

Child Discipline in the 21st Century: The Role of Parents and Teachers

Kingsley Bekom Abang, Ph.D

*Department of Educational Foundations
Faculty of Educational Foundation Studies
University of Calabar, Calabar
bekomabang@gmail.com*

Abstract

Discipline is becoming extinct from among children and this is fast giving way to indiscipline. A careful observation of daily events in the contemporary society will show that children neither have respect for constituted authorities nor do they demonstrate a high sense of responsibility by way of loyalty and obedience to parents, elders and others, especially in this 21st century. It is on this background that this paper critically examines the role of parents and teachers as major stakeholders in the business of child discipline in the society. This is because the major part of the child's life is spent with the parents at home, and the teacher while at school. The paper recommends among others that, teaching should be reserved for professionals and that the teacher recruitment process should be thorough and based strictly on merit. Again, disciplined and committed teachers should be rewarded by the school management. Moreover, parents should not have children when they are not ready, and parenthood should be for adults and not children.

Introduction

Childhood is the most critical stage in human development that requires serious attention. This is because most problems some adults are experiencing today would have been mitigated if parents and teachers had shown concern at the formative stage. No wonder it is said, "you can only bend a plant when it is young and tender and not when it is mature and strong".

The relevance of child discipline to any society in any century, past or present, needs not be over-emphasized, as any human society devoid of discipline is like an animals' kingdom and does not deserve to exist. Therefore, for the society to experience peace in all facets, discipline must be enhanced through parents and teachers. This agrees with Denga and Denga (2007) who asserted that child's discipline as a cardinal part of family congruence requires special attention because lack of discipline results in bad children. According to them, without good children, the society lacks stability; without stability, the nation crumbles. Indeed, this is exactly where the Nigerian society is tilting to, if parents and teachers do not wake up to their responsibilities. This is as indiscipline behaviours are manifested in all facets of the Nigerian society. Parents and teachers need to play their roles more seriously to arrest the ugly situation because the 21st century child is being exposed to horrible and terrible conditions and situations that were not so common in the past. For example, advance technology, kidnapping, yahooism (internet fraudsters), gay, lesbianism, incest, bestiality, and so on, confront children in the news and social media. Therefore, teachers and parents should step-up their roles in order to enhance discipline among the children.

Child Discipline in the 21st Century: The Role of Parents and Teachers Kingsley Bekom Abang, Ph.D

In addition, parents and teachers must drop the obsolete and crude rules that were practiced in the past centuries where a child was not supposed to be seen or heard, and face the new reality. Discipline before the 21st century in Africa and Nigeria in particular, was quite crude, inhumane and even barbaric. For example, among the Boki people in Cross River State Nigeria, discipline for a child who stole a piece of meat from the pot, was to grind hot pepper and put into his/her eyes or sometimes to his/her private parts. Sometimes, parents would give the child cuts all over the body. Some others would prevent the child from sleeping in the house and would deny the child food for some days. In school, a child who came late to school was made to either remove a tree stump or was given a v-shaped portion of bush to clear which may take the child a day or two to complete. Sometimes, the child was held down on a table during the morning assembly before the entire school and was flogged 12, 24 or 60 strokes of the cane by a strong and healthy teacher over a minor offence. These were actually very crude measures which went beyond correction. Such measures could rather harden the child.

Clarification of Concepts

The following concepts are explained: child, discipline, parent, teacher and 21st century. **Who a Child is:** Biologically, a child is a human being between the stages of birth and puberty or between the developmental period of infancy and puberty (Hornby, 2015). The legal definition of a child generally refers to a minor, otherwise known as a person younger than the age of maturity (Farlex, 2013). In Nigeria, the Juvenile Justice Information of the National Welfare Policy of 1989 defines a child as anybody who is 12 years or below. However, a Draft Decree put into law has now set the age of the child in Nigeria at 18 years or below. Perhaps that is why one can only exercise his/her franchise or engage in any legal business with the government at 18 years and above. The definition may vary from country to country; for instance, in Singapore, a child is legally defined as someone under the ages of 14 years (Singapore statutes online, 2020). In psychology, however, childhood is one of the broad stages of human development. The stages comprise childhood (0-12 years), adolescence (12-18 years) and adulthood (19 years and above). The concept of childhood in psychology is in alignment with those who describe a child as an individual ranging from zero (0) to twelve (12) years of age (Peretomode, 1994). However, this does not mean that an adolescent who is 13-18 years is an adult. No! An adolescent is still seen as a child but in an entirely different phase with different characteristics from that of a child.

The Concept of Discipline: Here, discipline will not be seen in the context of punishment. For example, a student who was disciplined (punished) for coming late. It should not also be seen as a course of study. For example, a branch of knowledge, typically, one studied in higher education. However, discipline in this discuss has to do with controlled behaviour. It is described as the action or inaction that is regulated to be in accordance with a particular system of governance. Discipline is applied to regulate human and even animal behaviours in its society or environment it belongs (Ukpong, 2020; Saharan, 2009).

There are three levels of discipline: **Preventive** (established rules to prevent disruption), **Supportive** (measures taken when rules are broken for the first time) and **Correctional** discipline (measures taken when supportive discipline does not work. However,

Isangedighi (2007) in Abang (2010) classifies acts of discipline into five: (1) **moral** (not being involved in sexual offences and deceits) (2) **personal** (being obedient and sincere) (3) **legal** (not fighting or engaging in falsification of records) (4) **safety** (not smoking, bullying, taking drugs or being in possession of dangerous weapons) (5) **educational** (not playing truancy, skipping classes and indulging in examination malpractices). Note should be taken here that all the different types of discipline are ranked the same.

Parent: A parent is one of the two persons from whom one is immediately biologically descended: a mother or father. There are also step, adoptive and surrogate (loco parentis) parents. Parents are saddled with the responsibility of parenting which is the activity that involves bringing up and looking after a child or children. Also, they are responsible for the child disciplined behaviour.

Teacher: A teacher is one who shows, directs, explains, leads or controls a person to do something, so that the person concerned can do it himself. This explanation automatically qualifies everybody to be a teacher. This is because once upon a time, this role was being played directly or indirectly by virtually everyone. However, Isangedighi (2007, p.378) defines a teacher as “a trained professional with knowledge and skills, as well as a level of competence in the task of teaching and remodeling the learners under his or her care”. By this definition, a teacher must acquire certain basic pre-requisites to make him/her a professional. This, of course, is the ideal teacher that can effectively play a good role to enhance child discipline.

21st century

A century is a period of one hundred (100) consecutive years. It is used to calculate times and seasons, just like a week (7days), a month (4weeks), a year (12 months), a decade (10 years). The 1st century AD dated from 1-100 AD. The 21st century which is the current century started in the year 2000 and will end in the year 2099.

Role of parents in child's discipline

The parents have a robust role to play in child discipline (Tino, 2012). This is because the formative life of the child is mostly spent with the parents, and parents happen to be the first teachers to the child. In order to inculcate disciplined behaviour in children, parents must play the following roles: economic, social, educational, moral/spiritual and punishment.

1. **Economic role:** A child starts being indisciplined when he is hungry (famished), not well fed or not served with the food of his interest. This can send a child out to the neighbourhood to make-up for himself or demonstrate any abnormal behaviour to get something to eat. The angry child may transfer the anger to his siblings, peers and others. Parents should therefore ensure that provisions are made for the child's welfare if they have to enhance discipline in children.

2. **Social role:** Parents should learn to show love to themselves first, as this is the fastest means to teach the child how to love, and then to the children. Parents should find time to interact and discuss with their children, play, share jokes and celebrate with the children from time to time. This will make the children to be at ease in the home and open up to parents in case of any eventuality. It is so disheartening that some parents cannot look into the eyes of the child and observe if the child is sick, sad or happy. A child who

is not loved by the parents will always try to find love from peers and since peers cannot provide parental love, they go to the extreme, which always results in indiscipline.

3. **Educational role:** The provision of educational needs of the child including fees, books, uniform, snacks, transport fare and others are very necessary to keep the child in tune with the school discipline. Parents also need to monitor the child's activities in school and the progress report. The child should be reinforced positively or negatively where necessary. The non-provision of the school needs could lure the child into indiscipline.

4. **Moral/spiritual role:** Parents should strive to live an upright life in the home. This is because children learn faster from what they see parents do than from what they are being told. This is summed up in the words of Abang and Amalu (2018):

If a child lives with hostility, he learns to fight
If a child lives with pity, he learns to feel sorry for himself
If a child lives with tolerance, he learns to be patient
If he lives with shame, he learns to be ashamed of himself
If he lives with acceptance, he learns to love
If he lives with fairness, he learns to value justice
If he lives with honesty, he learns to value truth (p.32)

This agrees with the "tabula raza" position of Locke (1969) that a child is the product of his environment. Above all, parents should learn to pray together and practice to fast and pray for the children.

5. **Punishment as a role:** There are conflicting opinions about this role among parents. While some are in support, others are against it. This is because some parents/teachers have abused the use of punishment and most times apply crude methods. In fact, there is nothing wrong with punishment if it is administered effectively. If parents have to apply punishment for effective result, they:

- Must deliver the punishment immediately the undesirable behaviour occurs.
- Must be in agreement with each other when it comes to punishment.
- Must ensure that the punishment is commensurate with the offense committed.
- Must ensure that the rules of punishment should always be specified before the occurrence.
- Must ensure that punishment is administered in privacy especially if it has to do with adolescents.
- Must not threaten the child in the name of punishment.
- Must ensure that the frequency of delivering the aversive stimulus should be at its highest (Iheanacho, 2017 & Ukpong, 2020).

If parents are able to play these roles effectively, they can drastically reduce indiscipline in the society and enhance disciplined behaviour among children.

Role of teachers in child's discipline

In the past, the teacher's role was that of a mere subject area specialization for teaching. However, in recent times, the teachers' expanded roles include that of holistic human development and management, popularly known as "human engineering" (Nwachukwu, 2007). The teacher, even more than the parents, therefore, has a more robust role to play in enhancing disciplined behaviour among children. This is true because the teacher is a trained professional with knowledge and skills as well as a level of competence in the task of teaching and remodelling learners, whereas, the parent is not. Just like an engineer can

work on a broken-down vehicle, a farmer can apply manure to dying plants to resuscitate them; the teacher should be in a position to know, interpret, control and treat learner's behaviour. It is on this premise that the student teachers are exposed to different theorists in the course of training: Jean Piaget, Ivan Petrovich Pavlov, Albert Bandura, Sigmund Freud, Erik Erikson, Abraham Maslow and others, to enable the teachers treat learners' behaviour and enhance discipline. Where the teacher cannot apply this in the classroom setting, then he has nothing to do with the profession. It is important to remember the words of Watson (1927, p.233):

Give me the baby and I'll make it climb and use its hands in construction of buildings of stone or wood... I'll make it a thief, a gunman or a dope fiend. The possibilities of shaping it to any direction are almost endless... men are built, not born.

The role of a teacher is explained in different ways by different people but with the same meaning. According to Isangedighi (2007), a typical teacher sees his role in relationship with the learners, ministry officials, parents of learners and the local community. Here, the concern is with the roles that relate to the teacher and the child. He went further to summarize these roles into authoritarian, helping, and the negative roles.

a) **Authoritarian role:** Among the authoritarian roles played by the teacher are those of surrogate parenting (in loco parentis), dispenser of knowledge, group leader and role model. Once a child gets to the school, the teacher takes the entire responsibility of the child until the school is over, if it is a non-boarding school. The teacher must see the learner as his own child. Again, teachers must understand that they are being emulated by the learners. The learners imitate the teacher's manners, customs, style of life and above all, believe the teacher more than his own parents irrespective of the parents' academic status; especially at the formative years. Therefore, a corrupt and decadent class of teachers can create a fertile ground for indiscipline behaviour among learners which goes a long way to harm a nation more seriously than a class of corrupt and perverted judiciary, army, police, politician, to mention but a few. Hence, a corrupt and incompetent teacher who cannot dispense his role appropriately and live an exemplary life, is not only a danger to himself but to a generation of learners. Indeed, a nation with corrupt and incompetent teachers is at risk of collapse and failure.

b) **Helping role:** Teachers' helping role is that of character moulder, counsellor, friend and confidant to learners. Teachers as professionals should try to mould the character of learners even when the parent have lost hope. They should be able to make students their friends so that they can open up for counselling which would bring about discipline.

c) **Negative role:** The teachers' negative role consists of those roles that induce stress on the learner. They include a teacher as a detective, disciplinarian, policeman and a judge who detects faults, brings culprit to book and execute justice.

Unfortunately and regrettably, many teachers in public and private schools, do not seem to know what the teachers' role is, let alone play the role. Some are politicians; some assist learners to cheat in examinations; others request students to settle them with money. Many, often request female students to go out with them. A great number of them do not care to go to class but allocate arbitrary scores to students during exams. Some send notes to students to copy while they relax in the staff room. These and many other reasons may

be responsible for the gradual extinction of discipline among children, thus, giving way to gross indiscipline.

Conclusion

Child discipline in the 21st century can only be achieved when parents and teachers start realizing what their roles and responsibilities are, and ensure that they play these roles effectively and consistently with a high sense of commitment, sacrifice and dedication.

Recommendations

- 1) Teaching should only be reserved to professionals.
- 2) Teachers' recruitment process should be thorough and based on merit.
- 3) Sincere, disciplined and committed teachers should be rewarded by the management.
- 4) Students should always rate their teachers and forward the report to management.
- 5) Parents should not go for children when they are not ready.
- 6) Parenthood should be for adult and not children.

References

- Abang, K. B. (2010). *Home environment, anxiety disorder and indiscipline among senior secondary school students in Cross River State, Nigeria*. Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Calabar.
- Abang, K. B. & Amalu, M. N. (2018). Need satisfaction, School type and indiscipline behavior among secondary school adolescents in Cross River State, Nigeria. *International Journal of Educational Research and Management Technology*, 3(1), 26-36.
- Denga, D. I. & Denga, H. M. (2007). *Child Parenting in the Developing Nations: challenges and prospects*. Calabar: Rapid Educational Publishers.
- Farlex, Inc. (2013). *The Free Dictionary*. Pennsylvania: Huntingdon Valley.
- Hornby, A. S. (2015). *Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary of Current English* (8th edition). Oxford University Press.
- Iheanacho, R. A. E. (2017). *Psychology of Learning*. Owerri: Nigeria: GOC International Publishers.
- Isangedighi, A. J. (2007). *Child Psychology, Development and Education*. Calabar: Eti-Nwa Associates.
- Locke, J. (1969). *Fundamental Psychology of Childhood*. New York: Basic Books.
- Nwachukwu, D. N. (2007). *The Teacher Counselor for Today's School*. Calabar: University of Calabar Press.
- Peretomode, V. F. (1994). *Psychology of Human Development for College Students and Teachers*. Owerri: International University Press.
- Saharan, S. K. (2009). Vital role for teachers in nation building. <https://www.researchgate.net>>2 (retrieved 11/01/2023).
- Singapore Statutes Online (2020). Children and young persons Acts 1993 (Revised edition).
- Tino, M. S. (2012). *21st century teacher and the society*. Ibadan: Gallant Press.
- Ukpong, E. M. (2020). *The Psychology of Human Growth, Development and Learning*. Calabar: University of Calabar Press.
- Watson, J. B. (1927). *The Behavior Looks at Instincts*. Hamper's Magazine (July) 233.