

Parenting Education for Holistic Child Development in Nigeria

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Abstract: *This paper examines the role of Parenting Education in fostering holistic child development in Nigeria, emphasizing the need for informed parental involvement in children's physical, emotional, cognitive, social and spiritual growth. The paper focuses on assessing the level of knowledge and practices among Nigerian parents regarding holistic parenting and its impact on child development outcomes. The objectives of the paper are to examine the influence of Parenting Education on child development; assess parental knowledge and skills related to effective parenting practices; identify barriers to parental involvement in child development, including socio-cultural and economic factors; and recommend strategies for enhancing Parenting Education for holistic development. The study adopts a qualitative methodology using a literature review approach. Data were gathered from scholarly journals, academic books, policy documents, and multimedia sources relevant to parenting and child development in Nigeria. The paper shows that parenting practices influence academic performance, children's health, and emotional well-being. Parents with access to Parenting Education are more likely to provide a nurturing environment, support their children's education and reduce developmental risks such as stunting or behavioral issues. The paper concludes that, Parenting Education is an essential tool for enhancing holistic child development in Nigeria. It recommended that effective implementation of community-based parenting programs, the inclusion of fathers in child-rearing education and culturally sensitive interventions are essential to equip parents with the knowledge and skills needed to support their children's growth.*

Keywords: parent, parenting, education, child, development

INTRODUCTION

The happenings in Nigeria with regards to the behaviors of our children such as hooliganism, armed robbery, burglary and thuggery, unholy dressing, truancy, fraud and yahoo yahoo plus, teenage pregnancy, prostitution among others are reflections of lack of holistic child development

in Nigeria. Parenting Education provides parents additional knowledge and skills to improve their parenting capacities. Parenting Education is a tool for the development of the child holistically. A major influence in the development of children in the society appears to be neglected, that is, parenting, which stands as a strong bond between children and their holistic development. Parenting is a foundational pillar in the development of a child, influencing emotional, cognitive, moral, and social growth. In Nigeria, the role of parenting in child development is increasingly significant due to various socio-economic and cultural challenges that affect family structures and parenting styles. Parenting education, which involves equipping parents and caregivers with knowledge and skills to nurture and support their children, has been recognized globally as a crucial strategy for promoting holistic child development. Holistic development refers to the all-round growth of a child intellectually, physically, emotionally, socially, and spiritually and it requires informed and intentional parenting practices to achieve this balance in the use of a child (Okafor & Akinwale, 2021).

Parenting Education, can be referred to as nurturing a child from birth that is from age 0 to age 12 (Gandu, 2014). This responsibility lies with child's parents (father and mother). In socialization of a child right from birth, it involves the duties of the members of the family especially the mother who is the child's bearer, home maker, as she nurtures the young one right from birth. Being the first teachers in the family, women build the nation when they nurture children who will eventually contribute positively to the development of the society. A mother uses her assets to train each child especially in the early years to develop into an individual with sound moral ideals, which enables the child to be good to fellow human beings (Gandu, 2014).

It appears that parenting of a child by parents now a day is not total, some aspects of child development are neglected, this may not be unconnected with modernization or civilization. Some parents are not always available to mentor their children. Mothers that are supposed to stay at home to nurture and take care of the children are not always there. Fathers that are to play their masculine roles in the upbringing of a child in the family randomly stays at home. It has been observed that most parents have left their caring responsibility to the hands of house girls and boys or child nanny. This has in a long way affected the lives of the children. Generally, parents have the God-given responsibility to train their child and inculcate moral values such as honesty, kindness, forgiveness among others in their children (Odia, 2014).

Some of the home training are lacking, and in most cases, only formal education that is given by teachers in the school from pre-primary through primary stage is present whereas the informal education that a child was supposed to receive from home was not given by their parent. Formal education takes place in the school while informal education occurs outside the school. Holistic child development encompasses the physical, emotional, social and cognitive and spiritual growth of a child, recognizing the interconnectedness of the domains (Shenkoff & Philips, 2000).

However, the lack of structured parenting education programs in Nigeria has left many parents ill-prepared for the complexities of child-rearing in today's society and this has in a long way affected the life of some of our children and the youths of nowadays. Many Nigerian parents rely on inherited cultural norms or trial-and-error methods, which may not align with modern developmental needs of children. This often results in issues such as poor academic performance, behavioral problems, emotional instability, delinquency and weak social skills among children. According to Eze and Chinedu (2020), inadequate parenting knowledge and poor engagement in children's development are linked to the increasing cases of child abuse, neglect, juvenile delinquency, and mental health issues across the country. The problem is further compounded by poverty, low literacy levels, and the breakdown of extended family support systems that traditionally offered informal parenting guidance. In urban and rural areas alike, parents are often overwhelmed by economic pressures and personal limitations, leaving little time or capacity for intentional parenting. Consequently, children are deprived of the comprehensive support necessary for their holistic development. In this context, parenting education is not just beneficial but necessary to empower parents with practical tools and understanding to foster environments conducive to positive child outcomes (Adebayo & Yusuf, 2019).

It is against this background that this study seeks to examine the role of parenting education in promoting holistic child development in Nigeria, with a focus on identifying the gaps in parenting practices and proposing sustainable educational interventions. By addressing these challenges, Nigeria can create a pathway toward raising total children who are not only academically competent but also emotionally intelligent, socially responsible, morally grounded and spiritual in attributes essential for national development.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

Child

A child is typically defined as a human being in the early stages of development from birth to adolescence. The concept of a child is often understood through biological, legal, and socio-cultural lenses. Biologically, a child is defined as a young human being below the age of puberty or below the legal age of majority. Legally, various international frameworks, such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), define a child as any individual under the age of 18 years (UNICEF, 2020). In the Nigerian context, the Child Rights Act (2003) adopts a similar definition, recognizing a child as a person who has not attained the age of eighteen. This legal perspective is essential in ensuring the protection and promotion of children's rights in areas such as education, health, and protection from abuse (Adeyemi & Akinbote, 2017). From a socio-cultural viewpoint, the definition of a child often extends beyond age to include dependency status and developmental capacity. In many African societies, including Nigeria, a child is seen not just by age but also by their level of responsibility, emotional maturity, and social roles. Children are considered to be individuals who are still in the process of being nurtured, trained, and socialized

to fit into societal expectations (Okonkwo & Ogunyemi, 2018). Scholars argue that the way a society defines a child impacts how that society treats and raises its younger population, thereby influencing policy decisions and educational practices (Ogunlade, 2021).

Furthermore, psychologists and child development experts emphasize that a child is a unique individual undergoing physical, emotional, cognitive, and social development stages. According to Piaget's theory of cognitive development, children pass through specific developmental stages, and their capacity to reason and interact with the world evolves with age (Ibrahim & Salami, 2020). Therefore, understanding who a child is must include not only age but also their developmental characteristics and needs. This comprehensive view helps caregivers, educators, and policymakers create supportive environments for nurturing children's potentials. This is a stage when they need to have time for them, impact the family values, norms and customs to them through imitation, deliberate teaching, trial and error and method of socialization processes. It appears that some parents lack adequate parenting education and that is the more reason they cannot give their children the best parenting education because you cannot give what you did not have and this has been part of the cankerworm that has been eating deep into our society these days. They are solely left at the mercy of caretakers or nannies while their parents travel away to fend for the family or accumulate wealth at the expense of their children mentorship or nurturing.

Parent

A parent is an individual who has a biological, adoptive or caregiving relationship with a child. Their roles are not limited to the following: providing care and support for child's physical, emotional and psychological needs. Parents guide and discipline their children and, more importantly, they protect and ensure a child's physical and emotional safety. Parents play critical roles in shaping the emotional, social, cognitive, and moral development of children, serving as primary caregivers and role models during a child's formative years (Adewunmi & Adekeye, 2018). In the Nigerian context, parenting extends beyond biological ties to include foster parents, guardians, and even members of the extended family who participate in a child's upbringing (Okonkwo, 2017). This broader understanding is reflective of the communal nature of African societies where parenting responsibilities are often shared between extended family with a common saying that: "Oju kan lo nbi omo, igba oju lo nwo", meaning that: "it is only one person that gives birth, but many people nurtured the child" and this was possible when families lived in the Courtyard (Akodi). This is lacking now and this cannot be dissociated from Civilization and Western culture that give room for the nuclear family to live separately in a house or flat apartment that is so fenced with high walls surrounding the house all in the name of security.

Parenting Education

Education is an essential process in human development as "it deals with the total process of human learning by which knowledge in impacted facilities are trained and different skills are developed".

It is a dynamic instrument of change that is expected to affect or condition the behavior of the person being educated and it is a life-long process which is always used to imply a positive state of mind (Adesemowo & Sotomade, 2022).

This education must be both formal and informal mechanism for transmitting culture, values and accumulated knowledge from one generation to another and this is not limited to classroom learning but includes moral instruction, vocational training and social participation (Fafunwa, 2004). For any parent to present a holistic child, he must possess the adequate knowledge, skills and confidence to create a supportive environment, promote healthy development and address challenges effectively.

Parenting Education refers to the process of providing parents and caregivers with knowledge, skills and support to effectively care for and raise their children (Hupp. Reitman & Jewel, 2008). This can be provided through various channel, such as parenting classes, online resources supporting groups and finally through books and articles. Parenting education plays a vital role in promoting holistic child development, encompassing physical, emotional, social, spiritual and cognitive growth and this significantly influences holistic child development encompassing physical, emotional, social and cognitive growth.

This aspect of Education is of benefits to both the children, parents and the society at large in these following ways, Parenting Education enhances parent-child interactions, building trust and strengthening relationship it finally supports children overall development, including physical, emotional, social, and cognitive growth. This has gained recognition as a vital component in promoting healthy child development and strengthening family relationship. Also, parenting is a complex and dynamic process that significantly influences a child's development. As children grow and mature, they require guidance, support and nurturing to reach their full potential. Parenting Education can provide parents and caregivers with the knowledge, skills and confidence to create a supportive environment, promote healthy development and address challenges effectively.

Holistic Development

Holistic development means the comprehensive growth of an individual across multiple domains as intellectual, emotional, social, physical, moral, and spiritual, rather than focusing solely on academic or cognitive achievements. It emphasizes the development of the whole person. According to UNESCO (2023), Holistic Development in education promotes the overall well-being of learners by addressing cognitive, emotional, social and physical aspects of learning. It prepares individuals not only for work but also for life. Holistic development refers to the comprehensive growth of an individual across multiple dimensions cognitive, emotional, social, physical, moral, and spiritual. It is based on the understanding that each aspect of development is interconnected and essential for the overall well-being and functioning of an individual in society.

According to Nwagu (2017), holistic development involves nurturing the whole child rather than focusing solely on academic or intellectual advancement. It promotes balanced growth, enabling individuals to contribute meaningfully to their families, communities, and the nation at large.

Educationists and child development experts stress that holistic development requires intentional efforts in creating supportive environments that cater to all aspects of a child's life. As noted by Obasi and Uzoechina (2019), early experiences at home, in school, and in the community significantly influence a child's overall growth and future success. Emotional security, social relationships, physical health, moral guidance, and intellectual stimulation all contribute to shaping a well-rounded individual. Ajayi (2020) asserts that education systems must go beyond rote learning to include programs that build empathy, creativity, communication, physical activity, and civic responsibility. Moreover, holistic development is viewed as a sustainable approach to human capital development, particularly in developing countries like Nigeria. It ensures that children not only acquire academic knowledge but also develop values, life skills, and resilience necessary to face life's challenges. Ogunyemi and Adebayo (2018) argue that without a holistic approach to development, efforts in education and child welfare may produce individuals who are intellectually capable but socially and emotionally underdeveloped. Therefore, stakeholders in education, health, and social services must collaborate to promote policies and practices that support the all-round development of every child in our society.

PARENTING EDUCATION AND HOLISTIC CHILD DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

Parenting education plays a foundational role in fostering holistic child development, encompassing the physical, cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions of a child's growth. In the Nigerian context, where socio-economic disparities and cultural diversity affect parenting practices, educating parents on child development principles is crucial. According to Adebayo and Fashola (2021), parenting education helps parents understand developmental milestones, nutrition, health, and emotional needs, which directly influence children's academic performance and behavioral outcomes. Similarly, Alabi and Bello (2022) emphasize that when parents are informed about the importance of early childhood stimulation and responsive caregiving, children are more likely to thrive in school and social environments. These findings support the argument that parenting education is indispensable for equipping caregivers with the knowledge to raise well-rounded children.

Moreover, evidence shows that parenting education strengthens parent-child relationships and reduces behavioral and emotional challenges in children. Ajayi and Eze (2023) reveal that Nigerian parents who participated in structured parenting workshops demonstrated increased empathy, better communication with their children, and more effective discipline strategies. International scholars like Darling and Steinberg (2021) agree, noting that authoritative parenting fostered through education promotes self-confidence, responsibility, and emotional resilience in children. In line with this, Yusuf and Adeola (2023) found that children from homes where parents had

access to parenting education exhibited better problem-solving skills and were less prone to aggression and anxiety. These outcomes highlight the transformative potential of parenting education in nurturing emotionally secure and socially competent children.

Parenting education should be considered a national priority in Nigeria, especially in the face of rising insecurity, poverty, and educational challenges. In many instances, parents rely solely on cultural or inherited methods of child-rearing, which may not address the complexities of modern child development. Integrating parenting education into community programs, religious institutions, and school-based initiatives could bridge the knowledge gap and enhance national development through a better-prepared younger generation. As supported by research, an investment in parenting education is an investment in the future of Nigeria.

FACTORS INFLUENCING PARENTING

Level of Knowledge and Practices among Nigerian Parents Regarding Holistic Parenting and Its Impact on Child Development Outcomes include, limited awareness of holistic parenting concepts - many Nigerian parents have limited understanding of the holistic parenting model, which encompasses emotional, cognitive, social, physical, and spiritual development of the child. According to Akinyemi and Ogunlade (2019), most parenting practices in Nigeria are still influenced by traditional norms that prioritize discipline and academic success over emotional intelligence and creativity; parenting styles and their influence on child behavior - studies have shown that authoritarian and permissive parenting styles, which are common in Nigeria, may negatively affect children's self-esteem, autonomy, and problem-solving skills. Ajibola and Ajayi (2020) found that authoritative parenting—associated with holistic approaches encourages better developmental outcomes like emotional stability and academic performance.

Educational Attainment and Parental Knowledge - parents' level of education significantly influences their knowledge and adoption of holistic parenting. UNICEF (2021) highlights that educated parents are more likely to access parenting resources, engage in open communication, and support children's socio-emotional needs; role of Socioeconomic Status - holistic parenting practices are often constrained by poverty and lack of access to support systems. Okafor and Eze (2022) report that low-income families in Nigeria struggle to provide balanced nutrition, quality education, and emotional support, which negatively impacts children's cognitive and social development; and Impact of Cultural and Religious Beliefs - cultural and religious beliefs strongly influence parenting in Nigeria, often emphasizing obedience, respect for elders, and spiritual development. While some of these values align with holistic principles, others may hinder open communication or mental health awareness. Omede and Odiba (2020) stress the need for contextual parenting education that respects culture while promoting developmental needs.

LIMITATIONS TO HOLISTIC CHILD DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

Barriers to Parental Involvement in Child Development in Nigeria include, poverty and economic hardship - Many Nigerian parents struggle to meet basic needs due to widespread poverty. This economic pressure limits time and resources for active child involvement. Parents may focus more on survival than emotional or educational support. Children may be left in the care of relatives or sent to hawk or work. The cycle of poverty reduces the quality of child-parent interaction. As a result, holistic child development is often compromised; low educational attainment of parents - some parents lack formal education or awareness of child development needs. This limits their ability to support learning or understand growth milestones. They may not appreciate the importance of early childhood education. Poor literacy also hinders communication with teachers or caregivers. Educational gaps affect parenting confidence and effectiveness. Consequently, children may not receive the guidance they require at home.

Cultural Beliefs and Practices - certain traditional beliefs discourage parental involvement in child matters. Fathers, for example, may see child-rearing as solely the mother's duty. Some cultures promote harsh discipline or neglect emotional needs. Early child marriage and gender roles can also limit engagement. These practices often ignore the psychological aspects of development. They hinder modern, nurturing parenting approaches necessary for holistic growth; work-related stress and time constraints - long work hours and multiple jobs reduce parental availability at home. Urban parents, in particular, face demanding schedules and long commutes. Limited time results in reduced bonding, supervision, and educational support. Even when present, exhausted parents may lack energy to engage children. Work-life imbalance affects emotional connections and consistent guidance. This often leaves children without adequate parental influence; lack of awareness and Parenting Education - many parents are unaware of the crucial role they play in child development. Without proper training, they may not know how to support learning and behavior. There is little access to parenting workshops or public awareness campaigns. Ignorance of children's psychological and emotional needs is widespread. Parents may rely on outdated or harmful parenting methods.

This gap limits their ability to raise well-rounded and confident children; and broken homes and family instability - High rates of divorce, separation, and single parenting affect involvement. Conflicts between parents can create a toxic environment for children. Children from unstable homes often lack emotional and psychological support. Parental absence or neglect can delay academic, moral, and social growth. Family instability may also lead to neglect or inconsistent discipline. Such conditions hinder the child's sense of security and development.

ENHANCING PARENTING EDUCATION FOR HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

- Strategies for Enhancing Parenting Education for Holistic Development in Nigeria include, community-based parenting programs - Parenting education should be decentralized through community centers and local groups. These programs should use indigenous languages and culturally relevant examples. Workshops, forums, and seminars can be organized to engage parents regularly. Community leaders and elders should be involved to increase acceptance and impact
- This will ensure grassroots-level participation and sustainable knowledge transfer;integration into school curricula - Parenting Education can be included in adult literacy and civic education programs. Schools can organize periodic seminars for parents during PTA meetings. Educational institutions can serve as hubs for disseminating parenting tips. Topics may include child development, discipline, health, and emotional support.
This strategy encourages lifelong learning and strengthens home-school partnerships; use of
- Mass Media and Digital Platforms - radio, television, and social media can be used to broadcast parenting tips. Interactive sessions like call-in radio shows allow real-time problem-solving. Online platforms can offer courses, webinars, and support forums for parents. Content should be tailored to reflect local realities and values. This broadens access to quality parenting information across all regions; training of Parenting Educators and Counsellors. Professionals should be trained to facilitate parenting education programs. Social workers, teachers, and religious leaders can serve as facilitators. Capacity building should focus on child psychology and communication skills. Equipped educators can guide parents more effectively with evidence-based practices. This professional approach ensures consistency and credibility of information
- Incorporation of Religious and Cultural Institutions - Churches, mosques, and traditional gatherings can serve as learning platforms. These institutions hold moral authority and influence over family structures. Faith-based parenting seminars can promote values like empathy and responsibility. They can also discourage harmful practices such as corporal punishment. Collaboration with these groups can increase reach and cultural relevance; and promotion of peer-to-peer Learning . Parenting support groups encourage experience sharing and collective growth. Parents can meet regularly to discuss challenges and successful practices. Mentorship programs can pair young or new parents with experienced ones. This peer model fosters mutual learning in a non-judgmental environment. It promotes confidence, inclusion, and practical problem-solving skills.

CONCLUSION

Parenting Education plays a vital role in promoting holistic child development enhancing parenting skills and strengthening parent-child relationship. Education can have a lasting impact on children's physical, emotional, social, cognitive and spiritual growth. In a society where traditional practices often dominate child-rearing approaches, structured parenting education helps to bridge generational gaps, enhance positive discipline, and promote healthy parent-child relationships. By empowering parents with evidence-based strategies, it reduces incidences of child abuse, neglect, and developmental setbacks, fostering a more nurturing environment for children to thrive.

Furthermore, investing in parenting education is essential for national development, as it directly impacts the quality of the future workforce and citizenry. When children are raised in supportive, stimulating, and emotionally secure environments, they are more likely to become responsible, productive, and emotionally balanced adults. The Nigerian government, civil society organizations, and educational institutions must collaborate to integrate parenting education into community outreach programs, school curricula, and health services. Such collective efforts will ensure that parents across socio-economic backgrounds are adequately supported to raise children who can contribute meaningfully to the nation's socio-economic and cultural advancement.

Suggestions

This paper has revealed reasons for lack of holistic child development against the background of the various negative practice among children in our country ,it is therefore very important that areas of existing measures to enhance child development be improve upon. The following suggestions are proffered;

- Parents and would be parents should be frequently engaged in programs that provide skills and support for effective parenting.
- Parenting education modules should be incorporated into adult education, antenatal care, and civic orientation programs to reach a wider population of parents and guardians.
- Nigerian government should formulate and implement national policies that promote parenting education as a critical component of child welfare and development, including funding support for training and awareness campaigns.
- Teachers, social workers, healthcare professionals, and community leaders should be trained to deliver culturally sensitive and evidence-based parenting education programs that align with the developmental needs of children.
- Media platforms, religious institutions, and non-governmental organizations should be engaged in promoting the importance of effective parenting practices through targeted campaigns, workshops, and seminars across urban and rural communities.

- An effectiveness tracking mechanism on parenting education programs through periodic assessments, feedback from participants, and child development indicators to ensure continuous improvement and relevance should be put in place.

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