

Children Adjustment Process and Problems: Implication for Early Childhood Care Development and Education (ECCDE)

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Abstract: *Children came into the world with no idea of enormous challenges to be faced and resolved. But naturally all human beings are born with instincts to detest, avoid or adjust to problems, thus adjustment is a necessary ingredient for survival and success that must begin from birth. Children adjustment problems are mostly ignored or neglected and this affects their development, wellness, wellbeing, education, and general life . This paper addresses relevant stages, patterns, processes, factors and ways in which adjustment or lack of it affect children. Most importantly, it all depend on how children are perceived, handled, treated,educated, trained and catered for. In Nigeria children adjustment problems identified by this paper embraces social, emotional, intellectual, physical health, mental health and personality. Similarly, Children adjustment are influenced by many factors such as people, situations, processes, beliefs, activities, and children unique inborn abilities, incapacities, temperaments and compositions. The paper suggests the need for changes in values, status and handlings accorded to children, need for proper policies, programmes, advocacies, sensitizations and outreach programmes on issues related to children adjustment and education.This should involve collaborative efforts of parents, academic and professional associations, government and non-governmental bodies to identify, address practices that might directly or indirectly lead to adjustment problems among children.The paper concludes that proper adjustment in children cannot be met until general adjustments is made by adults in shaping the world around children to be a better and conducive.*

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I. Introduction

Contextually, adjustment is used in this paper to mean capacity to cope. This refer to ability to strike a balance between personal needs and demands of life, or capacity to take a stride in overcoming difficulties, or solving, problem and maintaining a state of equilibrium. Characteristically, human life is problematic, some encounters are dangerous, others are risky and unbearable such that adjustment becomes difficult. Life is more tough and threatening to children than adults. So adjustment is more difficult for children than adult. What adult can bear tolerate, endure and adjust to is not same with children. Human babies come into the world with capacities to be developedamong which adjustment . Children life and success depend on help, assistance and guidance they receive to enable them cope and adjust well.

Adjustment is an important factor in human life as it is a prerequisite for wellness, wellbeing and success in life. Due to precarious and complex nature of humans and environments, it is obvious that human beings must engage in series of adjustments processes which are necessary condition for coping with life and its challenges. Most psychologists Piaget, Vogstky, Frued, and Kholberge in (Santrock 2007) believed that period from birth through childhood is -essentially the most crucial and critical period in human life span, as experiences ,encounters and adjustments in early years have tremendous impact in later life .Despite this, issues related to children adjustment has not been accorded due concern. The perceptions, position and status of children in Nigerian society is still very worrisome, as most children are often left to wallow in life without proper care, affection, handling, education and training needed for proper adjustment and achievement in life. The 21st century Nigerian child is faced with inadequacies, inconsistencies, instabilities, difficulties and lacks in so many perspectives, example children in indigent homes, in Internally Displaced People(IDP) camps, and parents who lack times forchildren due to business or work. The scenarios, circumstances, experiences and encounters often involve lots of sufferings, that make adjustment difficult for them. Some lack homes or family, and are not certain of feeding, clothing, shelter, medication, love, education and security which are essentials for adjustment, and survival. Education cannot take place without proper adjustment. Micheal, and Ronald (2008.) emphasized on the importance providing children with their needs especially the primary needs ,without which survival is difficult. Piaget in (Santrock 2001) indicated the relevance of adjustment through adaptation, assimilation, accommodation and state of equilibrium in childhood development and learning.

The issue is that in Nigerian society parents/are accorded complete autonomy over their children such that children who are not lucky to be adequately catered for by parents have nowhere to get compensatory services. In such circumstances children are left to suffer in the hand of their parents or from the circumstances that befall their parents such as natural disasters, diseases, poverty, unemployment, misconducts, hopelessness and carelessness. It is obvious that children cannot be able to adjust and cope with situation their own parents could not resolve, thus various maladjustment conditions are manifested by children in our society today. This is worsened by phasing out of indigenous family ties and attachments. The rich cultural heritage of family bond in which extended relations co-exist and are responsible to give succor to family members are no longer tenable. So many reasons could be attributed to this, which include loss or replacement of cultural values with foreign or alien ones, poverty, elitism, monogamy, and detachment from family tie especially among the educated elites, disorientation to norms and values, urbanization, modernisation and capitalism among others.

In Nigerian society like others, children are powerless, defenseless, vulnerable, dependent, and at mercy of adults, they have no choice, voice, no chance to challenge what is done and how it is done to them, is either they adjust or they mal-adjust. This will ultimately result in severe consequences on their, health, wellness, wellbeing, education other life attainments and success. Children capacity to adjust well result from the quality of support, care, love, affection, attachment, security, protection and need satisfaction, reinforcement, motivation, education, social, psycho-emotional, moral and spiritual training of the child from birth through childhood into adulthood. Early child care, education and development programme are purposefully meant to cater for physical, moral, emotional, intellectual, personal development of the growing child.

In Nigeria cases of maladjustment in children is becoming issue of major-concern as depicted by high rate of street-children, school dropouts, school age children not going to school, child labour, child abuse, child neglect; delinquent children, orphans and children from broken homes not adequately treated. Grych, Jouriles, Swank, McDonald, Norwood and Schulz, (2000) indicated children that lack adequate environmental condition, bio-social, psycho-emotional care, or are from broken homes, or battered mothers account for maladjustment in children. The current state of insecurities in Nigeria demonstrated by Boko haram, Niger Avengers, Indigenous People Of Biafra (IBOP) insurgencies, kidnappers, suicide bombers, religious and ethnic conflicts are among salient issues showing adverse effect of lack adjustment during their childhood, and currently affecting another generation of children whose home, schools and societies were destroyed. Another issue is improper names and disciplinary measures against children who could not adjust. They are called and categorized as difficult children, delinquent or children with behavioral disorder and treated harshly. Which often worsen their plight, leading to lack self-control, negative and aggressive reactions. It is during childhood that important foundation for adults life are provided, successful childhood experiences turns out successful adults, while problem or maladjusted children are likely to transform into problem adults and the challenges are enormous for society. The world today is full of challenges that are beyond the coping capacities of children. In addition, the desirable roles to be played by family, home setting, schools, peer group, media, in promoting adjustment in children are not properly implemented. According to Oesforges and Abouchaar(2002), children are susceptible to insurmountable process of changes, experiences, exposure that they have to resolve, adapt and adopt to in their process of growth, development and education and interactions with other people. Similarly, Cummings, Schermerhorn, Davies, Goekey-Morrey and Cummings (2006) in their studies found strong link between inter-parental discord, marital conflict and children adjustment problems. They opined that when destructive marital conflict erodes the bridge of union, children become hesitant to move forward and lack confidence or may move forward in deregulated way and become unable to find appropriate footing within themselves or in their interactions. Some manifestations of adjustment problems include conduct problem, noncompliance, rudeness, tantrum, crying which alter child capacity for learning and performances.

Adjustment patterns and Processes in children

Children like adults encounter variety of adjustment problems in their encounters and life. as relate to diverse dimensions of personality development. The paper opines that need to overcome these adjustment problems.

Psychological adjustment: Behavioural adjustment is central and very important in human life. This refers to the process of balancing conflicting needs against obstacles in environment and resolving it amicably, this leads to balance state between need and satisfaction. Lack of adequate psychological adjustment is associated to inefficiency, behavioral problem, stress, depression, projection of day dreams and mental ill-health conditions. Extensive literature available on children adjustment such as, Grych, Jouriles, Swank, McDonald, Norwood and Schulz, (2000) in their research found five distinct "clusters" or patterns of psychological adjustment in children as:

- a. "No problems reported"(31% of subjects): Responses by these children indicated they were functioning well, and responses were within normal limits for their age.
- b. "Multiproblem-externalizing" (19%): These children were characterized by serious, acting-out behaviors. Eighty-six percent had scores on the Child Behavior Checklist (Achenbach, 1991) that indicated significant

conduct disorders, and 9% had scores on measures of internalizing problems that indicated clinically significant depression, anxiety and low self-esteem.

c. "Externalizing" (21%): These children were characterized by clinically high levels of acting-out behaviors, 89% of which had significant conduct disorders. However, they had relatively high self-esteem, and none reported internalizing problems.

d. "Mild distress" (18%): Low self-esteem, very few acting-out problems and mild depression and anxiety problems (only 5% in the clinically significant range) characterized these children's responses.

e. "Multiproblem-internalizing" (11%): These children's responses indicated high levels of depressive symptoms, 65% of whom reported symptoms consistent with a diagnosis of clinical depression.

2. **Biological adjustment:** This involves how the child's body changes commensurate with the outer environment. Human biological adjustments begin from the prenatal period and through the postnatal period, such as adjustment to the uterine environment and from birth adjustment to respiration, feeding, excretion, digestion, body chemistry and adjustment between genetic components of the child and environment component. Santrock (2007) indicated that thermal regulatory adjustment is very necessary at birth, they are normal changes, sequential adjustment process that occurs which promote child's survival and development such as taking the first breath results in lung fluid being replaced by air producing outcome. This is also connected to change in skin colour and simultaneous change in appearance. Lack of biological adjustment can cause discomforts, digestive, respiratory, and other ill-health conditions.

3. **Situational adjustment:** Children need to adjust to weather, climate and demographic conditions, conflicts, disasters and other daily events so as to cope with life. Situational and temperamental fluctuations do affect children's health, education, wellness and well-being. Children need to be assisted to adjust by providing them with quality and conducive home, school and social environments.

4. **Cognitive adjustment:** From birth children use the brain in taking synapses of happening in the environment. This is further processed by the information processing unit. This role is affected by exposure and experiences such that adaptation, accommodation, and assimilation help the child to be at equilibrium. Children do not have automatic capacity to adjust and this eventually affects their perception, cognition, information processing capacity and learning. They need adequate stimulation, reinforcement, motivation, role models and learning through play as advocated by Socrates, Montessori, Froebel in (Okoro 2006) activity and discovery learning as proposed by Piaget in (Santrock 2007).

5. **Social adjustment:** A new-born is asocial, child social adjustment involves development of acceptable and desirable behavior through the process of socialization. This involves internalization of norms, ethics, customs, tradition and culture and development of appropriate interpersonal relationships, interactions in the society. According to Vygotsky, Bronfenbrenner in (Michael and Ronald 2008), children develop gender, stereotype, behavior and relevant social behavior, based on exposures and experiences made available to them. Lack of social adjustments leads to deviant and anti-social behaviour.

6. **Emotional adjustment:** Emotions in children are often a reflection of handling, intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships. Children are born with certain inborn characteristics and corresponding feelings. Attempts to adjust to situations often put them at disequilibrium, confusion, and disharmony. Children's emotions are not stable but can be put under control. The efficacy of the control measures used helps in management of emotions in children otherwise, maladjustment occurs such as tantrums, irritability and negative reactions.

7. **Educational and learning adjustment:** Learning is connected to internal and external efforts between learners and providers. Learning occurs through many processes and active agents include parent caregivers, family, teachers and resource persons. Children need to adjust to the needs and demands in the educational process. ECCDE is geared to give children head start, best start, sure start and gain start, and readiness to learning. It seeks to refine children into the best mold of human being they can be. This can be realized when children's needs are met and are free from other adjustment problems.

Factors affecting child Adjustment

Various factors ranging from hereditary, personal, social, moral, emotional, economic, ethical, religious all tend to influence adjustment in children and adults. Similarly family type, size and parenting style, interactions, relationships, peer group, media and other social agencies just as they greatly impact in behavior, development and learning so also they do to adjustment. Simple example is that children need to adjust to feeding, sleeping behavior, school routine otherwise it becomes difficult and problematic. There are various intervention skills used to assist children in self-regulations, which is the ability to control impulses and expression of emotions moods that constitute disturbances.

Study conducted by Raju and Rahmatulla (2007) showed that low parent-child relationship in early years, parental conflicts, family chaos, use of unresponsive or harsh and punitive practices are leading factors in child adjustment problem and behavior in early years which extend to later years. Similarly, Oesforges and Abouchaar (2002) indicated that parents and families face troublesome or disturbing moments themselves or

have limited skill for self-managements of temporary impulses, or lack capacity to offer adequate monitoring services, or cannot plan for the needs of children and instead of preventing adjustment problems, add more to children problem of adjustment. Actually, maladjustment leads to series of unwanted and undesirable behavior that have negative effect in children life and subsequent adult life. This means parents and care givers often contribute to phenomena of adjustment problems in children causing difficulty to their development and education.

Childhood Period and Adjustment Problems

Childhood period involve rapid developmental changes demanding serious adjustment and adaptive capacity usually occur more specifically within 0-5years. This is because each moment and experience in early years could make or mar the child's life. The disharmony Discrepancies, in-balance and uncertainties among people, events, happenings, environments requires continuous and consistent adjustment by the child. Consistencies result in normal and inconsistencies in some abnormal behavior.

Gardener and Shaw (2008) indicated that newborn have genetically instinctual survival mechanism that help in adjustment process by use of the senses and reflexes. **The neonate stage 0-2 weeks** is virtually known as period of adjustment as it marks the transitional adjustment between uterine and extra-uterine environments. Those who adjust have high chance of survival, those who could are at risk of diseases and death. But child's life, development, survival depend very much manifold nature and nurture factors. Vital adjustment for transition and stabilization of newborn include impulse, respiration, temperature, blood pressure, pupils, color, level of consciousness, reaction to pain reflex. Physical conditions involved pulse, heart rate, breathing, muscle tone, activity, reflex, response to stimulation, rooting, grasping, starting, skin color/appearance. Other necessary adjustment requirement for the newborns includes

1. Achievement of thermal stability independently: involve the replacement of fluid in living with oxygen, the crying facilitate this responsible for change of skin colour and adequate skin to skin contact by kept warm and dry facilitate this also.
2. At birth the Inter-uterine heat reservoir and heat exchange through placenta is usually lost. The new child has to adjust to world climate and temperature. The need to adjust to new environment remains vital for survival. New born are said to have Non shivering thermogenesis.
3. The new born need warmth to keep stable which is necessary for their survival and health. Allowing them to become cold may make them to develop brown fat store which deplete and endanger the newborn and make them hypoxic and hypoglycaemic.
4. Another facet of adjustment is glucose homeostasis adjustment: In which a new born has to adjust and switch from obtaining glucose from mother through placenta to independent glucose production. At birth the glucose level falls but when babies are kept warm and within first few hours after birth and adjustment takes place and they become able to control their own blood glucose as they produce protective response to increase availability of alternative substance or fuel for the brain when the glucose is low.
5. Fluid balance change: during pregnancy while in mother womb, foetus life depression interplay between the uterine, amniotic fluid and key fluid production. To maintain adequate fluid balance and long tissue growth at birth, newborn, the fluid balance undergoes significant adaptive postnatal changes. All new borns experience extra cellular fluid contracting after delivery and during the first week. Due to adjustment process newborn are said to lose upto 10% of their birth weight.

Infancy stage: 2 weeks -24 months, this is the time for extreme dependence on adults. Children came into the world with no safe survival skills. Their survival at this stage depend on utmost care they receive. The major cause of child mortality at this age period is issue of maladjustment. There are differences in family set up and children experiences diverse or varying circumstances that affect their development. The new born adjustment is very crucial for childhood as children are born into the world as dependent, helplessness through neonate to infancy period. During the first month: issue related to mothers condition before and after child birth, during post partum affect child care, such as crying, feeding and nutritional adjustments, waking and sleeping behavior, bathing, holding, dressing, infections, skin condition, eye condition relationship stress, demand, baby blues. From 1-12 months issues of attachment, bonding, safety, coaching, crawling, touch messaging, kangaroo care, affection are important adjustment concern. Thus the use of Apgar scale to assess new baby adjustment to identify neonatal health, muscle tone, body color and responsiveness, respiration efforts and reflex irritability were encouraged. From 13 month to 2 years aspect of sleep, anger management, day care issues, socialization, moral training are major issues for adjustment.

Children engage in adaptation and adjustment process to the new world which is completely different from uterine environment. Encounters, experiences, handling, children at this level have a lot to do with child ability to adjust well. Inadequate adjust results in personal, adequacy, difficulty, lack of ability, incompleteness that may be displayed by children and may extend into adulthood. The implication for ECCDE is that early child care provision should be focused to address all children.

Early childhood: preschool 3-5years, in this period children are able to form activities, behavior show some of the inborn capacities and potentials which need to be discovered, shaped, guided and changed for a proper adjustment which is a necessary ingredient for growth, development, learning, maturation, achievement and success in children life and subsequent adult life. Activities, experiences geared to children at home and school should be harmonious and incoherence with individual need of the child. Otherwise disequilibrium may need to maladjustment and eventually affects not just physical but also social, mental, cognitive, emotional, wellness and well being of the child. 2-4 years preschool: cold, discipline, speech problem, speech arid language development of phonological awareness; visual motor skills, reading and writing skill demands.

Middle childhood: primary school 6-11years, equivalent to primary school years 6-11 or 12 years. Transition from preschool to primary school is often easy and mild adjustment but for children with no.preschool experiences a wide g'ap exist between home and school transition. The crises may be enormous as it involve series of adjustments, adaptation . The child life skills involve going adequate self control, intrapersonal relationship, readiness for learning and socializing with world beyond family circle which involve a great deal of pros and cons as the child entertain difficulties, fears, anxiety, aspirations, needs in addition to parental, school, social expectation.

Late childhood: 9-12 years JSS, transition from childhood to puberty or preadolescence involves let of adjustment, changes as children experiences rapid physical changes such as weight, height, sexual characteristics, emotions, social attachments. They as well tend to seek for independence from adult dominion for more abstract logical and idealistic developmental characteristics.

Implication For Early Childhood Care Education

Before birth the uterine environment which is the mother's womb provides all the necessary environmental comfort and needs of the unborn child. Children came into the world with no physical strength or skill to face this world. All experiences and exposure on infants encounters can become source of adjustment problem for the child which if not properly handled can transmit into further health, psychological, social and personality or other complicated issues that may eventually affect education, career and life pursuit problem. Socrates in Okoro(2006) emphasized that in every work the beginning is the most important part especially in dealing with anything young and tender. Because is the time when impression is most easily stamped and taken. This mean the best period to invest in human is the childhood period, and the best way is to build their capacity to adjust, cope and solve problems to enhance their development education and success. Early childhood care and education globally is conceived as a holistic programme that cater for all the needs of children(NPE 2013) but the goal is being cripple by numerous problems such as curriculum content, delivery, personnel, environment, stakeholders, inadequate funding human and material resources (Obiweluozor 2015 and Salami 2016). Actually, the characteristics of learning processes in ECCDE and primary schools does not foster adjustment and problem solving, activity and discovery learning. It only enhance memorization, rote and de-active learning. Children are faced with compounded problems that are inimical to their health, development and education. They exhibit traits and disposition of behavioural disorder, defiant and oppositional behavior, disruptive behavior, stress, depression and other maladjustment symptoms which are often left untreated leading them to become delinquent and harden criminals posing serious threat to their life and others. Certainly, it is the children that suffer more from problem of adjustment which results from the incapacities of homes schools and larger society. Naturally, the characteristics of children make them vulnerable and endangered species. They lack awareness of the intrigues and complexities in life .In addition childhood period is time when most rapid growth, development and changes occur in human life span, with inadequacies of immaturity, lack of knowledge, inexperience, and wisdom to act impromptu, so they depend on others to be able to adjust, resolve problems and move forward. When they failed to adjust the consequences dreary. They are labeled, stigmatized, punished, despised, discarded, abandoned and they will end up as wastes and menace such as ,school failures, school dropouts, hooligans, criminals with no past, no present and no future.

Lengua and Kovas (2005), examined a longitudinal associations between child temperament (fearfulness, irritability, positive emotionality, self regulation and parenting acceptance, involvement, inconsistent discipline) in predicting children's internalizing and externalizing problems using a community sample of 92 children aged 8-11 years and their mothers, using multiple regression analysis, their findings show that by directional relations between temperament and parenting such that inconsistent increases negative emotionality in children. The issue is the school environments and services meant to promote adjustment, education of children in way contribute to their maladjustments.

II. Conclusion

Lack of adjustment leads to maladjustment which refers to habitual pattern of behavior, that are negative and detrimental to the child and others. Usually adjustment problems cannot be corrected by punishment or discipline actions. Some children develop internal conflict, unpleasant feelings, such as excessive

bedwetting, some adopt to externalizing acting behaviors such as aggression, bullying, fighting, breaking rules, difficulties in conforming to standard expectations, understanding and obeying rules. All adult are stake holders in child care, the responsibility is to revert back to being our brothers keeper. Children belong to everybody and must be cared for, guided, supported and catered for by all to ensure proper adjustments and to promote education as a right that must be pursued and attained by all.

III. Suggestions

1. Some suggestions offered ranges from changes in values and status accorded to children, need for psychologists, guidance and counseling at community level, need for proper government policies and programmes to address child related issues, need for advocacy, sensitization and outreach programmes to be organized by academic and professional associations like Nigerian Society for Education Psychologists (NISEP) Early Childhood Association of Nigeria (ECAN) and other collaborative efforts between government and non-governmental bodies to identify, address practices directly or indirectly affecting children adjustment.

2. Children cannot make life by themselves, cannot adjust to situations or solve problem without adequate intervention, ECCDE goals must be pursued vigorously. All children must have access to quality early years care, support, learning and training, especially, Children in Internally Displaced Person camps and other indigent children should benefit from ECCDE services.

The first transition is from home to day care centers and most day care centers create problems for children which further complicate adjustment process. Only qualified ECCDE care givers and facilitators should be employed to serve them.

3. Parental involvement take many forms such as good parenting in the home, provision of secure life. Santrock (2007) indicated four styles used by parents, teachers and others, and their consequences on children: these are authoritarian, authoritative, indulgent and neglectful styles. But proposed authoritative as the best style. The authoritative style: these are parents/teachers are who encourage children to be independent but place limitations on the child and control his actions. These sort of teachers / parent are nurturing and supportive. Such children are said to become self-reliant, get along with peers, gratifications are offered to enhance, have high self esteem and is said to provide more positive outcomes.

4. Peer relationship and adjustment: Children need peer adjustment to go a long way in school as children spend considerable time in class and school with time with peers. The type of peer relationship established determine child adjustment status: Children rated are rated as popular, neglected, rejected or controversial status each with its implication on adjustment and affect wellbeing and school achievements. Teachers and parent need to work for children.

5. School environment should be friendly and accommodating. Provision of friendly faces, good interpersonal relationship, adaptable set of routines, roles, rules, activities for the child which the child can easily adjust to. Inability to adjust may likely lead to behavior that are inimical to the child, others or environment. Maladjustment, aggression, punishment, discrimination, threat, and instilling fearful should be stopped as they impede learning, development and wellness and wellbeing of the child.

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