

PARENTING CHALLENGES FOR THE 21ST CENTURY NIGERIAN CHILD: A SOCIAL STUDIES PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Parenthood is one of the most important social roles all over the world including Nigeria. This role has been altered by globalization. It has led to trends that are threatening the Nigerian parentage as such most parents are in a crisis struggling to provide appropriate supports to their children. Social studies education that is designed to rescue the situation is seriously challenged. This paper takes a cursory look at the emerging roles of parenting in the 21st Century and the role played by Social Studies Education. It highlights the challenges faced by Social Studies education, which has hindered society from benefiting from its inclusion into the school system. Recommendations are proffered to help realize the efficacy of social studies education in creating an effective parentage for a 21st Century Nigerian child.

Introduction

Parenthood is a social role especially in Africa. The major role/obligations of father and mother within the family are clear. Parenting in much of Africa including Nigeria is the shared responsibility of the extended family. For example, a man is a father because he has responsibility for a child (Nsamenang, 1987). Similarly Mkhize (2005) explained that through collective parenting, a mother's sister is also a child's mother, as is a father's brother also a child's father. These other men are addressed as father and are expected to behave in a manner deserving of being called fathers.

In the western world, it is commonly accepted that a man becomes a father when he impregnates a woman. According to Richter and Morrell (2005),

this biological criterion of fatherhood, though, is under increasing stress. Some biological fathers do not act like fathers and do not support their children. New technologies make it possible to create human life without impregnation through test tube baby and cloning is rapidly becoming a possibility. However, collective parenthood is typical of traditional African society, but social parenthood has become typical of life in cities and towns, as well. A man may father a child but never live in the same house with her or him, or he may live with a woman and care for her children from another man, while supporting the children of his brother in a different household. In varying circumstances, many men provide father care and support for children who

may not be their biological offsprings (Mkhize, 2004). Bearing this in mind, the Nigerian notion of father, then, is a man who enacts the responsibility of caring for and protecting a child.

However, the patterns of social changes and the disruptions caused by the process of modernization, urbanization and industrialization have made it difficult for many men in Africa to meet the societal expectation of a father as an economic provider. In some cases, the shame of being unable to provide for families has driven men away from their children to seek solace in drinks and other women (Ramphela, 2002). The picture in Nigeria may not be too different. Moreso, among some younger men, respect for fathers, as well as a father's own sense of responsibility for his children, have diminished. It is now tragically common for a young man to turn his back on his pregnant girl friend and the child they share. Due to all these challenges, the parents seem to be inadequately prepared to perform their parenting roles. Therefore, relegating this function to other institutions is having grievous implications for the parents, the children and society.

This paper examines parenting challenges for the 21st Century Nigerian child and the role Social Studies education can play to remedy the ugly trend.

Parenting Challenges and the 21st Century Nigerian Child.

The 21st Century is an age of increasing global competitions in all aspects of human endeavours. This has led to the process of increasing

interconnectedness between societies such that events (social, political and economic) in one part of the world more and more have effects on peoples and societies far away (Smith and Baylis, 1996). In each case of event, the world seems to be 'shrinking' and people are increasingly aware of this. For example, there is now, more than ever before, a global culture that portrays most urban areas resembling one another. Also the world shares a common emerging risk culture. For example, people are realizing that the main risks that face them are global (like HIV/AIDs, family instability, moral decadence etc) and states are unable to deal with the problems. The world is becoming more homogenous thus differences between peoples are diminishing. This has led to a cosmopolitan culture where people are beginning to think globally and act locally. The picture in Nigeria may not be too different because this is evident in virtually all aspects of our culture such as marriage and family relationship, religious beliefs, language and communication, music and entertainment, the place of women and general life style.

Based on this, Nigeria is considered a globalizing nation. If this is so, then, what are the parenting challenges posed by globalization on the 21st Century Nigerian Child?

Children were and remain highly valued in African communities including Nigeria. Parent's valued children for their assistance in carrying out family chores and responsibilities. They were seen as an investment when parents grew old. Children were seen as a source of joy and

received with pride. More importantly, children had a spiritual significance, linking the creator and generations, past and present (Kilbride and Kilbride, 1990; Mwamwenda 1996). Therefore the expectations of families and communities and the values they placed on children influenced how children were cared for and educated.

The place of the child at the international (global) level is equally significant. For example, Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Nalta World NGO forum all point at the best interests of the child (United Nations, 2004). In cognizance with this, Engle, Lhotska, and Armstrong (1997) stated that the most important factor in a child's healthy development is to have at least, one strong relationship (attachment) with a caring adult who values the well-being of the child.

Social Scientists and Anthropologists have reported that parenting pattern either an extended family model, a community/tribal model, a nuclear family or some other stable pattern are disrupted in many societies because of globalization. Studies have confirmed that the state of young children in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) as measured by a child welfare index that combines national economic well-being and child-level indicators in health, nutrition, poverty, orphanage and early education and care portray that they live in dire conditions (World Bank 2007 and UNESCO 2006). No doubt this ugly trend has posed a threat to the institution of family not only in

Nigeria but the world generally. Organization of African Unity (2001) has argued that, "today's investment in children is tomorrow's peace, stability, security, democracy and sustainable development".

Globalization has affected demographic patterns through growing poverty and unemployment (Antoine 1995). In line with this, Bigombe and Khadiagala (2003) concluded that globalization has resulted in "double marginalization across the African continent. This implies that local incomes have had an absolute decline in relation to the global economy and socio-economic disparities have widened in countries that have taken advantage of it. This subsequently has questioned how adequately prepared parents are to perform their parental roles. Therefore, areas of parenting challenges to be focused on are migration pattern, trends that threaten the family and choices of who parents young children.

Rural-urban migration has been seen as essential to expand job opportunities, enhance social mobility and increase income. However, the expectation of higher incomes and standards of living in urban areas is seldom realized. This has led to widespread and growing poverty in urban areas though many of these people continue to support families in rural areas. Thus dependence and the absence of those who have moved to urban areas have changed household dynamics, consequently, affecting household roles like childrearing (Ferrare 1991). The mobility of young males in search of

opportunities in urban areas remains a constant feature of migration. This implies that the solidarity between spouses is weakened by the separation.

Globalization has led to trends that threaten family such as shift in roles. In today's economy, both the husband and wife have to generate income. This led to changes in household structures as control over resources has shifted gradually away from men to women. These shifts have had an impact on the role of men in childrearing. Not only that, there is a decline in family size due to dependence on a monetary economy. This subsequently, has changed the value of children from active contributors to a farm economy, to a drain on limited resources. One of the consequences of the changing view of the value of children is that young men and women are getting married, or raising families without being officially married, at increasingly younger ages. Bigombe and Khadiagala (2003) observed that parents see early marriage as a way of immediately realizing the economic value of a daughter's dowry. The AIDS epidemic has had far-reaching effects on family. According to UNICEF (2004), more than 1.9 million children had been orphaned by AIDS resulting in an increase in child and grandparent-headed households. This implies that when parents are sick or have died, the older children struggle to fulfill the parenting roles. Balsey (2003) explained that many children have been denied their right to grow up with their parents and to experience parental love and guidance.

The on-the-job training many parents formerly received from extended family members or from religious and cultural traditions is largely unavailable to contemporary parents (Evans, 2004). Besides, in many parts of Nigeria, single and female-headed households have become dominant.

Given the multiple disruptions to family life in Nigeria, there is a need to be concerned about the kind of parenting that children receive regardless of who, willingly or unwillingly has a parenting role. This is where Social Studies is challenged to rise to the occasion and provide means of adapting and adjusting to occurring changes in the family in the 21st Century Nigeria.

Challenges for Social Studies Education

According to Kissock (1981), Social Studies is a programme of study, which a society uses to instill in learners the knowledge, skills, attitudes and actions it considers important concerning the relationships human beings have with one another, their world and themselves.

The primary purpose of Social Studies education is to help young people develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for the common good of all as citizens of a culturally inter-dependent world. In short, Social Studies is interested in making learners effective and productive citizens.

The content and methodological approaches allow for the accomplishment of the goals of social studies. The content of Social Studies is the same as that of traditional African education, which

prepared the child for life in society (Ololobou, 1999). The education provided for the all-round development of the child, in terms of intellectual development, character training and practical skills, which integrated the child into the community. The main agency responsible for this great task was the family. The recent changes affecting the family imply that this vital task is no longer adequately performed. Social Studies as a compulsory school subject in the Nigerian primary and junior secondary schools stands as the viable option for the society that can bring re-dress.

In addition, the society serves as the laboratory of Social Studies education. The learners are encouraged to explore their environment and develop innovative and creative minds through inquiry oriented and problem-solving tasks. Moreso, they are exposed to different varieties of culture and encouraged to be involved in societal development activities.

However, Social Studies teacher by virtue of his training has been groomed a parent-substitute at the lower levels of schooling where Social Studies is offered. Therefore, the teacher bridges the gap between the home and school by providing care, love and emotional stability which children need to grow up as effective citizens.

Despite the potency of Social Studies education, the current status and mode of teaching Social Studies in Nigerian schools prevent the effective use of social studies to re-dress the shortcomings of the Nigerian changing

family. This no doubt, spells doom for the society.

Social studies education can however function well if teachers, resources and facilities are readily available. According to Ololobou (1997) Social Studies curriculum guides are cognitive in nature to an almost total neglect of objectives in the psychomotor and affective domains. The inherent weakness in the curriculum guide is misleading particularly for teachers from other disciplines different from Social Studies. The rationale of broad based curriculum is yet to be understood, with the complexity of the present world and the rapid changes taking place all over the world. Besides, the termination of Social Studies at junior secondary school is not healthy for the progress and development of the country.

The anti-social behaviours exhibited in our society to a large extent, truly reflect the mirror and nature of families. Also, teachers are faced with the problem of catering for children with emotional problems arising from child abuse, labour and neglect. The tight timetable schedules of the schools prevent adequate counseling to be rendered to such children. This virtually leads to the general hopelessness and helplessness of the Nigerian child.

Recommendations

- i. Contemporary issues should be infused into the Social Studies curriculum so that learners are taught through practical

- experiences the consequences of actions.
- ii. The school and family should work cooperatively in order to instill the needed norms, values and attitudes in younger children.
 - iii. The educational system should be made more functional and relevant particularly the curriculum areas in order to adequately meet the inherent weaknesses of a changing family set-up.
 - iv. Economic empowerment and redistributions of wealth is vital in order to reduce inequality. This may likely empower the families and make them meet up with their parental responsibilities.
 - v. Parenting is a joint responsibility by both parents, therefore each partner should contribute meaningfully his quota.

Conclusion

The relationship between family and society is so strong to the extent that the shortcomings in the family are virtually transferred to the larger society. Good and desirable parental virtues greatly influence their children's upbringing. However, the Nigerian society and the family are going through globalization that directly affects child's upbringing and parental roles. Economic crisis, poverty, unemployment and deprivation have hindered the positive socialization of family members. Children in the 21st

century Nigeria are worst hit since the crises seem difficult to handle. This implies that there is increasing challenge for the school system to make up for the family's lapses.

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