
Family Involvement in Early Childhood Education: A Step to Solving Contemporary Issues in Education in Nigeria

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Abstract

The issue of education has been a very big problem in Nigeria, especially that of the early childhood. Opinion of early childhood psychologists and educators are that parental involvement in the child's learning is highly appreciated at this stage. The society is of the view that one's personality stems from the family and that the child's future social and academic prospects depend on how effective the family was able to prepare and assist the child at home. The dwindling economic situation of the nation has made most families to abandon most of their roles and responsibilities in the upbringing of the children in pursuit of better livelihood. The consequences can be seen in the declining standard of education and high rate of corrupt practices among youths. This paper focuses on addressing some family involvement strategies for inculcating positive social and academic behaviors and attitudes in the 21st century. Children at their early stage (0-3yrs), are filled with unpredictable and backup plans. They appear self-centered, demanding and annoying by adult standard. At times, one feels happy and proud or feel challenged and embarrassed by behaviours and attitudes. Children need parents that can shape them to think for themselves, relate cordially with self and others, make good choices and set excellent academic, moral and political records and make the society a better place to leave in future.

Children all over the world are accepted and treasured in the family as the highest gift from God. Their early education is very important because of their sensitive nature. The family is the life wire of every individual from birth to death. As such, it is the duty of the family to see to the moral and academic upbringing of their children r off springs.

According to Anyanwu (2012), the contemporary society generally views family as a haven from the world, that is, a place of refuge from the hustle and bustle of the harsh world outside the family that supplies absolute fulfillment. In other words, whatever one is stems from the family. Thus, Anyanwu further explained that Murdock in Goetz (2005) identifies economic and education as among the functions of the family. The family in most cases, put in their best efforts in order to satisfy the needs of their children financially and educationally.

Eze and Anyanwu (2012) explained that most factors that make it difficult for school children to maximize the learning opportunities provided in school setting often

times, have links to the families. As a result of the economic nature of the country that affects most homes, many mothers are getting enlightened that they no longer wait for the husband to fend for the family alone. Most mothers have engaged in one trade and the other just to make sure that their home's economic standard meet the family necessary needs. This has resulted to making the house helps take control of the entire family members including the children. They see to the home training of the children and in most cases, represent the parents in most affairs of the children that demand their attention. This is not in the best interest of the child. Bennis (1990), explains that part of the background to crime, to drug addiction, low motivation to school, poor job prospects and to the transmission of all these problems to the next generation comes from inadequate parenting. To Beggs (1849), the withdrawal of a woman's attention from the care of her offspring, and from domestic duties is an unnatural arrangement and stigma upon the social state. It is probably a system fraught with innumerable evils, especially when we consider the early direction of the child's mind to the value of money and the consequent temptation to procure it by all means.

The Child and Development

The 21st century child needs the family involvement in his/her education so as to reduce the high rate of children with maladjusted behavior and attitudes. The National Policy on Education (2004) sees early education as the education for children under the age of six years and affirmed that the purpose of the Early Childhood Education would be to:

- a. effect a smooth transition from the home to the school,
- b. prepare the child for the primary level of education,
- c. provide adequate care and supervision for the children while their parents are at work,
- d. inculcate social norms,
- e. inculcate in the child the spirit of inquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature, the environment, art, music and playing with toys etc.
- f. develop a sense of co-operation and team-spirit,
- g. learn good habits; especially good health habits,
- h. teach the rudiments of numbers, letters, colours, shape, forms etc through play.

These call for the involvement of the child's family members who are the immediate significant others in the child's environment. Their social and intellectual boudness are highly needed to make the child imbibe or develop the desired attitude and behavior that would make him/her an adult with worthy personality. Montessori (1983) stressed that education begins from birth and secondly, that although education is a continuous process, the first years are crucial, impressions laid down in the first three years are the foundation of later development, and that the experience of the additional three years can do much to redress and modify bad, emotional, social and intellectual experiences. Durojaiye in Onyemachi (2012) sees child growth as a continuous process and what happens at one stage can be carried over into and influence the next stage. Every individual in the society have developmental asks to achieve.

Havinghurst in Agbakwuru (2012) defines a developmental task as that which arises at about a certain period in the life of an individual, successful achievement of which leads to his happiness and to success with later tasks, while failure lead to unhappiness in the individual, disapproval by the society and difficulty with/later tasks. Havinghurst further identifies the specific tasks of early childhood as: learning to speak and communicate through the use of language, learning gender differences; forming simple concepts; learning to relate emotion with siblings, parents and others; distinguishing between right and wrong and developing a conscience. Piaget in Montessori states that children at the early stage of their development interact actively with and act in their environment. They need to achieve greatly in solving problems or in completing a task not minding the short attention span. They are very curious at this stage. This makes them to explore and understand their environment. Toddlers hit, bang, taste, suck objects in order to determine what they are. But in most cases, these children are restricted to do as they wish and this constitute restriction to their development. They need to express themselves in variety of ways, through body movement, symbolic play, song, cry, language and other artistic forms.

Erikson in Eggen and Kauchak (2001) opined that the early childhood falls in the developmental stage when the child needs to trust or mistrust, develop autonomy or shame, and that the foundation laid at this stage matters because it is the determinant of subsequent behavioral manifestations. They are exploratory and inquisitive, they need parental encouragement not criticisms or punishment that would make them to doubt their own abilities thereby, develop sense of shame or guilt and lack initiative.

Severe (2004) explains that parents of early childhood learners need the combined talents of a teacher, Recreation Director, Mediator, Psychologist, Spiritual Mentor, Chief Medic, Counselor etc. These years are so critical because the behaviors and attitudes that are shaped during this period last a life time. Parents are more important at this stage than any other. Children need parents who understand them, their excesses and how to teach them to think for themselves, make good choices, practice and reinforce good behavior. They need parents to be good models, that is, have good manners that they would want their children to acquire and practice self-control.

Achieving Positive Behavior and Attitude

All parents want successful children who are happy and well behaved. He want children to be loving, respectful of others and themselves. No parents is happy when the child makes him to be repeating everything. Sometime, parents react passively in t calling them “Children of nowadays” giving into misbehavior because they do not know what to do. At times they react with anger: e.g yelled or screamed thinking is the best way to handle the child. Some adopt the methods that parents applied in training them. It should not be so with the 21st century child.

Child rearing class should be organized for parents where they should learn about child development and factors that affect and influence their children’s behaviors, how they learn, how language develops, how temperament is related to behaviors, and how self-esteem affects behavior. Every parent must learn behavior that involves

courage and patience because the manner parents behave toward children affects the way they behave toward them and everyone else.

Extended family are gradually phasing out in most homes to care for children and to pass along family values and traditions. Most parents have the false belief that if they love their children as much as possible, their misbehavior would someday improve. Some have the confidence that their children would not like them, if they correct them on how to behave, while some are afraid that they might harm their children emotionally. Such parents need guidance and councilors and child experts to guide them on how to develop effective strategies that would enable them acquire skills on self and anger management when dealing with their children.

Language and Behavior

Language, according to Severe allows us to take a thought from one person and put it into the thoughts of another. Human beings communicate and think with language, do everything from abstract concepts to practical innovations. Infants communicate by crying, cooing, laughing, making sounds and squeal. They start to imitate speech of their parents by exchanging sounds with them gradually; the babbling develops into respective sounds to echo simple adult world such as come, bye, etc. as time goes on, they start associating objects with names and words with gestures to get what they want. Expression begins with simple words that may be open to different meanings to express their want and needs thereby, assert independence. When the child becomes angry or upset, he/she expresses self physically with tantrums, out bursts, or aggressive behavior. He may push, bite, and kick etc because of the inability to use words in expressing feelings.

As from three years, new words are acquired at astonishing rate meaning that the words vocabulary becomes enlarge. The child's brain develops, he learns about the world by observing and discovering what happens when interacting with the world and people around them. He starts to build complex, informative sentence that link ideas, events or pieces of information, classify items, develops an awareness of fine and sequence. He starts practicing social skills involved in using language-taking turns, listening, and judging the effect of the word on listeners. The child's ability to interpret and understand the meaning of words and then, use words for self-expression affects every aspects of the behavior. He begins to learn how to control his behavior and how different behavior results to different outcome. This marks the onset of self-control. He sees relationship to what happens when he cries unnecessarily, when he spills water, kick, beat or take somebody's toys. Teach children how to use "words" instead of cry to make demands e.g John drank fruit juice and wants more, he begins to cry. Ask him to use the word by saying 'I need more juice', instead of crying. This technique could be introduced to teach children as from the age of three. Learning is not automatic, it takes the child time to understand and practice. So consistent teaching is required.

Communicating when a child is upset

Children are impatient to listen when they are upset and are not ready to understand long sentences. They are emotionally shattered and mentally confused. Use

simple words and phrases that they can understand. E.g calm down, please stop, please share, etc.

Teaching Good Listening Skills

Children at times fail to listen fine not because of any deficit but because their brains and nervous system are still developing. In other words, their attention skills are just developing and as such, may not attend to more than one thing at a time. They need to be taught listening skills as from four years. When they are playing, watching television or things, they find it difficult to divide their attention by answering to a call or listening to someone talking to them. Model good listening by showing the child how to be a good listener. When the child talks to you, stop what you are doing, and listen. Mute the television, look at the child, and make eye contact, repeat what he says to show him that you were listening and that what he is saying is important to you.

Reward the child when your instruction is followed by saying. "Thank you for listening", etc. where not followed when talking to him; redirect the child's attention by turning off the television, or stopping he activity. Do not raise your voice or shout on the child. This would teach the child how to yell on someone to get the attention. Use non verbal cues to get the child's attention when he is deeply engaged in an activity such as walking up to the child and touch him on the shoulder, eye contact, sit in a chair or squat down to the child's level, whisper to his ear, say the name. some causes of inattentiveness of the child could be emotional stress as a result of anxiety, worry and fear, accident scene, death in the family, birth of a sibling, illness in the family, etc. Do not overload the child with too many request or directors. Give one instruction at a time. Always reinforce any good behavior. Disengage the child in a polite and mild tone e.g, John, I am sorry, we have to go now, I am sorry, it is time to leave, etc. not, get to the car, stop playing and jump to the car, don't you know is time? Run inside. Create a daily routine activity for your child so as to meet the physical needs, e.g watching television, reading a story, doing the home work, going for market etc. talk privately with the child before the activity begins on how you expect him to behave and when you should expect his attention.

There are times when the child intentionally does not listen. He hears you but ignores you; sometimes may put his hands over the ears to show the fact that he hears you. Do not laugh, get upset or start yelling or nagging, otherwise the child wins. Remain calm to figure out what really caused this action then talk to him- "I see that you are upset because I could not give you --- use simple words, speak slowly, provide clear and concise explanation, give him time to think, then explain the consequences of not listening/ignoring to him.

Using Foul Word/Language

Children like using words: poppy head, bombom, wewe, pupu--- at times to get your attention. Do not overreact, laugh, cough, scream, etc. otherwise, he keeps using them. Ignore him, explain that such words are not polite but can offend people; teach substitute word(s), monitor television programme(s) that he watches more; teach the correct words for body parts. Teach by example - use polite language yourself.

Using questions to correct misbehaviors

Children are not always aware that their behavior needs to be corrected so help the child to see that the behavior is inappropriate and need to be corrected. Rather than confronting the child about misbehavior you can make him think about behavior by asking: Are you whining? Are you crying? Are you teasing? Are you laughing? What is this on my ear?

(If phoning and disturbing), what do you do? Etc. be realistic with children and consistent.

Teaching Self-Control

This involves the ability of the child to discipline self before an adult, when learning, playing, eating and so on. Children need certain abilities before they can control their own behavior. That is to say that the readiness skills that are developmental in nature must emerge during the early childhood. Parents are to nurture these skills with guidance and teaching so as to enable the child learn easily to control the behavior. These skills are: The ability to pay attention and listen, on understanding of the vocabulary you use to explain what you expect; understanding of the behavior that you expect; understanding of how he chooses his behavior, understanding of cause and effect and understanding of how his choices have outcomes and the ability to use words to express his needs, wants-feelings and confusions.

Teaching Positive Directions

Stop Crying	Calm Down, Please dry your tears
Stop Fighting	Please share yours toys, please take your turn, I know you can
Stop teasing	Please ask in a polite voice, use nice words
Stop Whining	Please use your words, use a big-girl/boy voice
Stop Squirming-sit still	Quiet legs and arms, please, let your legs and arms rest
Stop creaming	Use a quiet voice, use an inside voice, can you whisper? My ears hurt
Stop Hitting	please keep your hands to yourself, use a gentle touch please toys are for playing.

Teaching Self-Concept

Self-concept according to Odidoa (2010)s, is the way a person feels about himself or herself a major determinant of behavior, goals and achievement. It means ones belief about self. Children who believe in themselves expect success from life; they feel good about themselves, confident and can take constructive criticism. They are better learners and more able to control their behavior. They see their efforts and abilities as the cause of their triumphs and accomplishments. To them, failure is a temporary setback or challenges that can motivate them to put on more effort to overcome their disappointment. While those with low self-concept have difficulty learning, feel insecure, and lack persistence. They are oversensitive to what others think and often blame others when things go wrong. They see the world a place of fear, feel unworthy, have little self confidence, and do not have faith in themselves. They see

themselves as failures and often expect failure. They see success as the result of chance or destiny. The goal of every parent should be to promote high self-concept among the children, by feeling good about your child. Give your child love, respect, support acceptance, and encouragement in all endeavors like good try, you can do better etc. accept your child as he is. Accept, value and love the child as he is and not as you would want him to be. Do not love the misbehavior but the child by using warm words to correct him, hug him as he wakes up from sleep, going to school, coming back etc. treat him with respect and dignity to show how important he is.

Recognize your child's contributions to the family. Appreciate the assistance when working with you-thank you. Value the suggestion-that's good idea. Give him choices by limiting the options-out these two clothes which one would you wear to party tomorrow? Teach compassion- teach your child to contribute to the well-being of others by modeling compassion, kindness and concern. Explain what you are doing to him. Encourage him to share things with others. Accomplish a task. Encourage your child to learn new skills and accomplish task before going to another as this would encourage him to be more determined. Nurture persistence as a gift for a lifetime. It teaches your child to pursue his goals. Be encouraging as your child attempts to complete a task by saying, "Keep trying and you will get it", "work hard", "Congratulations" etc. Let him know that everyone has strong and weak qualities. Teach him how to accept and overcome disappointments. Let him know that disappointments are part of life and that we all have them, recognize and empathize with your child's sadness and disappointment: "I see that you're very sad, that's okay". Build trust. Be consistent with your child as this would teach him what you expect from him and what he expects from you. Model trust for your child by keeping promises. Listen to your child and help him sort through feelings that are new or confusing, be fair, give reasons why your child has to do certain things, share your experiences with your child. Time builds relationship, so, spend time with your children. Make your child feel safe and protected at all times. Use praise and encouragement carefully, making sure it is sincere and specific. Praise, correct behavior or accomplishment- "You did a fine job picking your clothes"--- Humor builds a healthy relationship, so be careful when you laugh. Do not laugh when the child is doing something he should not do, he will think that what he is doing is pleasing. Do not laugh when the child is not expecting it, he becomes confused and hurt.

Improving family climate: Spend time with the child, emphasize success cooperation, speak in a pleasant tone or voice, practice giving compliments, help and use good manners; plan family activities together e.g. having dinner, going to church, telling stories, praying, singing etc. Encourage humor by telling jokes, playing games, etc. Change environment by visiting places of interest from time to time.

Managing your anger: Is an inborn emotion, which if you try to ignore or suppress, builds up and comes out as an overreaction. Showing your child that you are angry is not necessarily harmful, as long as you do not react with physical or verbal aggression. When anger is expressed constructively, it can help teach children what is unacceptable behavior. It is always important to manage your anger in front of your child by following these strategies:

Be aware of your anger. What triggers it? What's the positive outcome? Be aware of your child. He learns how to manage the anger and other emotions by watching and copying you. What do you think about your anger? You can or cannot manage it? Develop ways to express anger constructively. Use a calm voice to express how you feel rather than yelling. Tell your child calmly. How his behavior makes you feel. Deal with anger as soon as possible. "I am beginning to become angry about this joke. Please stop now". All children misbehave, so do not blame yourself when your child does. Apologize to others when you have expressed anger inappropriately. Instead of feeling guilty have a specific plan for managing anger, read materials on anger management.

Normalizing the child through activities: Montessori (1983) stress on the importance of creating optimum conditions possible for the natural development of the child, emphasizing that there should be little interference with the normal maturation process. The infant needs to be involved as far as possible in the complexity of his environment from birth, in spite of the difficulties this creates for the parent. For parents to achieve this and free the child from frustrations, they need to engage the child with variety of activities that hold the interest and keep him busy, and watch these characteristics manifest in the child: Love of order – the child demonstrates this because he is harmony with the activity. He develops love of work by demonstrating his ability to concentrate on the task in hand. The child demonstrates his capacity of maintaining stillness and silence for a short time. He learns to focus his attention on objects for the knowledge he can gain from them. He will increasingly demonstrate the capacity to accept guidance from adults; the child should be increasingly demonstrating his capacity for independence and initiatives. He should demonstrate increasingly his powers of self-discipline., joy and cooperation with peers.

Family involvement in the child's academics: one of the primary purpose of family education is the preparation of the child for smooth transition to school. Some children find this transition exciting and easy while some do not. All depend on how the child was prepared for this journey. Parent involvement must not lose sight of the child's health status and introduction to learning, concepts and materials. Parents must ensure that any health issue that may not allow the child to learn effectively must be taken care of in one way or the other.

Encouraging your child's language competence: Helping the child in stories and poem reading at home. Allow the children access to books. Encourage them to listen and join in jingles and rhymes, practice action songs and finger play song with them. Engage the child with games that involve careful listening, question and answer. Encourage the child to report incidents that happen in the school, home, etc. involve the child in discussion. Expose the child to variety of educative pictures with objects. Introduce the use of Tapes, records, radio, video and television to teach at home. Identify things by names, colour, shape and usage.

Mathematics

Introduce the child to counting part of the body, associating things with numbers-bring one spoon, two spoons, two forks, one plate ad so on. Introduce time by associating events, activities etc with time e.g we go to church on Sunday, you start

school on Monday, we travel next month, you watch television in the night, wait a minute, go and rest for 30 minutes, etc. Teach the concept of colour by identifying objects in the environment by their colour for the child. Things like: red shirt, white bed sheet, yellow--- blue etc. provide materials of assorted colours, shapes letters/numbers etc for the child's learning. Encourage the child to practice learning or always play with them. Engage the child with shopping games.

Science

Parents should teach the child names of animals, reptiles, plants, trees, fruits, insects, ants, leaves etc, at home. Paste or hang posters of such things where the child can always see and make use of them and show also the child the real ones. Allow the child time to experiment with water, walk round the compound from time to time. Take the child to farms, markets, zoo, etc from time to time so as to see things real. Introduce weather to the child-raining, sun, dry season, wet season, harmathan, morning, day, moon, sun, cloud, and so on. Introduce the concept of land formation-valley, creek, hill mountain, potholes, Bumps, rivers, stream, pond, sea, ocean and their vessels and so on.

Social Studies

Teach the child early enough to identify the family members with names and positions. Speak the mother-tongue to the child. Introduce greeting or compliments to the child, roles and responsibilities of family members, names of places, things and persons, name of countries, states, home, streets and the likes. Discuss means and vessels of transportation with the child always. Introduce leadership training by assigning roles and responsibilities to the child. Introduce artisanship education to the child by making him to show appreciation, respect to people and what they do, recite the national Anthem and pledge always, hang portraits of past and present leaders in the vicinity of the child. Take the child to places to identify people and what they do. Attend festivals and ceremonies with your child from time to time and engage him to narrate incidents that took place. Discuss types of foods and production with your child, likewise the nutrients. Do not underestimate the child's abilities and understanding at this stage of life. Parents should teach the child at any point and place. Teach the child with pictures, real objects/things, films, projectors, video tapes and so on. Answer the child's questions always and be specific. As we teach the child, so we equally learn from them because 'in the child is much knowledge and much wisdom if we do not benefit from the child is because of our inability and impatience to understand the wonders that the child can teach'.

Conclusion

Early childhood is the most important stage in life that should be treasured with care. Character formation starts at this stage of life, and so, any mistake made may be carried over from one stage to the other. It is an interesting stage in life that is full of teachings. and learning. As Montessori would put it, "in the child is much wisdom and

knowledge, if we do not profit from the child it is because of our inability to be patient and see the wonders that the child can teach”

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

1. Child rearing and caring workshop should be organized for parents from time to time to update their knowledge.
2. Government should provide adequately for material, financial and human resources for the funding of early childhood education.
3. Child friendly environment must be ensured in early childhood schools and homes.
4. Teachers of early childhood education should be encouraged to attend conferences, seminars and workshops to update their knowledge.
5. Intensive supervision of the learners and staff activities should be carried out from time to time.
6. Children must be placed on routine medical check-up.

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