CONSTRAINTS AFFECTING MEN'S PARTICIPATION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION (ECE): IMPLICATIONS FOR INTERVENTION

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ABSTRACT

A qualitative study grounded in the interpretive paradigm was adopted where four men, four women and four educators were purposively selected, responded to the semi-structured interviews. The aim of the study was to establish the constraints affecting men's participation in the early childhood education of their children. The researchers observed all the ethical concerns. Data was analysed in easily understood themes. The findings revealed that although all stakeholders fully understood the importance of men in the early childhood education their participation was still minimal indicating that they still faced constraints. The constraints included work-related absence, broken relationships, lack of interest, traditional and cultural beliefs, stereotypes and mothers' monopoly on the children. The study concluded that for the achievement of early childhood goals, men should improve their participation in early education of children. The study recommends that all stakeholders make a retrospect into how they have contributed to the constraints that men face in their endeavour to change the status quo.

Keywords: Barriers, Early Development, Father involvement

INTRODUCTION

The subject of early childhood education has gained momentum in the government agendas as well as the research arena. Since the Declaration of Jomtien and the Dakar Framework in 1990 and subsequent Conventions, Treaties and World Summits on the Rights of the Child numerous major policy and practical initiatives towards the implementation of sustainable quality Early Childhood Education (ECE) have been developed worldwide. Interest in the field of education and increased research has led to new philosophies and approaches which seek to describe sequential conditions that constitute child development. Early childhood is the most fundamental stage in the life of a child in terms of physical, intellectual, emotional and social development. This stage then calls for high quality care and learning experience since it forms the key to predicting ultimate success in school and life. Science also indicates that taking in new sights, sound and information plays a dominant component in the establishment of active neural pathway; hence, the current study is interested in the participation of men in the early life and education of the child.

Development and enhancement of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is perceived as the first goal in the Education for All (EFA) Dakar Framework (Vargas-Baron & Schipper 2012). ECCE is a term used for care and education offered to children in the years before formal schooling commences (Heckman, Moon, Pinto, Savelyev & Yavitz 2010). Part of these years is spent at home before the child is introduced to a new environment where they get to spend time away from home. ECEC is an extremely cost-effective way of consolidating the society assuring the success of children in achieving generational success (Gertler,

Heckman, Pinto, Zanolini, Vermeersch, Walker, Chang & Grantham-McGregor 2014; Grantham-McGregor, Cheung, Cueto, Glewwe, Richter, Strupp 2007). It is in these years that foundations in values, norms and cognitive learning are formed. Extensive research that has repeatedly been conducted clearly establishes appropriately developed high quality early childhood programmes have short-range and long-term progressive impact on the cognitive development of children as well as their social aspects (Heckman & Masterov 2007; OECD 2011; Aber, Lombardi, Klaus & Campion 2013; UNSDSN 2014). ECEC is a programme that enables the prediction of children's course of later schooling. Neuroscience overwhelmingly proves the serious impression that early childhood experiences make on the brain structural design and how the negative circumstances and experiences in these early years can permanently impact on every facet of an individual's life, societal and economic growth and human capital development of a nation (Sherr, Mueller & Varrall 2009).

In South Africa, Early Childhood Development (ECD) is a term embracing all the services that endorse or uphold improvement of young children from birth to nine years old (Department of Basic Education 2013) in which ECCE is regarded as an important facet of ECD. This service provides programmes and services that are meant to develop a group of young children academically. ECEC also offers services such as birth registration, affordable day-care, health service in centres that have adequate infrastructure and facilities such as water and sanitation (Richter 2012). Roughly, 60% of babies and young children, mostly Black Africans received the government child support grant, thus indicating the level of poverty in the country (Albino & Berry 2013; World Bank 2015b) and the need for ECEC to redress the disadvantages caused by the apartheid era (Meier, Lemmer, Niron 2015). The capability of ECCE programmes in predicting the future trends in shaping the society in terms of human capital development and redressing the apartheid era injustices places it at the heart of any national programmes. It is against this background that the study aimed at (a) finding out the stakeholders' perspectives on the constraints that affect men's participation in Early Childhood Education in East London District and (b) exploring the policies and programmes can be instigated to reinforce men's participation in the Early Childhood Education in East London District.

LITERATURE REVIEW

What men's participation entails

The broad and general research questions seek to understand respondents' experiences with the fundamental phenomenon, in this case, stakeholders' views on the constraints affecting men's participation in early childhood education and care with the objective of finding out how that affects intervention programmes (Creswell 2014; Maree 2007). Masculinity and manhood are terms used to describe a man. Connell and Messerschmitt (2005) define masculinity as what men should be and manhood is a term used in discourses regarding gender and sex among the human race. These terms are used for men who become fathers or father-figures in families. A man is defined by his role in the reproduction of a baby, and his role as a father evolves with traditional, historical and socio-economic circumstances (Ball & Wahedi 2010). Defining a father, Goldman (2005) suggests that he is a man that has a warm, close, friendly, supportive, relationship with his child and at the same time, can also be described as being sensitive and intimate, nurturing and affectionate, and, above all, inspiring and uplifting. Furthermore, fathers are categorised as being engaged if their child develops a robust, secure attachment to them. In this respect, a father's involvement with children from an early age plays a critical

role in ensuring positive outcomes and has also been found to equate with better cognitive development (Henderson & Mapp 2002; Green 2003). Research indicates that fathers can be as capable and skilled as mothers in taking care of children, providing financial support and parenting (Starkey & Klein 2000; Lamb & Lewis 2010). Their participation also positively contributes to several psychosocial and progressive results in children (Lamb & Lewis 2010; Pleck 2010; Mathwasa & Okeke 2016). However, where the father is not present the child would still need a male figure who can be a positive influence on the child. These role models can be in the form of a stepfather, grandfather, uncle, older brother, a coach, teacher or pastor.

What the National Integrated ECE Policy says on fathers' involvement

Worldwide ECD is regarded as a human right that is universal and fundamental to ensure that every child is afforded the opportunity to develop physically, intellectually, socially and emotionally in order to learn (UN General Assembly Resolutions S-27(2)). In the National ECD Policy, the Government of South Africa (2015) observes that parents have the responsibility to ensure the child develops to his/her full potential and well-being by providing a nurturing and caring atmosphere. At birth, the child is introduced to his/her parents then to the family at large. The term parent is a collective word that means biological father or mother, foster parents, stepparents and other relatives who assume the role of caregiver to the child. The Convention on the Rights of the Child Parents consider parents as dominant in upholding the rights of children in the family context while governments support families financially (Pećnik 2006; Henricson 2009).

Literature indicates that in the European countries, the policy on paternity leave affords fathers time to be present at the birth of the child (Cohen 2000) and subsequently be involved in the care giving for the child. Through this paternity leave, fathers can bond with their children the moment they are born. Although not widely utilised, Costa Rica's Responsible Paternity Law has raised an awareness campaign for mothers to entreaty for DNA testing from men so that they officially acknowledge paternity and are held accountable for financially supporting their children (especially those men who do not reside with their children) (Greene & Barker 2011). Based on the DNA results, fathers are left with only one option of being involved and being responsible fathers.

Although the South African Government is explicit in its mandate and responsibility in provisioning for ECD in the National Integrated ECD policy (Government of South Africa 2015), it is silent on the paternity leave policy and in terms of making fathers responsible for financial provision for their children, considering that a high number of South African children live without their biological fathers (Richter, Chikovore & Makusha 2010; Stats SA 2011). Subsequently, the National ECD Policy is silent on how men as fathers should be involved in their children's early childhood development (Government of South Africa 2015). The policy gives the responsibility of nurturing children to the umbrella term "parents" which can mean any adult taking care of the child.

Values of men's participation in early education of children

Studies carried out have constantly found progressive relationship between the level of father's participation and the academic success of children throughout the school-age years (Henderson & Mapp 2002; Bricker, Clifford, Yovanoff, Pretti-Frontczak, Waddell, Allen & Hoselton 2008). It has also been realised that high levels of father participation are correlated with their children achieving upper grades and test marks, completion of homework, exhibiting positive

attitudes towards schoolwork and good behaviour. Furthermore, children are likely to graduate and have higher chances of being enrolled in post-secondary education (Goldman 2005; Henderson & Mapp 2002). Hence, the activities undertaken by parents at home tend to be quite significant for the intellectual and social development of children more than parents' employment, education or earnings (Melhuish, Sylva, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford & Taggart 2001).

In a study that was conducted to explore the effects of diverse types of parental participation in homework in the United States, it was discovered that different methods of support such as for children's self-sufficiency were related to higher test marks (Flouri 2006; Duckworth 2008). When involved fathers play with and nurture their children from an infant phase, their children present with higher IQs and better dialectal as well as cognitive capacities in school (Rosenberg & Wilcox 2006). Stimulating comprehensive home-school partnerships becomes imperative; hence, learning institutions must offer a diversity of occasions that cultivate families, communities and schools to work collectively for the benefit of the child.

Men as teachers

The absence of men as fathers in their children's lives and families has attracted considerable attention due to extensive research revealing that when fathers are engaged, children achieve their best at school and have greater self-esteem (Carlson, Pilkauskas, McLanahan, & Brooks-Gunn 2011; Potter, Walker & Keen 2012; Richter et al. 2011; Wilson 2015). The absence of men as fathers has also been associated with adolescents' negative behaviour such as alcohol and substance abuse, delinquency and promiscuity (Winter, Karvonen & Rose 2012; Husin & Qamar 2013). Noticeable is the scarcity of research on the absence of men as teachers in the early childhood education. There is a consensus to get men to participate in the young children's lives yet resolutions to this dilemma are scarce and remote. It is noted that early childhood education was exclusively a female domain because of the belief that women by nature are inclined to nurturing young children, while men relegate this duty (Sanders 2000; Cunningham & Dorsey 2004; McKenzie & Woodruff 2014). Educators in the early childhood education confess to finding it more comfortable working with mothers than fathers (Mukuna & Mutsotso 2011; Mathwasa & Okeke 2016) partly because of their sensitivity to the needs of their children and their availability most of the times.

Even though men as teachers can make positive contribution to the education of young children, controversies, preconception and prejudices from families and societies at large hinder the recruitment and retention of men in the field of ECD (Rodriguez 1997; Wilson 2011). Statistics indicate that in the EU member states, the target of 20% male worker in the early childcare has not been realised but has declined from 5% to 3% in the 1990s (Peeters, 2007). According to Mukuna and Mutsotso (2011), in Kenya, there is a surge of men interested in obtaining diplomas and degrees to enter in the ECD in transitory to administration and not as direct caregivers or teachers. Recruitment of men is essential in developing the socio-emotional status of children (Wardle 2004) and not only to advance a gender-diverse labour force but consequently augment the significance of men in the upbringing of children (Martino 2008). The need to consolidate the importance of men as fathers in the lives of children within family structure and the engagement of men in the education set-up is long overdue, hence this study seeks to understand the constraints affecting men's participation in ECE.

The constraints on men's participation from previous studies

The revelation that men influence their children through their attitudes, behaviour and messages they express (Lamb & Lewis 2010) has led to greater attention being focused on fathers and father-figures involved in early childhood programmes (Ortiz 2004; Mathwasa & Okeke 2016). Yet, a mounting number of men are failing to fulfil their monetary, honourable, or societal obligation to their children. Men's role as economic breadwinners has captured major attention of policymakers and the public the same way. Regrettably though, social, economic, and/or cultural barriers have made many men to be insufficiently engaged in the education of their children (Greene 2003; O'Brien 2004). Researches have exposed that some men were not willing to spend money on children (Ingoldsby & Shaw 2002; Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn 2000; Richter et al. 2011; Mathwasa & Okeke 2016); hence, the existing welfare reforms deliberations on personal responsibility, put father absence in the limelight as the prime cause of escalated family poverty creating high public dependency. Votruba-Drzal (2006) found that reduced father/child attachments at an early age caused lack of commitment to conventional activities which leads adolescents to resort to drug abuse. Likewise, Singh et al. (2004) attest that black men are not enthusiastic about being involved. Sadly, men have failed to teach, support, nurture and guide their children; some of the children have no idea who their father is. It should be appreciated that black men are mostly uneducated, and the illiteracy rate is high due to the apartheid pre-independence education system. Legotlo's (1998) opinion was that illiterate men are hesitant to partake in school functions because they feel inferior when they must face highly educated, well-informed and economically better-off teachers.

Strategies for improving men's participation

Research has been elaborate on the benefits of involving men as fathers and father figures in their children's lives and education (Kim & Chung 2011; Potter et al. 2012; Jorosi-Tshiamo, Mogobe, & Mokotedi 2013; Okeke 2014; Holcomb, Edin, Max, Young, D'Angelo, Friend, Clary & Johnson 2015; Linn, Wilson, & Fako 2015; Wilson 2015) yet, the idea of involving men as educators/ caregivers in the ECE has been given less attention. Creation of a platform for collaboration on the significance of men's involvement as fathers in the ECE and men as educators entails coming up with strategies that will accelerate the recruitment and retention of men into the female-dominated environment.

Levitating the awareness and prominence of men's participation as educators is a strategy that involves word-of-mouth campaigns through well-established male community systems to entice men into a predominantly feminised domain (King 2000; King, Sweeney & Fletcher 2004). Within these community systems, men's clubs can be used to encourage reliable male participation in schools (Yeung 2004). Male-dominated organisations such as Sisonke Gender Justice, Men for Development South Africa (MEDSA), South African Men's Action Group (SAMAG) Banna Buang and men's fellowship assemblies in religious establishments can be used to mobilise the recruitment of young men into ECE educators. Through these fellowship groups, negative perceptions about male educators in early childhood can be addressed (King 2005; Change 2015). According to King (2005), strengths-based approaches that use solution-focused philosophies and endeavour to develop men's desire to be protective and affectionate towards their families will greatly impact on developing parenting skills, increase confidence and competence of men as care givers and educators.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Epstein's (1995), theory of overlapping spheres of influence is adopted for this study as it regards the family, community and school as the three major foundations that influence children's learning and development. These three contexts inform each other and are pretentious by the verdicts made regarding the nearness or disconnectedness. The collaboration of the three spheres depends on the ability of education centres to foster high-quality relationships with families and communities through community engagements (Epstein, Sanders, Simon, Salinas, Jansorn & Van Voorhis 2003; Green 2003). Although parents may be faced with limitations, they can make rigorous efforts to be actively involved in the learning of their children. It cannot be disputed that the three learning environments are equally important, as one cannot be entirely secluded from the others.

The choice of this theory is based on its appropriateness in unloading the constraints that fathers face in their attempt to participate in early childhood education. Abundant research grounded on Epstein's framework has brought to light the six types of involvement which are communicating, decision-making, parenting, cooperating within the community, learning at home and volunteering (Epstein et al. 2003). Epstein acknowledges that each domain plays a vital role in cultivating a progressive learning atmosphere for children in which educators should play a leading role in this partnership. Conspicuously, high quality collaboration amid the spheres nurtures positive outcomes for learners, parents as well as their teachers (Epstein 2001; Epstein et al. 2003), which matches with the belief that fathers' participation leads to academic success, making students, teachers and parents to be contented.

Overlapping of school, family and community leads to "family-like schools" and "school-like families" (Epstein 1995 p. 702). In "family-like schools" atmosphere, families accept individuality; children's special traits are acknowledged within the school; schoolwork is important; and there is emphasis on doing homework and learning activities, thus increasing the completion rate. Understanding the children's background, parents' cultures and unique strengths creates a pathway for teachers to be in a better position to involve fathers. In this study, the researchers gained better understanding through the Epstein's theory of the constraints men face in becoming engaged fathers in their children's education and what stratagems can be adopted to encourage men's involvement.

METHODOLOGY

This study espoused the Subtle Realism paradigm which is grounded on the interdependency of people's morals and philosophies describing how people respond towards situations in the real world (Johnson & Christensen 2010). It informs the qualitative approach which was adopted as researchers endeavoured to reconnoitre and comprehend the fundamental phenomenon in its natural condition. A qualitative research can be viewed as an analytical procedure that pursues understanding of social and human challenges, centred on constructing a multifaceted, holistic depiction, which is shaped with words, reportage expressed opinions of informers in their natural environment (Creswell 2014). It then became necessary to use the case study design. A semi-structured interview was utilised to collect data purposively from a sample of 12 participants comprising four men with children aged 0-6; four women and four educators in two selected ECE centres in the East London District. Semi-structured interviews are well-known for their ability in obtaining in-depth data through face-to-face interaction (Maree 2007). The selection of participants was based on the probability of them being more knowledgeable about the phenomena under study (McMillan & Schumacher 2010). Analysing

collected data involved transcription of recorded data, reading, interpretation and coding (Creswell 2014) as to come up with themes and individual aspects which formed logical classifications presented further down in findings.

Credibility and Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is a means to back up the arguments that the analysis findings "deserve attentiveness" (Lincoln & Guba 2000 p. 290). Flick (2002) argues that qualitative investigators need to be as watchful as positivist researchers in terms of guaranteeing the validity and reliability of their studies, even if they opt to use different terms such as credibility and authenticity, to describe the qualities that inaugurate the trustworthiness of their research. To ensure trustworthiness, there is need for factual accuracy of the account (Tashakkori & Teddlie 2010). Interviews were captured on a tape recorder to augment credibility and trustworthiness of the study (Creswell 2014). Member checks on transcripts and analysed texts were also done to ensure credibility of data (Babbie 2015).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are also known as codes of conduct which regulate the researchers' behaviour. In the laymen's terms, it means doing what is right, treating other people fairly and not hurting anyone. Ethics refer to what is or what is not appropriate to do, or what "moral" research procedure encompasses (May 2011). Ethics in this study were achieved by observing the participant's right to privacy confidentiality, anonymity and voluntary participation by signing the consent form. The pseudonyms were also used in this study to conceal the identity of participants. Participants were also given the freedom to withdraw from partaking at any time of the research.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Importance of men as fathers in children's lives and education

The study set out to find out stakeholders' views on men in the lives of their children.
Delisa expressed that: *Men are important firstly to fulfil their role as the head of the family to protect and provide the children with their needs*. Elma also added: *I think men are important and should be involved from birth to help in the bringing up of the child, to help with the discipline because children tend to listen to the father more than their mother*.

Collaborating with educators, Rodney, a father said: *Men are important because there are some things that we teach our children which women cannot teach. Men bring balance into the child's life*. James concurred that: *I think men are important to teach boys to be men, and you know…. the father provides stability; they discipline better than mothers who are very soft*. Reacting to the same question, Suzie, an elderly mother sadly said: *I don't know my father; I feel there is an empty space in my life, but I think it is important for the father to guide and teach the child about his roots. The boys look up to their fathers, I see how happy my children are with their father and often wonder what it would be like with my father*.

Basically, the importance of men in the children's lives is acknowledged by all stakeholders. They provide that stability and discipline to children that mothers cannot provide; yet their absence creates emptiness not easily filled.

Level of men's participation in ECE

The study also established the level of father participation in sampled centres. For instance, Bev the educator said: *I would say only 2 out of 10 men come to school either just to drop or pick up their children even though I have invited them.* Similarly, Leighla stated: *Not really, but just a few men that care for their children like who really come to class to check if everything is right and that the child is well dressed. I would say just about 20% of men get involved.* Correspondingly, Delisa observed that: *Only a few men maybe ten percent are involved, most of fathers are working but the sometimes attend meetings.*

The study also sought the views of fathers whose responses were:
Father 1 expressed: *Well many men do not participate because of different reasons like work, not having value for education and because we men think it's a mother's job.* In his response, Father 2 plainly said: *I really don't like coming to school because I don't know what to do there, I am not working so I do this and that to make money.* However, Father 3 proudly attested: *I like to check on the progress of my children because I want them to do better than me… my grandfather was my role model. I think if all fathers can take an interest in what children do at school because it is the right thing to do.* On finding male educators in the ECE fathers responded: *I would relate better but question their capability in nurturing young children. That would be good for children especially boys. Men in ECE are viewed with suspicion, fear of paedophiles, culturally men are not cut out to look after small children.*

Responses from mothers also revealed a similar trend:
First mother: *He doesn't want to hear anything about school, even when he is at home, he tells me to go.* Second mother: *He only went to school to find out how our daughter had been injured, it turned out that she fell on her way home outside the school.* Confirming third mother said: *Generally, fathers are not home so I attend to children's schoolwork without involving him, because he will always give me an excuse.*

It turned out that the level of participation from men was very low. The few who pitched up in the centres come to drop or pick up their children. Seemingly, fewer are those who show interest in children and those who are concerned with the safety of their children.

Constraints affecting men's participation

The question of constraints was directed to fathers first as they were at the centre of this study. The issue of being at work was cited as the most constraining factor that caused fathers not to engage in children's lives and education.

Additionally, the first father posits that: *It is difficult to cultivate a relationship with a baby or small child when you are no longer in a relationship with the mother.* The second father sadly expressed his inability to be involved with his child: *I feel ashamed to visit, let alone spend some time with the child empty handed. I lost my job three years ago and am not able to support her.*

The third father confessed to non-involvement because he works away from home and has contact with his children one weekend a month, even then it is not quality time as there are so many issues to be solved. Reiterating to the same question on constraints one mother expressed this idea: *Mothers are always involved and fathers are always focus on their work which I think is just an excuse, because mothers are also working but we do make time for the children. When we come home, we have to do a lot of things take care of the children, the housework and even take care of the men. I feel they need to change this attitude and be more involved. We need to help each other say 50/50 very few men are involved.* Echoing similar

sentiments, the second mother said: *Fathers have very little interest in children because in most cases they have excuses. Personally, I get tired asking, hence, I tell my son that his father doesn't love him.*

The same question was posed to the educators who expressed their thoughts as follows; Bev's opinion was *I think men just keep away from ECD because of tradition, or stereotype and generally fear of young children but we find them in the intermediate phase classes. I think men do not have the patience and that motherly love however personally I would love to work alongside with men in the foundation phase.* Concurring with Bev, Leighla expressed that: *Mostly, men keep away from children because of their work. They feel the mother can look after the children at home and school while they work to bring money. But they could sacrifice and spend some time with their children, my sister's husband works very hard but, in the evening, he sits down with his children.* Elma's reaction to the question was like others when she said: *Sometimes mothers override the roles of men and don't give them a chance. When men are separated from the women, they still must be involved. Sometimes it is us women who discourage men from being involved with their children.*

Sentiments expressed in this section indicate that fathers are rarely involved due to work related issues or mothers prevent them because of broken relationships which cause resentment. However, while some fathers may want to be involved, the desire to provide for the family take precedence in their choices.

Stratagems to motivate men into participation in ECE

The study went on to find out how men could be motivated to be more engaged in the early stages of their children's lives. Bev, a female educator proposed that: *Fathers could be invited fathers to have family day or be given tasks to do in the school. They could be involved in repairing the school and encouraged to come for consultations to know the progress of the child.* In the same way, Randy suggested that: *If a policy was designed it would involve dealing with men on a personal level. Right now, we have male dominated groups or organisation like Sisonke Gender Justice, Brotherhood for men but we see them on TV, they appeal to the elite in big towns. They need to specifically target men at community level, in universities with large concentration of men, to address even the illiterate, the unemployed and socially disadvantaged men in the rural settlements and influence other men who have a superior perception about themselves. Men need to be made aware of their duties. Lack of education contributes to men's ignorance on participation so is the level of social status. In this community, the unemployment is high and socio-economic status is very low. Hence, we need these organisations to engage with the socially disadvantaged.*

Mothers also had these suggestions: *They should make it compulsory for the fathers to attend meetings. I think the level of men's involvement depends on the relationship between the father and the mother. Fathers can be invited to participate in sports. These men's groups should talk to fathers and boys come at community level and warn women and girls about the tactics men use to indulge with them and what makes men fail to comment to their responsibility.* The third mother was of the opinion: *First of all, it depends on the men's willingness to participate, culture and socialisation has created a problem especially in the black community where gender roles are so significant right from small boys. Men should be instrumental in changing these perceptions. Nurturing children has been left to mothers hence fathers have absconded their fatherly duties. The community can encourage male inclusion in the school by influencing the School Governing Boards to bring more men on board to serve*

in various committees and activities. Use men to design programmes or clubs of involvement in the school.

Interviewed fathers also gave suggestions that could encourage more participation from the men. *First of all, women should let us be more involved, personally I want to be more involved, but I don't know what to do (first father). I think socialization, the culture and stereotype have to change. Women have to change too because at times they do not tell us about involvement at school (second father). I may not think of something big now, but I feel that it is the duty of every father to be involved, programmes to be designed that teach fathers how they can be hands on dads. Teachers should be more accommodative because at times I feel they look down upon us you know* (third father).

Responses from educators, mothers and fathers seem to unanimously agree on the need to have solid programmes that foster father involvement in the early childhood education programmes. Suggestions include making it compulsory for fathers to attend meetings, form clubs and use male-dominated clubs to influence men from all socio-economic backgrounds to be involved.

DISCUSSION

The status of fathers in children's lives and education is acknowledged as pivotal in moulding good behaviour and accelerating academic achievement in children, yet the involvement of men in this study was found to be negligible. The findings of this study corroborate earlier findings by Heystek and Louw (1999), Green (2003) and Mathwasa and Okeke (2016) where in their studies, fathers were invisible figures in the early education of their children. The findings exposed that men's participation as fathers in the education of their children was so low augmented by total lack of men as educators. This finding is in line with observations by Greene (2003), O'Brien (2004) and Mathwasa and Okeke (2016) who reported that men were insufficiently engaged in their children's education. The findings of this study show a resemblance to Peeters' (2007) observation of the decline in male educators worldwide.

The study revealed that some fathers were not participating with their children because of lack of finance to adequately provide for their children. Findings of the current study are in line with earlier studies that reported that some men experienced embarrassment and estrangement because they were unemployed and could not provide for their families as expected of them (Ramphele & Richter 2006). Similarly, Desmond (2012) and Sheng (2012) found that fathers were constrained from participating in their children's lives because of lack of time, lack of confidence in themselves and the fear of school. Cultural values, traditional beliefs and stereotype were found to be constraints affecting men's involvement in their children's early lives in this study because on the long standing believe that nurturing children was a woman's work.

Engaging male-dominated clubs or association came out as a strong strategy in influencing men's involvement in the ECE confirming the assertion that male fellowship groups can quell negative perspective against male educators in ECE (King 2000; King et al. 2004; Yeung 2004). The findings of this study revealed cultural barriers such as traditional gender assigned roles in child nurturing and stereotypes as causing men to be insufficiently involved in their children's education in line with proclamations by Greene (2003) and O'Brien (2004). Despite these constraints that men face, the need for them to be actively involved in the lives of their children can never be underestimated.

CONCLUSION

The main objective of this study was to explore the constraints affecting men's participation in the early childhood education of their children to establish feasible intervention for men's engagement. A qualitative research approach utilising semi-structured interviews to collect data was employed in this study. Findings of the study indicate multi-stakeholders understanding of the importance of men as fathers and men as educators in the early education of children. Also exposed was the non-involvement of fathers and the scarcity of male educators in the early education of children. Men faced a myriad of constraints militating against their engagement compelling men's fellowship clubs/associations to intensify their campaign for male involvement at grassroots level to all strata of socio-economic status. The study findings also indicate female dominancy that is hostile to men's engagement due to cultural beliefs, stereotypes and gender assigned roles which need a complete change of multi-stakeholder mindset to circumvent constraints affecting men's involvement in the early childhood education of young children.

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