

PARENTAL INFLUENCES ON ACADEMICS IN THE ERA OF COVID-19

ABSTRACT

Parents are the first teachers in children's life. This means that learning begins before a child first walk into a classroom. The skills developed in early years of childhood, forms the basis for future learning and human capital development (Naudeau et al., 2011).

Holistic development and early interventions are the most cost-effective measures that a child can be given during this stage of child's growth and development. Such measures minimize the need for special interventions, have the most significant impact on children's development and learning and have a decisive and lasting influence on how children grow to adulthood. (UNICEF, 2001: 14). The longer the parents and the society waits to intervene in the life cycle of a disadvantaged child, the more costly it is to put right (Naudeau et al., 2011: 19). Advocates of the child argue that ECE should be a major priority on a country's development agenda, at home as well as in class/school (Naudeau et al., 2011: xiv; UNESCO, 2011a: 29). However, none of the education polices nor the many conventions on education have emphasized on the direct role of parents in educating children at home, importance of their involvement in their growth and development nor in education.

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has upended family life around the world and with a lot for parents to navigate around. In response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, countries have taken unprecedented steps in an effort to prevent and contain spread of the virus. Some of these containment measures have included closures of schools and childcare services, lockdowns, working remotely, and guidelines for physical distancing, and suspension of community and recreation services. Robert Jenkins, UNICEF's Global Chief of Education, offers five tips to help keep children's education on track while they're staying at home. The tips are based on the child and not addressing the parents' issues in line with their children's' education, yet children are supposed to be

reliant on their caregivers for nurturing and to meet all their developmental needs. (Andrei, 2020). The ongoing crisis is likely only to exacerbate the situation of children who are living in home environments characterized by lack of access to developmentally appropriate resources, such as toys and books, low levels stimulation and responsive care, or inadequate supervision prior to the crisis. This was compounded with the economic instability and social isolation which in many cases has caused stress and anxiety to the family. To examine the impact of the current covid-19 restrictions on social interactions, the researcher conducted a study on parental perceptions and interactions with children in education and other aspects of children's development during the forced children's stay at home. Collected data was coded and grouped according to themes. Descriptive analysis was used to analyze data.

Keywords: coronavirus disease, human capital development, ethical writings, parental influences

BACKGROUND

Most children have two main educators in their life. Parents are the first educators of their children and they continue to influence their children's learning and development during the school years and long afterwards (Family-School Partnerships Framework) Seeds K.,Goldstein, A. &Coleman, N.,2008). It is within the family that the child is first socialized in all aspects of development. The earliest moral & ethical writings of many cultures assert the significance of the family in the life of the child. The view is often expressed that society losses its strength if people do not fulfill the family obligations. It is within the family that the child's basic needs are met, and at the right time, when required and not when the parents have time. Just as the chain breaks first at its weakest links, so problems of a society become most pressing & visible in the social strata's that are under greatest stress; the family. It is therefore important that we should recognize the disruption of the process of socialization in the family and society that will interfere with children's quality education (Fontanesi et al., 2020; Cluver et al., 2020).

The influence of early years on the quality of education cannot be overemphasized (Sammons,2007). The mental, social, emotional and physical development of the child plays a critical role in the ability to learn, which is shaped during the early years. However, the current socio-economic factors have had unprecedented impact on parents and children's behavior today that can be considered unsuitable when weighed against traditional values in relation to children's wellbeing and long-life quality education.

Children's education

Parents engage in their children's education in many ways at home and in school that influence children in all aspects of development. Good parenting at home includes engagement in children's education through; feelings of secure environment, providing intellectual stimulation and conversation, modelling constructive social and educational values and guidance in career choices, shaping the child's self concept as a learner by fostering literacy and problem-solving skills, Encouraging high aspirations both personally and socially (Roos et al., 2021).

However, the advent of industrialisation in the nineteenth century redefined the role of mothers and fathers further. The role of fathers has become that of role providers while the role of mothers has expanded in some respects and narrowed in others. This has further been influenced by changing family responsibility and economic demands which have had their toll in the family setup.

Studies by Urie Bronfenbrenner (2008), indicates that a child requires a reciprocal activity on a regular basis over a period of time with one or more persons with whom to develop strong, mutual, irrational attachment and who are committed to their wellbeing and development for life. John Bowlby (1991) in his attachment theory calls it as starting life with a 'secure base'. Empirical studies have shown that failure to secure emotional base can lead to devastating consequences for the child; effects that largely reflects in adulthood, affecting one's relationships and sense of well-being, education achievement and one's personality.

Empirical review

According to Vygotsky and Bandura (1978) learning takes place first in a social context. To build a new context, children interact with significant others who provide feedback for their hypothesis or those who can help them accomplish the tasks they cannot do on their own. - zone of proximal development. This is enhanced more by fathers who are confident, interested in their children's education, make learning fun and enjoyable which gives children positive attitude towards reading and books and develops reading skills early (Lancy and Bayce's 1992). This is achieved through engagement (direct involvement), accessibility (being there for the child) and responsibility (provision of needs). But are parents and teachers readily available for children?

Research using data from the National Child Development Study (NCDS) to explore the effect of parents' involvement on achievement at 16 in English and Math's (and average grades across all public exams) found that very high parental interest is associated with better exam results compared to children whose parents show no interest. Parental involvement has a positive effect on children's achievement even when the influence of background factors such as social class and family size have been taken into account (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). Parental behaviour has a bigger effect than school quality on pupils' attainment at key stages in education development - formative stages (Duckworth, 2008).

Duckworth, (2008) study reviews that a child's ability on entry to school is the most important factor in predicting their attainment across subjects, followed by socio-economic background and parental education. Meaning that quality education results is as a result of collective responsibility from all stakeholders taking their rightful roles and at the right time. Therefore, parents should take their place alongside educators in the schooling of their children, fitting together their knowledge of their children, teaching and learning, and teachers' knowledge. With parent engagement, possibilities are created for the structures of schooling and empowering the child in education.

With parents being major stake holders in education and as the first teachers of their children, they should be engaged, accessible and involved in their children's school activities from the early years, to set a strong foundation, instill their expectations and aspirations for their children in education at all levels. The three dimensions; engagement, involvement and accessibility are achieved through active interaction with children when children need them and not when parents

have time for them. Weiss, Lopez and Rosenberg (2010) assert that family engagement must be a systemic, integrated and sustained approach, not an add-on or a random act by the parents.

Constrains of COVID 19

In response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, countries have taken unprecedented steps in an effort to prevent and contain spread of the virus. Some of these containment measures have included closures of schools and childcare services, lockdowns, working remotely, and guidelines for physical distancing, and suspension of community and recreation services.

Disruptions to everyday life means that children are at home, entirely reliant on their caregivers for nurturing and to meet all their developmental needs (physical, emotional, social and cognitive).. (Andrei, 2020). Home confinement of the parents could mean increased responsive and nurturing care provided to children as caregivers spend increasing amounts of time at home, less engaged at their work places and other social activities. Similarly, the ongoing crisis is likely only to exacerbate the situation of children who are living in home environments characterized by lack of access to developmentally appropriate resources, such as toys and books, low level stimulation and responsive care, or inadequate supervision prior to the crisis.

Among the many new norms that parents had to adopt to during the 2019-2020 COVID pandemic, was children learning and playing at home during closures. During this time, parents needed resources to keep their little humans engaged productively, However, none of the education polices nor the many conventions on education have ever emphasized on the direct role of parents in educating children, importance of their involvement in their growth and development nor their involvement in education curriculum. Maina, 2016, mwoma 2010, Koech 2010 emphasis on the importance of parental involvement in their education for better achievement. Robert Jenkins, UNICEF's Global Chief of Education, offers five tips to help keep children's education on track while they're staying at home and are based on the child and not addressing the parents' issues in line with their children's' education.

This is added burden on families who have to balance childcare and work responsibilities, compounded with the economic instability and social isolation which in many cases has caused stress and anxiety to the family. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has upended family life around the world and with a lot for parents to navigate around.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

To examine the impact of the current covid-19 restrictions and isolations on social interactions, involvement in children's education and other aspects of development. The researcher conducted a study on parental perceptions and interactions with children's development during the forced children's stay at home.

TARGET POPULATION

The study targeted the middle and low-income parents within an urban setting. The population was determined by the age bracket of their children; 6-9 years who are already in school. A questionnaire was used to assess parents' social interaction with their children on various aspects development, Media use in education and general information on covid-19. The study was guided by the following objectives: To investigate on parental interaction with school going children on various aspects development, to investigate on their level of direct involvement in children's education while at home, Assess their feelings towards children prolonged stay at home and the use of mass media.

Cognitive development

In response to questions on cognitive development, parents differed.

Parents from the middle income said they realized that they didn't understand their children's ability and most of them found it difficult work with children in academic work. 70% of parents were trying to read with their children, giving assignments even as they leave for work or when at home, read story books and picture books with children, though they lacked patience. The lower Low-income parents urged that they did not understand what was expected of them. Their complaint was that they were not orientated and therefore they were in the dark as far as children's coaching was concerned. Both category of parents were not conversant with the school curriculum and helping their children was too much of a demand and a trying moment.

In response to Questions on Physical development, parents had no time for exercise with children, neither did they know those activities they can share with children. Play is very important in children's growth and development. Children played throughout the day while working-class parents sat watching the Televisions, playing video games and other social media

related devices for long hours. Parents didn't know how to engage with children in physical activities.

In responses to emotional development, most parents did not understand the concept of emotional development. E.g “care to listen to their concerns, Identifying and recognizing children’s emotions,” Responses to questions based on emotional development raised issues. Most parents in the low-income group did not understand the first question; “care to listen to their concerns”. Their only concern was provision of food and other basic facilities. To them, covid information was in the media and that they also did not know much about it. middle-income parents were concerned that children were confused about the disease. They took time to listen to them, to understand what they knew or felt about their forced holiday, about the school and about the disease.

Response to questions on use of Media were key during the Corona Era. Parents were not keen on the use of the media and children watched the media freely. A small percentage agreed that they had time to learn about their children’s favourite cartoons, channels and to guide them, had daily routine and enquired what they watched. The middle class familiarized themselves with online teaching and helped children learn to setup their computers for scheduled online classes. Those who were not knowledgeable, involved part time teachers while children were able to set their laptops with time. The low-income parents were ignorant on online teaching, they did not understand the ministry nor did they have money to spare for bundles.

SUMMARY

- COVID-19 crisis has challenged parents’ overall relationship with children, their role in children’s education and other developmental needs. Overall, parents have left most of their responsibilities to the teachers hence they longed for their going back to school.
- You can’t guide children unless you understand their requirements in all aspects of growth. Parents are not aware of their children’s ability in education, their emotions, and

the education curriculum, hence it was hard for them to make effective contribution to children's academic work and their emotional development.

Conclusion

- To parents it was a reawakening time for more involvement in children's lives and in academics. The pandemic has set a new era in education. A new dimension in teaching where learning for every age can take place outside the classroom and involve more people.
- Generally, findings indicate that the targeted parents were too busy with their occupations at the expense of time with children, nurturance and children's education.
- All children had a lot of time on the mass media and parents had no control on the amount of time spent or what they watched. Meaning that parents are not aware of the influence of mass media in cognitive, social and, emotional development hence their lack of control.
- Parents were not comfortable with their children at home. They were all in agreement that schools should be opened. Meaning they are more comfortable when children are in school.
- There seems to be a big gap between parents' life and that of their children. Parents are investing in provisions for the children at the expense of understanding children. Time for bonding and interaction is a luxury to parents all claiming to be busy working.
- Though restrictions are loosening and centres are opening again, bridging the gap of education and care between school and home has proven to be valuable, attainable and necessary in order for our tiny humans to grow into well-balanced adults

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Appendix

Questions for parents

Questions on Social interaction with parents

1. Do you Set aside time to spend with each child?
2. Sharing one on one with children
3. Do you take time to play with your children?
4. Do you sit and share talks with your children?
5. What games do you play with your children?
6. Do a chore together – make cleaning and cooking a game
7. Cook a favourite meal together?
8. Have open conversations
9. Do you think such moments with children are worth the time?

Questions on Cognitive development for parents

1. Read a book or share pictures
2. Make drawings with crayons or pencils.
3. Give assignments using their class textbooks and correcting their work
4. Tell a story,
5. Reciting poems together
6. understand the education curriculum

7. Use online teaching

Questions on physical development

1. Do you practice any of the following activities with your children?
2. Do exercises together?
3. What types of exercise do you practice?
4. Have fun together?
5. Dance to music or sing songs?

Emotional development

1. Do you care to listen to children's concerns?
2. Do you take time to explain to them all about covid?
3. Do you take time to explain to them why they should keep to themselves?
4. Do you address their concerns
5. Do you allow your children to talk freely
6. Do you encourage your children to ask questions and express their feelings freely?
7. Do you believe all feelings are valid

QUESTIONS ON THE USE OF MEDIA

- Set up parental controls.
- Set up strict privacy settings on online applications and games.
- Create device-free spaces and times in your house for other activities such as;
(Eating, sleeping, playing and schoolwork).
- Spend time with your child or teen online
- One on one time with the children discussing media information
- Are you interested in knowing what your children watch from the media and safe online practices?