

## **ENGENDERING HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE AFRICAN CHILD**

**Lead paper presented by Prof. Luqman A. Akinbile**

**Department of Agricultural Extension and Rural Development**

**University of Ibadan**

### **Introduction**

Engender indicates to bring into existence. In this context, to engender is to bring the holistic development of the African child into existence. A child is a person below the age of adulthood, who is below the legal age of responsibility or accountability. This stage is crucial to the extent that what happens at the stage become very difficult to reverse. The need to develop the African child is borne out of the fact that the African child is disadvantaged in access to basic necessities of life, relative to children from other parts of the world. This is with respect to requirements for educational, social, emotional, physical and other needs to ensure a broadened world view. The development requires to be holistic so that the African child will achieve complete development which will equip them for being all round citizens that would develop Africa to be able to compete effectively with the world in all ramifications of development. This is as the rest of the world is developing at jet age, that only minds that have undergone holistic development can compete and ensure the sustainable development of the continent.

The African child is plagued with diseases that retards growth and limit exploitation of the maxims of education even when access to basic and qualitative education is restricted in Africa. It is also important that the African child is developed emotionally and psychologically so that the negative effects of delinquent behaviours will be reduced to the barest minimum. These are ingredients for a holistic development of every individual, including the African child for the maximum goal of general world development can be achieved.

### **The African Child**

The situation of the African child is such that he is in need of help as the world considers the situation as requiring urgent attention. The [2016 global estimates of child labour](#) indicate that one-fifth of all African children are involved in child labour, a proportion more than twice as high as in any other region. Nine per cent of African children are in hazardous work, again highest of all the world's regions. Africa has the largest number of child labourers; 72.1 million African children are estimated to be in child labour and 31.5 million in hazardous work. Progress against child labour appears to have stalled in Africa. Child labour went up in Sub-Saharan Africa over the 2012 to 2016 period, in contrast to continued progress elsewhere in the world, and despite the targeted policies implemented by African governments to combat child labour. The economic situation in most African countries is attributable to this trend. It is likely that the retrogression was driven by broader economic and demographic forces acting against

government efforts. The Africa region has also been among those most affected by situations of state fragility and crisis, which in turn heightens the risk of child labour.

Worldwide, the agriculture sector accounts for the largest share of child labour. In Africa, agriculture accounts for 85 per cent of all child labour and for 61.4 million children in absolute terms. Child labour in agriculture relates primarily to subsistence and commercial farming and livestock herding; and it is often dangerous in its nature and in the circumstances it is carried out. Of the remaining children in child labour in Africa, 8.1 million (11 per cent) are found in the services sector and 2.7 million (4 per cent) in industry. Most child labour is unpaid, and most children in child labour are not in an employment relationship with a third party employer, but rather work on family farms and family enterprises. This is not to say that efforts are not being made in Africa to ensure child development.

### **Child development in Africa**

Child development in Africa addresses the variables and social changes that occur in African children from infancy through adolescence. Three complementary lines of scholarship have sought to generate knowledge about child development in Africa, specifically rooted in endogenous, African ways of knowing: analysis of traditional proverbs, theory-building, and documentation of parental ethno-theories. The first approach has examined the indigenous formulations of child development and socialisation values embedded in African languages and oral traditions. Several collections of proverbs have been published in different African languages and their content has been analysed to show the recurrence of the themes of shared communal responsibility for children's moral guidance and the importance of providing it early in life<sup>□</sup>

The development of the children in Africa has unfortunately been eroded by the level of poverty that has impoverished the intellectual of most Africans to the extent of trivializing all the moral values that made child development effective. This has taken away responsibility from those that should discharge it to the extent that any bad thing has become acceptable as long as it can bring food to the table of individuals and groups in the society. However, the holistic development of individuals should encompass moral standards that must be complied with by all, the children and the adults.

### **Ingredients of Child Development**

Child development should involve the biological, psychological and emotional changes that occur in human beings between birth and the conclusion of adolescence. In the course of development, the individual human progresses from dependency to increasing autonomy

*Child development* refers to the sequence of physical, language, thought and emotional changes that occur in a *child* from birth to the beginning of adulthood. *Child development* is strongly influenced by genetic factors (genes passed on from their parents) and events during prenatal life.

Child development refers to the process through which human beings typically grow and mature from infancy through adulthood. The different aspects of growth and development that are measured include physical growth, cognitive growth, and social growth. Child development focuses on the changes that take place in humans as they mature from birth to about age 17.

### **Theories of Child Development**

Theories have been developed as to how we develop in the course of our existence. Throughout history, there have been many theories on how we develop throughout childhood. Some of the most recognized include those developed by Sigmund Freud, Erik Erikson, and Lev Vygotsky.

**Sigmund Freud** devised a psychosexual stage theory of development. He believed that children move through specific stages of development due to innate unconscious sexual drives. Freud's stage theory ends at adulthood.

**Erik Erikson** also created a stage theory of development, but his is a bit different from Freud's. Erikson focused more on social relationships as a driving force in development and referred to the developmental tasks as psychosocial stages. Erikson's theory is one of the most comprehensive and covers human development from birth through old age.

**Lev Vygotsky's** theory of development also focuses on social interactions as important in development. His theory views children in an apprentice role with parents mentoring them through developmental tasks.

### **Stages of Child Development:**

**Infancy** - Most people agree that babies are cute, but would need to understand what is going on with babies developmentally. The period of **infancy** begins at birth and ends at two years of age. It is the most rapid period of growth throughout the individual's lifespan. During this period of child development, human beings go from being helpless, reflexive babies to toddlers who can communicate and reason.

Specific physical milestones during this period include rolling over, sitting up, crawling, and walking. Cognitive milestones include early problem solving and increased sensory awareness and perception. Social milestones that usually occur during this period include the development of a sense of self-awareness, or that prior to the age of 12 months.

**Early Childhood** - The period of early childhood development lasts from two years of age through six years of age. Physically, the center of gravity shifts from the breastbone, where it was for infants, to the belly button. At this stage, physical growth occurs much more slowly as compared to the rapid growth that took place during infancy.

The fine and gross motor skills are also increased dramatically, making us now able to run, jump, climb, and balance. We can also write letters and create very detailed drawings due to fine motor development. Cognitive processing speed increases, which allows us to advance in thinking,

reasoning, and problem-solving, as well as master our native language. Social development advances as we learn to understand our own emotions and those of others; our earliest playmates tend to be chosen based on availability.

**Middle Childhood** – The Middle childhood typically takes place from ages 6 through 12. Physical growth continues and spurts of rapid growth in height and weight may occur. Fine and gross motor skills continue to develop, and we become stronger and faster than ever before. This time is known as the school years, as children are usually focused on traditional education at this point in development. Cognitive development allows for advanced and refined communication between both hemispheres of the brain, which enables us to use advanced logic and problem solving skills more efficiently. As a result, children in middle childhood begin learning advanced math techniques. Increased participation in competitive team sports is common during middle childhood.

### **Ensuring Holistic Child Development**

Holistic child development involves the biological, psychological and emotional changes that occur in human beings between birth and the conclusion of adolescence. In the course of development, the individual human progresses from dependency to increasing autonomy. It is a continuous process with a predictable sequence, yet has a unique course for every child. It does not progress at the same rate and each stage is affected by the preceding developmental experiences. Genetic factors and events during prenatal life may strongly influence developmental changes, genetics and prenatal development usually form a part of the study of child development. Related terms include developmental psychology, referring to development throughout the lifespan, and pediatrics, the branch of medicine relating to the care of children.

Developmental change may occur as a result of genetically-controlled processes known as maturation, or as a result of environmental factors and learning, but most commonly involves an interaction between the two. It may also occur as a result of human nature and of human ability to learn from the environment.

There are various definitions of periods in a child's development, since each period is a continuum with individual differences regarding starting and ending. Some age-related development periods and examples of defined intervals include: newborn (ages 0–4 weeks); infant (ages 4 weeks – 1 year); toddler (ages 12 months-24 months); preschooler (ages 2–5 years); school-aged child (ages 6–12 years); adolescent (ages 13–19). The child thus includes the school-age child and the adolescent.

Promoting child development through parental training, among other factors, promotes excellent rates of child development. Parents play a large role in a child's activities, socialization, and development. Having multiple parents can add stability to a child's life and therefore encourage healthy development. Another influential factor in children's development is the quality of their care. Child-care programs may be beneficial for childhood development such as learning capabilities and social skills.

## **Areas of Empowerment that Engender Holistic Child Development**

There are five areas of human development:

**Physical development:** This is an area that ensures that the individual grows to demonstrate being healthy to withstand the rigors of adulthood. It involves changes in size, shape, and physical maturity of the body, including physical abilities and coordination. Physical development is a function of the diet of individuals and how well they are fed. Good feeding is a function of the economic situation of the people, the situation of peace and conflict in the country that predispose people to be able to carry out their basic activities and freedom from other calamities. The extent to which the country is able to make the environment enabling for people to maximize their potentials will dictate the pace of physical development of the people.

**Intellectual development:** The learning and use of language; the ability to reason, problem-solve, and organize ideas determine the extent of intellectual development of the people. It is related to the physical growth of the brain. The brain grows to the extent that the ingredients required by the brain to maximize its potential are provided. This is a function of the opportunities offered to the people by the environment for brain development either through formal trainings for brain development or through the consumption of appropriate feeding regime to ensure growth and development of the brain. Many children in Africa need to have required food for brain development as well as acquire formal education and trainings that will endere intellectual development. It is unfortunate that most children in Africa lack access to formal education, thus limiting their opportunity for intellectual development. Effort to ensure intellectual development will reduce the rate of out-of-school children to the barest minimum. The situation where close to half of African children are out of school retards holistic development by limiting intellectual development.

**Social development:** The process of gaining the knowledge and skills needed to interact successfully with others in the society constitute social development. This should be such that an egalitarian society is being achieved when individuals consider the interests of others in satisfying their own interests. This is determined by what the people are exposed to through information and communication technologies, the moral teachings or decadence people are exposed to that either makes them socially responsible or social miscreants in the society. Absolute freedom is not in anyone's interest. There is therefore the need for regulation of information that is disseminated. The propagation of absolute freedom has not aided the course of any nation and should be discouraged. The era where individuals will consciously develop messages that are toxic for public consumption and ensure dissemination to the whole world is in no one's interest and must be discouraged with all might. Individuals and groups of corrupted minds and demented brains create problems for the world intentionally and the freedom of expression mantra is invoked to protect them. This affects the social wellbeing of individuals that puts not only Africa but the entire world in problems that are too enormous to contend with. Social development is very important for child development.

**Emotional development:** This involves feelings and emotional responses to events; changes in understanding one's own feelings and appropriate forms of expressing them. Emotional development ensures that individuals are able to cope with the ups and downs of life and the vagaries that are associated with how individuals relate within themselves and with individuals and occurrences around them. This refers to an individual's internal state of being and involuntary psychological response to an object or a situation, based on or tied to physical state and sensory data. Emotional development ensures that individuals respond appropriately to events. The increase in rate of depression and suicide is a function in improper emotional development. Africa needs the emotional development of her children to ensure appropriate response to events and prevent negative responses that threaten the existence of people through adoption of negative responses to events. The use of all communication media and establishment of agencies that will continually re-orientate citizens to positive thoughts and actions is very expedient. Emotional development enders people to positive thinking as well as individual and societal development

**Moral development:** The growing understanding of right and wrong, and the change in behavior caused by that understanding; sometimes called a conscience is very important in the development of the African child. Moral decadence is the result of lack of moral development. Moral decadence is shaking the fabric of societies, especially in Africa as all negative tendencies retard the growth of individuals and societies. Africa that was noted for moral uprightness lost the virtue and is now engrossed in moral decadence. Moral development relates to principles of right and wrong, especially for teaching right behavior. Right behavior elevates a nation while lack of it leads to breakdown of law and order. This has perpetrated corruption of all ramifications and extent, thus limiting development in most African countries. The need to enshrine moral development in the training of the African child portends growth and development not only for the youth and will ensure egalitarian society.

## **Conclusion**

The need to engender holistic development of the African child should ensure the development of the physical, intellectual, social, emotional and moral development of individuals and groups, especially the youth to make Africa able to compete with the rest of the world favorably. This is important as these values must be imbibed by all for it to be enduring in effort at achieving sustainable development. This will make the youth useful for themselves and the society. This is important as they constitute the fabric of the society that needs to be protected to achieve peace and stability in the continent of Africa. This is important as the children are not only the future of the continent but are also the today as tomorrow starts today.

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