

PARENTAL LOVE AND THE PSYCHOSOCIAL DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN IN NORTH CENTRAL NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper examined the level of knowledge and involvement of parents about the roles that parental love plays in the psychosocial development of children in North Central Nigeria. The variables examined under the psychosocial developments were self-confidence trust and social skills. The study was descriptive in its design as it collected data from a sampled population of parents from three states in North Central Nigeria, namely, Benue, Kogi and Plateau. Simple random sampling technique was used to obtain these three states out of the seven states including the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja that make up the North Central. A sample of 300 respondents was composed using purposive and accidental sampling procedures with 100 coming from each of the three states. Six (6) research objectives and questions guided the study. The instrument used was a five-point response scale questionnaire titled “Parental Love and Psychosocial Development Questionnaire” (PLAPDQ). PLAPDQ was designed by the researcher using information obtained from the literature reviewed and the researcher's personal experience as a parent. The instrument was face validated by three colleagues in the department of Educational Foundations, University of Jos and its administration was done by the researcher and two research assistants. Data collected were analyzed with the use of mean and standard deviations. One of the findings of the study was that respondents had high knowledge or awareness only on one of the constructs which was self-confidence and not on the remaining two constructs of trust and social skills. The second major finding was that parental love was very low and inadequate to build children's psychosocial development. Based on these findings, suggestions that included the following were put forth: that parents should be deliberate in giving sufficient attention to their children without interruption, do more to provide to meet the basic needs of their children especially at the early stages of their growth and development, praise children's efforts more than results, love children unconditionally, be to them models of good behaviours and to in addition, provide safe environment for them to thrive and make exploits.

Keywords: Parental love, psychosocial, Self-confidence, trust, social skills, children, North Central Nigeria

Introduction

Children are not responsible for their birth. They do not ask to be born (Munroe & Burrows, 2007). Except the biblical Jesus, every child born into the world is a product of a conscious conjugal relationship between a man and a woman that are biologically productive in or outside of wedlock. What this means by implication is that, every child born has earthly parents that are saddled with the responsibility of parenting the child to adulthood. Parents therefore play crucial roles in the growth and development of their children (Clifford-Poston, 2005 & Nair, 2014). At both the stage of infancy and childhood before the school age, children live largely with their parents (Cadence Education, 2022). And this is very important because it is at these stages that they learn and imbibe the family values, such as that of love and affection through the care and attentions that they receive from their parents or caregivers. All human beings need love and more particularly are children that are yet to be

independent of their parents. Studies in child development and psychology as noted by Munroe and Burrows (2007) have revealed that the pattern of a child's life is generally set by age four. The psychosexual theory of the development of an individual put together by Freud, believed that all behaviours are caused and that to understand later behavior, one would have to investigate development in infancy and early childhood (Omede&Odiba, 2001). The essence of this theory as Omede and Odiba (2001) noted is that basic drives (instincts) must be gratified at each stage of the child's development as too much frustration or gratification in each of the stages could lead to fixation (an improper psychological development). Similarly, the psychosocial theory of personality development by Erikson also alluded to this claim. For instance, according to this theory as noted by Omede and Odiba (2001), from birth to age five (5) years, the child vacillates between trust and mistrust, autonomy and doubt and then initiative and guilt depending on the home and or environmental conditions that are more largely predominant and available to the child. Speaking in the same direction, Payne (2019) affirmed that babies normally develop a close attachment bond with their main caregiver (usually their parents) within the first months of life. And as Payne noted, they cannot develop this close bond if they are in a situation where they do not receive normal love. What these views portend is that a child is supposedly equipped with fundamental values and training required to be successful later in life. It is a child that is to be parented and trained and not an adult that had been parented to parent. This is no wonder therefore, that in the book of Proverbs 22:6, it is written that, "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it (Success Bible with notes, 2021). Parental love is essential and is the primary love and the greatest love in the world (Moon, n.d.) but it has always remained the toughest job (Duong, 2017).

Love, in one of the definitions given by Hornby (2000) refers to strong feeling of deep affection for somebody or something, especially a member of the family or friend. Examining this definition more carefully reveals that this kind or type of love or strong feeling of deep affection is compelling as it puts demands on parents to do all that is within their power to meet the basic needs of the child for his or her healthy future growth and development. Therefore, parental love as conceived in this paper refers to the deliberate and conscious efforts and sometimes unconscious efforts put together by parents to help their children grow and develop holistically. It is simply the care that parents give to a child for him/her to grow well and healthy.

This kind or type of love is expressed or demonstrated in many ways that could include provision of food and water as at when due and in their balanced proportions, meeting other basic needs of the child such as the need for shelter from harsh weather conditions, emotional love through tactile stimulations and body contacts, helping the child to eliminate body wastes (when, where and how) to do it, helping the child to also meet his/her need for rest, his/her need for clothing, for personal hygiene, attention, listening and provision of other materials that could enhance the healthy growth and development of the child. It also includes helping the child to develop and keep relationship with God and people as well as training him or her to grow along the line of his masculinity and her femininity. At the school age, the child is to be cared for by sending the child to school and ensuring that the basic needs for his or her training is met. All these are in addition to being physically available to the child to listen to his or her feelings, reinforce his/her strengths and weaknesses, recognize and identify with his/her uniqueness, scaffolding the child by giving him/her the support to succeed on assignments that could be over-tasking and frustrating. Inability to provide children with these life necessities has obvious psychological, emotional, social and religious consequences.

In this paper however, attempt was devoted to examining the role that parental love could play on children's psychosocial developments. The constructs that were examined under this variable of psychosocial developments were self-confidence, trust and social skill.

Self confidence is defined by Hornby (2000) as the belief that one has in one's own ability to do things and be successful. This belief is undoubtedly cultivated at the home of the child through the child's parents and siblings. Parents largely nurture self confidence when they model self confidence

themselves, when they do not get upset about children's mistakes, when they encourage children to try new things as well as praising their perseverance, when they show them love and praise them for their accomplishments (Child Mind Institute, 2022). In a similar direction, Eanes (2022) and Cullins (2022) noted that rejection and criticism could hurt children very deeply and so suggested that parents and caregivers focus more on their children's strength than their weaknesses, practice gentle discipline, letting their children know they love and care for them even when they make mistakes, assigning special tasks to them that could make them useful and then letting the children overhear them speaking positively about them to others, as well as avoiding to compare them to others and also to help them overcome the fear of failure. Confidence is important to a child's future happiness, health and success (Cullins, 2022). And as Cullins noted, confident children are better equipped to deal with peer pressure, responsibility, frustrations, challenges as well as both positive and negative emotions. But how many parents are consciously committed to developing self confidence in their children? Do they really know that self confidence is usually largely built in children and by them? These are some of the questions that this study answered.

Trust is another psychological construct that parents are to also develop in their children before they grow to become adults. Trust refers to the belief that somebody or something is good, sincere and honest (Horby, 2000). Trust like confidence and other personality traits are usually and largely developed at childhood, that it is, from home. Trusting adults as noted by Nair (2014) were trusting children. Parents are to be committed and deliberate in building trust in their children for such children to become trusted adults later. Trust is essential to a happy family life and a happy childhood for children (WAHM.com (n.d.)). Strategies for building trust as pointed out by some studies included that parents practice what they preach or teach, learn to listen to their children, keep promises made to them, tell them the truth, be consistent in implementing rules, giving them the power to make choice, being available to them when they need support or help, meeting their needs consistently and positively to the best of their (parents) ability (Nair, 2014, Duong, 2017, Zhiming, n.d. & WAHM.com, n.d.). Trust and respect are essential to a positive parent-child relationship (Raising children.net.au., 2022). Parents therefore, have a significant role in how their children develop trust (Nair, 2014). But how many parents really consciously develop this psychological construct of trust in their children especially that many do part time parenting?

Social skill is another psychosocial construct examined in this study. Social skills are built upon as children grow (Cadence Education, 2022). They are to begin learning basic social skills as early as infancy. Children are expected to learn a lot of how to become humans from their parents. They need sufficient equipment socially to function well in school and later in a larger community or society. They need to be taught human qualities such as respect, orderliness, and tolerance, turn-taking, to be able to relate well with people in and outside their family. Suggestions on how to build social skills in children included the use of appropriate eye contact to aid their ability to communicate, talking often to them even when they may not be able to say actual word, providing safe environment for their exploration, helping the child to learn appropriate greetings and responses, giving them chance to play and socialize, and then setting a good sociable example by demonstrating positive interaction with other people as a social role model for them (AatoZz, 2018, Bhatnagar, n.d., Cadence Education, 2022). Teaching social skills to children will help them to be able to communicate effectively, solve problem, make and keep friends, cooperate with others, practice active listening, adapt to different situations as well as improving their self-esteem (Cadence Education, 2022&Sterland, 2012). In fact, as noted by Bhatnagar (n.d.), developing social skills and interacting with the world around them, play a critical part in children's success, happiness, and something as essential as academics. How well therefore, do parents know and achieve on these criteria or roles?

The North Central Nigeria where this study was domiciled is a part of Northern Nigeria. And Northern Nigeria is characteristically becoming notable with regular reports of banditry, kidnapping,

terrorism and ethnic cleansing. It has the largest statistics of out-of-school children (UNICEF, 2013; Mohammed, 2018). Children are largely left floating the streets seeking means of livelihood either legally or illegally when obviously they are supposed to be fended for by their parents. These street children are always seen unleashing their angers at very little provocations and opportunities on supposedly innocent Nigerians. They raid during riots, kill and maim every person that is unfortunate to have crossed their parts. The ventilation of these angers and mayhem is simply that their parents and government or in a more understandable tone, the society has failed them. The failure of the society is because the home is failing (Munroe & Burrows, 2007). This is not to be doubted as there are palpable evidences of this everywhere all over Nigeria. Children who are supposed to be in schools are seen roaming the streets in every city in Nigeria but worse in the Northern parts of the country. They are usually seen with plates in hands asking for alms from travelers in motor parks and scrambling with left over foods abandoned by customers in food shops and stalls. In addition, some are found to be engaged in menial jobs such as street trading, and apprenticeship on skills that are not age related. In fact, child labour is a common feature that characterizes a great number of Nigeria children today. Other very obvious consequences of inadequate parental love are heightened cases of banditries, kidnapping, arson and terrorism, rape and ritualism that have many youths at their vanguards.

There is no doubt about how very significantly indispensable parental love is to the healthy psychosocial development of the Nigerian child. In fact, when an adult misbehaves, such an adult is always believed or said to be lacking in home training. The home is indeed very central to human growth and development (Brauner-Ottos, Axinn & Ghimire, 2020), it is the child's first window to the outside world. A healthy home or family births a healthy society and a healthy nation. But regrettably, many parents seemed to be dodging these responsibilities either knowingly or unknowingly. Therefore, the problem of this study was to examine the level of knowledge and involvement of parents about their roles in the psychosocial development of children. The essence was to make suggestions that could improve the wellness of the Nigerian child and her society.

Aim and objectives of the study

The aim of this study was to examine the level of knowledge and involvement of parents about the role that parental love plays in the psychosocial development of pupils in North Central Nigeria. Specifically, the study examined the extent of parental:

1. Awareness of the role of parental love in building self confidence in children.
2. Awareness of the role of parental love in the development of trust in children.
3. Awareness of the role of parental love in building social skills in children.
4. Involvement in building positive self confidence in their children
5. Involvement in building trust in their children
6. Involvement in building social skills in their children

Research Questions

The following questions were addressed in this study:

1. To what extent are you aware as a parent that your love could build your children's self-confidence?
2. To what extent are you aware as a parent that your love could build trust in your children?
3. To what extent are you aware as a parent that your love could build your children's social skills?
4. To what extent are you involved as a parent in building your children's positive self-confidence?
5. To what extent are you involved as a parent in building trust in your children?
6. To what extent are you involved as a parent in building your children's social skills?

Methods

This study examined the level of knowledge and involvement of parents about the roles of parental love in the psychosocial development of children in North Central, Nigeria. The study used a descriptive design, and the specific design used was survey. This was because data was collected from a sample of parents in North Central, Nigeria. The population used for the study was made up of parents in North Central Nigeria who had their wards schooling at the Basic Education Level (especially as studies from the review at the background showed that basic values are usually developed in children before they are six years). Three states in North Central Nigeria namely, Benue, Kogi and Plateau were sampled out of seven for the study with one hundred (100) participants from each of the three states given a total sample of 300. The states were sampled using simple random procedure while the participants in each of the states were selected by purposive and accidental sampling. The parents that qualified were those married with wards at the Basic Education Level. The instrument used for the collection of data was titled “Parental Love and Psychosocial Development Questionnaire” (PLAPDQ). PLAPDQ was designed by the researcher and it had two main sections A and B. Section A collected data on the level of knowledge or awareness of parents about how parental love could be used to build the psychosocial development of children in three (3) areas of development namely: self confidence, trust and social skills. This section fielded 30 items. Section B demanded to know the level of involvement of parents in their use of love to build self confidence, trust and social skills in their children. Items in section A were replicated in Section B except that they were reworded. It sought to know whether parents use the items in Section A on their children. PLAPDQ was on a five point rating scale of 1 to 5. The instrument was administered in one state by the researcher while in two other states; the services of research assistants were elicited. The data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation statistics. Since it was a five point rating instrument, mean score of 3 and above was considered to be high knowledge as well as high level of commitment to promoting the variables in consideration. Conversely was any mean score of below 3.

Results

Table 1: Level of knowledge of parents on the role of parental love in building self confidence of children

S/N	Indicate the extent to which you are aware as a parent that if you demonstrate love in these following ways you could help to build self confidence in your children:	X	SD
1	Praising children's efforts	3.51	.02
2	Emphasizing their strengths rather than their weaknesses	2.8	0.83
3	Being available when they need me	2.5	1.00
4	Listening always to them without interruptions	2.3	0.95
5	Being a model of self confidence to them	3.2	1.04
6	Not being angry at their mistakes	3.0	0.80
7	Encouraging them to try new things	3.1	1.12
8	Praising their perseverance	3.0	1.02
9	Loving them	3.8	0.94
10	Not criticizing them	2.9	1.01
11	Assigning special tasks that could make them useful	3.0	1.03
12	Making them to overhear sometimes how I speak positively about them to others	3.2	1.01
13	Not comparing them with others	3.0	1.02
14	Helping them to overcome the fear of failure	2.9	0.81
Grand mean		3.1	0.97

Source: Survey, 2022, N = 300

The data on Table 1 itemized aspects of parental love that could influence the development of self confidence in children. The result of the analysis showed that parents had sufficient knowledge that the items in the Table could help in developing positive self confidence in children. This was evident from the calculated Grand mean of $X = 3.1$ that was higher than the acceptable criterion mean of $X = 3.0$.

Table 2: Level of knowledge of parents about the role of parental love in the development of trust in children

S/N	Indicate the extent to which you are aware as a parent that if you demonstrate love in these following ways you could help to build trust in your children:	X	SD
15	Being truthful myself	3.4	0.90
16	Listening to them without interruption	2.6	0.87
17	Practicing what I want to see in them	2.8	1.02
18	Keeping the promises I make to them	2.4	0.79
19	Being consistent in implementing rules	3.0	1.05
20	Giving them the power to make choices	2.2	0.82
21	Always available when they need me	2.5	1.00
22	Meeting their needs consistently and positively within the limit of my resources	3.8	1.12
Grand mean		2.83	0.95

Source: Survey, 2022, N = 300

Table 2 analyzed data on the knowledge of parents about the roles that parental love could play on the development of trust in children. The result of analyzes revealed that parents had insufficient knowledge that the items in the Table could be used to build trust in children. The Grand Mean of $X = 2.83$ was below the acceptable criterion mean of $X = 3.0$

Table 3: Level of knowledge of parents about the role of parental love in the development of social skills in children

S/N	Indicate the extent to which you are aware as a parent that if you demonstrate love in these following ways you could help to build social skills in your children:	X	SD
23	Using appropriate eye contact to aid his/her ability to communicate	2.0	0.88
24	Talking to the child even when he/she cannot yet talk back effectively	2.3	0.94
25	Helping the child to learn appropriate greetings and responses	3.4	1.03
26	Giving the child chance to play and socialize	3.2	1.01
27	Being a social role model to him/her	3.3	1.03
28	Recognizing and helping them to develop along their line of masculinity or feminism	3.0	0.91
29	Being a friend to them	2.5	0.87
30	Helping them to express their emotions in a healthy manner	2.8	0.82
Grand Mean		2.81	0.94

Source: Survey, 2022, N = 300

The result of analyzes of data on able 3 showed that parents had insufficient knowledge that the items generated could build the social skills of children. The Grand mean of $X = 2.81$ was smaller than the acceptable criterion mean of $X = 3.0$

Table 4: Level of involvement of parents in the development of self confidence of their children

S/N	Indicate the extent to which you as a parent use the following items to build self confidence in your children:	X	SD
31	I always Praise my children's efforts	3.6	1.03
32	I usually emphasize my children's strengths rather than their weaknesses	2.8	0.93
33	I am always available to my children when they need me	2.5	0.91
34	I always listen to my children without interruptions	2.2	0.89
35	I model self confidence to my children	2.8	1.01
36	I don't get angry when my children make mistakes	2.3	1.03
37	I usually encourage my children to try new things	2,4	0.82
38	I always praise my children each time I notice their perseverance	2.7	0.94
39	I love my children	3.6	1,05
40	I don't criticize my children	2,1	0.88
41	I usually assign special tasks that could make my children useful	1,6	0.83
42	I sometimes make my children to overhear how I speak positively about them to others	1.2	0.75
43	I don't compare my children to others	2,4	1,03
44	I usually help my children to overcome the fear of failure	2.0	0.81
Grand mean		2.44	0.92

Source: Survey, 2022, N = 300

Table 4 reported analyzes on the level that parents are involved in using the items in the table to build the self confidence of their children. The Grand mean of $X = 2.44$ was short of the criterion mean of $X = 3.0$ implying that parents do not use these items sufficiently to build the self confidence of their children.

Table 5: Level of involvement of parents in the development of trust in their children

S/N	Indicate the extent to which you as a parent use the following items to build trust in your children:	X	SD
45	I am always being truthful in my dealings with my children and others	3.4	1.00
46	I always listen to my children without interruption	2.3	1.02
47	I deliberately practice what I want to see in my children	2.8	0.89
48	I always keep the promises I make to my children	2.6	0.97
49	I am consistent in implementing rules	2.9	0.88
50	I usually give my children the power to make choices	1.5	0.92
51	I am always available to them when they need me	2.2	0.86
52	I meet their needs consistently and positively within the limit of my resources	3.2	1.12
Grand mean		2.61	0.96

Source: Survey, 2022, N = 300

The analyzes on Table 5 showed that the level of involvement of parents in using items 45-52 to build trust in their children was low or insufficient. The grand mean of $X = 2.61$ was below the acceptable criterion mean of $X = 3.0$

Table 6: Level of involvement of parents in the development of social skills in their children

S/N	Indicate the extent to which you as a parent use the following items to build social skills in your children:	X	SD
53	I usually use appropriate eye contact to aid my children's ability to communicate	1.3	0.86
54	I talk to my child even when he/she cannot yet talk back to me effectively	2.3	0.94
55	I help my children to learn appropriate greetings and responses	3.4	1.02
56	I give my children chance to play and socialize	3.2	0.97
57	I am a social role model to my children	2.5	0.78
88	I recognize and help my children to develop along their line of masculinity or feminism	2.8	1.04
99	I am a friend to my children	2.6	0.81
60	I help my children to express their emotions in healthy manners	2.8	0.85
Grand mean		2.61	0.91

Source: Survey, 2022, N = 300

The analyzes on Table 6 showed that the level of involvement of parents in using items 53-60 to build trust in their children was low or insufficient. The grand mean of $X = 2.61$ was below the acceptable criterion mean of $X = 3.0$

Discussion of results

The variable of psychosocial development of children was examined in this study. The constructs that were examined under the psychosocial were self confidence, trust and social skills. The levels of knowledge and involvement of parents about the roles of parental love in the development of these three main constructs provided the basis for raising six objectives and six research questions. The result of the analyzes that answered question one revealed that parents had sufficient knowledge that praising the efforts of a child, not comparing them with others, being a model of self confidence to them, encouraging a child to try new things and loving them among others had the capacity to build self confidence in them. The finding of this study aligned with results of previous studies that Parents largely nurture self confidence in their children (Child Mind Institute, 2022; Eanes, 2022 & Cullins, 2022). In fact, these studies noted that self confidence of children could be developed by parents when they model self confidence themselves and also do not get upset with children's mistakes as well as giving them opportunity to try new things.

The results of analyzes to questions 2 and 3 revealed that the level of knowledge of parents in using the identified items in Tables 2 and 3 was low or insufficient. A careful examination of some of the variables seemed as if doing them will compromise the authority and control that parents have over their children. For instance, it is not a common practice for a father or mother to leave the power of choice making to the child. It is largely believed in the African context that children are yet to be mature to make choices for themselves. It is also very rare among African parents to have undivided attention for the child in view of the many other crucial issues that compete for their attention and rarer also among many African parents to make friends with their children, regularly hug and engage in their plays or games. A child must be made to understand that a father is a father different from a child. But effective parenting will require that parents make their children their friends by being there for them when they are tired, angry, frightened or sad (Whitehurst, 2003), they are to be loved even when they do not deserve it (Harold in Whitehurst, 2003).

Research questions 4, 5, and 6 sought data on the level of involvement of parents in utilizing the identified items of parental love in Tables 4, 5 and 6 to build their children's self confidence, trust and social skills. The result showed that parents scored very low. Parents were not committed to building self confidence, trust and social skills in their children. This result agrees with the view of Whitehurst (2003) and Laura (2014) that many parents are overscheduled and so have little time for their children. When a man is supposed to be in the home, he is frequently out playing some kind of game or involved in something other than his family life (Munroe & Burrows, 2007). When parents abdicate their parental love or responsibilities, the consequences could be great. The high rate of insurgencies and terrorism in Nigeria today is not far from the fact that many homes are failing. A healthy home births a healthy society.

Conclusion

This study examined the level of knowledge and involvement of parents on the roles that parental love plays in the psychosocial development of children in North Central Nigeria. The findings revealed that parents had very low or insufficient knowledge as well as insufficiently utilizing parental love to build self-confidence trust and social skills of their children. Parents have largely abdicated their parental roles and the consequences of this on the Nigeria society is and will continue to be disastrous unless urgent remedial measures are taken. Children learn parenting from their parents and if they are not properly parented, the merry of poor parenting will continue to go round with obvious disastrous consequences as are currently being witnessed in Nigeria.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are put forward based on findings of the study

Children need the attention of parents; they want more parent than is being currently offered. They need parents to be available to them when they need them. It is therefore, recommended that parents slow down to keep pace with their children. Parents are to listen to them with attention especially as listening is different from hearing, avoid or minimize part time parenting, and stop thinking that they could buy their children's love with toys, video games and television.

1. Parents are to be deliberate in building self-confidence in their children by modelling confidence themselves, encouraging children to try new things, praising their efforts as well as their accomplishments, helping them to explore their interests, and making them to know very clearly that they are loved in spite of their mistakes. Building confidence into a child is very important as they will be able to deal effectively with peer pressure, responsibilities, frustrations and challenges later as they grow to become adults.
2. It is also part of parental responsibility to build trust in children. Parents are to know that they have very significant roles in how their children develop trust and they must also be deliberate in discharging this responsibility by practicing what they preach (walking their talk), telling them the truth, keeping promises made to them, appreciating their display of honesty, giving them the power to make choice as well as being available to the child when the child needs their support and by also listening to them without interruptions. Children need the attention of their parents so much that not even toys, televisions and videogames will be a satisfying alternative.
3. Human beings are social, gregarious and communal creatures. Therefore, children are to be taught or equipped with the social skills they need for effective relationship within and without their families. The onus therefore is on parents to train their children on the right and appropriate family and societal values, helping them to learn appropriate greetings and responses, making friendship with them, and being their social role model. Parents must not be too busy to talk or play with their children, create home environment that will enable children to express their emotions of love, joy, sorrow, pains etcetera in a healthy manner, regularly hug and appreciate children and then providing children with the safe environment for play and exploration and also finding it worthwhile to engage or participate with them in their play or games occasionally.

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