-30 years old	N/A	Separated/Divorced	French-speaking Cameroonian
Both parents	31-40 years old	41 years and above	Married	English-speaking Cameroonian
Guardian	41 years and above	N/A	Single	English-speaking Cameroonian
Father	41 years and above	N/A	Single	English-speaking Cameroonian
Mother	20-30 years old	N/A	Single	English-speaking Cameroonian
Both parents	20-30 years old	31-40 years old	Married	English-speaking Cameroonian
Mother	41 years and above	N/A	Single	English-speaking Cameroonian

Occupation Types and Income Levels: The public nursery school parents who responded to the questionnaire identified as having a variety of occupations, ranging from motorbike taxi driver, menial jobs, retired high school teacher, housewife, tailor, seamstress, small-scale business owner, safety officer and teacher. Motorbike riding, tailoring, small-scale businesses, and menial jobs are low-income jobs in Cameroon, and this explains why 11 out of 25 families who responded, recorded that their monthly income level was below 50000 Francs CFA, and 12 indicated an income level between 51000-100000 Francs CFA. Only two families earned between 101,000-200,000 Francs CFA and 1 earned above 301,000 Francs CFA. Lower middle-income families form most of Cameroon’s population (World Bank, 2021), meaning

the affordable public school tuition fees of 50,500 Francs CFA (135 NZD) per academic year was an important factor in parents selecting this school.

Level of Education: Figure 5.3 indicates that the highest level of education of public school parents was either primary and/or secondary school education. This finding is in line with the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (2021), which reports a higher total gross enrolment ratio for secondary education (60.06 percent) compared to tertiary education (12.5 percent) in Cameroon for the year 2016. The UNESCO Institute of Statistics (2021) data also reveals a significant drop in the total gross enrolment ratio for tertiary education in Cameroon from 17 percent in 2015 to 12.5 percent in 2016. A study by Fonkeng and Ntembe (2009) on higher education and economic development in Cameroon reports that enrollment into higher education institutions in Cameroon does not guarantee employment in the Government, which helps explain the lower rates of student enrolment into higher education institutions.

Six public nursery school parents marked primary school education, and 13 parents marked secondary education as their highest level of education, while only two parents recorded a bachelor’s degree and two parents recorded a graduate diploma as their highest level of education.

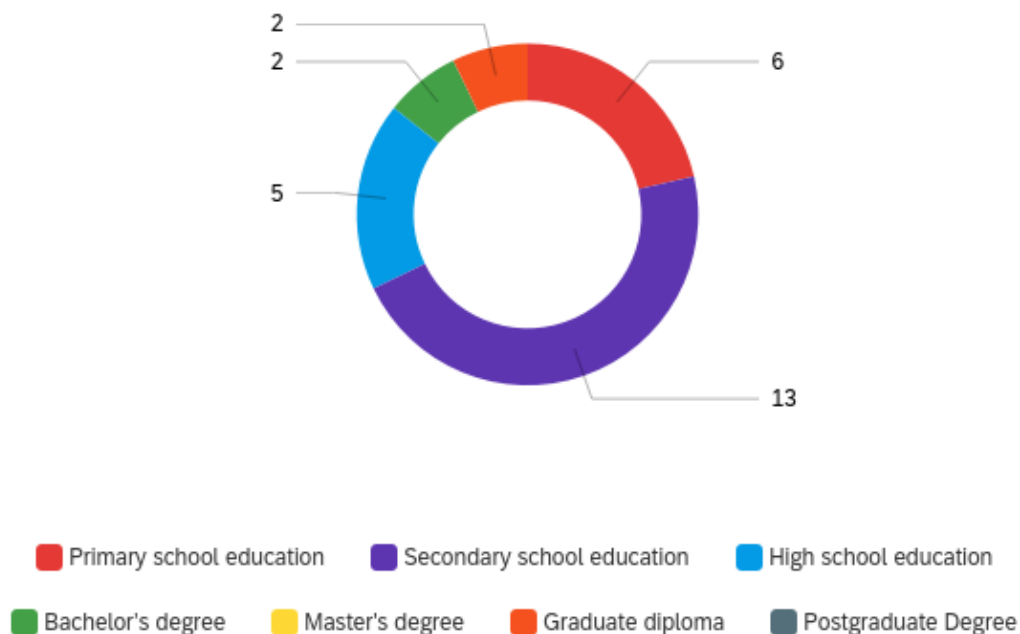


Figure 5-3: Level of Education for Public School Parents (n=28)

Pseudonyms and Gender Classification (Interviewed Parents): A total of eight parents were interviewed. Similarly with private nursery school parents, follow-up interviews depended on parents' availability and only five parents participated. Table 5.5 illustrates interviewed parents' pseudonyms and gender for the public nursery school.

Table 5-5: Pseudonyms and Gender Classification for Public Nursery School Parents Interviewed

Public Nursery school	
Pseudonym	Gender
Parent 1 (ES's mum)	Female
Parent 2 (GS's dad)	Male
Parent 3 (ZZ's dad)	Female
Parent 4 (YY's dad)	Male
Parent 5 (PT's dad)	Male
Parent 6 (RR's mum)	Female
Parent 7 (GL's mum)	Female
Parent 8 (SE's dad)	Male

Background Information on Observed Children: Six children were observed while in the company of their teachers and parents. Like in the private nursery school, the children observed were children of interviewed parents. Table 5.6 illustrates pseudonyms, gender and nursery school level of observed children in the public nursery school.

Table 5-6: Background Information about Observed Public Nursery School Children

Public Nursery School Children		
Pseudonym	Gender	Nursery school Level
ES	Female	Nursery 2
GS	Male	Nursery 2
ZZ	Female	Nursery 2
YY	Male	Nursery 1
PT	Male	Nursery 1
RR	Female	Nursery 1

5.8 Methods for Data Collection

One of the advantages of qualitative studies is that information can be collected using a variety of methods. In this investigation, data were generated through the use of questionnaires, semi-

structured interviews, observations, the analysis of document portfolios, and informal conversations. The purpose of these methods was to understand parents' and teachers' conceptions of what a child is and what parents' and teachers' views are of parental involvement in early childhood learning for children's holistic development. After all the data had been collected, contact was maintained through WhatsApp messaging with all participants for further probing, clarification of ideas and acquiring additional information as needed during the data analysis process to ensure the analysis reflected participants' views.

5.8.1 Questionnaires

Questionnaires are data-gathering instruments through which respondents respond to questions or statements in writing (Best & Kahn, 2006). According to Cohen et al. (2018), questionnaires are cheap, reliable, valid, quick and easy to complete, and are beneficial as they can offer responses from a larger population than some other instruments make possible. There are two forms of questions: open and closed (Marks & Yardley, 2004). Questionnaires with open-ended questions allow respondents to explain and express ideas freely in their own terms, avoiding the limitations of pre-set categories of response. The respondents have the opportunity to provide complex responses that are not possible in response to a closed question. Unfortunately, questionnaires that use open-ended questions may also generate irrelevant and redundant information that can sometimes be challenging to interpret, code, classify and summarise (Best & Kahn, 2006; Creswell, 2018). Short or check-mark responses characterise questionnaires that use closed-ended questions. Researchers may also ask questions that require yes or no answers, provide a range of responses which respondents may choose from or ask questions that may require a short response. Though questionnaires that use closed questions do not provide room for respondents' explanations to categories, they are easy to fill out and straightforward to code and analyse (Best & Kahn, 2006; Creswell, 2018). Best and Kahn stress the need for researchers to include the 'other' category when designing closed-ended questionnaires. This will enable respondents to "indicate what might be their most important reason, one that the questionnaire builder had not anticipated" (Best & Kahn, 2006, p. 314). This study employed both multiple-choice and rating scale types of questions (Appendix P). Multiple-choice questions enabled me to provide a range of responses that respondents could choose from. I ensured questions did not overlap and also indicated in certain instances whether respondents needed to tick either one response or all the possible responses that applied to them. The multiple-choice questions for parents were demographic in nature and sought information about gender, age, marital status, cultural background, language, family size,

occupation and income level. Rating scale questions enabled respondents to indicate their opinion by circling a mark on the position of the scale that best described their feelings. The questionnaire consisted of rating scale questions that targeted parents' views on how they are involved in their children's learning, and that were categorised according to home-based and school-based parental involvement. I also allowed room for the "other" category where respondents could specify or give a response not listed among the list of categories. The questionnaire was designed to question all parents of children attending nurseries 1 and 2 in each nursery school.

Overall, all 13 parents responded to the questionnaire in the private nursery school. Twenty-eight of the 40 parents (teachers helped select 20 English-speaking parents in each class) who were issued questionnaires in the public nursery school responded. The questionnaires were paper-based and took approximately 20 minutes to complete. A detachable sheet was attached at the end of the questionnaire asking parents to indicate if they were willing to participate in a one-on-one interview. Nine parents stated they were interested in the one-on-one interview in the private nursery school, while 12 parents from the public nursery school said they would participate. In the end, eight parents were randomly selected from each school for the one-on-one interviews.

5.8.2 Interviews

Interviews are often portrayed as conversations or interactions between two people to obtain information. They generate greater depth than other data collection methods (Cohen et al., 2018; Thomas, 2017; Xerri, 2018). Best and Kahn (2006) describe some aspects of training that are necessary to be an interviewer: an interviewer needs to be trained on how to contact and approach potential participants; otherwise, participants may not participate due the poor approach of the interviewer. During the interview process, the interviewer must understand their role and not express any opinions, and participants need to be advised that their ideas won't be judged in any way. For open-ended interviews, where probing is necessary, the interviewer should listen carefully and assist participants in formulating their thoughts without being directive. Lastly, interviewers are advised to secure the participants' permission before recording interviews. Alternatively, they will have to take brief notes during the interview and expand on these notes immediately after the discussion, when the information is still fresh in the interviewer's mind.

According to Cohen (2018), interviews are flexible methods of data collection where both the interviewers and interviewees discuss their interpretations of the world in which they live. There are several types of interviews such as structured and semi-structured interviews, group interviews, and exploratory interviews. This study focussed on semi-structured interviews where open-ended questions were asked, with the wording and sequence sometimes tailored to each interviewee. The teacher interviews concerned questions related to their views on parental involvement, perceptions of parents' professional expertise in children's education, and how the school administration and teachers promote parental involvement in children's learning (Appendix Q). The parent interviews aimed to understand how parents were involved in their children's learning at home and at the nursery school. Parents were asked about the various means of communication and information sharing between the home and school, their perception of the nursery school and teachers, and specific characteristics of their child's upbringing (Appendix R). In each nursery school, a total of eight parents and four teachers (four parents and two teachers at each level) were interviewed using semi-structured interviews and open-ended questions. Interviews lasted between 20 to 30 minutes. Second interviews were carried out to ask follow-up questions that emerged from participants' responses, which generated additional information where participants' responses were not sufficiently specific or incomplete (Cohen et al., 2018). Second interviews were organised around when participants were available to participate. The second interview involved four parents in the private nursery school and five parents in the public nursery school. The interviews were audio-recorded with participants' permission. At the end of the final interview, I transcribed the interviews and sent transcripts to the participants via email or in-person (whichever means they preferred) for amendments and confirmation, with the request that they return the transcripts within two weeks.

5.8.3 Observations

Smith (1998) defines observation as "a deliberate, active process, carried out with care and forethought, of noting events as they occur" (p. 40). Observations are also used as a means of data collection to complement information gathered by interviews. Amongst the various types of observations described by Smith, this study made use of *participant observations*. In this investigation, different methods were used to collect data through participant observation. I recorded field-notes based on my first-hand experience with participants and held follow-up conversations with participants to clarify what was observed. I took photographs and made video recordings of parent-child and teacher interactions, as children were dropped off and

picked up from their nursery schools. Video recordings were employed after the participants gave consent to use this method. Creswell (2018) notes that in the role of a participant-observer, the researcher can observe and record events as they occur. In this case, I was actively involved with the participants while observing and noting events as they occurred. Though this process was time-consuming, it was efficient because the field-note information was based on first-hand experience. In addition, follow-up conversations took place as a result of what was observed. This enabled me to get into close enough contact with research participants, and gain an in-depth understanding of the setting and perspective of the participants. This approach enabled the taking down of detailed information, including direct quotations, and some basic information such as the date, time and other pertinent information.

Zieman (2012) says, “[t]he essential purpose of observation is to watch human behaviours and actions and derive meaning from these experiences” (p. 50). The observations made in this investigation enabled me to draw inferences about perspectives that could not be gained from relying exclusively on interview data, thus gaining more credibility to the research process than would have been the case if the research had been limited to one source or method. Observations reveal other aspects of participants’ perspectives that participants might have been reluctant to share directly during interviews (Maxwell, 2005). For instance, watching how parents and teachers interacted with children offered more insight into parents and teachers views and perspectives on childhood and participation in children’s early learning. To obtain in-depth information, I conducted classroom observations of both parent and teachers’ interactions and parent and child interactions in the nursery school.

Two weeks of observations were carried out at each nursery school for nursery 1 and 2 levels (1 week in each class). The daily observations lasted for an entire session in the nursery school, usually between 7.30 am and 2.00 pm, including pick-up and drop-off times. A total of 13 parents took part in the research project, with the observations focusing on six of the eight interviewed parents. Observations were carried out each day using a video recorder, photographs and extra notes on a notebook. Observations were conducted in each nursery school with the consent of the principal, teachers and parents. Videos were made to complement the field-notes that were made during observations. The observations targeted parents’ drop-off and pick-up routines, interactions between parents, teachers, and children during drop-offs and pick-ups, and the time spent in the nursery school after parents had dropped off and picked up their children. I was also interested in knowing if parents helped out in any activity at nursery school during the nursery school session, teacher-child interactions

and how teachers and children connect with the home in their activities at the nursery school (Appendix S). Questions and discussions followed the observations to get participants' views and interpretations of what was observed and specific actions captured in photographs and videos. For instance, after observations, I discussed with parents to understand their reasons for dropping children in front of the school gate instead of at their classrooms.

The interviews and observations helped me understand the research participants' perspectives on childhood, and their involvement in their children's early learning. Also, interactions with participants led to discussions on promoting or finding other ways of parental involvement in children's early learning.

5.8.4 Informal Conversations and the Review of Document Portfolios

The informal conversations and the review of document portfolios were also a means of gaining valuable information from the research participants. Maxwell (2005) notes that qualitative data is not restricted to the results of a specific method. The researcher is considered a research instrument in a qualitative study using their eyes and ears as tools to make sense of what is going on. Informal data gathering strategies are possible through hanging out with participants, casual conversations and incidental observations. For this study, conversations with teachers and parents as a follow-up on what was observed was a useful source of information for data analysis. Examples of follow-up questions asked included questions concerning parents' reasons for choosing the particular nursery school that their children attend and what criteria or conditions are considered when selecting drivers to drop off their children. Teachers were asked to explain the reasons for keeping children's books in school and returning them only at the end of the school term.

Creswell (2018) describes document portfolios as qualitative documents. These documents may be public documents such as meeting minutes, newspapers, official reports and private documents, like personal journals, letters and emails. Best and Kahn (2006) also consider the following documents to be relevant: official records and other documentary materials, including reports of legislative bodies, school principals and educational committees, minutes of school boards, school newspapers, curriculum guides, teacher and pupil files. Accessing documents can enable the researcher to obtain information in the language and words of the participants. Also, such documents can be conveniently accessed by the researcher (Creswell, 2018). The documents accessed in this investigation included information that already existed, such as curriculum documents, report cards, progress reports, children's certificates and

diplomas, newsletters, parent education handouts and parenting guides/letters that were useful supplementary information. Both informal conversations and document portfolio reviews benefited the investigation as they brought out aspects of parent thinking that parents and teachers failed to express during the formal interview.

Table 5.9 below shows details of the research participants (private and public nursery school), the activities they were involved in and the estimated times for each activity.

Table 5-7: Research Participants and Activities (Private and Public Nursery school)

Participants	Activities Involved	Length of Time
Teachers	Interviews	20 to 30 minutes
	Demographic Questionnaire	
Parents	Questionnaires	Approximately 20 minutes
	Interviews	20 to 30 minutes
Parents, Teachers & Children	Observations	7.30 am to 2.30 pm (2 weeks)

5.9 Data Analysis

Data analysis involves describing, organising and making sense of the data collected from research participants, noting patterns, themes, categories and regularities (Cohen et al., 2018). Maxwell (2005) advises that piling up unanalysed field-notes and transcripts makes the process of analysis complex and in the end challenging; thus, the researcher should begin their analysis by writing reports and taking notes immediately after finishing the first interview or observation. Cohen (2018) adds that data analysis should be ongoing and take place during and after the research and is subject to modifications, additions and amendments. The initial data analysis, such as the transcription of interviews and observations, was initiated during the data collection process. After the data collection process, I maintained contact with participants and obtained new information related to the research.

5.9.1 Analysis of Interviews, Observation Data, Informal Conversations and Review of Document Portfolios

After conducting interviews, observations, informal conversations and the review of document portfolios, the scripts were transcribed, organised and labelled according to each of the participant categories, i.e., teacher, parent and child, and the private and public nursery school.

This investigation employed thematic analysis to analyse the data. “Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun &

Clarke, 2006, p. 79). Often, researchers find themes or codes in the raw data that they collect. These ideas and patterns can be derived from theoretical ideas that the researcher brings to the data (deductive coding) or directly from the raw data (inductive coding) (Boyatzis, 1998; Marks & Yardley, 2004). This research project involved the adoption of both deductive and inductive approaches to coding when developing codes or themes from the data collected. Using coding, information is broken down into categories for easy comparison and understanding (Maxwell, 2005). According to Cohen et al. (2018), coding means ascribing a category label to a piece of data. The same piece of text may have more than one code ascribed to it, depending on the richness and content of that piece of text. Cohen (2018) also notes that codes may be decided in advance or may originate from research questions. They may also come from words spoken by one of the participants in the transcribed data. The researcher goes through data systematically and gives a descriptive code to each piece of the datum to facilitate comparison between things in the same category (Cohen et al., 2018). The following steps were taken to analyse the data. The analysis in this investigation is informed by the following six significant phases of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Familiarising myself with the data: Braun and Clarke (2006) emphasise that the researcher should familiarise him/herself with the data by reading and actively re-reading data, with the interest of searching for meanings and patterns. Creswell (2018) suggests that researchers read all the data to get a general sense of the information and to take the opportunity to reflect on its general meaning. To familiarise myself with the data collected, I studied the data repeatedly to search for themes and meanings. Making notes and marking down ideas for coding began at this phase before moving to the subsequent phases. Thus, “coding continues to be developed and defined throughout the entire analysis” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87).

Generating initial codes: Generation of initial codes begins when the researcher has familiarised his/herself with the data and has generated an initial list of ideas about what is in the data and what is interesting about them (Braun & Clarke, 2006). “Coding involves noting patterns in the data and dividing up the data to give greater clarity regarding their detailed content. In order to do this, the patterns are labelled with codes” (Marks & Yardley, 2004, p. 5). For Creswell (2018), coding involves segmenting sentences into categories and labelling these categories with terms based on the actual language of participants, with such terms being called *in vivo* terms. After familiarising myself with the data from the interviews and observations, I developed some initial codes. These codes were identified through using

colouring techniques, such that I would search for ideas and patterns in the data and then mark them with their particular code colour.

Developing themes: Searching for themes is the next step which begins after initial codes have been generated. This involves the “sorting of the different codes into potential themes and collating all the relevant coded data extracts within the identified themes” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 89). Creswell (2018) says these themes are the ones that emerge in the findings of a qualitative study. During this stage, I thought about the relationships between codes, themes and the different levels of themes. This relationship was analysed with the use of tables (see Appendix U).

Reviewing themes: After searching for themes, the next step is to review the themes developed in phase three (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I began this phase by examining the combined codes for each theme to ensure that they formed a coherent pattern. If the codes in the theme did not fit, I rearranged the codes into new themes or created more accurate themes. If the data extracts formed a coherent pattern within a theme, I moved on to the next theme.

Defining and naming themes: According to Braun and Clarke (2006), defining and naming themes begins after the researcher has made a satisfactory thematic map of their data. In this process, the researcher identifies what each theme is about and determines what aspect of the data each theme captures. I wrote a detailed analysis of each theme and ensured that the themes reflected the data and related to the research questions. Although the themes at this stage already had working titles, I began considering the clear and concise names that I gave them in the final analysis.

Final analysis and producing reports: The last stage involved the final analysis and creating accounts. The aim of the final report “is to tell the complicated story of your data in a way which convinces the reader of the merit and validity of your analysis” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 93). The information gained from informal conversations as well as from the review of the document portfolios were reported to complement the data obtained from the interviews and observations. I ensured that the interpretation of the analysis was concise, coherent, logical and non-repetitive, providing enough evidence of the themes within the data and making an argument in relation to my research questions.

5.9.2 Analysis of Questionnaires

Data from the questionnaires were analysed using a software known as Qualtrics. The questionnaires were classified into two groups, representing the two groups of participants (private and public nursery school parents) and the data were inputted manually into Qualtrics. Responses to the questionnaires were manually inputted as well into the software because the original questionnaires were paper-based. Once the data input was completed, the analysis was generated using descriptive statistics (frequency counts), tables and graphs for the visual exploration and reporting of the data.

Interpretation of the entire data drew on the sociocultural and African theoretical frameworks underpinning the research. This investigation uses a combined approach, drawing from sociocultural concepts and theories of childhood, which recognise children's rights and see children as social actors whose development is influenced by the family. From an African theoretical framework, it emphasises the African context of community participation and peer mentoring culture. Data analysis was carried out with the intention of looking for specific patterns and ideas in relation to these aforementioned theoretical ideas.

5.10 Safeguarding Quality and Trustworthiness of this Study

This study employed a variety of methods to generate data to ensure quality and trustworthiness. One of the ways in which I ensured the quality and trustworthiness of this investigation was triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Triangulation involves collecting information from various individuals and settings, using multiple methods to reduce the chance of systematic biases (Hesse-Biber, 2011; Maxwell, 2005). To ensure the trustworthiness of data, triangulation was employed using a mixed-method approach to confirm participants' views. Another way of safeguarding quality and trustworthiness is to get respondents' validation of their data (Creswell, 2014; Harrison et al., 2001; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maxwell, 2005). This investigation avoided misinterpretation of information by asking for feedback on transcripts from all parents and teachers who were interviewed. Before data collection, I made contact through email with the principals of both nursery schools. Upon arrival in Cameroon, I visited and spent a week at each nursery school to familiarise myself with the research participants before data collection commenced. Data were collected during a three-month period (November and January, 2019) using questionnaires, interviews, observations, informal conversations and document review. When I arrived back in New Zealand, I continued to maintain contact over the following year with the research participants through WhatsApp messaging. In summary, there was prolonged engagement with the research participants during

which I gained an in-depth understanding of their views and ideas (Creswell, 2014; Maxwell, 2005). Lincoln and Guba (1985) emphasises four criteria for establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

5.10.1 Credibility

For Lincoln and Guba (1985), credibility is established when there is a probability that credible findings will be produced, which is made possible through prolonged engagement, persistent observation, member checks and triangulation. The use of external auditors and peer debriefing to provide an external assessment also enhances the credibility of a qualitative study (Creswell, 2014, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Accordingly, multiple means of data collection were employed when triangulating data in this study. I also ensured that there was prolonged engagement with the participants during and after data collection, and during the full-day observations over the two-week period these were done in each nursery school. The purpose was to gain an in-depth understanding of participants' views. After the interviews were transcribed, the transcriptions were emailed back to all teachers and some parents, while I printed copies and to hand other parents without email addresses. In this way, the participants were allowed to review their transcripts and add any further comments. During the data collection process, I shared the transcriptions with my supervisors, and we organised Zoom meetings to discuss data, and to think of other means for probing and acquiring more information. After I returned from data collection, a series of debriefing sessions were also held between my supervisors to get their ideas, perceptions and understandings of the information obtained from the participants.

5.10.2 Transferability

Transferability involves checking the degree to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations or contexts (Shenton, 2004). Since the findings from qualitative research are specific to a small population or environment, it may be hard to demonstrate that the findings and conclusions apply to other populations or settings. Maxwell (2012) acknowledges the difficulties in making general claims or transferring the results of a qualitative study to other settings or contexts. Thus transferability in qualitative studies would need to be achieved by developing a generalisable theory that can be extended to another context (Yin, 2009). This method is also described by Maxwell and Chmiel (2014) as an analytic generalisation. Shenton (2004), and Lincoln and Guba (1985) add that for transferability to be possible, the researcher needs to obtain a sufficiently thick description of the phenomenon under investigation such that readers will have a proper understanding of the findings. This will enable them to compare the

instances of the phenomenon described in the research report with those they have seen emerge in their situations. This investigation presents rich, in-depth data of the context under investigation. It ensures that the data is accurate by engaging in member-checks so that findings will be trustworthy, and can be compared and applied in a similar context.

5.10.3 Dependability

Dependability is the third criterion for ensuring quality and trustworthiness in a qualitative study. This may be a complex process due to the changing nature of the phenomena under investigation. Thus, Shenton (2004) concludes that “in order to address the dependability issue more directly, the processes within the study should be reported in detail, thereby enabling a future researcher to repeat the work, if not necessarily to gain the same results” (Shenton, 2004, p. 71). Creswell (2018) suggests the use of several procedures to ensure that qualitative data is reliable or dependable, which among others is to need to check transcripts to make sure that there were no errors during transcription. The researcher also needs to continuously compare data with the codes to ensure codes are correctly defined.

I have reported in detail all the processes involved in the investigation, especially details of the design of the investigation, data gathering, analysis and reporting. But I cannot ascertain that any future researcher who repeats the investigation under similar circumstances will gain similar results due to the changing nature of the phenomena under investigation.

5.10.4 Confirmability

Confirmability, another criterion for ensuring quality and trustworthiness in a qualitative study, is concerned with proving that the findings and interpretations mainly reflect the data collected and not the researcher’s imaginations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Shenton (2004) emphasises the role of triangulation in promoting confirmability to reduce the effect of the researcher’s bias. Collecting data using various methods to study a particular phenomenon reduces the risk of chance associations and the risk of bias (Holloway, 2017; Maxwell, 2012). Confirmability was established in this investigation through triangulation. Notes on the raw data (field-notes) were kept as well as electronic recordings of information (voice and video recordings). I cross-checked these various forms of data collection methods to ensure the findings reported reflected the data collected.

5.11 Ethical Considerations

Any individual involved in research is defined as a human subject. A researcher conducts research and obtains information from human subjects through intervention (through physical

procedures by which data is obtained) or through interactions with the individuals (by communication or interpersonal contact between the researcher and participant), or through identifiable private information (Lawrence, 2007). Therefore, ethical aspects should be considered in all research projects and especially those research projects which directly involve human beings. Abed (2015) says ethics are moral principles that guide conduct and should not be considered only at the beginning of a research project or fieldwork but should furthermore be borne in mind throughout the research process. The researcher also needs to state clearly the research aims, research design, methods and the research participants, including the involvement of vulnerable groups. Ethical issues considered in this research project involved access to participants, informed consent and considerations involving children in the project, confidentiality and anonymity, participants' protection from harm, participants' rights to withdraw, and social and cultural considerations.

5.11.1 Access to Participants

Approval to conduct research was obtained first from the University of Waikato, Division of Education Research Ethics Committee. Furthermore, before the investigation was initiated in Cameroon, I gained approval from the Regional delegate of Basic Education Littoral (Delegation Regional De L'education De Base Du Littoral). To gain access to the teachers and parents of the nursery schools, I emailed letters explaining the reasons and details of my research project to the principals for their approval. Upon arrival in Cameroon, I formally visited the nursery schools, and met with the principals to further discuss the research and clarify any doubts. After gaining permission from the principals to meet the teachers and parents, I asked to have an information meeting with the teachers, while I introduced myself to most parents as they picked up and dropped off their children.

5.11.2 Informed Consent

According to Abed (2015), informed consent involves making participants aware of what they are consenting to, participants' freedom to get involved or not and the right of participants to withdraw at any time. The research participants were informed about the nature of the research project, as much as possible, so that they could choose to participate or not. Participation was optional and participants were assured that there was no disadvantage to themselves or their children if they decided not to participate. All participants, except children, signed a consent form (see Appendix J, N and O). In addition, I verbally explained to the participants the purpose of the study and their rights before commencing any data collection. An information letter explaining the details of the research project was handed to parents seeking their consent to

participate. I distributed questionnaires to the parents to complete, at the end of which I asked them to indicate if they were interested in making time for an interview with me. We mutually decided the date, time and venue for the interviews and observations with teachers and parents.

Observations were conducted in each nursery school with the consent of the principal, teachers and parents. The principal, teachers and parents were asked to give permission for children to be photographed, and I assured participants that facial expressions in the photographs would be blurred when reporting data. Video recordings were made once participants gave their consent. Informed assent (and potential dissent) (Bissenden & Gunn, 2017) were sought from children. I also conducted classroom observations to understand parent-teacher interactions in the nursery school. Furthermore, I observed parents with their children to understand their interactions. According to Ebrahim (2010) seeking consent for research is an ongoing process of negotiations, sharing of information, and choice of participation. Before entering any classroom, I would introduce myself to the children and explain why I was there and what I was doing to seek their approval. The research project was a process that involved continuously seeking their agreement to participate. Assent and dissent are expressed not only verbally but also nonverbally (Ebrahim, 2010). I planned that if they were unwilling to participate at any point (through verbal or facial expression), I would respect their decision and stop the process. Fortunately, all participants participated continuously right through to the end of the data collection process.

5.11.3 Confidentiality and Anonymity

After gaining permission to speak with the participants, the researcher must protect participant information and their identities. “Confidentiality must be assured as the primary safeguard against unwanted exposure. All personal data ought to be secured or concealed and made public only behind a shield of anonymity” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013, p. 136).

In this study, confidentiality was preserved by keeping information regarding nursery schools, teachers, parents and children private (to be shared only with my supervisors). Information regarding schools, teachers, parents and children were kept confidential, and information was reported by use of pseudonyms where possible to maintain the participants’ anonymity. Allen and Wiles (2016) understand the importance of allowing participants to choose their pseudonyms for the two following reasons:

First, the care and thought with which many participants chose their names, and the meanings or links associated with those names, illustrated the importance

to the participants of the process of naming. Second, the rules and customs around naming further confirmed its importance. (p. 149)

Anonymity was preserved as much as possible by reporting information using pseudonyms to avoid exposing participants' true identities. The participants and I mutually agreed on their pseudonyms or nicknames (which I used the initials) out of respect for their views and because of the importance of creating good relations in my investigation during the interview process.

5.11.4 Potential Harm to Participants

Harm to participants occurs when the data collection process causes stress to or inflicts pain on the participants or in cases where they are forced to respond to the researcher against their will. Participants need the guarantee that the research will not harm them (Cohen et al., 2018). The participants involved in this investigation were treated with respect and opted to participate voluntarily while their information was kept confidential to protect them from any potential risk.

5.11.5 Rights to Withdraw at any Stage of the Research Project

To Cohen et al. (2018), "respondents cannot be coerced into completing a questionnaire (or an interview). They might be strongly encouraged, but the decision whether to become involved and when (and if) to withdraw from the research [project] is entirely theirs" (p. 471). In this investigation, the participants voluntarily decided to participate. They had the right to discontinue at any stage of the data collection until they had approved the veracity of the transcriptions of their interviews. Also, participants' returning their questionnaire meant they gave consent for that data to be used. After data collection, the participants' transcripts were sent through email or in-person (whichever means they preferred) for amendment and confirmation, which was to be completed within two weeks, after which they could no longer withdraw that data from the investigation.

5.11.6 Social and Cultural Considerations

Social and cultural considerations, including language and people's culture, were considered before preparing for the data collection and during the actual data collection process. It was noted at the beginning of the investigation that Cameroon is a bilingual country with two official languages, English and French, and furthermore numerous local languages including pidgin English. Generally, most Cameroonians will speak both official languages, or one of them along with their local language and pidgin English. During the investigation, I mainly engaged English-speaking families or families in which one of the parents was an English-

speaking Cameroonian. Culturally, the father is the head of the family, and his consent must be sought first to gain access to members of his household. Thus, before parents consented to participate in the research project and for their children to be observed, it needed to be something that they had mutually agreed upon within the family. This investigation took place in Cameroon and as a Cameroonian, I can confirm that I am familiar with the context, and its social and cultural practices. Thus the investigation was undertaken in a manner that prevented any disrespect of either the Cameroon cultures or its traditions.

5.12 Chapter Summary

Overall, this chapter focused on the research design for this research project, detailing the methodological strategies for data collection and analysis. The investigation followed an interpretive paradigm, involving a qualitative and a case study approach for generating data, analysing and interpreting participants' views and experiences. The data were generated from two nursery schools (one public and one private) using questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, observations, analysis of document portfolios and informal conversations. The methods employed by the investigation to ensure quality and trustworthiness were discussed, which included credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Finally, potential ethical issues were considered and explored, including access to participants, informed consent and considerations related to involving children in the research, confidentiality and anonymity, participants' protection from harm, participants' rights to withdraw, and social and cultural considerations.

The following chapters, six to eight, present and discuss the findings obtained from research participants. Chapter Six discusses the results obtained from the private nursery school (children, parents and teachers), while Chapter Seven discusses the findings from the public nursery school (children, parents and teachers). Chapter Eight examines the similarities and differences in the data between the two groups of participants.

Chapter 6

Findings from the Private Nursery School

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents findings from the data gathered from the two private nursery school classes. The findings are organised into themes that address the main research question investigating the parents' and teachers' beliefs and practices about parental involvement in early childhood learning. The main points analysed in this section include childrearing characteristics unique to families, and the role of the immediate and extended family in children's development. The parents valued independence and self-management skill development in children, moral education, and their children's understanding of their traditional language and culture. The ways in which teachers promoted cultural practices in terms of literacy and communication was a focus. Parents' ability to provide an optimal environment for learning at home by assisting with homework, providing educational resources at home, and supporting school-based learning is also explored. This chapter furthermore investigates the role of children in the teaching and learning process, and how they actively participated in the construction of knowledge. The chapter presents specific barriers that parents faced in relation to their involvement in children's education. Parents' and teachers' beliefs about parental involvement are explored, mainly to gain an understanding of how these beliefs influenced their attitudes and approach to parental involvement.

Furthermore, although the teachers believed the parents' professional knowledge was inadequate, plenty of opportunities were provided for parents to engage in school-based activities, and their suggestions were welcomed and implemented. Thus, favourable parent-teacher relationships ensured strong home-school connections impacting the children's education. The active role of the child in the teaching and learning process is also emphasised. Finally, case studies of parents with high and low levels of parental involvement are analysed. The same themes are examined for public nursery schools in Chapter Seven, and in Chapter Eight, where a cross-case analysis highlights differences and similarities between the private and public nursery schools and families.

6.2 Home-Based Parental Involvement

Both parents and teachers conceived of home-based parental involvement as being limited to parental engagement with children with the purpose of supporting school-based learning.

However, a deeper inquiry into parental engagement revealed that there were other forms of learning at home, which teachers did not consider to be learning at the nursery school.

Home-based parental involvement for private school parents is analysed in two ways. First, this section will introduce home learning involving parental engagement of children in everyday home activities that are aimed at developing their independence and responsibility. These activities revealed the nature of parents' childcare and upbringing methods, and their views about learning and development. Key themes are collective upbringing, sibling care, traditional language learning and practice and self-management skill development. Second, home-based parental involvement related to children's homework required by the school will be examined. This mainly involved parents in ensuring that children completed their homework and the provision of extra educational materials.

6.2.1 Child Development and Upbringing

Overall, child development in the African context occurs through gradual integration into the community. Childrearing is considered a community task with multiple agents involved exerting a significant influence on children's learning and development. Child upbringing methods particular to the families involved in the studies included raising children collectively, encouraging sibling caretaking, promoting traditional language understanding through home practice, and developing children's agency and independence by assigning chores.

Collective Upbringing: Most families collectively raise their children with the help of their spouse, grandparents, paid caregivers (nanny, driver), siblings, and relatives. Some children socialised with other family members through holiday visits and family meetings. Others lived together with grandparents and relatives. Some grandparents assisted financially in children's upbringing and contributed to teaching the traditional language. Grandparents and other relatives also helped in caring for children after school. Siblings and other relatives also cared for children after school hours, assisted with homework, showering, dressing and feeding.

KE's mum explained how she raised her children with the help of her husband, a nanny, other relatives and her parents:

I share the care with my husband, my nanny, my cousin who lives at home and my parents. When I must carry out another task out of school hours, my nanny or cousin looks after them. My child mostly interacts with my parents. They always visit them for the holidays. (KE's mum, private nursery school, N2)

SH's dad shared caretaking responsibilities with his wife and other family members, who lived together in the same house. He also mentioned that he has a good relationship with other family members, and they meet once every month in different homes for family meetings.

I share the responsibility with my wife, other relatives at home, and the nanny who assists in taking care of the children. For instance, my children go home on the school bus after school, and our other relatives at home receive them because my wife and I are still working. We have a healthy relationship with our extended family members. Every month we have a family meeting where we move from one home to another. We socialise, and the children are acquainted with other family members. We have four other relatives living at home with us, and they help with the kids' upbringing. These relatives help with homework, and my mum teaches the children the dialect. The external family members play a significant role in holding conversations, the grandparents especially are old school, and they focus on discipline, while other family members play a role in diversification, the children can talk to other people apart from their parents. For instance, the girls that I have in my home are from different families, from the northwest and southwest. Sometimes I feel their ideas contradict mine, but again I understand that as young children, they need to be exposed to the society that they will eventually face in life. A relative from the southwest, for example, cooked snails one day and offered them to my son. Like me, people from the northwest do not eat snails, but I met her feeding my son with snails. My son said he enjoyed the meal, so I decided that I needed to be more tolerant, and as parents, we should not try to live our lives through our children; they have their own lives and can make their own decisions. (SH's dad, private nursery school, N2)

WA's mum appreciated the presence of her children's grandparents in their lives but was concerned about disciplinary issues. According to her, they are pampered a lot by their grandparents. However, she also felt it was important that the children felt secure among people who cared about them.

I share the responsibility with my husband and the nanny who assist in taking care of the children. Occasionally their grandparents come to spend some time with us at home. They discuss and play a lot with their grandparents. You know

grandparents spoil children a lot. When my mother-in-law is at home, if you correct them, they will run to her, so it is as if their grandparents are there to give them what we cannot provide. I think the presence of grandparents and other extended family members gives children some sort of security, knowing that they have many people to count on and people who show them love. Though I feel relatives do not really discipline them, so we must discipline them, and then they have those other people [extended family members] to spoil them. (WA's mum, private nursery school, N1)

Sibling Care: Sibling caretaking was another important theme that emerged from the data collected. All the interviewed parents acknowledged the role of siblings and, in some cases, cousins in the day-to-day life of their children, especially in terms of play, feeding, showering and helping with homework, discipline and sometimes rivalry.

FO's and AB's parents indicated that older siblings helped their younger ones in many ways, including feeding, showering, dressing up and homework. According to FO's dad, the "older siblings help with homework, supervise him when he gets dressed, shower him and make sure he eats" (FO's dad, private school, N1). AB's mum noted that AB's elder sisters "help take care of her, feed her, shower and get her dressed" (AB's mum, private school, N1). It was observed, particularly, with these two families, how the older siblings ushered the younger children through the school gates to their classrooms after drop-off in the mornings. Figure 6.1 shows a parent after dropping off, handing over the younger child to the older sibling to be taken to class.

Other parents interviewed also commented on good relationships among siblings, especially in helping with homework. SH's dad said, "[t]hey socialise well. My older son helps his younger brother. He tries to teach him sometimes and helped him with homework" (SH's dad, private school, N2). RA's and WA's mums pointed out that there was some form of rivalry among the siblings, although they got along most of the time. "She socializes well with her younger sister although they sometimes fight. She sometimes helps her do her homework. They play most times and chat together" (RA's mum, private school, N2). WA's mum said that she encouraged the older sibling to take almost a parental role. This aligns with African concepts of learning by direct instruction from siblings or older peers, obedience and respect for older siblings by a younger sibling in the absence of parents (Colonna, 2012; Garcia et al., 2008; Nsamenang, 2008).

KE's mum mentioned that there are social interactions between her daughter and her cousins. Still, she was cautious about how her child interacted with her cousins for fear that her approach and beliefs about childcare and upbringing would be diverted from their current path.

Most of her cousins live outside the country. She plays with her cousins mostly during the holidays. However, I am very particular when it comes to my child's education, so if another child or another family's way of bringing up their child is not in line with my principles, I prevent my child from interacting with them. Parents nowadays are lax when it comes to their children's education. For instance, while my daughter was away on holiday, she interacted with her cousins, and one of them used the word: "*mouf*" [a local word used to insult someone, primarily used by French-speaking Cameroonians], and when she came back from holiday, she repeated that once, but by now she has forgotten about that because those are the kind of things I don't accept. Therefore, if you specify that there are certain things you as a parent do not want your child to learn and she goes somewhere else where people do not care about that, it makes it difficult. Therefore, I send them only to my parents, who understand how I want to care for them. (KE's mum, private nursery school, N2)



Figure 6-1: Parent Handing Over the Child to an Older Sibling in front of the School Gate

Traditional Language Learning and Practice: Both parents and teachers of the private nursery school acknowledged the traditional language as an important part of the Cameroon culture that needed to be practised and preserved, although some parents did not believe traditional language education should be part of the curriculum. Since over 270 languages are spoken across Cameroon, traditional language learning was a challenge for both preschools; thus, all teacher participants felt traditional languages would be better practised at home. AB's mum acknowledged that she had challenges in this area and pointed out that her mum helped in teaching her daughter the language as they live together. "That's a difficult one because I can't speak my traditional language very well, but my mum lives with me, so she helps to teach my child" (AB's mum, private school, N1). RA's and SH's parents intentionally practised the traditional language at home with their children. They believe it is a way to communicate privately or to convey secrets, especially when in public, and that it is also a way of preserving the African culture and identity.

I try to speak with her at home, and when I speak, I ask her to repeat after me. For now, she understands everything I say, but she finds difficulties in speaking. It helps us communicate with each other, especially in public when we do not want others to hear what we are saying. (RA's mum, private nursery school, N2)

SH's dad commented on the impact of colonisation and how this has influenced views of the older generation and turned them against learning and practising the traditional language. He gave a thoughtful analysis of the value of children learning their mother tongue.

We speak the language intentionally at home to preserve our heritage. I want to think that we have been deceived for a very long time. When we grew up, we felt it was a burden to learn any other language apart from English and French, and this could have a negative effect on us. Our parents will advise that we speak only English at home because we are going to an English school so that we can excel in English and do well in school. However, unfortunately, I realised recently that people understand best in their mother tongue. Also, the more languages we speak, the better we can understand and interpret situations. There are challenges that we face that we will get inspiration from our exposure to different languages and cultures. The mother tongue is very important, and it is the only language they can inherit from us directly because English and French can be learned elsewhere. This is the only way we can preserve our African culture and identity. (SH's dad, private nursery school, N2)

FO's dad also said that his children practised speaking their traditional language at home and when they visited their grandparents. "We practice at home and when they visit my parents. My children interact with them using the traditional language" (FO's dad, private school, N1).

KE's mum indicated that she does nothing when it comes to practising their traditional language because both she and her husband lacked knowledge in this area. "I do nothing about that because my husband and I cannot speak our mother tongue. Even when my children visit our grandparents, they communicate mostly in French" (KE's mum, private school, N2).

According to WA's mum, she spoke a language that was different from that of her husband, and though they did not teach their children this language, they still developed their children's knowledge in different aspects of their culture.

Honestly, we have not made any effort concerning that, as my husband and I come from completely different tribes. I think speaking and understanding the traditional language is important though it is not a necessity according to me. I think it is important to maintain that cultural identity, but unfortunately, I was not raised with the language, so it is difficult to give what you do not have. If we had a choice, we would want them to learn the traditional language, but that does not mean we will not give them the cultural touch in their upbringing. Though the language aspect might be missing, we have other cultural aspects that we teach them. For instance, in the African culture, they tell you of respect, attend funerals, make contributions and participate in extended family activities when it is Christmas; you need to share and help other less privileged people in the extended family if you can. So, the responsibilities are not limited to your immediate family and siblings but are extended to cousins and distant relatives.
(WA's mum, private nursery school, N1)

Self-management Skill Development: An important aspect of African culture valued by Cameroon parents is that every individual develops self-management skills by sharing responsibilities and taking part, according to their level of development, in daily family activities. Parents in the study encouraged their children to carry out some tasks at home to promote self-reliance and responsibility. Tasks ranged from fetching water, cleaning up after meals, washing, assisting in the kitchen, and caring for younger siblings, as seen in Table 6.1. The table illustrates the ways in which each parent engaged and encouraged their children to carry out chores at home as a means of promoting independence skills.

Table 6-1: Self-management skills Development, Private School Parents

Parents	Self- management skills development
Parent 1 KE (private nursery school, N2)	Yes, my child does chores. She dresses herself and arranges her shoes in the cupboard without supervision, she cleans up, and I supervise when we work in the kitchen. She helps me peel the garlic when I cook. (KE's mum, private school, N2)
Parent 2 RA (private nursery school, N2)	She brushes her teeth, takes off her clothes but during the week, I assist her because we are in hurry to go to school. She packs her toys, folds her clothes, and puts them in the drawer. I usually supervise her when she folds her clothes. Mostly my 4-year-old does these chores and sometimes with the help of her younger sister. I think the chores are important because they help children to be self-reliant without waiting for their mother to do things for them. (RA's mum, private school, N2)

Parent 3 SH (private nursery school, N2)	Yes. He cleans the table after eating, and sometimes he wants to wash his clothes. We always supervise what he does. It gives children a sense of responsibility. I always let them try to do certain things on their own, after which I come in to help, for instance, washing their underwear, cleaning the floor when they spill water. (SH's dad, private school, N2)
Parent 4 WA (private nursery school, N1)	Yes, they do chores, especially errands. I send her to get things for me around the house, I ask her to put her clothes in the laundry. She mostly does these chores without supervision. Both of my children do chores, but the youngest one does it only when she wants to, but the oldest one will always want to. Usually, I ask her to get me a broom or a plate or help serve food. I always send her to get what I know is within her reach. I think chores give children a sense of responsibility and help them to be more organised. They should not feel like they need to be served all the time, but they can offer service to others. (WA's mum, private school, N1)
Parent 5 FO (private nursery school, N1)	He cleans the table after he eats. (FO's dad, private school, N1)
Parent 6 AB (private nursery school, N1)	My daughter can undress and eat by herself, but she is supervised by her sisters or me when trying to put on her clothes. (AB's mum, private school, N1)

6.2.2 Homework

When asked about parents' involvement with their child's learning, 12 of the 13 parents who responded to the questionnaire reported that they always carried out follow-up studies at home about what was being taught in the nursery school. All eight parents interviewed in the private nursery school listed homework as one of the ways in which they got involved in their children's learning at home. Homework was sent home from school by the teachers. Teacher 1 in the private school indicated that homework was sent home twice a week, on Tuesdays and Fridays, and parents were expected to assist children in completing their homework (Teacher 1, private nursery school).

Points raised by parents portrayed how they viewed learning and what was important for them. Some of the parents expressed that homework helped them to understand what their children learned at school, and to know what their strengths and weaknesses are. Notwithstanding, the private school parents noted specific challenges they faced when helping their children do their homework. Some challenges were related to their circumstances (busy work schedules and travels out of town), and other challenges to the nature of the homework and access to resources (difficult homework, which according to them, was above their children's level of understanding and the lack of materials to do this homework). For instance, WA's mum raised

concerns about the lack of resources to complete homework, which was resolved through communication with the teacher. She also thought that homework given to children should match their level of understanding:

The homework is usually what they learned in class, especially what they learned on the day that it is sent. The most challenging part of the homework is that they ask you to cut and paste. We are not allowed to buy textbooks because the books are provided by the school. They ask us to cut and paste, for instance, pictures which begin with the letter “F”. So, one of the significant difficulties which I expressed to my youngest daughter’s teacher was, where do we get these magazines to cut and paste from? We may have these materials, but there are times when we run out of it. So, the teacher told me she understands, and from this year, she has supplied the papers for my daughter to cut and paste. I still need to speak to my oldest daughter’s teacher about this. I spend 20 to 30 minutes per child doing homework. I think parents’ work-life prevents their full participation in children’s education. I don’t think any parent will consciously want to stay away from assisting the child. I face challenges with homework, especially when I am very busy, or I travel out of town, and the nanny forgets to check their books. When I see the comment from the teacher saying “homework not done”, I feel very bad. To manage this situation, when I travel, or I am busy, I always call to remind the nanny to check their books. I also think some of the homework is well above the children’s level. For instance, their teacher might ask them to draw something which I believe they cannot do at their age. Since I cannot do it for them, I let them draw whatever they can. (WA’s Mum, private nursery school, N1)

RA’s mum emphasised the importance of homework in helping parents understand their children’s competencies. She considered reading and independence skills as important skills for her child at this stage. Independence skills are an important aspect of traditional African education that are valued by parents.

FD’s dad felt that homework supplemented learning at school. Thus he assisted his child for at least 30 minutes each day to complete his homework. This parent went as far as asking for homework from the school teacher when it was not sent. FD’s dad explained that the only challenge he sometimes faced was his son’s lack of motivation. He overcame this by making

promises of taking him out shopping as a way of encouraging him to study. Figure 6.2 shows examples of homework and feedback from the private nursery school teachers to families.

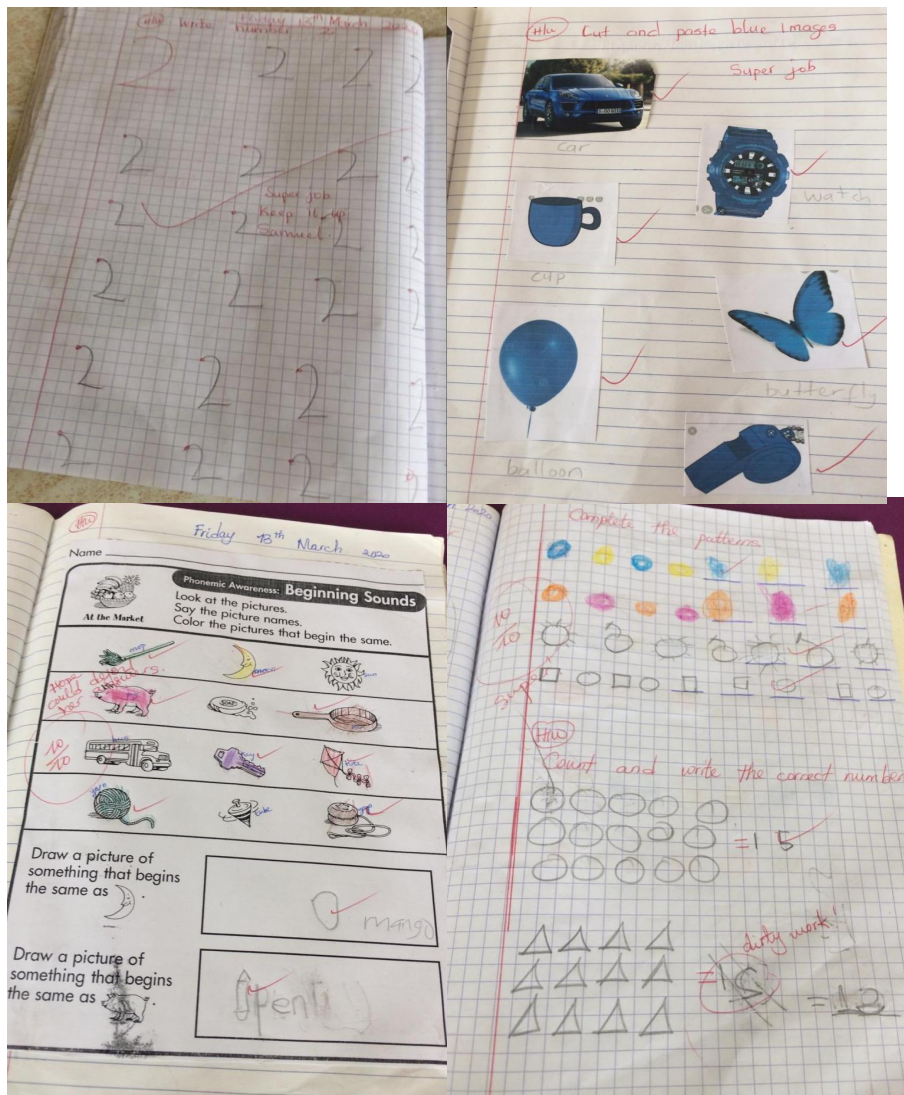


Figure 6-2: Examples of Homework and Feedback from Private Nursery School Teachers

6.2.3 Extra Educational Materials and Reading at Home

Eight of the 13 private nursery school parents who responded to the questionnaire indicated that they always provided extra educational materials besides doing homework to support their children at home. Extra educational materials ranged, according to them, from providing educational toys such as blocks, audio-visuais, alphabet and number charts, and storybooks to read at home. KE's mum (private school, N2) said that she bought books and did lots of reading at home, while RA's mum (private school, N2) talked of watching educational videos as another way of learning at home. In addition, TC's dad (private nursery school, N1) indicated

that he used educational resources as a means of developing not only his child's cognitive skills but also dispositions that are valuable for supporting learning:

I also provide educational resources and toys such as blocks and puzzles that we play together so she can develop her cognitive skills. I expose her to different environments (going on trips and other social activities), so she can build her self-esteem and be confident in herself. (TC's dad, private nursery school, N1)

The private nursery school parents' role in providing an enriching environment for learning at home as discussed above demonstrates their understanding of the importance of parental encouragement and motivation necessary for children's learning and development.

6.3 School-Based Parental Involvement

School-based parental involvement recorded by private school parents centred around attending school events, communications and class observations. The school events were categorised into two sub-themes: Parent-Teacher-Children Activities and Parent-Teacher/School Administration Meetings. Parent-Teacher-Children Activities were further classified into the following subheadings: Circle Time, Science Fair, Parent Volunteers for School-Based Activities, Thanksgiving Ceremonies, Open House, Cultural Week, and End-of-year Ceremonies. Parent-Teacher/School Administration Meetings were categorised into Parent Forum, Parent-Teacher Conferences, Communications and Class Observations.

6.3.1 Parent-Teacher-Children Activities:

Parent-Teacher-Children activities are described as activities and social events at school in which parents were invited to attend or voluntarily participate with their children. Sometimes these activities were conducted off the school campus. They included the following:

Circle Time: After the morning assembly, all the nursery school children made a circle together with their teachers where they greeted each other, sang songs, recited rhymes and danced for at least 30 to 40 minutes. RA's mum (private nursery school, N2), who was a primary school teacher in the same school, reported that occasionally she made time to participate with her children during this Circle Time.

The nursery school children usually have Circle Time for about 30 to 40 minutes every day after the general assembly, where they play games and recite

nursery rhymes. I join them sometimes, and we do it together. I think such activities build a close relationship between the parents, children and teachers. It also helps to boost the child's confidence. (RA's mum, private nursery school, N2)

Science Fair: Teachers carried out science-related projects with children in their various classes, and after completing such projects, parents were invited to visit the school and see what their children had achieved. Children were encouraged to participate in such projects, inducting children into John Dewey's principles of experiential learning. The Science Fair day was usually a regular school day like any other day when children attended school. Parents came in later in the day and visited their children's classrooms, and listened to both teachers and children present their projects. Teacher 3 of the private nursery school explained, "[p]arents were invited to attend the sciencefair, where different science projects were carried out by each class and displayed for parents to come in and see. For instance, in Nursery One they made a human skeleton" (Teacher 3, private nursery school).

SH's dad explained that learning in the private nursery school took the form of a project-based approach. Science projects for instance encouraged children to care for the environment:

During the Science Fair, we are invited to see children's creations and science projects. The Science Fair occurs once a year. The school encourages a project-based approach in learning, and some of the teachers use these projects to display on the day of the Science Fair. One interesting project that was carried out in my son's class was the recycling project where the children were taught to separate their rubbish both in school and in their homes. (SH's dad, private nursery school, N2)

Figure 6.3 presents a letter to parents from the class teacher in preparation for the Science Fair projects.

Thursday 12th Sept 2019

Dear Parents,

As part of Foundation Science program, the children are introduced to plants. Throughout the year, they learn to cater for plants and their functions. They also learn about the important role plants play in maintaining the delicate balance of nature.

In line with these, I solicit that you assist your child in purchasing a potted plant. To which you attach the following information:

- Child's name
- Name of plant
- Directions for care

Thanks alot for your cooperation as always.

M.A. - 1

Figure 6-3: Letter to Parents in Preparation for Science Fair Projects

Parent Volunteers for School-based activities: Some parents mentioned how the school invited them to come and participate as a volunteer in school activities, especially during field trips. For instance, KE's mum (private nursery school, N1) said the school invited her to be a volunteer during field trips, but she hardly had time for this due to her tight work schedule. Only two of the thirteen parents who responded to the questionnaires agreed that they always volunteered to help when children go for outdoor activities, field trips, or any other form of volunteer activity at the nursery school. While this could be attributed to parents' nature of work and busy schedules, it was interesting to note that some parents were interested in volunteering for school-based activities to support their children's learning. When asked about how interested they were in participating in activities that might enhance their child's learning,

six parents indicated that they were very interested in cleaning, cooking lunch, going with children for field trips, and as an assistant teacher (see Figure 6.4).

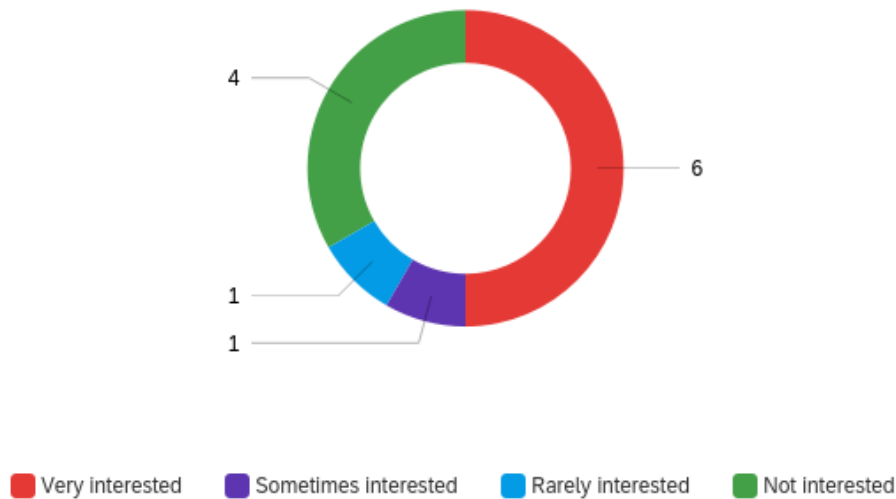


Figure 6-4: Private Nursery School Parents’ Response to their Interest in Volunteering in School-based Activities.

According to Teacher 3 of the private nursery school, “[t]he school builds close relationships by inviting parents to go for field trips with children, sometimes because parents are busy, they send their nannies to accompany children” (Teacher 3, private nursery school). SH’s (private school, N2) dad reported that volunteering as an assistant teacher added value to children’s learning as children become aware that their parents appreciate the teaching and learning process. He was also able to gain knowledge of his son’s behaviour and capabilities, as well as an opportunity to understand and appreciate the efforts of teachers:

Recently, I volunteered as an assistant teacher in my son’s class. At the end of that day, I realised that he was exceptionally well behaved, he read aloud, and each time he reads, he looks to see if I am watching him ... As far as teaching and learning are concerned, teachers are the most important people, and when the parents show children that teachers are valuable and that teaching is important, and when a parent goes and stay in class with the children for some time, it will make them understand that learning is very important, and it will inspire them too. (SH’s dad, private nursery school, N2)

Open House: The Open House was another way in which parents of the private nursery school participated in their children's learning at school. Teacher 1 of the private nursery school indicated that this was a day when parents were invited to visit the school and look around. Teacher 4 of the private nursery school said, “[d]uring the Open House ceremony, parents were invited to come and see their children's classes and discuss any concerns. I always encourage parents to teach something to the children, and some parents teach games or songs to the children” (Teacher 4, private nursery school). A parent said that Open House days presented parents with opportunities to share study advice and ideas:

I have attended the “open day”, which involves parents, teachers and the children. We participate in class, and we propose ideas on how the teacher can run the class. I think the school is doing its best to involve parents in school activities. (SH's dad, private nursery school, N2)

Thanksgiving Ceremony: The private nursery school organised a ‘thanksgiving ceremony’ once a year in November, which is at the end of their first trimester. Teacher 1 of the private nursery school recounted that parents and children are encouraged to engage in acts of kindness and sharing during thanksgiving activities:

The school promotes a close relationship with families by organising activities like thanksgiving, where we share gifts. Parents and children are encouraged to donate any gift of their choice. These gifts are taken to an orphanage within the city that will be decided by the school administration. (Teacher 4, private nursery school)

I was fortunate to witness a thanksgiving ceremony (20th November, 2019) during my data collection. The school worked actively to implement the Dewey principles which it values as being important to its aspirations. The concept of inclusiveness was evident in the ways in which the parents, children, and the school administration shared the same interests and goals. The school, together with families, contributed to organising and planning the thanksgiving event. An opening prayer was given by a parent, the school choir sang the national anthem and the principal made a speech. On this day, awards were also given to children recognising their competencies, and children read stories, performed sketches, rhymes, sang and danced. In partnership with the school, parents provided food and drinks, and the whole school participated in this shared meal. The president of the Parent Forum, who was a parent, made a speech congratulating the school administration for doing an excellent job with their children,

thanking parents for coming and reminding parents about the next Parent Forum meeting. She also made mention of a family fun fair scheduled to take place in March 2020, where parents, teachers and children were invited to participate in sporting activities together. The value of love and kindness was instilled in children by encouraging them to donate gifts to be taken to the orphanage. The teachers and children also designed a fruit tree (named the ark), and parents and children were encouraged to harvest from the tree and, in return, donate some money to be given to the orphanage (Figure 6.6). The Figures 6.5 to 6.12 provide pictures of some of activities done during the November 2019 thanksgiving ceremony.

Figures 6.5 and 6.6 show children and parents in attendance at the nursery school's 2019 thanksgiving ceremony. Parents' participation, during this event, (Figure 6.6), revealed their interest in engaging with children's learning. Most of the children appeared attentive.



Figure 6-5: November 2019 Thanksgiving Ceremony, Children of Private Nursery School



Figure 6-6: November 2019 Thanksgiving Ceremony, Parents of Private Nursery School and the Fruit Tree (named the ark).

Children's achievements were recognised through award-giving, as evidenced in Figures 6.7 and 6.8. Teacher 1 of the private nursery school reported that all children were given awards in appreciation of their unique skills.



Figure 6-7: November 2019 Thanksgiving Ceremony, Award Giving: Private Nursery School.



Figure 6-8: Examples of Awards Given to Children: Private Nursery School

Dewey’s concept of cooperative learning was reinforced through child participation. Children were active participants in making the thanksgiving theme board, writing ‘thank you messages’ to their teachers and parents (Figures 6.9 and 6.10).



Figure 6-9: Thanksgiving Theme Board Designed by Children and Teachers including Thanksgiving Messages: Private Nursery School



Figure 6-10: Thanksgiving Messages: Private Nursery School

Figure 6.11 shows the information letter sent out to parents regarding the 2019 thanksgiving event, and Figure 6.12 details the programme for that event. It was interesting to see how parents were included in the planning of the event. Parents were invited to bring a meal and drinks to the event in addition to what the school provided. They were also encouraged to contribute items to be donated to an orphanage and invited to join the school during the visit to the orphanage. Time was also allocated for the president of the Parent Forum to make a speech

during the event. This illustrates the concept of solidarity and hospitality within the private nursery school community.

Thanksgiving is around the corner.

It is November again, a month in which the entire DEWEY community comes together to celebrate, share and publicly acknowledge their divine blessings. This year's thanksgiving theme is "TOGETHER, LET'S BUILD AN ARK OF LOVINGKINDNESS." The Award ceremony and the thanksgiving celebration will take place on November 20th 2019 10:00 am. We teach the children to show love and appreciation by sharing, especially with the underprivileged.



Activities during Thanksgiving

- **Award ceremony:** Students should come in on this day, dressed in their school attire ready to receive their certificates.
- **The Ark:** There will be an opportunity to visit our "ark." The aim is to raise funds with which to purchase more items for the orphanages.
- **Visit to the orphanage:** Still in line with giving, we should remember that it is more blessed to give than to receive; especially when it has to do with the underprivileged in our community. We are expecting items from everyone in this DEWEY community. These items are to be taken to the orphanages where the children will show love and share with the orphans. Let's all use this opportunity to save a life by voluntarily donating, toys, clothing, toiletries, detergents and imperishable food items like rice, oil, sugar, spaghetti, milk, macaroni etc. We will inform you on the day we intend to visit the orphanages. Parents who are willing to join the convoy are welcome. The classes visiting these orphanages will be communicated in the nearest future.
- **Common meal:** We will share a meal together as a family; all the parents are invited to join us for this awesome time of the celebration. Please bring along a meal and soft drinks to share with every other person. For those who do not know what to bring, it should be finger foods like fried or roasted chicken, turkey, or fish, meat/soya, hamburgers, kwacoco bible, meat balls, dodo, eggs, egusi pudding, pili pili, cakes, pancakes, meat/fish pie, sandwiches, doughnuts, fried rice etc. Every family is encouraged to bring something.
- **You are all invited.** Kids having a dance to present on that day should bring their dance attire.
- **For inquiries please do not hesitate to call the school for clarification.**

Thank you again for your contributions.

The Thanksgiving Committee.

Figure 6-11: November 2019 Thanksgiving Invitation Letter to Private Nursery School Parents

DEWEY THANKSGIVING PROGRAM/AWARD CEREMONY –NOVEMBER 2019

1. 10:00 - Opening prayer by a parent
2. 10:05 - National Anthem – Choir
3. 10:07 - Statement of Belief.– Choir
4. 10:10 - Speech by Mrs
5. 10:25 - Thanksgiving Song- Choir
6. 10:30 – Drama Club Presentation
7. 10:45 - Kindergarten Awards – Head of Kindergarten
8. 11:15 - Secondary Dance
9. 11:20 - Primary Awards –Head of Primary
- 10.11:50 – A Word from . /PF President
- 11.12:05 - Primary Dance (Year 4)
- 12.12:10 - Secondary Award – Head of Secondary
- 13.12:40 - Song - Choir
- 14.12:50 - Item 11

Figure 6-12: November 2019 Thanksgiving Programme Schedule: Private Nursery School

Family Funfair: The family funfair was organised once a year by the private school parent-teacher association known as the Parent Forum. Parents were in charge of planning and organising the family funfair, and their input was sought out and really valued. According to Teacher 4 of the private nursery school, the family funfair was a day when sporting activities were organised, in which parents, teachers and children participated together.

The school promotes closer relationships with families through social activities like the family funfair day [that was] organised for different sporting activities for parents, teachers and children every year. We always nominate a parent to coordinate the day's activities. Both the school and the parents provide food and drinks, we organise singing, dancing and swimming competitions between parents, teachers and the students. (Teacher 4, private nursery school)

A parent said:

The Parent Forum organises three main meetings in an academic year. They also organise an outdoor activity called the family funfair, where parents, teachers and children come together for sports activities. They go to the playground out of school (Pacour Vita and Muyenge land), and there is music and food. (WA's mum, private nursery school, N1)

Cultural Week: All the teachers at the private nursery school reported that Cultural Week was one of the ways in which the school connected with families. It was also the only means through which the school promoted the practice of traditional languages. During the Cultural Week, the children and teachers practised speaking in the local language of every child, sang songs and rhymes in these languages, and practised different cultural dance steps. On the last day of the Cultural Week, which was Friday, parents were invited to come to school. Families were encouraged to dress up in different cultural regalia and showcase any activity peculiar to their cultures, for instance, a dance or cultural artefacts. Teacher 1 at the private nursery school reported that the school promotes traditional language practice and children's understanding of their cultural heritage during the Cultural Week:

The school promotes close relationships with families by organising activities like the Cultural Week, where parents and children come around with their traditional attire and make presentations. During the Cultural Week, we encourage parents to present their cultures, and it enriches children about their cultural background. (Teacher 1, private nursery school)

End-of-year/Term and Graduation Ceremonies: The private nursery school organised End-of-year and Graduation Ceremonies, as well as the End-of-term Activities, such as Christmas and Easter Celebrations. During such occasions, parents were invited to come along and watch their children read stories, recite rhymes and act in sketches, after which they all participated in a shared meal. Awards and report cards were also given on such occasions. SH's dad explained, "I attend the Graduation and Award Ceremonies because I understand that when the children see us in school, they know that school is important" (SH's dad, private school, N2).

6.3.2 Parent-Teacher/School Administration Meetings:

Parent-teacher/school administration meetings are meetings that are attended by parents, teachers and the school administration to discuss the education and wellbeing of children. Children were not involved in these events as active participants, but the decisions made

influence their learning and development. During such meetings, the school administration and teachers welcome suggestions from parents concerning children's learning. This was also an opportunity for the school to carry out parent education workshops.

Parent Forum: The school enacted Dewey's principles of democracy by creating a forum between the school administration and the parents, headed by a parent. The fact that this forum was not teacher-led was unusual in Cameroon. The Parent Forum was a democratic platform structured to enable full leadership and participation by parents. All but one of the parents who responded to the questionnaires agreed that they were members of the Parent Forum. SH's and RA's parents who attended the Parent Forum, often mentioned that the Parent Forum organises parent education workshops known as Parent School (École des Parent). Some examples of parent education topics presented by teachers and discussed during Parent Forum meetings included "child development and screen exposure" and "the impact of screen exposure on children".

SH's dad emphasised the role of parents and the contributions parents make to this forum.

Parent Forum is coordinated by parents only, which is different from the PTA, which is a parent-teacher association, so the parents control the affairs of this forum, and sometimes they can invite teachers. Parents discuss and share advice about child upbringing with other parents and express ideas on how to facilitate children's learning. In the last meeting, we talked about screen awareness and the effects of too much screen exposure on children's learning and concentration levels. Parents were asked to limit the amount of time they allow children to watch TV or play with the iPad. The parent-teacher meetings are coordinated by the parents and the school, and all suggestions are always welcomed from both ends. For instance, the idea of the family funfair where parents, teachers and children went out for a sports day was suggested by parents. (SH's dad, private nursery school, N2)

I find the PF helpful because the Parent School [parent education workshop] takes place during these meetings, and parents are educated on specific topics on how to care for children. Yes, I attended the last PF and what was discussed concerns screen awareness to see how parents can curb children's dependence on the screen. There is enough time for parents to share their suggestions and ideas. Of course, not everything can be accepted, but they will filter and choose

some. For instance, some parents complain about too much homework. So, they are looking for strategies to see how this issue can be addressed. (RA's mum, private nursery school, N2)

The Parent Forum had a genuine capacity to influence education. FD's dad saw the Parent Forum as a forum to express ideas and opinions on children's learning. He further explained that suggestions from parents were taken seriously by the administrative staff. During all school events, the president of the Parent Forum was given a chance to make a speech on behalf of all parents. The aim of the meeting was to promote social justice whereby the interests of the school would be shared by the school administration and families would be encouraged to pursue freedom of interaction between all parties involved. TC's dad, who worked in the school as an administrator, played an active role in the Parent Forum by preparing resources on what would be taught in the Parent School. TC's dad reported that parents were educated on topics such as child development and learning, how to manage children's school activities, coaching children at home, how to manage screen exposure and trauma experiences.

The Parent Forum appeared to be a very practical way in which parents could connect with the school and engage in their children's learning. Nevertheless, some parents complained of a few lapses in the function of this forum, such as attendance and paying of dues. WA's mum reported:

The Parent Forum involves all the parents of the whole school. The fee each parent needs to pay is 25000 FRS per child, but the fees were not forthcoming from parents for the past years, so it was included in the tuition this year. But I don't think it is enough to pay the fees, but parents' attendance and participation are more important. In the beginning, the date of attendance was put on Saturday, but parents complained that Saturday was not ideal, so it was moved to a Friday, but the attendance was still low. The last meeting's turnout was low. It involved only about 6 to 7 parents, and the plan was the election of new executive members. Due to the poor attendance, they decided to bring the meeting to the Christmas Party because many parents attended it. I think there is this difficulty in bringing together as many parents as possible to the meetings. (WA's mum, private nursery school, N1)

Parent-Teacher Conference: Parent-Teacher Conferences involved one-on-one meetings between teachers and parents of the private nursery school to discuss children's academic

progress and wellbeing. The parent-teacher conference was organised every trimester with parents invited to meet one-on-one with teachers to discuss their children's progress. Teacher 1 reported that parents were asked about their expectations for their children in these meetings, which helped teachers work hard to meet these expectations. However, some parents explained that teachers invited the parents to tell them about children's academic performance and suggested how they can support learning at home. These indicated that either not all parents' aims for Parent-Teacher Conferences were communicated to parents by the school administration or that some parents were simply unaware of the information.

WA's mum, for example, portrayed the parent-teacher conference as a medium where parents were informed of children's academic milestones, gained an understanding of children's behaviour management and got study advice from teachers:

The Parent-Teacher Conferences where the parent has a one-on-one talk with the teacher come at the end of every trimester; thus, it holds three times a year. Once they give your child's report, they call for parents to evaluate how the child behaves, their strengths and weaknesses. The role of the parent is just to listen to the teacher's feedback on the child's strengths and get advice on how the child can be assisted at home in the areas that need development. Sometimes when the teacher expresses this to me, I agree with her because there are some aspects children show in school that they don't show at home. For instance, they suck their fingers at home, but they don't when they get to school. At the beginning of school, my youngest daughter sucked her fingers, but her teacher managed that by putting her on the timeout chair each time she did that, but she still sucks her fingers at home. (WA's mum, private nursery school, N1)

FD's dad said that the parent-teacher conference was one of the mediums through which he discussed information concerning his child with the teacher. "During the parent-teacher conference, I had the opportunity to share with the teacher information about my child. We talked particularly about his concentration level in class and how I can help him at home with his studies" (FD's dad, private nursery school, N1). SH's dad regarded the parent-teacher conference as an opportunity to understand children's academic milestones and discuss study ideas and options:

Parent-Teacher Conferences occur once every trimester to discuss children's progress, particularly the areas in which the children need help and map out

strategies to help these children. Parents are encouraged to reward children when they perform well, and a parent will go home and tell the child all that the teacher said and reward them and this way, the child will understand that there is no gap between the home and the school and that parents are aware of all what happens in school. The school continually encourages parents to drop in frequently to talk with teachers; this way, issues between the teachers, parents and children will hardly last for long. For instance, when I drop my children, I greet the teacher, and if there is an issue, she lets me know immediately. The school took a long time to provide transportation for children because they encouraged parents to come to school by dropping off their children because, during this exchange, parents and teachers get acquainted. (SH's dad, private nursery school N2)

6.3.3 Communications and Class Observations

All private nursery school teachers and parents who responded to the questionnaires indicated that there are several modes of communication between the home and the school, including official letters, newsletters, WhatsApp messages, phone calls, Parent-Teacher Conferences and face-to-face communications when some parents came to drop off or pick up their children. Children's academic progress was communicated using progress reports every month and report cards every trimester. One out of the eight parents interviewed mentioned that he came in and observed his children as they studied in class.

When asked about how the school shared information with parents about children's daily activities and if parents also contacted the school, WA's mum reported:

I get information mostly through letters and phone calls. I get updates on the school activities, for instance, end-of-term exams, updates on school fees and basically the school programme for the academic year. Yes, I contact the school. For example, when I am running late to pick up my children, I call to inform the teacher, and if I have to take my daughter to the hospital, I call to let the school know she will be absent. Also, last year was my first year in this school, so I called the school sometimes to ask questions on things I did not understand. (WA's mum, private nursery school, N1)

SH's dad corroborated on the importance of Dewey's principles of democracy by expressing that the school upholds an open policy whereby parents are welcome to visit or call teachers at any time to inquire about their children or to share information about the child with the teacher. He got information through the WhatsApp group for parents and through the school newsletter where children's activities were displayed, including any news concerning the school. SH's dad also contacted the teacher to follow up on his child's studies and get updates about his child's health, if he felt unwell when he brought him to school. RA's mum always communicated with the teacher to seek study advice, and she also did class observations. She communicated face-to-face with the school and through notes and letters. KE's mum indicated that she got feedback through comments made in notebooks. Though she was happy with the information she received, she felt there was more the teachers needed to do, especially with regards to information concerning lesson planning.

I get feedback through the comments that come back in her books daily, including what she learned on that day. They also send information monthly to parents concerning what was done for that month. I am getting enough information, but I would appreciate it if they could give us their activity plan earlier before an activity or lesson is taught so I can prepare my child at home. For instance, if they are planning to study animals, they can inform parents on time, I can take my child to visit the zoo, so she can have first-hand experience about animals before she learns about it in class. Yes, I contact them; for instance, if she is sick and I send her to school, I always call to check up if she is feeling better. (KE's mum, private nursery school, N2)

6.4 Private School Parents Drop off and Pick-up Routines

The observations focused on six of the eight parents interviewed, their children and all the teachers. Three parents were Nursery One parents, and three were Nursery Two parents. Each group of parents were observed separately for two weeks (one week in each class). Table 6.2 shows parents' drop-off and pick-up routines, interactions between parents, teachers, children during drop-offs and pick-ups, and the amount of time spent in the private nursery school after parents dropped off and picked up their children.

Children were dropped off at the school gate by their drivers or parents in the morning (see Figure 6.13). Sometimes older siblings, who attended the same school, brought in their siblings and directed them to the classroom. This brings to light the culture of sibling caretaking evident

among African families as portrayed by Colonna (2012) and Nsamenang (2008). SH and RA were brought in by their parents in the morning, but they went back home by bus in the afternoon. Though children were dropped off at the gate, they must be picked up from the classrooms at the close of the day. Children who went home by bus were picked up from the classroom by the bus driver. “I drop them off in the mornings, and they go home by school bus. My mum, including other family relatives who live with us due to the Anglophone crisis, receive them when they get home” (SH’s dad, private nursery school, N2). RA’s mum said: “I always drop them off in the morning and in the afternoon, they go by the school bus. Their aunt receives them in front of the gate and stays with them until I get back home” (RA’s mum, private nursery school, N2). Again, the culture of collective upbringing is evident at this point, when children were dropped home after school and are catered for by relatives.

WA’s parents alternated with their personal driver in dropping off and picking up her and her sister. “I bring the children to school, and sometimes the driver does that. Our housekeeper recommended the driver to us, and it turned out that he was her husband. The housekeeper works at our house daily from Monday to Friday” (WA’s mum, private nursery school, N1).

All children who went back home by school bus or were picked up by drivers had relatives and stay-in nannies who looked after them while parents were at work. When asked why children were dropped off or picked up by the school bus or by drivers or why parents could not walk their children to their classrooms, they responded that they were trying to maintain their work schedule. According to the Nursery Two teacher, there was a closer relationship with parents who visited daily compared to those who sent drivers to collect their children. The parents who sent drivers to pick up their children visited the school when invited for meetings or parent conferences, or if there was a problem. Otherwise, they would stay away knowing that all was well. These parents also contacted the school or visited if they had any questions or information to pass to the teachers.

The information presented in Table 6.2 shows that these private nursery school parents rarely spent much time at the nursery school during drop off and pick-up. Most did not participate in any activities at the nursery school during these times. In some situations, children were dropped off or picked up by hired drivers or by the school bus. Parents reported work commitments and other inconveniences like traffic jams. Thus, they were always in a rush, especially during drop-offs. Therefore, parents’ lack of participation with their children and teachers during this time cannot be generalised as a low level of parental involvement. They

were very much involved in other aspects of the nursery school, like the parent forum and parent-teacher meetings.

Table 6-2: Drop off and Pick-up Routines of Six Private School Parents (Nursery One and Two)

Parents	Parent-child interactions during drop-off or pick-ups.	Time spent at nursery school after drop-off or pick-up.	Helping in any activity at nursery school, for instance, tidying up after dropping off or picking up a child.	Parents tried to reach out to the child's teacher to learn anything concerning the child, gave instructions or passed important information to a teacher.	The teacher welcomed parents and children by name when they come to drop off or pick up children.	The amount of time the teacher spent with each parent when they arrived for pick-ups or drop-offs.
Parent 1 KE (private nursery school, N2)	Dad or mum usually dropped the child off and helped the child out of the car, and the child walked to the class by herself. The Child went back home by school bus.	Dad spent less than a minute during drop-offs.	No.	No. Mum or dad stopped at the gate.	Yes (teachers always welcomed children by their name, greeted them, and said goodbye as they were picked up).	None. Neither dad nor mum entered the classroom during drop-offs or pick-ups, and the child went back home by the school bus.
Parent 2 RA (private nursery school, N2)	Children were always dropped off by mum, who is a school staff member. Mostly they arrived during morning assembly time; mum walked them into school after which they found their way to the assembly ground. Children went back home by school bus.	Mum worked in the same school, so she brought the children in the morning and dropped them off at the classroom or the assembly ground if they arrived during the morning assembly. On average, she spent less than 5 minutes with the children and teacher during school drop-offs.	No.	No. Children arrived during morning assembly time.	Yes.	On average, less than 5 minutes during drop-offs. The children went back home on the school bus.
Parent 3 SH (private nursery school, N2)	Dad was an administrative staff member of the school, so he always arrived together at school with the children. The	Dad worked in the same school, so he brought the children in the morning and sometimes dropped them off in the classroom. Thus on	I never observed, but the dad mentioned volunteering one or two times in his child's class.	Sometimes. Mostly the children ran off by themselves to the classroom when they arrived with their dad.	Yes.	On average, he spent less than 5 minutes during drop-offs. The children went back home on the school bus.

	children went back home on the school bus.	average, he spent less than 5 minutes with the children and teacher during school drop-offs.				
Parent 4 WA (private nursery school, N1)	The children were dropped off either by the driver or their mum, and were picked up by the driver or their dad. When mum dropped the children off, she always took them into the classroom and greeted the teacher before leaving.	On average, less than 5 minutes. When mum dropped off the children, she entered the classroom, greeted the teacher or discussed any concerns.	No.	Sometimes, especially when mum dropped the children off, she took them to class and always greeted the teacher.	Yes.	On average, less than 5 minutes. Dad or the driver picked up the children. The teacher welcomed whoever picked up the children and sometimes shared about their day at school.
Parent 5 FO (private nursery school, N1)	No interactions, as the child was always dropped off and picked up by the driver. Usually, the driver stayed outside the gate while older siblings took the child inside the school campus.	On average, less than a minute. The driver drops off the child in front of the school gate and picks up the child from the classroom.	No.	No. The driver stopped at the gate. But once during pick-ups, the driver introduced a new driver to the teacher who would pick up the children in his absence.	Yes.	On average, less than 1 minute. The driver always entered the classroom, greeted the teacher and picked up the child.
Parent 6 AB (private nursery school, N1)	The child and her older siblings were dropped off and picked up by her mum. Sometimes the uncle picked up the child. The child is taken to school by her mum or an older sibling, who hands her over to the teacher.	On average, less than 5 minutes. Mum dropped off the child in front of the school gate and the child is picked up from the classroom.	No.	Yes, mum usually came in and greeted the teacher before handing over the child to her. During pick-ups, she always asked about her child's wellbeing.	Yes.	On average, less than 5 minutes. The teacher welcomed whoever picked her up and sometimes shared about their day at school.

Figure 6.13 illustrates drop-offs for private nursery school children.



Figure 6-13: Drop-offs, Private Nursery School

6.5 Barriers to Parental Involvement in Children's Learning

Information from the observations, interviews and field-notes suggest that parents were interested in being fully involved in their children's learning but sometimes faced difficulties like tight work schedules and the challenges of single parenting. Some parents had problems with the homework given to their children. In contrast, others complained of the economic situation of the country, high cost of living and traffic jams which prevented them from dashing out of their offices quickly to attend school meetings.

Working Conditions: All eight parents interviewed complained of tight work schedules, and this was a barrier to their full engagement with their children's learning. During the observations, children who were dropped off by their parents were left in front of the school gate, and the security officer ushered them in. Parents explained that they did so in order to catch up with work. KE's mum was very busy, and sometimes she travelled out of the country for work. Nevertheless, she worked together with her husband to care for their daughter. She faced challenges in helping with homework due to the nature of her job, especially when she travelled out of the country. Thus, she engaged the services of a home tutor to assist her child in her studies (KE's mum, private nursery school, N2).

RA's mum worked extra hours beyond her regular working schedule to earn additional income, which was a limitation for her.

In my case, I do extra classes to make some extra money, and I arrive home late and tired, but I always try to help them at home. When we get home, the first thing I try to do is check if they have any homework. In a case where I feel tired, or the children are not motivated, we usually study for a lesser time. For instance, if there is homework, we will struggle just to do homework and end there. We will not go above that time to study something else. (RA's mum, private nursery school, N2)

Data from the questionnaires showed eight out of 13 parents who responded were engaged in full-time employment, as seen in Figure 6.14.

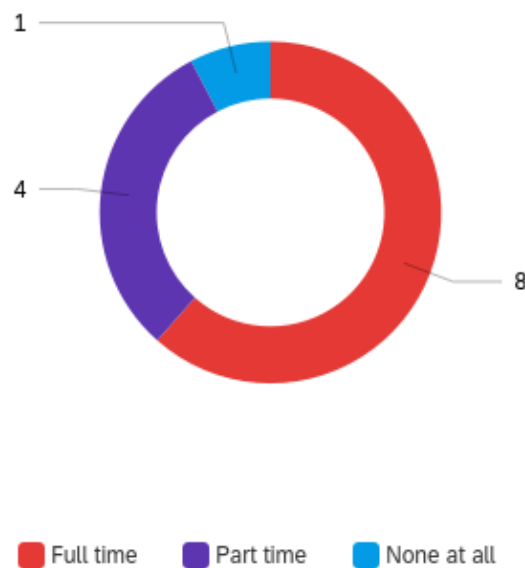


Figure 6-14: Amount of Time Spent in Paid Employment per Day

Challenges with Homework: Work commitments prevented some parents from helping with their child's homework. Two of the parent participants also said they faced challenges with the kind of homework sent home. RA's mum faced problems with helping her children do homework because the homework instructions were hard to understand. In such a case, she must call the teacher to get an explanation on how to complete the homework. WA's mum faced challenges with homework, especially when she travelled. She also complained of a lack of resources to complete homework.

Language Barrier: Language was another limiting factor. The private nursery school was an English school but was open to both English and French-speaking Cameroonians. Five out of the 13 parent participants were French-speaking Cameroonians (Table 5.1). Although none of the interviewed parents noted language as a barrier, I observed a parent completing the questionnaire at school with the help of the teacher who assisted with their translation. Teacher 4 at the public nursery school also emphasised language as a challenge for French-speaking parents, saying: “French-speaking parents have a language barrier. Sometimes I am called by these parents to explain the homework for their children in French. This is an English school, so I cannot give children homework using French” (Teacher 4, private nursery school).

Single Parenting: This was not the case of a single parent but a married parent who must play the role of the child’s father and mother when the father was working abroad. Two of the parent participants expressed difficulties in carrying out their duties because they played the role of both mother and father in their children’s lives. RA’s dad was out of the country, so RA’s mum needed to support RA’s learning on her own both at home and at school. AB’s mum said, “a busy work schedule is one of the barriers I face. Also, my husband works out of the country, so I must take the place of mum and dad at the same time” (AB’s mum, private nursery school, N2).

Economic Situation of the Country: Douala is the country's economic capital. It is also a city with a high cost of living; thus, families must work hard to meet their living expenses. SH’s dad mentioned the high cost of living and traffic jams as limitations that the parents face.

The high cost of living in the city of Douala makes parents work so hard. Also, there are a lot of traffic jams that prevent parents from dashing out of their offices or places of work to catch up with school activities. (SH’s dad, private nursery school, N2)

6.6 Parents’ Beliefs about Parental Involvement in Early Childhood Learning

Parents’ beliefs were assessed based on reasons for choosing the school for their children, views about home and school involvement, and the types of education valued for children at this age.

Reasons for Choosing the School: The private nursery school parent participants reported that they chose the school based on recommendations from friends and families, and also the idea that the school offered quality education. RA’s mum was a staff member at the school and was

confident of the quality of education her children would receive. She felt so comfortable because she could step in at any time to check on her child. Furthermore, the teachers were always ready to give answers to questions.

SH's dad emphasised quality education as one of the reasons he considered when deciding to enrol his children in this private nursery school. He also noted how the school encouraged parental involvement by welcoming parents' input and ideas.

This nursery school is the talk of the town in terms of quality education, especially at an early age. I visited a home, and I met children who studied at this school, and they could read and speak so eloquently, and I was so impressed. So, I decided to bring my children here. Teachers are welcoming, and the doors of the class are always open for parents. The school has an open policy that welcomes parents to drop in at any time, and you just need to pass in the office to notify them. It also encourages constructive criticism and suggestions from parents. For instance, we have academic retreats with the bigger children in the school, which was an idea that came in from the home [a suggestion from parents]. We also have the Parent Forum, which is managed by parents and last year we had the funfair, an activity suggested by parents. This brought parents, children and students together. (SH's dad, private nursery school, N2)

WA's mum responded that she chose the school based on recommendations from family and friends, and how the school fostered values that were important to her and her friends. There was an opportunity for parents to contribute and be listened to, and she also made school visits so that she could get information for herself.

It was based on recommendations from friends and family. My husband wanted a good school for our children. When I visited [another] school, the environment was ok but getting more information, one of the feedback we got was that the teaching was not the best, the school is owned by a businessman, and you know when a business person runs a school, the pedagogic part of it is absent, and it is just more of the business part. So, my boss's wife recommended this school to me, and a few of my husband's colleagues told him about this school. I like this school because they do not only teach children to pass their exams, but they bring children up in a Christian way focusing on the moral

aspects of education. The school staff always welcomes me, and I always can express my ideas and concerns, especially in the Parent Forum. (WA's mum, private nursery school, N1)

Parents Views on Parental Involvement: Despite the challenges listed by parents, which included demanding work schedules, language barriers, high cost of living, and challenges in completing homework, the parents acknowledged their essential role in children's education.

SH's dad faced challenges with his work schedule but tried to assist his child whenever he could. He believed it was necessary for parents to constantly be involved in their children's learning.

I think every parent needs to assist their children in learning, set educational goals, and so we must always check to know how the child is doing. For instance, if we find out that a child has problems with reading, we could go to the school and ask questions or step in to help. Parents should create more time for their children and not only go about chasing money. Children have been trained into monsters by nannies because parents are not always there. Parents should not focus on making money and lose their children in the process. (SH's dad, private nursery school, N2)

WA's mum thought it was important for parents to be involved in their children's learning to understand their capabilities. Thus, parents should prioritise and consider what is essential. RA's mum felt that when parents engage in children's education, it boosts the children's confidence. She also emphasised the father's role in children's development.

I think parents should get more involved in their children's learning because what the child learns from a parent is different from what they learn from others. For instance, we have a seminar organised by the school involving parents that are held twice a month called "the world needs a father". I always try to attend this because my husband is not around, and this seminar lays more emphasis on the place of the dad in a child's life. So, no matter how the mum may get involved in the child's life, there will always be a gap if the dad is absent. (RA's mum, private nursery school, N2)

FD's dad believed parental involvement created a good foundation in children's education. He felt it was important to assist his son at home to make him grow into a better person tomorrow.

He was very concerned about parents neglecting their responsibilities and the effect on children's behaviour.

Parents should always encourage and motivate their children. Direct them, and you will see the good output. Generally, especially within the context of this country, parental involvement is poor because many parents lack the time because they involve [themselves] more in their own work and neglect the needs of the children. Recently there was a case in a secondary school in Yaoundé where a student stabbed a teacher to death. This is because the child lacks home training and not because the teachers are not doing their job. (FD's dad, private nursery school, N1)

Type of Education Valued for Children: The education valued by these parents for children of this age was moral education, Christian education, and learning through hands-on activities. These types of learning valued by parents go in line with the school's principles and values, and may be an indication of what parents regarded as 'quality' and a reason why the school was chosen. Moral education was evident through the annual thanksgiving organised by the school in collaboration with families. The school encouraged togetherness, love and kindness, by urging families to donate gifts to be taken to the less privileged. The school also promotes hands-on activity learning and each class carried out a project which was often displayed to parents during the Science Fair.

SH's dad valued moral education in addition to what his children learned from school.

The most important things I try to teach my children apart from schoolwork are values. Say thank you, sorry, hygiene rules like wash hands before eating, wash hands after using the bathroom. I also involve them in housework. For instance, if they spill water, they must clean it up even if they don't do it well, so they will learn that they must be responsible for their actions. I also lay emphasis on Christianity. I make them understand that there is a God, a supreme being that I pray to, and they need to pray to as well because these are things they will hardly get from society. (SH's dad, private nursery school, N2)

RA's and FD's parents valued learning by hands-on activity at this age for their children. FD's dad felt his son quickly understood when he learned by doing. "I think manipulative learning

is particularly important at this age, learning by a hands-on activity, which is the private nursery school's policy, learning by doing" (RA's mum, private nursery school, N2).

WA's mum valued Christian education in addition to what her children learned from school.

One of our priorities is bringing up our children in a Christian way. We always hold evening devotion at 8 pm every day. My focus is on how to make my children different, not only to be intelligent but to be morally upright, to make them fit in the society after school life. Teach them how to speak to people, to greet, and to say thank you. My mother-in-law thinks I am too hard on them. I guess if such lessons are missed at this stage, it will be challenging to catch up, so I do what I must do. (WA's mum, private nursery school, N1)

6.7 Teachers' Beliefs about Parental Involvement in Early Childhood Learning

The private nursery school teacher's beliefs were assessed on four different levels. The level of importance teachers placed on home or school involvement, their beliefs about parental involvement in children's transition from home to the nursery school, beliefs about parents' expertise, and their general understanding of parental involvement.

Home and School Involvement: The private nursery school teachers believed that home and school involvement is essential to facilitating children's learning. They also thought parental involvement should be the same for Nursery One and Two because these are critical stages for child development. Home-based involvement was conceptualised narrowly as supporting school-based learning rather than as also offering learning opportunities through the many activities carried out at home.

Teacher 1 believed the parent's role was to provide support for school-based learning, which was necessary at all levels of nursery school education. She expressed that parental involvement with children was crucial since parents spend more time with them on a daily basis.

Home involvement is very important because teachers spend just about 4 hours a day with children, so parents spend more time with their children and [they] need to reinforce what has been learned at school with the children at home. So apart from their sleep time, the remaining hours spent at home should be used constructively; otherwise, children will lag behind as far as their academic progress is concerned. The age-range for Nursery One and Two is 3 to 6 years

old, and that is the absorbent mind stage. Thus, the child absorbs everything in his environment; therefore, parental involvement should be the same for both classes. (Teacher 1, private nursery school)

Importantly, Teacher 2 stressed that the home is the foundation for children's education and the teacher's role was to respond to parents' aspirations and wishes for their children.

Both home and school involvement are important because education does not only begin when the child comes to school. The parent decides who the child wants to be, and the educator is there to enforce. Parental involvement should be intense throughout the nursery school age because this is a very crucial age of development. (Teacher 2, private nursery school)

Beliefs on Parental Involvement in Children's Transition from Home to Nursery School:

The teachers believed that parental involvement was unnecessary for children to transition from the home to nursery school. The teachers reported that parents were invited to spend a limited amount of time in the classroom on the first week of the academic year. Teachers 2 and 3 believe it was the teacher's role to comfort and help the child adapt during this period.

I get the list of children's names, their pictures, the names that the parents call them at home, what they like, for instance, singing, dancing and colouring, so I can entertain them and make them feel comfortable when they come to class. (Teacher 2, private nursery school)

Teacher 3 adds:

We welcome children with a smile, sing songs, read stories, watch the TV to make the child comfortable, and when the child is so focused on playing or watching the TV, the parent can just sneak out. Parents could stay for 20 to 30 minutes for a week, but we ask parents to stop staying after a week in order for the child to adapt to the environment independently. (Teacher 3, private nursery school)

One of the teachers explained how she encouraged parents to drop off their children a week before the school officially began to help organise the classroom and become acquainted with their new environment. She reported that parents were not encouraged to stay during this time.

A week before the academic year begins, I come to school to prepare and arrange my classroom so, I encourage parents to send new children to the school during that week so we can arrange the classroom together. I don't encourage parents to come along with them because they will expect their parents to continue staying with them in class. When they come for their first day and cry, I comfort them, sing songs and watch videos with the help of other teachers.
(Teacher 4, private nursery school)

Parents' Professional Expertise: All the teachers interviewed believed not all parents had the professional knowledge to participate in children's learning at the nursery school. For Teacher 1, parents have not been professionally trained as teachers; thus, parents could acquire skills or techniques for educating their children by willingly coming to learn from teachers.

In my opinion, I don't think parents have the pedagogic know-how because there are teacher training schools that educate teachers on how to transmit knowledge to children in a way that they can understand. But I think if parents come, they can learn from teachers and they can be efficiently involved.
(Teacher 1, private nursery school)

Similarly, Teacher 2 believes parents do not have the professional expertise to be involved in school-based learning, but teachers can empower parents. She noted that the school trains parents to learn and acquire skills to educate their children through the Parent School programme. Teachers 3 and 4 believed that some parents might have enough professional expertise to be involved in children's learning. Teacher 3 took a different stance from the other teachers by accepting that all parents could participate in school-based education.

In my opinion, not all parents have the professional expertise, but some can. I also think if parents have an open mind about participating in school, they can do it. For instance, my colleague once asked parents to volunteer to teach in the class, but some declined, saying they could not do it. I don't think parents should only focus [on learning] at home, if they have the time, they can also get involved in the school. (Teacher 3, private nursery school)

Indicators of Parental Involvement: Teachers were also asked to share some of the things parents did that indicated that they were involved in their children's learning. According to Teacher 1, parents were actively engaged when they responded to comments or letters from

the school, and when children completed their homework and projects on time. Teacher 2 believed that parents were involved in learning if they called to find out about children's learning, school events or about children's homework. "For instance, if they miss Parent School, they can call to request information about what was done on that day" (Teacher 2, private nursery school). Similarly, Teacher 4 said that parental involvement was visible when parents attended school meetings, ensured children completed their homework and called to inquire about children's learning or wellbeing, especially for French-speaking parents who face language barriers. She also viewed parental involvement as a collaborative process where teachers and parents support each other to enhance children's learning experience. "Some French-speaking parents send back homework with a note if they don't understand, while other parents correct spelling errors I make accidentally in a child's book" (Teacher 4, private nursery school).

Teacher 3 saw the parent's role as providing support for school-based learning and helping children complete school tasks at home.

When parents come in to inquire about children's daily lessons, ask about homework if no homework is sent, and help children do their homework. In cases where parents don't help children to do homework at home, the children cannot catch up in class when compared to other children who have proper follow up at home. (Teacher 3, private nursery school)

Teachers' goals and agendas for children's education may hinder or promote parental involvement. It can be inferred from the responses that teachers regarded themselves as the child's primary educators, while parents humbly supplemented school work at home. Although the school portrayed a positive climate by providing many opportunities for involvement in children's learning, such perceptions by teachers affected parental involvement both at home and at the nursery school.

6.7.1 Didactics for Private Nursery School Teachers

The private school teachers' instructional approach was learner-centred. Therefore, close interaction existed between teachers and children, and children were active participants in the teaching and learning process. A variety of learning resources were available (movable letters and numbers, puzzles, fruits and animal toys, building blocks, storybooks) for children to explore and apply different strategies to engage with resources. The teacher was observed to

provide encouragement when necessary. Children’s completed worksheets were displayed on the classroom walls, and according to Teacher 1, children had the opportunity to see their work and what their friends had achieved. “This promotes positive competition and encourages them to work harder. When parents come into the classroom, especially when we organise “open day”, they are happy to see what their children can do” (Teacher 1, private nursery school). Figure 6.15 represents Nursery One and Nursery Two classrooms, while Figure 6.16 shows children’s worksheets displayed on the classroom walls and pictures of some play-based educational resources.

Nursery One Classroom

Nursery Two Classroom



Figure 6-15: Private Nursery School Classrooms



Figure 6-16: Class Activity Illustrated on Classroom Wall including other Play Resources

In addition, teachers reported using audio-visuals for teaching. There was a Smart TV in each classroom where children watched educational videos during free time and just before the close of the day pick-up time. The Nursery Two children also used LCD writing tablets for their class lessons. Figure 6.17 shows Nursery Two children using LCD writing tablets.



Figure 6-17: Picture of Nursery Two Children using LCD Writing Tablets, Private Nursery School

6.8 School Administration and Teachers' Role in Parents' Participation in Children's Learning

The private nursery school's role in encouraging parents' participation in children's learning was evident in the various ways (parent school, school events, communication with families, report cards, in which the school connected with families, Cultural Week and home visits) as reported by both teachers and parents. Figure 6.18 was generated from parents' questionnaires and depicts the various ways in which the school connected with the home; the main ways being through phone calls and text messages. Thirteen parents recorded their responses, with parents being asked to tick all the forms of communication that applied to them. Thus, the numbers on the figure represent the response counts.

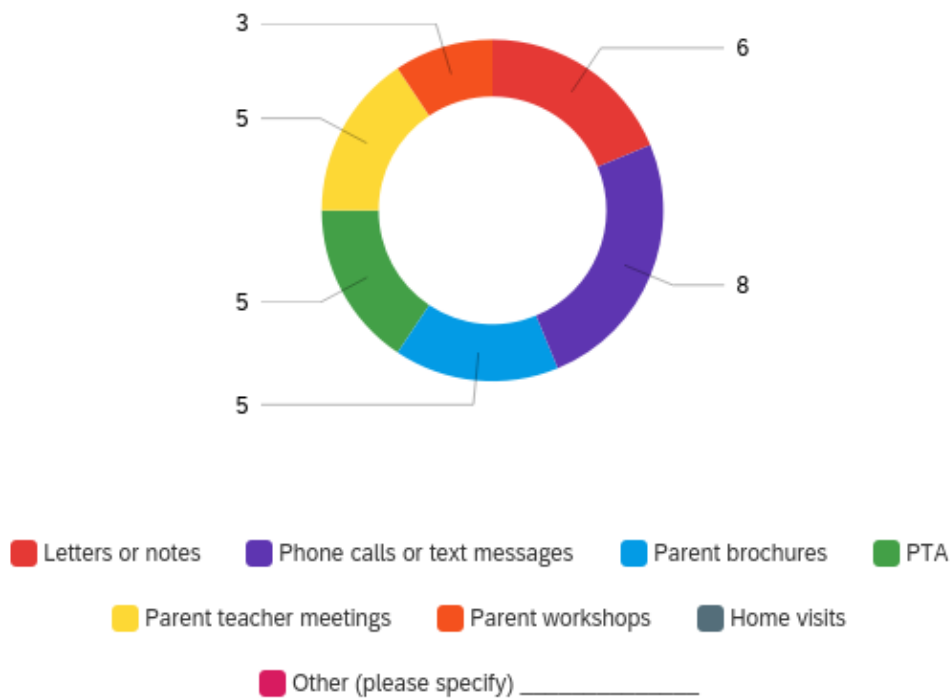


Figure 6-18: Number of Private Nursery School Parents using Different Forms of Communication with the School (n=13)

6.8.1 Parent School

Parents were invited for workshops in which parent education topics were prepared and presented during a lecture. There was room for question-and-answer sessions and the sharing of parenting ideas between parents and teachers. Again, a one-way view was conveyed in that it was understood that parents can learn from teachers, but not vice versa. Teacher 1 explained how the parent-school educated parents on how to help their children study at home.

We connect with parents through Parent School, where we educate parents on the importance of their involvement in children’s learning. In our context, parents are busy. Thus, we give them tips on how to participate in their children’s learning, for instance, assigning tasks to children to do in their absence. (Teacher 1, private nursery school)

6.8.2 School Events

School events, as elaborated in Section 6.4, promoted close relationships between families and the school. The private school teachers and parents listed a variety of school events such as the Open House, Cultural Week, Thanksgiving Ceremonies, Graduation and Award-giving

Ceremonies, and Christmas Parties as ways in which the school connected with families. Teacher 1 listed different school events which the school organised to promote closer relationships with families.

The school promotes close relationships with families by organising activities like thanksgiving, where we share gifts, a Cultural Week where parents and children come around with their traditional attires and make presentations. We also have the “Open House” day where parents are invited to visit the school and look around. We organise Parent-Teacher Conferences at least twice every trimester whereby parents are invited to sit one-on-one with teachers to discuss children’s progress. (Teacher 1, private nursery school)

Teacher 3 said that the school builds close relationships by inviting parents to go on field-trips with their children. The school invited parents during the Cultural Week, Christmas Show, and during the End-of-term Ceremonies to present children’s report cards. Children do some presentations in the form of dancing or drama during such events before report cards are given out.

According to Teacher 2, though the school formed close relationships with families through school events and extracurricular activities, they still needed to work more to encourage parents. Teacher 4 of the private nursery school mentioned that the school invited parents for school events and awarded certificates to parents acknowledging their participation in their children’s learning.


6.8.3 Communication with Families

Teachers reported that they stayed connected with families by communicating either face-to-face or through phone calls, letters and notes. Teacher 3 explained that the school connected with families through Parent-Teacher Conferences, newsletters and phone calls. They shared information about the whole school through WhatsApp, and the principal is said to run a WhatsApp forum only for parents. The private nursery school newsletter (Figure 6.19) is a monthly newsletter that keeps parents informed on upcoming school events, which maintains that connection between the home and school. Teacher 1 communicated with parents to provide study advice depending on the child's performance in class. “For children that are lagging behind in their studies, we realize they really need parent’s support, and so we make comments

and write short recommendation letters for parents to follow” (Teacher 1, private nursery school).

Teacher 2 communicated with parents to encourage them to provide support for their children.

I encourage parents to participate in their children’s learning. I make comments to remind them of what they can do to help their children. When children do well or acquire new skills, I make calls to parents and send a certificate of encouragement with the child to take home. (Teacher 2, private nursery school)



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

“Children are human beings to whom respect is due, superior to us by reason of their innocence and of the greater possibilities of their future.” – DR. MARIA MONTESSORI

“The greatest day in your life and mine is when we take total responsibility for our attitudes” – JOHN C. MAXWELL

NOVEMBER 20th DEWEY THANKSGIVING AND AWARD CEREMONY!!!

TOGETHER, LET'S BUILD AN ARK OF LOVING KINDNESS.

Dear parent,

The entire Dewey Family is extremely delighted to have you grace the occasion of tomorrow's **THANKSGIVING AND AWARD CEREMONY** with your presence.

It will be an opportunity for you to encourage your child by celebrating his accomplishments in the course of the First Trimester as well as commune with the rest of the Dewey Family. Your child along with his mates have prepared an awesome package of presentations, songs and dances to make the event one of its kind - **MEMORABLE!!!** Your presence is therefore indispensable. As you prepare for tomorrow's event, these few reminders will surely be helpful: ➡

Arrival time for students:	8h00 latest.
Arrival time for parents:	9h00
Start of Event:	10h00 prompt.
Close of Event:	14h00 latest.

Common meal: As has always been our tradition, each family is expected to bring along a common meal when coming, consisting of soft drinks and finger foods like fries, soya, cakes, buns, chicken, sandwiches, pancakes, meat/fish pies, sandwiches and doughnuts to share with every other member of the Dewey family.

Visits to the Orphanages: The Year Three and Nine classes have been selected to represent the Dewey family at the orphanages along with any willing parents. The visits are scheduled to take place between the 25th and 29th of November 2019. More information on the specific dates and permission slips will be communicated later. We are truly grateful to all our parents and teachers who have contributed to see to the success of the visits and appeal to those who have not yet responded to do so as the door is still open. As we prepare for tomorrow's event, let's bear in mind what one wise man rightly said that: **The More We Share, The More We Have.**

DATES TO REMEMBER!

Wednesday, 20th November 2019

- ❖ Thanksgiving / Award ceremony

Thursday 21st - Sunday 24th November 2019

- ❖ First Trimester Holiday.

Monday, 25th November 2019

- ❖ Start of Second Trimester

A COMMUNITY APPROACH TO LEARNING.

1

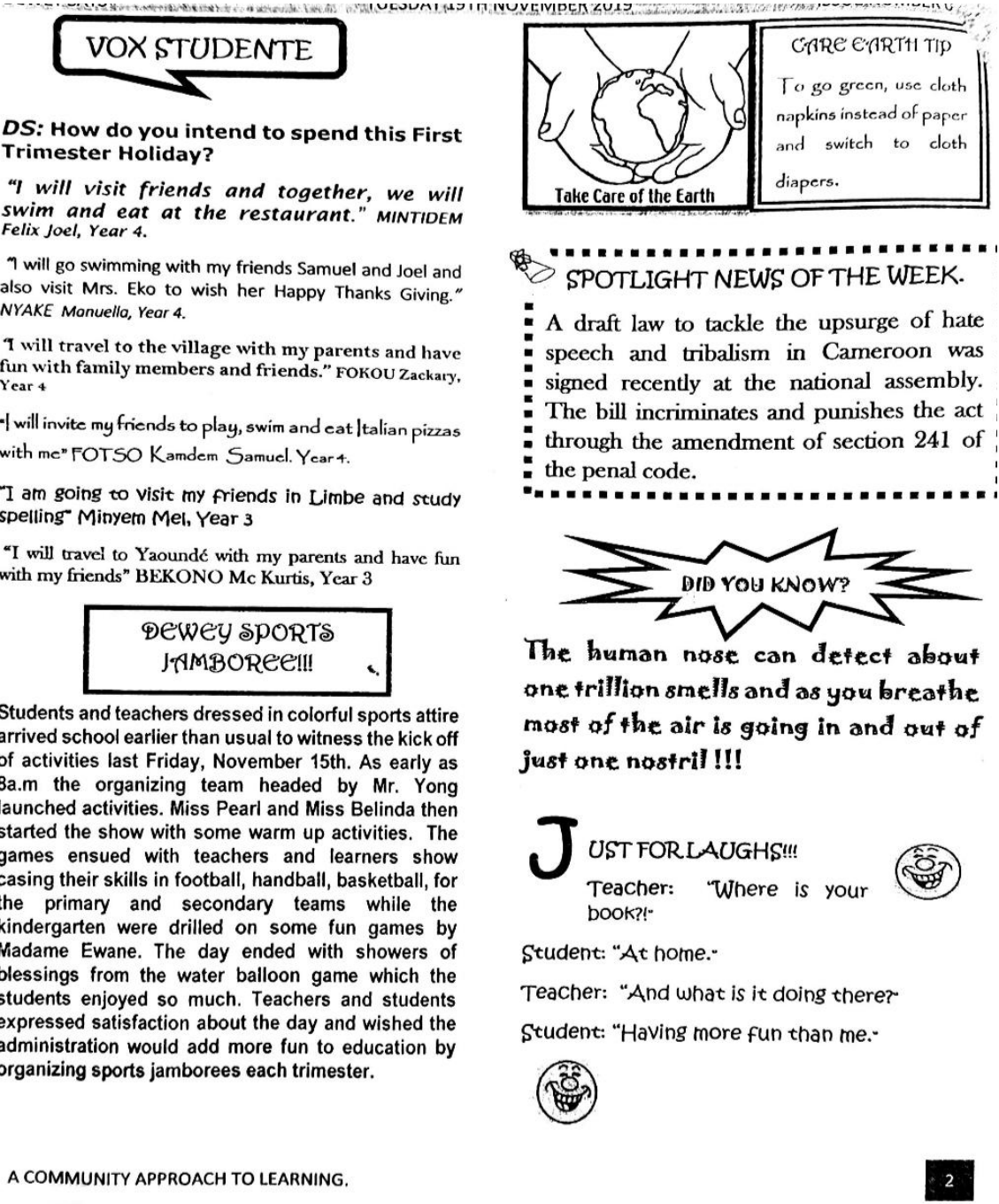


Figure 6-19: Private Nursery School Newsletter

6.8.4 Report Cards

Report cards were used by both teachers and parents of the private nursery school as another medium of communication between the home and school. The private nursery school teachers issued progress reports at the end of each month and report cards at the end of each trimester. Teacher 4 explained the contents of the monthly progress reports and end of trimester report cards:

I send home progress reports monthly, and it explains the child's weaknesses and strengths. The progress reports assess communication skills, adaptive and self-help skills, cognitive skills and general comments. The report cards assess the same skills but have images. I added the pictures describing the skills assessed. Comments made range from 'acquired', 'still to acquire' and 'not acquired' [skills]. (Teacher 4, private nursery school)

Most parents expressed their satisfaction with the contents of the report card, except KE's and SH's parents, who gave certain reasons for why they were not satisfied.

The previous year, I was not satisfied with all that was reported in my child's report card. For instance, the teacher mentioned she had not understood shapes perfectly, but I realised she was doing well when we learned about shapes at home. So, I had a talk with the teacher concerning this. (KE's mum, private nursery school, N2)

The report cards assess children's skills such as communication skills, social skills and motor skills. My oldest son has an academic report card where you can see how he performed in maths, science and English. I must confess that the Nursery One report is difficult to understand. I will prefer the standard report cards where children are assessed and given marks or percentage scores. (SH's dad, private nursery school, N2)

Assessments followed the traditional preschool approach with predefined goals to be achieved at each stage, aimed at school readiness. This approach was criticised by Bennet (2010) on the basis that children were evaluated based on predefined competencies. Notwithstanding, there was also a focus on holistic learning and a child-centred pedagogy in which the child actively participated in the learning process through interacting with educators and peers.

The Cameroon nursery school curriculum emphasises that assessments are to be carried out mainly to understand children's progress through observation checklists, samples of learners' work, oral and written quizzes, portfolios, willingness to participate in the classroom and school activities (Ministry of Basic Education, 2018a). The private nursery school report cards assessed children's personal skills, cognitive, motor, social and communication skills and competencies in a range of learning areas, including language, arts, mathematics, science, social studies, motor skills and study skills. The assessment approach tended to be summative,

rating the child in different learning areas, and giving little consideration to the contexts in which learning occurred.

Pictures of Nursery One and Two report cards, and progress reports are shown in the subsequent Figures (6.20 to 6.23).

Comments

FIRST TRIMESTER
 Samuel is a caring and polite little boy. He follows instructions and gives the best he can. He demonstrates a willing and conscientious effort in his daily work. He has made good progress in his cognitive, oral communication and adaptability skills. He should keep up the Super job.

SECOND TRIMESTER


THIRD TRIMESTER

GROWTH RATE

WEIGHT (Kg) AND HEIGHT (cm)			
	T1	T2	T3
Weight	15		
Height	90		

Homeroom teacher's signature _____

PERSONAL INFORMATION



PERSONAL INFORMATION

ID NUMBER

NAME

CLASS

DATE OF BIRTH

SCHOOL YEAR

DATE

ATTENDANCE

	Trim 1	Trim 2	Trim 3
Trimster			
Total days	60		
Absent	00		
Tardy	00		

Next level recommended _____

Rating	
A	ACQUIRED SKILL / ALWAYS
S	SKILL IN PROGRESS/ SOMETIMES
N	NOT YET/NEEDS ATTENTION

Principal's signature _____











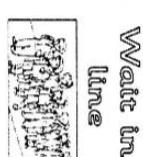

Personal skills 		Cognitive skills 			
<i>I take care of my personal needs</i> A	<i>I use outdoor play equipment</i> S	<i>I relax and rest at nap time</i> A	<i>I indicate positive feelings about myself</i> A	<i>I sing familiar songs and rhymes</i> A	<i>I can classify and categorize sets</i> A
Motor skills 					
<i>I care for toys and school materials</i> A	<i>I can work independently</i> A	<i>I use the learning centers consistently</i> S	<i>I draw, paint, and color pictures</i> A	<i>I can associate related items</i> A	<i>I am curious about my environment</i> A
Social skills 					
<i>I show fine visual motor coordination</i> A	<i>I show gross motor coordination</i> A	<i>I march and move to music</i> A	<i>I use tools and materials for construction</i> A	<i>I am interested in stories and books</i> A	<i>I learn concepts presented</i> A
Social skills 				Communication skills 	
<i>I share and play cooperatively</i> A	<i>I participate in group activities</i> A	<i>I follow school rules and procedures</i> A	<i>I speak in complete sentences</i> A	<i>I listen and follow directions</i> A	<i>I use acceptable grammar and punctuation</i> S

Figure 6-20: Nursery One Report Card, Private Nursery School

Nursery One Report Card: The Nursery One report card contained demographic information such as the child's ID number, name, class, date of birth, school year, date, weight, and height.

The child's weight and height are recorded each trimester, and attendance was also recorded per trimester. Children's personal skills, cognitive, motor, social and communication skills were assessed and rated as 'A', which means Acquired Skill or Always, 'S' meaning Skill in Progress or Sometimes, 'N' meaning Not Acquired or Needs Attention and '-' for Skill not Introduced. There was also a section where the teacher could add extra comments for each trimester.

Personal skills were assessed in relation to how well a child can care for their individual needs, use outdoor equipment, relax and rest at nap time, care for toys and school materials, work independently, and use the learning centres consistently.

Motor skills assessed the child's ability to show fine visual-motor coordination, gross motor coordination, and if the child marches and moves to the music.

Social skills investigated how a child played and cooperatively participated in a group activity and followed school rules and procedures.

Cognitive skills assessed how the child indicated positive feelings about his or herself, sang familiar songs and rhymes, classified and categorised sets, drew, painted and coloured pictures, associated related items, are curious about the environment using tools and materials for construction, interested in stories and books and learned concepts presented.

Lastly, communication skills assessed the child's ability to speak in complete sentences, listen and follow directions, and use acceptable grammar and punctuation.



PROGRESS REPORT

Date: **21st OCTOBER 2019**

Name: **FOMOLO DANIEL**

Level: **PRE SCHOOL**

Date of Birth: **APRIL 13th 2017**

Teacher: **MISS TATAW BERNADETTE LAM**

Oral communication	✓ Good Progress	Satisfactory	Needs Improvement
Fomolo Daniel is a cute little boy who is always composed when communicating with people. Thanks to educative videos, songs, rhymes and constant dialoguing, both at home and in school as well as peer learning. He should keep building up this skill through listening to stories and retelling them.			
Adaptability and self help	✓ Good Progress	Satisfactory	Needs Improvement
Daniel has adapted smoothly so far. He takes good care of his property and has good self-help skills like washing his hands and putting on his pants by himself after using the toilet. He should be further encouraged to keep doing things by himself like putting on his shoes and dressing up back home.			
Cognitive skill	✓ Good Progress	Satisfactory	Needs Improvement
He is a very smart and intelligent learner who has shown noticeable improvement in most of the concepts taught in class. Also, he resist the urge to be distracted by others. He can count numbers from 1 to 10 and identify numbers 1 to 5. He can also say the alphabet from A to G and associate words to letters A and B.			
Social skill	✓ Good Progress	Satisfactory	Needs Improvement
Daniel is very friendly, polite and kind. He knows the names of all his class mates. He participates fully in kinder educative routines, singing and dancing actively. He also follows instructions promptly.			
Physical/motor skills.	✓ Good Progress	Satisfactory	Needs Improvement
His fine and gross motor skills are blossoming. He partakes actively during sporting activities and during small games with his friends. He does a lot of coloring and picking of grains .All these activities have helped build his physical and moto skills.			
General working skills	✓ Good Progress	Satisfactory	Needs Improvement
Fomolo is an active and hardworking student though, he has not assimilate all concepts taught. He is always ready to learn and participates in all activities. He is working according to the standard of the class. Beautiful job, Daniel.			

Teacher's Signature:

Figure 6-21: Nursery One Progress Report, Private Nursery School

The progress reports for Nursery One were assessed monthly and sent to parents. Six skills were evaluated which included, oral communication, adaptability and self-help, cognitive skills, social skills, physical and motor skills, and general working skills. Children's abilities

were determined using three scales, Good progress, Satisfactory or Needs Improvement. The teacher added comments under each skill describing the child's ability.


COMMENTS

FIRST TRIMESTER
 Justine is a smart and ready learner who pays keen attention during the learning session, making relevant contributions when necessary. He follows instructions easily and uses his class time constructively. He shows perseverance on challenging assignments and is able to transition easily from one activity to the next. He demonstrates good communication, cognitive and social skills. He performed well in all subjects, scoring 87.13 % in Language Art, 94.71% in Math, 93.39% in Science and 94.74% in Social Studies with an overall percentage of **92.49**. He is at level three and on **B Honor Roll**.

SECOND TRIMESTER
 Justine has made remarkable progress so far. He has commendable reading stamina, reasoning and problem solving skills and is an eager peer teacher. He improved in Language Art this trimester with a percentage of 91.30, in Math with a percentage of 94.96 and in Social studies scoring 97.57%. He however dropped significantly in Science, scoring 83.76 %. He therefore needs to pay attention to the subject and continue practicing as he prepares for the crucial third trimester. He is an example to his mates. He obtained an overall percentage of **91.90** and is on **B Honor Roll**.

THIRD TRIMESTER

Homeroom teacher's signature _____



PERSONAL INFORMATION

ID NUMBER	0386/17
NAME	
CLASS	Reception
DATE OF BIRTH	
SCHOOL YEAR	2019/2020
DATE	13 th March 2020

ATTENDANCE

Trimester	Trim 1	Trim 2	Trim 3
Total days	60	60	60
Absent	00	01	
Tardy	00	00	

Next level recommended _____

Rating

A	ACQUIRED SKILL
S	SKILL IN PROGRESS
N	NOT YET/NEEDS ATTENTION
-	CONCEPT NOT TAUGHT

Principal's signature _____

Areas of learning	Trimester 1	Trimester 2	Trimester 3
-------------------	-------------	-------------	-------------

Language Art	Level 3	Level 3
Oral communication	S	A
Reading/Literature	S	A
Hand writing skills	S	S
Creative Writing Skills	S	S
Phonological/Phonemic Awareness	S	A
Identification and writing of name	S	A

Mathematics	Level 3	Level 3
Measurement	-	S
Algebraic reasoning	S	S
Number sense	A	A
Data analysis	S	S
Geometry and spatial sense	-	S

Science	Level 3	Level 3
Physical science	S	S
Earth science	S	S
Life science	S	S
Science Processes and Inquiry	-	S

Social studies	Level 3	Level 3
Civics	S	S
Geography	S	S
History	S	S

Physical Education	Level 3	Level 3
Following instructions	A	A

Working with others	S	A
Motor Skills	Level 3	Level 3
Fine Motor skills	S	S
Gross motor skills	S	S

Art	Level 3	Level 3
Color recognition and usage	S	A
Lines recognition and usage	S	A
Shapes recognition and usage	S	A

Study skills	Level 3	Level 3
Independent work skills	S	A
Following directions	S	A
Work presentation	S	S
Socialization skills	S	A
Class participation	S	A

Key

Level 4	Student consistently demonstrates the required knowledge and skill. Achievement exceeds standards.
Level 3	Student demonstrates most of required knowledge and skill. Achievement meets standards.
Level 2	Student demonstrates most of required knowledge and skill. Achievement approaches standards.
Level 1	Student demonstrates some of required knowledge and skill in limited ways. Achievement falls much below standards.
NA	Not assessed this term.

GROWTH RATE
WEIGHT (Kg) AND HEIGHT (cm)

	T1	T2	T3
Weight	21	23	
Height	112	114	

Figure 6-22: Nursery Two Report Card, Private Nursery School

Nursery Two Report Card: Nursery One and Two private nursery school report cards reported similarities in demographic information while reporting different information in the

skills assessed. The goal for each level was clearly defined. Children were assessed in the same learning areas as in reports from both nurseries, including language, arts, mathematics, science, social studies, motor skills, arts and study skills. An additional area that was not present in the Nursery One report card known as the Key was provided to explain what the different levels meant. For each level, children's progress was rated as 'A', which means Acquired Skill, 'S' meaning Skill in Progress, 'N' for Not Yet or Needs Attention and '-' for Concept Not Taught. The two columns on the report card show reports for the first and second trimester enabling parents to see their children's progress during each trimester. The assessment criterion was in line with curriculum requirements noted in the Ministry of Basic Education's (2018b) teacher handbook for nursery and primary education. There was also a section where the teacher could add further comments from each trimester.

Level 4 means that the student consistently demonstrates the required knowledge and skill (Achievement exceeds the standard). Level 3 explains that the student shows most of the required knowledge and skills (Achievement meets the standard). Level 2 means the student demonstrates most of the necessary knowledge and skills (Achievement approaches the standard). Level 1 is for a student who shows some of the required knowledge and skills in limited ways (Achievement falls much below the standard). Lastly, NA meant Not assessed this term. The child's level is stated for each area of learning, whether the skill had been acquired, or it is still to be acquired or has not been acquired.

Dewey International School of Applied Sciences										www.disscameroon.com									
Monthly Assessment Sheet										E-mail: info@disscameroon.com									
Student: JEAN MATHIEU NUNTONSI TACHO										Month: 20-Nov-2019									
										Class: Reception									
Subject: Science					Subject: Language Art														
No	Home Work		Test		Projects		Exams		No	Home Work		Test		Projects		Exams			
	Score	On	Score	On	Score	On	Score	On		Score	On	Score	On	Score	On	Score	On		
September	20	20	30	30					September	50	50	67	75						
October	30	30	49	56	18	20	53	57	October	50	50	90	107	18	20	93	105		
Sum Total	50	50	79	86	18	20	53	57	Sum Total	100	100	157	182	18	20	93	105		
TOTAL	10	10	18.4	20	9	10	55.79	60	TOTAL	10	10	17.3	20	9	10	53.14	60		
H/T	94.57 %				G.TOTAL				H/T	90.83 %				G.TOTAL					
H/T/P	93.43 %				93.16 %				H/T/P	90.63 %				89.39 %					
Subject: Social Studies					Subject: Mathematics														
No	Home Work		Test		Projects		Exams		No	Home Work		Test		Projects		Exams			
	Score	On	Score	On	Score	On	Score	On		Score	On	Score	On	Score	On	Score	On		
September	10	10	20	20					September	80	80	50	52						
October	40	40	49	56	18	20	54	56	October	50	50	33	35	18	20	87	89		
Sum Total	50	50	69	76	18	20	54	56	Sum Total	130	130	83	87	18	20	87	89		
TOTAL	10	10	18.2	20	9	10	57.86	60	TOTAL	10	10	19.1	20	9	10	58.65	60		
H/T	93.87 %				G.TOTAL				H/T	96.93 %				G.TOTAL					
H/T/P	92.90 %				95.02 %				H/T/P	95.20 %				96.73 %					
Total Average: 93.58 %					Grade: A (Distinction)														

Ms. Gagne
Teacher

Mrs. Eko
Principal

Figure 6-23: Nursery Two Progress Report Card, Private Nursery school

Children were assessed monthly, and the progress reports were sent to parents, as seen in the Figure above. Progress reports assessed four areas of learning: science, language arts, social studies and mathematics. Scores were combined from homework, tests, projects and exam results, and a percentage was calculated for each learning area. In the end, a total average was calculated, and the student was graded. The scores for monthly progress reports were combined at the end of each trimester to enable the teacher to rate the child’s progress as either ‘A’, ‘S’, ‘N’, or ‘–’ on their trimester report. Most parents were impressed with the school’s reporting style, especially the monthly progress reports, as they gave updated information on children’s learning progress. Teacher 1 explained that Parent-Teacher Conferences would be organised after progress reports were sent home. Thus, the one-on-one meetings with parents provided opportunity to discuss the teachers’ comments on the progress reports.

6.8.5 Promoting the Use of Traditional Languages by Organising Cultural Week:

Traditional language speaking and practice acknowledged by both private school parents and teachers were promoted by inviting families to the school during the Cultural Week to showcase their culture, language, dance, songs and artefacts. During the Cultural Week, Teacher 4 encouraged greetings in the traditional language during drop-offs and pick-ups

Our school promotes traditional language practice only during the Cultural Week; I encourage parents to greet children in their language during drop-offs and pick-ups, and I record this. For the whole week, we practice these words.
(Teacher 4, private nursery school)

Teachers 3 and 2 said that they learned easy words and greetings in each child's language during this week and practised this for the rest of the week.

6.8.6 Home Visits

Home visits were not a formal programme instituted by the school administration as a means of connecting with families. Still, some of the teachers mentioned random visits to homes when invited by these families. Teacher 1 said that her class once visited a family to welcome their newborn. They also visited families when invited to birthday parties.

We don't really visit parents, but parents are very open to receiving us in case we design a project like a home visit. There was a time in the nursery school when the whole class visited a child's family whose mum had given birth. Children went there to learn how a newborn is showered. In addition, we visit our children's homes when invited to birthday parties. (Teacher 1, private nursery school)

Teacher 2 reported that her class planned to visit one of their school parents with a newborn child for study purposes. This reveals the teacher's efforts at forming positive relationships between this parent and the whole class which was, overall, a positive learning experience for children.

In a few weeks, we will be studying stages of growth in children, so I plan to visit a parent with my whole class to see a baby who has been born to take some pictures, and after three months, we will visit the same parent to see the changes that have occurred with the newborn baby. (Teacher 2, private nursery school)

6.9 Case Studies of High and Low Parental Engagement in Children's Learning (Private Nursery School)

This section introduces case studies of high and low parental engagement for two selected private nursery school parents interviewed.

6.9.1 Case Study of High Parental Engagement in Children's Learning (Private Nursery School): SH's Dad

SH's dad was an administrative staff member of the private nursery school. He had two children (2 and 4 years old), and they both attended the private nursery school. In addition to mum, dad, SH, and his younger brother, four other relatives, including SH's grandmother, lived together. This family hailed from the northwest region of Cameroon. SH's dad was a very active participant in the study. He responded to the questionnaires promptly, gave consent to be observed alongside his children, was available for the first and second interviews, and agreed to provide further information if needed.

This dad took part in all the school-based activities. He attended all the school events such as Parent-Teacher Conferences, the Parent Forum, the Science Fair, the Award/Graduation Ceremonies and the Open House. He communicated with the teacher regarding his children's education and wellbeing, and reported doing class observations to see how his children participated and socialised with other children in the classroom. SH's dad volunteered once as a teacher, where he assisted the teacher in teaching in his son's class. Parent-teacher-children activities such as the Science Fair, for example, were organised where children and their class teachers carried out specific projects, and parents were invited to watch their children display and talk about their projects. SH's dad explained that Parent-Teacher Conferences were one of the mediums through which he had one-on-one discussions with the teacher about his children's learning. During these meetings, the teacher and dad discussed SH's academic progress in subjects such as language, art, mathematics, science, social studies, and his general wellbeing at the nursery school. SH's dad explained that teachers invited the parents to tell them about children's academic performance and suggested to parents the ways in which they can support learning at home. Parents could also ask questions regarding the teachers' comments on the progress reports. These reports indicated two-way communication between teachers and parents.

Apart from attending Parent-Teacher Conferences, this dad was an active member of the Parent Forum, attending all meetings, parent education workshops and activities organised by the forum like the family funfair, which involved parents, children and their teachers.

Communication with the teacher enabled this dad to understand what the child and the teacher were doing, and he followed up at home by supporting homework. SH's dad, as a staff member of the school, reported that it was easy for him to walk into the classroom at any time to observe his children and see how they were coping with learning. He also discussed with the class teacher face-to-face or through messages if he had any concerns or information to pass across. He, therefore, had an understanding that the communication with the teacher enabled consistency between the two settings of home and school.

Finally, SH's dad was the only parent out of the eight parents interviewed in the private nursery school who mentioned volunteering as a parent-teacher in the classroom. The teachers reported that parents were invited to partake in their children's learning on several occasions like the Science Fair, Open House and Graduation ceremonies. SH's dad said that parents were also encouraged to come and teach any topic of interest alongside teachers of the class:

The teacher invited me to take part in my child's activities at school. For instance, when they were teaching the children about the family, the teacher invited parents, siblings, grandparents, and other extended family members, and we came together and made a family tree. That was a practical way to teach that subject. (SH's dad, private nursery school, N2)

An important point made by this dad was that parental involvement left a positive impression on the children. SH's dad commented that when parents participated in school-based learning, children become more invested in the learning process as they see how their parents intentionally participate. He thus understood that parental involvement had an impact on children's attitudes towards education.

SH's dad upheld core African values, which included cooperation and dependence on other family members in terms of children's upbringing, respect for African culture and values, sibling caretaking and self-management skill development. Caretaking and education of his children were shared with his wife and other extended family members. He believed children developed agency and responsibility when they participated in the daily activities of the home and cared for their younger ones. He held an appreciation for his culture and acknowledged the impact of colonisation on the loss of local languages. Consequently, he thought it was necessary to pass on family resources and traditions to children as a means of preserving the African culture and identity.

SH's dad faced some challenges that sometimes prevented him from participating fully in his children's study life, such as tight work schedules coupled with challenging socio-economic conditions. Despite the challenges he faced, he strongly believed it was necessary for parents to constantly be involved in their children's learning.

In conclusion, SH's dad reported a high level of parental engagement as he participated in both home and school-based activities. He believed parental involvement was crucial even though parents may face challenges. Thus, he assisted at home with homework and attended almost all school events organised by the nursery school. He raised his children following African beliefs and culture, and shared responsibility for caretaking with other family members. He encouraged his children to assist and care for each other, as well as carry out tasks at home. Finally, SH's dad valued and encouraged the practice of the children's mother tongue as a means of acknowledging and preserving their culture and identity.

6.9.2 Case Study of Low Parental Engagement in Children's Learning (Private Nursery School): FO's Dad

FO's dad was a large-scale businessman who hailed from the Western region of Cameroon. He had four children (the older three were 12, 10, 6 years old) and FO, who was 2 years old, and who was attending the private nursery. Other family members at home included his wife, their driver, and a nanny who assisted in chores at home. Dad mentioned that grandparents occasionally visited to spend some time with the family. It was such a struggle to make time for an interview with this family. The only opportunity I had was when FO's dad was invited to a parent-teacher conference by his son's teacher. He was unable to make time for a second interview due to his busy schedule.

FO's dad valued core African practices and traditions, including the collective upbringing of the child, sibling caretaking, learning and practising the traditional language and self-management skill development.

He mentioned the good family relationship that existed between his family and the other family members, and the short visits made by his children's grandparents to spend time with his family.

I share the responsibility with my wife and a nanny who lives with us. Grandparents often visit and spend some time with us and teach them the traditional language. We attend family meetings with other extended family

members to socialize and get to know each other. (FO's dad, private nursery school, N1)

FO's family encouraged self-management skill development by encouraging FO and his siblings to do chores at home. FO's was the youngest among his siblings and received a lot of support from the older siblings, especially with homework, feeding, showering, and dressing up. Dad reported that the "[o]lder siblings help with homework, supervise him when he dresses up, shower him and make sure he eats" (FO's dad, private nursery school, N1). FO and his siblings were dropped off at school by their school driver. The driver dropped them off in front of the school gate, and the older siblings took the responsibility to ensure that FO was brought to his class. African values of collective caretaking are evident here where the older siblings take responsibility to look after their younger siblings. In addition, the driver, though not related by blood, was considered a member of the household and FO's childcare was also entrusted to him by parents.

Practising the traditional language was valuable for this family as FO's dad reported practising it at home with his children. Furthermore, the role of grandparents in helping the children to speak their traditional language was regarded as important.

FO's dad supported his son in a variety of ways at home. He indicated his support through homework and the provision of extra educational materials for studies at home. FO's dad considered home learning as supplementary to the quality education which his son had at school. He reported:

I support my child's learning at home through homework, reading books, and educational toys. The school educates the children while parents are there to supplement. I think my child's age is appropriate for his class, and they have been taught what is appropriate at their age. So, I don't bother about their development, and I know everything is okay. (FO's dad, private nursery school, N1)

Considering that the school offered a lot of opportunities for parental involvement, FO's family only participated in Parent-Teacher Conferences and the Parent Forum. Their attendance was dependent on their work schedules, as reported by FO's dad. He explained, "I attend meetings when I can; my children were surprised to see me today in school. I am here today because today is my off day from work. If I can't attend meetings, my wife comes" (FO's dad, private

nursery school, N1). FO's parents were also members of the Parent Forum, and one of them will always attend the meetings, depending on who is available.

I attend the parent forum when I can, and my wife attends if I can't be there. I find the meetings helpful; parents can express their opinions about school activities. Unfortunately, the last time I attended, attendance was very poor, the meeting had to be postponed, the principal had to pass a very strong message to parents, and in the next meeting, attendance was good. (FO's dad, private nursery school, N1)

Like many other parents who took part in the study, FO's dad mentioned his busy work schedule as the most significant barrier that prevented him from fully engaging in his child's learning. Nevertheless, he believed the teachers were doing well with the education of his child, and all he needed to do was to provide support. FO's dad's idea that parents only supplement what children learned from the school, of course, influenced his views about parental involvement.

In this regard, it can be said that FO's dad was a parent who was showing limited levels of parental involvement, both at home and at the nursery school. He believed learning at home was supplementary to learning at the nursery school, and thus he put little effort into home study. Furthermore, his attendance at school events was dependent on his work schedule. However, core African values of caretaking such as collective upbringing, sibling caretaking, traditional language practice and self-management skill development were evident in this dad's report.

6.9.3 Analysis of Themes Differentiating Case Studies of High and Low Parental Involvement

Case studies of parents with high and low levels of parental involvement are differentiated according to the nature and depth at which parents participated in their children's learning.

Home-based Parental involvement

Parents' beliefs in the value of home learning was a contributing factor in the learning activities they supported at home. SH's dad, who is considered in this study to be a parent with high levels of parental involvement, actively helped his child at home by doing homework, reading books, and revising what was taught in class. He believed home learning helped children gain

a retentive memory and improved children's performance at school. FO's dad, on the other hand, classified in this study as being a low engagement parent, helped with homework and provided extra educational materials but emphasised that what his children needed was quality education, which could only come from the school and, as such, he said he did not bother much about his children's learning and development.

School-based Parental Involvement

Parents' working conditions and the value they saw in the nursery school shaped how they supported school-based involvement. The private nursery school offered a lot of opportunities for families to participate in children's learning at school. SH's dad was a parent who participated in almost all of these activities and was the only parent among the eight interviewed parents who volunteered as a teacher in his son's class. However, he was in the unusual position of being a member of the school staff, so it was easy for him to regularly communicate with his child's teacher and volunteer in classroom activities. Furthermore, quality education and the school's openness to the ideas and suggestions of the parents were the reasons why SH's dad chose the private nursery school for his son. He stressed the importance of parental involvement in children's learning, especially in identifying children's weaknesses and focusing on addressing these weaknesses in collaboration with the teacher. On the other hand, FO's dad was a very busy businessman. He mentioned that he could only attend some Parent-Teacher Conferences and the Parent Forum, depending on the nature of his work schedule. This dad believed that the teachers were doing a great job in providing quality education for his child, which went hand-in-hand with the lower children-to-teacher ratio, which, in turn, led him to think that he had nothing to worry about.

6.10 Chapter Summary

The analysis of the data from the field-studies was categorised into two types of parental involvement, home-based involvement and school-based parental involvement. Home-based involvement included parents assisting with homework and providing extra educational materials for home study. Parents also shared their experiences of their children's learning at home, which involved children's participation in day-to-day home activities, which did not seem especially connected to school-based learning concepts. The key findings on child development and upbringing that is indigenous to families in this investigation were categorized into four major themes, collective upbringing, sibling caretaking, traditional language learning and practice, and self-management skill development. All participants

reported sharing the caretaking responsibility of their children with other extended family members. Sibling caretaking and children participating in the daily activities of the home were valued and encouraged by all families. Lastly, traditional language learning and practice were acknowledged as very important aspects of the culture that needed to be preserved. One of the parents noted the impact of European imperialism on the culture and values of the Cameroonians. English and French languages, the official languages of Cameroon which were inherited from their British and French colonial masters, have relegated the use of indigenous languages to the background. Generally, the Cameroon education system requires Anglophone students to speak and write in English as their first official language and French as a second official language, likewise, the reverse is the case for Francophone students. Still, no specificities are made for indigenous languages. This has influenced parents' beliefs over time in that their choice of language for communication in the home portrays the impact of colonialism in this context. This was evident in this investigation as some parents did not practise their traditional languages at home. This has several implications for curriculum development and practice, meaning there would appear to be the need for education policy development that aims at a more inclusive curriculum where diverse indigenous cultures and practices can be fostered and incorporated into the current pedagogy.

School-based parental involvement included attending school events (parent-teacher-children activities and parent-teacher/school administration meetings), communication and class observations. The nature and depth of parental involvement varied and was influenced by challenges that some parents encountered. These included inflexible working conditions, challenges in completing homework, single parenting, economic and language barriers which made it hard for parents facing these challenges to participate fully. Exploring parents' beliefs, it was understood that regardless of the challenges parents faced, most of them acknowledged that parental involvement was important. They were also careful in choosing a 'good' school for their child. Parents chose to enrol their children in this private nursery school on account of recommendations made by family and friends, and because the school, according to them, offered quality education. Moral education, Christian education, and learning through hands-on activities were the types of education parents valued for their children at this age.

Teachers' beliefs were examined, and it was revealed that private school teachers considered both home and school involvement important, and that they thought parental involvement should be the same for both Nursery One and Two because this is the critical stage of child development. Private school teachers indicated that parents lacked the professional expertise

to participate in children's learning at the nursery school. They suggested that parents could acquire skills or techniques on how to educate their children by willingly coming to learn from teachers. Finally, private school teachers thought parents were actively involved when they responded to comments or letters from the school, attended school meetings, ensured children completed their homework and called to inquire about their children's learning or wellbeing. This concept of involvement is ostensibly representative of a one-way understanding. Nevertheless, the school administration and teachers encouraged parents' participation in many ways such as the Parent School, inviting parents to attend school events (Thanksgiving and End-of-year ceremonies, Cultural Week) and communication with families. Participating in shared meals with families during Thanksgiving Ceremonies highlights the values of hospitality and reciprocity. Furthermore, during the Cultural Week, the teachers practised speaking in the different local languages of every child and parents were encouraged to showcase their culture, meaning, the inclusion of all children in the learning process and a two-way approach to parental involvement is evident in these activities.

Finally, case studies of parents with high and low levels of parental engagement were discussed at the end of the chapter. The next chapter presents the findings of parents' and teachers' perceptions of parent involvement in children's learning in the context of children attending a public nursery school.

Chapter 7

Findings from the Public Nursery School

7.1 Introduction

The previous chapter introduced findings from the private nursery school and the families of the children who attended that nursery school. This chapter will present findings drawn from the public nursery school and the families of the children that attended this nursery school. The findings are categorised into themes with the purpose of answering the main research question, which investigated parents' and teachers' beliefs and practices about parental involvement in early childhood learning in Douala. Like the previous chapter, this chapter presents parent participants' child development and upbringing methods, and how learning at home was carried out to enable an understanding of their views of childhood in the study context. The chapter also illustrates how parents were involved in children's learning at the nursery school, as well as the challenges parents face in fully engaging in their children's learning. In addition, parents' and teachers' beliefs in relation to their attitudes and approaches towards parental involvement in early childhood learning are examined. Teachers' beliefs were also reflected upon with respect to the ways in which the school administration and teachers fostered parents' participation in children's learning. Finally, case studies of families with high and low levels of parental involvement are portrayed.

7.2 Home-Based Parental Involvement

In the first instance, as noted in Chapter Six, both parents and teachers narrowly conceptualised home-based parental involvement with respect to how parents participated in their children's learning at home to support school-based learning. However, home-based parental involvement for public school parents is categorised into home learning involving children's participation in everyday home activities and home-based parental involvement related to school. Home learning was viewed in terms of collective care and learning provided by multiple caregivers, sibling care, traditional language learning and practice, and self-management skill development to develop independence and responsibility. Home-based parental involvement relating to school learning was categorised under two sub-themes, home study and the provision of extra educational materials and reading at home.

7.2.1 Child Development and Upbringing

Like the private nursery school families, the public nursery school families' upbringing practices included collective upbringing, sibling caretaking, traditional language learning

through intentional practise at home, and assigning chores to children to develop self-management skills and independence.

Collective Upbringing: The parents of children attending the public nursery school raised their children in a collective way with the help of their spouses, grandparents, paid caregivers, siblings and other family relatives. Some parents sent their children to interact with other family members during holidays and when there were family meetings. Other parents reported living together with grandparents and relatives. Parents reported how other relatives assisted financially in their children's upbringing and care after school hours. Generally, there were many cases of parents who lived together with relatives being linked to the ongoing Anglophone crisis in the English-speaking region of the country. These parents had to flee from their hometowns to the city of Douala and were received by relatives who provided housing, meals and financial assistance.

ES's mum was one of the parents who lost her husband due to the Anglophone crisis, who arrived in Douala to live with other family members. She explained:

I share the responsibility with my elder sister and other family relatives. When I am not around and my younger sister is not back home, I have a good neighbour who helps take care of my child. My child's dad was shot during the Anglophone crisis, and other relatives are assisting financially with the child's upbringing; that's all I have to say about this. We have a good family relationship. Due to the Anglophone crisis, we had to leave our homes and travel to Douala, where it is safe. I live with other family members, my sisters, and my grandmother. My younger sister, for example, always takes care of my child; she showers her and feeds her, and my grandmother teaches her the local language. We always communicate on the phone with other family members that are far from our home. (ES's mum, public nursery school, N1)

GS's dad said:

I share the responsibility with my wife and my cousins who live with us at home. I also have another cousin who lives close to the house, and my children usually go there when I am not around. I usually send my children to the village before the onset of the Anglophone crisis to visit their grandparents and other relatives. They will live with them throughout the holidays, interact, and learn

from them. It's important for children to know their grandparents and know where they come from. (GS's dad, public nursery school, N2)

ZZ's mum shared the responsibility of child caretaking with her husband, parents, older siblings and a nanny. Her children used to visit her parents back in her hometown during school holidays. She explained how she could not send her children back to her hometown now for holidays because her husband and she are civil servants (a military officer and a teacher, respectively), who are targets to the secessionist groups in the English-speaking part of the country. So, for safety reasons, they must remain in the French-speaking region of the country (ZZ's mum, public nursery school, N2).

YY's dad (public nursery school, N2) lived with his parents in the same house, and they collectively raised his children and also did school drop-offs. During the observations, YY was dropped off or picked up by either his mum, dad, uncle or grandfather. YY's dad explained how his children's upbringing was a priority to him; thus, if he was not available, he made sure his wife was at home to look after their children. They could only assign others in emergency situations. He also reported that his parents have been very supportive during their children's upbringing, with his children learning and practising the traditional language with them.

Sibling Care: The role older siblings play in the life of the family cannot be overemphasised. During observations, children were dropped off and picked up from school by paid motorbike riders, parents, or older siblings. During the interview, ZZ's mum expressed that ZZ's elder brother was the one who always helped ZZ with her homework because she always felt tired when she arrived home after teaching extra classes at school. PT's dad explained that he allowed his children to socialise with other cousins so they could form good relationships rather than knowing each other just by name.

We meet cousins during weekends, sometimes when a child is named after an elder cousin in the family, that cousin always takes special care of the child and buys them gifts. They play together, and I encourage this because they bond with each other and know each other better so that when a child sees his or her cousin, they don't only call the cousin by name, but they have a close relationship. (PT's dad, public nursery school, N1)

ES was an only child whose social interactions with cousins and other relatives had been affected by the ongoing Anglophone crisis in Cameroon. According to her mum:

She used to engage well with other cousins and play together with them. Currently, we don't have cousins to play with her because we moved to Douala due to the Anglophone crisis. Back in the village, the cousins take care of her when I am not around, feed her, and they play together. (ES's mum, public nursery school, N2)

On the other hand, the Anglophone crisis benefited GS's family because their cousins from the English-speaking part now lived with them in the same house, which improved their communication skills in English.

The elder sister cares for him, teaches him and showers him. My brother's children visit during holidays, and they interact and have fun together. My daughter was five, and my son was two years old when she started showering him. She also teaches him how to colour and because she passes through the same school, she corrects him using her old books. They also play together. My brother's children, eight and eleven years old, who came from Bamenda due to the Anglophone crisis, live with us as well, so he teaches them a lot of English. They can now speak well in English. (GS's dad, public nursery school, N2)

Figure 7.1 illustrates the important role of older siblings in the family where an older sibling is dropping off a younger sibling at the public nursery school.



Figure 7-1: Older Sibling Doing School Drop-offs

Traditional Language Learning and Practice: All the public nursery school parents acknowledged the importance of their children's competency in the traditional language and indicated that they all practised speaking the traditional language at home with their children. ES's mum said the traditional language was essential for children to know their origin. Thus, she taught her child their traditional language at home, they communicated at home in their dialect. She explained that her child understood their language although she responded back in English or French (ES's mum, public nursery school, N2).

Both GS's and PT's parents said that the traditional language was essential when conveying secrets and helped someone identify with people of their origin.

We speak mostly in our traditional language at home. I believe the traditional language is our own language. French and English are foreign languages we learn because we cannot use traditional languages in our offices. In school, they already speak English and French so in the house they need to learn the traditional language. Speaking the traditional language is beneficial to communicate private things (secrets) with your family that you may not want others to hear. You can communicate with your children in your traditional language when there are strangers in the house. It is good for security reasons; for instance, if thieves break into your home, you can instruct the child in your traditional language to hide somewhere. At the same time, if the child is in danger somewhere, he can cry in his dialect, and he will be favoured by people of the same origin who are around. We cannot speak English more than the people in England, and we can't speak French more than the people in France because it is not our first language. Thus we need to learn and value our own language. (GS's dad, public nursery school, N2)

PT's dad said,

My wife and I try to teach them by speaking the language at home and giving them instructions using the traditional language. My father told me a story when I was a boy that the police were coming to arrest a man one day, and he told his son in the dialect that he should go under his bed, take the carton and throw it away because there was something bad inside. But the child responded in pidgin, repeating what the father asked him to do. So, the police got that, and the man was arrested. So, I think children need to know the traditional language

for security reasons, also to identify with people of their culture when they are in another land and to preserve their culture. (PT’s dad, public nursery school, N1)

Other parents expressed how they practised speaking their traditional language at home. They mentioned the role of grandparents in facilitating their children’s understanding of the language when they visit them for holidays. “We speak the traditional language at home, and when she goes for holidays, she learns from her grandparents” (ZZ’s mum, public nursery school, N1). YY’s dad said, “[s]incerely, I am still learning because I am a victim of neo-colonialism. But we live together with my parents, so we all teach him at home” (YY’s dad, public nursery school, N1). The teachers acknowledged the challenges of practising traditional languages at the nursery school due to children coming from different backgrounds and speaking different languages. Nevertheless, they promoted traditional languages by using the ‘child as a teacher’ once every term in an academic year. In this case, children were sent home to learn simple words and expressions in their dialect to share this in class with others. Also, during their morning assemblies, the teachers and children sang songs or recited rhymes in different languages.

Self-management Skill Development: African traditional forms of learning require individuals to acquire skills and develop through participation in daily activities at home and in the community. The public nursery school parents encouraged their children to do some form of chores at home, which ranged from washing dishes, fetching water, washing their clothes and tidying up to promote some level of independence and responsibility in their children. These chores were sometimes supervised by parents or older siblings. Table 7.1 illustrates the methods, used by the parents, whose children attended the public nursery school, to encourage their children to carry out tasks at home as a means of developing independent skills and autonomy.

Table 7-1: Self-management Skills Development, Public School Parents

Parents	Self-management skills development
Parent 1 ES (public nursery school, N2)	She always follows me to the kitchen and rinses the plates after I wash them. She also tries to wash her pants, and I am always there to watch and supervise her. It is important for children to do chores because the child will become aware that she cannot sit and expect everything to be done for her, but she can try to do something for herself, training her to work hard so that in my absence she can do something by herself. (ES’s mum, public nursery school, N2)
Parent 2	Yes. I ask my child to make up his bed, and I supervise him while he learns to wash his clothes. I supervise all his chores. The only thing he can do without supervision is play.

GS (public nursery school, N2)	Doing chores helps the child to know that working at home is a duty so that he will understand that this is what he has to do even in his own house when he grows up. (GS's dad, public nursery school, N2)
Parent 3 ZZ (public nursery school, N2)	She fills water in the container and washes plates with the supervision of her older brother and sister. (ZZ's mum, public nursery school, N2)
Parent 4 YY (public nursery school, N1)	Yes, when he comes back home, he knows where to keep his bags and uniform, and he also washes dishes sometimes. My wife and I supervise him. (YY's dad, public nursery school, N1)
Parent 5 PT (public nursery school, N1)	On Saturdays, I ensure they help in cleaning the house and cleaning their shoes. My wife and I usually supervise them. Doing chores helps children to do things independently and makes them not to be lazy, sometimes you find boys and girls in the university who cannot look after themselves or cook. Where are they heading to? (PT's dad, public nursery school, N1)
Parent 6 RR (public nursery school, N1)	She sweeps and washes dishes; even if the dishes are not clean, I feel grateful. In the morning, we shower together, so I shower her first and send her to the room. Before I arrive in the room, she is already trying to apply body lotion on her body. She also carries water from the tap and brings it to the house. She carries water without supervision, but I supervise every other thing she does. I think chores are a good way for the child to learn how to do things around the home and as she does it continuously, she becomes perfect. Just that sometimes she likes doing chores a lot for a long time that she becomes tired and falls asleep without studying and I don't like that. (RR's mum, public nursery school, N1)

7.2.2 Home Study

One of the ways in which public nursery school parents engaged in their children's learning was through home study. All but one of the 28 parents who filled out the questionnaires agreed that they always carried out follow-up studies at home about what was being taught in the nursery school. Contrarily, during the data collection period, it was observed that only few parents were able to do drop offs and pick-ups thus follow-up studies at home could be less dependent of what was taught at the nursery school.

Home study was emphasised by all eight parents interviewed, with children at the public nursery school, as a way of being involved in their children's learning at home, especially since teachers at the public nursery school neither sent books home daily nor gave homework. Three out of the eight interviewed parents believed that the only way they could support their children's learning was to assist them at home and that once the child was dropped off at school, the teacher took over. One of these parents was very worried, especially as teachers did not send homework, making it challenging to assist her child at home. These parents explained that they had to improvise, and sometimes had to communicate with teachers and their children in order to understand what was learned at school so they could follow up at home. PT's dad emphasised that studying at home was very important. He explained how he taught children at

home at least 4 times a week for about 20 minutes. They read books and watched videos on phonics and animals. He believed studying at home was like creating a second awareness. Thus, if the parent repeats what was learned in school each day, it will stick in the child's mind.

RR's mum reported using her personal initiative to teach her child at home, since books were not sent back:

We do educational activities, and we rehearse songs taught in school. I show her pictures of fruits and animals for her to identify by calling out the names. I was once a nursery and primary school teacher, but I had to stop working due to my health condition, so I used my initiative to teach her at home because she did not return home with her books. (RR's mum, public nursery school, N1)

According to RR's mum, education is not just the prerogative of schools: "It is important to support my child's learning because I believe it is a good way to bring up the child and helps the child to be well behaved because a child is not educated only in the classroom" (RR's mum, public nursery school, N1).

In addition, this parent understood that household artefacts and activities could be used for learning; and that teaching should connect with the child's interest and what a child enjoys.

Some of the basic things I teach her at home involve the identification of objects and naming them, such as household equipment and kitchen utensils. For instance, if I ask her to bring me a particular spoon, she will have to identify that among the many different spoons and bring it to me. I assist her daily unless I am busy, then we could study a few days a week. What I observed was she has difficulties in writing, but she is very good at counting. Even though I may be very busy sometimes, we never go to bed without practising how to count and to sing some songs. We usually study for 20 to 25 minutes because I discovered that if we learn for more than 20 minutes, she becomes tired or distracted. I feel learning at home is essential because the child becomes aware that learning can take place anywhere, not only at school. (RR's mum, public nursery school, N1)

ES's mum had no other choice but to send her child to this nursery school because she could not afford the tuition fees for a private nursery school. She was disappointed that the teachers did not send homework, and when she requested homework, the teacher asked her to pay extra

money, which she could not afford. ES's mum understood that the home is also a place where children can engage in a range of enriching activities that facilitate their learning.

I teach her the local language, teach her how to write, and ask her questions about what she studied in school. I give my child homework to do because the school does not give homework. I teach her at least three times a week because I believe they need to be taught gradually at this age. We could spend an hour learning. Even though the school does not give homework, I think doing homework improves the child's learning, it makes them not to forget what they learned in school, and a child will be aware that learning also takes place at home and not only in the school. When I am busy, especially now that I am with my sister at the hospital, I can ask my younger sister to help her if she is not busy; otherwise, there is no one to help her. (ES's mum, public nursery school, N2)

Teachers at the public school were worried that parents would not return children's books to school punctually. According to these teachers, in the past, when children were allowed to take books home, some children would return to school without some of their books, especially readers and workbooks, and this practice made learning at school difficult. So, they decided to keep the books in school, allowing children to only take these books home at the end of the school term. Parents must then return books at the beginning of the new term. Nevertheless, during some PTA meetings, the school administration bought picture books and gave them to all parents to take home to help children (Teacher 3, public nursery school).

The teachers expected parents to come and snap pictures of what was written on the blackboard, request to see their children's books, and communicate with the teacher to know what has been taught at school to understand how to help at home. According to Teacher 3 of the public nursery school:

Parents can come in and take pictures of activities on the board and request to see their children's books to understand what they are studying in school so they can know how to help them at home. The reason we don't allow children to take their books back home is we fear they won't bring them back. We give them the books at the end of every term so they can learn during the holidays with their parents but when school returns not all of them return with these

books. Some get lost, and some parents claim they never saw the books.

(Teacher 3, public nursery school)

The public nursery school teachers' conception was construed to be a one-way view of the relationship between teachers and parents. Teacher 1 of the public nursery school thought parents needed to visit the classroom to know what children learned that day, to ask questions and to get feedback from teachers about children's learning. For her, most parents who visited the nursery school were educated and had the time to visit the class. She therefore thought some parents needed education on the importance of child upbringing in the early years. In addition, since children did not go back home every day with their books, it was important for parents to create time for home learning and hold learning conversations with children. She explains:

As a teacher, I encourage parents to help their children daily and ask them questions, such as what is your teacher's name, how old are you, what are your friend's names? Parents should spend at least 25 to 30 minutes each day talking with their children about school activities. (Teacher 1, public nursery school)

Teacher 2 of the public nursery school also expected parents to work in close collaboration with teachers, and they required training sessions to understand how they can help their children at home. Thus, she strongly believed that parents lacked professional expertise to help their children even at home.

7.2.3 Extra Educational Materials and Reading at Home

Sixteen of the twenty eight public nursery school parents who responded to the questionnaire indicated that they always provided extra educational materials to support their children at home and eight indicated that they sometimes provided educational materials at home. Four of the eight interviewed parents, whose children attended the public nursery school, provided extra educational materials to support their children's learning at home. Additional educational materials included audio-visuals, alphabet and number charts, and storybooks to read at home. PT's dad found extra educational materials as resources for children to explore on their own:

I provide educational materials at home, books, and videos on phonics, animals. I prepare a corner in the house where I provide all these resources such that when I come back home and I feel so tired, they can work on their own, after which I will look at what has been done and give corrections. (PT's dad, public nursery school, N1)

GS's dad (public nursery school, N2) reported that he bought books for his son to read at home because his books were kept at school and only came back home at the end of the school term.

7.3 School-based Parental Involvement

Parents whose children attended the public nursery school got involved in their children's education at school through school events and meetings such as the end-of-the-year and graduation ceremonies, parent-teacher association meetings, communications and class observations. However, overall the opportunities for parents to be involved in their children's learning at school were more limited than at the private nursery school.

7.3.1 End-of-year and Graduation Ceremonies

The public nursery school organised end-of-year and graduation ceremonies. Parents were invited to come along and watch their children read stories, recite rhymes and act sketches. This was the only time parents received children's report cards, and the Nursery Two children graduated to Primary One on that day. According to ES's mum, when children engaged in different activities during the end-of-year ceremony, it enabled parents to understand children's abilities:

The one-on-one parent-teacher children activity I engaged in was during the end-of-year graduation ceremony. On this day, children act drama and dance while the parents watch. Unfortunately, my daughter did not participate due to ill health. It is good for parents to go and see what the children are doing in school. (ES's mum, public nursery school, N2)

PT's dad said that school events presented opportunities for parents to understand their children's abilities in relation to those of other children.

The only parent-teacher children activity I engaged in was the end-of-year event organised by the school, and the Delegate of Basic Education was present. Children present what they learn, they dance, and it is roughly a five hours activity. From this activity, you can easily identify children who are smart and those who need to follow up. For instance, there were two children last year who moved from Nursery One directly to class one because they were very smart. So, watching children on such occasions enables the parent to define where the child belongs. For instance, some children, when they see their parents, they become so shy, but others are motivated. Parents are also

impressed by seeing the physical output of their children, and they are motivated to work hard and educate their children. (PT's dad, public nursery school, N1)

Another parent, whose child attended the public nursery school, wanted more regular ceremonies rather than ceremonies that just occurred once at the end of the year. She said:

I really wish the school could organise end of term activities or events so that parents can observe and see what their children can do. It will be easy to identify children who are timid and know how to support them. (RR's mum, public nursery school, N1)

7.3.2 Parent-Teacher Association

Like the parent forum organised by the private nursery school, the public nursery school teachers and parents attended their Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meeting. However, unlike the Parent Forum, the PTA was led by administrators and teachers. At PTA meetings, the school administration and teachers planned and organised school activities, educated parents on how to engage in children's learning, and organised projects concerning school repairs and maintenance. In this case, the PTA can be defined as exhibiting an autocratic system of governance in that it is uniquely managed by the school administration and teachers, even though the president was a parent. In addition, meetings, including meeting agendas, were planned and announced to parents by the school administration. Teacher 3 of the public nursery school complained of low attendance during PTA meetings and said that sometimes less than 20 parents attended, which is very few given the school has about 165 children. Notwithstanding this disappointment, she noted that the PTA was one of the ways in which the school connected with families. The questionnaire response further confirmed the low parent attendance for PTA meetings as only 14 out of the 28 parents agreed they were PTA members. However, 20 parents indicated they were very interested in regularly attending PTA meetings and parent education workshops.

PT's dad, who was a parent with an active role in the PTA, emphasised the importance of the PTA and listed a couple of projects carried out by the PTA that ensured that children learn in a safe and comfortable environment. He reported that parents' suggestions were welcomed and implemented. This is in line with the school's philosophy concerning its need to provide a safe environment for children's education:

Through the PTA, we fenced the school to keep children safe because guys used to come around smoking cigarettes. We also provided fans in the classrooms (4 fans per class) so children could learn in a comfortable environment. I find the meetings helpful because the PTA supports the Government to maintain the school. During the PTA meetings, the school provides information on how to care for our children. For instance, the PTA decided to fence the school around to keep children safe from these guys who come around smoking and to prevent children from copying such behaviours. I encourage all parents to attend these meetings to discuss and know about the progress of their children. Parents are given enough time to say whatever they want to say; it is just like emptying your basket. Yes, suggestions are always taken into consideration. For instance, last time, I suggested that the gateman's salary should be increased, and it was considered. I requested for that because I think if he is well paid, he will do a great job. If he is underpaid, he will not be committed to doing his job, he might see a child running out of the gate, and he will care less about that. I also suggested that the school make a badge for each child that must be presented by the person picking up that child from school for security reasons [see Figure 7.2]. And this idea has also been put in place. (PT's dad, public nursery school, N1)



Figure 7-2: Badge to be Presented by Public School Parents During Pick-ups

Teacher 1 at the public nursery school also indicated that parents were educated during the PTA meetings. They were told to respond when called for meetings, always to pass by, and to ask teachers about their child's progress at school. Thus, parents were welcome to call in at anytime if they needed to.

We host PTA meetings and mostly discuss the wellbeing of children. Children should be dressed in clean uniforms, putting on black shoes and white socks. In the PTA meetings, we also discuss children's nutrition, clean drinking bottles, prepare different varieties of food for lunch, inform children about what they will have for lunch and make them know the colour of their lunch boxes. Otherwise, in a situation where a child drops food from their lunch box, it is difficult to identify who has the food if the child is not aware of what is in their lunch box. (Teacher 1, public nursery school)

GS's dad reported that PTA meetings gave him the chance to interact and appreciate teachers for doing a great job with the children:

We pay PTA dues (10000 FRS per year), I talk with teachers and encourage them to teach my child well. Due to the nature of the country, most teachers

today are not teachers by vocation, but they are there to look for something to earn a living. In our society today, everyone is not in their rightful place, which they dreamt of being, so they don't give out their best, they are angry about their situation and the salary, so I as a parent need to encourage these teachers to help my child at school. I encourage the teacher sometimes by offering monetary gifts. This is not done all the time, and they do not request it, but I do this occasionally out of my own will. (GS's dad, public nursery school, N2)

Another public nursery school parent who had recently enrolled their daughter in the school had never participated in PTA meetings. She was concerned that the first term, the longest term in the academic calendar, had passed without any PTA meeting being scheduled. She reported, "I also wish they can organise the PTA at least once or twice a term so that parents can share their views and lay complaints. The whole first term has already passed without any PTA meeting" (RR's mum, public nursery school, N1).

Figure 7.3 illustrates some of the parent education topics discussed during PTA meetings at the public nursery school. The school administration prepares the resources and lectures parents on these topics and questions, after which discussions follow.

- P.T.A HELD ON THE 27TH APRIL 2019.
- Some points to be discussed.
- 1) Giving wrong telephone numbers: Why do we need these number for emergencies e.g when a child is sick we can easily call, but at time the numbers don't go through and then we the teachers become very frustrated.
 - 2) Teaching children Sex Education. By making love in front of children which is bad.
 - 3) Poor Inner wears for our children. Mothers make sure you clean pants for our children so that from childhood, they will know that they have to always put on clean inner wears.
 - 4) Birth days: When celebrating a child's birth day enough should be brought so that we are not put in a difficult situation.
 - 5) No Issuing books on time. That is text books. Some parents come with text books late when the term has almost gone.
 - 6) Prize giving ceremony - Suggesting that Parents can always award prize to kids with good behaviour, cleanliness, academics etc.

Parents writing in children books. which is bad.
Allowing children to tear and write inside their books which is bad.

Child Sex Abuse.

What is child sex abuse? Before I talk about sex, I want to let our parents know that we have children here of the age of 3 and above. It is our responsibility as parents and teachers from preventing and protecting our children from child abuse.

To talk about child sex abuse, we must be informed about the facts when we talk of child sex abuse. It does not only mean by sleeping with a child, sex abuse ~~is done~~ occur in several ways

- ① This can happen in the form of touching a child contact or penetration, or non contact like flashing or pornography.

In Africa, one out of four girls and one in six boys are sexually abused.

A - Always remember that your body belongs to you. Let the child know that he can report if some one touches him or her in a way that makes them uncomfortable. Give them examples of good touch and bad touch.

N - means NO! is NO. Encourage our children to say NO! even if it is our brother, father, uncle, aunt or close family friend.

T - Talk about secrets that upsets you. Create an open forum where a child can easily share anything. Remind the child that there should be no secrets especially if it is disturbing to them.

S - stands for speak up and get help. Encourage our children to always say what worrying them. They should feel free and report any attempt or activity that makes him worried.

HOW TO KNOW OR IDENTIFY PERSONS WHO CAN ABUSE OUR CHILDREN.

- ① Take a close look of those who are very close to our children. Be it a brother, uncle, father, mother, friend...

There is a great culture of silence on child sexual abuse fuel by culture, family or religion. 90% of people who abuse our children are well known by the child and family. 30% are family members and 60% are people trusted by the family. Most of the children who are abused are children from dysfunctional and homeless children.

WAYS TO AVOID THESE ABUSES:

We should notes here that child abuse can be by the same sex.

We as parents must take the responsibility to teach our children from the age of 3 that our bodies has private parts.

Great opportunity for our children or child for open dialogue. Good examples to explain to our children is by using the examples of parts. Here "P" stands for private. Private parts are private. Here remember to use the correct name for each part. If vagina called vagina, if its penis call it penis Not to to or dede so when they go elsewhere, they don't get confused with the names.

Figure 7-3: PTA Meeting Agenda, Public Nursery School

7.3.3 Communications and Class Observations

Twenty-four of the twenty-eight public nursery school parents who responded to questionnaires reported communicating with teachers through face-to-face communication, letters, phone calls, text messages, including WhatsApp messages. Three parents left the question unanswered, and one parent reported that they had no contact with the school. Teacher 4 of the public nursery school indicated that they communicated with parents through written notes or through phone calls in case of an emergency. "Parents call to find out how the children are doing in school, and if the child is sick and cannot come to school they call to inform us" (Teacher 4, public nursery school).

Parents, with children at the public nursery school like PT's dad reported the use of phone calls, messages, and face-to-face communication with teachers as mediums of information exchange between the home and the school.

Through phone calls, through the school WhatsApp group though not all parents can afford smartphones to download this app, and the teacher communicates with us when we come to school. The teacher shares information about my child's progress, and I am called if my child is sick. Yes, I am getting

enough information. I contact the teachers or school sometimes if my child is ill and cannot come to school. (PT's dad, public nursery school, N1)

Two of the eight parents interviewed mentioned that they came in and observed their children as they studied in class, usually after drop-offs and in most cases, they did so without the child's knowledge. ES's mum felt she was not getting much information from the school. She mentioned how she stays on after drop-offs to observe her child's behaviour and interactions with friends. She reported that she spoke with the class teacher mainly to know how her child was progressing, and she received information through notes or letters from the school. RR's mum was another parent who indicated she does observations at school to see how her child studies and interacts with other children.

I always make observations when I drop her off and pick her up, and if I have any concerns as to the way she is playing or behaving with her friends, I advise and correct her. I also communicate directly [face-to-face] with the teacher daily during drop-offs or after pick-up about my child's education. Again, when I come here and see parents crowded in the classroom to pick up their children. I think if they stand at the door, their children can easily identify them. I am waiting for the PTA meeting to be called so I can share my ideas. (RR's mum, public nursery school, N1)

She emphasised her close relationship with her child's teacher and how she contributed to getting her daughter registered at the school. She also mentioned the teacher's role in giving feedback and explaining that it was okay to use her left hand when writing.

The teacher gives me feedback on her studies, and she also tells me my daughter likes to play a lot. I also observed that my daughter uses her left hand, so I asked the teachers to always correct her to use her right hand. The teacher advised that she should be allowed to use whatever hand she prefers. I think I am getting enough information because her teacher is like a mother to me, she has been my mother in church for the past seven years, and she was the one who helped me to register my daughter in this school. I contact the school, especially on days that my daughter is sick and needs to be taken to the hospital. (RR's mum, public nursery school, N1)

7.4 Public Nursery School Parents' Drop-off and Pick-up Routines

Observations were focused on six out of the eight parents interviewed and their children, which also included all the teachers. The observations were carried out over two weeks (one week in each class) with the use of a video recorder and making extra notes in a notebook at the end of each day. The first three parents (Nursery Two parents), and the last three parents (Nursery One parents) were observed on separate days.

Over 165 children attended Nursery One and Two in the public nursery school. Approximately 70 percent of all these children were dropped off and picked up by motorbike riders who carried children to and from school (see Figure 7.4). Families hired motorbike riders to drop off their children daily, so the same motorbike rider would always drop off and pick up a child, as explained by one of the teachers. After talking to some parents and the teachers, it was understood that motorbike riders were hired based on recommendations from other friends or family members who knew these riders. Some parents mentioned that they came from the same hometown or ethnic group as the motorbike rider, while others explained that they lived in the same neighbourhood. Sometimes older siblings accompanied the younger ones to school, dropped them off and then headed for their own schools.

Every week, teachers took turns to stand by the gate to greet and welcome children, while the other teachers stayed in class waiting to receive the children. So traditionally, the parents were supposed to stop at the gate. The teacher on duty is supposed to report at the gate by 7 am and receive children until 7.30 am, which is the time for the general assembly. During my observation days, the teacher on duty arrived and stood by the gate most times between 7.15 and 7.20 am, sometimes not at all. When the teacher was not standing by the gate, children could be dropped off to their classrooms by their parents. Other children, especially those brought in by motorbike riders, who were dropped off at the school gate, were ushered in by the gatekeeper.

The teachers rarely spent time with the parents. Children mostly arrived in the morning before the teacher had arrived at the gate. During pick-ups, one of the teachers stood by the door, and the other stayed inside. The teacher called out to the child when she spotted their mother or father or whoever was picking up the child. Sometimes parents greeted the teacher, or they just took their child and walked away. It was usually very rowdy during pick-ups.

Table 7.2 below, shows the drop-off and pick-up routines of parents with children at the public nursery school. The table indicates who dropped off and picked up the child, the amount of

time parents spent in school during pick-ups and drop-offs, and indicates whether there were any interactions observed between parents, teachers, and children during drop-offs and pick-ups. Although it was reported that 70 percent of children were dropped off and picked up by motorbike riders, interestingly, all the case study children were dropped off and picked up by either their mums, dads or another family member. These were families who indicated an interest in being interviewed and whom I interacted with when I visited the nursery school. It could be implied that these families were interested in school-based activities, had a work schedule that permitted time to drop off or pick up their children or were interested in being part of this study. While two of the six children walked with their parents/relatives to school, four rode on bikes together with their parents/relatives (one on the motorbike had his dad as a driver). Parents rarely spent time at school after dropping off or picking up their children. In most cases, parents stopped in front of the school gate, and the child walked alone to class. Sometimes, as noted above, a teacher stood by the entrance to welcome and greet children, but the teacher left the gate by 7.30 to go in and prepare for the morning assembly. Thus, there were few interactions between teachers and families during drop-offs. It was also noted that among the six parents observed, only one parent helped at the school. This parent, an active PTA member, was mainly concerned with ensuring that the learning environment was safe for children. More importantly, only one parent was observed talking with a teacher about their child's wellbeing; the possible reason being that this parent knew the teacher socially.

Table 7-2: Drop off and Pick-up Routines of Six Public School Parent's (Nursery One and Two)

Parents	Parent-child interactions during drop-off or pick-ups.	Time spent at private nursery school after drop-offs or pick-ups.	Helping in any activity at the private nursery school, for instance, tidying up after drop-offs or pick-ups.	Parents tried to reach out to the child's teacher to learn anything concerning the child, gave instructions or passed important information to a teacher.	The teacher welcomed parents and children by name, when they came to drop-off or pick-up children.	The amount of time the teacher spent with each parent when they arrived for pick-ups or drop-offs.
Parent 1 ES (public nursery school, N2)	Mum usually dropped off in the mornings and picked up the child in the afternoons; she either walked her to the classroom or left her inside the school gate.	On average, less than 5 minutes. Mum usually walked into the school campus during drop-offs or pick-ups.	No.	Sometimes they arrive when the teachers have not arrived. When mum met the teacher at the gate, she greeted the teacher and left the child in front or inside the school gate.	Sometimes.	On average, less than 5 minutes. Mum greeted the teacher during drop-offs or pick-ups. Sometimes, she collected the child from the school playground when she was late for pick-ups. Thus, there was no interaction with the teacher during these times.
Parent 2 GS (public nursery school, N2)	Dad is a motorbike rider, so he dropped the child in front of the school gate and left to drop off other children.	Dad spent less than a minute during drop-offs or pick-ups. Sometimes he greeted the teacher when it was less busy in the mornings.	No.	No.	Sometimes.	Dad dropped off the child in front of the school gate. He was often late during pick-ups, so he collected the child from the playground.
Parent 3 ZZ (public nursery school, N2)	Mum rode a bike with the child to school and dropped her off in front of the school gate.	On average, less than 5 minutes. Mum watched the child from the school gate during drop-offs and picked up the child from the classroom.	No.	Yes. Mum usually greeted the teacher in front of the gate when she dropped off her child before leaving.	Sometimes.	On average, less than 5 minutes. Mum always greeted the teacher during drop-offs and pick-ups, and she stood at the school gate and watched the child as she walked to class.

Parent 4 YY (public nursery school, N1)	Dad or uncle always dropped off the child, and mum or dad usually picked up the child.	On average, less than a minute. The child is dropped off in front of the school gate and picked up from the classroom.	No.	During drop-offs or pick-ups, the parents or the uncle greeted the teacher, except for very busy times.	Sometimes.	On average, less than a minute. Whoever picked up or dropped off the child greeted the teacher.
Parent 5 PT (public nursery school, N1)	Mum or dad dropped off the children and walked them through the gate to their classroom. Mum or dad picked up the children from school.	5-10 minutes.	Mostly checked the study environment to see if anything needed to be repaired. It was observed once when he collected the Nursery One classroom fan for repairs and helped pull down an old slide that caused many accidents during lunch breaks.	Yes. He always walked into the school and dropped off his children at their classrooms. He is a parent with an active role in the PTA, and always enquired about any needs or things that the teachers thought needed repairing.	Sometimes.	5-10 minutes. Dad stayed around after pick-ups or drop-offs, talked to the teachers, and enquired about any issues that needed addressing.
Parent 6 RR (public nursery school, N1)	Mum or dad dropped off the child in front of the school gate. They also picked up the child from school.	On average, less than 5 minutes.	No.	Yes. Mum always greeted the class teacher during pick up. She indicated during the interview that the teacher was like a mother to her, and that they attended the same church. She also mentioned the teacher's role in helping her get admission for her daughter to the school.	Sometimes.	On average, less than 5 minutes. Mum always greeted the teacher during drop-offs or pick-ups, and sometimes they discussed the child's wellbeing.

Figure 7.4 illustrates the drop-offs of children at the public nursery school.



Figure 7-4: Drop-offs, Public Nursery School

7.5 Barriers to Parental Involvement in Children’s Learning

Challenges faced by parents, whose children attended the public nursery school, hindered them from being fully engaged in their children’s learning. These challenges range from financial difficulties, pressures of work, language barriers, single parenthood, as well as the country’s current political crisis, which has led to the internal mass migration of families from the English-speaking regions of the country to Douala and other French-speaking towns.

Financial Barriers: The financial and economic situation of the country was a factor that affected the public nursery school parents’ involvement in their children’s learning. According to YY’s dad, parents work hard to earn a living and children can only see their parents at night. There was limited quality time spent with children; thus, there were so many children who lacked home education. Reports from the survey showed that public nursery school parents were primarily engaged in menial work, which was time-consuming and produced a low income, thus affecting the level of involvement in their children’s learning. Data from the questionnaires also indicated that 26 percent of the public nursery school parent participants were unemployed. While unemployment may have allowed parents to spend more time with their children, there were other factors to consider. For example, one of the parents was unemployed for health reasons, and this negatively impacted her finances. She explains:

The most significant barrier I face is finance. I stopped work because I have problems with my eyes, and I am not married to the father of my child. He hardly supports me, which is why I indicated in the questionnaire that I share the care of my child with well-wishers because I am assisted by friends and my church members to raise my child. When I face challenges, I try to create time for my daughter as much as I can, and when my daughter does not feel like learning, I start by singing the songs that she likes most, and when she feels happy, then we can study. (RR's mum, public nursery school, N1)

Working Conditions: Difficult working conditions acted as a barrier for many public nursery school families. Figure 7.5 shows 15 out of 27 public nursery school parents are in full-time employment. These parents engaged in jobs like providing a motorbike taxi service, tailoring, working as a seamstress and managing small scale businesses which are often stressful and time-consuming. For instance, GS's dad explained that the nature of his job limited the time spent with children. As a motorbike rider, sometimes he worked all through the night to earn a living for his family. ZZ's mum faced the same challenges due to long working hours.

I usually face challenges due to my job. I am a teacher as well; I do have extra classes that I teach students just to make some extra money to meet up with my expenses. So, when I arrive home, I feel so tired, and I am unable to help my daughter. I am so lucky because my son, who is her elder brother, always assists me by teaching her and helping her with her homework when I am unavailable. (ZZ's mum, public nursery school, N2)

However, a quarter of parents had no paid-employment.

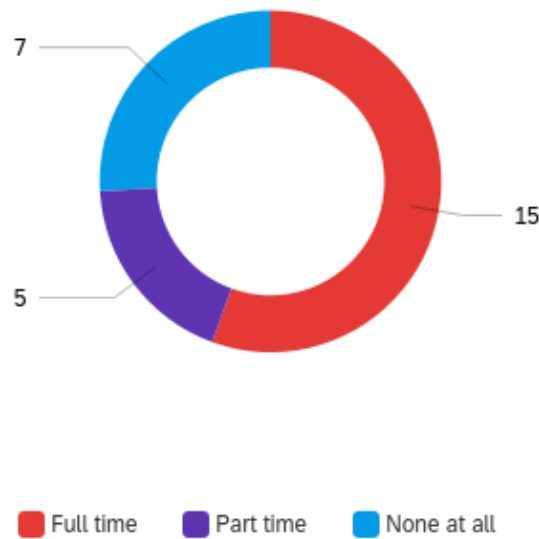


Figure 7-5: Amount of Time Spent in Paid Employment per Day

Language Barrier: The English nursery school was open to both English- and French-speaking families. Data reported earlier on the background of families showed that though this was an English language institution, French-speaking children made up for 60 percent of the school roll. This goes against one of the main Government objectives when creating the English nursery, which was to meet the needs of Anglophone parents who wished for their children to have a good foundation in English education. Teacher 3 of the public nursery school explained that 60 percent of the children in her class were Francophones, making teaching and learning challenging, especially at the beginning of the academic year. She believed parents were unable to help children because of the language barrier. She stated that “the children come to school and parents expect the teacher to perform a miracle, but they never get involved in their children’s learning because they don’t understand the language”. Therefore, she thought Anglophone families should be given more opportunities to enrol their children in an English-speaking institution, and Francophones should go to French-speaking institutions.

Single Parenthood: Eleven out of the 28 participants who responded to the questionnaires, as reported earlier, were single parents. One out of the eight parents interviewed was a single parent, and this parent emphasised the difficulties he faced in raising three children all by himself. His challenges as a single parent included working and caring for his children’s needs and undertaking domestic duties, which he said prevented him from engaging in his children’s learning at home and at school. According to him, bringing his child to school was enough, and

there was nothing he could do more than that because it was hard to both work long hours and take care of his children. Sometimes he paid people to prepare meals for his children (SE's dad, public nursery school, N1).

Anglophone Crisis: The Anglophone crisis covered earlier in chapter two has also caused many families to flee from their hometowns to seek refuge in the French-speaking regions of the country, including Douala. This impacted the class size of the public nursery school as many of these English-speaking families who could not afford the high tuition demands of private nursery schools had no choice but to enrol their children in the public nursery school. ES's mum explained that she struggled a lot financially. She lost her husband due to the Anglophone crisis, and she had to move to Douala to live with other family members, her sister, and her grandmother. Her relatives assisted her financially with her child's upkeep. PT's dad was another parent whose financial situation has been greatly affected by the Anglophone crisis. He also explained how the crisis had impacted on the livelihood of young men and women from the English-speaking regions of the country:

Money is very important, and when you have money, you try to make sure you can give the best to your children, and because of this, parents struggle every day, and this may prevent them from being available all the time for their children. We used to earn higher before the Anglophone crisis, but we have moved to Douala due to the crisis, and our income levels have dropped. This has also affected our involvement in children's learning because we work so hard to put food on the table rather than helping them in school. Men try to engage in any job they can find, like motorbike taxi service and car taxi service. Some have made themselves very useless, engaging in theft and prostitution. It is not their fault, but it is just the situation in which they find themselves and try hard to make a living. (PT's dad, public nursery school, N1)

7.6 Parents' Beliefs about Parental Involvement in Early Childhood Learning

Parents' beliefs were analysed in relation to the reasons parents gave for choosing the nursery school for their children, parents' views about home and school involvement, and the types of education valued for children at this age.

Reasons for Choosing the School: The parents interviewed, whose children attended the public nursery school, gave varied reasons for choosing the public school for their children's education. GS's dad mentioned that he believed Government schools hired trained teachers,

and even the teachers hired through the PTA were also trained, and that was the reason why he was sending his child to this school. Other parents chose the school based on recommendations from friends and families, and they believed the school offered quality education. Contrarily, ES's mum was disappointed with the services provided by the school, especially the fact that teachers did not send back homework and PTA meetings were not held regularly. She sent her child to a public nursery school because she could not afford the tuition fees charged by a private school.

Parents' Views on Parental Involvement: Seven of the eight parents interviewed, whose children attended the public nursery school, admitted that parental involvement in children's learning was vital. Parents can do so by spending more time with their children, prioritising childcare, encouraging and listening to their children, supporting their children's learning and learning parenting tips gained from PTA meetings. While some of these parents found it difficult to be involved in their children's learning at the nursery school because of other demands like challenging work conditions, other parents felt it was not their role.

The parent's role was seen as less important than the teacher's role by SE's dad. Due to hardship and other difficult situations in life that he faced as a single parent, he felt his role as a parent was to ensure his child attended school. On the other hand, YY's Dad and RR's Mum said that the parent's role is important no matter the challenges they face. RR's mum believed the home was the base for children's education; thus, "parents should not only depend on what the teacher teaches children at school. Parents are the first teachers" (RR's mum, public nursery school, N1). She explained that in schools with so many children, like the public nursery school, parents should form close relationships with the teacher.

They should not only drop off and pick up their children from school at the end of the day. A teacher may know a child but may not know precisely who the parent is, so it is always the parent's place to contact the teacher and ask them to keep an eye on his/her child and give advice on how to help the child at home. Parents should not only wait for comments on the report card. (RR's mum, public nursery school, N1)

YY's dad thought parents should prioritise childcare and education no matter what the circumstances were.

I just want to advise that parents should be available for their children. I understand the situation in our country is bad. It is hard to get a good job, and even if you get a job, it is not a decent one, but parents should not go astray. Parents should make it a priority to educate their children. No job is more important than the quality time spent with children. It is dangerous for both parents to be always away from the child, and that is why you see some children with funny behaviours because they lack the love and education from their parents. (YY's dad, public nursery school, N1)

For PT's dad, following up with children's studies enabled parents to evaluate children's progress. He also believed sensitisation through the PTA can help parents become aware of their child's needs and how to help their learning both at home and at school.

Type of Education Valued for Children: The types of education valued by parents whose children attended the public nursery school were moral education, basic education, hygiene and environmental awareness. GS's dad emphasised that basic education was what he considered necessary for his children at this age. "What I mean by basic education is education that starts from me. The parents start laying a good foundation even before the child is born" (GS's dad, public nursery school, N2). Thus, according to him, parents should ensure their children have good moral education and that they as parents should be role models for their children. Other parents who preferred moral education talked about the importance of educating children to be well behaved in society. Three out of the eight parents interviewed thought environmental awareness was vital at this age; children should identify dangerous objects around them and learn how to keep themselves safe.

7.7 School Administration and the Teacher's Role in Parents' Participation in Children's Learning

The parents whose children attended the public nursery school had limited opportunities to participate in their children's learning at the public nursery school compared to the opportunities of parents whose children attended the private nursery school. The administration of the public nursery school encouraged parents to participate in their children's education by organising school events like PTA meetings and end-of-year ceremonies, communicating with parents by phone and letters, and through children's report cards given at the end of each academic year. Figure 7.6, generated from parents' questionnaires, shows how the school connected with the home; the main ways being: through letters or notes, phone calls or text

messages and parent-teacher meetings. Twenty four of the 28 parents recorded their responses, and parents were asked to tick all the forms of communication that applied to them.

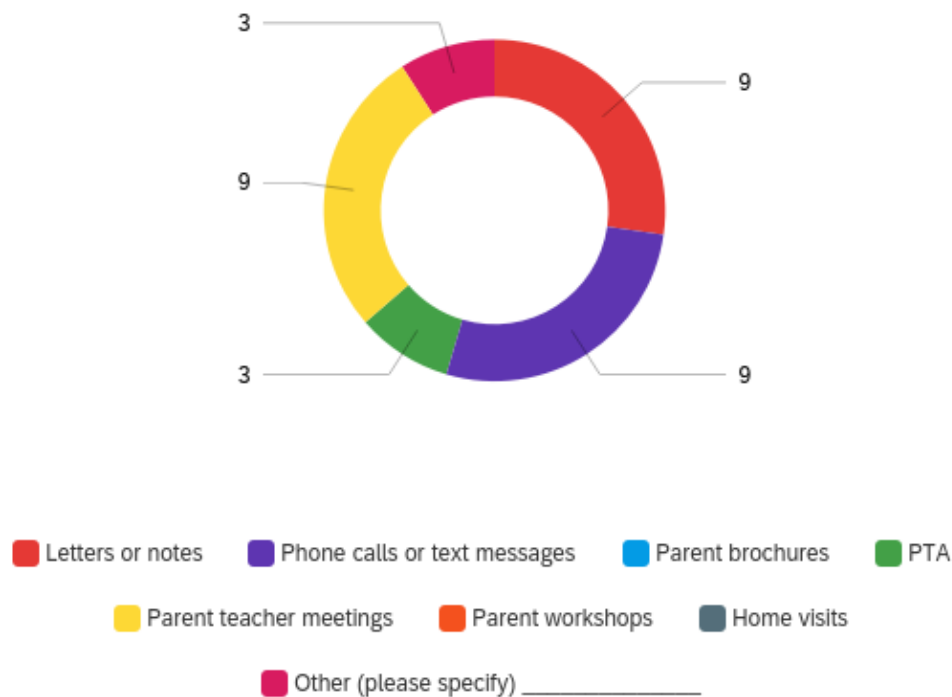


Figure 7-6: Number of Public Nursery School Parents using Different Forms of Communication with the School (n=28)

7.7.1 School Events

In Sections 7.3.1 and 7.3.2, as mentioned earlier, the public nursery school engaged parents in the children’s learning by organising end-of-year ceremonies and PTA meetings. Teacher 4 of the public nursery school explained that parents invited for PTA meetings were given advice on how to help children at home, in addition to a rundown of their children’s activities at the nursery school. Another teacher reported that the school administration invited parents for PTA meetings and to end-of-year ceremonies. “The school only organises the PTA meetings and usually end-of-year ceremonies where parents are invited to come and see what their children are doing. On this day, children sing, act in dramas and share rhymes” (Teacher 1, public nursery school).

7.7.2 Communication with Families

The public nursery school communicated with parents face-to-face during pick-ups and drop-offs, and through letters and notes, and by phone calls. All public nursery school teachers who

were interviewed reported that they spoke face-to-face with parents when they came to school to either drop off or pick up their children, especially if there were any concerns. However, during the two-week-observation period, most children were dropped off and picked up by motorbike riders. Sometimes, information was sent home through these bike riders. Only a few parents who dropped off their children would spend a couple of minutes greeting the teacher. Pick-up times were usually rowdy as many parents gathered in front of the classroom to take their children home. The conditions in which parents worked reflected the nature of pick-ups and drop-offs, as these conditions hindered a two-way communication flow between the nursery school and home.

The teachers reported that PTA meetings and end-of-year ceremonies presented other opportunities for teachers to discuss one-on-one with parents about the progress and wellbeing of their children. Letters were given out to remind parents of any vital school information like public holidays and teacher seminars. Phone calls were made mostly for emergency situations like in a case where a child was sick. Teacher 1, of the private nursery school, mentioned how she always spoke to parents about maintaining good hygiene and good nutrition for their children.

7.7.3 The Nursery School Curriculum and Home-school Relationships.

The Cameroon nursery school curriculum (Ministry of Basic Education, 2018a) calls on educators and parents to work collaboratively to promote children's academic, emotional and social skills. Home-school communications about children's academic progress and wellbeing were emphasised, and one of the ways in which it was understood that these things would be achieved was through conducting regular assessments and providing feedback to parents. The aim of assessments, as stated in the curriculum, was to inform parents of their children's learning and development, enable parents to set realistic goals for their children, encourage them to participate in their children's holistic development, and integrate nursery school activities at home.

Report Cards: The public nursery school updated parents about their children's education by sending children's activity books home at the end of each term and by issuing report cards at the end of the academic year. Parents were expected to send back these books at the beginning of the new term. The public nursery school report card contained information for all three terms of the academic year, and was issued only at the end of the third term. The public nursery school teachers expressed that report cards were not given to parents at the end of each term

because most parents will not return them to school at the beginning of the new term. According to Teacher 1 of the public nursery school, children's skills in language, maths, rhymes, reading, and sign language are assessed in the report cards. Teacher 3 of the public nursery school explained the reasons why books were kept in school:

The reason we don't allow children to take their books back home is we fear they won't bring them back. We give them the books at the end of every term so they can learn during the holidays with their parents but when school returns not all of them return with these books. Some get lost, and some parents claim they never saw the books. Some parents don't even read the report cards. In the report cards, we assess children's skills in terms of 'acquired', 'in acquiring process' and 'not acquired'. Activities that are evaluated include initiation to mathematics, oral language, gestures or sign language, pre-letter formation, and storytelling. (Teacher 3, public nursery school)

Figure 7.7 below shows an example of the public nursery school report card which was sent home at the end of the school academic year.

GOVERNMENT ENGLISH PRACTISING NURSERY SCHOOL
INDIVIDUAL REPORT SHEET

School year:
Name of the child:
Section:

Code
A= Acquired
IAP= in acquiring process
NA= Not acquired

Teacher's name:

Domains	Activities	Expected learning outcome	Competence	1 st Term	2 nd Term	3 rd Term	observation
Literacy and Communication	Story Telling	Good in the two	Pronounce the words correctly	A			
	Poetry/Rhymes	Official language and one national language	Recite the rhymes				
	Sign language/ Gestures		Mime and decord some gestures	NA			
	Reading		Read vowels and three letters word				
	Writing		Write vowels, Write the date of the day, write his/her name				
	French		Understand and speak French				
	National Languages		Understands and speak the national language				
Science and technological skills	Mathematics	Count and write numbers progressively. Recognize some shapes do simple addition and subtraction. Use the toilet appropriately. Show love for beautifying the environment with flowers and plants	Recognize some shapes, count from 1 to 10, do simple addition and subtraction				
	ICT		Name some local and modern tools of communication				
	Sensory/Per/Education		Recognize primary colours, recognize secondary colours, distinguish between sweet and bitter				
	Science and technology		Name the days of the week, wear appropriate clothes, turn the light on and off				
	Agriculture		Take care of the environment, shows interest in farming				
Practical life skills	Citizenship	Respect elders and show love for the country and community. Shows love to everyone. Throws dirt in dustbins. Report any incident to the teacher, follow hygiene and sanitation rules.	Practice social and citizenship values				
	Character Education		Practice good manners and good interpersonal relationship				
	Environmental Education		Conform with environmental rules				
Crafts	Music and dancing	Relate to music through singing and dancing. Draw and colour to express beauty and their	Demonstrate a spirit of autonomy, a sense of creativity and entrepreneurship				

Figure 7-7: Public Nursery School Report Card, Nursery One and Two

The public nursery school report card was designed following the guidelines set by the Ministry of Basic Education and it assessed children's skills in the domains outlined in the Cameroon Nursery School Curriculum (Ministry of Basic Education, 2018a). One of the Cameroon nursery school curriculum's (2018a) aims for assessment is to inform families about children's learning progress; thus, "families received assessment information at the end of the line" (Carr et al., 2015, p. 15), but were not involved as participants and contributors to assessments. Assessments in nursery school were summative, and this was carried out at the end of the instructional period, assessing children's knowledge and skills using standardised tests.

The report card contained the child's name, the school year, the teacher's name, and the section, which could be Nursery One or Two. It was divided into four domains, literacy and

communication, science and technology, practical life skills, and arts and crafts. These domains were further broken down into the different activities with their distinctive learning outcomes and competencies to be developed. Remarks were made on each domain for the first, second and third terms using three different codes. The code 'A' means the child has Acquired the skills expected to be acquired for that domain, 'IAP' means the child is still In Acquiring Process, while 'NA' means the child has Not Acquired the skills. Observation remarks are also added by the teacher.

The activities involved for literacy and communication included storytelling, poetry/rhymes, sign language/gestures, reading, writing, French and national languages. Children were expected to be fluent in both English and French, including one national language. Competencies involved pronouncing words correctly, decoding some gestures, reciting rhymes, reading vowels and three-letter words, writing their own names, understanding and speaking French and the national language.

Science and technology skills activities included mathematics, information and communication technologies (ICTs), sensory and perceptive education, science and technology, and agriculture. Children were expected to count and write numbers progressively, recognise some shapes, do simple addition and subtraction. They were also expected to use the toilet appropriately, show love and beautify the environment with flowers and plants. Competences involved recognising some shapes, counting, identifying colours, different tastes, naming days of the week, dressing correctly, and caring for the environment and showing interest in agriculture.

Practical life skills activities involved practicing citizenship, character education and environmental education. Children were expected to portray good citizenship by showing love for the country and community, and respecting elders, showing love to everyone, and practicing good hygiene. Competencies in this domain involved practising social and citizenship values, practising good manners and interpersonal relationships, environmental care, and the practice of healthy habits or lifestyles.

Arts and crafts included drawing, colouring, painting, handwork, music and dance. Children were expected to sing and dance, draw and colour to express beauty. Competencies involved demonstrating a spirit of autonomy and a sense of creativity and entrepreneurship.

Didactics for Public Nursery School Teachers: The curriculum (Ministry of Basic Education, 2018a) recognises that children have unique skills, interests and abilities that they bring into the classroom and that teachers must draw on and build upon, thus maintaining a balance between child-led and teacher-led activities in the teaching and learning process. The curriculum also acknowledges the importance of learning resources in nursery school settings. The document states that in the case of difficulty in obtaining learning resources, “natural and recycled materials should be used. These are recommended in order to rekindle the spirit of creativity in both the learners and the teachers alike” (p. 37). Such materials could be produced by learners, teachers, parents and the community, implying that the contribution of all members in the teaching and learning process should be acknowledged.

The findings revealed that the public nursery school faced the problem of limited study materials and a lack of play resources. Data emerging from the interviews with teachers and observations in the public nursery school indicated that teaching and learning was carried out in a teacher-centred approach. Most of the teachers emphasised the lack of enough educational resources, ranging from books, coloured pencils and audio-visuals materials. The issue of an overcrowded class made it difficult to adopt a learner-centred approach in education. The issue of an overcrowded class also made teachers believe that it was not their place to encourage parents to be involved in their children’s learning, especially at the school. The teachers said they thought that parents should use their initiative, and if they needed advice or wanted to get more information about their children, they should communicate with the teacher. Teacher 2 commented on the large class size, which made teaching and learning challenging, and the difficulty of reaching parents as motorbike riders dropped off most children:

I have about 84 children in my class, and it is stressful for two teachers to manage such a number of children. Sometimes I use Monday to Wednesday to write down exercises in their notebooks; on Thursday, they do the exercises, and we revise on Fridays. I personally do not give homework in my class because the children are so many and it is impossible to write in all their books. Secondly, my method of teaching could be different from the parent’s method, and this could confuse the child, and so I don’t give homework. I have about 84 children in my class, but less than 10 parents come to ask for information about their children. The academic year runs from September to June, and throughout this period, there are children in my class whose parents have never come to school, and furthermore I don’t know who these parents are. I know

mostly the motorbike riders who are hired to pick up and drop off these children. Most times, I invite the parents, and they don't respond, and it is not my place as a teacher to go and see these parents; they are supposed to come to me. (Teacher 2, public nursery school)

She further explained some of the difficulties at the public nursery school, especially those that her class faced when implementing the one-hour daily play-based learning programme, as advised by the Ministry of Education.

The Ministry recently sent out a communique to schools advising teachers to implement a one-hour daily play-based learning approach at the start of every day before any formal instruction occurs. Implementing play-based learning is a good idea, but the problem is we lack space and the resources to implement this. To manage this, I put out the few toys we had in front of the class and divided the children into four groups. Each group takes turns with the toys while the others sit down watching, waiting for a turn. (Teacher 2, public nursery school)

Teacher 1 believed that parents' level of education influenced parental involvement. Her approach to parental involvement was one-way as she expected parents to always initiate contact with teachers:

Parents should visit the classroom to know what children learned on that day, ask questions, and get feedback from teachers about children's learning. Most parents who visit are educated parents and those who have the time to come to class. The parents need education on the importance of child upbringing in the early years. (Teacher 1, public nursery school)

The teachers indicated that they taught children using songs and rhymes, using "whole class participatory methods" in which the teacher speaks or sings, and the children responded altogether. The teacher often wrote and drew pictures of the lesson on the blackboard for children to copy into their books. Pictures were also drawn and pasted on the classroom walls for children to read and learn.

Figure 7.8 shows learning activities for children (introduction to literacy and numeracy) illustrated on the blackboard by a public nursery school teacher.

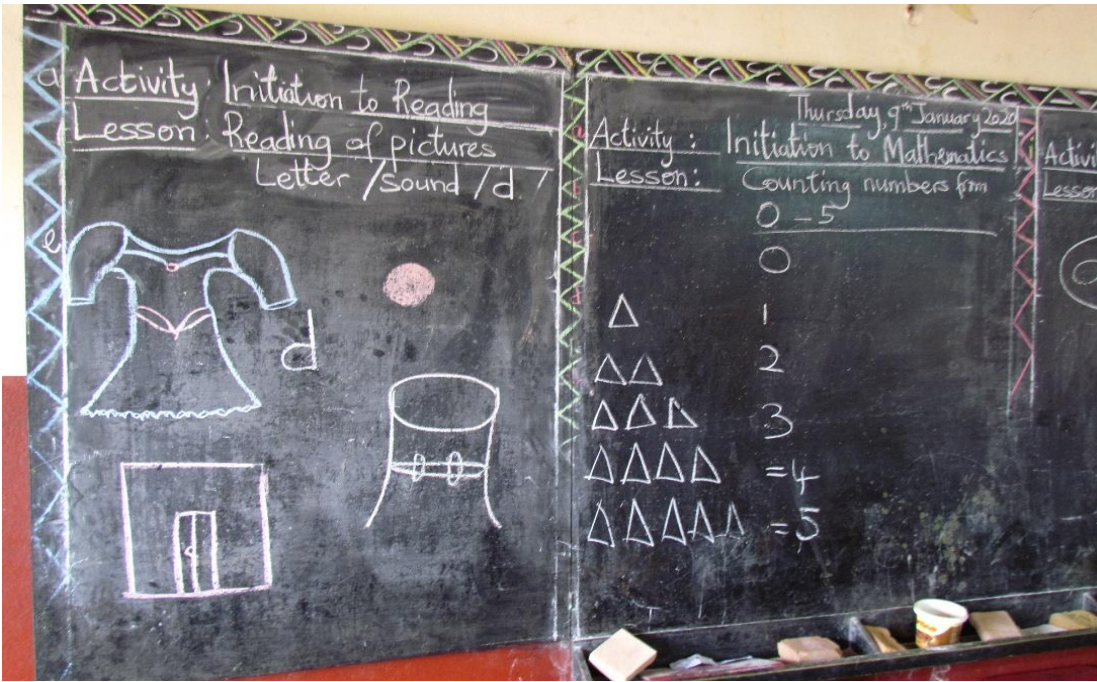


Figure 7-8: Class Activity Illustrated on the Blackboard by a Public School Teacher.

Figure 7.9 further shows other learning activities for children that teachers had pasted on the classroom walls. Some of these activities include information about family and daily life activities, as well as pre-writing skills.



Figure 7-9: Educational Resources and Some Class Activity Illustrated on the Classroom Wall.

The Cameroon nursery school curriculum (Ministry of Basic Education, 2018a) emphasises poetry and rhymes as a means of enhancing children’s conversation skills. Thus, in the public nursery school, rhymes were recited mostly during morning assembly and also towards the

close of the day when it was almost pick-up time. Figure 7.10 shows the Nursery One classroom and Nursery Two children reciting rhymes with the teacher close to pick-up time.



Figure 7-10: Nursery One Public School Children Reciting Rhymes with Teacher

The few play resources they had made it impossible for children to participate altogether during the one-hour free playtime, as one of the public nursery school teachers reported. Thus, during this one-hour free playtime, a few children would engage with the resources in front of the classroom while others would wait to take turns. Figure 7.11 shows some of the Nursery Two children playing with toys while waiting for parents to pick them up.



Figure 7-11: Children Playing with Toys While Waiting for Parents to Pick-up

There was only one slide in the school playground at the public nursery school, which had a school roll of approximately 320 children for both English- and French-speaking sections. Figure 7.12 shows children playing on the school's only slide after school while waiting for their parents.

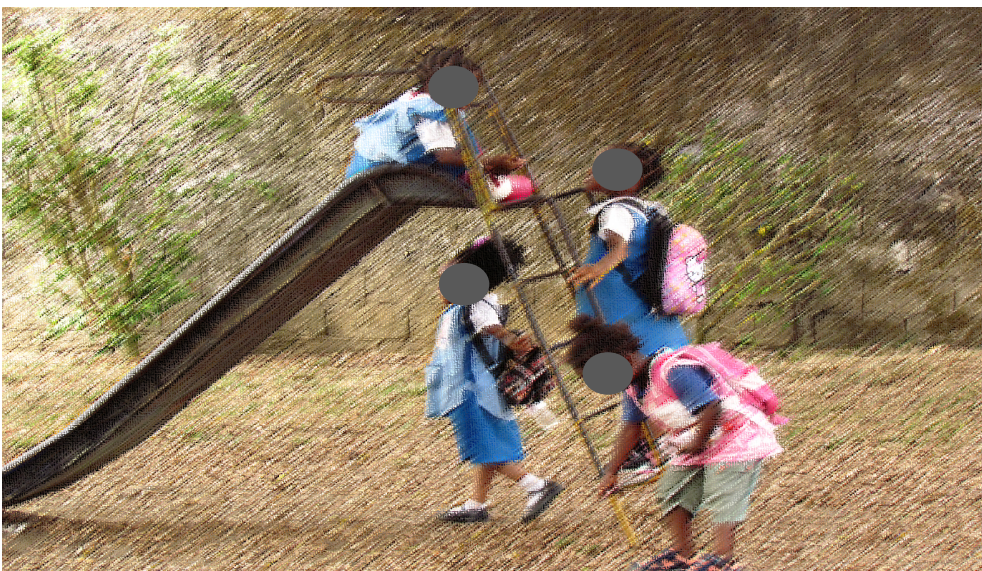


Figure 7-12: Children Playing in the School's Only Slide

A week before the end of the data collection, this slide was removed from the playground by the PTA president and the school gateman, due to the numerous accidents that happened when the children played on the slide.

7.8 Teachers' Beliefs about Parental Involvement in Early Childhood Learning

Public nursery school teachers' beliefs were examined in four categories; the level of importance teachers placed on home or school involvement, their beliefs on parental involvement in children's transition from home to the nursery school, beliefs about parent's expertise, and their general understanding of parental involvement.

Home and School Parental Involvement: Teacher 1 believed that both home and school involvement are essential, and she recognised the home as the foundation experience of children's education.

Both home and school involvements are important, and education starts from the home before children come to school. Parental involvement, in my opinion, should vary according to the needs of the child. It depends on how the child can understand and respond to learning. (Teacher 1, public nursery school)

Teachers 2 and 3 emphasised the collaborative relationship between parents and teachers. They believed parental involvement should be the same for Nursery One and Two because children need support from parents, no matter the class-level, and concepts introduced in Nursery One are furthermore taught in Nursery Two.

Both home and school involvement are valuable, and parents will work in close collaboration with teachers. Parental involvement should be the same for all levels because there are children who struggle to learn in both Nursery One and Two children and therefore need help from their parents. (Teacher 2, public nursery school)

Teacher 3 adds:

Both home and school involvement are essential. I believe parents should work in close collaboration with the teachers, and they can come on a Wednesday and Friday, for instance, to get updates about their children. Parent involvement should be the same in both classes because what we teach in Nursery One, we repeat it in Nursery Two. (Teacher 3, public nursery school)

Teacher 4 acknowledged the importance of parental involvement in children's learning. However, it was understood as a one-way process through which the parent was responsible

for contacting teachers to know what was happening at the nursery school and supporting the child at home.

Both home and school involvement are essential. Help children at home with homework, come to school, and snap what is on the board, and go back home to repeat the lesson with children. I think parental involvement should be the same for Nursery One and Two because all children need help. (Teacher 4, public nursery school)

Beliefs on Parental Involvement in Children's Transition from Home to the Nursery School: Similar to teachers' beliefs at the private nursery school, the teachers at the public nursery school believed that parental involvement in the transition from home to nursery school was unimportant. Some of the teachers reported that since children were received from the school gate, parents were not encouraged to come along. Teacher 1 reports:

We receive children from the school gate, and we pamper the children who are crying and assure their parents they will be fine; although we are teachers, we are also mothers. Some parents may come in to take pictures of their children in the classroom with friends. (Teacher 1, public nursery school)

Teachers 2 and 4 believed it might take a longer time for children to finally settle in the nursery school environment if parents are involved in the transition process.

The children cry on their first day, but we try to pamper them, offer them small gifts and assure them we will call their parents to pick them up quickly. Parents can stay for about 30 minutes, but we don't encourage them to continue staying because it delays the adaptation time for the child. (Teacher 2, public nursery school)

We comfort the children, and we encourage them that we will call dad to pick them up soon and offer them gifts. We don't encourage parents to stay because the adaptation period might be more extended if that happens. (Teacher 4, public nursery school)

For Teacher 3, while teachers were capable of helping the child to settle and to make the process less complex, parents were not encouraged to come into the classroom.

There are two teachers in Nursery One, so I stand at the gate to receive the children while my colleague waits in the classroom. We go to class, we play and pamper them. We buy sweets and offer them to the children and promise them more sweets if they come to school the next day. We don't encourage parents to come in because if they come, it's difficult to leave. (Teacher 3, public nursery school)

Parents' Professional Expertise: All the teachers thought parents lacked the professional expertise to participate in children's learning at the public nursery school. According to teachers, parents were not trained as teachers, and some were uneducated while others faced language barriers.

According to Teacher 2, educated or not, parents still lacked professional expertise because they were not trained as teachers. Thus, it was vital for the school to organise training sessions in which parents could be trained in the areas in which their children needed help, and they could work in collaboration with the teachers to help their children.

Teacher 4 reported that parental involvement should be home-based because parents were not trained as teachers.

Not all parents because before being a teacher, we go for training, and so a parent might not be able to do what we do because he/she might not teach the child what is appropriate for that age. So, parents should focus on following up at home on what the children learned from school. (Teacher 4, public nursery school)

For Teacher 3, parents lacked professional expertise to be involved in children's learning at the public nursery school. She believed the language barrier was one of the reasons for the lack of parental involvement, especially, as over 60 percent of the children in her class were French in background. Lastly, Teacher 1 said not all parents have the professional expertise to be involved in children's learning, but the few who know the value of the child and what it takes to bring up a child will sacrifice the time to get involved in their children's education. (Teacher 1, public nursery school)

Indicators of Parental Involvement: Teachers were also asked about some of the things parents did that indicated involvement in their children's education. Teachers' views about parental involvement was again one-way. Understanding teachers' views of parental

involvement, it could be inferred that the issue of an overpopulated classroom could be one of the reasons they shifted the role of and responsibility for home-school communication entirely to parents. Parents were expected to ask questions about daily activities, come into the classroom, take pictures of what was written on the blackboard, and inquire about the school's daily programme. It was also the parents' responsibility to ask the teacher about the child's academic progress and wellbeing, and ask questions about how to help them at home. Teachers did not regard parental involvement as a collaborative process in which parents will contribute to planning classroom learning activities with teachers and participating in the decision-making process of the nursery school.

Parents were understood to be involved in their children's learning when the children performed well in class. According to Teacher 4, children who received help from their parents at home performed well in the class. For Teacher 1, parental involvement positively affected children's learning outcomes. "If parents are involved in their children's learning, the learning outcome will significantly improve in all domains" (Teacher 1, public nursery school).

7.9 Case Studies of High and Low Parental Engagement in Children's Learning (Public Nursery School)

This section introduces case studies of high and low parental engagement for two selected public nursery school parents interviewed.

7.9.1 Case Study of High Parental Engagement in Children's Learning (Public Nursery School): PT's Dad

PT's dad was very responsive throughout the study: he responded to the questionnaires, was available for the first and second interviews, and gave consent to be contacted in the future when necessary. This was a family of four in which the dad worked as a safety officer while the mum stayed at home. PT (4 years old) and his older brother (5 years old) both attended the public nursery school. This family moved to Douala in response to the ongoing Anglophone crisis.

PT's dad actively supported his children's learning at home. He provided opportunities for his children to participate in the everyday activities of the home. He reported sharing the care of his children with his wife and other relatives and the benefits of collective upbringing.

I share the responsibility with my wife. My wife brings the children to school and picks them up if I am unavailable. She also teaches them at home

sometimes. We have a good relationship with our neighbours, and we share meals and drinks together. They go to their uncles and grandparents for holidays. I always make sure my family has a close relationship with other family members. The children benefit by learning good manners and how to interact with other family members. (PT's dad, public nursery school, N1)

PT's dad emphasised the role of his and his wife's care of their children, especially at this tender age.

I don't like sending someone to bring my children to school. If I don't bring them to school, my wife will do so at least from now until they are ten years old; I want to take on that responsibility. From 10 years, they are a bit mature, and I can assign someone else if I am not around. Each time I bring them to school, I make sure I walk them to their classrooms, greet the teacher, and my wife does the same. (PT's dad, public nursery school, N1)

Information emerging from the data collected not only portrayed the role played by older siblings in the family but also portrayed the maintenance of good relationships that were important between siblings and cousins. PT's dad encouraged socialisation between his sons and their cousins to promote close relationships. He also acknowledged the importance of understanding and speaking their mother tongue to preserve their culture and convey secrets when among strangers. Thus, his family practised speaking their traditional language at home.

Children carrying out tasks such as cleaning, washing dishes, and fetching water, among other things, are considered as contributing to the general wellbeing of the family. PT's dad encouraged his children to engage in chores, especially on weekends, to promote independent skills.

He assisted with home study at least four times a week for about 20 minutes and explained how much he valued and prioritised teaching his children at home. This dad also provided extra educational materials to aid learning at home, and he explained that these additional educational materials provided opportunities for self-exploration, especially when he was busy. Home study and provision of learning resources at home were essential, especially as teachers did not send back children's books or homework.

Furthermore, although opportunities for school-based involvement were limited, this dad attended all organised school events like PTA meetings and end-of-year ceremonies, and he

always maintained contact with the school teachers. He also offered support to the school, especially in terms of ensuring a safe study environment for the children.

PTA meetings were organised by the school, and parents were invited to come along to discuss their children's wellbeing and academic progress, and any other concerns. PT's dad, as a safety officer, was very concerned about whether the public nursery school was a safe learning environment for his and other children. He was an active member in the PTA and explained how the PTA helped the Government in school maintenance. PT's dad reported that parents' suggestions and views, made during PTA meetings, were considered and executed by the school administration.

PT's family also attended the end-of-year ceremonies organised by the school to support their children's learning. End-of-year ceremonies were celebrated to mark the end of the school academic year, at which time Nursery Two children graduated to Primary One and children did dramatic sketches, chanted rhymes and sang songs. During end-of-year ceremonies, teachers handed out the children's report cards to their parents. During these ceremonies, PT's parents were able to observe how their children participated and socialised with other children.

In addition, communicating with the teachers, especially during drop-offs, gave this dad the opportunity to know how his children were doing in school and to find out if there was anything that needed repairing in the study environment. He reported:

I am always in close contact with the teachers, and sometimes I feel sorry for them because they have a lot of work with a small salary. There was a time I bought hair scarfs and gave them to the teachers as gifts just to motivate them. Sometimes when parents come here and shout, I am not happy because these teachers possess the motherly character to take care of the many children. I always contact the teachers, so we talk almost every school day when I drop off my children. I think they are doing a great job. The teacher also made a remark last year that my son is one of the neatest in his class. His uniform is always very clean. (PT's dad, public nursery school, N1)

The challenges faced by PT's dad from being fully engaged in his children's learning ranged from financial difficulties, work-life and the ongoing Anglophone crisis in the country. Despite these limitations, this dad still prioritised the care and wellbeing of his children. PT's dad emphasised the importance of parents participating in their children's learning, especially both

at home and at school. He believed following up at home led to positive outcomes and improved children's learning.

Concerning the role parents play in children's learning, I believe every parent has his or her individual opinion about this. Still, for me, I try to teach my children something new each day, adding to what they already know. So, I think every parent should plan to teach their children so that they will not be blamed tomorrow for not raising their children. The kind of learning I value for my children at this age is environmental awareness and how to identify hazards in order to be safe. Apart from following up with what is being taught in school, I always teach my children to identify risks in the environment. I train them how to use electrical appliances like the TV, fan, and my laptop. My wife helps them identify kitchen equipment, and sometimes she cooks together with my daughter. Also, teaching my children the alphabet and learning to read is important. (PT's dad, public nursery school, N1)

To sum up, PT's dad exemplified high parental involvement levels, among the interviewed participants, as he diligently assisted with home study and provided home learning resources. He valued and upheld African values of child caretaking such as collective upbringing, sibling caretaking, traditional language practice and self-management skills development. Lastly, he participated in all events organised by the public nursery school and was an active member of the PTA.

7.9.2 Case Study of Low Parental Engagement in Children's Learning (Public Nursery School): SE's Dad

SE's family was a family of four, SE's dad, SE's older siblings, who were 11 and 7 years old, and SE, who was 5 years old and attended the public nursery school. They came from the North West region of Cameroon. SE's dad mentioned other family members and relatives although they did not live together. SE's dad was a single parent and worked as an auto-mechanic. He responded to the questionnaires promptly and gave consent to be observed alongside his son. We struggled scheduling a time for the first interview due to his tight work schedule. Fortunately, we finally held the interview one afternoon in front of the headmistress's office after he picked up his son. He declined to attend the second interview because he had no time and was very busy with work.

Parents, whose children attended the public nursery school, and who took part in this study reported bringing up their children collectively with the help of other external family members, friends and even members of the external community, such as the church. SE's dad emphasised the fact that he was solely responsible for his children's upbringing as a single parent but also mentioned how his children spent their school holidays with his stepmother. "I am solely responsible for my children's upbringing. I have other relatives and family members, but my children spend their holidays with my stepmother" (SE's dad, public nursery school, N2).

The parents whose children attended the public nursery school acknowledged the importance of teaching their children to communicate in their traditional language, as a means of preserving their cultural heritage and identity. SE's dad agreed that it was important for children to know their language and origin and, thus, intentionally practised speaking their traditional language at home. "Understanding and speaking the traditional language is important, so I teach them at home. Sometimes we communicate in the traditional language at home. They understand what I say, but it is difficult for them to talk back" (SE's dad, public nursery school, N2).

This dad explained how, as a single parent, he relied a lot on the assistance of his oldest child in carrying out specific tasks at home in his absence.

My youngest son does not do any chores. The older siblings take care of my youngest son, they shower him and teach him at home, and when I am so busy with work, the older siblings bring him to school. I must pick him up from school because they do not close school at the same time. In a case where I cannot meet up due to circumstances beyond my control, my son will have to wait for the older ones to close and then come to take him home from school.
(SE's dad, public nursery school, N2)

It was common for all parents, whose children attended the public nursery school, to improvise and teach their children at home as the teachers never gave homework and books did not return home until the end of the term. But as a single parent, SE's dad was very busy struggling to provide for the daily needs of his children and he could not meet the demands of teaching his son at home.

I am a single parent, so there is no time for me to do that. Life is so hard, and I must struggle daily to take care of the children all on my own. So, when I return

home, all I need is rest. Sometimes my eldest child teaches him at home. (SE's dad, public nursery school, N2)

Furthermore, other parents participated in their children's learning at the nursery school through class observations, face-to-face communication with the teacher, attending school events such as the end-of-year graduation ceremony, and PTA meetings. SE's dad reported that he could only participate in PTA meetings to know what was going on at school and to communicate with the teachers concerning his child's learning. He explained:

I attend PTA meetings, and it is helpful. A lot of things are said during the meeting; for instance, parents are advised to take care of their children and keep their uniforms clean. As a single parent, I can't do more than that; bringing him to school is enough for me. (SE's dad, public nursery school, N2)

SE's dad specifically complained about the difficulties he faced as a single parent.

It is very hard to be a single parent, to work and take care of the children. I can hardly make time to teach them at home because I feel very tired after long hours of working. At times I pay people to prepare meals for my children because it is hard for me to cook after work. These are my barriers. (SE's dad, public nursery school, N2)

Although SE's dad faced limitations as a single parent in actively being involved in his child's learning, he believed he was not supposed to do much other than make sure his child attended the public nursery school. When asked about how he got involved in his child's learning at school, he laughs and asks:

... "how can I?" I just leave him here, and I go; I only come back to take him, and if there is any information, the teacher should tell me. If the teacher doesn't say anything or write to me, I know nothing is wrong. They have never called or written to me, so I know everything is fine. Talking about contacting the teacher sounds funny to me because I am a parent and if there is a problem the teacher will call me and if she doesn't it means everything is fine. I believe the teachers know more than us parents. (SE's dad, public nursery school, N2)

The reason he chose this school for his son was due to convenience and proximity to their home. “My child is happy here, and the distance from my home to school is close enough that I don’t have to trek for long” (SE’s dad, public nursery school, N2).

Following SE’s dad’s responses, it can be concluded that he was a parent with limited levels of parental engagement. His challenges as a single parent are noted, but despite these, he held an appreciation for teachers’ professional expertise but believed that parental involvement was optional. Thus, the only activity he could afford to attend was the PTA meetings to communicate with the teachers about his child’s wellbeing at school. Finally, all parent participants (including SE’s dad), no matter their level of parental engagement, maintained African customs and practices of child caretaking and development.

7.9.3 Analysis of Themes Differentiating Case Studies of High and Low Parental Involvement

The case studies of high and low parental involvement are categorised according to the level at which both parents engage in their children's education.

Home-Based Parental Involvement

Home study and provision of extra educational materials were noted as the different ways in which public school parents helped their children at home. PT’s dad, categorised as the parent with high parental involvement, taught his children at least four times a week for about 20 minutes. He also provided extra educational materials like books for reading and videos on phonics, and animals. He valued learning at home and believed studying at home is like creating a second awareness. On the other hand, SE’s dad, categorised as a parent with low parental engagement, was a single parent facing a lot of challenges raising his three children all alone. Thus, he was unable to provide extra educational materials for learning and had no time to assist his son at home with his learning, and sometimes he left this task for the older siblings.

School-Based Parental Involvement

The parents whose children attended the public nursery school engaged, as earlier mentioned, in children’s learning at school through class observations, face-to-face communication with the teacher, attending school events such as the end-of-year graduation ceremony and PTA meetings. PT’s dad always communicated with the teachers concerning his children’s wellbeing and academic progress. He always asked the teachers after school drop-offs to find

out if teachers had any challenges or if there was anything that needed repairs in the study environment. In addition, he was also an active member of the school PTA and attended meetings regularly, including end-of-year graduation ceremonies organised by the school. SE's dad could only participate in PTA meetings to communicate with the school teachers and to get information concerning his child's learning.

Parents' Beliefs

The beliefs of both parents (PT's and SE's parents) were different. PT's dad believed the public nursery school offered quality education for his child, and he also believed parental involvement in children's learning leads to positive outcomes and improves children's learning. Contrarily, SE's dad thought teachers could better handle children's education as they knew better than parents, and all he needed to do as a parent was to ensure his child attended school.

7.10 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented findings obtained from field studies on the parents whose children attended the public nursery school with respect to their involvement in their children's learning. Analysis of data obtained unveiled two types of parental involvement, home-based involvement and school-based parental involvement. Home-based involvement included parents assisting with home study and providing extra educational materials for children to study at home, since public nursery school teachers never gave their children homework. Home-based learning also involved parents encouraging and supervising children as they participated in everyday activities at home. This included children's participation in chores at home, sibling caretaking, and learning aspects of their culture and language from grandparents and other relatives. School-based parental involvement at the public nursery school was limited compared to that of their private nursery school counterparts. It included attending school events (PTA meetings and end-of-year ceremonies), communication and class observations. The studies also revealed barriers faced by public nursery school parents, which affected their levels of involvement in their children's learning. The barriers included financial difficulties, work-life, language barriers, single parenthood and the effects of the Anglophone crisis in the English-speaking regions of the country.

Despite limitations of the parents whose children attended the public nursery school, some parents still believed parents play an essential role in their children's learning. Although some participant families preferred the public nursery school because they only trusted trained teachers who were employed to teach their children, others were disappointed by the services

offered by the nursery school and only sent their children there because it was affordable. When exploring teachers' beliefs, it was seen that the teachers at the public nursery school valued both home and school parental involvement for children's learning. The teachers also thought all parents lacked the professional expertise to participate in children's learning at the nursery school because they are not trained as teachers; some being uneducated, while others face language barriers. According to the teachers at the public nursery school, children whose parents are involved in their learning always excel in class and such parents are also in close communication with the class teacher. Teachers, in turn, encouraged parents to participate in their children's education by inviting parents to school events, communicating with parents and issuing report cards to describe children's academic progress.

The chapter concluded by discussing case studies of parents with high and low levels of parental engagement. The following chapter illustrates key differences in parental involvement between the public and private nursery schools.

Chapter 8

Understanding Similarities and Differences in Parental Involvement between the Public and Private Nursery schools

8.1 Introduction

The previous chapters analysed significant findings from each of the nursery schools. This chapter incorporates literature and analyses similarities as well as substantial differences between the two schools, and the implications for parent-teacher relationships and quality early learning provision for children. Similarities between the private and public nursery schools were identified in their overall goals and objectives. Also, there seemed to be similarities in parent engagement, mainly in home study and in the provision of extra educational materials for children at home. In both nursery schools, a few parents reported doing class observations, communicating with teachers and attending school events to participate in children's learning.

On the other hand, key differences were found in parents' background/demographic features, for instance, parent age-groups, income and occupation, and education levels. Also, class sizes, teacher ratios and class structure were more favourable in the private nursery school. Furthermore, the ways in which the school administration and teachers promoted parental involvement and fostered home-school relationships, and the levels at which parents engaged in school-based activities differed between both nursery schools. There existed significant differences in teaching methods, and the nursery reporting of children's learning progress.

8.2 Similarities between Private and Public Nursery Schools

The private and public nursery schools shared similarities in terms of general goals and objectives for children's education, as well as some aspects of home- and school-based parental involvement. Both the private and public nursery schools' overall goals and objectives stated that the school worked together with families to lay a foundation for children, their education and preparing them for primary school. However, the private nursery school administration and teachers had broader goals, which were based on John Dewey's education principles. Children were active participants in the learning process and parents had many opportunities to contribute to children's education. Therefore, teaching in the private nursery school prepared children not only for academic achievement but also aimed at social skills development.

Parents of both the private and public nursery schools were involved in children's education at home and school at different levels. Both private and public nursery school families engaged in home learning by encouraging children's participation in day-to-day home tasks. For

instance, children carried out chores supervised by parents, older siblings or relatives, and cared for younger siblings to develop their independence and responsibility. Parents also assisted their children in school-based learning at home and provided extra educational resources such as reading books, educational videos and games for children to study and engage with at home. Attending school events was another way for parents of both private and public nursery schools to engage in their children's education at the nursery school. However, the private school offered a much wider variety of school events than the public school, thereby affording greater opportunities for private school parents to participate, which they took up. Parents of both schools concluded that while the end-of-year ceremonies provided opportunities to observe and celebrate children's achievements, the parent-teacher meetings were opportunities to meet and discuss children's academic progress. Parents also had the chance to ask any questions or share their thoughts. Therefore, a constant flow of communication between the home and the school was sustained.

In addition, parents of both public and private schools communicated with teachers through face-to-face contact with teachers, and through letters, phone calls, text messages, and WhatsApp messaging. A few parents reported doing class observations to observe how their child learned at school and also interacted with other children. Usually, teachers tailored their communication to individual family's needs.

Furthermore, child upbringing practices reflected African cultural values and practices. These were similar for both groups of participants and included collective upbringing, sibling caretaking, traditional language learning and practice, and self-management skills acquisition. The study revealed the joint efforts of parents, grandparents and other relatives as well as wider members of the community, such as the nanny and the driver in the children's education and upbringing. Parent participants reported living together with grandparents and relatives. Grandparents and other relatives (some who lived in the home) assisted financially in the children's upbringing and contributed to teaching the traditional language by practising daily with children at home. Sibling caretaking was an essential task through which children developed skills and worked together for the general cohesion of the family. Older siblings and other relatives cared for children after school hours, helped with school drop-offs and pick-ups, assisted with homework, showering, dressing and feeding. Thus, children benefited from the love and care shown by many caregivers as they learned to fully participate in the family and community. The traditional language was considered an essential part of the Cameroon culture that needed to be practised and preserved. Thus, according to all teacher participants, it was

best practised at home as the school children and teachers hailed from different ethnic groups, and it was not considered possible to use every child's language at the nursery school. External family members provided care and support, and taught children how to communicate in their local language by daily speaking in the traditional language. Hence most children were multilingual, speaking their traditional language, and English and some French. Lastly, parents encouraged their preschool children to carry out some tasks at home, washing dishes, cleaning up after meals, assisting in the kitchen, and caring for younger siblings. When carrying out a task, children were supervised by parents, siblings or other relatives to develop self-management skills and independence, and take responsibility.

8.3 Differences between the Private and Public Nursery Schools

This section outlines the differences between the private and public nursery schools following two significant characteristics: the demographic characteristics and practices between the two nursery schools. Demographic characteristics explored the differences in the age group of parents, marital status, level of education, income level and occupation types. The differences in practices were examined in terms of class size, teacher-child ratios, class structure, level of parent engagement, teachers' didactics and report cards.

8.3.1 Age Groups of Parents

Differences in ages of parents, whose children attended the private and public nursery schools, were noticeable. The private nursery school parents, with children at the preschool level, were relatively older parents. This could be linked to many factors, including the parents pursuing their educational and career goals first before having children, as the findings showed high levels of educational achievement for private school parents.

8.3.2 Marital Status

Among the thirteen parent participants, whose children were attending the private nursery school, only one parent was single, but eleven out of the twenty-eight parents whose children were attending the public nursery school were single parents. This may well have an impact on children's learning, especially as single parents may work longer hours to meet living costs and support the care of their families (Hornby & Blackwell, 2018). Such parents may be unable to fully participate in their children's learning, and certain types of involvement like volunteer teaching, class observations and attending school meetings may require a commitment to time that is not possible for a single parent. Although many families talked about wider family involvement in the care of their children, during the observations, I only saw one grandparent

of one of the observed children at the public nursery school help with school drop-offs and pick-ups. Given that grandparents and other relatives were involved in the care of children in the home, the role of many caregivers in children's learning and development is an important aspect that could be considered by the nursery school.

8.3.3 Level of Education

Educational attainment for private nursery school parents seemed to be higher compared to public nursery school parents. Analysis of the questionnaires returned by private nursery school parents indicated that none had a level of education lower than high school certificate, as seen in Figure 5.2. Contrarily, most public nursery parents had a level of education that fell between having completed primary or secondary school education (Figure 5.3). Again, the parent's level of education can influence their beliefs on parental involvement in children's education. Recent studies on the impact of parents' education on children's education (Del Boca et al., 2016; Dickson et al., 2016) reveals a positive relationship between parents with high levels of education and the amount of time spent supporting children's learning and the provision of a rich educational environment at home. Weigel et al. (2006) reported that maternal education significantly influenced literacy beliefs; thus, parents with high levels of education believed that taking an active role in teaching children at home would positively impact children's academic achievements.

8.3.4 Income Levels and Occupation Types

Another difference between the public and private nursery schools was the parents' level of income and occupation types. Private school parents were engaged in more skilled and professional occupations, and earned higher incomes than their public school counterparts.

Furthermore, despite the fact that the cost of fees at the public nursery school was low compared to that of the private one, most parents with children in the public nursery school still struggled to find the necessary finance. Some parents were unable to buy uniforms and resources for learning, impacting children's ability to attend school regularly. According to Teacher 3 of the public nursery school:

Finance is another significant limitation. Some children came in 2 months after the beginning of the term because their parents could not afford 7500cfa tuition fees/year. I was a teacher who had once taken the responsibility to buy books and uniforms for three children in my class who lost their parents and were living with a relative. Providing financial assistance to some parents will

encourage them to get involved in children's learning. Some children in my class cannot write when others are writing because they cannot afford textbooks (Teacher 3, public nursery school).

The difference in income that parents receive across both nursery schools was also evident in the kind of transportation provided for their children during drop-offs and pick-ups. Private school parents who were unable to drop off or pick up their children from school due to busy work schedules, employed the services of a paid personal driver who used their family car to do drop-offs and pick-ups on school days. In addition, some children who were dropped off by parents in the morning went back home at the close of the day on the school bus. In contrast, approximately 70 percent of public nursery school families who could not drop off or pick up their children hired motorbike riders to take their children to and from school. Generally, only middle- to high-income earners in Cameroon can afford private cars. The majority of the population, primarily low-income earners, make do with public transportation either by using a motorbike taxi service and a car taxi service. In most cases, car taxi services do not access the innermost parts of the city, therefore, motorbikes have emerged as a popular means of transportation, although without precipitating an improvement in the road infrastructure (Chichom-Mefire et al., 2015). Even though motorbikes are faster and more flexible in the service they can provide, especially in a town like Douala characterised by traffic jams, this service is unsafe and associated with many accidents. Chichom-Mefire et al. (2015) also report that most motorbike riders lack training, and operate without a licence and protective wear such as a helmet. Both private and public nursery schools were located in the interior parts of the city. Still, most families, with children attending the public nursery school, could only afford public transport by motorbikes. While children's agency and independence skills development is highlighted here (some fundamental African values), as preschool children can ride on a motorbike to and from school without their parents, their safety is also compromised by what their parents can afford.

8.3.5 Class Size, Teacher-Child Ratios and Class Structure

Children were grouped into each class according to their age levels for both nursery schools. Learning was designed to fit each age-group, thus engaging in teaching practices that fostered learning and development for the particular age-group. However, class size, teacher-child ratios and structural organisation reflected distinctive differences between the private and public nursery schools. The private nursery school was split into Nursery One and Two, and class sizes were much smaller, with a high teacher-child ratio of 1:4. In contrast, the public nursery

school was a bilingual institution having both English and French sections, with each of these sections further divided into Nursery One and Two. Compared with the private nursery school, the public nursery school was characterised by low teacher-child ratios of approximately 2:80. Therefore, for teachers, who were working in the public nursery school, the method of instruction, classroom interactions with children and relationships with parents were affected by large class sizes with low teacher-child ratios. In line with the literature, class size and the nursery school's organisation impacted child-teacher relationships, the quality of learning and interactions, and children's academic progress in general (Downer et al., 2010; Hamre, 2014). Hanno et al. (2020) further established that large class sizes affect the level of teacher-children engagement and teacher-parent interactions. On the other hand, favourable teacher-child ratios and small class sizes allowed close interactions between children and teachers, as well as close relationships for teachers and parents, which was the case of the private nursery school.

8.3.6 Levels of Parent Engagement

Parent involvement was evident in both schools, but the level at which parents were involved in children's learning greatly varied between the private and public nursery schools. Examining the responses given by the parents of both public and private nursery schools, parent involvement at the private nursery school particularly was more than that experienced by parents at the public nursery school. Many opportunities were provided by the private nursery school administration and teachers for parents to be engaged in children's education. In these ways, families were building reciprocal relationships and communication with teachers, finding out about school-based teaching and learning, supporting their child through attendance at school events and contributing to school life through participation. Contrarily, the parents whose children were attending the public nursery school indicated that they participated in their children's learning at the nursery school in more limited ways; that is to say, by communicating with the teachers, class observations and attending school events. The only school event mentioned by these parents was the end-of-year graduation ceremony.

8.3.7 Teachers' Didactics

Teaching and learning in the private nursery school followed a learner-centred approach as opposed to that of the public nursery school, which was teacher-centred. In effect, there was close interaction between teachers and children, as well as parents. Personalised learning was facilitated, and the teacher was observed to identify each child's strengths and weaknesses, improving class participation and learning performance. Pictures of activities were also pasted on the walls as an affirmation of the children's work and to show what is valued in the nursery

school. Play-based educational materials were available and plentiful, such as movable letters and numbers, puzzles, plastic fruits and animal toys, building blocks and storybooks. Children could choose from a variety of activities to learn and play during free play. Enriching classroom resources promotes higher classroom participation levels, builds children's cognitive and social skills, and encourages creative thinking as children develop the ability to engage with learning resources, and thus actively participate in the learning process (Bierman et al., 2017; Heckman, 2006). Each class had a Smart TV where children could watch educational videos, mostly towards the close of the day while waiting for parents to pick them up. Sometimes, Nursery Two children were provided with LCD writing tablets for their class lessons.

The relationship between parents and teachers in the private nursery school can be described as a two-way relationship, and the school offered a lot of opportunities for families to be involved in children's education at school. In addition, the school administration and parents created a democratic forum headed by a parent. Parents' ideas and suggestions were always considered and implemented by the school through this forum.

According to public school teachers, a learner-centred approach in education was impossible to implement due to the lack of enough educational resources, such as books, coloured pencils, audio-visuals and an overcrowded class. In addition, public school teachers' views on parent-teacher interactions were found to be one-sided. Teachers expected parents always to contact teachers if they needed advice or wanted to get more information about their children and did not initiate contact themselves. Children were taught with the use of songs and rhymes using "whole class participatory methods", in which the teacher spoke or sang, and the children responded altogether. The teachers wrote and drew pictures of the lesson on the blackboard for children to copy in their books, and pictures were drawn and pasted on the classroom walls for children to read and learn from. Due to the large class size, children lacked opportunities to initiate activities or explore what was interesting to them, which could impact their cognitive development. Maintaining order in the classroom was challenging. If teachers were not paying attention, children would run in and out of the classroom, thus, indicating a lack of self-control and cognitive development. Similarly, Sandstrom's (2012) study found that large class sizes, lack of staff, and educational resources were limiting factors for children's cognitive and social development during the pre-school years.

8.3.8 Report Cards

The report cards and frequency of reporting for both nursery schools were also different. The private nursery school reported on generic skills and dispositions as well as progress in learning areas. The private nursery school teachers issued progress reports at the end of each month and report cards at the end of each trimester. Progress reports and report cards were different for Nursery One and Two. Issuing progress reports monthly gave the private nursery school parents up-to-date information. Furthermore parent-teacher conferences were organised monthly to provide opportunities for parents and teachers to talk about children's progress and the comments made on their progress reports.

On the other hand, the public nursery school reported only on progress in learning areas and reported less frequently. The public nursery school report card was designed to follow the Ministry of Education guidelines. Children's competencies were assessed in four domains (literacy and communication, science and technology, practical life skills, and arts and crafts) through observation, quizzes, and interviews with learners and children's ability to engage in class projects (Ministry of Basic Education, 2018b). Therefore, the focus of the assessment was basically on children's academic skills and less on social development or learning dispositions. The same report card was used for both Nursery One and Two classes. The public nursery school report card contained information for all three terms of the academic year, so the teacher provided comments at the end of each term and issued the report cards only at the end of the third term. Parent Teacher Association meetings were held only once a year for parents to formally discuss with their children's progress with teachers. Furthermore, teachers expected parents to initiate contact if they had any concerns. Thus, parents had limited opportunities to find out about their child's school-based learning and communicate with teachers, and were not invited to share information from home.

8.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter elaborates on the key similarities and differences between private and public nursery schools. The findings on the types of parental involvement as analysed in Chapters Six and Seven revealed two types of parental involvement: home-based and nursery school-based parental involvement. It was also discovered that private nursery school families were more involved in their children's learning through various school-based activities organised by both parents and teachers, when compared with the public nursery school families. Furthermore, the private nursery school administration provided a lot of opportunities such as parent-teacher conferences, parent forums, science fairs, cultural week, thanksgiving and end-of-year

ceremonies for families to be involved at the nursery school as opposed to the public nursery school administration. Differences in class size and the parents' level of income were other outstanding differences that impacted the level of parental involvement at both schools. Private nursery school parents' involvement was acknowledged by welcoming and implementing decisions made by parents through the parent-led forum. Collaboration between teachers and families enhanced children's education and formed strong connections between children, parents and teachers.

The next chapter discusses the findings of this study using relevant literature and the theories underpinning the study.

Chapter 9

Discussion of Findings

9.1 Introduction

The main objective of this study was to understand parents' and teachers' conceptions and practices about parental involvement in children's learning, the ways in which parents were involved in children's learning and how teachers encouraged their participation. This chapter discusses findings from data gathered in two nursery schools (one private and one public) in Douala, Cameroon. The study generated an understanding of the types of parental involvement, as well as the challenges parents face in engaging in children's learning. The chapter explores sociological and sociocultural theories and African concepts of learning and development and how these theories and concepts are engaged by the schools' and home practices. The aim is to develop new understandings of parental involvement at home and in the nursery school. The chapter is divided into three sections; this first section (9.1) introduces the chapter and reviews the theoretical framework. The second section (9.2) discusses the findings in relation to sociological and sociocultural theories, African concepts of child development, and relevant literature with the intention of addressing the research questions. This analysis led to the development of the maize model as a metaphor for understanding child development and upbringing in the African context. The last section (9.3) summarises the chapter.

A common approach in educational research in developing countries is to undertake analysis from Euro-American ideologies to interpret child development and learning, which in turn influences theory and practice (Ebrahim, 2012; Marfo & Serpell, 2014). Such an approach fails to recognise the existence of different cultural perspectives and views of child development and learning (Moss & Gunilla, 2008). For example, Nsamenang (2010b) noted that while Islamic-Arabic, Western Christian perspectives and Indigenous African perspectives co-exist in Africa, Indigenous African perspectives are often neglected. He described how Islamic-Arabic perspectives of childcare introduced by early Muslim scholars and merchants and Western Christian perspectives linked with education introduced by Protestant, Baptist and Catholic missionaries under colonial rule. These perspectives have suppressed indigenous perspectives. A typical example is the dominance of the English or French language in formerly colonised countries as a medium of instruction, marginalising indigenous languages (Marfo & Serpell, 2014). Ebrahim et al. (2018) and Nsamenang (2010b) call for a blend in these ideologies, where education might draw from both perspectives such that the dominant ideology would be informed by Indigenous ideologies. A way forward is to rethink approaches

aimed at bringing the cultural practices of the people into institutional child development and learning programmes.

This study considers the interface between sociocultural theories of childhood and African concepts of child development and learning in order to gain new understandings of child development and learning within the family, community and learning institution. Using James and Prout's (2015) sociological construction of childhood, the study acknowledges that childhood experience varies from culture to culture, which highlights the importance of studying children and their nature while paying close attention to context. This is directly related to Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural approach, which interprets learning and development as embedded in the cultural context. Therefore, children acquire new knowledge and skills by learning and interacting with their parents or more capable adults (teachers or other community members). Bronfenbrenner (1986) goes further to identify different ecological environments and the relationships between these environments that influence children's development directly or indirectly. In this study, the home and school environment, community settings, parents' place of work, broader systems of beliefs and values held by the society were found to impact child development and learning.

Finally, considering that child development should be shaped within the cultural context, an inclusion of African concepts of learning and development is relevant to the focus of this research project. Community participation, connections between parents and children in the immediate family, extended family, and the community are essential influences in early childhood learning from an African perspective (Nsamenang, 2010b). Drawing from sociocultural and African concepts, the child is characterised as a social being who learns and develops by actively participating in the family and the community. Sociocultural theories also emphasise the relationship between the home, schools, family, extended family and the society, and their influence on children's development. Recommendations for future consideration suggest a two-way relationship between the teachers and families, sharing ideas and gaining funds of knowledge that are beneficial to children's learning.

9.2 Discussion of Findings in Relation to Sociological and Sociocultural Concepts, and African Concepts of Child Development

Understanding and interpretation of findings in this study drew on James and Prout's (2015) new paradigm for the sociology of childhood, Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, and Bronfenbrenner's (1986) ecological model. Dewey's (1916) concepts of democracy in

education were used to analyse and discuss the private nursery school findings only since this private nursery school based its practice on Dewey's ideas. Furthermore, discussing and interpreting findings in relation to African images of childhood and development (Nsamenang, 2006a, 2008, 2010b) was crucial as this is relevant to the study context. The relationship between the theories and the findings characterises the child as a social being who learns and develops by interacting with the family, extended family and social institutions (nursery school).

James and Prout (2015) emphasised that child development varies from one culture to another, and thus it is important to explain how children learn and develop in their social and cultural contexts. This was an important consideration, although the findings also revealed within culture differences, not in the values of the homes but the nature of children's experiences in the two nursery schools. Overall, child development and learning was analysed from an African perspective, which emphasised the home environment as a base for child development. It was evident among the participants (both private and public nursery school families) that the child's upbringing is a communal task involving the immediate family, siblings and external family members. Children were able to observe and participate, as part of their learning in daily activities within their families and carry out tasks with guidance from adults or older siblings as in line with the ideas of Nsamenang (2008), Rogoff (2003) and Vygotsky (1978). Traditional language learning and practice was an important cultural tool used by grandparents to educate children about their roots/origins, and preserve their culture and identity. In some situations, everyday interactions at home were not focused on intentionally instructing children. However, children were still able to observe and participate in the daily routines and household chores in the family with their parents, siblings and other relatives through guided participation. Thus, children were active participants, in their own development through observation and participation, and in similar ways to those described by Rogoff (2003) in her key assertions that individuals develop by participating in their cultural communities.

Children were active participants in their own learning, while more knowledgeable adults mediated learning through guiding participation (Rogoff, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978). Similarly, Dewey (1916) notes that social interaction is central to development as children interact with adults to understand their cultural communities' social practices, customs and beliefs. Rogoff (2003) furthermore explained that parents and caregivers choose the kind of activities for children to observe and participate in through mutual structuring. In this investigation, parents reported that younger children assisted in the kitchen, cleaned up after meals and fetched water.

At the same time, older siblings were involved in sibling care in the absence of parents, during school drop-offs and pick-ups and with helping with homework. Therefore, learning took the form of a progressive process whereby children were assigned different tasks depending on their abilities with adult support provided (Nsamenang, 2006a; Rogoff, 2003). These were everyday tasks that were not designed as formal instruction but provided children with skills to grow and transform their ways of being (Rogoff, 2003). Socialisation practices, therefore, played an important role in children's development as children engaged in responsive relationships between peers, siblings and adults through guided participation, observation and practice (Nsamenang, 2008). Thus, the child was not a passive recipient of knowledge but an active learner within a community of learners and contributed to constructing their own learning experiences (Mitchell, 2010; Smith, 2007). Extended family members and hired nannies played significant roles in children's education. Grandparents, other relatives and hired nannies for families from both preschools assisted in caring for children after school. Parents entrusted the care of their children to other caregivers who did school drop-offs and pick-ups. These were hired motorbike riders for public nursery school parents and hired car drivers for private nursery school parents. The findings extend our understanding that child development and context are not separate entities but mutually interdependent.

Bronfenbrenner's (1981) ecological model is directly related to the African concepts of child development as articulated by Nsamenang (2008). Bronfenbrenner considered child development to be influenced by the interaction between the child and the environment, which he categorised as involving interactions with microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems and macrosystems. The microsystems were the child's immediate environments, where the child engaged directly with parents, siblings and teachers. The microsystems in this case study represented the child's home environment (families, siblings and external family members, peers and neighbourhood) and the nursery school environment (both private and public nursery schools). The home environment (in both preschool settings) exerted a strong influence on children's development through participation and socialisation practices.

In the context of the research project, understanding the various environments in which children learn and participate offers a framework for understanding child development and learning in the following settings: the home, wider community and preschool. Figure 9.1 below illustrates the study's findings about child development and learning in the home, community and the preschool setting. It depicts the child's relationship within the home environment and the influence of the immediate family, extended family members and the community on the

child's learning and development. The figure also shows the relationships between different environments (the private and public nursery schools) in which the child participated and the impacts on their learning. There existed a two-way relationship between the home and school in the case of the private nursery school. Parents actively participated in the learning process, contributing ideas and the setting of goals for their children's learning. This was not the case for public nursery school families who had limited opportunities to contribute to school-based learning. Home-school communication and relationship was one-way where teachers expected parents to always make contact when necessary. Finally, the child is influenced by broader systems of values that are disseminated by the society/Government through curriculum development, policies and practices for child development and learning.

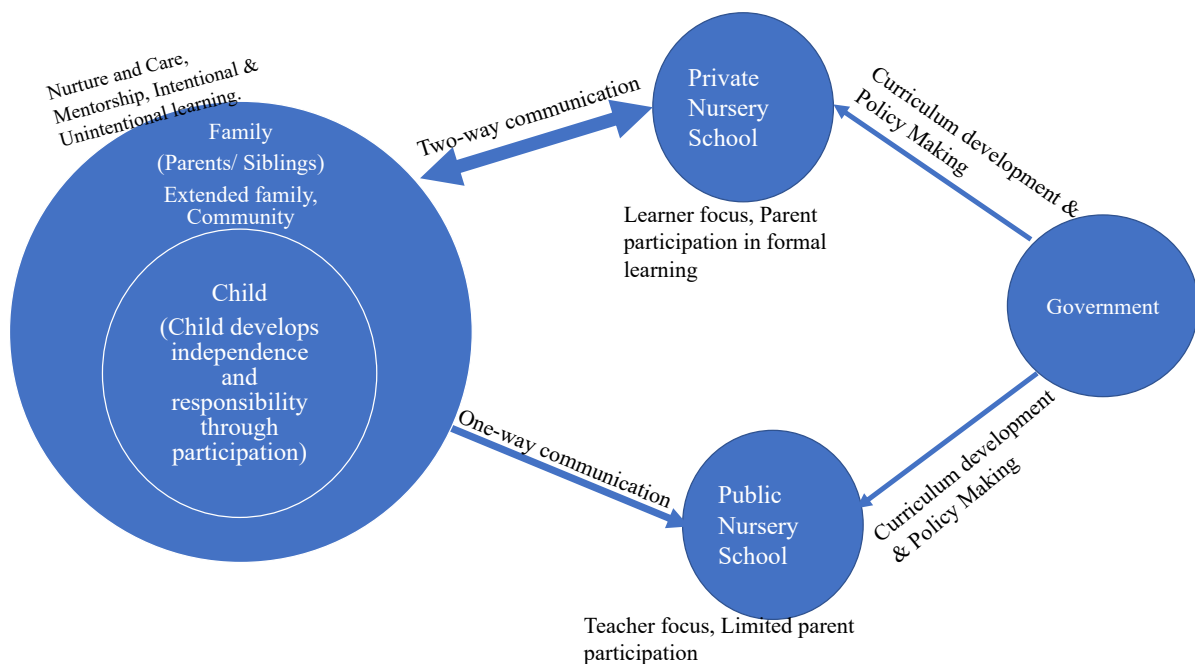


Figure 9-1: Child Development and Learning in the Home, Community and Preschool setting.

In Figure 9.1, the child is defined as a social being with participation rights and responsibility within the community. The family is the child's immediate environment and exerts a strong influence on the child's development. The family falls within Bronfenbrenner's (1981) definition of the microsystem, which is a setting where a developing person actively participates and engages in face-to-face interactions with others. The child depends on the family and other external family members for care and nurture, and the family acts as a carrier of cultural tools, and the child learns how to use these tools (Vygotsky, 1978).

The nursery school, which is still part of the child's microsystem, also influences the child's learning and development. "Activity, role, and interpersonal relation" (Bronfenbrenner, 1981, p. 22) are crucial elements of Bronfenbrenner's description of the microsystem that influences the child. Within the two nursery school settings in this study, the child learned by engaging with the teacher and other peers. The private nursery school adopted a learner-focused pedagogy, with the teachers involved in an interactive relationship with children. Child participation was an important feature here as the child engaged in the teaching and learning process. For instance, children worked independently in small groups supervised by the teacher, engaging in science-based projects like the recycling project, which encouraged them to care for the environment. Thus, children had opportunities to develop a sense of responsibility and independence which are valued attributes in Cameroon culture. It was noted that apart from responsibility and independence, only limited cognisance was given by the school of African childrearing values. However, through assisted learning and guidance from educators, the child could develop new knowledge and skills such as communication and language development, and an ability to work cooperatively with others.

On the other hand, the public nursery school lacked the resources to adopt a learner-centred approach to pedagogy, in addition to having to contend with overcrowded classrooms. Thus, children were taught using "whole class participatory methods", whereby the teacher recited rhymes and sang songs together with the children. In addition, children's activity charts were hung on classroom walls for children to learn, and teachers wrote down exercises for children to complete in their notebooks once a week. High child-teacher ratios influenced classroom interactions and teachers' ability to encourage parents' participation in children's learning. Differences in the activities, roles and relationships within these two preschool settings were associated with different patterns of parental involvement and might lead to different developmental outcomes.

Bronfenbrenner's (1981) mesosystem explains the relationships or the connections between microsystems. This can be seen through parent involvement in children's education, parent-teacher relationships and home-school connections. Parents' participation and input in the private nursery school was recognised and encouraged through their invitation to events like parent-teacher conferences and other events like the democratic Parent Forum. Some key characteristics of a democratic learning institution, according to Dewey (1916), are those that encourage freedom of communication, mutual respect, shared goals and interest of all stakeholders. The private nursery teachers explained that they were guided by these ideals. In

the case of the private nursery school, there existed a reciprocal and responsive relationship between the home and the school. This was evident through a two-way flow of communication between the home and school, parents' participation in school-based activities and their contributions to decisions that influenced their children's learning. There were very limited opportunities provided for school-based involvement in the public nursery school and no evidence in the school of cognisance of African childrearing values. Parent participation was considered necessary for children's education, but parent-teacher relationships were construed as being necessarily one-sided. Due to the large class size and the difficulties this posed for parent-teacher relationships, teachers expected parents to always be in contact with them if they needed advice or wanted to get more information about their children. There was an inconsistent flow of communication between the school and the home, especially as most children were dropped off and picked up by motorbike riders and not by their parents. Therefore, there existed limited opportunity for information sharing between parents and teachers, which impacted children's learning. Interestingly, not all public nursery school parents wanted to form links with the school or teachers. They assumed the teacher would make contact if there were any concerns; otherwise, they believed there were no issues. The differences in parents' roles and activities, as well as the power balance within the mesosystems, influenced children's developmental potentials differently in the two settings (Bronfenbrenner, 1981).

Furthermore, events that occurred in external environments (exosystems), in which children were not directly involved, still had significant impact on their learning. For instance, parents' working conditions were one of the barriers to parental involvement reported by parents in both preschool settings. Private nursery school parents' busy work schedules acted as a barrier to attending parent-teacher meetings and sometimes posed challenges for completing homework. Public nursery school parents' socio-economic status and difficult working conditions affected the patterns of parent-child interactions, as well as their ability to provide the needed learning resources for their children. The Anglophone crisis posed challenges as it led to internal migration, loss of income for some families, high enrolment rates at the public nursery school, and higher child-teacher ratios impacting child-teacher interactions in the classroom.

The microsystems, mesosystems and exosystems are all embodied in the macrosystem, which includes the broader sociocultural and political systems within the country (Bronfenbrenner, 1981). In this study, the macrosystem influence was evident in the Government's impact on children's learning as seen in the values emphasised in the curriculum and policies related to

the nursery school sector. The Ministry of Basic Education develops policies that set the rules and guidelines, as well as funding for the nursery school education sector. In collaboration with other education stakeholders, the Ministry has designed a curriculum that is a working document for all nursery school teachers. It was evident that parents had no direct influence in the development of the nursery school curriculum and that the Government did not offer any financial support to families. There was inadequate funding for the public nursery school, resulting in overcrowded classrooms and a lack of material resources for teaching and learning. It was challenging to implement the Government-recommended 1-hour free playtime periods due to the under-resourcing of learning materials. Therefore, measures to strengthen the macrosystem link and its influence on children's development would be advantageous.

The following section will present an in-depth discussion of the findings and show how these relate to the theories and relevant literature that has facilitated answering the research questions. In answering the research questions, the discussion is categorised into four points of focus:

- Parents' beliefs and practices about parental involvement in early childhood learning.
- Barriers to parental involvement in children's learning.
- Child development and upbringing methods, and their influence on the preschool curriculum.
- Teachers' beliefs and practices, and how these influenced teachers' attitudes towards parental involvement in early childhood learning.

9.2.1 Parents' Beliefs and Practices about Parental Involvement in Early Childhood Learning

Sociocultural and African conceptions of early childhood learning emphasise the critical role of the family and other caregivers in children's learning and development. The findings confirmed that parents assisted children in their learning at different levels both at home and at school for both private and public nursery schools. Therefore, though the child has the ability to learn and develop, additional guidance and knowledge from parents or teachers can extend their cognitive development beyond their actual developmental level (Crain, 2011; Vygotsky, 1978). The level of parent engagement at the private and public nursery schools differed. These differences were influenced by two factors, parents' beliefs about parental involvement and opportunities provided by the nursery school for parents to engage and contribute to the learning process. In line with Hornby and Lafaele's (2011) model, parents' beliefs about their

roles and responsibilities in school-based learning, in addition to the role and attitude of educators towards involving parents, promoted or hindered parental involvement. Hornby and Lafaele (2011) noted that parents who believe their part is only to get children to school, and the school then takes over their education, will not fully participate in either home or school-based learning.

Parents in both preschools were actively involved in home learning by encouraging children to participate in domestic tasks. This learning at home was not recognised or immediately visible to teachers. The teachers of both preschools interpreted a lack of visible involvement (school involvement) as representing a lack of parental support for their children's learning. This is consistent with the findings in a study by Minke et al. (2014), which showed how school-based parental involvement positively influenced parent-teacher relationships compared to home-based involvement that was not visible to teachers.

9.2.2 Barriers to Parental Involvement in Children's Learning

Recent literature indicates that social and economic barriers such as the level of education, low income, children in a single-parent-household or children from divorced or separated parents, and parents working conditions may influence the level of parental involvement in children's learning (Dickson et al., 2016; Greenberg, 2011; Li & Fischer, 2017). Parents who participated in this study reported on challenges that prevented them from fully engaging in their children's learning at home and school, such as financial difficulties, work-life, language barriers, the demands of being a single parent and the effects of the ongoing political crisis in the country. All parent participants reported difficult working conditions as preventing them from attending school meetings and spending time helping children with home study. A single parent maintained that school-based parental involvement was unnecessary, especially as he will never have time to participate. Inflexible working conditions act as barriers to both home-based and school-based parental involvement. It is established in the literature that single parents and low-income families may face more challenges, especially as they may work longer hours to cater for their families (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Li & Fischer, 2017).

The socio-economic status of families of both preschools was evident in the opportunities parents had at their disposal to support their children's learning, as well as in the levels of parental involvement at school in some cases. Harris and Goodall (2008) found that families with high economic status, as opposed to low-income families, communicated freely with teachers, regarded them as equals and had access to childcare and transportation. Similarly, the

private nursery school parents had access to personal transportation and were actively involved in the school's decision-making through their Parent Forum compared to public nursery school parents. Hence most public nursery school parents had limited contact with the school daily.

Furthermore, parents and teachers held different opinions about their roles and responsibilities, which hindered parental involvement. Some public nursery school parents acknowledged that teachers are trained to educate their children; thus, they are more knowledgeable than parents, and for this reason, there is no need to participate in children's learning at school. In addition, the public nursery school teachers believed these parents lacked professional expertise to engage in their children's education, especially at school, because they are not trained as teachers, and some of them are uneducated. In effect, coupled with the added disadvantage of overcrowded classrooms, teachers did not consider creating opportunities for parent participation in the nursery school. They expected parents to make contact if they had any queries. Some of these parents did not make any contact and did not attend PTA meetings, believing that teachers would contact them if they needed to. These differing perceptions and beliefs about parents' and teachers' roles and responsibilities in children's education hindered parental involvement (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Wolf, 2020). Studies carried out by Gonzalez et al. (2005), and Mitchell and Ouko (2012) see the need for an inclusive practice in educational institutions, which should lead to relationships of trust and respect between educators and families. The study suggests a relationship of mutual respect between teachers and parents, and the integration of family aspirations and funds of knowledge in the nursery school setting would be desirable.

9.2.3 Child Development and Upbringing Methods and their Influence on the Preschool Curriculum

According to Nsamenang (2010b) and Colonna (2012), communal upbringing and sibling caretaking are key concepts of child development, as is evident in the African culture. These concepts offer a conceptual framework for interpreting the importance of the immediate family and extended family in children's development. Although I set out to explore the role of parents, the study revealed the joint efforts of parents, grandparents and other relatives in children's education and upbringing, reflecting the traditional patterns and beliefs of African culture (Nsamenang, 2008, 2010b). Other families reported living together with grandparents and relatives, and some grandparents assisted financially in children's upbringing and contributed to teaching the traditional language.

Participants in the study acknowledged traditional language as an important part of the Cameroon culture that needed to be practised and preserved. Although English and French are official languages in Cameroon, over 279 indigenous languages are also spoken by different ethnic groups (Simons & Fennig, 2018). All teachers, as such, reported that learning and practicing traditional languages is a challenge at school as the school children and teachers hail from different ethnic groups. Therefore, according to both groups of preschool teachers, traditional languages were best practised at home among family members, grandparents, and other relatives.

The child is defined as a social being, an active participant who socialises, learns and develops by interacting with the family, extended family, the nursery school and the society (Bronfenbrenner, 1996). The child is a dependent in the family with participation rights, learning within a community of learners, at home and in an educational setting (Mitchell, 2010; Smith, 2007). Colonna (2012) defined children as agents and participants in society. Presenting his concept of sibling caretaking, he focused on the ordinary circumstances of children's everyday life, not just on children who were in particularly difficult situations. Children who care for their younger siblings work for the general benefit of the family by aiding their parents and other caregivers, while they carry out other tasks. Parents in this study reported that older siblings helped younger siblings with feeding, showering, getting dressed, playing together, assisting with homework, and sometimes doing pick-ups and drop-offs to and from school. Participating in the daily routines of the home is an important aspect of child development and as is learning in the African context, which was not drawn on in teacher-led activities in this study. African conceptions of child development emphasise sibling caretaking culture as a prominent way through which children learn and develop. In the study, multiple caregivers were involved in the learning and caregiving process, and children learned and developed through gradual social integration into the community (Nsamenang, 2006a).

Nsamenang (2010b) introduced the concept of peer mentoring as another way through which a child can acquire skills by learning and carrying out tasks supervised, corrected and mentored by older peers or siblings. While older siblings look after their younger ones in the absence of adult caregivers, younger children in the charge of their older siblings have the duty to respect them and obey their orders (Colonna, 2012). Older siblings may assign a task to younger ones which may include washing dishes and sweeping. Thus, there is reciprocity between rights and duties. Parents in the study encouraged their children to carry out some tasks at home to promote self-reliance and responsibility. As noted earlier, tasks ranged from fetching water,

cleaning after meals, washing, assisting in the kitchen and caring for younger siblings. Some parents gave older siblings the right to discipline their younger ones.

In summary, the connections between parents and children in the family, external family and the community are significant in child development and learning, from an African perspective, and this was reflected in the findings from the researcher's engagement with the parents who participated in this study. Several factors come into play in relation to the learning and development of the African child. African children's daily routines involving community participation, especially child-to-child sociability and peer-mentoring cultures, aim to develop skills, competency, agency and autonomy, and rights and opportunities. One recommendation from the study is that educators should be aware of these critical developmental aspects and incorporate them into their curriculum. For example, child development and learning programmes could be designed in a way that fits the "unique needs, cultures, and institutions" of a country (Garcia et al., 2008, p. 205).

9.2.4 Teachers' Beliefs and Practices and how these Influenced Teachers' Attitudes towards Parental Involvement in Early Childhood Learning

Bronfenbrenner (1986) theorises that mesosystem links are formed when a child actively engages in more than one setting/microsystem. In this study, a mesosystem link is visible as the child spends time both at home and at the nursery school, although the nature of this link varied for different children, depending on the nature of the connections that were made. This section discusses features of the micro and mesosystems, such as the different methods of teaching and learning, teachers' beliefs, as well as teacher-parent relationships for the private and public nursery school, and the influences of these phenomena on children's development and learning.

Methods of Instruction

The findings disclosed different methods of instruction being implemented by the private and public nursery schools. The Cameroon nursery school curriculum (Ministry of Basic Education, 2018a) encourages a child-directed approach to learning which focuses on building on the unique skills and abilities of the child. The private nursery school teachers applied a learner-centred pedagogy engaging with their students in the teaching and learning process. On the other hand, a teacher-centred approach was practised in the public nursery school; teachers engaged learners using whole-class participatory techniques due to lack of educational resources and an overcrowded class. It is noted that high pupil-teacher ratios negatively

influence the quality of instructional support, classroom interactions and home-school relationships (Downer et al., 2010; Hanno et al., 2020). These two microsystems were very different and afforded different opportunities for children.

Private nursery school teachers in most cases adopted a learner-centred pedagogy advocated by Beckett (2018) and Dewey (1915), guiding and actively engaging children in the learning process, prompting and reconstructing children's experiences, and participating in real-life activities. Children were recognised as active participants in the construction of their own lives (James & Prout, 2015). Chung and Walsh (2000), and Dewey (1915) assert the importance of designing teaching strategies that are based on teachers' professional knowledge and curriculum, incorporating children's interests and co-constructing learning with them. There seemed to be a variety of resources for children to engage in learning and play; learners engaged in cooperative as well as community-based learning whereby children were organised into small groups and carried out projects that impacted on the community. This was evident when the school organised the annual thanksgiving ceremony, and children were asked to bring items or cash to be donated to an orphanage. After the ceremony, teachers, together with children, visited the orphanage to present the donations. Sociocultural approaches encourage guided and intentional teaching methods where the teacher actively supports children's learning and play (Rogoff, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978). The findings also revealed that the nursery school teachers and children carried out science-related projects, which were presented to families during their yearly science fair. During the last science fair, the Nursery Two children worked on a recycling project, composted waste and grew a garden. The teachers applied practical life experiences to their curriculum, and children experienced and learned new ideas expanding their existing knowledge. Teachers at the private nursery school acknowledged all children's competencies by awarding certificates.

On the other hand, public school teachers applied "whole class participatory methods" of teaching. Children were passive learners, learning by reciting and copying what the teacher wrote on the board. Despite the shortage of resources for teaching and learning, the teachers managed to teach many enrolled children in their classes. Large class sizes and lack of learning resources influenced teachers' methods of instruction. Similarly, Downer et al. (2010) and Hamre (2014) noted that class sizes affected child-teacher relationships and the quality of learning. Nevertheless, the public nursery school teachers encouraged children's participation, giving the child the role of the "teacher" during traditional language learning and practice, but this was not a regular event, scheduled only once every term. To an extent, families' knowledge

and cultural background were recognised and utilised (McDevitt, 2016) by sending the child home to learn simple words in their dialect and to share their new vocabulary in class with other children. Children's learning and development occur through observation and participation in the home and community activities, and through interactions with parents, siblings, peers and other community members. Teachers overlooking these community routines and practices, which are crucial to child development, support the view of Marfo and Serpell (2014) and Nsamenang (2010b), who argue that exogenous ideals are imposed on African perspectives of child development and family-based childrearing practices.

Teaching and learning in both nursery schools aimed to achieve curriculum goals that focused on cognitive development and were framed for different age categories. This approach to learning is described by Alasuutari et al. (2014) and Bennet (2010) as the Anglo-Saxon tradition or the infant school approach. Children's academic progress was assessed in specific subjects for private and public nursery schools, and focused on summative information about children. Assessment systems with varied assessment opportunities considering cognitive and noncognitive aspects of children's learning will be valuable to inform and improve teaching and learning systems and practices (Gordon Commission, 2013). Although the private nursery school considered children's cognitive and social development skills, the assessment tools were not responsive to the cultural and linguistic diversity within the local context.

The findings revealed negligence on the part of the Government in funding and providing the necessary resources needed to manage the public nursery school. A key implication is that the Government needs to take major steps to improve the services of the public nursery school. Firstly, a provision of extra classrooms and teachers to accommodate the increasing number of students and to implement the recommended child-teacher ratio, which is 30:2. "Early childhood is a critical stage of development that forms the foundation for children's future wellbeing and learning" (UNICEF, 2016, p. 1). Therefore, it is absolutely essential to ensure that children learn in a comfortable and safe environment with all the resources provided.

Teachers' Approaches to Enhancing Parent's Participation in Children's Education

The involvement of parents in children's education does not only enhance learning and performance but also builds strong connections between children, parents and teachers (Moll et al., 1992). While parents need to take up this responsibility to become active participants in children's learning journeys, teachers are also responsible for encouraging and motivating parents. Findings from the study indicated that both nursery schools promoted parents'

participation in different ways. The private nursery school involved parents in its activities by organising a series of events throughout the academic year. Private nursery school parents had the opportunity to be part of a parent-led Parent Forum through which they contributed ideas, learning suggestions and expressed issues of concern. Parents were not simply responding to teachers' agenda and in this way the parent-teacher relationship became more balanced. Accommodating parents' inputs into the school policy and organising parent awareness workshops improves communication between the school and families, ensuring strong parental involvement as suggested by Barrera and Warner (2006) and Epstein (1995). The private nursery school also organised a series of events throughout the academic year.

Furthermore, the private nursery school teachers reported carrying out unofficial home visits to some families for learning purposes. Home visits generate strong connections between families and teachers, and create opportunities for teachers to understand children's identities and backgrounds (Hedges et al., 2019; Moll et al., 1992). Thus, carrying out intentional and frequent home visits would be beneficial. Home visits will serve as an opportunity for teachers to interact with families, understand their own conceptions of child development and learning, and how they can include their knowledge of these phenomena in their pedagogy. In this process, Cooper et al. (2014) encourage "the teacher-as-learner" approach where the family is seen as the expert while the visiting teacher presents themselves as a learner. This will help to create a curriculum that connects home-based knowledge and the school curriculum, supporting the mesosystem for the child (Bronfenbrenner, 1981) by enhancing the interrelationship between the settings. Home visits may also be a good opportunity to foster home-school relationships in the public nursery school, but this will be challenging for teachers with the current pupil-teacher ratios of over 80:2.

Opportunities were found to be limited for public school parents to participate in children's learning in the nursery school. Parents had the chance to attend one annual event organised by the school, and home-school communications were limited. Sharing information about child development and parenting techniques, supporting skills-building through modelling and practice, and communication enhance parents' participation (Barrera & Warner, 2006; Grindal et al., 2016). Thus, I argue that creating and implementing more opportunities by public school teachers to involve parents in children's learning at school is essential.

Teachers' Beliefs about Parental Involvement in Children's Learning

Teachers' beliefs about parental involvement in children's learning may promote or hinder parental involvement. Teachers of both the private and public nursery schools who took part in the study acknowledged the importance of parental involvement in children's learning. One of the teachers believed that poor achievement results from parents' lack of involvement or valuing of education. Similar to the findings from Robinson and Harris's (2014) study, the teachers considered children's poor achievement results to be directly related to a lack of parental involvement. In line with the findings of Huss-Keeler (1997), the teachers in the study viewed parents who were actively involved in their children's education as interested parents. The teachers considered parents as actively involved when they responded to comments or letters from the school, attended school meetings, ensured children completed their homework and called to inquire about their children's learning or wellbeing. Thus, the preschool teachers disregarded other forms of parent involvement which took place at home involving children's participation in the daily activities supervised by parents or older siblings. Considering that learning and development are directly related to culture, utilising household knowledge and cultural resources for classroom instruction is something that could be developed in the future. This promotes mutual relationship and connection between the home and the nursery school, which is beneficial for children's learning, as previously articulated by Moll et al. (1992).

Hughes and Mac Naughton (2000) note that impediments to parental involvement in children's education result from teachers' views that parental knowledge is subordinate to their professional knowledge. Similar to Hughes and Mac Naughton's (2000) argument, teachers from both nursery schools considered parental knowledge as inadequate, supplementary, and sometimes unimportant. One of the public nursery school teacher participants assumed that teachers are fully competent in their work and that parents, through offering support with their children's homework, may be introducing different teaching methods that are contrary to those used by the teacher. This attitude towards parents fortifies the barrier between the home and the school. On the contrary, although two of the parents who participated in the interviews for this study believed their knowledge is supplementary to the teachers' knowledge, most parents believed that parents were their children's first educators and that education began from home. Hornby and Lafaele (2011) concluded that differing beliefs impacted the way parental involvement was perceived by both parents and teachers.

Furthermore, teacher beliefs influenced parent-teacher relationships. Although the private nursery school teachers considered parental expertise inadequate, their relationship with parents can be described as a two-way relationship. The school offered a lot of opportunities for families to be involved in children's education at school. The teachers portrayed a positive and facilitating attitude towards parental involvement, and in addition, parent inputs and suggestions through their Parent Forum were considered and implemented by the school. Parents felt that their participation, as such, was valued, which influenced their involvement. Similarly, Hornby and Lafaele (2011) noted that parents are motivated to participate in children's learning when they perceive teachers are welcoming and value parent contributions. Contrarily, for the public nursery school, parent-teacher interactions were considered one-sided. Teachers expected parents to always contact teachers if they needed advice or wanted to get more information about their children. It was noted that teachers mainly contacted parents when there were issues such as failure to complete school fees registration or to remind them of parent-teacher meetings. Teachers' concerns about the large class size and difficulties it posed for parent-teacher relationships were understandable.

In both preschool settings, communications from teachers and invitations to attend school events were sent exclusively to parents. Yet parents valued African childrearing practices emphasising community care and responsibility, where grandparents and siblings played a crucial role. These participants could also play important roles through involvement with the nursery school. By disregarding valuable funds of knowledge and ways of teaching at home, teachers missed opportunities to understand the child better and work in partnership with the wider family. This study supports the suggestion of Janssen and Vandebroek (2018) who state that teachers should demonstrate flexibility in their practices and beliefs, and deal constructively with parental opinions and recommendations. Recognising that family and community resources are useful for pedagogical purposes can promote mutual relationships of trust and respect between schools and families, positively influencing children's learning (Gonzalez et al., 2005).

So far, the key findings from this study have been discussed in relation to theoretical underpinnings and relevant literature. This has provided valuable insights into parental involvement in this context, parent-teacher relationships, parent and teacher beliefs, as well as families' unique childcare and upbringing methods. The child's position within the family and the external community has been established, as well as the roles of a number of agents involved in children's upbringing and learning. Analysing the findings in relation to

sociological and sociocultural approaches, including African conceptions of learning and development, have led to my development of the maize concept for understanding childrearing practices from an African perspective.

9.2.5 Maize as a Concept for Understanding Childrearing Practices in the African Context

The idea of maize as a concept for understanding child development and upbringing in the African context was inspired by “Tiakina te Pā Harakeke” which explains Māori childrearing practices within a context involving whānau, hapū and iwi (family, clan and tribe) (Christchurch City Council Libraries; Pihama et al., 2014). Harakeke or the flax plant is used as a metaphor for understanding childrearing in the Māori context. The baby leaf in the middle (Rito) represents the child who is protected by the next level of leaves that surrounds it (Awhi rito), known as the parents, and the outer protective leaves (Tūpuna) represents the grandparents and ancestors (Watson, 2020). The Harakeke is about strengthening the family/whānau to offer protection to the child at the centre. The plant’s outer layers provide protection, shelter, and care for the inner layers, thus developing community and inter-generational roles and support (Watson, 2020). The entire family shares a common root, enabling the strengthening and supporting all levels of the social group. Therefore, the responsibility for care and upbringing of a child lies not on the immediate family alone but the extended family members and the community.

Agriculture is the backbone of the economy in most African countries. Maize is a staple food crop cultivated in all regions of Cameroon, mainly for subsistence living. Maize, as a concept for understanding child development and upbringing in Africa, places the child in the middle as the kernel, which is protected and nurtured by the husks, leaves, stalk, roots and influenced by other environmental elements such as rain, sunshine and the soil. The husks, leaves, stalk and roots represent the entire family system, including the child’s immediate family, extended family members and ancestors, while the rain, sun and soil act as external influences on child development like the nursery school and the Government. In addition, a group of maize plants growing together can be understood to be working as a support mechanism for each other and metaphorically depicting different family units supporting each other in a community as illustrated in Figure 9.2.

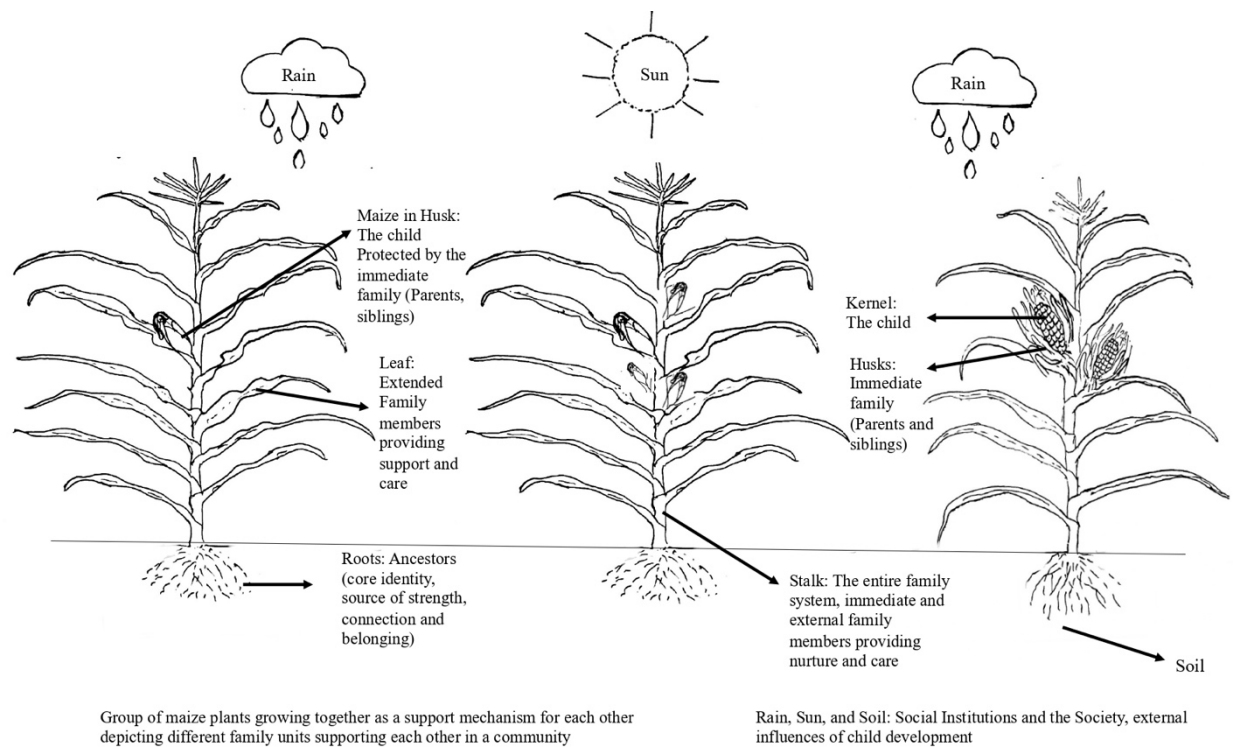


Figure 9-2: Maize as a Concept for Understanding Childrearing Practices in the African Context

Source: Adapted and modified from “Diagram of a Maize Plant” by Tata (2021).

Continuing from the summary above, the husks are the leafy outer layers covering the seeds and protecting the kernel (the child) as it grows on the plant. These layers represent the child’s immediate family members with whom the child lives, the most important influence in the child’s life and the child’s microsystem where the most direct interactions occur (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Parents, siblings or other caregivers living with the child are the child’s first teachers and are responsible for teaching and nurturing the child at this early stage. The leaves absorb light energy to ensure the process of photosynthesis. The leaves are seen here as extended family members acting as an ongoing support mechanism to parents for the child’s wellbeing and development. The stalk embodies the leaves, husks and kernel, and acts as a pathway for the flow of nutrients within the maize plant. The stalk can be defined as the entire family system providing nurture and care and acting as the primary social group for children’s learning and socialisation. A maize plant usually does not grow in isolation, but amid other maize plants in a farm growing together, supporting each other from natural hazards like heavy winds, storms and erosion, so too are different family units supporting each other in the community. The family is nested in the community and cultural context with values, resources, and knowledge traditions that shape socialisation practices influencing children’s learning and development (Marfo & Serpell, 2014). All the parts of the maize plant are important for healthy

growth. Therefore, including the immediate and external family and other community members is essential for the child's wellbeing and development.

Children need support from immediate and external family members, and there is an emphasis placed on raising children to maintain cultural values and traditions through these family connections. Thus, the absence of a parent or grandparents, for instance, creates an imbalance. Using the metaphor of maize, childrearing is seen as a community task with multiple agents involved in the socialisation process, as highlighted by Keller et al. (2005) and Nsamenang (2008). Cultural knowledge, skills, attitudes, practices and cultural values are passed on from parents/grandparents or other elders in the community using learning methods such as poetry, songs, storytelling, games and dance. This is in line with Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural approach which explains how knowledge is handed down from adult caregivers to the child by social interaction. Children observe and participate in activities within the community and are guided by parents, siblings or other caregivers. Children in this context are not only receptors of knowledge but develop through their own initiative as they participate in routine work of the family and community, and contribute to others' development too (Smith, 2007). This emphasises the significant role of the family and external family, and other community members in children's learning and development.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 54 articles clearly establishes children's participation rights, protection rights and provision rights (Smith, 2013). Articles 12 to 15 and 28 advocate for children's right to freedom to form their own views and expression, freedom of thought, associations and right to education (United Nations General Assembly, 1989). Article 29 also stipulates that children's education should be directed to ensure that they respect human rights, that is, respecting their rights, the rights of other people and the natural environment. Finally, in Article 42, it is noted that children and adults alike should be aware of these rights and responsibilities. Children's rights are acknowledged in the African context, and their rights come with responsibility (Okwany, 2016). Children's responsibility in the African context is seen through participation in the home and external community. Following the maize model, the child (kernel) depends not only on the immediate family (husk) for nurture and protection but also actively observes and participates in the daily activities of the home and community to thrive. Ebrahim (2012) notes that children's participation in the family and community is linked to African society's values, beliefs, and traditions. Participation here does not only refer to children's expression of their opinion or their asking adults to satisfy their needs; instead, it involves hands-on processes like being engaged in the day-to-day activities

of the home or community (Nsamenang, 2008). Thus, children assume various roles and responsibilities within their homes and community at an early age and, in due course, as adults. Childrearing is seen as a community task with multiple caregivers involved. Children observe and participate, as part of their developmental knowledge, in activities within the community and are guided by parents, siblings or other caregivers. For Nsamenang (2008), this explains participation with respect to collective upbringing as opposed to individualistic care.

The roots grow underneath the maize plant, providing support and stability while absorbing water and minerals that travel through the stem of the plant. The roots in my maize model represent the ancestors, the child's origin and source of strength and belonging. The ancestral phase is the third and last phase of the human life cycle according to Nsamenang's (2006a) socio-ontogenesis theory. Still, it can also be related to the beginning of the human life cycle through reincarnation (Nsamenang, 2006a). In the African context, the relationship between the people and their ancestors is appreciated and maintained, and the ancestors offer guidance to the beliefs and practices of the people. Environmental factors that influence plant growth include water, light, temperature and nutrients from the soil. These environmental factors are considered here as some of the external influences on child learning and development and, in this case, includes the nursery school and the Government. Within the nursery school, the child learns and develops knowledge and skills by interacting with the teacher and other peers. The child is also able to socialise, form relationships and learn socially accepted behaviours. Through the nursery school, the Government provides conditions for child development through policy-making and curriculum development.

9.3 Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed and elucidated findings in reference to the sociological and sociocultural conceptions, including African perceptions of learning and development, which underpin the investigation. The study reveals that there are different roles played by family members and teachers in the two preschool settings in children's learning. Generally, parents engage in children's learning by attending school events and meetings, communicating with teachers and assisting children with their studies at home. Child upbringing methods typical of families that participated in this study included communal upbringing and sibling caretaking. This portrayed the importance of immediate family and extended family in children's development as conceptualised by Nsamenang (2010b) and Colonna (2012). Teacher-parent relationships were examined, and it was concluded that private nursery school parents and teachers shared mutual relationships of trust and respect. Contrarily, public nursery school parent-teacher

relationships flow in a one-way direction where the teacher expects parents to approach or initiate communication if need be. Public nursery school teachers expressed difficulty in the teaching and learning process, as a consequence of overcrowded classes, lack of educational resources and difficulties in teaching local languages in the classroom, as stipulated by the curriculum. In addition, teachers and parents of the study disclosed differing beliefs and opinions regarding parents' roles in children's learning, which impacted parental involvement.

Analysis of the findings, in relation to the theoretical concepts that inform the study, positions the child as a social being influenced by the home environment (parents, siblings and extended family), social institutions (nursery school) and society (Government). This led to the development of the maize concept for understanding the roles and responsibilities of children and multiple caregivers involved in childcare from an African perspective.

The next chapter concludes the study by highlighting the key thesis arguments and outlining some recommendations for parental engagement in children's learning. In addition to discussing the implications and limitations of the study, the chapter suggests areas for further research.

Chapter 10

Conclusion, Implications and Recommendations

10.1 Introduction

This study explored parents' and teachers' perceptions of parental involvement in children's learning in Cameroon. This research project analysed the ways in which parents are involved in learning at home, and in a private and public preschool, and the factors that affect their involvement. The investigation is culturally situated, explores parents' conceptions of child development and practices in upbringing, alongside the conceptions and practices of teachers in the two preschools. The previous chapter discussed the findings obtained from field studies and interpreted these findings in relation to the sociocultural and African development theories that underpinned this study. This final chapter discusses the thesis arguments and provides recommendations for parental engagement in children's learning. The implications of the findings are considered for the key stakeholders involved, which includes the Government, school administration and teachers, and families. Limitations to the study are highlighted, and suggestions are made for areas requiring further research that may enhance parental involvement in children's learning in Cameroon, as well as in other contexts.

10.2 Summary of Thesis Arguments

The study was guided by the main overarching research question:

What are parents' and teachers' beliefs and practices about parental involvement in early childhood learning in Douala (Cameroon)?

With this in mind, the study aimed to find out: the various ways in which parents are involved in early childhood learning both at home and at ECE, the factors affecting parental involvement in early childhood learning as well as the cultural and social characteristics of parents in Cameroon, and how these characteristics appeared to influence children's experiences of their caretaking and upbringing. Teachers' beliefs and prior experiences that might influence their attitudes towards parental involvement in early childhood learning and how teachers encouraged parents' participation in children's early learning both at home and at the private and public nursery school were examined.

The study analysed parental involvement in early childhood learning from both a sociocultural and a African perspective. There exists a body of evidence (Marfo & Serpell, 2014; Nsamenang, 2010b) suggesting that educational research in developing countries undertakes analysis mainly from the perspective of interests pursued by Euro-American ideologies, but

seldom have African conceptions of childhood been incorporated in such an analysis. There is thus a need for ECE research and practice that is both sensitive to culture and meaningful to the people in that context. This study therefore, brings together sociocultural concepts and indigenous African perspectives of child development and learning to generate understanding of child learning and development within the Cameroon context. Sociocultural and African perspectives suggest that children learn and develop through self-generated efforts and by interacting with their parents, siblings, extended family members, teachers and other members of the community (Ebrahim, 2012; Nsamenang, 2008). Vygotsky (1978) identified that children can achieve far beyond their developmental level with the help of more knowledgeable adult caregivers. In this case, children are not viewed only as outcomes of social processes but as actors within these processes (James & Prout, 2015; Nsamenang, 2008). Bronfenbrenner (1996), in his ecological model, defined different environments that influenced child development, including those where the child is not directly involved, for instance, Government institutions. These theories and concepts point to the critical role of parents, teachers and other caregivers in children's education and the family, which is the child's immediate environment, which exerts a substantial influence in children's learning and development. There is, therefore, a call for mutual collaboration and ongoing communication between the home and the school that fosters children's learning (Gonzalez et al., 2005).

Applying the sociocultural and African theoretical frameworks to the investigation, a number of findings emerged. The first of these was that teaching and learning practices appeared to be informed by a curriculum that placed more emphasis on colonial systems of education while showing little regard for African indigenous ideologies. Colonial systems of education placed emphasis on the individual parental responsibility of raising children. However, in the context of this investigation, child development and upbringing was regarded as a community task with parents, siblings, external family members and the community involved. Children's participation in the family's daily activities was encouraged and supervised by either parents, siblings or relatives. Sibling caretaking was a very common practice among these families. According to Colonna (2012), caretaking "is a cultural response to the need for mothers to participate in other tasks for the sustenance of the family" (p. 81). Nsamenang (2010b) adds that child-to-child sociability and peer cultures, while often neglected by African and expatriate experts, are crucial to children's learning and development. "Africa's innovative, but basically unexplored, sibling and peer networks are cultural adjustments to the notion that the 'village' can still 'raise' the child" (Nsamenang, 2010b, p. 24). Therefore, an inclusive curriculum

framework that incorporates the everyday experiences of children into classroom instruction and welcomes the contribution of parents and the community can be beneficial in enhancing children's sense of their self-identity. This also helps preserve the culture of the children.

Secondly, parent and teacher conceptions of parents' roles in early childhood learning were constrained by how parents and teachers saw their roles in relation to the capacity of each to educate and where learning happened. This was most evident in the public nursery school where some parents placed a high value on teachers' qualifications and believed that teachers were more qualified to engage with children's learning at school, while they understood their own place to be that of assisting their children learn at home. Teachers of both preschools considered parental involvement was valuable to children's education but believed parents lacked the expertise to engage in children's learning in the nursery school. Therefore, teachers' belief in their professionalism was a potential barrier to parents exercising their capacity to support school-based learning at home. Despite their beliefs, the private nursery school administration and teachers encouraged parent participation at the private nursery school through various school-based programmes. In line with Dewey's (1916) principles of education in a democratic society, parents' contribution to children's education and wellbeing was acknowledged through the parent-led forum.

On the other hand, although the public nursery school administration and teachers encouraged parent participation in the nursery school, the opportunities offered were limited. Communication between the home and the school was one-way in which teachers expected parents to initiate conversations when necessary. Similar to findings in a study that Bridgemohan et al. (2005) conducted in South Africa, communication between the school and home was primarily evident when there was a problem. The teacher-led PTA meetings and end-of-year ceremonies were the only events available for parents to come into the nursery school to discuss their children's education or participate in their learning. According to parent participants, these events were only held once a year. Parental involvement and home-school relationships establish a connection between home-based and school-based learning, enhancing children's learning experiences. Therefore restricting parents' participation in limited events and low-level interactions between the nursery and home microsystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1981) bypasses the opportunities for richer contributions from families, which are beneficial for children's learning.

Bridgemohan et al. (2005) emphasised that working with parents should be seen as part of an educator's training. The findings revealed that working with parents was not as important to teachers as the researcher believes it could be. Most teachers reported that they had not taken any courses on parental involvement during their training and had never taken such courses for professional development. Thus, the school administration could consider offering professional development courses that provide strategies for working collaboratively with parents. Furthermore, more opportunities for parents to be engaged in the nursery school and ways to maintain ongoing communication between the home and school would be valuable. After all, children's development is enhanced when there exists positive relationships and mutual trust between the settings (mesosystem), as well as a smooth flow of communication in both directions (Bronfenbrenner, 1981).

Yulianti et al. (2020) suggested that school leaders can promote parental involvement directly by inviting parents by themselves or indirectly through teacher invitations. The school leaders can encourage parents directly by creating a warm and comfortable environment that is attractive for families to come in and participate or indirectly by providing staff with professional development programmes that target teachers' beliefs and assumptions towards families with the intention of overcoming barriers to parental involvement. It was evident in the investigation that childcare and upbringing was a collective process with parents, extended family members and the community involved. Thus, the study argues that a two-way strategy, whereby teachers can work alongside families (parents and extended family members) as partners, and that acknowledges the expertise of all members of the partnership, will foster children's learning and development. Therefore, educators viewing families as partners will also imply that teachers are appreciating and welcoming families' funds of knowledge into their classroom practices, in addition to community participation to enhance children's learning experiences. According to Nsamenang (2010b), "one useful approach for Africa is to rethink how to fit and tailor African children's daily routines into institutional [early child development] ECD programmes and services rather than to regard children only as beneficiaries of ECD services" (p. 26). Teachers in this study viewed themselves as primary educators for children and emphasised the supporting role of parents in children's learning. Parents acknowledge their role in children's learning but mostly conceived of this support as being limited to home-based learning. Therefore, welcoming household resources and parents and community participation, in the teaching and learning process, will involve a shift from the current views and practices of both teachers and parents.

Furthermore, parents experienced both barriers to and facilitators of involvement. Socio-economic barriers (low-income families, long working hours, level of education, single parents, economic crisis) and language barriers were the common challenges parents faced, which limited their involvement. This finding aligns with Harris and Goodall's (2008) argument that long working hours, and childcare difficulties, especially for women and single parents, are significant barriers to parental involvement in education. Hornby and Lafaele (2011) added that when both parents work long hours, they will hardly have time for home and school-based parental involvement, which was the case for most families in this study. Bridgemohan et al. (2005), in their research, found that according to educators, parents from the low socio-economic demographic, who had problems at home, and who were from what they termed "broken" homes tended not to be involved in children's learning and never attended school meetings. It is hoped that findings from my study will inform school administrators and teachers about the challenges faced by families in engaging with children's learning. Communication and understanding are encouraged between the home and the school to find out what might work best for families and how they can be supported because involving parents in their children's learning is beneficial for children's learning. Following African Indigenous childrearing principles, other extended family members are responsible for childcare and education; thus, in the absence of parents, grandparents, for example, can act in their place. This is already happening, but it could be reinforced by school administration and teachers formally recognising the role of other relatives, as well as the role of biological parents. In addition, considering the country's economic situation and parents' working conditions, school meetings could be organised in the evenings to accommodate the needs of those families who couldn't previously attend.

Lastly, there were several challenges in the public nursery school regarding large class sizes, higher child-teacher ratios, inadequate learning and teaching materials, and limited study space. One of the Cameroon nursery school curriculum goals and objectives (Ministry of Basic Education, 2018a) was integrating play-based learning and child-led activities into the teaching and learning process to foster socio-emotional development and creative and problem-solving skills. The lack of learning resources and large class sizes influenced teaching and learning methods, which were largely teacher-focused. It was reported that the public nursery school was one of the two English nursery schools in that district, and despite the fact that the school was partitioned into French and English sections, about 60 percent of the children in the English section of these schools were Francophones. Recently, there had been a high influx of English-

speaking parents into Douala to escape from the political war which was ongoing in the English-speaking parts of the country, and these parents needed English-speaking schools for their children. Hence, there is a call for Government action in terms of providing funds to facilitate the achievement of lower class sizes, to provide rich learning resources and to expand the provision of English-speaking nursery schools to enable access for all children to ECE. Early childhood education is crucial for children's cognitive development and overall school readiness. According to a UNICEF (2019) report, quality education during the early years sets children up for success throughout their education; thus, investing in the ECE sector could make education investments more efficient across all levels.

10.3 Recommendations for Parental Engagement in Children's Learning

The primary objectives of this study were to understand parents' and teachers' perceptions and practices relating to parental involvement in children's learning and to suggest other ways for parental involvement based on the Cameroon context. The key findings discussed in the previous section revealed a general picture of parent and teacher conceptions of parents' role in early childhood learning. The contributions of extended family and other community members in the caregiving and learning process were remarkable. These findings have given room for proposals for teachers and families (parents and extended family) and the community to work in partnership to support children's learning. Recommendations also target teachers' beliefs and attitudes, including approaches towards forming solid home-school relationships as well as an appreciation for household resources incorporating this into teaching and learning practices. Proposals for increased parental engagement in children's learning range from educators' approach to including families as partners in the teaching and learning process, to Government policies that focus on the provision of better quality ECE.

Families as Partners: Collaboration between the home and the school is essential for children's learning and development. The findings of my study indicate that there was scope to enhance the relationships between families and teachers. When teachers view families as partners, there is a smooth flow of information between the two groups, which may enhance the teacher's knowledge about the child and the family and, therefore, the child's learning needs. Teachers possess professional expertise and can understand children's individual needs and characteristics. Still, parents have accumulated knowledge of their own children's development and unique features, and have the advantage of experiencing minute-by-minute child contact in various situations (Wolfendale, 2018). Therefore, it is valuable to acknowledge on all sides the expertise of all members of the partnership (Goodall, 2017). This can form the

basis for both parties working in close collaboration, contributing their specific skills and knowledge towards achieving the best learning outcomes for children.

Furthermore, educators can provide conditions for parents' voices to be heard in parent-teacher meetings in addition to carrying out parent education programmes and explaining the nursery school programme to the parents. This helps parents share ideas and connect with other parents, share stories about their children and other ideas that will facilitate their children's learning. The school can promote a partnership with families in the following ways:

Forming good relationships between the home and the school. The findings revealed limited opportunities provided by the public nursery school for parents to engage in school-based activities and contribute to the school policies. Respecting parents' perspectives and contributions is one way to build trust and lasting relationships with parents (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). Parents are advocates for their children, and if educators see parents as advocates for their children and place values on their perspectives, it can change the way they relate and respond to parents' requests and questions (Pushor & the Parent Engagement Collaborative, 2013). Children's education begins at birth within the context of the family, caregivers and the community, and lasts till later in life (Barrera & Warner, 2006; Pushor & the Parent Engagement Collaborative, 2013). When teachers and parents engage in a relationship of trust and mutual respect, they work together to support children's cognitive and social development (Epstein, 1995, 2018). In addition, when children understand that there is a good and trustful relationship between the home and the school, they develop a positive attitude towards education and schooling. Trustful home-school relationships can be achieved by organising various events that are already staged in the private nursery school context, such as open house, family fun events, thanksgiving and Christmas celebrations. Parents need to be supported and welcomed into the programme such that they make their voices, perspectives, questions heard and such that their knowledge counts. Parent Teacher Association meetings in the public nursery school could be transformed into an avenue where parents can offer significant contributions to children's learning and share their aspirations, just like in the private nursery school Parent Forum. Suppose the recommended child-teacher ratio (30:2) is observed in the public nursery school, teachers would be more able to engage with parents, in addition to which home visits could be considered as a way in which teachers develop more collaborative relations with families to understand their intentions and perspectives. Therefore, as discussed above, additional funding to allow the recommended child-teacher ratio to be met is an important step in meeting these other recommendations.

Making assumptions about families prevents educators from seeing past what they believe the value of these families is, thereby missing out on their funds of knowledge. Believing that families have an important role in their children's education is vital to creating engaging partnerships with parents. On the other hand, negative assumptions and beliefs create incorrect understandings, hindering any relationship from forming. "Nurturing relationships between families and school creates understanding between home life, life experiences, culture, and religion and how families understand school, and the importance of the family's contribution to a successful educational experience" (Pushor & the Parent Engagement Collaborative, 2013, p. 95).

Co-constructing nursery school curriculum with families and the wider community. Parents and teachers developing and sharing ideas in the teaching and learning process can promote parental engagement and enhance children's learning experiences (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014).

When parents and staff engage around the care and education of children, they develop a shared vision and an appreciation of each other. The friendships which start in [centres], among children and families, are lasting. Families often connect later, in schools, after-school activities, or [on] work-related occasions. These early experiences can become strands of the strong webs of relationships that form community. (Pushor & the Parent Engagement Collaborative, 2013, p. 105)

Parents could engage in school-based learning by initiating a class study of many kinds. Such a study could focus on dancing, cooking, talent show, or cultural activities at the nursery school. For instance, when I used to work and study in South Korea, my daughter's teacher would send to parents a letter inviting them to pick a date and volunteer to teach the children at the childcare centre with a focus on any activity of their choice. Given the nature of the parent participants' work, opportunities to participate in nursery school activities could be extended to include other caregivers like grandparents or other relatives.

Drawing from the theoretical framework used in this investigation and from the findings that this research project delivered, it is highly recommended that teachers recognise the learning that takes place at home with the support and engagement of siblings and other caregivers. Inclusive educational practices that incorporate cultural values and beliefs, and include a wider group of participants (family, extended family and other elders of the community) is essential

to enhancing children's learning experiences. Furthermore, culturally sensitive teaching and learning practices could be accessible to the majority of African children both in rural and urban areas at a lower cost compared to professionally driven ECE services that only partially incorporates the cultural ways of the people (Nsamenang, 2010b).

Teachers can make regular use of local and community resources by partnering with families, elders or other community members, inviting them to share stories, riddles, sing songs, and connect with children's daily lives and their classroom experiences (Lawton, 1983; Omolewa, 2007; Penetito, 2001). In addition, not all the local languages will be relevant in a particular institution; thus, inviting selected family or community members that are served by the learning institutions is essential (Lawton, 1983; Penetito, 2001). This is in line with the Garcia et al.'s (2008) argument that ECE programmes need to draw from indigenous knowledge and material resources within the local environment. Furthermore, indigenous knowledge is usually transmitted from elders who are the bearers of such knowledge, which is furthermore knowledge that is rarely documented. Thus, Omolewa (2007) proposes that indigenous knowledge which is increasingly disappearing needs to be collected, documented and made readily available for teachers.

The integration of traditional education into school curriculum would thus enable schools to act as agencies for transferring the culture of the society from one generation to the next and to explore the benefits of linking the learning process more closely to learners' everyday experience in order to help them to make better sense of what they learn. (Omolewa, 2007, p. 608)

This form of shared learning helps children to connect their experiences in the nursery school with their experiences at home. A good relationship between the home and school increases parental engagement and also improves children's performance (Green et al., 2007; Yulianti et al., 2020). The relics of colonisation and the influence of modernisation have led to the abandoning of indigenous learning practices in nursery schools. Nsamenang (2010b) argues that Euro-Western perspectives of development continue to dominate early childhood development in Africa, while other views are dismissed. Therefore, context-sensitive early childhood pedagogy, as well as an appreciation of diverse knowledge, is crucial. A way forward is for educators to work in collaboration with community elders/families to incorporate family resources and local knowledge to be adapted and integrated into the nursery school curriculum.

In addition to including families and community members in the learning process, assessments could be designed to include the contributions of children, families and community members. Mitchell and Carr (2014) argue that a democratic approach to assessment considers the contribution of all stakeholders, educators, children and families, and reflects the cultural values and aspirations of the home and community context. Educators working in partnership with families in all aspects of children's learning and assessment implies an acknowledgement of the funds of knowledge from the home, community and culture, which leads to positive outcomes for diverse learners. A practical example of involving families as contributors to assessments would involve the inclusion of parents' comments when recording children's learning progress, thus achieving the making of connections between the home and school (Carr et al., 2015; Ministry of Education, 2004). Children may be involved in the assessment process through self-assessment and peer-assessment of their learning (Carr et al., 2015; Mitchell & Carr, 2014). This aligns with Nsamenang's (2008) idea of peer-mentoring, where children learn and develop through their efforts and are supervised by peers or older siblings.

School events and parental support mechanisms. School events are possibilities for creating a warm and inviting environment for families to come and participate in the teaching and learning process. A great deal of work in organising school events is ongoing in the private nursery school but more needs to be done for public nursery school families. Public nursery school families reported only two events (end-of-year ceremonies and PTA meetings) through which they are invited to participate in children's learning; each of these events only being held once a year. The nursery school can involve parents in a number of ways through:

... traditional events at the school (e.g., parents' evenings or sports day), to active involvement in the child's schooling (e.g. supporting homework), and to higher-level parental engagement with the child's learning (e.g. ongoing moral support) and acknowledgement of the parent's own educational needs (e.g. attending parenting classes). (Hornby & Blackwell, 2018, p. 18)

Efforts towards parental engagement in children's learning should be planned and must be an important part of the school's policies. Effective school leadership is required in this regard because parental engagement efforts does not lie only on the class teacher. Hornby and Blackwell (2018) recommend "a whole school approach" of school leaders, teachers and parents co-constructing strategies together. This is similar to Yulianti et al.'s (2019) transformational leadership approach aimed at promoting parental engagement in children's

education. Co-constructing strategies together may involve finding out what works best for both the nursery school parents and teachers. School meetings, for instance, can be organised in the evenings to support the needs of some parents who may find this an easier time to attend meetings. The school administration could also explicitly acknowledge other caregivers as well as parents attending such meetings.

Home visits. Home visits are an important resource for making connections between teachers and families. Recent studies have highlighted the importance of field experience as means by which teachers can develop real perceptions about students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Reyes et al., 2016). This call for connection between teachers and families aims to bridge the home and the school, engage families more in children's education, and generate partnerships between home and school (Whyte & Karabon, 2016). Early literacy development does not only involve learning how to read and write but also the social, cultural and linguistic practices characteristic of a particular community (Gonzalez et al., 2005; Reyes et al., 2016). Thus, creating respectful and reciprocal relationships with families, especially through home visits, can help teachers understand the learning potential of linguistically and culturally diverse students and, therefore, prepare how best to teach them in the nursery school. Through home visits, teachers can engage closely with the children and families within their home and community environments and understand children's learning practices across the home, school and community contexts. Gonzalez et al. (2005) identify this as funds of knowledge, that refer to the historical and cultural knowledge of the family. Thus, teachers who investigate and learn about children's home-based contexts stand a better chance to know the child as a whole person actively involved in multiple spheres of knowledge and relationships (Gonzalez et al., 2005; Reyes et al., 2016). Through social interaction and engaging in daily life activities, children and their families use oral and visual text forms, including images, graphics, sign language, gestures, drama and a whole array of language and literacy activities. By visiting and interacting with families, teachers can focus on the ways families and their respective children interact with environments. Teachers can also reflect on the ways that these experiences, values, knowledge and skills afford potential learning resources that can be incorporated into curricula (Reyes et al., 2016).

The notion of home visits encourages teachers to enter homes to learn and gain information from families in addition to sharing information about children's academic progress and wellbeing, and offer recommendations to parents on how they can support children's learning at home. By interacting and posing inquiry-based questions, teachers build relationships based

on mutual trust with families. Teachers will reflect on this acquired information and think about how to use children's funds of knowledge to inform pedagogy and curriculum for diverse communities (Carlos & James, 1992; Moll et al., 1992; Whyte & Karabon, 2016). A new kind of curriculum or pedagogy that could emerge from home visits can be linked to what Pushor and the Parent Engagement Collaborative (2013) describe as a 'curriculum for parents'. In this curriculum, the teacher, children, family and community members all inform the teaching and learning (Pushor & the Parent Engagement Collaborative, 2013). Pushor and the Parent Engagement Collaborative (2013) understanding of a 'curriculum for parents' originated from the belief that children's education begins at birth within the context of the family and the community, and lasts forever. Thus teachers are only facilitators to this life-long process. Therefore a 'curriculum for parents' would consider children's learning and interaction with teachers, parents, extended family members and the community, to fulfil the aspirations of the family and also the school. A 'curriculum for parents' disrupts practising teachers' taken-for-granted understandings of the place and voice of parents, as teachers are challenged when considering their roles as well as those of parents, as roles that need to be treated equally in children's education.

Teachers can utilise the funds of knowledge approach to understand parents' involvement in their children's learning. Through home visitations, teachers transform their relationships with families by respecting the rich cultural resources that are present in daily home practices (Gonzalez et al., 2005; Moll et al., 1992). Teachers who carry out home visits will be able to grasp the families' experiences and understand the different ways in which parents are involved in their children's education (Whyte & Karabon, 2016). In addition, families, as well as children, will value these home visits (Pushor & the Parent Engagement Collaborative, 2013). Children and their families feel happy to create a relationship out of their school environment, and these relationships and experiences can last a long time. Teacher and parent relationships are a two-way thing. If teachers go to parents, research suggests that parents will also be ready to come to teachers when invited (Pushor & the Parent Engagement Collaborative, 2013). During home visits, teachers share their personal experiences and stories with parents and give room for these parents to feel comfortable and reciprocate, thus forming respectful and trusting relationships. It is acknowledged that home visits in the context of the public nursery school would be challenging due to current child-teacher ratios of approximately 80:2. Future policy action aimed at implementing the Government-recommended ratio of 30:2 would be a good

starting point for public nursery school teachers to consider this approach of forming stronger relationships with families.

Communication and collaboration between home and school are essential for the development of positive relationships between the home and the school (Minke et al., 2014). Consistent communication leads to trust, and better understanding between the two parties and this contributes to effective measures aimed at supporting children's academic progress and wellbeing (Moll et al., 1992; Whyte & Karabon, 2016). Teachers in the public nursery school may have seen some parents as 'difficult to reach', mainly as the children were dropped off and picked up by motorbike riders, and some of these parents rarely responded to school invitations. Parents faced challenges such as lack of means of transportation to school, especially those families who hired motorbike riders for drop-offs and pick-ups, family issues, financial difficulties related to incomplete payment of fees or PTA dues, which may have acted as barriers. Parents may also regard the school as 'difficult to reach', one of the parent participants' perceptions was that parents are not allowed through the school gate during drop-offs. Thus, according to this parent, her role was to bring her child to school, and the teacher took over from that point. Effective communication is essential to clarifying certain misconceptions and facilitating the best learning experiences for children.

Inviting parents on school opening days. Requesting that parents stay around on school opening days helps children transition from home to school, and encourages parents to help organise the classroom, and get them involved in the teaching and learning process. The nursery school teachers in Cameroon in my study believed that it is best for both parent and child if parents drop off children and walk away so that they can calm down the child as soon as the parent leaves the classroom. However, it will be beneficial if teachers allow transition periods where a parent can spend sufficient time for their child to feel settled with their children at the nursery school. This will enable the child to understand his or her new environment and begin to make new connections with the teacher and other children. The possibility of inviting parents to spend time at the nursery school during these transition periods will largely depend on classroom sizes and pupil-teacher ratio. With the current situation at the public school, it will be challenging to have parents in small classrooms with high pupil-teacher ratios of 80:2. Still, with Government support on constructing extra classrooms and implementing the recommended pupil-teacher ratio of 30:2, this would be possible.

Government Action for Quality ECE: The role of the Government is significant in the provision of quality early learning services and for the implementation of policies to increase parental involvement. The Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA16-25), under the auspices of the African Union (AU), affirms that ECE is neglected in most African countries in terms of policy development and provision of quality programmes and services (African Union, 2018). Quality learning services to be enforced by the Government as recommended by UNICEF (2019) will include: lower pupil-teacher ratios, and 25 percent of pre-primary expenditures be reserved for non-salary costs, like learning and teaching materials, teacher training, curriculum development and quality assurance mechanisms. Pupil-teacher ratios according to Cameroon Ministry of Education recommendations should be 30:2 for 4 to 6 years old children, but findings from the public nursery school indicated a high ratio of over 80:2. Thus, it is vital for Government policy to be accompanied by appropriate action, such as strategic implementation, information dissemination and training (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). An appeal from the public nursery school headmistress and PTA president included: the provision of funds for the expansion of classrooms and the school hall, construction of a playground for children, and allocation of funds for play-based learning materials for children to engage during the 1-hour free-play period. The school administration and parents also reported that the PTA supports the Government in managing the school financially; thus, the PTA, in collaboration with the Government, could ensure the supply of adequate learning and play resources for children's education.

The findings revealed that there is no direct connection between the Government and families. Generally, the Government impacts on children's development indirectly through policy-making and curriculum development. Furthermore, curriculum development does not clearly state the involvement of parents, who are also key educational stakeholders. This study recommends the inclusion of all key educational stakeholders' perspectives to collaborate and make contributions towards the holistic education of children. The Government is called to initiate social support schemes to support low-income families, especially families that have recently migrated to Douala as a result of the ongoing Anglophone crisis.

Possibilities for pre-service teachers to engage in extensive courses on parental involvement in children's learning and organising ongoing professional development courses for current teachers to enhance their beliefs and perceptions on parental involvement are recommended. Most of the teacher participants, as noted earlier, did not recall taking courses on parental involvement during their training and have never taken professional development courses in

this aspect as they continue to teach and engage with families. Government policies geared at making parental involvement courses mandatory, especially for initial teacher education, will be beneficial (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). This is especially important for future teachers to incorporate understandings of “the interconnected concepts of parental engagement with children’s learning, barriers to this and ways to support parents to overcome those barriers” (Goodall, 2017, p. 131).

10.4 Implications of Findings

The implications of the research with respect to the findings of this study are discussed in this section. The research implications are considered for families, school administration and teachers, and finally, the Government.

10.4.1 Implications for Families

The findings revealed implications for families and the community. Though parent participants in this study acknowledged that parental involvement was essential for improving children’s learning outcomes, they understood their role mostly in terms of home-based involvement. Furthermore, public nursery school teachers asserted that parental participation was low because most parents were from low-income backgrounds with low levels of education. Children can become successful in their education no matter the socio-economic status of their parents. Therefore, educators need to create awareness for families to understand their important role in children’s learning and development. Parents who are aware of their role are likely to become active in nursery school activities and this improves children’s education.

Parents are also required to take responsibility and initiate communication with teachers concerning children’s academic progress and wellbeing. They can share about learning activities at home, request for support or ideas from teachers if needed, and this will compel teachers to provide feedback on the learning taking place in the classroom. It is also recommended for parents to make connections with other parents sharing parenting tips and ideas; this can be done by socialising during pick-ups and drop-offs and attending school events.

Interactions with parents during the interview process led to some great suggestions from these parents with regards to how other parents might become more involved in their children’s learning. It was suggested that parents be role models to children and spend time with them and not only consider work and money, and help their children at home. They can get helpful tips and guides on how to bring up a child using the Internet, especially through YouTube.

They have to do this intentionally. A challenge here is that not all parents can access the Internet. This is especially the case for most public nursery school families. Furthermore, parents will need to review the information they get from social media and question if this information aligns with their core values and beliefs about child development and learning. Again, despite the difficult economic situation of the country and how this might influence parents' working conditions, they should prioritise and consider what is important: children's education and wellbeing. It is acknowledged that all parents will always want what is best for their children, but sometimes other life challenges might get in the way of their aspirations. Another recommendation is about setting routines for children's learning, doing things in a particular way at a specific time and always motivating and assuring children that there are no limits to their achievements. Attending school meetings is important; while sensitisation through the PTA, for example, can help parents become aware of the child's needs and how to help their learning both at home or at school. These are good recommendations, and since childrearing in this context involves multiple caregivers, extended family members could also attend school events/meetings in the absence of the children's biological parents.

Teacher participants called for parents to spend quality time with their children, engage them in meaningful conversation, and carry out educational projects at home at least every month. Teachers also indicated that parents need to take some time, even though they are busy, dropping off and picking up children, and spending some time with them in school, which will boost children's confidence. However, a strong home-school network is valuable to children's education. Parents and teachers working together as partners in the learning process should involve sharing ideas and making connections between home and school-based learning. This will lead to positive outcomes for children.

10.4.2 Implications for School Administration and Teachers

Several recommendations have been made in the previous section with regards to the school administration working in close partnership with families to promote parental involvement. Yulianti et al.'s (2019) transformational leadership approach calls for school leaders to support and encourage teachers to actively involve families in the nursery school programme. School leaders may achieve this by organising professional development courses for teachers that challenge their current beliefs, and encourage them to see parents as partners in the teaching and learning process.

The findings revealed that teachers of both public and private nursery schools believed parents' expertise was inadequate, especially when it comes to involvement within the nursery school. Interactions between the school and families are essential for teachers to recognise the strengths of families, and viewing them as equal partners in the education of children (Ferrara, 2009). A two-way approach in which family resources are recognized and incorporated with classroom instruction will promote trustful relationships between the home and the nursery school.

It is also helpful to sensitise parents (through parent education workshops) on the benefits of parental involvement, and provide them with strategies to support children's learning at home and in the nursery school. In addition, creating more opportunities for parents to be involved in children's learning gives parents the feeling that the school values their presence and contributions.

Furthermore, it was reported in the findings that public school teachers applied teacher-centred approaches using the 'whole class participatory method' in which the teacher speaks or sings, and the children respond altogether. Measures aimed at maintaining Government-recommended ratios of 30:2 and increased investment in learning resources will make a learner-centred approach to learning achievable for the public nursery school. In this case, children will be active participants bringing their knowledge and ideas into the teaching and learning process.

10.4.3 Implications for the Government

The findings have implications for the Ministry of Basic Education in the areas of nursery school curriculum development, the curriculum development process for teacher education programmes concerning parent involvement issues, policies for ensuring quality ECE and expanding investment in this sector.

All key players, families, teachers and Government education experts need to be involved in the development and implementation of the nursery school curriculum. Children's interests and the sociocultural context, and indigenous childrearing ideas and practices should be the centrepiece when reviewing the Cameroon nursery school curriculum in the near future.

There is a need for an evaluation of the policies and procedures, especially in the public nursery school. Government action through the Ministry of Basic Education should aim to provide quality care and education, and increase funding for nursery school education, especially for teaching and learning materials. Inclusion of complete courses on parental involvement, as a

required course for initial Teacher Training Colleges, as well as continuous professional development courses for current teachers could be considered. Furthermore, attention needs to be given to maintaining a low child/teacher ratio and ensuring a fair distribution of English nursery school institutions in the area, to enable equal access to preschool education for all children.

Finally, through school review officers, the Ministry of Education should monitor and ensure the policy and standards put in place are met by school leaders and other administrative staff. These review officers will supervise teaching practices and ensure teachers meet the curriculum standards, evaluate the quality of learning provided by nursery schools and report the findings to the Ministry of Education.

10.5 Limitations to the Study

The limitations of this study are discussed in this section.

Douala is the economic capital of Cameroon and one of the largest cities in the country. The focus of the study evaluated parental involvement in children's learning in two nursery schools in a section in one of Douala's five districts. Although the findings from the private and public nursery schools may be applicable to other districts in Douala or in other parts of the country, these findings may not give a complete picture of parental involvement in all nursery schools in Cameroon.

The research design approach to this study involved a mixed-method for data collection using questionnaires, interviews, observations, field notes, informal conversations and the review of documents. One of the aims of the study was to investigate parents' and teachers' understandings of parental involvement in children's learning at home and in their nursery schools. Therefore, the parent surveys and interviews questions were more focused on understanding parental involvement and home-school relationships. Nevertheless, the findings revealed other forms of learning at home that teachers did not specify as part of children's learning in the nursery school. Some of the themes that emerged regarding parents' child development and upbringing methods included collective upbringing, sibling caretaking, traditional language learning and practice, and self-management skill acquisition. The limitation here was that teacher interview questions did not provide opportunities to explore these child development and upbringing practices in more depth with teachers. Another limitation was that children were only observed alongside their teachers and families. Still, their feelings and opinions were not sought concerning these development and upbringing

practices, especially in terms of sibling caretaking and assigning tasks to develop independence skills. Again, observations were school-based, which prevented any opportunity to observe detailed interactions between parents and children at home.

The study design ensured a qualitative approach in which only one private and public nursery school was selected for data collection to obtain deeper insights on parental involvement/barriers, teachers'/parents' beliefs and teaching/learning approaches. These two schools may not represent the beliefs and teaching/learning approaches, as well as the types of parental involvement/barriers that are experienced in other nursery school institutions around the country.

In addition, Cameroon is a bilingual country and Douala, in particular, inhabits residents from both English and French-speaking regions of the country. Due to my inability to communicate fluently in French and to avoid misinterpretation of participants' views, French-speaking nursery schools and parents were not included in the study. However, some of my research participants were of bilingual origin and so the results can be generalised to French-speaking Cameroonians as well.

Lastly, the period of main data collection was limited to only 3 months, November, December, and January. Within this period, there was a two-week Christmas and new year break, and thus data collection was paused for two weeks. Most parent and teacher interviews were carried out before the break, but it was a challenge to get through to parents to organise follow-up interviews after the break. Thus, only five out of the eight parents who were initially interviewed agreed to undertake follow-up interviews with me. Nevertheless, after my return to New Zealand, I continued to maintain contact with some research participants through WhatsApp messaging to obtain additional information and responses for questions that emerged from previous interviews.

10.6 Suggestions for Further Studies

Following on from the above described limitations, the researcher makes the following recommendations for further research.

In future research, a larger sample size of nursery schools could be drawn from each of the city's five districts. This could also include French-speaking public and private nursery schools. A study of this nature would offer a greater depth of knowledge and understanding of parental involvement/barriers, teachers'/parents' beliefs and teaching/learning approaches.

A more extended period of data collection is recommended of at least 6 to 9 months and a larger sample size of parent participants in each school for interviews. A longer data collection period will be helpful if a researcher wants to involve children as active participants and include home observations as part of the data collection process. This timeframe would also allow the researcher enough time to interact with research participants, conduct follow-up interviews as required and obtain more information.

Figure 9.2 could be explored and evaluated further in any future study. Considering the maize plant as a metaphor for understanding child development and learning in the African context, it is understood that children's upbringing is a collective process (with multiple caregivers involved). Children are active contributors to their own development at an early age. Thus, learning and development entail the child's efforts as an individual, and guidance and support provided by parents, siblings and extended family members/community. Against this backdrop, it would be valuable to investigate ways in which children and their extended families can be given a respectful voice in the teaching and learning process, and in the development of the curriculum, in local preschools nationwide.

A future inquiry may also examine how Africa's rich cultural values and practices for childrearing and learning can be integrated into the Government's nursery school curriculum. Learning in the classroom cannot be separated from the social and physical context. It is beneficial to explore possibilities in which the ideas of early childhood experts and families can be brought together to develop a curriculum for children in their early years.

Furthermore, it is recommended that future research examines and represents the voices of children more, targeting older siblings to get their opinions and ideas relating to child development and upbringing practices. In addition, home-based observations will allow any future researcher to interact more closely with families and gain detailed insights on home-based parental involvement, family childrearing practices, and the roles and responsibilities of children and multiple caregivers involved in the child care and upbringing process.

10.7 Conclusion

This study explored parents' and teachers' conceptions of parental involvement in early childhood learning in Douala, the economic capital of Cameroon. Parents' and teachers' beliefs on parental involvement were investigated, and the various ways parents engaged in their children's education at home and school. The ways in which the school administration and teachers engaged parents in their children's learning were explored. The study also considered

the social and cultural characteristics of families and the specific barriers they faced in relation to their involvement in their children's education.

Primarily dominant conceptions of parental involvement in education held by parents and teachers in this study were framed from a colonial ideological perspective. Participants constructed the relationships between preschool and homes as being somewhat narrowly confined to the responsibilities of the immediate family and their role to provide opportunities at home that support school-based learning. This approach ignores the rich traditions of childrearing in Cameroonian culture and the contributions of children, parents, extended family, and the community in the teaching and learning process. In this way, these dominant conceptions and associated practices involved missed possibilities for incorporating significant funds of knowledge to develop contextually appropriate educational methods crucial to children's learning and development.

The sociocultural theories and African concepts of learning and development, relevant literature and findings from this study generated new understandings of home-based and school-based parental involvement. The main argument is for educators to go beyond a focus on parents alone, to consider families (parents and extended family members) and community members as partners to co-construct teaching and learning together. Acknowledging the role of other caregivers alongside parents in the learning and care process will reduce barriers parents face when wanting to participate fully in their children's education. In addition, viewing families as partners means acknowledging their expertise, which will lead to developing relationships of mutual trust and respect between the school and the home. A two-way relationship between teachers and families gaining funds of knowledge would be beneficial for children's learning (Gonzalez et al., 2005). Families will recognise the value of their role in their child's education, which motivates them and increases parental engagement. Educators will be able to better understand the cultural background of children and their families, which allows them to create a learning environment inclusive of all students. This is likely to motivate children and boost their self-esteem and attitude towards learning.

A sociocultural perspective draws attention to how individual efforts, interaction processes and participation in daily activities influence learning and development. Children's learning and development thus occur in the process of their involvement in the activities of their cultural communities. A collaborative network between the Government, nursery schools and families, is recommended whereby parents' perspectives are included in policy-making and curriculum

development. The result is a nursery school curriculum framework that reflects the people's cultural aspirations. The conditions in the public nursery school, such as large class sizes with high child-teacher ratios, were not conducive for parents to build sustained relationships with families. Therefore, policies that aim to ensure comfortable learning environments and improve the social conditions of vulnerable families will provide access to quality early education for all children.

The significance of the study lies in the fact that it offers insights into parents' and teachers' views on parental involvement, and how children learn and develop by participating in the activities in both their homes and cultural communities. This contributes to knowledge of African parents' perspectives on parental involvement, which are largely absent from the literature and reiterates the importance of a contextually relevant education framework. The majority of teachers report they never took a course on parental involvement in either their training or as part of their professional development, which indicates that they have little experience interacting with parents. The study can also contribute to the curriculum development process for pre-service teachers and in-service teacher education programmes concerning parent involvement issues. The school administration, Ministry of Basic Education, and other educational experts like psychologists will better understand the barriers to parental involvement and will be better suited to planning for measures to promote parental involvement in children's learning. Furthermore, understanding different parental beliefs and socialisation practices are beneficial for local and international contexts, especially in countries characterised by different cultural groups with diverse values and beliefs. Thus, knowing other views of childrearing and development that are different from those of their own contexts is beneficial as teachers engage with multicultural families.

References

- Abed, M. G. (2015). A consideration to two main ethical issues in educational research, and how may these be addressed. *I-manager's Journal on Educational Psychology*, 8(3), 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.26634/jpsy.8.3.3099>
- Abondo, O. (2019). Paternal involvement in early childhood care and development in Cameroon and Congo-Brazzaville. Contextual redefinition of indicators. In H. B. Ebrahim, A. Okwany, & O. Barry (Eds.), *Early childhood care and education at the margins: African perspectives on birth to three* (pp. 173–189). Routledge. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351185158-13>
- African Union. (2013). *Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want*. <https://au.int/en/agenda2063/overview>
- African Union. (2018). *Launch of CESA Early Childhood Education and Development Cluster*. <https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20180904/launch-cesa-early-childhood-education-and-development-cluster>
- Akame, G. A., Crockett, J., & Anoma, R. A. B. (2021). *Baseline research: Education in crisis in the anglophone regions of Cameroon*. Solidarity and Development Initiative. https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Baseline%20Research_Education%20in%20Crisis%20in%20the%20Anglophone%20Regions_Final.pdf
- Alasuutari, M., Markström, A.-M., & Vallberg-Roth, A.-C. (2014). *Assessment and Documentation in Early Childhood Education*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315818504>
- Allen, R. E. S., & Wiles, J. L. (2016). A rose by any other name: Participants choosing research pseudonyms. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 13(2), 149-165. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2015.1133746>
- Amin, A. A., & Awung, W. J. (2008). Economic analysis of private returns to investment in education in Cameroon. *Developing a Sustainable Economy in Cameroon*, 219.
- Amin, J. A. (2021). President Paul Biya and Cameroon's anglophone crisis: A catalog of miscalculations. *Africa Today*, 68(1), 95-122. <https://doi.org/10.2979/africatoday.68.1.05>
- Angwafo, P. (2014). *Cameroon's predicaments*. Langaa Research & Publishing CIG.

- Aspden, K., McLachlan, C., Cherrington, S., Tyler-Merrick, G., McLaughlin, T., & Phillips, J. (2019). Partnership with families in early childhood education: New Zealand's policy and professional context. In S. Phillipson & S. Garvis (Eds.), *Teachers' and families' perspectives in early childhood education and care: Early childhood education in the 21st century* (1st ed., Vol. 1, pp. 140–154). Routledge.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203730546>
- Avramidis, E., & Smith, B. (1999). An introduction to the major research paradigms and their methodological implications for special needs research. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, 4(3), 27-36. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1363275990040306>
- Barnard, W. M. (2004). Parent involvement in elementary school and educational attainment. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 26(1), 39-62.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chilyouth.2003.11.002>
- Barrera, J. M., & Warner, L. (2006). Involving families in school events. *Kappa Delta Pi Record*, 42(2), 72-75. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00228958.2006.10516437>
- Bastiani, J. (1989). *Working with parents: a whole-school approach*. NFER-Nelson.
- Beckett, K. (2018). John Dewey's conception of education: Finding common ground with R. S. Peters and Paulo Freire. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 50(4), 380-389.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2017.1365705>
- Bennet, J. (2010). Pedagogy in early childhood services with special reference to Nordic approaches. *Psychological Science and Education*, 15(3), 16-21.
- Best, J. W., & Kahn, J. V. (2006). *Research in education* (10th ed.). A & B/Pearson.
- Bierman, K. L., Heinrichs, B. S., Welsh, J. A., Nix, R. L., & Gest, S. D. (2017). Enriching preschool classrooms and home visits with evidence-based programming: Sustained benefits for low-income children. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 58(2), 129-137. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcpp.12618>
- Bissenden, M., & Gunn, A. C. (2017). Consent, assent and dissent: A case study of one child's understanding of research. *Early Childhood Folio*, 21(1), 11-15.
- Boyatzis, R. E. (1998). *Transforming qualitative information: Thematic analysis and code development*. SAGE Publications.

- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Breneman, A., Mbuh, R. N., Ferreira, B., Enermalm, A., Xiaoqun, W., Moletsane, M., Delancey, M. W., & Breneman, B. (2006). *Women in the new millennium: The global revolution*. Hamilton Books.
- Bridgemohan, R., van Wyk, N., & van Staden, C. (2005). Home-school communication in the early childhood development phase. *Education*, 126(1).
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1974). *A report on longitudinal evaluations of preschool programs. Vol II: Is early intervention effective?* (DHEW-OHD-74-25).
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1981). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design*. Harvard University Press.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1986). Ecology of the family as a context for human development: Research perspectives. *Developmental Psychology*, 22(6), 723-742. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.22.6.723>
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1996). *The ecology of human development experiments by nature and design*. Harvard University Press.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (2005). *Making human beings human: Bioecological perspectives on human development*. SAGE Publications.
- Bronfenbrenner, U., & Evans, G. W. (2000). Developmental science in the 21st century: Emerging questions, theoretical models, research designs and empirical findings. *Social Development (Oxford, England)*, 9(1), 115-125. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9507.00114>
- Bronfenbrenner, U., & Morris, P. A. (1998). The ecology of developmental processes. In W. Damon & R. M. Lerner (Eds.), *Handbook of child psychology: Theoretical models of human development*. (5th ed., Vol. 1, pp. 993-1028). John Wiley & Sons Inc.
- Bühler-Niederberger, D. (2010). Introduction: Childhood sociology — defining the state of the art and ensuring reflection. *Current Sociology*, 58(2), 155-164. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392109354239>
- Cameroon Travel and Information Guide. (n. d.). *Douala Cameroon West Africa Cameroun Douala schools*. <https://www.cameroon-today.com/douala-schools.html>

- Carlos, G. V.-I., & James, B. G. (1992). Formation and transformation of funds of knowledge among U.S.-Mexican households. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 23(4), 313-335. <https://doi.org/10.1525/aeq.1992.23.4.05x1582v>
- Carr, M., Cowie, B., & Davis, K. (2015). *Continuity of early learning: learning progress and outcomes in the early years: Report on the literature scan: Report to the Ministry of Education*. Ministry of Education.
- Central Intelligence Agency. (2019). *The world fact book, Africa: Cameroon*. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/cm.html>
- Chichom-Mefire, A., Atashili, J., Tsiagadigui, J. G., Fon-Awah, C., & Ngowe-Ngowe, M. (2015). A prospective pilot cohort analysis of crash characteristics and pattern of injuries in riders and pillion passengers involved in motorcycle crashes in an urban area in Cameroon: lessons for prevention. *BMC Public Health*, 15(1), 915. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-015-2290-4>
- Christchurch City Council Libraries. (2021). *Harakeke*. <https://my.christchurchcitylibraries.com/harakeke/>
- Chung, S., & Walsh, D. J. (2000). Unpacking child-centredness: A history of meanings. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 32(2), 215-234. <https://doi.org/10.1080/002202700182727>
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2018). *Research methods in education* (8th ed.). London: Routledge.
- Colonna, E. (2012). Children who take care of other children in the suburbs of Maputo, Mozambique. In M. Ensor (Ed.), *African childhoods education, development, peacebuilding, and the youngest continent* (1st ed.). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Cooper, M., Hedges, H., Ashurst, L., Harper, B., Lovatt, D., Murphy, T., & Spanhake, N. (2014). Transforming relationships and curriculum: Visiting family homes. *Early Childhood Folio* 18(1), 22-27.
- Crain, W. C. (2011). *Theories of development: Concepts and applications* (6th ed.). Pearson/Prentice Hall.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.

- Creswell, J. W. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Croucher, S. M., & Cronn-Mills, D. (2015). *Understanding communication research methods*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203495735-9>
- Crowe, S., Cresswell, K., Robertson, A., Huby, G., Avery, A. J., & Sheikh, A. (2011). The case study approach. *BMC Medical Research Methodology*, *11*(1), 100-100. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2288-11-100>
- Dahlberg, G., Moss, P., & Pence, A. (2013). *Beyond quality in early childhood education and care: Languages of evaluation*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203371114>
- Del Boca, D., Flinn, C., & Wiswall, M. (2016). Transfers to households with children and child development. *The Economic Journal (London)*, *126*(596), F136-F183. <https://doi.org/10.1111/eoj.12340>
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2013). *The landscape of qualitative research* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Desforges, C., & Abouchar, A. (2003). *The impact of parental involvement, parental support and family education on pupil achievement and adjustment: A Literature Review* (Vol. 433). DfES London.
- Dewey, J. (1915). *The school and society* (Rev. ed.). Chicago, The University of Chicago Press.
- Dewey, J. (1916). *Democracy and education: An introduction to the philosophy of education*. The Macmillan Company.
- Dickson, M., Gregg, P., & Robinson, H. (2016). Early, late or never? When does parental education impact child outcomes? *Econ J (London)*, *126*(596), F184-F231. <https://doi.org/10.1111/eoj.12356>
- Downer, J., Sabol, T. J., & Hamre, B. (2010). Teacher-child interactions in the classroom: Toward a theory of within- and cross-domain links to children's developmental outcomes. *Early Education and Development*, *21*(5), 699-723. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10409289.2010.497453>

- Dusabe, C., Pisani, L., Abimpaye, M., & Honeyman, C. (2019). Using evidence and implementation experience for advocacy and policy influence: The Rwanda emergent literacy and maths initiative (ELMI) case study. *Early Years, 39*(3), 243-259.
- Dze-Ngwa, W. (2014). The first world war and its aftermath in Cameroon: A historical evaluation of a Centenary, 1914-2014. *International Journal of Liberal Arts ad Social Science, 2*(8), 78-90.
- Ebrahim, H. (2012). Tensions in incorporating global childhood with early childhood programs: The case of South Africa. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood, 37*(3), 80-86. <https://doi.org/10.1177/183693911203700311>
- Ebrahim, H. B. (2010). Situated ethics: possibilities for young children as research participants in the South African context. *Early Child Development and Care, 180*(3), 289-298. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430701822958>
- Ebrahim, H. B., Okwany, A., & Barry, O. (2018). *Early childhood care and education at the margins: African perspectives on birth to three* (1st ed.). Routledge.
- Echu, G. (1999). Colonialism and linguistic dilemmas in Africa: Cameroon as a paradigm (revisited). *Quest, 13*(1-2).
- Egbe, M. B. (2015). Cameroon: An overview. In E. J. Takyi-Amoako (Ed.), *Education in West Africa: Education around the world* (1 ed., pp. 67-84). Bloomsbury Academic. <http://www.bloomsburycollections.com/book/education-in-west-africa-education-around-the-world/ch4-cameroon-an-overview/>
- Endeley, M. N. (2014). Teaching practice in Cameroon: The effectiveness of the University of Buea Model and implications for quality. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education, 39*(11), 147–160.
- Epstein, J. L. (1995). School/family/community partnerships: Caring for the children we share. *Phi Delta Kappan, 76*(9), 701-712.
- Epstein, J. L. (2018). *School, family, and community partnerships: Preparing educators and improving schools* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Epstein, J. L., & Henry Jay, B. (1982). Teachers' Reported Practices of Parent Involvement: Problems and Possibilities. *The Elementary school journal, 83*(2), 103-113. <https://doi.org/10.1086/461298>

- Esteban-Guitart, M., Monreal-Bosch, P., Perera, S., & Bastiani, J. (2016). Schooling and identity: A qualitative analysis of self-portrait drawings of young indigenous people from Chiapas, Mexico. *Front Psychol*, 7, 2083-2083. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2016.02083>
- Ferlazzo, L. (2011). Involvement or Engagement? *Educational Leadership*, 68(8), 10-14.
- Ferrara, M. M. (2009). Increasing parent involvement knowledge and strategies at the preservice level: The power in using a systematic professional development approach. *The Teacher Educator*, 44(4), 268-274. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08878730903180192>
- File, N. (2017). *Understanding research in early childhood education: Quantitative and qualitative methods*. Routledge.
- Fonkeng, G. E., & Ntembe, A. N. (2009). Higher education and economic development in Africa: The case of Cameroon. *Educational Research and Reviews*, 4(5), 231-246.
- Francisca, E. E. (2021). Impact of parental involvement in the acquisition of reading competencies by children living with dyslexia in Fako division, South West region of Cameroon. *International Journal of Integrated Education*, 4(5).
- Garcia, M. H., Pence, A., & Evans, J. L. (2008). *Africa's Future, Africa's Challenge: Early childhood care and development in Sub-Saharan Africa*. World Bank Publications.
- Gonzalez, N., Amanti, C., & Moll, L. C. (2005). *Funds of knowledge: Theorizing practices in households, communities and classrooms*. Erlbaum. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781410613462>
- Goodall, J. (2017). *Narrowing the Achievement Gap: Parental Engagement with Children's Learning* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315672465>
- Goodall, J., & Montgomery, C. (2014). Parental involvement to parental engagement: a continuum. *Educational Review (Birmingham)*, 66(4), 399-410. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2013.781576>
- Gordon Commission. (2013). *Technical report executive summary. To assess, to teach, to learn: A vision for the future of assessment*. ETS.
- Grauer, K. (2012). A case for case study research in education. In S. Klein (Ed.), *Action research methods: Plain and simple* (pp. 69–79). Springer.

- Green, C. L., Walker, J. M., Hoover-Dempsey, K. V., & Sandler, H. M. (2007). Parents' motivations for involvement in children's education: An empirical test of a theoretical model of parental involvement. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 99*(3), 532.
- Greenberg, J. P. (2011). The impact of maternal education on children's enrollment in early childhood education and care. *Children and Youth Services Review, 33*(7), 1049-1057. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chilyouth.2011.01.016>
- Grindal, T., Bowne, J. B., Yoshikawa, H., Schindler, H. S., Duncan, G. J., Magnuson, K., & Shonkoff, J. P. (2016). The added impact of parenting education in early childhood education programs: A meta-analysis. *Children and Youth Services Review, 70*, 238-249. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chilyouth.2016.09.018>
- Grolnick, W. S., Benjet, C., Kurowski, C. O., & Apostoleris, N. H. (1997). Predictors of parent involvement in children's schooling. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 89*(3), 538-548. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.89.3.538>
- Guo, Y. (2018). *Home-school relations: International perspectives*. Springer.
- Gwanfogbe, M. (2018). *Changing regimes and the development of education in Cameroon*. Spears Media Press.
- Hamre, B. K. (2014). Teachers' daily interactions with Children: An essential ingredient in effective early childhood programs. *Child Development Perspectives, 8*(4), 223-230. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdep.12090>
- Hanno, E. C., Gonzalez, K. E., Lebowitz, R. B., McCoy, D. C., Lizárraga, A., & Korder Fort, C. (2020). Structural and process quality features in Peruvian early childhood education settings. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology, 67*, 101105. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appdev.2019.101105>
- Hardman, C. (2001). Can there be an anthropology of children? *Childhood, 8*(4), 501-517.
- Harris, A., & Goodall, J. (2008). Do parents know they matter? Engaging all parents in learning. *Educational Research (Windsor), 50*(3), 277-289. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131880802309424>
- Harrison, J., MacGibbon, L., & Morton, M. (2001). Regimes of trustworthiness in qualitative research: The rigors of reciprocity. *Qualitative Inquiry, 7*(3), 323-345. <https://doi.org/10.1177/107780040100700305>

- Heckman, J. J. (2006). Skill formation and the economics of investing in disadvantaged children. *Science (American Association for the Advancement of Science)*, 312(5782), 1900-1902. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1128898>
- Hedges, H., Cooper, M., & Weisz-Koves, T. (2019). Recognising and responding to family funds of knowledge. In S. Alcock & N. Stobbs (Eds.), *Rethinking Play As Pedagogy* (1st ed., pp. 107-120). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429454042-9>
- Hesse-Biber, S. N. (2011). *The practice of qualitative research* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Holloway, I. (2017). *Qualitative research in nursing and healthcare* (4th ed.). Wiley Blackwell.
- Hornby, G., & Blackwell, I. (2018). Barriers to parental involvement in education: An update. *Educational Review*, 70(1), 109-119. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2018.1388612>
- Hornby, G., & Lafaele, R. (2011). Barriers to parental involvement in education: An explanatory model. *Educational Review*, 63(1), 37-52. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2010.488049>
- Hughes, P., & Mac Naughton, G. (2000). Consensus, dissensus or community: The politics of parent involvement in early childhood education. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 1(3), 241-258. <https://doi.org/10.2304/ciec.2000.1.3.2>
- Huss-Keeler, R. L. (1997). Teacher perception of ethnic and linguistic minority parental involvement and its relationships to children's language and literacy learning: A case study. *Teaching and teacher education*, 13(2), 171-182. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0742-051X\(96\)00018-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0742-051X(96)00018-2)
- Igbo, J., & Ihejiene, M. A. (2014). Influence of parenting styles on deviant behaviors and academic achievement in secondary school students in Garoua, northern Cameroun. *International Journal of Educational Science and Research*, 4(5), 19-34.
- Izzo, C. V., Weissberg, R. P., Kasrow, W. J., & Fendrich, M. (1999). A longitudinal assessment of teacher perceptions of parent involvement in children's education and school performance. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 27(6), 817-839.

- James, A., & Prout, A. (2015). *Constructing and reconstructing childhood: Contemporary issues in the sociological study of childhood* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315745008>
- Janssen, J., & Vandebroek, M. (2018). (De)constructing parental involvement in early childhood curricular frameworks. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 26(6), 813-832. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1350293X.2018.1533703>
- Jarvie, W. K. (2012). Qualitative research in early childhood education and care implementation. *International Journal of Child Care and Education Policy (Seoul)*, 6(2), 35-43. <https://doi.org/10.1007/2288-6729-6-2-35>
- Jenks, C. (2005). *Culture* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Johannes, T. A., & Noula, A. G. (2011). Gender and increased access to schooling in cameroon: A marginal benefit incidence analysis. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 12(1), 94-106.
- Keller, H., Voelker, S., & Yovsi, R. D. (2005). Conceptions of parenting in different cultural communities: The case of West African Nso and Northern German women. *Social Development (Oxford, England)*, 14(1), 158-180. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9507.2005.00295.x>
- Kernen, M., Singer, E., & Kernan, M. (2011). *Peer relationships in early childhood education and care*. Routledge.
- Kouega, J.-P. (2018). The anglophone problem in Cameroon: Focus on education. *Open Access Library Journal*, 5, 1-9.
- Lamb, M. E. (1992). *Child care in context: Cross-cultural perspectives*. L. Erlbaum.
- Langbehn, V. (2013). Ferdinand Oyono's *Flüchtige Spur Tundi Ondua* and Germany's Cameroon. *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, 128(1), 142. <https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2013.128.1.142>
- Lareau, A. (2011). *Unequal childhoods: Class, race, and family life* (2nd ed.). Berkeley: University of California Press. <https://doi.org/10.1525/j.ctt1ppgj4>
- LaRocque, M., Kleiman, I., & Darling, S. M. (2011). Parental Involvement: The Missing Link in School Achievement. *Preventing School Failure*, 55(3), 115-122. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10459880903472876>

- Lau, E. Y. H., Li, H., & Rao, N. (2012). Exploring parental involvement in early years education in China: Development and validation of the Chinese Early Parental Involvement Scale (CEPIS). *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 20(4), 405-421.
- Lawrence, D. J. D. C. (2007). The ethics of educational research. *Journal of Manipulative Physio Therapy*, 30(4), 326-330. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jmpt.2007.03.005>
- Lawton, D. (1983). *Curriculum studies and educational planning*. Hodder and Stoughton
- Li, A., & Fischer, M. J. (2017). Advantaged/disadvantaged school neighborhoods, parental networks, and parental involvement at elementary school. *Sociology of Education*, 90(4), 355-377.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. SAGE Publications.
- Mack, L. (2010). The philosophical underpinnings of educational research. *Polyglossia*, 19, 5-11.
- Macrotrends. (n. d.). *Douala, Cameroon metro area population 1950-2021*. <https://www.macrotrends.net/cities/20362/douala/population>
- Marfo, K., & Serpell, R. (2014). *Child development in Africa: Views from inside*. Jossey-Bass.
- Marks, D., & Yardley, L. (2004). *Research methods for clinical and health psychology*. SAGE Publications.
- Mashford-Scott, A., & Church, A. (2011). Promoting children's agency in early childhood education. *Novitas-ROYAL*, 5(1).
- Maxwell, J., & Chmiel, M. (2014). Generalization in and from qualitative analysis. In U. Flick (Ed.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative data analysis* (pp. 540-553). SAGE Publications
- Maxwell, J. A. (2005). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications.

- Maxwell, J. A. (2012). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach* (Vol. 41). SAGE publications.
- Mbaku, J. M. (2005). *Culture and customs of Cameroon*. Greenwood Publishing Group.
- Mbaku, J. M. (2014). Judicial independence, constitutionalism and governance in Cameroon. *European Journal of Comparative Law and Governance*, 1(4), 357-391.
<https://doi.org/10.1163/22134514-00104001>
- McDevitt, S. E. (2016). Rediscovering and reconnecting funds of knowledge of immigrant children, families, and teachers. *Childhood Education*, 92(6), 470-475.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00094056.2016.1251796>
- Merriam, S. B. (2001). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education* (2nd ed.). Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Meshram, R. G. (2013). Parent's perception about there involvement in children's academic achievement. *Indian Journal of Health and Wellbeing*, 4(9), 1692.
- Ministry of Basic Education. (2018a). *Cameroon nursery school curriculum*.
http://www.minedub.cm/uploads/media/Program_Nursery_2019.pdf
- Ministry of Basic Education. (2018b). *Teacher's handbook for the Cameroon nursery and primary school curricula*.
- Ministry of Education. (2004). *Kei Tua o te Pae. Assessment for learning: Early childhood exemplars Books 1-9*. Learning Media.
- Minke, K. M., Sheridan, S. M., Kim, E. M., Ryoo, J. H., & Koziol, N. A. (2014). Congruence in parent-teacher relationships: The role of shared perceptions. *The Elementary School Journal*, 114(4), 527-546. <https://doi.org/10.1086/675637>
- Mitchell, L. (2010). Constructions of childhood in early childhood education policy debate in New Zealand. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 11(4), 328-341.
<https://doi.org/10.2304/ciec.2010.11.4.328>
- Mitchell, L. (2019). *Democratic policies and practices in early childhood education: An Aotearoa New Zealand case study* (1st ed.). Imprint: Springer.

- Mitchell, L., & Carr, M. (2014). Democratic and learning-oriented assessment practices in early childhood care and education in New Zealand. *United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization*.
https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000226550_eng
- Mitchell, L., & Ouko, A. (2012). Experiences of Congolese refugee families in New Zealand: Challenges and possibilities for early childhood provision. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, 37(1), 99-107. <https://doi.org/10.1177/183693911203700112>
- Moll, L. C. (2014). *L. S. Vygotsky and education*. Routledge.
- Moll, L. C., Amanti, C., Neff, D., & Gonzalez, N. (1992). Funds of knowledge for teaching: Using a qualitative approach to connect homes and classrooms. *Theory into Practice*, 31(2), 132-141.
- Monteha, D. R. N. (2018). Colonial education system in Africa: The German experience in Cameroon 1884-1916. *Sociology Study*, 8(5), 220-231. <https://doi.org/10.17265/2159-5526/2018.05.003>
- Moss, P., & Gunilla, D. (2008). Beyond quality in early childhood education and care: Languages of evaluation. *New Zealand Journal of Teachers' Work*, 5(1), 3-12.
- Murray, J. (2010). Qualitative research methods. In C. Morgan & D. Bhugra (Eds.), *Principles of social psychiatry* (pp. 77-87). John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470684214.ch7>
- Neuman, M. J., & Okeng'o, L. (2019). Early childhood policies in low-and middle-income countries. *Early Years (London, England)*, 39(3), 223-228.
- Ngoran, M., & Ngalim, V. B. (2019). Early girl-child marriage practices among the Moghamo rural communities of Cameroon. *European Journal of Education Studies*, 6(7), 395-406.
- Nsamenang, A. B. (1992a). Early Childhood Care and Education in Cameroon. In M. E. Lamb, C.-P. Hwang, A. G. Broberg, & K. J. Sternberg (Eds.), *Child Care in Context: Cross-cultural Perspectives*. Taylor and Francis.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315799612>
- Nsamenang, A. B. (1992b). Perceptions of parenting among the Nso of Cameroon. In B. S. Hewlett (Ed.), *Father-child relations: Cultural and biosocial contexts* (1st ed., pp. 321-343). Routledge.

- Nsamenang, A. B. (2006a). Human ontogenesis: An indigenous African view on development and intelligence. *International Journal of Psychology*, 41(4), 293-297. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00207590544000077>
- Nsamenang, A. B. (2006b). Teacher education. Some issues and challenges for Cameroon in the third millennium. In T. Tchombe & P. Fonkoua (Eds.), *Formation et professionnalisation des enseignants au Cameroun (Training and professionalization of trainee teachers in Cameroon)* (pp. 267–282). Terroirs.
- Nsamenang, A. B. (2008). Agency in early childhood learning and development in Cameroon. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 9(3), 211-223. <https://doi.org/10.2304/ciec.2008.9.3.211>
- Nsamenang, A. B. (2010a). Fathers, families, and children's well-becoming in Africa. In M. E. Lamb (Ed.), *The role of the father in child development* (5th ed.). Wiley.
- Nsamenang, A. B. (2010b). Issues in and Challenges to Professionalism in Africa's Cultural Settings. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 11(1), 20-28. <https://doi.org/10.2304/ciec.2010.11.1.20>
- Nutbrown, C. (2011). *Key concepts in early childhood education and care*. SAGE Publications.
- OCHA. (2019). *Data on gender equality in Cameroon*. <https://reliefweb.int/report/cameroon/data-gender-equality-cameroon>
- Okwany, A. (2016). 'Every mother dances her baby': Contextually responsive narratives of early childhood care and education in Kenya and Uganda. *South African Journal of Childhood Education*, 6(2), 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajce.v6i2.464>
- Omolewa, M. (2007). Traditional African modes of education: Their relevance in the modern world. *International Review of Education*, 53(5/6), 593-612. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11159-007-9060-1>
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (1997). *Parents as partners in schooling*. Centre for Educational Research & Innovative Publications.
- Ouandji, A. (2018). *Financial literacy education in Cameroon: Teachers' beliefs and perspectives* University of Oulu.

- Patrikakou, E. N., & Weissberg, R. P. (2000). Parents' perceptions of teacher outreach and parent involvement in children's Education. *Journal of Prevention & Intervention in the Community*, 20(1-2), 103-119. https://doi.org/10.1300/J005v20n01_08
- Penetito, W. (2001). If we only knew. Contextualising Maori knowledge [Conference proceedings]. Early childhood education for a democratic society, Wellington, New Zealand.
- Peters, S. (2019). Working together effectively [Guest Editorial] [Journal Article]. *Ako, The Community Issue*(Winter), 7-7. <https://hdl.handle.net/10289/14127>
- Peters, S. A., Paki, V. A., & Davis, K. (2015). *Learning journeys from early childhood into school*. http://tlri.org.nz/sites/default/files/projects/TLRI_%20Peters_Summary%28v2%29%20%281%29.pdf
- Piaget, J. (1973). *To understand is to invent: the future of education*. Grossman Publishers.
- Pihama, L., Lee, J., Te Nan, R., Greensill, H., & Campbell, D. (2014). *Tiakina te Pā Harakeke: Māori Childrearing practices within a context of whānau ora*.
- Plan International. (2011). *Starting education on the right foot in Cameroon*. <https://plancanada.ca>
- Posey-Maddox, L. (2013). Professionalizing the PTO: Race, class, and shifting norms of parental engagement in a city public school. *American Journal of Education*, 119(2), 235-260.
- Pushor, D., & the Parent Engagement Collaborative. (2013). *Portals of promise transforming beliefs and practices through a curriculum of parents* (1st ed.). SensePublishers.
- Rattigan-Rohr, J. (2012). *It Takes A Village: A Collaborative Assault On The Struggling Reader Dilemma* (1. Aufl. ed.). SensePublishers. <https://doi.org/https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-94-6091-781-3>
- Reyes, I., Da Silva Iddings, A. C., & Feller, N. (2016). Building relationships with diverse students and families: A funds of knowledge perspective. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, 16(1), 8-33. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468798415584692>
- Robinson, K., & Harris, A. L. (2014). *The broken compass: Parental involvement with children's education*. Harvard University Press.

- Rogoff, B. (2003). *The cultural nature of human development*. Oxford University Press.
- Rogoff, B., Dahl, A., & Callanan, M. (2018). The importance of understanding children's lived experience. *Developmental Review, 50*, 5-15.
- Roller, M. R., & Lavrakas, P. J. (2015). *Applied qualitative research design: A total quality framework approach*. The Guilford Press.
- Rosa, E. M., & Tudge, J. (2013). Urie Bronfenbrenner's theory of human development: Its evolution from ecology to bioecology: The evolution of Urie Bronfenbrenner's theory. *Journal of Family Theory & Review 5*(4), 243-258.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/jftr.12022>
- Rozsahegyi, T. (2018). Bronfenbrenner's 'bio-ecological' model and its application to understanding children's development. In Z. Brown & S. Ward (Eds.), *Contemporary issues in childhood: A bio-ecological approach* (1st ed., Vol. 1). Routledge.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315513850>
- Saito, N. (2000). Perfecting Democracy through Holistic Education: Dewey's Naturalistic Philosophy of Growth Reconsidered. *Philosophy of Education Archive*, 155-163.
- Sandstrom, H. (2012). The characteristics and quality of pre-school education in Spain. *International Journal of Early Years Education, 20*(2), 130-158.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09669760.2012.715012>
- Sebolt, S. (2018). Capitalizing on funds of knowledge to support family engagement. *Kappa Delta Pi Record, 54*(3), 130-134. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00228958.2018.1481660>
- Shapiro, C. J., & Harper Browne, C. (2016). *Innovative approaches to supporting families of young children*. Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-39059-8>
- Shenton, A. K. (2004). Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects. *Education for Information, 22*(2), 63-75. <https://doi.org/10.3233/EFI-2004-22201>
- Shonkoff, J. P., & Phillips, D. (2000). *From neurons to neighborhoods: The science of early child development*. National Academy Press.

- Shuker, M. J., & Cherrington, S. (2016). Diversity in New Zealand early childhood education: Challenges and opportunities. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 24(2), 172-187. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669760.2016.1155148>
- Silova, I., Piattoeva, N., & Millei, Z. (2018). *Childhood and schooling in (post)socialist societies memories of everyday life* (1st ed.). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Simons, G. F., & Fennig, C. D. (2018). Ethnologue: Languages of the world, twenty. *Dallas, Texas, SIL International*, 26(12), 2018. <https://www.ethnologue.com>
- Siraj-Blatchford, I., Mayo, A., Melhuish, E., Taggart, B., Sammons, P., & Sylva, K. (2011). Performing against the odds: Developmental trajectories of children in the EPPSE 3 to 16 study: brief. <https://ro.uow.edu.au/sspapers/1700>
- Smith, A. (1998). *Understanding children's development : A New Zealand perspective* (4th ed.). Bridget Williams Books.
- Smith, A. (2007). Children and young people's participation rights in education. *The International Journal of Children's Rights*, 15(1), 147-164. <https://doi.org/10.1163/092755607X181739>
- Smith, A. (2013). *Understanding children and childhood: A New Zealand perspective* (5th ed.). Bridget Williams Books.
- Smith, C., Perou, R., & Lesesne, C. (2002). Parent education. In M. H. Bornstein (Ed.), *Handbook of parenting: Social conditions and applied parenting* (3rd ed., Vol. 4, pp. 389-409). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.
- Souto-Manning, M., & Rabadi-Raol, A. (2018). (Re)centering quality in early childhood education: Toward intersectional justice for minoritized children. *Review of Research in Education* 42(1), 203-225. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732X18759550>
- Stack, S. F., & Simpson, D. J. (2010). *Teachers, leaders, and schools essays by John Dewey*. Southern Illinois University Press.
- Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Sage Publications Ltd.
- Super, C. M., & Harkness, S. (1986). The Developmental Niche: A Conceptualization at the Interface of Child and Culture. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, 9(4), 545-569. <https://doi.org/10.1177/016502548600900409>

- Tata, J. (2021). *Diagram of a Maize Plant*.
- Tchombe, T. (2014). Progressive transformative teacher education in Cameroon. *Educational Leadership and Management Studies*, 33(1), 23-32.
- Thomas, G. (2017). *How to do your research project : A guide for students in education and applied social sciences* (3rd ed.). SAGE PUBLICATIONS.
- Tichafogwe, T. R. (2018). Urban land grabbing mayhem in Douala metropolitan local council areas, Cameroon. *Current Urban Studies*, 6, 243- 259. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.4236/cus.2018.62014>
- Tichenor, M. S. (1998, 1998/03/01). Preservice teachers' attitudes toward parent involvement: Implications for teacher education. *The Teacher Educator*, 33(4), 248-259. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08878739809555178>
- Topping, K. (2018). Parental involvement in reading: Theoretical and empirical background. In K. Topping & S. Wolfendale (Eds.), *Parental involvement in children's reading* (1st ed.). Routledge.
- Tudge, J. R. H., Mokrova, I., Hatfield, B. E., & Karnik, R. B. (2009). Uses and misuses of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory of human development. *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, 1(4), 198-210. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1756-2589.2009.00026.x>
- Tylor, E. B. (2016). *Primitive culture. Volume I, Researches into the development of mythology, philosophy, religion, language, art and custom*. Dover Publications.
- UNESCO. (2014). *Global Monitoring Report: Education for All 2000–2015: Achievements and challenges, 2015*. <https://en.unesco.org/gem-report/report/2015/education-all-2000-2015-achievements-and-challenges>
- UNESCO. (n. d.). *Early childhood care and education*. <https://en.unesco.org>
- UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report. (2021). *Cameroon: Financing for equity*. <https://education-profiles.org/sub-saharan-africa/cameroon/~financing-for-equity>
- UNESCO Institute of Statistics. (2021). *Cameroon. Education and literacy*. <http://uis.unesco.org/country/CM>

- UNESCO International Bureau of Education. (2006). *Cameroon early childhood care and education (ECCE) programmes*. <http://www.unicef.org>
- UNICEF. (2016). *Early childhood development: The key to a full and productive life*. <http://www.unicef.org>
- UNICEF. (2019). *A world ready to learn: Prioritizing quality early childhood education*. New York. <http://www.unicef.org>
- UNICEF. (2021). *Analysis of education spending in the West and Central Africa region*. United Nations children fund regional office for West and Central Africa Dakar, Senegal. <https://www.unicef.org/wca/media/7131/file/Reimagining-Financing-for-Education-Policy-Brief.pdf>
- United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. (2018). *Sustainable Development Goals*. <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/metadata/>
- United Nations General Assembly. (1989). Convention on the rights of the child. *United Nations, Treaty Series, 1577(3)*, 1-23.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.
- Wadende, P., Oburu, P. O., & Morara, A. (2016). African indigenous care-giving practices: Stimulating early childhood development and education in Kenya. *South African Journal of Childhood Education, 6(2)*, 1-7. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajce.v6i2.446>
- Watson, A. (2020). Pā harakeke as a research model of practice. *Aotearoa New Zealand social work, 32(3)*, 30-42.
- Weigel, D. J., Martin, S. S., & Bennett, K. K. (2006). Mothers' literacy beliefs: Connections with the home literacy environment and pre-school children's literacy development. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy 6(2)*, 191-211. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468798406066444>
- Whitebread, D. (2012). *Developmental psychology and early childhood education*. SAGE Publications.
- Whyte, K. L., & Karabon, A. (2016). Transforming teacher-family relationships: Shifting roles and perceptions of home visits through the funds of knowledge approach. *Early*

years (London, England), 36(2), 207-221.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09575146.2016.1139546>

Winder, C., & Corter, C. (2016). The influence of prior experiences on early childhood education students' anticipated work with families. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 55, 133-142. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2016.01.005>

Wohlfahrt, M. U. (2018). Primary teacher education in rural Cameroon: Can informal learning compensate for the deficiencies in formal training? *Africa Education Review*, 15(3), 1-20.

Wolf, S. (2020). “Me I don’t really discuss anything with them”: Parent and teacher perceptions of early childhood education and parent-teacher relationships in Ghana. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 99, 101525.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2019.101525>

Wolfendale, S. (2018). Overview of parental participation in children's education. In K. Topping & S. Wolfendale (Eds.), *Parental involvement in children's reading* (1st ed.). Routledge.

Wood, D., Bruner, J. S., & Ross, G. (1976). The role of tutoring in problem solving. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 17(2), 89-100. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-7610.1976.tb00381.x>

World Bank. (2012). Cameroon - governance and management in the education sector. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/12262>

World Bank. (2014). *Global partnership for education funding the amount of US\$53.3 million to the republic of Cameroon for an equity and quality for improved learning project*. <https://www.globalpartnership.org/country/cameroon>

World Bank. (2021). *GNI per capita, Atlas method (current US\$) - Cameroon*. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GNP.PCAP.CD?locations=CM>

Xerri, D. (2018). The use of interviews and focus groups in teacher research. *The Clearing House*, 91(3), 140-146. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00098655.2018.1436820>

Yin, R. K. (2003). *Case study research: Design and methods* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.

Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.

Yulianti, K., Denessen, E., Droop, M., & Veerman, G.-J. (2019). Transformational leadership for parental involvement: How teachers perceive the school leadership practices to promote parental involvement in children's education. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15700763.2019.1668424>

Yulianti, K., Denessen, E., Droop, M., & Veerman, G.-J. (2020). School efforts to promote parental involvement: The contributions of school leaders and teachers. *Educational Studies*, 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03055698.2020.1740978>

Zieman, G. A. (2012). Participant observation. In S. Klein (Ed.), *Action research methods: Plain and simple* (pp. 49-67). Palgrave Macmillan.
<https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137046635>

Appendices

Appendix A: Research Approval Letter from University of Waikato, Division of Education Research Ethics Committee

Te Kura Toi Tangata
Faculty of Education
The University of Waikato
Private Bag 3105
Hamilton, New Zealand, 3240

FEDU Ethics Committee
fedu.ethics@waikato.ac.nz
07 8384500 ext. 7870
www.waikato.ac.nz/education



8/6/2019

Dear Fenmachi Emela Achu

FEDU Ethics Application Approved FEDU033/19

I am pleased to advise you that your ethics application for the project entitled “Parental Involvement in Early Childhood Learning: Douala, Littoral Region, Cameroon” was approved by Te Kura Toi Tangata Faculty of Education Ethics Committee on June 8th, 2019.

Please be aware that the Te Kura Toi Tangata FEDU Ethics Committee must be advised (by memo) of any changes to the details recorded in your ethics application. Please send any such advice to fedu.ethics@waikato.ac.nz. You will receive a memo of approval once the change(s) has been considered.

Kind regards

Jayne O'Connell *Nicola Daly*

Co-chair

Te Kura Toi Tangata Faculty of Education Ethics Committee

Appendix B: Information Letter for the Regional Delegation of Basic Education Littoral (Delegation Regional De L'education De Base Du Littoral). Application to conduct study in Douala, Cameroon

Fenmachi Emela Achu,
Division of Education,
University of Waikato,
Hamilton, New Zealand.
Email: fenmachiemela@yahoo.com

The Regional Delegation of Basic Education,
N3, Yaoundé, Cameroon.

Application to conduct research in Douala, Cameroon.

My name is Fenmachi Emela Achu, a PhD candidate at the Division of Education, University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand. I kindly request your permission to conduct my research study at two nursery schools in the Douala Region.

PhD Research Topic: “Parental Involvement in Early Childhood Learning: Douala, Littoral Region, Cameroon.”

Significance and aims of the study:

The study aims to explore parents' and teachers' perspectives about parental involvement in early childhood learning in the Cameroon context. While there are numerous studies done about parental involvement especially their roles and involvement in early childhood education, little has been written particularly about Cameroonian parents as well as the issues of parental involvement and child development in light of a Cameroonian point of view. Thus, the significance of this research lies in four aspects of contributions it could make to Cameroon or similar contexts.

First, this research underscores the significance of the cultural and intercultural ecosystems (English educational system as well as indigenous culture and practices) and the cultural experiences for children's identity formation in Cameroon or similar contexts.

This research seeks to understand parents' and teachers' perspectives about parental involvement in early childhood learning it might raise other ways for effective parental involvement primarily based on the Cameroon contexts. This may lead to developing recommendations for future practices involving parents, based on the findings, literature and experiences reviewed throughout this study.

This research with special reference to the Cameroonian parents will contribute to further study in this area by developing insights into views on childhood, child development, and effective parental involvement in early learning. Lastly, the study will inform other countries with similar context on parental involvement in early childhood learning.

Methods of data collection:

- The study will involve two English nursery schools (one public, one private) to understand the level of parental involvement in children's learning.
- A questionnaire will be designed for all the parents of children attending level 1 and 2 in each nursery school to respond to. The questionnaires will be paper-based and will take

approximately 20 minutes to complete. Parents will also be asked to indicate if they will be willing to participate in a one-on-one interview.

- Interviews will be carried out and I anticipate in each nursery school a total of 6 parents and 4 teachers (3 parents and 2 teachers at each level) to be interviewed. Interviews will be audio-recorded with participants' permission and at the end of the final interview, I will transcribe the interviews and send transcripts to participants' through email or in person (whichever means they prefer) for amendment and confirmation within a period of two weeks.
- Two weeks observations will be made per nursery school (1 week in each class) to observe parents' and teachers' interactions, and parents' involvement in children's learning at the nursery school. Observations over the two weeks will each last a full session in the nursery school which is usually between 7.30am to 2pm. Observations will focus particularly on the 6 parents interviewed in each school and their children including all the teachers (3 parents and their children including the teachers for 1 week in each class). Comments will also be made on the general picture of what happens in the nursery school. Consent will be sought from the principal, teachers and parents and children before conducting observations.

Anonymity/ Confidentiality

After gaining access to talk with participants, the researcher must protect research participant's information and identities. In this study information regarding nursery schools, teachers, parents and children will be kept confidential (shared only with my supervisors) and information will be reported by use of pseudonyms where possible to keep participants anonymous. In addition, nursery schools and participants will not be named in any reporting to maintain anonymity.

Use of the information

The information will be used for completion of my PhD thesis, and other scholarly publications, presentations, seminars and conferences. When the thesis is completed and approved, the electronic version will be accessible through the University of Waikato Research Commons for theses and I will provide participants with the link and a summary of the research findings by email.

Participants' Rights

For this study, participants will voluntarily decide to participate and have the right to discontinue at any stage of the data collection. The data (observations, interview and survey) collected to that point will remain part of the study. Principals, teachers and parents can withdraw by contacting me through my email provided below. Principals have the right to withdraw their nursery schools from participating in this study should they receive complaints from parents and teachers concerning the study.

Proposed date of commencement of data collection:

November 2019

Expected date of completion of data collection:

January 2020.

This research is being undertaken through the University of Waikato and has been approved by the Division of Education Research Ethics Committee. Please find attached copy of the approval letter from the Division of Education Research Ethics Committee for more information. Should any issues or concerns arise regarding this study, please contact me directly through email: fenmachiemela@yahoo.com, or through my Doctoral Supervisors; Associate Professor Sally Peters, sally.peters@waikato.ac.nz and Professor Linda Mitchell, linda.mitchell@waikato.ac.nz

If you give your permission for me to conduct this study, please complete the attached consent form.

Thank you for your consideration and assistance.

Kind Regards,

Fenmachi Emela Achu.

Appendix C: Regional Delegation of Basic Education Littoral (Delegation Regional De L'education De Base Du Littoral) Consent Form

Please complete two copies, keep one for your records and return one for my records.

PhD Research Topic: "Parental Involvement in Early Childhood Learning: Douala, Littoral Region, Cameroon."

The Regional Delegation of Basic Education _____

I have discussed and understood this research project and understand that participants' anonymity will be protected as much as possible in any data collected including questionnaire forms, voice and video recordings, photographs, transcribed interviews, and field notes. I also understand that no nursery schools will be named in the study.

I understand that participants will have the opportunity to review the transcript of the interviews and to request changes when necessary.

I understand that research participation is voluntary, and participants can withdraw from this study at any time. The data (observations, interview and survey) collected to that point will remain part of the study.

I also understand that children will be observed alongside teachers and their parents and all parties involved will need to voluntarily agree to participate and not be forced to. The consent of principals, teachers and parents will be sought before any videos or photographs are taken during observations.

I understand that ethical approval for this research has been received from the University of Waikato Division of Education Research Ethics Committee.

I would like to receive a notification email with a summary of the research findings and an access link for the electronic copy of the thesis from the researcher once the thesis has been completed and approved.

I also understand that should any issues or concerns arise regarding this study, I can contact Fenmachi Emela Achu directly through email: fenmachiemela@yahoo.com, or through my Doctoral Supervisors; Associate Professor Sally Peters, sally.peters@waikato.ac.nz and Professor Linda Mitchell, linda.mitchell@waikato.ac.nz

I hereby give consent for this research to be conducted.


Signed _____

Name:

Date _____

Role _____

Appendix D: Regional Delegation of Basic Education Consent Letter

REPUBLICQUE DU CAMEROUN Paix-Travail-Patrie ----- MINISTERE DE L'EDUCATION DE BASE ----- REGION DU LETTORAL ----- DELEGATION REGIONALE DE L'EDUCATION DE BASE ----- BP 1271 DOUALA		REPUBLIC OF CAMEROON Peace-Work-Fatherland ----- MINISTRY OF BASIC EDUCATION ----- LITTORAL REGION ----- REGIONAL DELEGATION OF BASIC EDUCATION ----- PO BOX 1271 DOUALA
--	---	--

N° 12971 /AR/R-LT/RDBE Douala, le 05 OCT 2019

*The Regional Delegate of Basic Education Littoral
To
Jenmachi Emelda Achu
Division of Education University of waikato
Hamilton, Newzealand*

Acknowledgement of receipt


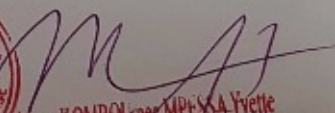
Subject: An application for an authorisation to conduct a research in some nursery schools in Douala.

'Parental Involvement in Early Childhood Learning' is a topic which cannot leave any reader indifferent to a study of this aspect of child development.

Therefore, I hereby acknowledge receipt of your request for an authorisation to carry out this study and salute your contribution and the results which might raise different ways for effective parental involvement in child development.

Thus, I look forward to receive a summary of the research findings.

THE REGIONAL DELEGATE



Mme. KOMBOU de MPESSA Yvette
Professeur d'Ecole Normale d'Instituteurs
Hors Echelle

Appendix E: Information Letter for Principals of English Nursery Schools, Douala, Cameroon

Fenmachi Emela Achu,
Division of Education,
University of Waikato,
Hamilton, New Zealand.
Email : fenmachiemela@yahoo.com

The Principal,
Nursery school: _____
Douala, Cameroon.

Application to conduct research at your nursery school.

My name is Fenmachi Emela Achu, a PhD candidate at the Division of Education, University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand. I kindly request your permission to conduct my research study at your nursery school.

PhD Research Topic: “Parental Involvement in Early Childhood Learning: Douala, Littoral Region, Cameroon.”

Significance and aims of the study:

The study aims to explore parents’ and teachers’ perspectives about parental involvement in early childhood learning in the Cameroon context. While there are numerous studies done about parental involvement especially their roles and involvement in early childhood education, little has been written particularly about Cameroonian parents as well as the issues of parental involvement and child development in light of a Cameroonian point of view. Thus the significance of this research lies in four aspects of contributions it could make to Cameroon or similar contexts.

First, this research underscores the significance of the cultural and intercultural ecosystems (English educational system as well as indigenous culture and practices) and the cultural experiences for children’s identity formation in Cameroon or similar contexts.

This research seeks to understand parents’ and teachers’ perspectives about parental involvement in early childhood learning it might raise other ways for effective parental involvement primarily based on the Cameroon contexts. This may lead to developing recommendations for future practices involving parents, based on the findings, literature and experiences reviewed throughout this study.

This research with special reference to the Cameroonian parents will contribute to further study in this area by developing insights into views on childhood, child development, and effective parental involvement in early learning. Lastly, the study will inform other countries with similar context on parental involvement in early childhood learning.

Methods of data collection:

- The study will involve two English nursery schools (one public, one private) will be studied to understand the level of parental involvement in children’s learning.
- A questionnaire will be designed for all the parents of children attending level 1 and 2 in each nursery school to respond to. The questionnaires will be paper-based and will take

approximately 20 minutes to complete. Parents will also be asked to indicate if they will be willing to participate in a one-on-one interview.

- Interviews will be carried out and I anticipate in each nursery school a total of 6 parents and 4 teachers (3 parents and 2 teachers at each level) to be interviewed. Interviews will be audio-recorded with participants' permission and at the end of the final interview, I will transcribe the interviews and send transcripts to participants' through email or in person (whichever means they prefer) for amendment and confirmation within a period of two weeks.
- Two weeks observations will be made per nursery school (1 week in each class) to observe parents' and teachers' interactions, and parents' involvement in children's learning at the nursery school. Observations over the two weeks will each last a full session in the nursery school which is usually between 7.30am to 2pm. Observations will focus particularly on the 6 parents interviewed in each school and their children including all the teachers (3 parents and their children including the teachers for 1 week in each class). Comments will also be made on the general picture of what happens in the nursery school. Consent will be sought from the principal, teachers and parents and children before conducting observations.

Anonymity/ Confidentiality

After gaining access to talk with participants, the researcher must protect research participant's information and identities. In this study information regarding nursery schools, teachers, parents and children will be kept confidential (shared only with my supervisors) and information will be reported by use of pseudonyms where possible to keep participants anonymous. In addition, nursery schools and participants will not be named in any reporting to maintain anonymity.

Use of the information

The information will be used for completion of my PhD thesis, and other scholarly publications, presentations, seminars and conferences. When the thesis is completed and approved, the electronic version will be accessible through the University of Waikato Research Commons for theses and I will provide participants with the link and a summary of the research findings by email.

Participants' Rights

For this study, participants will voluntarily decide to participate and have the right to discontinue at any stage of the data collection. The data (observations, interview and survey) collected to that point will remain part of the study. Principals, teachers and parents can withdraw by contacting me through my email provided below. Principals have the right to withdraw their nursery schools from participating in this study should they receive complaints from parents and teachers concerning the study.

Proposed date of commencement of data collection:

November 2019

Expected date of completion of data collection:

January 2020.

This research is being undertaken through the University of Waikato and has been approved by the Division of Education Research Ethics Committee. Please find attached copy of the approval letter from the Division of Education Research Ethics Committee for more information. Should any issues or concerns arise regarding this study, please contact me directly through email: fenmachiemela@yahoo.com, or through my Doctoral Supervisors; Associate Professor Sally Peters, sally.peters@waikato.ac.nz and Professor Linda Mitchell, linda.mitchell@waikato.ac.nz

If you give your permission for me to conduct this study, please complete the attached consent form.

Thank you for your consideration and assistance.

Kind Regards,

Fenmachi Emela Achu.

Appendix F: Principals of English Nursery Schools, Douala, Cameroon Consent Form

Please complete two copies, keep one for your records and return one for my records.

PhD Research Topic: “Parental Involvement in Early Childhood Learning: Douala, Littoral Region, Cameroon.”

The Principal,

Nursery school: _____

Douala, Cameroon.

I have discussed and understood this research project and understand that participants’ anonymity will be protected as much as possible in any data collected including questionnaire forms, voice and video recordings, photographs, transcribed interviews, and field notes. I also understand that my nursery school will not be named in the study.

I understand that participants will have the opportunity to review the transcript of the interviews and to request changes when necessary.

I understand that research participation is voluntary, and participants can withdraw from this study at any time. The data (observations, interview and survey) collected to that point will remain part of the study.

I understand that I have the right to withdraw my nursery school from participating in this study in case of any complaints from parents and teachers concerning the study.

I also consent that children will be observed alongside teachers and their parents, and all parties involved will need to voluntarily agree to participate and not be forced to. Parents’ and teachers’ consent will also be sought for videoing and photographing during observations.

I understand that ethical approval for this research has been received from the University of Waikato Division of Education Research Ethics Committee.

I would like to receive a notification email with a summary of the research findings and an access link for the electronic copy of the thesis from the researcher once the thesis has been completed and approved.

I also understand that should any issues or concerns arise regarding this study, I can contact Fenmachi Emela Achu directly through email: fenmachiemela@yahoo.com, or through my Doctoral Supervisors; Associate Professor Sally Peters, sally.peters@waikato.ac.nz and Professor Linda Mitchell, linda.mitchell@waikato.ac.nz

I hereby give consent for this research to be conducted.

Signed _____

Name: _____

Date _____

Appendix G: Principal of Private English Nursery School Consent form

Appendix D: Principals of English Nursery Schools, Douala, Cameroon

Consent Form

Please complete two copies, keep one for your records and return one for my records.

PhD Research Topic: "Parental Involvement in Early Childhood Learning: Douala, Littoral Region, Cameroon."

The Principal,
Nursery school: _____
Douala, Cameroon.

- I have discussed and understood this research project and understand that participants' anonymity will be protected as much as possible in any data collected including questionnaire forms, voice and video recordings, photographs, transcribed interviews, and field notes. I also understand that my nursery school will not be named in the study.
- I understand that participants will have the opportunity to review the transcript of the interviews and to request changes when necessary.
- I understand that research participation is voluntary and participants can withdraw from this study at any time. The data (observations, interview and survey) collected to that point will remain part of the study.
- I understand that I have the right to withdraw my nursery school from participating in this study in case of any complaints from parents and teachers concerning the study.
- I also consent that children will be observed alongside teachers and their parents, and all parties involved will need to voluntarily agree to participate and not be forced to. Parents' and teachers' consent will also be sought for videoing and photographing during observations.
- I understand that ethical approval for this research has been received from the University Of Waikato Division Of Education Research Ethics Committee.
- I would like to receive a notification email with a summary of the research findings and an access link for the electronic copy of the thesis from the researcher once the thesis has been completed and approved.
- I also understand that should any issues or concerns arise regarding this study, I can contact Fenmachi Emela Achu directly through email: fenmachiemela@yahoo.com, or through my Doctoral Supervisors; Associate Professor Sally Peters, sally.peters@waikato.ac.nz and Professor Linda Mitchell, linda.mitchell@waikato.ac.nz
- I hereby give consent for this research to be conducted.

Signed _____

Name: _____

Date: _____



Appendix H: Principal of Public English Nursery School Consent form

Appendix D: Principals of English Nursery Schools, Douala, Cameroon Consent Form

Please complete two copies, keep one for your records and return one for my records.

PhD Research Topic: "Parental Involvement in Early Childhood Learning: Douala, Littoral Region, Cameroon."

The Principal,
Nursery school: _____
Douala, Cameroon.

I have discussed and understood this research project and understand that participants' anonymity will be protected as much as possible in any data collected including questionnaire forms, voice and video recordings, photographs, transcribed interviews, and field notes. I also understand that my nursery school will not be named in the study.

I understand that participants will have the opportunity to review the transcript of the interviews and to request changes when necessary.

I understand that research participation is voluntary and participants can withdraw from this study at any time. The data (observations, interview and survey) collected to that point will remain part of the study.

I understand that I have the right to withdraw my nursery school from participating in this study in case of any complaints from parents and teachers concerning the study.

I also consent that children will be observed alongside teachers and their parents, and all parties involved will need to voluntarily agree to participate and not be forced to. Parents' and teachers' consent will also be sought for videoing and photographing during observations.

I understand that ethical approval for this research has been received from the University Of Waikato Division Of Education Research Ethics Committee.

I would like to receive a notification email with a summary of the research findings and an access link for the electronic copy of the thesis from the researcher once the thesis has been completed and approved.

I also understand that should any issues or concerns arise regarding this study, I can contact Fenmachi Emela Achu directly through email: fenmachiemela@yahoo.com, or through my Doctoral Supervisors; Associate Professor Sally Peters, sally.peters@waikato.ac.nz and Professor Linda Mitchell, linda.mitchell@waikato.ac.nz

I hereby give consent for this research to be conducted.

Signed _____

Name: _____

Date: 13/11/19 _____



Appendix I: Information Letter for Teachers of English Nursery Schools, Douala, Cameroon

Fenmachi Emela Achu,
Division of Education,
University of Waikato,
Hamilton, New Zealand.
Email: fenmachiemela@yahoo.com

Dear Teacher,
Nursery school: _____
Douala, Cameroon.

My name is Fenmachi Emela Achu, a PhD candidate at the Division of Education, University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand. I have been given consent by your principal to conduct my research study in your classroom using it for a case study. This letter is to inform you about the study and to seek your consent to participate in an interview with me.

My thesis is focused on **“Parental Involvement in Early Childhood Learning: Douala, Littoral Region, Cameroon.”**

What is the aim of the research?

The aim of this study is to understand parents’ and teachers’ beliefs about parental involvement in early childhood learning in Cameroon.

What is the importance of the research?

This research highlights the significance of the English education system as well as indigenous culture and practices for children’s early learning and identity formation in Cameroon or similar contexts.

This research seeks to understand parents’ and teachers’ perspectives about parental involvement in early childhood learning and it might raise other ways for effective parental involvement specifically in the Cameroon context. It is expected that the research will lead to developing recommendations for future practices involving parents, based on the findings, literature and experiences reviewed throughout this study.

This research with special reference to the Cameroonian parents will contribute to further study in this area by developing insights into views on childhood, child development, and effective parental involvement in early learning. Lastly, the study will inform other countries with similar contexts on parental involvement in early childhood learning.

How will data be collected?

The study will involve children, parents, and teachers in two English nursery schools (one public, one private) in Douala city to understand the nature of parental involvement in children’s learning.

Data will be collected in three ways: A questionnaire will be designed for all the parents of children attending level 1 and 2 in each nursery school to respond to. The questionnaires will be paper-based and will take approximately 20 minutes to complete. Parents will also be asked to indicate if they will be willing to participate in a one-on-one interview. I am planning to interview 6 parents (3 in each level) in your nursery school. The interviews will

take about 20 to 30 minutes and there could be a second interview with parents if they volunteer to participate.

I am also planning to interview 4 teachers (2 in each level) within your nursery school, including yourself, if you agree. These interviews will also take about 20 to 30 minutes, and with your permission will be audio-recorded.

In addition, I will do two weeks observations per nursery school (1 week in each class) which will last the whole session of the nursery school programme. Observations will focus particularly on the 6 parents interviewed in each school and their children including all the teachers (3 parents and their children including the teachers for 1 week in each class).

Comments will also be made on the general picture of what happens in the nursery school. During observations videos and photographs may be taken but this will be done if you permit, and with parents' consent. I will constantly monitor children's willingness to participate as the observations progress and if at any point they appear uncomfortable or unwilling to participate, I will not focus the observations on those children.

How will your identity be protected?

Should you agree to participate, any information shared by you will be kept confidential (shared only with my supervisors) and your information will be reported by use of pseudonyms (nick names) to keep you anonymous. You can choose your own pseudonyms or nick names which you will be referred to in the study. Also, your nursery school will not be named in any reporting to maintain anonymity.

How will your information be secured?

All your information will be stored in a locked cabinet and in my personal computer secured with a password for a minimum of five years to allow for academic examination, challenge, or peer review. Data collected will be shared with my doctoral supervisors, but all participants' identities will remain anonymous and confidential to me. After a period of five years, all data will be destroyed completely.

What will the information be used for?

The information will be used for completion of my PhD thesis, and other scholarly publications, presentations, seminars and conferences.

How will you receive information about the research?

When the thesis is completed and approved, the electronic version will be accessible through the University of Waikato Research Commons for theses and I will provide you with the link and a summary of the research findings by email.

What are your rights to participate in this research?

Your participation in this study is voluntary and you have the right to discontinue at any stage of the data collection. The data (observations and interview) collected to that point will remain part of the study. You may also refuse to answer any questions during the interview, or request for me to stop the audio-recorder. You can withdraw by contacting me through my email provided below.

When will the study commence?

The timeframe within which I will collect data is estimated to take place between November 2019 and January 2020.

This research is being undertaken through the University of Waikato and has been approved by the Division of Education Research Ethics Committee. Should any issues or concerns arise regarding this study, please contact me directly through email: fenmachiemela@yahoo.com, or through my Doctoral Supervisors; Associate Professor Sally Peters, sally.peters@waikato.ac.nz and Professor Linda Mitchell, linda.mitchell@waikato.ac.nz

If you agree to take part in this study, please complete the attached consent form.

Thank you for your consideration and assistance.

Kind Regards,

Fenmachi Emela Achu.

Appendix J: Teachers of English Nursery Schools, Douala, Cameroon Consent Form

Please complete two copies, keep one for your records and return one for my records.

PhD Research Topic: “Parental Involvement in Early Childhood Learning: Douala, Littoral Region, Cameroon.”

Dear Teacher,

Nursery school: _____

Douala, Cameroon.

Please check the following circles to confirm your participation.

- I have discussed and understood this research project and understand any data collected including questionnaire forms, voice and video recordings, photographs, transcribed interviews, field notes, will uphold my anonymity as much as possible.
- I agree to participate in an interview that will take approximately 20-30 minutes.
- I agree to the interview being audio-recorded, and that I can ask for audio-recording to be stopped at any point.
- I understand that I will have the opportunity to review a transcript of my interview and to request changes when necessary.
- I understand that research participation is voluntary and I as a participant can withdraw from this study at any time. The data (observations and interview) collected to that point will remain part of the study.
- I also consent to be observed alongside the children of my classroom, but this must be done after both parents and children agree to do so, including parents’ consent to videoing and photographing during observations.
- I understand that ethical approval for this research has been received from the University of Waikato Division of Education Research Ethics Committee.
- I would like to receive a notification email with a summary of the research findings and an access link for the electronic copy of the thesis from the researcher once the thesis has been completed and approved.
- I also understand that should any issues or concerns arise regarding this study, I can contact Fenmachi Emela Achu directly through email: fenmachiemela@yahoo.com, or through my Doctoral Supervisors; Associate Professor Sally Peters, sally.peters@waikato.ac.nz and Professor Linda Mitchell, linda.mitchell@waikato.ac.nz

- I understand my role in this research and hereby agree to participate.

Signed _____

Name: _____

Date _____

Appendix K: Sample Consent Form for Teachers of English Nursery School

Appendix F: Teachers of English Nursery Schools, Douala, Cameroon Consent Form

Please complete two copies, keep one for your records and return one for my records.

PhD Research Topic: "Parental Involvement in Early Childhood Learning: Douala, Littoral Region, Cameroon."

Dear Teacher,
Nursery school: _____
Douala, Cameroon.

Please check the following circles to confirm your participation.

- I have discussed and understood this research project and understand any data collected including questionnaire forms, voice and video recordings, photographs, transcribed interviews, field notes, will uphold my anonymity as much as possible.
- I agree to participate in an interview that will take approximately 20-30 minutes.
- I agree to the interview being audio-recorded, and that I can ask for audio-recording to be stopped at any point.
- I understand that I will have the opportunity to review a transcript of my interview and to request changes when necessary.
- I understand that research participation is voluntary and I as a participant can withdraw from this study at any time. The data (observations and interview) collected to that point will remain part of the study.
- I also consent to be observed alongside the children of my classroom but this must be done after both parents and children agree to do so, including parents' consent to videoing and photographing during observations.
- I understand that ethical approval for this research has been received from the University Of Waikato Division Of Education Research Ethics Committee.
- I would like to receive a notification email with a summary of the research findings and an access link for the electronic copy of the thesis from the researcher once the thesis has been completed and approved.
- I also understand that should any issues or concerns arise regarding this study, I can contact Fenmachi Emela Achu directly through email: fenmachiemela@yahoo.com, or through my Doctoral Supervisors; Associate Professor Sally Peters, sally.peters@waikato.ac.nz and Professor Linda Mitchell, linda.mitchell@waikato.ac.nz
- I understand my role in this research and hereby agree to participate.

Signed _____

Name: _____

Date: 13/11/2019

Appendix L: Parent Letter

Dear parent,

My name is Fenmachi Emela Achu, a PhD candidate at the Division of Education, University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand. I kindly request your permission to conduct my research study at your child's nursery school using it for a case study.

The Title of my thesis is **“Parental Involvement in Early Childhood Learning: Douala, Littoral Region, Cameroon.”**

The aim of this study is to understand parent's and teacher's views about parental involvement in early childhood learning.

If you agree to take part in this study, you will receive a questionnaire to respond to, that will take approximately 20 minutes to complete. At the back of the questionnaire is a consent form that you will sign if you would agree to participate in a one-on-one interview with me.

In other to gain more information on this study, I will also be doing two weeks observations (one week in each class) at your child's nursery school, so I am asking your consent to observe, video tape and photograph your child.

To confirm your participation, please complete the attached consent form. For detailed information about this study, please refer to the information sheet attached.

Thank you for your consideration and assistance.
Kind Regards,
Fenmachi Emela Achu.

Appendix M: Information letter for Parents

What is the aim of the research?

The aim of this study is to understand parents and teachers' beliefs about parental involvement in early childhood learning in Cameroon.

What will you do if you choose to be in this study?

You will receive a questionnaire to respond to, that will take approximately 20 minutes to complete. At the back of the questionnaire, you will be asked to indicate if you are willing to participate in a one-on-one interview

I will also be interviewing other parents and teachers in your child's nursery school. The interviews will take about 20 to 30 minutes and you will have the chance for a second interview. With your consent I will audio-record the interview.

I am also planning to do two weeks observations per nursery school (1 week in each class) which will last the whole session of the nursery school programme. Observations will focus particularly on the 6 parents interviewed in each school and their children including all the teachers (3 parents and their children including the teachers for 1 week in each class).

Comments will also be made on the general picture of what happens in the nursery school. During observations videos and photographs may be taken but this will be done if you permit. I will constantly ask children's permission as the observations progresses and if at any point the refuse to participate, I will not force them to continue.

How will you and your child's identity be protected

In this study information regarding you and your child will be kept confidential (shared only with my supervisors) and your information will be reported by use of pseudonyms (nick names) to keep you and your child anonymous as much as possible. You and your child can choose your own pseudonyms or nick names which you will be referred to in the study.

How will your information be secured?

All your information will be stored in a locked cabinet and in my personal computer secured with a password for a minimum of five years to allow for academic examination, challenge, or peer review. Data collected will be shared with supervisors, but your identities will remain anonymous and confidential to me. After a period of five years, all data will be destroyed completely.

What will the information be used for?

The information will be used for completion of my PhD thesis, and other scholarly publications, presentations, seminars and conferences.

How will you receive information about the research?

When the thesis is completed and approved, the electronic version will be accessible through the University of Waikato Research Commons for theses and I will provide you with the link by email, as well as a summary of the findings.

What are your rights to participate in this research?

Participation in this study is voluntary and you have the right to discontinue at any stage of the data collection. The data (observations, interview and survey) collected to that point will remain part of the study. You have the right to decline to answer any questions in the questionnaire and interview, and to ask me to stop audio-recording. You can withdraw by contacting me through my email provided below and do not need to give reason.

When will the study commence?

The timeframe within which I will collect data is estimated to take place between November 2019 and January 2020.

This research is been undertaken through the University of Waikato and has been approved by the Division of Education Research Ethics Committee. Should any issues or concerns arise

regarding this study, please contact me directly through email: fenmachiemela@yahoo.com, or through my Doctoral Supervisors; Associate Professor Sally Peters, sally.peters@waikato.ac.nz and Professor Linda Mitchell, linda.mitchell@waikato.ac.nz

If you agree to take part in this study, please complete the attached consent form.

Thank you for your consideration and assistance.

Kind Regards,

Fenmachi Emela Achu.

Appendix N: Parents' Consent Form

Please complete two copies, keep one for your records and return one for my records.

PhD Research Topic: "Parental Involvement in Early Childhood Learning: Douala, Littoral Region, Cameroon."

Dear Parents,

Please check the following circles to confirm your participation.

- I have discussed and understood this research project and understand any data collected including questionnaire forms, voice recordings, transcribed interviews, field notes, will uphold my own and my child's anonymity as much as possible.
- I understand that I will be given a questionnaire to complete, and also given the opportunity to participate in a one-on-one interview.
- I understand that if I agree to participate in an interview it will take approximately 20-30 minutes, be audio-recorded, and that I can ask for audio-recording to be stopped at any point.
- I understand that if I participate in an interview, I will have the opportunity to review a transcript of the interview and to request changes when necessary.
- I understand that research participation is voluntary and I as a participant can withdraw from this study at any time. The data (observations, interview and survey) collected to that point will remain part of the study.
- I also give consent to be observed, videoed and photographed alongside my child, and should she/he refuse to participate at any given moment, this decision is to be respected.
- I understand that ethical approval for this research has been received from the University of Waikato Division of Education Research Ethics Committee.
- I would like to receive a notification email with a summary of the research findings and an access link for the electronic copy of the thesis from the researcher once the thesis has been completed and approved.
- I also understand that should any issues or concerns arise regarding this study, I can contact Fenmachi Emela Achu directly through email: fenmachiemela@yahoo.com, or through my Doctoral Supervisors; Associate Professor Sally Peters, sally.peters@waikato.ac.nz and Professor Linda Mitchell, linda.mitchell@waikato.ac.nz
- I understand my role in this research and hereby agree to participate.

Name _____

Signed _____

Date _____

Child's name _____

Appendix O: Consent to Interview Form for Parents

Dear Parent,

Thank you for taking time to respond to the questionnaires.

To gain more insight on this study I humbly request for a further one-on-one interview with you. If you are willing to participate in this interview, please write down your contact information below so I can contact you to arrange a place and time convenient for you.

Name _____

Cell Phone Number _____

Please detach this paper and submit it separately from your questionnaire.

Thanks

Appendix P: Questionnaire for Parents

A. Parent Information.

Please provide answers to the questions below and tick (✓) where applicable.

1. Person filling out this questionnaire.
 - Mother
 - Father
 - Both parents
 - Guardian
2. Marital status
 - Single
 - Married
 - Separated or divorced
3. Which age group do you fall under?
 - Less than 20 years old
 - 20-30 years old
 - 31-40 years old
 - 41 years and above
4. If married, which age group does your spouse fall under?
 - Less than 20 years old
 - 20-30 years old
 - 31-40 years old
 - 41 years and above
5. What is your background?
 - English Cameroonian (Anglophone)
 - French Cameroonian (Francophone)
 - Other (please specify) _____
6. Which region of the country do you originate from? For instance, North West region, Littoral region. _____
7. What is your occupation? _____
8. What is your spouse's occupation? _____
9. Total number of children?
 - One
 - Two
 - Three and above
10. Who is responsible for taking care of your child? (Please tick (✓) all that apply)
 - Only me
 - I am a single parent
 - I share the care of my child with my wife/husband
 - I share the care of my child with my ex-wife/husband
 - I share the care of my child with a grandparent
 - I share the care of my child with relatives and/or older siblings.
 - I share the care of my child with a paid caregiver
 - Other (please specify)

11. Which of the following describes your family's monthly income level?

- Below 50,000 Francs CFA
- 51000-100,000 Francs CFA
- 101,000-200,000 Francs CFA
- 201,000-300,000 Francs CFA
- 301,000 Francs CFA and above

12. How long do you work per day in paid employment?

- Full time
- Part time
- Not at all

13. Highest level of education completed?

- Primary school education
- Secondary school education
- High school education
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- Graduate diploma
- Post graduate degree

B. Parent involvement activities.

Section 1

1. Are you a member of the Parents Teachers Association (PTA)?

- Yes
- No

2. Language of communication at home? Tick all that apply

- English
- French
- English and French
- English, pidgin English and local language
- French and local language
- All of the above
- Other (please specify) _____

3. What is the mode of communication between you and your child's teacher concerning your child's progress, requesting assistance with readings or homework and general feedbacks? (Tick (✓) all that applies)

- Letters or notes
- Phone calls or text messages
- Parent brochures
- PTA
- Parent teacher meetings
- Parent workshops
- Home visits
- Other (please specify) _____

Section 2: What involvement do you have with your child’s learning? Please circle (○) the number that applies in the table below.

Activities	Always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Follow-up studies at home about what was being taught in the nursery school	1	2	3	4
Assist with homework	1	2	3	4
Providing extra educative materials e.g., story books, audio-visuals, for child to study at home	1	2	3	4
Setting limits on television watching time	1	2	3	4
Working in the nursery school as parent tutor, volunteer, or library assistant.	1	2	3	4
Volunteering in preparing children’s lunch, or general cleaning in the nursery school	1	2	3	4
Volunteering as assistant teacher when children go for outdoor activities or field trips, or any other form of volunteer activity at the nursery school.	1	2	3	4
Attending parent education workshops	1	2	3	4
Attend PTA meetings	1	2	3	4
Always contact child’s teacher to keep track of my child’s progress	1	2	3	4
Speaking one or two of the national languages together with my local or traditional language	1	2	3	4
Participating in community work, like clean-up campaigns with my child	1	2	3	4
Participating in cultural activities around my community to boost my child’s sense of identity	1	2	3	4

How interested are you in participating in the following activities that might enhance your child's learning? Please circle (○) the number that applies in the table below.

Activities	Very interested	Sometimes interested	Rarely interested	Not interested
Attending parent education workshops to help me understand my child's individual style of learning	1	2	3	4
Providing a comfortable learning space at home for my child to study and revise nursery school work	1	2	3	4
Participating in community works such as clean-up campaigns with my child as another way of learning and development	1	2	3	4
Controlling amount of TV and types of programmes my child watches	1	2	3	4
Attending PTA meetings and parent education workshops regularly	1	2	3	4
Assisting my child at home with reading assignments or other nursery school work	1	2	3	4
Providing out-of-nursery school tutorials (extra classes) for my child if necessary	1	2	3	4
Maintaining contact with child's teacher to keep track of my child's progress	1	2	3	4
Volunteering in cleaning, cooking lunch, going with children for field trips, as an assistant teacher.	1	2	3	4
Speaking one or two of the national languages together with my local or traditional language	1	2	3	4
Participating in cultural activities around my community to boost my child's sense of identity	1	2	3	4

Appendix Q: Interview Questions for Teachers

1. In what ways are parents involved in their children's education in this nursery school?
What happen specifically in Nursery 1/2? What kinds of things impact on their involvement, in your view?
2. In your view, what kind of parental involvement is valuable in children's education?
What leads you to think that? Does your opinion vary depending on the age of the child or does it apply to all ages? Why do you think that?
3. Do you think parents possess the professional expertise to participate in children's learning at the nursery school? Why/ why not? Or would it be better for them to concern themselves with children's learning at home? Give reasons for your response
4. What are some of the thing's parents do that indicate to you that they are involved in their children's education?
5. Apart from helping out with homework what do you think are some other ways in which parents could get involved in children's education
 - At home?
 - At the nursery school?
6. How do you, in collaboration with parents, help children who are new to the nursery school adapt to the school environment especially on their first day at school?
 - a) How are children in nursery one who are planning to move to nursery two assisted to adapt to the new class?
7. How do you communicate with parents about nursery school activities?
 - a) Do parents ever contact you? Why or about what?
8. How do you as a teacher promote parent participation in their children's learning?
 - a) How does the nursery school administration promote parent participation in their children's learning?
 - b) What are some of the ways in which the nursery school promotes close relationships with families?
9. What other ways do you as a teacher connect with parents to foster children's learning, for instance home visits, PTA meetings, special invitation for parents to visit the school, or emails and phone calls?

- a) What are some of the reasons or what is discussed during any of such occasions?
10. Apart from the report cards given to parents every month, how else do parents get informed of their children's daily activities at school?
- a) Briefly explain the contents of the report cards given to parents every end of term.
11. What are some of the barriers that you think parents of your nursery school may face that limits their participation in children's learning?
- a) What difficulties do you or the nursery school administration face when considering parents' participation in their children's learning activities?
12. In what ways do you think increased parental involvement would make a difference in children's learning?
13. Apart from using the national languages in the nursery school, how does the nursery school encourage the use of local or traditional languages?
- a) What other cultural activities does the nursery school promote?
14. How does the nursery school encourage children and families to participate in community works such as clean up campaigns or other volunteer activities organised by the community or neighbourhood?
15. What are your suggestions about how parent involvement in their child's learning might be supported?
16. Anything else you would like to say?

Appendix R: Interview Questions for Parents

Is there any question you responded to in the questionnaires that you would like to discuss further about?

1. How many children do you have? How old are they and how many attend this nursery school?
2. How do you support your child's learning at home? Why do you think it is important? (Beliefs, values, teacher's request).
3. What are some of the things you do to support your child's education at the nursery school? Give examples? If not, what prevents you from going to the nursery school?
4. Do you feel comfortable or welcomed at your child's nursery school? Please give reasons for your response.
5. Do you attend PTA meetings often? If yes, do you find them helpful (and if they are helpful, in what ways?) and if not, can you discuss your reasons?
6. How do you get information on your child's daily activities at the nursery school? What kind of information does the nursery school usually provide to you? Do you think you are getting enough information? Do you also contact the nursery school? If yes, how and for what reasons?
 - a) How do you feel about the report card given to you by your child's teacher every end of term?
 - b) Is there anything more that you like to see included in your child's report card?
7. Do you share information that might improve your child's interaction and learning with the teacher? If yes, what kind of information do you provide to the teacher?
8. In what ways does the nursery school or the teacher try to involve you in your child's education at home? Or at nursery school?
9. Generally, what are some of the things that might prevent you or other parents from engaging actively in your child's education
 - At home?
 - At nursery school?
10. How do you enhance your child's ability to speak the national languages and your local or traditional language in particularly?

11. Does your child do chores at home? If yes, what kind of chores do you assign to your child? Who supervises the chores? What are some of the chores your child can carry out independently without supervision?
12. How does your child engage with other siblings or cousins if any? Please give details of how they socialize with one another.
13. To what extent does your child socialize with other relatives or members of your extended family?
14. Are you solely responsible for your child's caretaking or do you share this responsibility with others? Please specify? In a case where you need to carry out other task outside your home who looks after your child/children?
15. Do you have any suggestions on how you as a parent or other parents might become more involved in their children's learning?
16. Anything else you would like to say?

Appendix S: Observations

In this study, nursery schools were observed under the following guidelines:

Name of nursery school _____
 Number of children in class _____ Number of
 teachers _____

Time observed _____

- ❖ Observations will focus particularly on the 6 parents interviewed in each school and their children including all the teachers. Comments will also be made on the general picture of what happens in the nursery school.
- ❖ Observations will be done with the use of a video recorder and making of extra notes on a note book at the end of each day.

First steps of observation analysis.

- Parent child interactions during drop off or pick-ups?

Parents	Yes	No	Sometimes	Description of activity
Parent 1				
Parent 2				
Parent 3				
Parent 4				
Parent 5				
Parent 6				
Other parents				

- Time spent at nursery school after drop off or pick-ups?

Parents	Averagely less than 5 minutes	5-10 minutes	10-20minutes	More than 20minutes
Parent 1				
Parent 2				
Parent 3				
Parent 4				
Parent 5				
Parent 6				
Other parents				

- Helping out in any activity at nursery school for instance tidying up after dropping off or picking up child?

Parents	Yes	No	Sometimes	Description of activity
Parent 1				
Parent 2				
Parent 3				
Parent 4				
Parent 5				
Parent 6				
Other parents				

- Tries to reach out to child’s teacher to listen to anything concerning child, give any instructions or pass important information to teacher? Yes/ No/Sometimes, description of activity

Parents	Yes	No	Sometimes	Description of activity
Parent 1				
Parent 2				
Parent 3				
Parent 4				
Parent 5				
Parent 6				
Other parents				

Guidelines for observing teachers and children.

- Welcomes parents and children by name when they come to drop or pick up children? Tick (v)

Parents, teachers and children	Yes	No	Sometimes
Parent 1			
Parent 2			
Parent 3			
Parent 4			
Parent 5			
Parent 6			
Other parents			

Additional comments _____

- Time spent with each parent when they arrive for pick up or drop-offs? Tick (v) what applies.

Parents, teachers and children	Averagely less than 5 minutes	5-10 minutes	10-20minutes	More than 20minutes
Parent 1				
Parent 2				
Parent 3				
Parent 4				
Parent 5				
Parent 6				
Other parents				

Additional comments _____

- Tries to reach out to child’s parents to communicate anything concerning child, give any instructions or pass important information to parents? Tick (v) what applies.

Parents, teachers and children	Yes	No	Sometimes

Parent 1			
Parent 2			
Parent 3			
Parent 4			
Parent 5			
Parent 6			
Other parents			

Additional comments _____

- Other medium of communications between parents and teachers? For instance, Posters on notice board, phone calls or emails, letters, visits. Indicate _____
- How teachers and children connect with the home in their activities at the nursery school for example, sharing letters, displaying family pictures, lunch boxes?
Indicate _____

Appendix T: Demographic Information for Private and Public Nursery School Teachers

1. Which age group do you fall under?
 - Less than 20 years old
 - 20-30 years old
 - 31-40 years old
 - 41 years and above
2. What is your gender?
 - Male
 - Female
3. Civil Status
 - Single
 - Married
 - Separated or divorced
 - Widow(er)
4. What is your background?
 - English Cameroonian (Anglophone)
 - French Cameroonian (Francophone)
 - Other (please specify) _____
5. Which region of the country do you originate from? For instance, North West region or Littoral region. _____
6. What is your highest teaching qualification? For instance, Master's or Bachelor's degree in Education, Nursery and Primary Teaching Certificate (CAPIEMP), or High school certificate. _____
7. How long have you been teaching with any age group?
 - Less than 5 years
 - 5-10 years
 - 10 years and above
8. How long have you taught as a nursery school teacher?
 - Less than 5 years
 - 5-10 years
 - 10 years and above

9. What other work have you done (professional development course for example) that is useful to you as a nursery school teacher? Please describe briefly.

Appendix U: Categorising Parental Involvement in Children’s Learning

Categorising Parental Involvement in Children’s Learning (Private Nursery School).

Codes	Examples (some direct quotes from parents)	Themes
Homework, Extra educational materials, Reading, Home tutor	<p>“I think it is important to always repeat what they have learned at school over and over so they can better understand” (KA’s mum).</p> <p>“I also provide educational resources and toys such as blocks and puzzles that we play together so she can develop her cognitive skills” (TC’s dad). “I buy books and we do lots of reading at home. I pay a home tutor who helps with studies at home” (KE’s mum).</p>	Home-based involvement parental
Parent-teacher children activities (Circle time, Science fair, Volunteer teacher, Open house, Thanksgiving ceremony, Family funfair, Cultural week, End of year/term and Graduation ceremonies), Parent-teacher/school administration meetings (Parent-teacher conferences, Parent forum (PF), Communication and class observations). School drop-offs and pick-ups	<p>“During the science fair, we are invited to see children’s creations and science projects. The science fair occurs once a year” (SH’s dad).</p> <p>“The Dewey parent forum is very helpful because I have feedback about my child, and it helps me to know how to help her” (KA’s mum).</p> <p>The school promotes close relationships with families by organising activities like the cultural week where parents and children come around with their traditional attires and make presentations (Teacher 1, private nursery school). I get information mostly through letters and phone calls. I get updates on the school activities for instance end of term exams, updates on school fees, and basically the school programme for the academic year (WA’s mum).</p>	School-based involvement parental
Working Condition, Challenges with Homework, Language barrier, Single parenting, Economic challenges	<p>“A busy work schedule is one of the barriers I face. Also, my husband works out of the country, so I have to take the place of mum and dad at the same time” (AB’s mum). “The challenges I face with homework is that sometimes instructions are not clear, or they may be clear, but we don’t understand so we have to call the teacher to know what is required” (RA’s mum).</p>	Barriers to parental involvement
Reasons for choosing school, Parents views on parental	<p>“I like this school because they do not only teach children to pass their</p>	Parents’ beliefs about parental involvement

<p>involvement, Types of education valued for children</p>	<p>exams, but they bring children up in a Christian way focusing on the moral aspects of education” (WA’s mum). “The most important things I try to teach my children apart from schoolwork are values. Say thank you, sorry, hygiene rules like wash hands before eating, wash hands after using the bathroom” (SH’s dad).</p>	
<p>Home and school involvement, parents’ role in transition, Parents’ professional expertise, Indicators of parental involvement</p>	<p>“Both home and school involvement are important because education does not only begin when the child comes to school” (Teacher 2 private nursery school). “In my opinion, I don’t think parents have the professional expertise to be involved in school but as educators, we can empower parents” (Teacher 2). “Parents come in and see the child’s class and could stay in for just 30 minutes or more but not more than one hour. They can come a few minutes before closing time to spend time with the child in class but as time goes on, the child becomes used to his or her new environment” (Teacher 1, private nursery school)</p>	<p>Teachers’ beliefs about parental involvement</p>
<p>Parent school, School events, Communication, Report cards, Promoting use of local languages at school, Home visits</p>	<p>“We connect with parents through “parent school” where we educate parents on the importance of their involvement in children’s learning” (Teacher 1, private nursery school). “For children that are lacking behind in their studies and we realize they really need parent’s support, we make comments and write short recommendation letters for parents to follow” (Teacher 1, private nursery school). “Our school promotes traditional language practice only during the cultural week; I encourage parents to greet children in their language during drop-offs and pick-ups and I record this. For the whole week, we practice these words” (Teacher 4, private nursery school).</p>	<p>School Administration and Teachers’ Role in parental involvement</p>
<p>Collective upbringing, Sibling caretaking, Traditional language learning, Self-management skill development</p>	<p>I share the care with my husband, my nanny, my cousin who lives at home, and my parents. When I must carry out another task out of school hours, my nanny or cousin</p>	<p>Child Development and upbringing characteristics</p>

	<p>looks after them. My child mostly interacts with my parents. They always visit them for the holidays” (KE’s mum, private school, N2). “Older siblings help with homework, supervise him when he dresses up, shower him and make sure he eats” (FO’s dad). “The mother tongue is very important, and it is the only language they can inherit from us directly because English and French can be learned elsewhere. This is the only way we can preserve our African culture and identity” (SH’s dad, private school, N2).</p>	
--	--	--

Categorising Parental Involvement in Children’s Learning (Public Nursery School).

Codes	Examples	Themes
<p>Homework, Extra educational materials, Reading.</p>	<p>“It is important to support my child’s learning because I believe it is a good way to bring up the child and helps the child to be well behaved because a child is not educated only in the classroom” (RR’s mum,). “We do educational activities, we rehearse songs taught in school, I show her pictures of fruits and animals for her to identify by calling out the names” (RR’s mum, public school, N1).</p>	<p>Home-based involvement parental</p>
<p>Parent-teacher children activities (End of year/term and Graduation ceremonies), Parent-teacher/school administration meetings (Parent Teacher Association (PTA), Communication and class observations). School drop-offs and pick-ups</p>	<p>“The only parent-teacher children activity I engaged in is the end of year event organised by the school and the delegate of basic education was present. Children present what they learn, they dance, and it is roughly a five hours activity” (PT’s dad). “The PTA supports the Government to maintain the school. During the PTA meetings, the school provides information on how to care for our children” (PT’s dad). “I always do observations when I drop her off and pick her up and if I have any concerns as to the way she is playing or behaving with her friends I advise and correct her” (RR’s mum).</p>	<p>School-based involvement parental</p>
<p>Financial barrier, Working Condition, Language barrier, Single Parenthood, Economic challenges, Anglophone Crisis</p>	<p>“The greatest barrier I face is finance. I stopped work because I have problems with my eyes, and I am not married to the father of my child” (RR’s mum). “I am a single parent so there is no time for me to do that. Life is so hard, and I must struggle daily to take care of the children all on my own. So, when I return home all I need is rest” (SE’s dad,). “We used to earn higher before the Anglophone crisis, but due to the crisis, we have moved to Douala and our income levels have dropped” (PT’s dad).</p>	<p>Barriers to parental involvement</p>
<p>Reasons for choosing school, Parents views on parental involvement, Types of education valued for children</p>	<p>“I believe the Government schools hire trained teachers. Even the teachers hired through the PTA are also trained and that is the reason why I’m sending my child to this school” (GS’s dad). “Parents</p>	<p>Parents’ beliefs about parental involvement</p>

	<p>should make it a priority to educate their children. No job is more important than the quality time spent with children” (RR’s mum). “Basic education is what I consider important for children at this age. Basic education is education that starts from me. The parents start laying a good foundation even before the child is born” (GS’s dad).</p>	
<p>Home and school involvement, parents’ role in transition, Parents’ professional expertise, Indicators of parental involvement</p>	<p>“Both home and school involvement are valuable, and parents will work in close collaboration with teachers” (Teacher 2, public nursery school). “We comfort the children, and offer them gifts. We don’t encourage parents to stay because the adaptation period might be longer for us if that happens” (Teacher 4, public nursery school). “Not all parents have professional expertise but just a few who know the value of the child and what it takes to bring up a child will sacrifice the time to get involved in their children’s education” (Teacher 1, public nursery school). “Parents are involved when they come every day to inquire about their child’s wellbeing in school” (Teacher 2, public nursery school).</p>	<p>Teachers’ beliefs about parental involvement</p>
<p>School events, Communication, Report cards,</p>	<p>“The school organises only the PTA meetings and usually end of year ceremonies where parents are invited to come and see what their children are doing. On this day, children sing, act dramas, and say rhymes” (Teacher 1, public nursery school). “We give them the books at the end of every term so they can learn during the holidays with their parents but when school returns not all of them return with these books. Some get lost and some parents claim they never saw the books. Some parents don’t even read the report cards” (Teacher 3, public nursery school).</p>	<p>School Administration and Teachers’ Role in parental involvement</p>
<p>Collective upbringing, Sibling caretaking, Traditional language learning, Self-management skill development</p>	<p>“I share the responsibility with my elder sister and other family relatives. When I am not around, and my younger sister is not back home, I have a good neighbour who helps take care of my child” (ES’s mum). “The elder sister cares for him, teaches him, and showers him. My brother’s children visit during holidays and</p>	<p>Child Development and upbringing characteristics</p>

	they interact and have fun together” (GS’s dad). We speak mostly in our traditional language at home. “We cannot speak English more than the people in England and we can’t speak French more than the people in France because it is not our first language, thus we need to learn and value our own language” (GS’s dad).	
--	---	--