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PARENTING, HOME ENVIRONMENT AND EDUCATION OF THE NIGERIAN CHILD

KEYNOTE PAPER

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Introduction

At birth, the human infant is not significantly different from other animal infants and especially from our closest living relative, the chimpanzee, except in physical characteristics. Consequently Parenting is not the prerogative of human beings. The lower animals also share the joy and responsibility of parenting, which explains why virtually all aspects of parenting among human beings are also observable among animals, at least to some extent. The universality of parenting is manifest among humans and animals and it is particularly striking between humans and chimpanzee, with which we share over 90% of our DNA (Suntsova and Buzdin, 2020)!

What however, distinguishes man from animals particularly; the chimpanzee is the capacity to learn. With the exception of reflexive and instinctive behaviours, every human behaviour is a product of learning. Whereas the baby chimpanzee requires only 7-10 years to learn all it requires for survival i.e. how to groom, make nests in trees, find food and use tools; for the human child, learning is not only from cradle to grave, it also involves learning more complex behaviours than required of lower animals. Expectedly, therefore, humans have much bigger brains and are as, species,

much more intelligent than chimpanzees. Indeed, the human brain is about three times as big as the brain of the chimpanzee; and the cerebral cortex – which plays a key role in memory, attention, awareness and thought – contains twice as many cells in humans as the same region in chimpanzees (Suntsova and Buzdin, 2020).

Important to this paper is the fact that such learning to reason, to relate and to resolve challenges is primarily from the parents at home and formal education in schools. Besides, the nature of parenting in homes has profound implications for learning in schools. Interrogating this linkage is the primary purpose of this paper. To this end, the objectives of the Paper are to:

Conceptualise Parenting, Home environment and Education;
Establish the nexus between Parenting and Home Environment;
Reflect on contemporary Parenting and Home Environment in Nigeria;
Examine the implications of Parenting and Home Environment for Children's Education; and
Highlight major productive Parenting Tips for effective education of the Nigerian child.

Conceptualising Parenting, Home Environment, Education and Child

Parenting: Every seed has the potential to grow into a tree depending on how it is cared for. If provided the right care at the right time and to the right degree, the seed of today can become a giant tree tomorrow.

In like manner, in childhood is the root of who each child becomes. The human infant has the potential to sprout and flourish depending on the nature of parenting it received. This is because the entire material essential for the child to emerge as a fully functioning, unique individual are already present at conception and are merely waiting nurturing by parents. Underscoring the all- important factor of parenting, Benjamin Carson, a renowned Pediatric Neurosurgeon, in 2005, wrote an Essay he titled "There is no job more important than parenting." But what is parenting? The starting point is an understanding of who a parent is.

A parent is a biological mother or father of a child. Another adult figure that is not biologically related to the child may also play the role of a parent but would be more appropriately described as a guardian. Such a guardian may be a parent to an adopted, foster or step child, as the case may be. Even government or agencies can perform the functions of parents for orphans, abandoned or abused children. However, such forms of parents are outside the scope of this Paper.

It is also important to acknowledge that the 21st century concept of a parent is flexible. In the context of gay marriages, for instance, a child's parents can actually comprise two males or females; and the child may be a product of assisted conception, adoption or surrogate motherhood. In the context of this Paper however, the concept of parent is limited to biological mother or father of a child. Besides, it is often assumed that a biological parent would be an adult with capacity to take care of him/herself, take care of others and make responsible decisions. This may however not always be the same. Cases abound of child mothers, victims of teenage pregnancy, mentally defective or physically incapacitated mothers with limited capacity for responsible decision making skills. Such categories of parents are not included in this Paper.

Parenting therefore, is about the care a parent provides for the child to meet its fundamental primary physical, security and emotional needs (Maslow, 1943). These guarantee the child's growth, comfort, love and warmth. Parenting involves protecting the child from harm, promoting and supporting his intellectual, spiritual and social development as well as inculcating in him acceptable values, norms and skills of his/her group/culture. Parenting is thus more of an activity than just biological relationship.

An important dimension of parenting relates to its nature i.e. whether co-parenting, (involving a mother and father) single parenting (either a mother or father alone), shared parenting (husband and wife taking turns), and same-sex parenting (gay/lesbian partners) or blended parenting (where at least a parent has children who are not biologically related to their spouse). The focus in this paper is limited to co-parenting.

The ultimate goal of parenting is to nurture the child into a responsible and viable member of the society. Accordingly, parenting is a life-long responsibility with specific developmental tasks at specific life phases from infancy to adulthood. However, focus in this Paper is limited to parenting responsibilities in the early childhood.

Home Environment: The child is a member of a family unit or household and the family resides within a physical structure called a house. The home environment is however significantly more than the physical structure. It is more about the nature of relationship provided by the parents for the child and between the parents and the child in terms of quality and quantity. It is about all the setting, conditions and experiences the child is exposed to in terms of physical nourishment, emotional warmth, learning and social experiences as well as physical surroundings. The home

environment is a measure of the degree of warmth and intimacy between the parents and the child and the adequacy or consistency of opportunities provided the child for such experiences, positive or negative. Indeed, just like the atmospheric temperature, home environments can be categorised into *warm or cold, mild or harsh, conducive or unconducive in* terms of variations in the degrees of warmth and intimacy between the parents and the children. Consequently, the home environment is the most significant institution for the nature and continuity of human life and the growth of different characteristics of personality of the child (Ghosh, 2020). The possible contributions of specific home environment to the child's educational achievement are the focus of this Paper.

Education: Children are not born with social skills; they must learn them; and learning for man is, lifelong. Learning molds or shapes the behaviours of children in distinct ways. The process through which such behaviour modification takes place is technically referred to as education. Education is defined as 'the process of facilitating learning or the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, beliefs and habits' (Murray, 2023). Education takes place informally through day-to-day interactions parents have with the children in the home environment. Education becomes formal when it involves receiving systematic instruction in a structured school setting. The ultimate aim of education, formal and informal, is to produce desirable changes for all round development of personalities of the children that could equip them for effective participation in the society.

Informal education in the home not only contributes to children's physical growth and development; it also contributes significantly to shaping their social, emotional, mental and character development. Similarly, through the formal education system, children acquire cognitive (knowledge), affective (character) and psychomotor skills. The focus of this Paper is on the possible contributions of parenting styles, home environment to the achievement of the child in each of the three domains both at the home and formal school settings at childhood.

Child: Every child is a changing, growing and developing organism; and the changes are in stages. From birth to the first two years of life, the child is in the stage of infancy. From two-five years, it is early childhood; and 5 to 12 years, late childhood. The childhood period spans the nursery and primary school years in Nigeria and this is the age group of interest to this Paper.

The Nexus between Parenting and Home Environment

While Parenting is common to human species, it manifests in various styles and it is characterised by distinct home environments. The term Parenting Style describes

the spectrum of attitudes, behaviours and practices that define the parent–child relationships in homes. Five major parenting styles are easily discernable from varying home environments: Authoritarian, Authoritative, Permissive, Over-involved and Uninvolved (Onikoyi, 2023; Yakubu and Idoko 2021; Sammons, et.al. 2015; and Parveen, 2007).

Authoritarian Parenting style is characterised by strict discipline and control. Parents expect instant obedience of, and strict compliance with, directives and any form of refraction attracts aversive consequences. Authoritarian parentitng style is associated with a strict and harsh home environment devoid of warmth and autonomy; and where the child lives in constant fear and apprehension. While this parenting style may result in instant obedience, compliance and submission, it ultimately generates feelings of resentment, rebellion and strained relationships.

Conversely, **Authoritative** Parenting is characterised by warmth, responsiveness and clear expectations. It manifests in a warm, flexible and conducive home environment where open communications, mutual respect and collaborative problem-solving are encouraged. Expectedly, Authoritative parenting fosters love, independence and sense of responsibility in children.

More than exists in Authoritative parenting, **Permissive** parenting style is marked by excessive warmth and affection, actually bothering on indulgence. Limited or no demands are placed on the child, no clear behavioural expectations or structures are set. Consequently, the child develops no sense of self-regulation, responsibility or behaviour boundaries.

Even more indulging than permissive parenting is the **Over-Involved** Parenting, in which excessive control and protection feature. This typifies an unconducive home environment where everything is done for the child. The child is not only in constant view of the parents there is also hardly any opportunity provided for self expression apparently to protect the child from injury/ harm, real or imagined. While this parenting style may be well-intentioned it may limit the child's ability for decision- making , emotional stability inducing anxiety dependency.

Perhaps, the most abusive Parenting style is the **Uninvolved style**, involving low levels of engagement and support. This is associated with a cold and destructive home environment where the child faces apparent neglect with limited support provided for his/her physical and emotional needs . Expectedly, this style tends to cause the child significant emotional and behavioural problems as well as a lack of self-esteem.

Reflections on Contemporary Parenting and the Home Environment in Nigeria
While Nigerian parents can not be outrightly described as manifesting Uninvolved Parenting styles, it can hardly be contested that more and more children are currently being raised in passive ways for a couple of reasons:

Social Media Effect: No doubt, many Nigerian parents tend to be generally concerned about placing their children in good schools and providing comforts within the limits of their resources in the home , however , more and more limited quality time appears to be invested in personal interactions with children. 'Cold' home environments, in which parents are engrossed with the social media and the children with computer games on ipads, appear to be fast becoming the new normal. More than ever before, the Nigerian child appears to be more on his/her own in the home.

The State of the Nation: The realities of the current economic situation in the country make parents spend increasingly more time outside the home and the frustrations associated with limited financial resources further limit opportunities for quality parental interactions with the children.
While providing the child with good education and good things of life are important, the truth however remains that parenting is much more than paying school fees ; and children need the presence of parents more than presents.

Great Expectations: Some Nigerian parents currently appear to harbor idealized mental images of what their children are and how they can perform consequently pushing for their early exit from secondary and entry into tertiary institution without recourse to the timeline provided in the National Policy on Education, even to the extent of legally challenging the same. While it is true that some children are exceptionally brilliant enough to access tertiary education much earlier than others, it is doubtful if many of the children being currently agitated for actually fall into that category. Pushing children to assume developmental tasks they are not ready for often lead to problems associated with arrested development. Perhaps awareness of possible detrimental effects of arrested development is the reason why more advanced countries like Britain and other countries in Europe, do not allow children to access primary schools earlier than 6 years or tertiary institution before the age of 18. It is doubtful if many of the current generation of Nigerian parents themeselves even accessed primary school earlier than 7 years following kindergatten. More importantly, children who are deprived of critical opportunity to experience the full strecth of childhood tend to pay for it dearly in emotional and personality challenges later in life. The push for growth lies in every child because every child has an inner timetable for growth –unique to him/her. Parents must respect this fact and allow

each child to progressively navigate the path of development rather than push for their early school completion. It should really be more about the children than the parents after all; it is about their future not the parents'!

Implications of Parenting and Home Environment for Children's Education

Parenting style and home environment are intricately related to children's development in every facet of life, physical, emotional, social, cognitive and moral each and all of which also have profound implications for learning, which is the purpose of education (Lehri , Evangelou and Sammons,2020; Ceka and Murati, 2016; and Sammons, et.al.2015;). The organ that enables learning in human beings is the brain, specifically, the cerebellum, otherwise known as the human brain, which lower animals do not have.

The cerebellum is the seat of cognition having to do with information encoding, processing, coding, thinking, remembering , appreciating, coordinating and utilizing all of which are integral to learning. Important as the cerebellum is however, it is not fully developed at birth. Rather, the development of the brain depends on the mutual influences of genetics, the environment and experience. Specifically, while the genes for the structure of the brain, in terms of nerve cells and neurons are laid at conception the manifestation of the actual potentials of the brain require a warm and caring home environment ; and healthy, responsive and, stimulating interactions with parents.

No doubt, the human brain has continuous opportunities for change or improvement, but early life experiences tend to be more critical in brain development, particularly in laying the foundation for intellectual, emotional and social development required for the child's education. The brain is especially sensitive to good and bad early life experiences, especially in the first five years of life, when the human brain forms connections more easily. More importantly, aspects of the brain that process basic information must get properly developed early in life without which the development of higher circuits of the brain, required for higher level functioning will not be wired properly (Tierney and Nelson Ill, 2009). Consequently, the nature of Parenting style and home environment a child is raised in at this period are important determinants of the quality of development of the critical aspects of the brain required for the child's intellectual, emotional and social functioning.

Children of authoritative parents, who are raised in stable, safe, supportive and responsive environment of relationships; whose parents plan with and are given a voice in the family; and where parents take responsibility for the children's learning will most likely develop healthy brains and personalities that can put them in good

stead for learning. Expectedly therefore, research shows that children raised in authoritative homes and given a say in the family not only develop positive self esteem, they also tend to do well academically (Khan, Begum and Imad, 2019; Hussain et.al., 2013 ; and Shah, Atta, Qureshi, and Shah, 2012).

Conversely, children raised in authoritarian, permissive, over-involved and un-involved homes are not similarly advantaged. For instance, on account of fear and anxiety, children raised in harsh homes typically lack capacity for decision-making, creativity and curiosity required for productive learning; just as children raised in permissive homes are likely to lack the self control, attention span and the sense of responsibility required to profit from education. Similarly, while children used to excessive protection from, and dependency on, over-involved parents, will most likely lack the degree of autonomy and decision-making skills required to profit from education; children raised in uninvolved, neglecting homes will not only develop emotional and behavioural problems, they will also typically find it difficult to cope with academic demands (Bandhana and Sharma, 2012; and Parveen, 2007). It thus appears that authoritative parenting style, typical of warm, stimulating and supportive home environment, is the most profitable for optimising children's intellectual and emotional potentials for productive education.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Parenting styles play a pivotal role in shaping a child's development and future outcomes. By understanding the implications of parenting styles and adopting effective strategies, parents can create nurturing environments that will promote resilience, autonomy and well-being in children. A number of profitable recommendations to engender such outcomes are here proffered.

Recommendations on Productive Parenting Tips for Effective Education of the Nigerian child Respecting the fact of Individual Differences: Children are unique beings with unique potentials waiting to be nurtured for the good of the society. Apart from the fact that parents should resist comparing them with others, they must also remember that though they come through parents, the children do not only belong to parents but also to the society at large. Parenting should therefore not be directed at striving to make the children like other children or like their parents but also at helping to nurture their own unique qualities so that they can become the best they can be in the society. This will require parents being intentional in creating quality time to identify and help children to discover their own strengths, interests and values, which are critical in shaping their future outcomes. Positive and quality parental involvement is a proven strategy for ensuring children's success in life. This does not only provide the child needed security, it also communicates love and

affection to the child, which are important foundations for developing strong self esteem and optimising brain development.

Productive Discipline: Discipline is an important and integral part of parenting but it should neither be too aversive, unnecessarily prolonged nor inconsistently applied. Rather, discipline should be instilled with clear rules and instructions and used to motivate children through love not through fear. It is important that children are loved for who they are rather than being corrected for every little mistake all the time. More importantly, children who are celebrated for small achievements tend to become more successful in life than those raised in strict and highly controlling environments.

Role modeling: Children learn more and better through observation and imitation than instruction. Parents would therefore need to be intentional in modeling the characters they want to see the children imbibe.

One practical approach to determining the best parenting style to adopt and type of home environment to create is by parents reflecting on their own early life experiences and evaluating how such experiences have impacted their own development trajectory. Such reflections should then provide parents critical insights into whether the home environments and parenting styles they were exposed would be the best for their own children. Such critical reflection would not only convince parents of the profound implications of parenting styles and home environment on children's future life outcomes; it will also be a possible acid test in determining the best parenting style and home environment they would want to create for their own offsprings.

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