UNIJERPS
Unizik Journal of Educational Research and Policy Studies VOL.2;
2021 Impact Factor: 5.641; 2020 Impact Factor: 5.355. *January-June, 2021*
Indexing and Impact Factor URL: http://sjifactor.com/passport.php?id=21363

THE NEED FOR EFFECTIVE DEVELOPMENT OF THE NIGERIAN CHILD: A CHALLENGE TO PARENTS

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ABSTRACT
Social beings are enclosed with the abilities and capabilities of being viable as well as productive in the society. It is in the light of the above that the paper focuses on the child as a social being. It examines the vital position occupied by the child in the society. It considers parental role and responsibility as well as the challenges of the twenty-first century.

Key words: development, and Nigerian child

Introduction
In the world system, it is expedient that human being pilots the affairs of both the ecological and social sub-systems effectively and efficiently, with a view to facilitating maximum efficiency as well as intelligent utilization of resources for achieving self-reliance or development in the society. on the other hand, a deviation from the above focus is likely to obstruct or impede speedy process and ability to convert available resources into viable benefit for the citizenry of this country. Such a lack on the part of human development is capable of thwarting the socio-economic tempo as well as social engineering which constitute mechanisms for global and socio-political influence in the comity of nations.

It is in the light of the above that frantic efforts must be put in place properly by government and individuals

to provide congenial environment essentially for the holistic development of the child to make them useful and productive instruments of societal development in the twenty first century.

Definition of Child

A child according to the United Nations definition, is a person between the ages of 0 and 18 years. National Child welfare policy regards a person between the ages 0 and 15 as a child. This definition of a child by the National Child welfare policy conforms with the definition by the International labour Organization (ILO). Labour decree in Nigeria does not permit a Child below the age of 16years to be in a gainful employment while Educational laws stipulates that nobody should be admitted into the University until after the age of 16 years. (EKPO,2009:60)

Position of The Child In The Family / Society

It has been universally discovered and accepted that the arrival of a child into the family is usually associated with happiness and a high sense of fulfilling, especially by the parents, particularly in most African Societies. The child is seen as a spring of honour, supported and protected for the parents as they gradually get down the drain of life. It is therefore apparent and not surprising to hear most people or persons in some cultures giving fantastic name to their children. For instance, names like Blessing, Joy, Good-Luck, Faith, Yetu, Peace, Chukwuemeka, Patience, Endurance, Fungi, Okeh, among others are found in most Nigerian homes. This is thus a practical demonstration of how children are esteemed and cherished by the society.

In addition to the warm and joyful mood that surrounds the arrival and presence of a child in the family, children are seen as instruments of social and cultural transmission. Usually, parents and/or guardians instill or inculcate socio-cultural values into children or wards with a view to making them socially acceptable and responsible beings in the society. In the same vein, it is culturally binding on the children when they become parents, to equally transmit such socially acceptable values to future generations. Thus, cultural transmission in children is a cyclical trend from generation to generation, thereby enhancing identity and continuity which is likely to serve as a portrait for the community and symbol of national unity (kolo,2010:25, Adeoye&Ogumbola 2012:45)

Equally important, is the fact that procreation does not only enhance

cultural growth, but societal progress or development. The act of reproduction facilitates societal growth, continuity as well as socio-economic activities. Therefore, it could be asserted with a high degree the world is likely to exist unless if there is a divine folding up of the world. The same line of reasoning may apply to socio-economic activities which is the life wire of societal existence. In practical terms, social, economic and political activities are carried. out by the total work force that originate from different families in Nigeria. This implies that society and its activities may crumble if new members are not born into it. Consequently, children occupy very crucial position in the society (kolo, 2015:30).

Parental Role and Responsibilities

Parents are the first contact a child meets in life. They are from demented and most proximate members that are influential in the life of the child. It is the duty of parents to nurture the child physically, spiritually, morally and otherwise. The influence of parents in the life of any child cannot be over-emphasized: starting from the mother who gives the child nourishment even from the womb to the stage of independence; and the father with the mother who instill discipline and stability into the life of the child.

Furthermore, parental responsibility would be considered in a deeper and penetrating would be considered in a more deep and penetrating manner. The parents are channels through which children are brought into the world. In view of this very fact, the child depends substantially on parents especially during the elementary stages of life for survival. Thus, parents are expected to provide the most needed comfort, warmth and care for the child until independence. In other words, emotional and social needs of the child should be provided to children by parents without much stress. These needs must not be compromised because of its serious implication on the child.

Quality and adequate provision of basic as well as functional education should be provided by parents. Materials and adequate supervision should be given to the child with a view to making him/her academically sound or successful in life. Similarly, Parents should ensure and provide proper nutritional needs of the child adequate supervision should be given to the child with a view to making him/her academically sound or successful in life. Similarly, parents should ensure and provide proper nutritional needs of the

child. Adequate and balanced diets should be given to the child/ward for complete physical growth as well as facilitating proper functioning of the system for productive purposes. This is also necessary so as to arrest diseases and malfunctioning of the system. Adequate clothing, shelter and other physical needs of the child are responsibilities vested on parents. The child should be secured and protected from environmental hazards by putting in place the needed security and preservation. Thus, well-ventilated house, good drinking water and a highly tidy environment must be provided with a view to rescuing children from environmental pollution and death.

Parent should provide basic social, cultural and economic training to children in order to make them responsible and sensitive to societal demands as well as challenge of life. In doing this fundamental values norms, attitudes and traditions of the society are preserved and entrenched with the ultimate goals of enhancing discipline and patriotism in the society (kolo, 2015).

A Brief Assessment of Parent Role/Responsibility In Nigeria.

Although, it is an established fact that the training and upbringing of children is the responsibility of parents, relations and guardians especially in the African context, yet a critical examination of such role revealed some serious contradictions and inadequacies.

Studies have shown that parents/guardians who are supposed to be intimate, loving, caring and provide for their children end up frustrating and abusing children under their care. In other words, some parents engage in acts that are injurious to the child's physical and emotional health

Such unhealthy conclusions take the form of sexual abuse, child labour, child marriage and child battering (Jaja, 2013). These negative actions retard and obstruct the personal socio-physiological development of the child in life. Similarly, In some cities and towns in Nigeria, children are near bread, winners in the family. Children engage in hawking, trading and all sort of labouring either to supplement source of living or actual providers of basic needs in the family. This practice is likely to be more prominent in homes where the father is dead, lost job or family income insufficient to meet the need of its members. This situation is more tremendous coupled with the dwindling performance of the Nigerian economy as well as its, poverty-oriented consequences. The effect of this

unhealthy happenings are devastating and capable of crippling the development as well as effective performance of children in the country. For instance, media report of children knocked down in the streets in major towns/cities are alarming. Thus, increasing sorrow in the hearts of parents or relatives in an attempt to provide medical care for such children. The situation is more compounded with given cases of rape and/or kidnapping of innocent children in the country.

Related to the above, is the issue of serious cases of abandoned children in the country. Such children are left alone to fend for themselves in a chaotic and depressed economy where poverty is almost written on the faces of significant majority in the society. This situation further exposes such children to conflicting ideology and negative values, thereby plunging them to criminal activities as well as probable destruction of life/career through imprisonment or death. Some Nigerian children are living under precarious situation and treatment. There have been increasing cases of child trafficking and mal-treatment on the print and electronic media in the country. For instance, NTA news of 20/6/2015 reported that, about 40 Nigerian girls were trafficked in Britain as prostitutes. Such children end up being socially, mentally and morally destroyed as well as constituting a nuisance to the society. This conduct tends to portray a negative picture and constitute an embarrassment to the sovereignty of this nation in the international scene.

The materialistic and get- rich syndrome in most parents constitute an aberration to the progress of children in Nigeria. Most parents pursue money and material things vigorously at the expense of providing needed care to children / wards. Umokoro (2014), in Nwankwo, observed that "parents who stay outside hurting for "bread and butter" will find it hard to provide the necessary care and attention kids need to make educational progress". This situation is now more compounded than when this observation was made. Inflation now rages in the economy to the extent that parent have to be engaged in more than one job or business in order to survive, thereby leaving teenage children unattended to at home.

In the same vein, Okonkwo, (2015), reiterated that most working mothers, business women and fathers spend little or no time with their children at home. Hence, such children are left on their own and with maids who cannot take care of themselves. Therefore, some are left at the mercy and influence of

television or film media where dangerous films are shown beyond the intellectual capacity of children. At long run, such children may take after drugs, become social delinquents and potential criminals in the society.

In the light of this appraisal, the proverbial adage of "to whom much is given, much is desired", is a force to be reckoned with in this regard. Thus much is expected from parents or guardians concerning provision of adequate care and support for children in order to build a conscious, well-articulated, fed, nurtured, disciplined and highly skilled potential beings, who are likely to be the most viable instruments for socio-economic progress, a requirement for global recognition in the twenty-first century.

Summary and conclusion

A child could be likened to an investment, asset or gift in the society. The nature and quality of dividends it yields depends among others, on the ability of parents and the community to provide quality care and proper support for his well-being or welfare.

Conclusively, the objectives of poverty alleviation as well as the universal basic education (UBE), strategy of Obasajo's administration transformation agenda of Jonathan's administration and change agenda of Buhari's administrations would only be achieved and meaningful if children are out of the street, cared for and empowered by providing them with basic needs such as adequate food, adequate security, basic education, health, shelter, peaceful and stable society. In view of the above discussion, the following recommendation may help in building a vibrant and highly productive citizenry in the country.

1. A more serious recognition and respect should be accorded the child as a social being in the society.
2. Cultural practices and benefits on seeing children as tools or objects of material acquisition and use should henceforth be discarded.
3. The government should come up with a legislation specifically on providing better treatment, care, support and essential needs for children in Nigeria with a view to reducing the rate of suffering, malnutrition, abandonment, trafficking and dehumanization.
4. A more realistic and concerned effort should be made through the mass media in ensuring adequate mobilization campaign from the grass root on the need for parents or guardians and the entire society to protect, prevent and deliver children

from the epidemic of violence, rejection, poverty, disease, ignorance as well as moral decadence in the society.

5. Children or wards should be given adequate and balanced teaching on the fear of God and accepted societal values in order to rid our society of corruption, destruction and wastefulness. Counselling are needed to help in the realization of these recommendations.

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