The Role of Parents in Early Childhood Education: A Case Study of Ikeja, Lagos State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This research aims at providing solutions to role of parents in early childhood education in Nigeria. It will serve as an eye opener to parents and the society in helping to modify or re-adjust their mode of parental involvement towards achieving a better future for themselves and their children notwithstanding their busy schedules and in some cases, inadequacy of resources. A survey approach was used through self- administered questionnaires, and analysis was done using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to test thehypotheses. Based on the findings of this work, parental involvement, that is emotional care and support has a very big influence on early childhood education, particularly the academic performance of the child. More so, it was observed that the extent of parental educational attainment has a significant influence on the age which the child is being sent to school. This implies that the extent or level of the parental educational attainment and exposure determines the age at which the child is being enrolled to school. It was also discovered that, the residential setting of the parents (respondents) has nothing to do with the educational performance of the child. On the whole, parental involvement is very essential in early childhood education and this helps to broaden the child?s horizon, enhance social relationships, and promote a sense of self-esteem and self-efficacy.

Index terms— Childhood education, parental involvement, parental education and academic performance

1 INTRODUCTION

ducation in the second half of the twentieth century has been characterized by increases in the provision of educational programs for preschool-age children. The largest wave of preschool education activity has been the federally funded Head Start program, established in the 1960s to help children overcome the cognitive, social, emotional, and physical deficits that frequently accompany growing up in economically deprived homes. By providing an array of educational and social services to children and their families, Head Start programs are designed to foster general well-being and enhance school readiness, so that these children might gain the full benefit of their school experiences and be more successful in life generally.

If Head Start and other programs for economically disadvantaged children can be shown to make a positive difference in these children's school and life experiences, their impact can be very widespread. **??**chweinhart (1985) points out that one-fourth of all children under the age of six are living in poverty, and that three-fifths of the mothers of three-and four-yearold children now work outside the home. However, fewer than 20 percent of the nation's three and four-year-olds from poor families are currently enrolled in Head Start programs.

Kindergarten enrollment has also increased dramatically in recent years. While only seven states mandate kindergarten attendance, about 95 percent of all children currently attend kindergarten (Sava 1987), and 23 percent of these attend full-day programs **??**Karweit 1988). In addition to the generally recognized need to provide some kind of extra support to children from low-income homes, there is another reason for the dramatic increase in educational programs for children before first grade. This is the increase, alluded to above, of mothers

in the workforce. Many parents who are not at home with their children in the daytime are not satisfied with unstructured day care or babysitting, preferring that their children participate in more formal learning experiences. Finally, some of the increased interest in and push for structured preschool programs comes from the unfortunate notion, held by some, that education is a race to be won, and those who start first are more likely to finish ahead. Commenting on this source of pressure for preschool education, Elkind (1988) says: ...the choice of the phrase "Head Start" was unfortunate. "Head Start" does imply a race. And not surprisingly, when middle income parents heard that low-income children were being given a "Head Start," they wanted a similar "Head Start" for their children.

A great many educators and researchers view early childhood education as beneficial to children's cognitive and social development. These proponents including virtually all of the researchers and theorists whose work was consulted in order to prepare this document base their conviction on personal observation and on the many research studies linking early childhood programs to desirable outcomes. It is important to note, however, that some educators, such as Elkind (1988), **??**atz (1987), Zigler (1986), and representatives of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (1986) warn against too much formal, highly structured education for very young children. These and other writers have called attention to three major objections to school-based programs. As summarized by Katz, these objections include:

? Such programs, because they are to be conducted in schools normally serving elementary-age children, will inevitably adopt formal academic teaching methods that early childhood specialists generally consider developmentally inappropriate for under-sixyear-olds. In addition, writers such as Herman (1984) and Puleo (1988) call attention to the issues surrounding the half-day/full-day kindergarten controversy. They note that some educators and researchers feel that the additional hours are too fatiguing for young children and that, in any case, increasing allocated time does not necessarily enhance program quality. Given this array of assertions and reservations about preschool and kindergarten programs, it is important to examine what well-designed research studies reveal about the longand short-term effects of early childhood education. It is also important to determine whether different effects are produced by different models for early childhood programs–to determine, for example, whether didactic, teacher-directed programs or less-structured, "discovery" models produce superior cognitive and behavioral outcomes. Finally, we need to determine whether different populations of students respond differently to early childhood education in general or to particular program models. "The relationship of the early childhood education research to the general effective schooling research is also of interest to teachers, administrators, theorists, and researchers. The effective schooling research base developed over the past two decades tells us a great deal about what school and classroom practices are effective for students in general".

The series of topical synthesis documents of which this report is a part examines particular topic areas against the backdrop of the general effective schooling research to determine points of congruence and identify any areas where the general and specific bodies of research do not match. To achieve this, the present report invokes the general effective schooling research cited in Effective Schooling Practices: A Research Synthesis (Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory 1984). In reviewing the many research findings cited in this document, it is important to remember that they did not, for the most part, emerge from studies conducted with children younger than first graders. Many of these studies are therefore not applicable to these very young children, because the settings and treatments employed in them represent what Katz described above as "formal academic teaching methods that early childhood specialists generally consider developmentally inappropriate for under-six-year-olds."

There are, nevertheless, several points of congruence between the two literatures, and these will be noted following a discussion of the research on early childhood education.

2   1) General Objective

The broad objective of this study is to critically examine the role, effectiveness and impact of parents in early childhood education in Nigeria, specifically the geographical location of Ikeja, Lagos State. The specific objectives include the following:

? To examine the impact of parents in early childhood years.

? To investigate if the socio-demographic characteristics of the parents have an impact on early childhood education.

? To examine the factors affecting parental involvement in early child hood education.

? To recommend measures to increase the rate and involvement of parents in early childhood education in the study area and also Nigeria.

2) Hypotheses to be tested A hypothesis can be defined as a hunch, an educated guess or logical speculation based on available data information relative to a problem or a set of problem under investigation (Izedonmi 2005).

It is a proposition made about a population that is subjected to test in order to determine its validity. It is an intelligible uncertified proposition. In testing the hypothesis of the role of parents in early childhood education the hypothesis below is being deduced;

? The higher the level of parental involvement in early childhood education, the higher the educational performance of the child. ? The socio-economic characteristics have an impact on early childhood education. ? The more conducive the learning environment of the child the higher the educational performance.

II.

3 LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous studies, observations, opinions, and comments related to the problem under investigation will be identified and evaluated. More so, the future of any country and mankind depends solely on the children. In order to achieve this, there must be emphasis laid on the issue of the role of parents in early childhood education.

Children's rights have been argued about for centuries, and the concept touches raw nerves when adult decisions and actions are put to the test (Stainton Rogers, 2004). 'Rights are entitlements, valuable commodities' which we 'do not have to grovel or beg to get', according to **??**reeman (1996, p. 70). Children's rights do not receive widespread public or political support in New Zealand, and perhaps even less so in Australia. Children's rights have often been perceived as 'a political hot potato', which, rather than advancing children's interests, jeopardize them **??**Melton, 2005, p. 655). This is a disturbing state of affairs, which one would like academics and professionals working on children's issues to fight. There is a responsibility for education about children's rights to be implemented in countries which have ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (the Convention). Article 42 obliges the state 'to make the principles and provisions of the Convention widely known, by appropriate and active means, to adults and children alike'. It is particularly important, therefore, for early childhood teacher education and professional development programs to ensure that the principles of the Convention are understood and implemented in early childhood services.

Professionals working with children have an important role in advocating for them: by taking a proactive approach towards recognising the rights of all children; and responding by trying to change systems, policies and individuals. Child advocacy involves raising the status of children, increasing their self-determination and the responsiveness and accountability of institutions affecting them (Melton, 1987). Professionals should be educating government and local agencies about the Convention and using it to provide a common basis for understanding, and a framework to plan and operate services for children. Child advocacy is not about undermining the role of parents, families or teachers, nor is it about denying children their childhood. The Convention provides legal and ethical grounds on which to argue for changes to policy in favour of children's rights. Greater collaboration between agencies concerned with the rights of children in different spheres, and even between different countries, could do much to speed implementation. The Convention is a powerful international treaty, ratified by all but two countries in the world (US and Somalia), which is being used proactively in many countries to persuade governments and communities to support better policies for children. Even if countries do not fully comply with the Convention, ratification of it signals an intention for them to progressively implement it and incorporate it into their domestic law, policies and practice (Ludbrook, 2000).

The Convention provides an internationally accepted standard to be applied to basic human rights affecting children. Freeman (1995) argues that, while the Convention is not the final word on children's rights (because it is a result of international compromise); it goes well beyond any previous international documents and reflects a world consensus on the status of children. Melton believes that the Convention is unusual in the breadth of its coverage. Not only is the Convention a nearly universally adopted expression of respect for children as persons, but it is also unparalleled in its conceptual breadth. No other human-rights treaty directly touches on so many domains of life. (2005, p. 648). It is a document of reconciliation which treats parents and children with respect. It has had a major impact on other fields, including law, welfare and health. The following quote from the Principal Family Court Judge in New Zealand, referring to a new law, the Care of Children Act, 2005, illustrates well the different perspective on children associated with the Convention.

Children are citizens and social participants in their own right. This is a fundamental shift from the old adage 'children should be seen but not heard'. No longer are children to be thought of as the property of their parents, unwarranted of consideration until the attainment of adulthood. Children are human beings and entitled to the same degree of respect as adult human beings. ... This position of being people unto themselves, while also being dependent on others, is clearly recognised in the pre-eminent human rights instrument specific to children. That is the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC). As the most widely adopted human rights document in history, ratified by 192 countries, UNCROC provides a powerful backdrop to the Care of Children Act. (Boshier, 2005,

4 p. 7).

There are other the Convention articles which are also important for early childhood education (Smith, 2000), but it is participation rights, in particular Articles 12 and 13, that are the most challenging. Article 12 says the views of children should be taken into account in decisions affecting them (according to age and maturity). Article 13 says children have the right to express their views and to be given information. Article 12 is 'the linchpin' of the Convention (Freeman, 1996) which recognises children's personality and autonomy; children as people and not just objects of concern, and that children must be listened to. Article 13 is equally important in setting out children's rights to give and receive information. These articles accept that children are full human beings with rights and dignity, and accord respect to their identity (Pufall & Unsworth, 2004).

Increasing attention has been paid to the early childhood years as the foundation of children's academic success. The importance of high quality learning environments, qualified teachers, and family engagement with early care and education programs have all been identified as critical factors in enhancing young children's early learning experiences and their subsequent educational outcomes (Cost, Quality, and Outcome Study Team, 1995; NICHD,

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2000; Peisner-Feinberg et al., 1999). This report focuses on one critical aspect in supporting high quality learning experiences for young children -that of family involvement in early care and education programs. Family is the primary influence of young children and sets the stage for how they grow and develop (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). The more parents are involved with their children, the more positive learning and general life outcomes occur (Baker, Goesling & Letendre, 2002).

Furthermore, children of involved parents typically display higher levels of achievement, more acceptable behavior and greater motivation in school (Keith, 1999). Students who excel academically often have parents who are interested in their children's learning from an early age and who engage in supportive learning activities, such as rhyming and shared book reading (Wade & Moore, 1998). It is important that the key role families play in supporting their child's learning at home and in early care and education programs be understood, facilitated, and nurtured across the array of services and programs available to young children and their families. The following report examines this issue particularly as it relates to the current context of early care and education in Kentucky;

While many studies have focused on "parent involvement," the concept remains unclear, leading to uncertainty for many families and early care and education providers. Thus, there is no standard definition of parent involvement. Rather, the term is used loosely and is construed in a number of ways. For instance, Sheldon (2002) loosely defined parent involvement as the investment of resources in children by parents. While Coleman and Churchill (1997) provide a more descriptive definition stating that family involvement can include many different components including a program providing emotional support, providing parents with skills and knowledge, communicating about the child with the provider. However, their definition is still quite broad and they admit that it is not inclusive. Furthermore, McBride, Bae and Wright (2002) use the words family-school partnership, parent involvement, and family involvement interchangeably to define the process between schools and families that enhances learning for the children. The interpretation of parent involvement is highly dependent on the individual beliefs and expectations of each person concerned. Often, the beliefs and expectations between families and early care and education programs are not shared collectively. This often causes confusion as to what role each is to play in the care and education of children, which can ultimately lead to decreased involvement.

With the understanding that parent involvement is highly individualized, a broad approach to defining parent involvement is more likely to encompass the full extent of beliefs and expectations presently held by families and providers. To that end, Epstein (2001) suggests that the relationships and interactions among family members, educators, community, and students are similar to partnerships. **??**unst (1990) presents a family-centered approach, one where a child's growth and development is nurtured by the overlapping supports of parents, family, community, and child learning opportunities, as most effective for successful outcomes. Both Epstein and Dunst present the partnerships between families and providers as an opportunity for shared responsibility for facilitating the growth and development of children.

Following a comprehensive approach of involvement for family and professional partnerships, Epstein (2001) describes six types of involvement including parenting, communication, volunteering, learning at home, and decision making, and collaborating with the community. Each type of involvement comprises various components (see Table 1). Families and educators can work together to develop goals and establish the best possible practices that are meaningful and appropriate for both parties. 22, **??**003). Many young children who are considered "atrisk," as defined by their family income level, receive services through either federal program, such as Head Start, or through state supported programs such as the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) preschool programs in Kentucky. Thus, many Kentucky families are currently accessing some type of early care and education program. Although these programs vary in many ways, they all have the potential to provide the foundation for successful parent-school partnerships for Kentucky families.

Despite the number of children in early care and education programs, most research concerning parent involvement is focused on families with children in the school system and for school-age children in particular. It is essential that the foundation for familyschool/program partnerships is nurtured early in a child's educational experience in an effort to enhance future family-school partnerships as well as optimize children's educational success. Although the schoolbased research provides insight to parent involvement, several differences exist between early care and education programs and school-based programs, which can affect the nature of parental involvement. These differences stem from both the ideological differences that have historically served as the catalyst for the emergence of these programs, as well as their funding and current structure of operation. Specifically, public school programs are an entitlement to all children who reside in the U.S. and are seen as the primary vehicle to support children's formal education and preparation for society. Although varying philosophies and approaches can be witnessed throughout the public school system, their funding structure is essentially similar and secured by a combination of federal and state funding. a) Theoretical Framework i) Family Systems Theory Family Systems Theory proposes that families are interconnected units in which each member exerts a reciprocal influence on the other members (Boss et al., 1993). Thus, each member of a family is affected by the family system in which they participate (Berger, 2000). Changes occurring in any part of the family system, such as a parent losing a job or a child switching classrooms, affect and initiate changes within other members of the family. Thus, early care and education programs can expect to see changes in children based on what happens within the family system. Likewise, families can anticipate changes in their child based on what

takes place within the program. Therefore, it is essential that parents are involved with what is happening with the child while in the program, as well as for the program to stay informed of what is happening with the family.

There are many factors that influence a family's ability to both facilitate a child's growth and development and participate in parent education programs. Issues of diversity, communication, meeting preferences, resources, time, knowledge, and personnel affect family involvement. Issues of diversity can be found throughout the majority of research regarding parent involvement. In recent research, diversity is most commonly discussed in terms of race, socioeconomic status (SES), parents' educational level, and family structure (Desimone, 1999; Bruckman & Blanton, 2003).

While there are disagreements within the current literature about the degree of influence these factors have on parent involvement, there is consensus that they are influential. Race and ethnicity have also been a focus of many studies of family involvement, specifically Caucasian, African, Hispanic, Latino, and Asian American families. Most often, findings suggest that parent involvement programs fail to serve minority groups, groups that are not Caucasian and/or middle class and that programs that are designed around the needs of Caucasian, middle class parents do not efficiently serve other groups. This leads to feelings of discomfort and disconnection among parents of minorities, which minimizes their chances of participation. Crozier (2001) has contended that parent involvement strategies will ultimately fail until the needs of ethnic minorities are recognized and addressed. Although it is necessary to recognize the needs of particular groups, it is also important to avoid restricting people to specific categories. Placing stereotypes on individuals may potentially suppress the uniqueness of individuals in minority groups (Jordan, Reyes-Blanes, Peek, Peel, & Lane, 1998).

In addition to ethnicity, education and SES are commonly examined as it relates to family involvement. U.S. Census Bureau (2000a) indicates that 28.6% of adults over the age of 25 have a high school diploma or higher while 15.5% have a bachelor degree or higher. Increasing parents' educational levels and knowledge has been shown to lead to an increase in their children's knowledge, thereby decreasing the disadvantageous lives that some families lead (Bauer and Barnett, 2001).

According to Bauer and Barnett (2001), the United States has one of the highest percentages of children in poverty among developed countries, with many of these children being raised by single mothers. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2000b), over 2.5 million families with related children under age 5 live below the poverty line. The resources available to families have a large impact on every aspect of life, including participation in parent education programs. Parents from lower SES backgrounds experience many obstacles, which affect their ability to participate. Time constraints due to work schedules, need for child transportation and financial difficulties (Eccles & Harold, 1993;Finders and Lewis, 1994;Lamb-Parker et al., 2001;McBride, Bae and Wright, 2002;Sheldon, 2002) are all hindrances to their ability to be involved. Parents who come from higher SES backgrounds generally have more flexibility in their schedules and do not have the additional daily stressors that lower SES parents' experience. Parents with few resources who struggle with such stressors may not have the time to practice effective parenting (Eccles & Harold, 1993) Not only can life at home be disadvantageous for some parents, but they can also receive poor treatment by teachers and professionals. Bruckman and Blanton (2003) found that teachers who were not supporters of parent involvement typically had negative views about parents with lower income levels and those with less education. Glanville & Tiller (1991) propose that some parents, due to their low SES background, lack certain skills that would allow them to participate and help in their child's development. Coleman and Churchill (1997) further found that parent with low SES and education levels are just as interested in being involved in parent education programs as those with higher incomes and greater levels of education, but may not demonstrate their involvement in the same ways. For example, low income parents prefer helping their children at home over volunteering at school (Desimone, 1999). Knowing that diversity exists among the parents participating in early care and education settings, it can be assumed that various groups of people also have diverse needs in regards to working with professionals in education programs.

5 III.

6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY 1) Sampling Procedure

A simple random technique was be adopted in the selection of the respondent (parents) from no education level, to primary education level, to secondary education level, and tertiary/post-secondary education level in Ikeja, Lagos state. The questionnaires were distributed in primary schools, through the headmistress, in non-governmental organizations, and governmental organization.

7 2) Method Of Data Collection

Since the population was primary school, governmental and non-governmental organization, more so, the respondents are majorly parents and most of them are literate, therefore, the questionnaire was designed in such a way that the respondent will be able to fill-in the answers themselves without having any problem on either of the questions , that is, open and close-ended questions. About five (5) people including myself will carry out the administration of the questions.

8 3) Data Processing

After returning from the field work, information supplied in the questionnaire was edited to check for inconsistencies and inadequacies. Thereafter, the response were categorized and re-coded where the questions are open-ended type. The coding was used in preparing the frequency tables and cross tabulations. The tables' cross-tabulations were then prepared for analytical purposes.

9 IV.

Data presentation and analysis 1) Data analysis and interpretation HYPOTHESIS I: The higher the level of parental involvement in early childhood education, the higher the educational performance of the child.

Multiple H0: There is no significant relationship between parental involvement in early childhood education and the educational performance of the child.

H1: There exists a significant relationship between parental involvement in early childhood education and the educational performance of the child. CONCLUSION: Since P value is less than 0.05 .i.e. (0.000<0.05) therefore, we can reject the Null hypothesis (H0) and accept Alternative hypothesis (H1), meaning that there is a significant relationship between parental involvement in early childhood education and the educational performance of the child. From the analysis it is vividly obvious that children are most likely to perform better in their early childhood education with adequate participation of parents.

HYPOTHESIS II: The socio-economic characteristics have an impact on early childhood education.

Multiple H0: The socio-economic characteristics do not have an impact on early childhood education.

H1: The socio-economic characteristics do have an impact on early childhood education. CONCLUSION: Since P value is less than 0.05 .i.e. (0.000<0.05) therefore, we can reject the Null hypothesis (H0) and accept Alternative hypothesis (H1), meaning that the socio-economic characteristics do have an impact on early childhood education. The parental educational exposure is very crucial. Some parents just don't buy the idea of letting their kids experience early childhood education. More so, some parents who are illiterate do engage in practices like; if the child's hand does not touch the other side of his/her ears then he/she can't start school. These are kind of old beliefs that should be discarded. So therefore, the parental educational exposure has a very huge impact on the early childhood education.

HYPOTHESIS III: The more conducive the learning environment of the child the higher the educational performance.

Multiple H0: There is no significant relationship between the learning environment of the child and the child's educational performance.

H1: There is a significant relationship between the learning environment of the child and the child's educational performance. CONCLUSION: Since P value is greater than 0.05.i.e. (0.934>0.05) therefore, we can accept the Null hypothesis (H0) and reject Alternative hypothesis (H1), concluding that there is no significant relationship between the learning environment of the child and the child's educational performance. This means that for the fact that a child schools in the rural area doesn't mean his/her educational performance would be poor, and on the other hand, the fact that a child schools in the urban area doesn't mean his/her educational performance would be good. [1] [2]

1

Type Of Involvement	Purpose/Goal
Parenting	Help all families establish home environment to support children as students
Communicating	Design effective forms of school-to-home and home -to-school communications about school programs and their children's progress
Volunteering	Recruit and organize parent help and support
Learning at Home	Provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and

Figure 1: Table 1

9 IV.

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