

## Parental Involvement in Engineering Effective Early Childhood Care and Development

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### Abstract

Early childhood care and development is a responsibility that should be shouldered by virtually all the stakeholders; be it government, parents and society. However, this paper restricts itself to parents. Of all the aforementioned stakeholders in early childhood education, parents are expected to play pivotal but crucial role in the area of care and development of their children/wards. This view is predicated not only on the bare fact that they are biologically tied to their children but also spend abundant time with these children with a view to meeting their emotional, social, educational and physiological needs. Besides, early childhood period calls for a solid foundational but concerted efforts of parents to give care that could engineer development. Parents, therefore, have crucial roles to complement the efforts of the school and the community in order to ensure an unshaken growth and development in children. It is on this premise that this paper explores and overhauls the pivotal roles of parents that could galvanise and stimulate care, growth, and development of children in Nigeria specially and the world in general.

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**Keywords:** Parents, Parental Involvement, Early Childhood and Development

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### INTRODUCTION

Early childhood care and development is of great concern to any responsible parents, government and even the society at large. This is because the extent to which such care and development are provided to the child early in life determines to a great extent his/her later success in life, bearing in mind the fact that the love and care given especially by the parents who are seen as the prime providers and educators of the child" will make the child to properly and adequately adjust to the challenges. Besides, parents' involvement in the provision of care and development at the early stage of childhood cannot be over-accentuated having realized the fact that early childhood years, according to Nwagbara (1) are full of complexities as the nature of children differ from stage to stage of their development. During this period they are in the process of undergoing great transformation and taking important development strides.

These children at this stage need their parents love and care to fast track and facilitate quality growth and development in life. The children at this stage are observed to be super active, restless and full of incredible energy. They are seen also to be very inquisitive while some by nature are very reserved. At this stage, children need understanding adults especially parents to provide the deserved care and love as well as accommodating their peculiarities and sometimes exuberant overbearing nature as opined by Community on Early childhood Pedagogy (2)

This paper intends providing awareness and ways parents can improve their care and education of their children. It has been observed in Nigeria of high rate of child-neglect by parents which is degenerating and giving birth to myriads of societal problems threatening peace. And without peace, there will be no growth and development, hence this article.

### Parental Responsibilities in Early Childhood Care and Development

In early childhood development, parental role is very crucial as the family is the first agent of socialization in the society a child ever knows. The primary location for early childhood development is the home. Nwagbara (1) , Eccles and Harold (3) assert that parental roles in early childhood development are varied. This view is also corroborated by Popoola (4) that parents have a lot to do in bringing about early development in their children.

At the early stage in life, the quality of care given to children affects their development. Responsible parents therefore realize the necessity to pay adequate attention to their children needs. Parents especially mothers are responsible for feeding their children at this critical period. Efforts should be geared towards having adequate food supply, as a plethora of research has shown that a child at the early stage that is well-fed tends to be more physically and cognitively developed. For babies, mothers breast milk offers the best and complete food. Breast milk provides babies with antibodies which help to keep

off the risk of illness. The early introduction of other liquids and solids if prepared in unhygienic conditions increases the likelihood of infection often resulting in potentially life-threatening conditions like diarrhea. Mothers that ensure the provision of exclusive breast feeding in the first six months of life is enough to support the growth and development of children and this should be complemented with high quality food until about 24 months of age to sustain the rate of growth. It should be noted that a parent that provides adequate care and nutrition lays a solid foundation for proper early childhood development. This is because proper nutrition aids brain growth necessary for intellectual cognitive as well as psychomotor development in the child. The home serves as a take-off point for this development in the child. The child who is usually helpless depends on maternal stimulation and physiological functioning. This includes toileting, feeding and bathing.

Besides, having realized that it is imperative for parents to give special attention to the needs of their children as well as appreciating the fact that development is thus a life-long determinant of well-being, health, and learning skills children in the future as expressed by Osanyin (5) and Epstein (6), concerted efforts should be made to ensure adequate care and love are provided as much as needed by these children to engineer quality life assurance.

Also, it has been generally noted that mothers are the first important persons in babies world. How they behave to the children is very crucial in establishing feeling of comfort and security. According to Esu (7) as quoted by Nwagbara(1) "insufficiency of maternal care is detrimental to development during early years as the child grows." It is the responsibility of both parents to lead children through the early years, providing them with adequate nutrition, stimulation, good values and good health habits. It is also the duty of parents to teach children the language of their immediate environment preparatory for formal learning in school. They expected to help children to communicate with family members and peers.

According to Gonzalez-DeHass, Willems and Holbein (8), parents, who know are responsible, and who care about their children's success in life would create time for their children in learning to read as well as providing a conducive learning environment. Both parents have crucial role to play here. Mothers alone should not be left with this teaching role, though mothers spend much time with these children. At the early stage, early love and care should be given to them by creating time to teach these children how to read early in life. Mothers are expected to devote at least an hour interacting with the children on how to read. Research has shown that an average Japanese mother spends not less than an hour on a

daily basis teaching her baby how to read in Japanese Language. This practice should be emulated by mothers worldwide.

Moreover, children at an early stage need special health care from their parents. Though the children might not be able to express their health condition responsible parents should find a way of detecting when their children are displaying some symptoms and signs of certain illness and promptly take action to bring normalcy to the affected children. Often, mothers are being left to shoulder the responsibility of providing healthcare. This should not be the case. Both parents should be responsible and responsive to the healthcare of their children. Even if the mother spends much time with the child, this does not call for a total neglect from the father during this critical period of the child's life. Quality health facilities should be provided to ensure quality life for these children.

As responsible parents, it should be noted that a child may be given good nutrition, good health care but when parents are not always available with whom to form an attachment, understand and respond to signal, such children may develop emotional disability at early stage. To ward off such condition, parents should always be available to provide the desired emotional satisfaction for their children. Solitary life breeds negative tendencies, and this should not be allowed to thrive in the life of these children at such a tender age. As parents make themselves available, they should provide things for the children to look at, touch, hear, smell, taste and hold. Being available to these children will afford the parents of providing appropriate language stimulation that would aid their linguistic abilities and thus make communication possible early in life.

Parents also have the responsibility of ensuring that the environment where these children move around is safe and secure to carry-out their exploration. Safe environment to explore gives them a sense of security, a sense that is free from danger(s). Such care, if provided adequately, makes the children to freely move or play which in turn affects their physical and social skills positively. Carrying out this responsibility, no doubt, will engender quality care and development from responsible and responsive parents. However, if this is not provided by the parents for the children, they may have problem later in life and in turn affect the parents and the entire family as equally expressed by Grolnick, Ryan and Deci (9)

Ensuring quality care and development in children also calls for effective parenting in the home. The form or type of parenting style adopted by parents goes along way to determine the personality development of their children. Whether parents adopt

democratic, autocratic, permissive or negligent parenting style is a matter of choice. However it should be noted that no single parenting style is wholly and entire the best. Parents are often advised to use which ever one(s) that will bring about positive development to the children. The fact that a family is adopting one particular parenting style does not however mean that such parenting style becomes a model for other parents.

Parent-child discussion is yet another responsibility that can generate meaningful care and intellectual development in the children. This however calls for regular presence and availability of the parents to their children where the parents can engage in appropriately developing discussion because children, at their early stage, are very inquisitive and curious. To satisfy their curiosity, time must be created where both parents and the children would have the opportunity of discussing, asking and answering questions that border on plethora of issues. Narrating events or telling stories about animals and human beings that are appropriate to their level of understanding makes them derive joy and satisfaction which in turn develops their skills of listening and reasoning.

Participating in leisure time activities or taking the children out on excursion to some important or historical places like Museum, National library, Palace, Stadium, Post-office, University campus, and a host of other places of educational interest would enable them to see things themselves, and such memories tend to linger on their minds for a long period of time. This facilitates understanding of some related issues that may come up in the school curriculum. Having such a trip with children does not only help academically but also make the children happy as this may be fun to them aside other benefits that they may gain from such field trips or excursion.

Considering the view of Osanyin (5) that early childhood development is actually an umbrella term encompassing a child's social, emotional, language, literacy, physical, creative and cognitive development, parents are therefore expected to play enormous role in these areas to have an all-round development in the children. Most especially in the area of the early childhood education that children receive, going to "day care centres" or E.C.E. centres will go along way of laying a solid and reliable foundation for the future academic progress of the children. Efforts should be made by parents to register children for early exposure to formal education. It has been observed that when parents are involved in their children's education, both children and parents are bound to benefit. Researchers have reported that parents' participation in their children's schooling frequently enhances children's self-esteem, improves children's academic achievement, improves

parent-child relationships, helps parents develop positive attitudes towards school and a better understanding of the schooling process.

Related to the above is the issue of providing academic materials the children can use or interact with both at home and at the E.C.E. centre. The provision of such will in no small measure engender easy and fast development of certain skills (literacy especially n the children. Besides, parents personally taking them to the E.C.E. centres makes them to develop positive attitude and thus make them to be ready for school instead of abandoning this responsibility to the housemaids who may be very hostile to the children.

According to Ehindero (10) the home provides the first natural social environment for the child. All forms of early development including the weapons needed to cope with the challenges of later life are all nurtured in the home, unfortunately most homes appear ill-prepared or are not equipped to nurture the key qualities and skills of children in a way that ensure normal development. One reason for parents' inability or unwillingness to do this, is clear ignorance. This is why it is important and desirable for homes especially parents to be aware of some of children's basic needs and to fashion out what we tagged "Needs Policy" which will have according to Ehindero (10):

- (i) A clear definition of the categories of needs in question;
- (ii) Procedures for the identification of children within each category;
- (iii) Means for the diagnosis of the precise needs of each child so identified;
- (iv) Appropriate home-grown "curricula" provisions to meet these needs.

With this mechanism in place parents would have equipped the child with relevant tools to cope with the developmental challenges at home and prepare for the learning (intellectual) requirements in the school.

In addition, two areas where the parents can make an enduring social and carryover effect on the child are in social and spiritual developments. Since the home is the first socializing agent, it behooves on the parents to assist the children learn the general rules by which adult members of the society behave. According to a publication by the Office of Standard in Education (OFSTED) Handbook (11) Social development is to be judged by:

- The quality of relationships in the school,
- The child's ability to exercise a degree of responsibility and initiative,
- The child's ability to work successfully in groups and to participate.
- cooperate and be productive in the school community.

In order for the parents and/or other relatives to socialize the child properly the in born egocentric tendencies of the child should be progressively transformed through planned interventions involving social interactions and spiritual development. Responsible parents are expected to inculcate and judge the extent of the child's spiritual development with respect to the extent to which the child displays:

(a) System of personal beliefs which may include religious beliefs;

(b) An ability to communicate their beliefs in discussion and through their behaviour;

(c) Willingness to reflect on experience and to search for meaning in that experience.

(d) Sense of awe and wonder as they become more conscious of deeper meanings in the apparent familiar features of the natural world or in their experience (OFSTED), (11).

Closely associated with spiritual development is the need also for parents to inculcate moral behaviour and positive attitude early in the life of the child. Such an attitude is to be assessed as the child shows: an understanding of the difference between right and wrong: respect for persons, truth and property; A Concern for how their actions may affect others; the ability to make responsible and seasoned judgments on moral issues.

According to Ehindero (10) parents should establish a framework of inculcating family values firmly in the minds of the child which will form the basis of his/her subsequent behaviour. Such values should articulate the four aforementioned terms listed above in a comprehensive ethical blue print. The primary purpose of early childhood education therefore is to assist the child to become a fully capacitated, self-motivating, self-fulfilled, contributing member of the society. On the whole, the greatest opportunity for both mother and child to find the love, warmth, security, human relationships needed to ensure the child's maximum intellectual and social growth is to be found in an intimate family unit, an ideal home-based developmental environment for every child during that formative time when the child's life happiness hangs in the stability and friendly atmosphere of the home.

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