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Walden University

College of Education

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Jawan M. Burwell

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

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Walden University
2021

Abstract

Preschool Teachers' Perspectives on Engaging Fathers in their Child's Education

by

Jawan M. Burwell

MR, North Carolina State University, 2016

BS, North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University, 2014

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

November 2021

Abstract

Preschool environments set the educational foundation for children in the early years. Despite the positive effects that preschool environments have on children and families, previous studies have shown that preschool teachers are challenged to engage fathers in their child's education. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to investigate preschool teachers' perspectives on engaging fathers in their child's education. The conceptual framework was based upon Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. The research question focused on the challenges that teachers encounter in engaging fathers in their child's education. This qualitative study included individual one-on-one interviews with 12 teachers using an open-ended interview protocol. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis to ensure the findings of the study accurately reflected the participants' perspectives of father engagement. Five themes were identified including promoting parent-teacher communication opportunities, identifying teacher responsibilities for classroom engagement activities, understanding barriers that limit father engagement, providing resource opportunities for fathers to increase engagement, and teacher mentorship on father engagement strategies. Many of the teachers demonstrated a high level of discomfort when engaging fathers in their child's education; therefore, there is a need for additional teacher professional development on strategies to engage fathers in their child's education. This study presents implications of positive social change by suggesting that preschool teachers increase the engagement of fathers in their child's education by providing equal and inclusive opportunities. Most teachers from this study suggested that collaborative inclusive strategies will produce a positive outcome on children's education and father's commitment to their child's education.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my Lord and Savior, family, friends, mentors, and instructors that prayed and supported me to get to where I am today. In 2016, I obtained my master's from North Carolina State University. After that degree, I told myself I was finished with school. The long nights of trying to balance school and work were finally taking a toll on me. One day I was sitting at my grandmother's countertop, and she mentioned, "You might as well go ahead and get that doctorate." I looked at her puzzled and immediately shook my head no. All I could think of was more student loans that I would have to pay back. Two years went by, and it finally hit me that I needed to finish what I initially set my goal for. I researched various programs to find out which one would be the best fit for me, but it was difficult. One day I was on Facebook browsing through and an ad for Walden University appeared. I clicked the ad, researched their school and program, and spoke with an enrollment advisor. We spoke about my interests and what my goal in life was. After speaking a few times on separate occasions, I applied and was accepted. I was skeptical at first from the reviews I read online, but since enrolling in August 2018, it has been amazing. Though the journey has not always been easy, the support and compassion have motivated me to continue pressing forward. For this, I will be eternally grateful.

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge my committee, Drs. Donald Yarosz and Karyn Hawkins-Scott and University Research Reviewer, Dr. Wade Fish, for the hard work, dedication, and support they have provided me throughout my entire doctoral process. I would also like to acknowledge the teachers that participated in my study. Without your input, this study would not have been possible. I would like to thank all individuals that work in the early childhood field. Often, they get overlooked and are underappreciated for the work they do for our children and families. Continue to provide fathers with an experience where they can be actively involved in their child's learning and development. I would also like to encourage preschool teachers and fathers to continue to be an advocate for children to help produce them into life-long learners.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The focus of this study revolved around preschool teachers' perspectives on engaging fathers in their child's education. By gaining a better understanding of how teachers attempt to engage fathers in their child's education, the results of this study may lead to a positive social change in the world. The findings can enable teachers to provide more inclusive opportunities for fathers to participate in their child's learning and development, to seize limited research that is available on father engagement. This chapter will discuss the background, purpose of the study, the statement of the problem, research questions, the conceptual framework, nature of the study, key terms, assumptions, scopes and delimitations, limitations, significance, and a summary.

Background

The launch of early childhood education began in 1837 by founder Fredrich Froebel. Kurniah et al. (2019) best defined early childhood education as an effort aimed at children from infancy to the age of 6 by providing educational stimuli to help the growth and development of children to have readiness in entering higher education. For this study, the term early childhood education was used in reference to children in preschool from infancy to age 6. After a careful review of the literature, there is a lack of information on preschool teachers' perspectives on engaging fathers in their child's education (Lang et al., 2017). Miller et al. (2017) also noted that there is a lack of inadequate resources and challenges that are added to the teacher's workload. Teacher-child relationships play an important role in children's behavior, development, and learning. Wolcott (2019) implied that there is a link between children in preschool

environments and the relationship they have with their teachers. “When children experience a high-quality relationship with their teachers, they may form positive working models of the social world” (Acar et al., 2018, p. 252). Fabricius and Suh (2017) suggested improved engagement of teachers with fathers may be beneficial to children and fathers themselves.

Parent-child relationships also play a major role in children’s development and learning. Parent engagement is a broad term that the United States Department of Education defines as “regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities” (Gross et al., 2020, p. 747). There is a vast amount of research on mother-child relationships, yet there is limited information emphasized about father-child relationships, father engagement, and father attachment (Cabrera, 2020). Researchers have established father engagement contributes to a higher intelligence quotient (IQ) and advanced linguistic and cognitive capacities (Ancell et al., 2018). Lee and Schoppe-Sullivan (2017) reported “conceptualizations of father involvement have shifted from emphasizing fathers’ total time spent interacting with or available to children toward emphasizing aspects of father involvement that is more likely closely linked to children’s development” (p. 485). Furthermore, the authors indicated that father engagement “protects children from increases in externalizing behavior problems and from increases in internalizing behavior problems.” (p. 485).

Both teacher-child and parent-child relationships play a vital role in children’s learning and development. As noted by Morgan (2019), high-quality preschool environments are essential in the early years of a child’s life and “can make a critical

difference in a child's future" (p. 2). Another researcher notes, "Fathers' engagement becomes a more critical issue when the mother is employed and their child is at the preschool age because fathers are required to adjust to their child's interactional and childcare needs" (Lee, 2019, p. 1).

Although father engagement is important to children's learning and development, it is also important to understand that there are barriers that can cause a lack of engagement from fathers. Hornby and Blackwell (2018) discussed that there are four types of barriers to the establishment of effective parental involvement in education which include: (a) individual parent and family barriers, (b) child factors, (c) parent-teacher factors, and (d) societal factors. Some of the known barriers to parent engagement include lack of time, interest, transportation, and language. Since there is a lack of research on challenges that teachers face in engaging fathers in their child's education, there is a need to provide more creative and inclusive opportunities for fathers to participate and engage in to contribute to children's learning and development.

Problem Statement

There has been a significant increase in the challenges preschool teachers are having in an attempt to engage fathers in the education process of children (Kadar-Satat et al., 2017). Teachers attempt to engage with fathers in their child's education; however, there is still a challenge in identifying and implementing strategies to ensure fathers are significantly engaged in other aspects of their child's education. Anderson et al. (2015) indicated that most early childhood programs need guidance on providing effective strategies that engage fathers in providing developmental support for children. An

engaged father is (a) one who feels responsible for and behaves responsibly toward his child, (b) is emotionally engaged and physically accessible, (c) provides material support to sustain the child's needs, (d) is involved in childcare, and (e) exerts influence in child-rearing decisions (University of California, Berkely, School of Social Welfare, 2020). In my study, father engagement represents fathers who participate in their child's preschool education. Activities that fathers could participate in include, but are not limited to parent-teacher conferences, volunteering in the classroom, chaperoning field trips, parent meetings, and/or serving on the preschool's policy council. National statistics show that fathers spend an average of 8 hours a week participating in their child's preschool environment (Livingston & Parker, 2019). In a study conducted by Tully et al. (2018), "17.2 percent of teachers reported that fathers often attended programs/services, 53.4 percent of teachers reported fathers sometimes attended, and 29.4 percent of teachers reported that fathers rarely attended" (p. 114). In another study, it was reported that 63%of nonresident fathers are associated with low engagement and have less contact with their children (Yogman et al., 2016). At a local level, it was emphasized that "it is difficult to support fathers in the engagement of their child's learning and development because they rarely participate in any of the activities that are planned throughout the school year" (staff meeting, personal communication, August 24, 2020). It was also reported that "approximately 65 percent of fathers participate when the preschool program is having a special event or field trip; however, the percentage drops to approximately 25 percent when there are parent meetings and parent-teacher conferences" (Preschool teacher, personal communication, August 3, 2020). Rohrmann

(2019) indicated that working with fathers is an important task in the context of collaboration with parents and engaging in this field can provide a positive role in the center's work. Charles et al. (2018) reported that father engagement in educational activities occurs approximately one-third of the time while the child is in a school setting.

Fathers have a critical role in the lives of their children; yet, they are often overlooked regarding the influence they have on their children (Rankin et al., 2019). McMunn et al. (2017) stated that there is an urgent need for fathers to strengthen family life, particularly against the current backdrop of busy working parents. The field of early childhood education remains a female-dominated field; however, Rohrmann (2019) stated that strategies for more father involvement in preschool environments are often brought forward by responsible ministries and national agencies in the context of gender equality.

Fathers play a significant role by contributing to a child's developmental domains, which consist of physical, social, emotional, and language (Chacko et al., 2018). Ancell et al. (2018) reported "an important, yet overlooked component in the effort to increase engagement in preschool programs have been fathers. Also, most preschool programs do not have active engagement from fathers." (p. 22). The gap in practice identified in my study is the immense amount of research reported on mother-child relationships; however, there is limited information highlighted about father-child relationships, father engagement, and father attachment (Cabrera, 2020). Kohl & Seay (2015) noted that fathers are not participating in parent engagement practices. Anderson et al. (2015) reported that preschool programs typically provide less structured experiences in which

individual fathers self-select their engagement from a variety of program opportunities. It has been shown that there is a low rate of engagement from fathers due to personal, family, societal, and agency factors (Coakley et al., 2014). Although fathers may have a strong interest in building relationships with and supporting their children, a comprehensive range of services is needed to address their varied needs (Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, 2015). Lau (2016) determined that the significance of teacher engagement with fathers draws important implications on how father engagement can be improved to increase child outcomes.

Parents and preschool teachers must be on the same side of defining and demanding high-quality early childhood education (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2020). Beyond the consideration of the aforementioned factors and frameworks, little consideration has been placed on low engagement rates of father engagement and the support teachers offer for fathers to engage in preschool environments (Tully et al., 2017).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to investigate preschool teachers' perspectives on engaging fathers in their child's education. With the growing demand for early childhood education, there is a vital need to gain an understanding of how preschool teachers engage fathers in their child's education. Furthermore, there is a growing need to provide preschool teachers with the tools and resources that will increase the visibility of father engagement in early childhood education (Lechowicz et al., 2019). For this study, early childhood education was used in reference to children in preschool from infancy to

age 6. Increased visibility of father engagement begins with addressing who the fathers are, what they need now, and letting them set goals and be the experts in their own lives and their children's lives (Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, 2015). Twelve teachers from a preschool classroom were interviewed to gain an understanding of how fathers engage in their child's education.

Research Question (Qualitative)

What are preschool teachers' perspectives on engaging fathers in their child's education?

Conceptual Framework (Qualitative)

The conceptual framework of this study was based upon the construct of Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. Bronfenbrenner's theory identifies how "human development is influenced by various environmental systems" (Ettekal & Mahoney, 2017, p. 239). Bronfenbrenner revised the original theory and currently identifies it as the bioecological systems theory. The newly revised version of the theory supports the "active role of an individual in the developmental process; and emphasizes the importance of building effective relationships between parents and teachers related to children's development" (Ettekal & Mahoney, 2017, p. 239). There are five levels of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory. They are identified as the (a) microsystem, (b) mesosystem, (c) exosystem, (d) macrosystem, and (e) chronosystem. According to Bronfenbrenner, the mesosystem "involves processes that occur between the multiple microsystems in which individuals are embedded" (Ettekal & Mahoney, 2017, p. 241). This theory supports the understanding of how teachers attempt to engage

fathers in their child's education, as it confirms an association between the relationships, environments, and interactions between home school, and community, and how each relation influences the individual child within the microsystem.

The bioecological systems theory serves as a framework for my study as it constructs the relationship between parents, teachers, and the individual child's learning, behavior, and development. A father is an integral part of the family structure, and his love and care are critical to the development of healthy children. Barker et al. (2017) found that increased paternal sensitivity to children's needs and development is associated with reduced child psychopathology and decreased adverse outcomes. From the usage and implementation of current research, the bioecological systems theory fully supports the context within my research.

Nature of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate preschool teachers' perspectives on engaging fathers in their child's education. The qualitative design in my study was based on interviews with preschool teachers in an early childhood environment. Ravitch and Carl (2016) mentioned that interviews are most appropriate when conducting research. The goal of semistructured interviews is to generate insight and reflection on the study topic (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

In my study, 12 preschool teachers were interviewed using an open-ended interview protocol via Zoom. Each virtual interview was conducted synchronously. The 12 preschool teachers were selected from a private early childhood program. The program is a private childcare program that contains a group of children and families

from low to middle-class status. The program is located in a low-income neighborhood in North Carolina, USA. The clientele is open to all families that are in the surrounding area. The program is made up of a diverse population of children from various cultures and socioeconomic backgrounds. The demand for the program is high with a waiting list of over 125 families. The program is currently limited in space but is looking to expand within the next 2 years. Family engagement is not a requirement in this program; however, it is strongly encouraged.

Most preschool programs are predominantly made up of female teachers, due to "male professionals constructing stereotypical masculine identities" (Andrä, 2020, p. 83). As a result of this trend, male teachers at this early childhood program have been identified, who were willing to volunteer to participate in the study. The male and female preschool teacher participants were used to gain a full understanding of how they attempt to engage fathers in their child's education. Prior to the preschool teacher interviews, a field test was conducted with two members from my targeted population. The members were from a different preschool program. The two field test members provided feedback to my interview questions to ensure the questions were clear and understandable. After the field test, I determined that the interview protocol did not need to be amended. All interviews were recorded via Zoom for transcription purposes. "Transcribing gives researchers a way of slowing down the talk to capture relevant interactions" (Hepburn & Bolden, 2017, p. 8). After interviews were transcribed and analyzed, they were sent to the participants to review for accuracy.

Definitions

Early childhood environment: An environment for children from infancy to age 6, that supports their learning, growth, and development. A high-quality early childhood environment provides indoor and outdoor environments that provide interactions between teachers, children, and peers (Tonge et al., 2019).

Early childhood teacher: A person who is responsible for planning, implementing, and evaluating the program curriculum for children from birth to age 6. Additionally, they are responsible for the developmental assessment and progression of children's skills and behaviors, and the overall health, safety, and well-being of all the children (Post et al., 2020).

Father: A representation of a male parent of a child in a family. This definition can include any male that fulfills the father role (e.g., stepfather, godfather).

Father-child relationship: A long-term or life-span affiliation between a male and one or more children (Fagan & Palkovitz, 2019).

Parent engagement: For this study, parent engagement was used in reference to the contribution a father provides to a child's learning and development. This includes, but is not limited to "classroom volunteering, attending parent meetings, attending parent-teacher conferences or communicating with the teacher, going to social events, participating in policy, and observing in the classroom" (Cutshaw et al., 2020, p. 3).

Parent-teacher relationship: A working commitment between parents and teachers that impact a student's classroom learning experience (Sadiku & Sylaj, 2019).

Assumptions

Assumptions "show how other framings of educational problems are made possible when the constructs excluded through methodological elimination decisions are taken into consideration" (Wolgemuth et al., 2017, p. 131). Three assumptions were associated with this study. The first assumption was that the teachers provided honest and accurate responses to the questions that were asked. Honest and accurate responses are important as they helped to draw conclusions to the research question that was asked. Before allowing the participants to take part in the study, I explained the purpose and obtained their consent. Participants were given a few days to review the study and the form before giving consent to participate. I also noted that it may take approximately 60 minutes to review the transcript. If participants felt they understood the study and wished to volunteer, they indicated their consent by replying to the email with the words, "I consent". All responses remained anonymous and participant identities remained confidential.

The second assumption was that all teachers that participate in the study had been teaching in an early childhood setting and had at least an Associate's degree or higher in early childhood or related field. According to the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (2020), 540,400 Americans with an Associate's degree became preschool teachers. This agency also stated that 13,500 Americans made an employment change to a preschool teacher. Participants may use this opportunity to express themselves freely to build a stronger parent-teacher relationship. This assumption was important as it may bridge the

gap between the two parties and allow teachers to provide more hands-on experiences for fathers to participate.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this study addressed preschool teachers' perspectives on engaging fathers in their child's education. Due to the limited research available on father engagement, this study was aimed to address the gap in practice between fathers not participating in parent engagement practices and teachers having limited resources to increase father engagement. Additionally, there was an indication that fathers may not feel that the preschool environment is inclusive, nor do they have the support needed to engage within their child's classroom. My study was delimited to 12 teachers in a preschool environment. I did not include administrators, teacher assistants, or students. The results of this study may be transferrable to other contexts and settings.

Limitations

There were multiple limitations identified in my study. "Limitations represent weaknesses within the study that may influence outcomes and conclusions of the research" (Ross & Bibler Zaidi, 2019, p. 261). The first limitation was based upon the early childhood program where I completed my study. The program is located in a precise region in North Carolina, USA.

Another limitation was the small sample size of the study. Twelve participants were included in the study. There are a total of 11 classrooms with 22 preschool teachers employed by the early childhood program. The teachers are not classified by lead and assistant; therefore, they are known as coteachers. Both teachers in the classroom have

equal responsibility for engaging and communicating with the parents. The teachers provide the parents with daily reports at arrival and departure. Additionally, the teachers provide parents with monthly updates at the program's monthly Parent Teacher Organizations (PTO) meetings. The mothers are the main attendees of these meetings with few fathers (Program director, personal communication, September 13, 2020).

Another limitation was the small number of male teacher participants in the study. Out of the 22 preschool teachers employed by this early childhood program, only two were males. According to Bryan and Williams (2017), males only account for only 2% of the teacher workforce. Xu (2019) noted that gender diversity and gender balance in early childhood education should be continuously advocated and emphasized in our society to develop new perspectives in the early childhood education profession.

Another limitation was the increase of single-family homes, where the mother is the head of the household, and fathers are not involved at all. The U.S. Census Bureau (2016) reported the percentage of children living with only their mother from 1960 – 2016, tripled from 8% to 23%. Harkness et al. (2020) indicated that more children are growing up in single-mother households with little or no father contact, leading to increased attainment deficits for children in single-mother families over time.

A final limitation was the parent-teacher engagement level based upon the age group of the classrooms. The program serves children ages 2 to 5. There are three 2-year-old classes, four 3 to 4-year-old classes, and four 4 to-5-year-old classes. The teachers in the 2-year-old class focus their attention more on setting the foundation for children's social and emotional development. The majority of the children that are in that classroom

have high separation anxiety, due to limited presence in a preschool environment. The teachers in the 3 to 5-year-old classes focus their attention on developmentally appropriate content and Kindergarten readiness skills. The communication between each class will be slightly different.

Significance

The importance of this qualitative study stemmed from identifying the challenges preschool teachers have in an attempt to improve the engagement of fathers in the development process of children. The gap that was identified in my study was fathers not participating in parent engagement practices and teachers having limited resources to increase father engagement. From the findings, the contributions from this study may fill the gap by (a) enabling fathers to become more engaged in early childhood education, (b) developing a stronger child relationship between the fathers of children in early childhood education (c) developing a stronger teacher relationship with fathers of children in early childhood education, and (d) encouraging early childhood educators to seek support and professional development opportunities for teachers from outsourcing agencies to increase the visibility of father engagement. Leenders et al. (2019) proposed that "building connectedness and trust between parents and teachers is conducive, which enables a mutual understanding of expectations and the child's needs" (p. 520). This is because, as the researchers note, "When teachers acknowledge that parents are usually aware of their children's needs and willing to support their development, the nonoptimal division of roles of teachers as advice-givers and parents as advice seekers can be overcome" (Leenders et al., 2019, p. 521). Cowan and Cowan (2019) discovered when

fathers are supported and included in father-based intervention groups, they are more likely to engage in their child's learning and development. Building stronger relationships and increasing engagement opportunities for fathers will build the foundation for gaining a better understanding of how teachers engage fathers in their child's education, in an essence to bridge the gap between home to school. These findings may continue to contribute to the body of positive social change. It may serve as an opportunity to better promote and implement strategies that will upkeep the engagement of fathers in their child's education.

Summary

To conclude this chapter, I provided an overview of the problem and purpose of investigating preschool teachers' perspectives on engaging fathers in their child's education. The background literature was provided to support the problem and the gap in practice, which is fathers not participating in parent engagement practices and teachers having limited resources to increase father engagement. The research question was developed to gain an understanding of preschool teachers' perspectives on engaging fathers in their child's education. The conceptual framework was constructed using Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. Assumptions, limitations, and delimitations were also provided to identify the influence, outcomes, and conclusions of the research. In Chapter 2, I will provide current research and literature that will closely view the engagement practices of fathers in their child's educational process, and the role teachers have in engaging fathers in their child's education. The problem and purpose of this study are restated in this chapter.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The problem that was focused on in my study revolves around the challenges that preschool teachers are having engaging fathers in the educational process of children. The purpose of this study was to investigate preschool teachers' perspectives on engaging fathers in their child's education. According to Planalp and Braungart-Reiker (2016), "father engagement is often studied by examining overall amounts of time or involvement in which a father engages with his child. However, the literature offers no research on fathers' engagement in children's education or teachers' perspectives of father engagement in their child's education" (p. 136). Nevertheless, there is a need for more information about father engagement. In this chapter, I will present the literature search strategies related to the noted keywords and phrases. Next, I will expound upon my conceptual framework and the contribution it applies to my study. Finally, I will present an extensive review of the current literature relevant to this study.

Literature Search Strategy

The databases that were used to guide the literature of this study were the Google Scholar and Walden University Library. Within the Walden University Library, I utilized the Thoreau multidatabase search. The search was conducted using keywords and phrases that included *early childhood environment, early childhood teacher, parent engagement, father, father-child relationship, parent-teacher relationship,* and *teacher perspectives*. From the limited research that is available on father engagement, most involve the father's care and interactions in the home. Furthermore, I found scarce research that addresses father engagement in their child's education. To support the gap

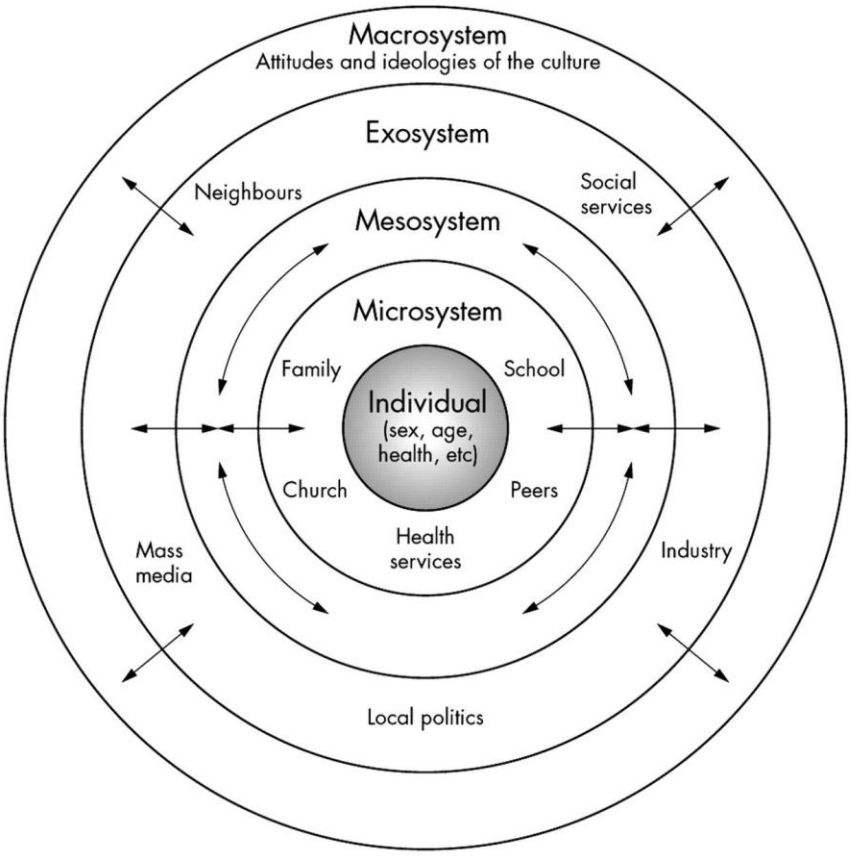
in practice, I also used keywords and phrases such as *improvement*, *limited resources*, *participation,* and *recruitment*.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework that guided this study was based on the work of Urie Bronfenbrenner and his ecological systems theory. Bronfenbrenner (1992) used this theory to explain how the innate qualities of an individual and their surroundings interact to determine growth and development. Bronfenbrenner suggested that the impact of parent engagement at schools and other surroundings influences a child's development. Bronfenbrenner's theory included five levels, in which children's development is affected by their social relationships and the world around them. These levels are known as the: (a) microsystem; (b) mesosystem; (c) exosystem; (d) macrosystem; and (e) chronosystem.

Figure 1

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory



Note. This figure illustrates the second revision to the ecological theory of human development. From "Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory Revision: Moving Culture. From the Macro Into the Micro," by N. Velez-Agosto, J. Soto-Crespo, M. Vizcarrondo-Oppenheimer, S. Vega-Molina, and C. Coll, 2017, *Perspectives on Psychological Science, 12*(5), p. 902. https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691617704397

Musgrave and Woodward (2016) noted that the microsystem is the closest to the individual and the one in which they have direct contact. The mesosystem is where a person's microsystem does not function independently but is interconnected and asserts

influence upon one another. The exosystem refers to a setting that does not involve the person as an active participant but still affects them. The macrosystem focuses on cultural values, health, public policy, and laws. Lastly, the chronosystem demonstrates the influence of both change and constancy in the children's environments.

For the purpose of this study, the levels that contributed to the literature are the microsystem and mesosystem. Both systems have a direct correlation with children and have been used in numerous studies to impact the findings of children's learning and development. These levels construct the relationship between parents, teachers, and the individual child's learning, behavior, and development. Based on Bronfenbrenner's theory, children's school experiences are made up of interactions of the child, teachers, and peers as discussed in the microsystem. Tekin (2011) noted that understanding the influences of a child's environment provides support for parent engagement in children's education. Bronfenbrenner's model predicts that high levels of parent involvement in schools should lead to successful child outcomes (Kocayörük, 2016). He also stated that parental involvement is crucial in preventing achievement and educational problems as well as facilitating children's development.

There has been an overabundance of research conducted on parental engagement, but limited research has been placed on father engagement and teacher's perspectives of father engagement in their child's education. I intend to use past research paired with current research of parent engagement to understand the perspectives of preschool teachers to engage fathers in their child's education. Within the next sections, I will address the importance of early childhood education, parental roles in early childhood

education, father participation in early childhood education activities, barriers of father engagement, and teacher roles in engaging fathers in early childhood education. The literature is used to support preschool teachers' perspectives on engaging fathers in their child's education.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts and Variable

The Importance of Preschool

Preschool serves as the educational foundation that children from infancy to age six receive to enhance their learning and development. Cutshaw et al. (2020) defined father engagement as the contribution a father provides to a child's learning and development, which includes, but is not limited to "classroom volunteering, attending parent meetings, attending parent-teacher conferences or communicating with the teacher, going to social events, participating in policy, and observing in the classroom." (p. 3). Pruett et al. (2017) indicated that a child's birth is a time of transition when many men discover the transformative wonder of parenting as they fall in love with their babies. Palkovitz et al. (2020) explained that "the way we represent our relationship with our father is the way we come to represent our relationship with our father is that we call to mind a sense of who he is towards us, our representation of our interaction history with him, and those cognitions of associated feelings." (p. 40).

Fathers play a significant role in families, and their relationships with their children influence youths' well-being across several domains, including academic success (Gordon, 2016). Furthermore, McMunn et al. (2017) noted that fathers' increasing engagement may work to strengthen family life, particularly against the

current backdrop of busy working parents. Recent studies have found positive associations between father-child interactions and young children's social-emotional development, academic achievement, self-regulation, and language development (Baker, 2017; Baker, 2014; Bockneck et al., 2017; Fagan et al., 2016).

Foster et al. (2016) conducted a study that investigated the home learning environment during early childhood and how fathers' parenting practices predict children's academic outcomes. The findings showed that fathers' contributions were a significant predictor of children's early academic skills. In another study (Basil & Ndijuye, 2019) stated that "fathers advised their fellow parents to be close to their children in order to determine and understand the challenges impacting their development and learning to improve the future of the young children and the nation as a whole." (p. 70). Eslava et al. (2015) noted that there are positive effects of being engaged in preschool children's lives; however, did not reference father engagement in their child's education. It is important to note that there are several preschool environments such as Head Start and Title I, that require mandatory participation as a part of children being enrolled in that type of program. The purpose of Head Start standard 1302.50 indicates that a program must integrate parent and family engagement strategies into all systems and program services to support family well-being and promote children's learning and development (Head Start Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center, 2020). Fathers should be encouraged to nurture their relationships with their children throughout all stages of their childhood (Khan, 2018). Despite the importance of father engagement, there is still a lack of engagement practices that are present (Alio, 2017).

Parental Roles in Preschool

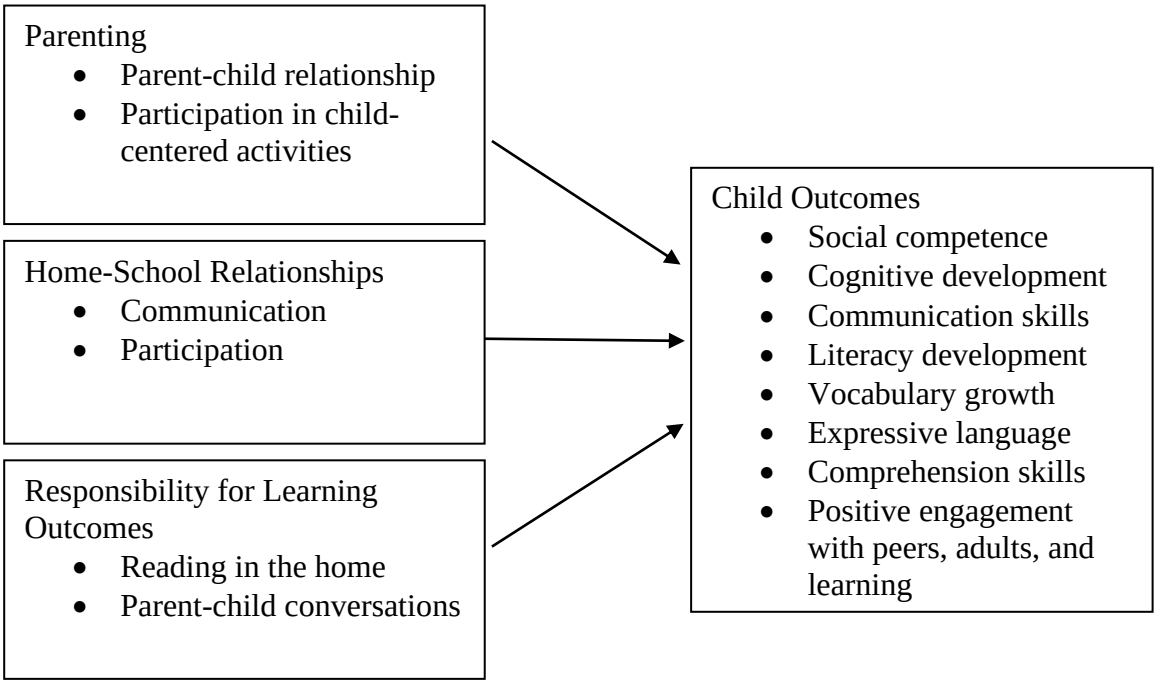
The goal of preschool is to provide children from infancy to age six with an early foundation that contributes to their cognitive, language, social-emotional, and physical development. Important aspects of children's preschool experience are the roles parents take part in and engage in. McDowell et al. (2018) indicated that parent engagement at the prekindergarten level is more often found in the form of engagement at home, as opposed to school. In modern-day society, a parent's role includes, but is not limited to "providing a loving atmosphere, willingness to accept children no matter what they are, appreciate children's potential, and give stimulations that enrich with every development aspect" (Sunarni, 2018, p. 319). Ceka and Murati (2016) further explained that parents "play the role of the direct leaders as well as supporters of the implementation of the education of their children." (p. 61). Successful engagement of parents in early childhood education has significant implications for a growing child's well-being and success (Barnes et al., 2016). The stronger the engagement between parents and teachers, the stronger the academic success of the child (Miller et al., 2016). Nitecki (2015) indicated that meaningful school-to-family relationships begin in preschool and have the potential to shape the child's and family's perceptions of school over time. Recent studies have concluded that the optimal time for promoting and instilling parent-school engagement is in prekindergarten and can help foster a stronger relationship in later years to support academic success (Ma et al., 2016).

Parents and teachers must establish a partnership that will ensure the child reaches their full potential developmentally. Panter-Brisk et al. (2014) noted that fathers are often

ignored or disregarded by preschool teachers. In a recent study, Minke et al. (2014) reported that 62.3% of teachers and parents refer to their relationship as a positive one. Parents and teachers support children's development by sharing information related to the child's development both at home and school and this information is used to guide the child's learning (Boit, 2020). Research has determined that quality parent-teacher relationships can support children's academic and behavioral outcomes (Garbacz et al., 2015). Arce (2019) shared that the belief of having good communication is the key to building a working relationship with families. McDowall et al. (2017) discovered that teachers recognized their job responsibility, which includes engaging parents. Garbacz (2016) noted that it is important to identify factors that predict family involvement and parent-teacher relationships for children and families. Ellis et al. (2015) revealed that by examining the improvement of educational standards, parental engagement will transpire and improve student performance levels.

Figure 2

Processes of family involvement and young children's outcomes.



Father Participation in Preschool Activities

Over the last several years, there has been a growing awareness of father engagement in preschool environments (Rollè et al., 2019). The primary years are the most critical of a child's life. Brooks-Gunn et al., (2016) indicated that fathers should use the primary years of a child's life to develop a foundation that constantly engages them in the child's learning and development. Father engagement is widely acknowledged to have a positive impact on children's learning in mainstream education, and interventions to increase parental engagement have had some success in improving educational outcomes (See & Gorard 2015). Baker (2018) conducted a study that investigated predictors of improving academic achievement and social-emotional skills. The findings

concluded that 74 % of nonresidential fathers participated in their child's preschool learning. In another study, Foster et al. (2016) reported that fathers' contributions were a significant predictor of children's early academic skills.

As teachers continue to have challenges engaging fathers in their child's education, some provisions need to be made to ensure there is an increasing measure of engagement from fathers. Sani and Treas (2016) stated "to clarify patterns in parental time in childcare, including trends in the important educational gradient, systematic analysis over a large set of countries is needed." (p. 1084). "Children whose parents are actively involved in their schooling benefit better than children whose parents are passively involved" (Đurišić & Bunijevac, p. 144). The authors also indicated "by examining parents' and teachers' perceptions, educators and parents should have a better understanding of effective parental engagement practices in promoting student achievement." (p. 144). Furthermore, Rollè et al. (2019) organized a study that examined the association between father involvement and the development of children's cognitive skills during early and middle childhood. The findings proved that father engagement was positively associated with children's math and reading skills and teacher-related approaches to learning during preschool.

Barriers to Father Engagement

Jeynes (2015) advised that father engagement continues to be a crucial component to the academic success of children; however, several barriers hinder fathers from being engaged as much as they would like (Mathwasa & Okeke, 2016). Bateson et al. (2017) suggested that the barriers of father engagement potentially include "the preponderance

of female early years professionals, societal attitudes and biases around fatherhood, a lack of specialist training or personal reflective space on fatherhood for early years professionals, workload capacity of early years professionals, and a reluctance of some mothers to include their partner." (p. 124).

Gender roles are considered to be a major barrier that hinders father engagement. The teaching profession is highly regarded as a "feminine profession" (Perez de Villarreal & Zufiaurre, p. 43). Gender segregation in early childhood education is one of the highest in most professions (Besnard & Letarte, 2016). Bateson et al. (2017) reported that "both genders make assumptions about the female-centric nature of care." (p. 124). In the early childhood field, there is a lack of males that enter and remain. Fitzgerald et al. (2020) summarized that fathers have been perceived as being uninterested and less nurturant; however, they are more interested in noncaregiving roles. Females are characterized as natural nurturers and have a soft feminine touch (Bullough, 2015). Males are characterized as a tool for classroom management due to their more dominant appearance and personalities (Cole et al., 2019). Males are also known as the "breadwinner" in their families, but unfortunately with the low wages associated with the education field, they often leave the field to pursue better-paying jobs to support their families (Jones & Aubrey, 2019). Keizer (2020) reported that higher educated fathers, who have significant skills and resources, flexible jobs, and stable families, can expand their roles beyond breadwinning and are more likely to adhere to norms of intensive parenting.

Gender stereotypes are another barrier that hinders father engagement. For example, males battle with others questioning their masculinity by working with young children (Davis & Hay, 2017). Solomon (2016) suggested that the "male and female gender binary remains a default perspective. Moreover, a more inclusive view of the gender spectrum can enhance and inform our practice and worldview." (p. 71). Siyanova-Chanturia et al. (2015) indicated that gender is often associated with a specific occupation, personal trait, or activity, and we rely on our beliefs and background knowledge to infer. Gender stereotypes ultimately influence a father's attitude toward engagement in their child's development and learning (Güder & Ata, 2018). Furthermore, Park and Banchefsky (2018) suggested that there is a greater disconnect between the social category of men and the social role of a dad than that of women with the role of mom.

Another barrier that hinders father engagement is incarceration. According to Murphey and Cooper (2015), approximately 7% of all children in the United States have had a parent spend time in prison or jail, ranging from 6 % of Caucasian children to nearly 12 % of African American children. Washington et al. (2018) conducted a previous study that proved "paternal incarceration exerts a deleterious influence on father involvement." (p. 3477). Porter and King (2015) described the linkage between delinquency and paternal incarceration by the absence of a father from a household and a child's subjective attachment to the father. It has been reported that there is an increase in parental incarceration and father absence from the majority of adults that are confined to jails and prisons (Menjívar, 2016; Ousey & Kubrin, 2018). Leath (2017) described an

absent father as a male, biological parent who fails to provide emotional, financial, and other forms of consistent support for his children. Ryabov (2020) indicated having their parent incarcerated can have profound implications for the life course of many children. Due to the current barrier of incarceration of fathers, McLeod and Bonsu (2018) noted that some correctional institutions have tried to increase and improve visitation and contact for parents and children by offering more developmentally appropriate and child-friendly visitation areas, secure contact visits, increased phone and visitation privileges, more ample access to video visitation, and evidence-based intervention strategies. Once incarcerated, "fathers face considerable challenges to reestablish relationships with their children, and the risk for recidivism is high" (Charles et al., 2019, p. 225). Martin (2017) suggested that the strength or weakness of the parent-child bond and the quality of the child and family's social support system play significant roles in the child's ability to overcome challenges and succeed in life.

Another barrier that is considered to be the most common that hinders father engagement, which was reported by fathers, is the ongoing contentious relationships with the mothers of their children (Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, 2015). The term gatekeeping has been controversial in some policy areas because it suggests that mothers are to blame for fathers' noninvolvement with children (Fagan & Kaufman, 2015). "Unmarried/nonresident fathers report resistance to their involvement from the coparenting mother, who often expect fathers to buy access to their children via contributions of formal or informal child support, and do not see the involvement of noncontributing fathers in other, nonfinancial ways, as desirable or beneficial for

children" (Jessee & Adamsons, 2018, p. 30). Meggiolaro and Ongaro (2018) argued that it is not the marital status in itself that leads to differing childcare involvement across types of couples, but rather unmarried couples and fathers differ in a variety of ways from their married counterparts, which influences the father's investment in childcare. Some mothers construct boundaries that exclude fathers from engaging with their children. For example, "exclusion occurs because of violent or neglectful behavior toward family members. Also, they are excluded for not providing financial support to the family" (Fagan & Cherson, 2017, p. 635). Nomaguchi (2017) argued that fathers' participation in parenting relates to mothers' parenting stress and depends on the extent to which mothers expect such contributions from the father. Cooper et al. (2015) reported that high-quality coparenting relationships are expected to be especially important to the involvement of nonresident fathers. Due to relationship instability, parents may end their relationship or get married, transition into or out of cohabitation, find new romantic partners, or choose to live with a grandparent or other relatives (Osborn & Ankrum, 2015).

A final barrier that hinders father engagement is working conditions. Laris (2018) reported that fathers' employment status and economic stability influence the relationship with children. Most research on irregular work schedules and father involvement has been conducted with two-parent households (Weinshenker, 2016). Pilarz et al. (2020) indicated that irregular work schedules may indirectly impact fathers' amount and quality of time with children by taking a toll on their physical and mental health. Reimer (2015) also suggested that fathers' possibilities and likelihood to engage in childcare might be mediated particularly through workplace cultures. Various countries such as Norway,

Sweden, Iceland, Germany, and France provide fathers with incentives called “daddy quotas” that achieve a more equal division of childcare, housework, and employment between mothers and fathers (Tamm, 2015). In addition to work conditions, it is also important to discuss socioeconomic status as it is linked to work conditions and father engagement barriers in preschool environments (Wang et al., 2016). Lechuga-Peña & Brisson (2018) indicated low-income parents face multiple barriers that prevent them from being involved with their children either at school or at home. Arditti et al. (2019) noted fathers that who are economically disadvantaged “show patterns of engagement that either does not fit more typical models of father engagement or reflect adaptations to environmental constraints” (p. 69).

Teacher Roles in Engaging Fathers in Preschool Environments

The roles that teachers have on father engagement are influential in identifying strategies to increase engagement in their child’s education. Gokturk and Dinckal (2018) stated that teachers can provide aid to a child by engaging their parents. There are several methods in which teachers can encourage father engagement in their child’s education. Dahlin (2016) discussed approaches to family engagement to be implemented in preschool environments. The author concluded that teachers can engage families in their child’s education by (a) building awareness around family engagement, (b) providing guidance to providers through documents and tools on family engagement standards and strategies, (c) providing information geared to families in multiples formats, (d) creating professional development opportunities, (e) providing funding to support family

engagement training and activities, and (f) creating a position at the state or local level to coordinate and support family engagement.

Epstein (2018) noted that educators must enter the profession with an understanding of how they will develop and maintain partnership programs that inform and involve families. Furthermore, Epstein also noted that families cannot remain active in their child's education and development if these types of programs are unavailable. Community involvement in school activities includes people of different classes, tribes, views, languages, and people from different communities with different cultural backgrounds coming together to work (Donkor & Waek, 2018). Coleman (2018) stated that a very close family or a community that is characterized by many relations of interdependence will have extensive norms and delineated sanctions that serve to control deviant actions by its members. Hauseman et al. (2017) indicated that "facilitating school–community involvement is a relatively new job demand with an increase in the complexity and volume of work-related tasks, contributes to work intensification." (p. 86).

Family engagement standards and strategies must be presented in a way that will help teachers and other practitioners make the connection between intent and application (Dahlin, 2016). Grant and Ray (2018) noted that there are several professional organizations and projects that display a framework for family engagement practices such as Clinically Rich Plus Family Engagement Project, National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), Council for Accreditation of Education Preparation (CAEP), Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC), National

Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), Association for Childhood Education International (ACEI), National Board for Professional Teaching Standard (NBPTS). Each organization has its own set of standards and strategies of how teachers can strengthen family engagement practices. For example, Head Start has a Parent, Family, and Community Engagement (PFCE) Framework that provides programs with a research-based, organizational guide for implementing Head Start Program Performance Standards for parents, families, and community engagement (Head Start Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center, 2020). This framework is discussed with families during Head Start enrollment intake as a required standard.

Information geared to families must be provided in multiples formats. In today's modern era, there are multiple formats that teachers use to engage families, with an emphasis on technology usage. One way teachers communicate with families is through parent-teacher conferences. Walker and Legg (2018) indicated that parent-teacher conferences create a visible partnership to ensure that there is consistency between the home and school environment. The findings showed Pillet-Shore (2015) reported that parent-teacher conferences present teachers' up-to-date evaluations of student progress, with parents working to achieve a mutual understanding of and basic agreement over these evaluations. Oianas et al. (2017) stated that "teachers' feedback on pupil performance should be realistic and concrete so that parents know how to support their children in learning." (p. 61). Most traditional parent conferences are held face to face; however, with barriers such as COVID-19 (coronavirus), most preschool environments are beginning to host their conferences virtually (Grundmeyer & Yankey, 2016). During

conferences, teachers develop portfolios to share with families. Knauf (2017) explained that portfolios contain entries that present the children as having fun, cultivating friendship, being prepared for school, receiving high-quality care, and being valued as individuals. With technology becoming the new trend in present-day curriculums (Lyons & Tredwell, 2015), a recent study showed that eportfolios have also made a positive contribution to collaborative parent-teacher partnerships in the context of this setting (Beaumont-Bates, 2017).

Another format that teachers engage families is through digital messaging apps that can send communications directly to the parent's mobile device (Setyawan et al., 2016) and social media (Willis & Exley, 2018). For example, there are popular applications used such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Remind, ParentSquare, and ClassDojo. Digital platforms also enable exchanging information about all running issues but also about more personal matters such as pupil progress, possible conflicts in school, or learning difficulties (Heath et al., 2015; Palts & Kalmus, 2015). Ventura et al. (2018) indicated that mobile technology, video games, and the Internet create nonprint forms of learning that highlight the need to investigate new cognitive processes.

Providing professional development opportunities is an important aspect strategy that is needed to keep teachers abreast of current trends and issues in the field of early childhood. The term professional development is defined as in-service training opportunities for teachers who work in center-based childcare (Egert et al., 2018). For example, Regional Educational Laboratory Pacific developed a toolkit of resources for engaging families and the community as partners in education, which addresses the

challenge of achieving a level of family and community engagement that supports student success by bringing together research, promising practices, and useful tools and resources (Garcia et al., 2016). Hauge (2019) indicated that teachers' professional development can lead to improvements in teaching and the development of pedagogical thinking about students' learning and development. In many states, ongoing professional development hours are required for teachers that work in early childhood, based upon their level of education. For example, in North Carolina, USA, (a) preschool teachers that have a 4-year degree or higher are only required to obtain 5 clock hours, (b) preschool teachers that have a 2-year degree or higher are only required to obtain 8 clock hours, (c) preschool teachers that have a certification or diploma in early childhood are only required to obtain 10 clock hours, (d) preschool teachers that have 10 years documented experience as an early childhood caregiver are only required to obtain 5 clock hours, and (e) preschool teachers that have none of the criteria are required to obtain 20 clock hours (North Carolina Division of Health and Human Services, 2020). Kennedy (2016) reported that teachers participating in professional development have already developed their practice and they have already found ways to balance among their many competing challenges and ideals. Finding ways to support and develop teachers remains a strategy worth pursuing with urgency to rebuild a teaching workforce from the point of recruitment (Gore et al., 2017).

Professional development is not free. In order to provide teachers with adequate professional development opportunities that support family engagement training and activities, the appropriate funding must be available. Darling-Hammond et al., (2017)

suggested that policymakers can provide flexible funding and continuing education units for learning opportunities that include sustained engagement in collaboration, mentoring, and coaching, as well as institutes, workshops, and seminars. Nearly half of $3.0 billion in federal funding under Title II, Part A, and billions more in other federal funds go to the professional development of teachers and leaders in our schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). With limited funding and continuous cuts in our education system, teachers must explore other opportunities to obtain funding (Sutcher et al., 2016). Dahlin (2016) stated that it is essential to provide funding not only for the activities themselves, but the teachers' time at these activities as it recognizes the importance of the work and the contribution of the staff.

It is important for teacher advocates also identified as teacher leaders (Poekert et al., 2016) to be a voice for children and families to coordinate and support family engagement. Bradley-Levine (2018) indicated that "teacher leaders are driven to advocate because they feel allied with their students or because they deeply understand their students' circumstances and needs." (p. 50). Smylie and Eckert (2018) noted that advocacy for and of teacher leaders and teacher leadership is important, but if teacher leadership is to improve schools our focus should extend beyond identifying or waiting for the emergence of the next teaching superhero to lead. Berger (2015) reported that newly emerging images of early childhood educators as researchers and critical thinkers broaden and extend possibilities for educators to see themselves beyond those who apply theories and policies developed somewhere else. Keegan (2020) noted that there is a growing need for mentors and coaching in early childhood. Furthermore, the author

reported that opportunities need to be provided that involves observation, planning, reflection, teamwork, and cooperation.

Kuusimaki et al. (2019) noted that the growing demands connected to using the appropriate communication channel for various kinds of information can directly affect the teacher's workload and well-being. Pfitzner et al. (2015) discovered that a better understanding of the engagement process and clear developed strategies are required to ensure recruiting, maintaining, and engaging fathers in preschool programs are established. McDowall et al. (2017) noted that increased perseverance from teachers contributing to father engagement in the classroom will positively influence the overall outlook on children's education and father's commitment to their child's education.

Summary and Conclusions

The information I presented in this chapter included a review of the literature, my literature search strategy, and the conceptual framework for this study. The literature included the importance of preschool environments, parental roles in preschool environments, father participation in early childhood activities, barriers of father engagement, and teacher roles in engaging fathers in preschool environments. Due to the lack of research on father engagement, there is still a need for further research to increase father engagement in children's education. From the literature, it was concluded that there are opportunities that are needed to reduce and eliminate barriers to father engagement. Father engagement has been neglected although there is proven research that demonstrates the positive effect it has on a child's education. In my study, the gap in practice is filled by investigating preschool teachers' perspectives on engaging fathers in

their child's education. In Chapter 3, I will introduce the research design, methodology, and data analysis plan for my study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to investigate preschool teachers' perspectives on engaging fathers in their child's education. There continues to be a lack of literature on preschool teachers' perspectives on engaging fathers in the educational process of their children. Furthermore, there is also a lack of inadequate resources and challenges that are added to the teacher's workload. In this chapter, I will present the research design and rationale, and methodology. The methodology will include participant selection, instrumentation, data analysis plan, trustworthiness, and ethical procedures.

Research Design and Rationale

The research question that guided this study was: What are preschool teachers' perspectives on engaging fathers in their child's education? This was a basic qualitative study with the use of interviews of teachers in preschool environments. This type of study was selected to discover the challenges preschool teachers are having to improve the engagement of fathers in the educational process of children. The research question provided assisted with an in-depth investigation to analyze how teachers engage fathers in their child's education. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016,) "qualitative research is composed based on the understanding of how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (p. 6). The qualitative method included individual teacher interviews to gain extensive information on teachers' personal experiences. The rationale of qualitative interviews was to "understand contributions in complex social situations or the reasons underlying

behaviors" (Bullock, 2016, p. 330). The results from the individualized interviews will be used to make comparisons and connections to gain an understanding of teachers' perspectives of father engagement in their child's education.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher's role in this qualitative study was that of the observer to collect, analyze, code, implement, and report the findings of the research and interviews that will be conducted. I was not a participant in the study since the data was collected from preschool teachers. My experience in early childhood education includes serving as a program assistant at a youth center on a military base, managing a franchise childcare program, managing and leading a university laboratory school, and instructing college-level courses that teach students how to own and operate an early childhood program. I have served on local early childhood policy councils to inform and provide guidance on trends and issues in early childhood education. I have an undergraduate degree in child development and family studies with a family life education certification. I also have a graduate degree in youth, family, and community sciences with a concentration in administration and leadership.

My knowledge, skills, and dispositions from the various capacities that I have served have made me aware of the potential bias in teachers' perspectives of father engagement in their child's education. To eliminate any bias, I was not affiliated with the center that was selected to collect data from, nor did I have a professional or personal relationship with the participants who were employed at the selected center. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) noted to prevent personal assumptions, prejudices, and viewpoints from

filtering into a study, the researcher needs to explore and be aware of their own experiences. While working with the participants, I remained objective during the entire research process. To accomplish enhance objectivity, I kept a journal as suggested by Ravitch and Carl (2016) where I could make notes about my thoughts and experiences that would contribute to my study. Member checking was also used to provide participants with transcripts of the data collected and a draft of the findings for review of accuracy. No amendments were necessary. Also, a field test was conducted with two members from my targeted population. The members were from a different preschool program, and they provided feedback to my interview questions to ensure the questions were clear and understandable. After the field test, I determined that the interview protocol did not need to be amended.

Methodology

In this section, participant selection logic, instrumentation, and data analysis is explained further.

Participant Selection

The targeted population that was used for this study was preschool teachers from a preschool environment. In most preschool environments that are not funded by the federal or state government, parent engagement is not required; however, it is strongly encouraged. I conducted research from a preschool program that is in North Carolina, USA. The preschool program that was selected to participate in the study was licensed through the State of North Carolina and had a five-star rating. A virtual meeting was set up with the center director where I discussed my study via Zoom. The meeting was

conducted synchronously. The purpose of this meeting was to discuss the purpose of my study and obtain a letter of cooperation for the preschool to participate.

The center where I completed my study employs two preschool teachers per classroom. This center also has male teachers that are employed by the center. There is a total of 11 classrooms with 22 teachers. All 22 teachers were invited to participate in the study; however, only 12 teachers were included in my study, noting that all were not willing to participate. Both teachers per classroom were classified and coteachers and had equal responsibility for engaging families in their classroom and early childhood environment. I selected teachers that had at least 3 years of teaching experience in early childhood. All of the preschool teachers had at least 3 years of experience (Program director, personal communication, January 20, 2021). This allowed teachers to communicate from a broad range of experiences they had encountered from working and engaging with fathers in a preschool environment.

To identify participants of this study, the center director provided me with the contact information for the teachers that met the criteria. An invitation email was sent out to the teachers that met the criteria. Teachers were asked to contact me regarding their interest in participating in the study via email. Once they contacted me, I set up a virtual meeting to explain the study and emailed the participant consent form. Participants were given a few days to review the study and the form before giving consent to participate. If participants felt they understood the study and wished to volunteer, they indicated their consent by replying to the email with the words, “I consent”. I instructed them to keep a copy of the consent form for their records. Afterward, I scheduled another virtual meeting

to interview the teachers using a one-on-one open interview approach based on their experiences with engaging fathers in their child's education. Prior to the interviews, a field test was conducted with two members from my targeted population. The members were from a different preschool program. The two field test members provided feedback to my interview questions to ensure the questions were clear and understandable. After the field test, it was determined that the interview protocol did not need to be amended.

The sample size of my study was limited to 12 participants. This sample size allowed me to obtain meaningful data that contributed to the findings of teachers' perspectives on father engagement in their child's education. Sampling in qualitative research acquires information that is useful for understanding the complexity, depth, variation, or context surrounding a phenomenon (Gentles et al., 2015).

Instrumentation

For this study, I interviewed 12 preschool teachers on their perspectives of father engagement in their child's education. Before collecting any data, each participant indicated their consent. Participants were given a few days to review the study and the form before giving consent to participate. If participants felt they understood the study and wished to volunteer, they indicated their consent by replying to the email with the words, "I consent". The interview protocol consisted of open-ended interview questions that were conducted via Zoom. Each virtual interview was conducted synchronously. The interview protocol can be found in Appendix A. Prior to the interviews, a field test was conducted with two members from my targeted population. The members were from a different preschool program, and they provided feedback to my interview questions to

ensure the questions were clear and understandable. After the field test, it was determined that the interview protocol did not need to be amended. There were eight open-ended interview questions that allowed participants to provide authentic and detailed responses. Open-ended interview questions explore topics in-depth to understand processes and to identify potential causes of observed correlations (Weller et al., 2018). To gain a more in-depth understanding of the participant's responses, each question also included follow-up questions. Each interview question was aligned with the main research question: What are preschool teachers' perspectives on engaging fathers in their child's education?

To increase the internal credibility of the study, all interviews were recorded for transcription purposes. After interviews were transcribed and analyzed, they were sent to the participants to review for accuracy as a part of member checking. The responses to the interview questions provided an accurate response to my research question. No amendments were necessary. The results of my research may provide other preschool environments with an understanding of teachers' perspectives of father engagement and the need for inclusive opportunities to increase father engagement in their child's education.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

The participants in my study were recruited from an early childhood program that is in the eastern piedmont triad region in North Carolina, USA. The early childhood program that was selected to participate in the study was licensed through the State of North Carolina and had a five-star rating. To begin, I met with the center director via Zoom to explain the purpose of the study and reviewed the letter of cooperation. This

meeting was conducted synchronously. At the end of the meeting, I requested the center director to provide me with a list of potential teachers that meet the criteria. I recruited teachers that were at least 18 years old, had at least three years of teaching experience in early childhood, and worked in a 5-star rated facility. I developed an email invitation to recruit participants and requested a response if they were interested in participating. They were asked to contact me regarding their interest in participating in the study via email. Once they contacted me, I set up a virtual meeting to further explain the study and sent a participation consent form. Participants were given a few days to review the study and the form before giving consent to participate. If participants felt they understood the study and wished to volunteer, they indicated their consent by replying to the email with the words, “I consent”. I instructed participants to keep a copy of the consent form for their records. During the virtual meeting, I explained to the participants that the data collected in my study was for educational purposes and would remain anonymous. I notified them that confidentiality will remain a priority. Participants' names were not given; however, they were replaced with a pseudonym (e.g., teacher 1, teacher 2). My contact information was provided to all participants in the event there were any questions.

Twelve participants responded with an interest to participate in the study. I interviewed the teachers using a one-on-one open interview approach based on their experiences with engaging fathers in their child’s education. Prior to the preschool teacher interviews, a field test was conducted with two members from my targeted population. The members were from a different preschool program, and they provided feedback to my interview questions to ensure the questions were clear and

understandable. After the field test, it was determined that the interview protocol did not need to be amended. Participants were able to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Virtual interviews were recorded through Zoom and conducted synchronously. A journal was kept to record my thoughts and experiences of the interview protocol that contributed to my study. Interviews ranged from 45 to 60 minutes to allow a suitable amount of time for each participant. Each participant's consent was reviewed to ensure each participant understood the purpose of the study, the expected duration of the study, and the procedures to be followed. To increase the validity of the data collection, each interview was coded and transcribed. After transcribing, each participant was sent a copy of the transcription to review for accuracy. Participants spent a couple of days reviewing the transcript to ensure accuracy. Participants responded via email confirming the accuracy of the transcription. Member checking was used to provide participants with transcripts of the data collected and a draft of the findings for review of accuracy. No amendments were necessary.

I debriefed with each of the participants after completing their one-on-one interview and transcriptions review. A follow-up interview was not necessary. I explained and made sure they understood that all data collected would remain anonymous and participant identity would remain confidential. I gave a final opportunity for participants to ask any questions. Finally, I thanked them for their participation and provided them with a $15 egift card as an incentive for participating.

Data Analysis Plan

This study was focused on preschool teachers' perspectives on father engagement in their child's education; therefore, the participants used their own language to describe personal experiences of how they attempt to engage fathers in their child's education. By allowing the participant to use their own words, I was able to draw conclusions on the participant's ideas and thoughts, which contributed to the accuracy of their perspectives. Next, I used the six phases of thematic analysis as Braun and Clarke (2006) described to further analyze the data.

Phase one included transcribing the data. Each interview transcript was reviewed multiple times to note similar patterns based on each participant's own language and responses. Each interview was also transcribed in written form to conduct a thematic analysis. Phase two included coding features of the data set in a systematic fashion. As a part of the initial coding process, I read through each transcript and made notes of any key phrases and responses that appeared to be similar. Similar key phrases and responses were color-coded. Once the initial coding process was completed and reviewed multiple times, the data was be assigned a category. Phase three included collating codes into potential themes. Once the categories were assigned, the phrases and responses were organized into themes that contributed to the answer to the research question. Phase four included reviewing the themes. The themes were organized into a thematic map. The thematic map included the coded extracts that represented level one and the entire data set that represented level two. Phase five included defining and naming themes. Each theme received an individual analysis that was related to the research question. Further

analysis of the themes identified if there are subthemes. At the end of this phase, all themes had a name that was included in the final analysis. Phase six included producing the final analysis. The interview transcripts used in my study contributed to the data analysis and ensured it aligned with the problem, purpose, research question, significance, literature, and conceptual framework. Discrepancy cases may arise. The procedure to treat discrepancy cases was to search for cases that did not align with similar phrases and responses. The categories and themes were analyzed more concisely. Member checking was used to provide participants with transcripts of the data collected and a draft of the findings for review of accuracy. No amendments were necessary. A field test was conducted with two members from my targeted population. The members were from a different preschool program, and they provided feedback to my interview questions to ensure the questions were clear and understandable. After the field test, it was determined that the interview protocol did not need to be amended.

Trustworthiness

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) indicated that data needs to be consistent and reliable for trustworthiness to occur. Throughout the study, I used strategies that remained consistent and reliable. In this section, I will discuss credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability strategies that will further support trustworthiness in my study.

Credibility also referred to as internal validity is a key factor that contributed to the trustworthiness of a study. Hammarberg et al. (2016, p. 500) indicated that a qualitative study is credible when its “results, presented with adequate descriptions of

context, are recognizable to people who share the experience and those who care for or treat them." In my study, there were different strategies that established credibility such as a field test, journal records, and member checks. Prior to the preschool teacher interviews, a field test was conducted with two members from my targeted population. The members were from a different preschool program, and they provided feedback to my interview questions to ensure the questions were clear and understandable. After the field test, it was determined that the interview protocol did not need to be amended. Journal records were used to make notes about my thoughts and experiences on the progression of the study from beginning to end. Conclusively, member checking was used to provide participants with transcripts of the data collected and a draft of the findings for review of accuracy. Saldana (2016) noted that member-checking is a way to consult the participants as a method used to validate their findings. No amendments were necessary.

Transferability refers to the results of qualitative research being transferred to other contexts or settings with other respondents (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Leung (2015) suggested that transferability is supported by providing clear descriptions of the population, sample, setting, and methods used in a study, so that others may themselves determine the transferability of the findings to their own contexts. Throughout the study, the population, sample, setting, and methods were mentioned clearly using "thick descriptions" as mentioned by Roller and Lavrakas (2015, p.363) for other respondents to make connections to other contexts.

Dependability is another key factor that contributed to the trustworthiness of this study. Merriam and Grenier (2019) indicated dependability is established if the research findings are consistent and replicable. The authors also noted that using an audit trail supports the dependability of the study by being transparent and reliable. I used the audit trail to record the progress of the data collection and data analysis process. All participants were able to withdraw from the study voluntarily without any penalization. I recorded all interviews synchronously via Zoom. The interviews were transcribed and sent to participants for accuracy. The data that was collected from participants in my study was able to contribute to the limited literature on father engagement.

Confirmability is concerned with establishing that data and interpretations of the findings are not figments of the inquirer's imagination, but clearly derived from the data (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). To establish confirmability in my study reflexivity was used. Reflexivity enables researchers to acknowledge the changes brought about in themselves as a result of the research process and how these changes have affected the research process (Palaganas et al., 2017). The data was analyzed to ensure that the findings of the study accurately reflected the participants' perspectives of father engagement in their child's education. A reflective journal was maintained to record the progress of the data collection and analysis from beginning to end.

Ethical Procedures

I received approval from Walden University's IRB before beginning the study. My approval number is 04-08-21-0982675 and expires April 7, 2022. I obtained a letter of cooperation from the center director to reference the early childhood program. The

center director provided me with a list of teachers that met the criteria to participate in the study. I sent an invitation email to the teachers that met the criteria and asked them to contact me if they were interested in participating. A virtual meeting was set up to explain the study and provide the participants with the consent forms. Participants were given a few days to review the study and the form before giving consent to participate. If participants felt they understood the study and wished to volunteer, they indicated their consent by replying to the email with the words, “I consent. Participants were instructed to keep a copy of the signed consent form for their records. All participants' names were not given and replaced with a pseudonym for identity protection. I explained to the participants that the data collected in my study was for educational purposes and would remain anonymous and participant identity would remain confidential. I was the only individual that had access to this data. The data will remain in a locked safe in my residence and be maintained for five years after the study is completed. After five years, all data that was collected from this study will be destroyed. All hard copies of data collection will be shredded, and any digital files stored on a password-protected computer and encrypted flash drive will be deleted immediately. Participants were notified that this was a voluntary study; therefore, they could withdraw from participating at any time without being penalized.

Summary

In this chapter, I provided an overview of the research design and methodology for this study. This basic qualitative study investigated preschool teachers’ perspectives on engaging fathers in their child’s education. I discussed the research design and

rationale, in addition to the approach that was used to conduct the study. I also discussed my role as the researcher. In the methodology section, I described participant selection and instrumentation. I also presented the procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection. The data analysis plan was also explained which included trustworthiness. It also addressed the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability to further support the trustworthiness in my study. Finally, ethical procedures were discussed that will protect the participants throughout the study. In Chapter 4, I will present the results of the study.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to investigate preschool teachers' perspectives on engaging fathers in their child's education. The following research question guided this study: What are preschool teachers' perspectives on engaging fathers in their child's education? In this chapter, I will describe the setting, data collection, data analysis, results, and evidence of trustworthiness.

Setting

The setting for this basic qualitative study with interviews was in a private early childhood program located in North Carolina, USA. Twelve preschool teachers participated in my study. Two were White females, eight were African American females, one was a Hispanic female, and one was an African American male. All teachers that were interviewed were identified as coteachers of the respective age group with which they worked. The teachers worked with children between the ages of 2 and 5 years old. All teachers were at least 18 years old and had at least 3 years of experience in early childhood. There were no personal or organizational conditions that influenced participants or their experiences at the time of study that affects the interpretation of the study results.

Data Collection

After obtaining approval from Walden's IRB, I began the recruitment process for this study. All participants were currently employed at the private early childhood program for this study. After a consultation with the center director, I requested a list of potential teachers that met the criteria to participate in the study. The center director

provided me with a list of 20 teachers, who were at least 18 years old and had at least 3 years of experience. Afterward, I sent an invitation email to all the teachers the center director provided and asked them to reply to the email if they were interested in participating. The email also included the participant consent form. After 2 weeks, I received a total of 8 responses from teachers that expressed interest in participating in the study. Due to the study requiring a minimum of 10 to 12 participants, I sent a follow-up email to the potential participants and four additional responses were received.

I collected data from 12 participants using the interview protocol that is found in the appendices. Each participant was interviewed using Zoom. All virtual interviews were conducted synchronously. Before beginning the interview, I introduced myself and thanked the participant for taking the time to participate in the interview. I gave an overview of the study and explained the purpose of the interview. I informed the participants that I would be recording the interview for transcription purposes. I also informed them that they would receive a copy of the transcript and be given an opportunity to review and make any changes if necessary. A reminder was given to the participants to ensure their identity would be protected with a pseudonym and all data that was collected would remain anonymous. Participants were informed that the data collected in my study was for educational purposes and they could withdraw from participating at any time without being penalized. Last, the participants were allowed to ask any questions and no participants had any questions.

The time reserved for each interview was 45 to 60 minutes. After all the interviews were complete, I began the transcription process. I listened to each recording

and typed what I heard. I also used the audio transcription option from Zoom to cross-check the transcript I typed. After transcripts were complete, I emailed each transcript to the respective participant and requested them to review for accuracy and make any necessary changes. Participants were requested to reply via email confirming the accuracy of their transcript. All participants replied that their transcript was accurate and reflected the answers that were given during the interview. No amendments were necessary. The transcript and recorded interviews are kept on my password-protected computer and encrypted flash drive. All hard copies of data collection will remain in a locked safe in my residence and be maintained for 5 years after the study is completed. After participants confirmed the accuracy of their transcript, I compensated them with a $15 gift card and thanked them for participating. I also informed them that if any questions arose, they could contact me at any time via email. No inconsistencies were encountered during the data collection. If any inconsistencies had been encountered, they would have been discussed in the findings.

Data Analysis

All participants were assigned a pseudonym to protect their identity in my study. I assigned each teacher with a letter, and they were referred to as such (i.e., Teacher A, Teacher B, Teacher C, etc.). The criteria for this study is that the participants must be at least 18 years old and have at least 3 years of experience. The teaching experiences of the teachers ranged from 3 to 26 years. Four teachers had 3 years of experience, one teacher had 4 years of experience, two teachers had 5 years of experience, two teachers had 7 years of experience, one teacher had 9 years of experience, one teacher had 16.5 years of

experience, and one teacher had 26 years of experience. A summary of the participant's demographics is shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant Code	Gender	Years of Experience	Highest Level of Education	Race
Teacher A	Female	16.5 years	Associate's	White
Teacher B	Male	3 years	High School	Afr. American
Teacher C	Female	4 years	Associate's	White
Teacher D	Female	7 years	High School	Hispanic
Teacher E	Female	3 years	High School	Afr. American
Teacher F	Female	7 years	Bachelor's	Afr. American
Teacher G	Female	3 years	Master's	Afr. American
Teacher H	Female	5 years	Associate's	Afr. American
Teacher I	Female	5 years	Associate's	Afr. American
Teacher J	Female	9 years	Bachelor's	Afr. American
Teacher K	Female	3 years	Bachelor's	Afr. American
Teacher L	Female	26 years	Bachelor's	Afr. American

The data collected were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke (2006). Once transcripts were confirmed by participants, I put the responses into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet to be able to review each response line by line. I read through each transcript and made notes of any key phrases and responses that appeared to

be similar. Those key phrases and responses were color-coded with the highlighter option in Microsoft Excel. Once the initial coding process was completed and reviewed multiple times, the data was assigned to a category. The 26 categories that were discovered in my study were: *email, apps, PTO meetings, parent-teacher conferences, face to face vs. phone, teaching vs. learning, curriculum, implementation, kindergarten preparation, development, culturally appropriate, pick-up, incarceration, work schedules, mom as main parent, knowledge, nonresident father, open communication, confidence, support, engaging conversation, positive rapport, support groups, interests vs. strengths, workshops, and training*. Once the categories were assigned, the phrases and responses were organized into themes that contributed to the answer to the research question. The themes that were organized were: *promoting parent-teacher communication opportunities, identifying teacher responsibilities for classroom engagement activities, understanding barriers that limit father engagement, providing resource opportunities for fathers to increase engagement, and teacher mentorship on father engagement strategies*. The categories and themes identified were produced in the final analysis. Table 2 includes the thematic map of categories and themes associated with the research question.

Table 2

Thematic Map of Categories and Themes Associated with Research Question

Categories	Themes
Phone, Email, Apps, PTO Meetings, Parent-Teacher Conferences, Face to Face	Promoting Parent-Teacher Communication Opportunities
Teaching, Curriculum, Kindergarten Preparation, Learning, Implementation, Development, Culturally Appropriate, Pick-up	Identifying Teacher Responsibilities for Classroom Engagement Activities
Incarceration, Work Schedules, Mom Main Parent, Knowledge, NonResident Father	Understanding Barriers that Limit Father Engagement
Support Groups, Interests vs. Strengths, Workshops, Training	Providing Resource Opportunities for Fathers to Increase Engagement
Open Communication, Confidence, Support, Engaging Conversation, Positive Rapport	Teacher Mentorship on Father Engagement Strategies

At the conclusion of my data analysis, there was no evidence detected of any discrepant data or nonconforming cases. If any discrepant data or nonconforming cases had arisen, I would have followed the procedure as stated in Chapter 3 and discussed the inconsistency in findings.

Results

The purpose of this study was to investigate preschool teachers' perspectives on engaging fathers in their child's education. The research question that guided this study was: What are preschool teachers' perspectives on engaging fathers in their child's

education? There was no evidence detected of any discrepant data or nonconforming cases in my study. The thematic analysis from the coded data generated the following themes:

Theme 1: Promoting Parent-Teacher Communication Opportunities

The teachers in my study discussed the opportunities for parent-teacher communication that is promoted with fathers in an attempt to engage in their child's education. The categories associated with this theme were phone, email, apps, PTO meetings, parent-teacher conferences, and face-to-face. The question was asked, "What communication methods do you use to engage fathers in your classroom?" All teachers expressed that they have various tools and strategies they use to communicate with fathers. Six out of 12 teachers said that majority of communication with fathers occurs in person using verbal communication. For example, Teacher A stated,"I believe one on one conversations help the most. It gives you a better feel for what's going on in the child's life." Similarly, Teacher B stated,

> The communication methods that I use are talking to parents during drop off and pick up, also flyers and email is a way of communicating. I also make phone calls and we use an app that our childcare center has so the parents can see what their children do all day.

Teacher F stated,

> Some communication methods I use to communicate with fathers are verbal face to face or phone call, classroom newsletters, parent-teacher conferences, PTO meetings, memos, email, social media, and child's work folder.

The participants conveyed that communication regardless of the type that is used is important and beneficial. A follow-up question was asked, “Which communication method do you believe is the most effective?” All participants responded that verbal face-to-face communication was the most effective. Participants noted that there is a greater connection between the parent and teacher when you can verbally speak to fathers in person. For example, Teacher C stated, “Verbal communication is the best.” Teacher G succintly stated, “Verbal.” Similarly, Teacher I stated,“I believe verbal communication is the most effective.”

Teachers were given the opportunity to discuss communications received from the fathers. Another follow-up question asked, “Do the fathers ever contact you about anything? If so, what? The majority of the time fathers contact their child’s teacher if it consists of anything academic or behavior-related. For example, Teacher D stated,

> Yes, I’ve had a few fathers call me or email me about what learning method do I do cause their child won’t stop talking about it or if there was an issue bout their child or another.

Similarly, Teacher G stated, “Yes, if they need assistance with something the child is trying to learn.” Teacher L stated, “Yes, about the child’s day, if they are going to be out for any reason, and questions about an assignment.”

Theme 2: Identifying Teacher Responsibilities for Classroom Engagement Activities

The teachers in my study identified the responsibilities that are carried out daily in their classroom to engage children and fathers. The categories associated with this theme were teaching, curriculum, Kindergarten preparation, learning, implementation,

development, culturally appropriate, and pick-up. The teacher's experience ranges from 3 years to 26 years. The participants were diverse and had various levels of education from high school to master's degrees. The question was asked, "What does your job involve?" For example, Teacher B stated,"My job involves implementing curriculum based on the months and the themes to go with." Teacher C stated, "Preparing our children for Kindergarten." Teacher E stated,

> My job involves the care for all children working in my care as outlined by the State of North Carolina and the center. Also teaching as outlined by our curriculum.

Teacher H stated,

> I serve families and young children, as well as model age and cultural appropriateness in development and learning styles of young children. I also practice positive interactions with children, families, and fellow teachers.

Teachers also discussed inclusion opportunities that engage fathers in their classrooms. Most of the engagement from fathers occurs during arrival and departure. A follow-up question was asked, "Can you walk me through a typical day in the center/classroom that includes engagement from fathers?" For example, Teacher B stated,

> The day starts off with drop off, some fathers drop off their children in the morning, so we have casual conversation about the child in my classroom. I also give the fathers that drop off an opportunity to volunteer for something going on in the classroom or around school that week or month. I also do the same during

> pick-up. The fathers ask if they can do anything, and I let them know they are always welcomed.

Also addressing the typical day, Teacher F stated,

> Children are sometimes brought to school or picked up by their fathers. They walk their child inside the building and are greeted by the staff and administration. Fathers sign their child in and then walk their child to the restroom where they encourage them to use the restroom and wash their hands. The fathers walk their children to the classroom and help them sign in by locating their picture and putting it on the classroom door. The fathers walk their children to their cubby and assist them in hanging up their belongings. At this time fathers are engaging with their child. They are told to have a great day and they say goodbye to their child. The pickup process is similar.

Likewise, Teacher J stated,

> A typical day in the center and classroom that includes father engagement is when the father is delivering and picking up their child. Fathers must sign in and sign out the child at arrival and before the child leaves for the day, fathers must take the child to the bathroom and wash his or her hands before entering the classroom.

Theme 3: Understanding Barriers that Limit Father Engagement

Teachers discussed the challenges and barriers faced that limit father engagement. The categories associated with this theme were incarceration, work schedules, mom as main parent, knowledge, and nonresident father. The question was asked, “What

challenges do you face attempting to increase fathers to engage in their child's education? The teachers expressed that there is an increased difficulty in attempting to engage fathers in their child's education. All teachers considered that work, time, and nonresidency are the main barriers that cause a limitation for fathers to engage in their child's education. For example, Teacher B stated, "Some fathers may not be in the child's lives so it is hard to even bring up the father." Teacher C stated, "Some fathers are just always working." Teacher H stated,

> In some cases, time has been the factor. Some fathers work two jobs and find it hard to make time for the child. Some fathers travel a lot for work and find it difficult to make time for the child.

Additionally, Teacher J stated,

> One major challenge that increases fathers not able to engage with their children is that the fathers are not living in the household or not in the same residences and may be incarcerated.

A follow-up question was asked, "How can these challenges be addressed?" The teachers expressed that they must first recognize the barriers and challenges that the fathers are having and provide alternative opportunities outside of the classrooms for fathers to engage. Also, teachers expressed providing resources that discuss the importance of engaging in your child's education and how to work around the barriers that are faced. For example, Teacher F stated,

> These challenges can be addressed by coming together as a staff to see if there could be a Zoom meeting that the fathers can participate in or come up with some other alternative solutions to include fathers who may work and can't come.

Teacher G stated, “These challenges can be addressed by educating fathers about the importance of early childhood experiences.” Teacher H stated,

> The best way to approach most individuals about this matter is to print out a calendar planner sheet for the week, Sunday through Saturday, and have them plan it out. Sometimes it is hard to vision something if you cannot visually see it.

Teacher I stated,

> If a child’s father is not in his or her life, I do not believe there is nothing that can be done about that other than just making sure the mother or whomever that has custody of the child stays informed and engaged in the child’s work and progress in school.

Theme 4: Providing Resource Opportunities for Fathers to Increase Engagement

The teachers acknowledged that fathers need resources to assist with the attempt to increase engagement in their child’s education. The categories associated with this theme were support groups, interests vs. strengths, workshops, and training. The question was asked, “What resources, supports, expertise, and other factors would make the biggest difference in increasing father engagement? Teachers noted that allowing the father to take charge of what they do and how they do it would support and make them feel more comfortable engaging in their child’s education. Furthermore, educating fathers and enabling them to join a support group with other fathers would assist with

engagement practices. From the educational framework and support that guides father engagement, teachers in my study believe that this will encourage more fathers to engage in their child's education. For example, Teacher B stated,

> Identifying the strengths and areas of expertise of what they do can help to increase father engagement. If a father is comfortable with something they do every day, they may feel more comfortable in participating.

Teacher F stated,

> I believe that having a support group for fathers and single fathers, making sure there is a variety of workshops and training available for fathers at times that accommodate working fathers who cannot come during designated dates or times, so they have the opportunity to participate, and mentor programs conducted by positive male role models.

Teacher G stated,

> Many fathers feel like education is the mother's job that's something that I have noticed across all ethnic groups. I think if the fathers had a support group to support one another, then more fathers would participate.

Teacher I stated, Working with fathers to help identify children's interest and strengths and just having open communication to build a safe and trusting relationship between the teacher and father. Teacher J stated, "Have a support system. Have resources and materials to offer to fathers, which includes reading stories, art, and drawing and finding out what the child is interested in."

Theme 5: Teacher Mentorship on Father Engagement Strategies

The teachers expressed support strategies that would help their peers in engaging fathers in their child's education. The categories associated with this theme were open communication, confidence, support, engaging conversation, and positive rapport. The question was asked, "What advice would you give to teachers who want to encourage father engagement but having difficulty doing so? Most teachers expressed feeling uncomfortable when engaging with fathers and how it is easier to engage with the mothers. The teachers noted that fathers do not express much interest in their child's education in comparison to mothers that want to know how the child behaves in the classroom and where they are developmentally in their academics. The teachers encouraged their peers and other teachers to remain confident and communicate effectively with fathers. For example, Teacher B stated,

> Don't be afraid to ask because fathers are a big part of the child's life. It is very important that especially boys have someone to look up to. Being the only male teacher at my center the children love it, also making flyers, and sending emails may be another option to reach out to fathers.

Teacher H stated,

> Don't give up. Many times, I have found out we have not because we ask not. Always engage in a conversation with your fathers. Asked them how their day is going. Also, find out their interests and/or hobbies. Even mentioning what they do for a living can spark a conversation.

Teacher I stated,

> Have confidence. Don't be shy or scared to communicate with families or father's when it comes to getting them involved in classroom activities and their child's education. Don't be overbearing. Take your time to feel each parent out. Learn their communication style/preference and build trust. Over time it will become easy especially if dealing with a difficult parent or father that may be challenging. Join a workshop that helps teachers encourage fathers and just families, in general, to be involved.

Teacher L stated, "Be confident and communicate. Most fathers want to participate but they wait for the teacher to make the first move to make sure they are comfortable."

A follow-up question was asked, "Would you be willing to coach/mentor them?" All teachers agreed that they would serve as a coach/mentor for teachers who want to encourage father engagement but having difficulty doing so. They provided various strategies for attempting to engage fathers in their child's education. For example, Teacher C stated, "Tell them how I would go about talking to fathers because some women are afraid to talk to fathers because they feel threatened by them." Teacher H stated,

> It first starts with communication and building a relationship. Educators must get to know their parents and build a relationship with them. Find out what they do for a living, what their likes and dislikes are. The more you know about your families, the better you can encourage engagement as well as mentoring someone.

Teacher J stated,

Could offer a workshop, attend zoom meetings about activities that would teach and engage fathers and create brochures with a list of websites fathers can go to. You could also provide simple activities and examples by making a list of supplies that would be needed to do an activity and gather simple books.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

Credibility is determined by specific methods used to confirm data after it has been gathered (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In my study, I interviewed 12 preschool teachers who were at least 18 years old and had at least three years of experience. Prior to the interview, a field test was conducted with two members from my targeted population. The members were from a different preschool program, and they provided feedback to my interview questions to ensure the questions were clear and understandable. After the field test, it was determined that the interview protocol did not need to be amended. I also used a reflective journal to make notes about my thoughts and experiences on the progression of the study. Furthermore, I used member checking and provided participants with transcripts of the data collected and a draft of the findings for review of accuracy. Participants confirmed the accuracy of their transcript via email. No amendments to the interview transcripts were necessary.

Transferability

Leung (2015) suggested that transferability is supported by providing clear descriptions of the population, sample, setting, and methods used in a study, so that others may themselves determine the transferability of the findings to their own contexts.

Throughout the study, I mentioned the population, sample, setting, and methods using thick descriptions to accomplish transferability. I recruited 12 preschool teachers; two were Caucasian females, eight were African American females, one was a Hispanic female, and one was an African American male. Their experience ranged from 3 years to 26 years. Their highest level of education ranged from high school to master's degree. This study describes participant's responses fully so that others may themselves determine the transferability of the findings to their own contexts.

Dependability

Merriam and Grenier (2019) indicated dependability is established if the research findings are consistent and replicable. I used the audit trail to record the progress of the data collection and data analysis process. All participants were informed that they were able to withdraw from the study voluntarily without any penalization. All virtual interviews were recorded synchronously via Zoom and saved on my password-protected computer. The recordings were used to transcribe the interview from each participant. After transcription was complete, it was sent to participants for accuracy. Participants confirmed accuracy via email. I also kept a reflective journal to make notes about my thoughts and experiences on the progression of the study.

Confirmability

To establish confirmability in my study reflexivity was used. I used the audit trail to record the progress of the data collection and data analysis process. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis to ensure that the findings of the study accurately reflected the participants' perspectives of father engagement in their child's education. A

reflective journal was maintained to record the progress of the data collection and analysis from beginning to end. The findings are related to five themes that contribute to the research question.

Summary

In Chapter 4, the results from the study were presented. I discussed the setting, data collection, data analysis, results, and evidence of trustworthiness. Twenty-six categories were discovered. Five themes emerged from the categories. The themes that emerged promoting parent-teacher communication opportunities, identifying teacher responsibilities for classroom engagement activities, understanding barriers that limit father engagement, providing resource opportunities for fathers to increase engagement, and teacher mentorship on father engagement strategies. The results of the research question were presented indicating that verbal communication between teachers and fathers is the most effective communication method, most engagement from fathers on a typical day is during arrival and departure, there are several challenges teachers face attempting to increase fathers to engage in their child's education, father support groups would make the biggest difference in increasing father engagement, and teachers expressed interest in serving as a coach/mentor for teachers who want to encourage father engagement but having difficulty doing so. The evidence of trustworthiness was discussed in detail in relation to credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Chapter 5 will discuss the interpretation of the findings, limitations, recommendations, implications, and conclusion of the study.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to investigate preschool teachers' perspectives on engaging fathers in their child's education. Ravitch and Carl (2016) mentioned that interviews are most appropriate when conducting qualitative research. The qualitative design in my study was based on interviews with preschool teachers in an early childhood environment. The goal of semistructured interviews was to generate insight and reflection (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016) on preschool teachers' perspectives on engaging fathers in their child's education. This study was conducted because little consideration has been placed on low engagement rates of father engagement and the support teachers offer for fathers to engage in their child's education.

An analysis of the data that was collected indicated that preschool teachers recognize the lack of engagement from fathers and the support that is needed to attempt to improve the engagement of fathers in their child's education. Participants indicated that verbal communication is the most effective communication method with the fathers, father engagement is displayed the most during arrival and departure, teachers face several challenges in an attempt to increase fathers to engage in their child's education, father support groups are needed, and coaching/mentoring opportunities for teachers was strongly entreated by participants.

Interpretation of the Findings

The findings of my study corroborated the literature review from Chapter 2. The study was based on one research question: What are preschool teachers' perspectives on engaging fathers in their child's education? The findings validated that despite the

importance of father engagement, there is still a lack of engagement practices that are present. The themes of this study indicated that teachers still lack the adequate resources needed in an attempt to increase the engagement of fathers in their child's education.

Theme 1: Promoting Parent-Teacher Communication Opportunities

The majority of preschool teachers conveyed that verbal communication was the most effective communication method to fathers. A small number of preschool teachers also mentioned that they communicate through email, apps, and over the phone. It was noted that mothers tend to be the first point of contact before the father. Nine out of 12 preschool teachers that were interviewed expressed behavior of being hesitant or uncomfortable when communicating with fathers. For example, one teacher reported that during morning arrival or departure, some fathers were on their cell phones and seemed uninterested in communicating. All the preschool teachers indicated that mothers were more approachable as they want to know how their child's day was, what they learned, and in what capacity they can assist in the child's development. Miller et al. (2016) confirmed that the stronger the engagement between parents and teachers, the stronger the academic success of the child.

It was noted that teachers required the skills and resources needed to engage mothers and fathers in communication equally. Arce (2019) confirmed a similar finding that the belief of having good communication is the key to building a working relationship with families. Nitecki (2015) reinforced that meaningful school-to-family relationships begin in preschool and have the potential to shape the child's and family's perceptions of school over time.

Theme 2: Identifying Teacher Responsibilities for Classroom Engagement Activities

A vast majority of the preschool teachers notated that during a typical day the only most engagement from the father they receive is during arrival and departure. This allows the teachers to greet and speak to the father if they are the parent that is present during that time. Dahlin (2016) validated a similar finding that teachers engage fathers in their child's education by building awareness around family engagement and providing guidance to providers through documents and tools on family engagement standards and strategies. As teachers continue to bridge the gap in increasing the engagement of fathers in their child's education, it is imperative to note that teachers ultimately set the foundation of parent engagement practices and strategies.

Epstein (2018) long-established that "educators must enter the profession with an understanding of how they will develop and maintain partnership programs that inform and involve families" (p. 67). A teacher that was interviewed reported that fathers can be engaged in their child's education by mentioning volunteering in the classroom, preparing activities at home for the child to complete with supervision, and participating in parent-teacher conferences. Dahlin (2016) confirmed this by mentioning several approaches teachers can use to involve fathers in their child's education. In today's society, there has been a push for more technology usage as children continue to learn and develop. Lyons and Tredwell (2015) verified a similar finding that technology has become the new norm in present-day curriculums and communications. Teachers reported that they use email, Zoom, and apps to engage children in their classroom and communicate effectively with families.

Theme 3: Understanding Barriers that Limit Father Engagement

There continues to be a lack of engagement from fathers in their child's education. Mathwasa & Okeke (2016) verified that several barriers hinder fathers from being engaged as much as they would like. The teachers expressed the challenges and barriers of father engagement. Nine out of 12 preschool teachers reported that they realized that most fathers do not participate because they are either a nonresident father, incarcerated, or their schedule does not allow them to engage in their child's education. Bateson et al. (2017) authenticated a similar finding that fathers experience several barriers in regard to engaging in their child's education including, but not limited to the dominance of females in the early childhood field, biases around fatherhood, a lack of training on fatherhood for early years professionals, workload capacity, and a reluctance of some mothers to include their partner. Teachers recognized that fathers examine preschool as a female dominant career and requires nurturing. Fitzgerald et al. (2020) established that fathers have been perceived as being uninterested and less nurturant. Teachers must continue to strategize techniques to reduce or limit barriers as they continue to become more prominent.

Theme 4: Providing Resource Opportunities for Fathers to Increase Engagement

Next, the teachers expressed what factors, resources, and supports would make the biggest difference in increasing father engagement. More than half of preschool teachers notated that professional development, support groups, and identifying the strengths and interests of the fathers would benefit in an attempt to increase the engagement of fathers in their child's education. Professional development is a childcare

requirement in most states. For example, in North Carolina, USA, where this study was completed, preschool teachers are required to complete a certain amount of training hours based on the highest level of education. Hauge (2019) validated that teachers' professional development can lead to improvements in teaching and the development of pedagogical thinking. Kennedy (2016) verified a similar finding that teachers participating in professional development have become experts in their field of study and developed strategies to face challenges. Pfitzner et al. (2015) confirmed a similar finding that teachers need access to training and professional development on how to engage fathers in their child's education. This can be used as an attempt to recruit and maintain fathers to engage in their child's education and preschool programs. Gore et al. (2017) supported a similar finding that ways to support and develop teachers remain a strategy worth pursuing with urgency to rebuild a teaching workforce from the point of recruitment.

Theme 5: Teacher Mentorship on Father Engagement Strategies

Finally, the teachers articulated strategies that would assist other teachers who want to encourage father engagement but having difficulty doing so. Berger (2015) confirmed that newly emerging images of early childhood educators as researchers and critical thinkers broaden and extend possibilities for educators to see themselves beyond those who apply theories and policies developed somewhere else. A majority of preschool teachers mentioned being confident, having open communication, and building a positive rapport with fathers could contribute to fathers being more engaged. For example, mentoring and coaching practices amongst staff members would serve as an

excellent opportunity to increase the comfort of teachers engaging fathers in their child's education. Keegan (2020) confirmed a similar finding that mentors and coaches are needed to assist teachers with their strategies to support the professional structures in early childhood education, including father engagement.

These findings validate the literature and show that there continues to be little consideration placed on low engagement rates of father engagement and the support teachers offer for fathers to engage in their child's education. Despite the lack of consideration that preschool teachers extend to fathers, gaining male teacher's perspectives and father's perspectives of how they engage in their child's education would serve as a valuable contribution for future studies. McDowall et al. (2017) proved that increased perseverance from teachers contributing to father engagement in the classroom will positively influence the overall outlook on children's education and father's commitment to their child's education.

Limitations of the Study

There were four limitations that were identified in my study. The first limitation was the inability to generalize results across the small sample size of the study. Twelve participants were included in the study from an early childhood program, located in a precise region in North Carolina, USA. Out of the 22 preschool teachers that were employed and met the criteria, only 12 preschool teachers participated and offered their views on engaging fathers in their child's education.

Another limitation was the small number of male teacher participants in the study. Out of the 22 preschool teachers employed by this early childhood program, only one

male participated. A larger sample of males may have been more willing to engage fathers than the female preschool teachers. Only one male teacher participated in my study. A larger male teacher population could increase a diverse perspective of how they attempt to engage fathers in their child's education.

Another limitation was the increase of single-family homes, where the mother is the head of the household, and fathers are not involved at all. The teachers that participated in my study described that most of the children that attend the early childhood program are being raised in a single-family home. Children are growing up with little or no father contact which may be leading to increased attainment deficits for children in single-mother families over time.

A final limitation was the parent-teacher engagement level based upon the age group of the classrooms. The goal and communication level of each developmental age group is slightly different. The teachers in the 2-year-old class focus on children's social and emotional development. The teachers in the 3 to 5-year-old classes focus on developmentally appropriate content and Kindergarten readiness skills.

Recommendations

Recommendations for further research regarding teachers' perspectives on engaging fathers in their child's education are based on the limitations that were identified in my study. I recommend that this study be reproduced in other early childhood programs within the same location, with a larger sample size. A larger sample size would help to disconfirm the findings and add to current teacher perspectives of engaging fathers in their child's education.

Another recommendation would be to seek an early childhood program that has more male teacher representation. Male perspectives of engaging fathers in their child's education may be slightly different from female perspectives. More male teacher perspectives could reveal more information that is needed in an attempt to increase the engagement of fathers in their child's education.

Participant's perspectives revealed that they would like to see an increase in how fathers engage in their child's education; however, there is a lack of inadequate resources and challenges that are added to the teacher. Based on these results, I recommend that future research identify what support and resources are needed for teachers to be successful in attempting to engage fathers in their child's education.

Implications

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to investigate preschool teachers' perspectives on engaging fathers in their child's education. The research of this study disclosed various perspectives of early childhood teachers on fathers engaging in their child's education. Results of this study indicated that preschool teachers need more professional development opportunities that examine how to engage fathers in their child's education. With a high level of discomfort of engaging fathers, such training can be obtained through professional early childhood organizations and/or professional development conferences. The preschool where I completed my study is licensed through the State of North Carolina and requires preschool teachers to obtain training hours based upon their highest level of education. Training should be readily available and accessible

for all teachers that aspire to enhance their knowledge and skills on how to engage fathers in their child's education.

All of the preschool teachers agreed that support was needed to address the challenges that are faced in attempting to increase father engagement in their child's education. The majority of the preschool teachers indicated in my study that they would like to see more fathers engaged; however, the lack of inclusion practices and strategies affects the effort. The literature shows that fathers are often overlooked and are not invited to participate in comparison to mothers. It is detrimental that teachers identify the challenges fathers endure as an attempt to engage in their child's education and the tools and resources that are needed to address those challenges. An educational foundation begins in the early years. The earlier the father is engaged the more they will value their child's education.

From my study, a vast majority of the preschool teachers reported that an increased equal representation of fathers in their child's education is needed to reduce the lack of support that fathers receive when attempting to engage in their child's education. I also learned from interviews that nine out of 12 preschool teachers reported they have a low comfort' level of attempting to engage fathers in their child's education. The literature in my study identified that fathers are often ignored or disregarded by preschool teachers (Panter-Brisk et al., 2014). Inclusive strategies of fathers serve as an opportunity to enhance the research on father engagement as a whole. Research has also determined that fathers have a powerful influence on children's academic success and behavior (Connor & Stolz, 2021). When fathers are engaged in their child's education, they are

43% more likely to earn an "A" average in school and 33% less likely to repeat a grade than those without engaged dads (Nord & West, 2001). In fact, father engagement has a greater association with child behavioral outcomes and psychological measures than they do with academic achievement (Jeynes, 2015). As a result, data must be collected from preschool teachers about fathers that are engaged in their child's education and the challenges that are faced in assisting more fathers to be engaged.

This study presents several implications for positive social change. It implies that preschool teachers can increase the engagement of fathers in their child's education by providing equal and inclusive opportunities for fathers. The data that was reported indicated that nine out of 12 preschool teachers would be more willing to include fathers if they were provided with adequate resources (e.g., professional development workshops, training, webinars,) to be more effective. Research in the existing literature revealed that fathers are engaged more today in their child's education than they were in the past; however, there is still progress that needs to be made to increase the overall number of fathers that engage in their child's education (Goldscheider et al., 2015; Macon et al., 2017; Rushing & Sparks, 2017). Furthermore, fathers who are engaged in their child's education at the preschool level will continue to be engaged when the child reaches the college level (Jeynes, 2015). Most of the preschool teachers from this study suggested if they inclusively strategize together on ways to engage fathers, there will be an overall positive outcome on children's education and father's commitment to their child's education. The results from this study validate that there are various tools and

strategies that preschool teachers require in an attempt to increase engagement from fathers in their child's education and produce positive child outcomes.

For future research, there is a need to expand the research sample to a larger population of male teachers. Only one male teacher participated in my study. A larger male teacher population will enable a diverse perspective of how they attempt to engage fathers in their child's education. Additionally, gaining fathers' perspectives of how they engage in their child's education would serve as a valuable contribution for future research.

Conclusion

Results of this basic qualitative study have shown that little consideration has been placed on low engagement rates of father engagement and the support teachers offer for fathers to engage in their child's education. There are several challenges that teachers face that affect how teachers engage fathers in their child's education including comfort levels of communication, barriers from fathers, and the reluctance to include fathers. From these results, it is evident the father engagement has a positive impact on children and the way teachers perceive fathers. Preschool teachers who are provided with the adequate tools and resources to engage fathers in their child's education will see an improved outcome of fathers that engage in their child's education. Fathers also need the tools and resources to be equally represented in early childhood programs. The perspectives and attitudes of teachers are more likely to change when there is an increased balance of representation from fathers.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Time of interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewee Pseudonym:

Introductory Statement:

Hello, my name is Jawan Burwell. Thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview. The purpose of this interview is to investigate your perspective on engaging fathers in their child's education. The time reserved for this interview is 45 to 60 minutes. After the interview, I will be examining your answers for data analysis purposes. The interview will be recorded for transcription purposes. Once the interview is transcribed, I will email the transcription to you for review. If any changes need to be made, please make the necessary corrections, and email them back to me. As a reminder, your identity will be protected with a pseudonym, and all data collected will remain anonymous. You can choose to stop this interview at any time. Do you have any questions? Are you ready to begin?

Interview Questions:

1. How long have you been working at this center?
    a. What does your job involve?
    b. Can you walk me through a typical day in the center/classroom that includes engagement from fathers?
2. How do you encourage fathers to engage with their children at school?

   a. Does your center have an open house? What is the approximate percentage of fathers that attend?
   b. Tell me about a time you had to engage a father with his child while at school.
   c. What events are held at school that fathers can participate in? What is the approximate percentage of fathers that attend?
   d. Are fathers encouraged to volunteer in their child's classroom? If so, how often and describe a time when this occurred.
3. How do you encourage fathers to engage with their children at home?
   a. What materials do you send home that fathers can implement?
   b. How do you encourage father engagement when the father is not residential?
   c. Do you participate in home visits? If not, do you believe this will set the foundation to encourage fathers to engage in their child's education?
4. What communication methods do you use to engage fathers in your classroom?
   a. Which communication method do you believe is the most effective?
   b. Do the fathers ever contact you about anything? If so, what?
5. What challenges do you face attempting to increase fathers to engage in their children's education?
   a. How can these challenges be addressed?
6. Describe any support or assistance that the administration offers that you believe influences fathers to engage in their child's education?
   a. Is professional development offered? If so, what topics?

   b. Describe your collaboration with other teachers in the center on father engagement.

7. What resources, supports, expertise, and other factors would make the biggest difference in increasing father engagement?
   a. Describe how father engagement is different for families of nonnative English speakers, parents of children with disabilities, and/or children of different ages.
   b. How do these differences affect father engagement?
8. What advice would you give to other teachers who want to encourage father engagement but having difficulty doing so?
   a. Would you be willing to coach/mentor them?
   b. Explain how you would do this.

Closing Statement

That concludes the interview. Thank you for your time and willingness to share your perspective. Please be reminded that the data collected will be kept anonymous for your protection. Furthermore, the responses from your interview will be transcribed and emailed to you to review for accuracy. If any changes need to be made, please correct, and email them back to me. For your participation, you will be compensated with a $15 egift card. Do you have any more questions, comments, or concerns? If not, I would like to thank you again for participating and if you have any questions at any time, please do not hesitate to email me.