

LANGUAGE USE, PARENTING STYLES, AND STUDENTS' ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

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Abstract

The performance of students at all levels is influenced by a variety of factors, including parenting. This study examines how good parenting and students' academic performance can be shaped through language use. Drawing on secondary data and observation, and employing a qualitative method supported by content analysis, the study demonstrates that language use is central to parenting, just as it is fundamental to all human activities. Consequently, the way parents use language in the course of parenting either enhances or undermines their children's academic performance. It also influences their parenting style and determines whether their parenting practices are considered effective or ineffective. Baumrind's theory of parental styles identifies authoritative parenting as the most effective style, one that makes positive and constructive use of language and is associated with good parenting and high academic achievement among children. The study concludes that the positive use of language in parenting supports authoritative parenting practices, enhances parenting quality, and fosters high or excellent academic performance in students. It recommends that parents consistently employ positive and effective language and adopt the authoritative parenting style in order to significantly support their children's attainment of optimal academic outcomes.

Keywords: Language use, good Parenting, Academic performance, Students, Authoritative parenting style

Introduction

The alarming spate of poor academic performance among students of all levels these days, as in contemporary Nigeria, rouses the consciousness towards the influence of parenting on students' academic performance, with a view to ascertaining and discussing the place of good and bad parenting on students' academic performance respectively (Ubong, 2021). There are different factors that determine students' good or poor academic performance. Broadly speaking, these include teacher, student and parent factors, institutional lapses, deficient curriculum, societal or environmental factors, socio-economic, political, cultural and psychological factors, technological and globalisation trends, and linguistic factors. This paper is concerned with the parental factor. Odongo, Aloka and Raburu (2016) classify parental involvement in the academics of their children into four forms viz: frequency of parent-teacher contact; quality of parent-teacher interaction; participation in educational activities in the home; and participation in school activities.

Parents, like teachers, make or mar students' academic performance (Singh, Anshu & Mahananda, 2014; Dibie & Robert, 2015; Besong & Robert, 2019). As a concept, parent refers to a family leader, involving biological and/or foster father and mother and other guardian(s), who are primary agents of socialisation (Besong & Robert, 2019). They play the lead roles in parenting. Other members of the family or home also take part in the socialisation and education the child gets from home, which manifest in several ways at school either positively or negatively. The other family members include siblings, grandparents, uncles, aunts, other relatives, family friends and even close neighbours (Afen-Akpa, 2008; Dibie & Robert, 2015; Robert & Dibie, 2015; Besong & Robert, 2019). Parenting involvement in students' academics is a catch-all term for many different activities, including at 'home,' good parenting, helping with homework, talking to teachers, attending school functions, through to taking part in school governance (Ibukunolu, 2013).

According to Adewumi, Olojo and Falemu (2012, p. 196), the most accurate prediction of a student's achievement in school is not income or social status, but the extent to which that student's parent is able to create a home environment that encourage learning and to express high expectations for their children's achievement and future careers. This study seeks to show that the kind of parenting children receive from their parents at home influences their academic performance. It also intends to show that the kind of language used by certain parents for parenting reveals their parenting style. Thus, it holds the central argument that language use influences parenting and academic performance of students. It adds that good parenting is characterised by positive language use, while bad parenting is characterised by negative language use. Given the foregoing expressed concerns and arguments, this study seeks to descriptively analyse the correlation between language use and good parenting, which both determine or influence the academic performance of students.

Language Use, Parenting and Parenting Styles

Language is the natural phenomenon that serves as a means of communication between and among humans and animals, at both individual and group phases (Monday & Eze, 2012; Nwala, 2008). Every human activity involves language use. This reality is expressed by many scholars (e.g. Emeka-Nwobia, 2007; Uche, 1994). For example, Emeka-Nwobia (2007, p. 3) is of the view that 'there is no human society without language.' According to Uche (1994, p. 101), 'without language, science cannot strive; this shows that effective communication in science involves [the] ability to use and understand the technical terms as well as interpret information encoded in symbolic form into another non-symbolic form of language.'

Since every human activity involves language use, parenting is one of human activities involving the use of language. What matters most is how language is used by parents for parenting (upbringing) of children. Language is used to: communicate knowledge, etc; inform and direct; give directives, orders, and instructions; perform various activities; and share interactions and exchange of pleasantries, as in greetings, wishes, love and business transactions (Monday and Eze, 2012; Nwala, 2008; Anagbogu et al., 2001). Language is the instrument of communication used by parents for parenting. When used positively, parents are able to exert a great level of positive influence on children, such that it manifests in the children's academic performance too. The negative use of language in parenting spells doom on the children and shatters the goals of parenting. The way language is used by a parent tells of the parenting style used by the given parent for parenting.

Parenting involves the critical, disciplined, ethical, standard, moral or virtuous and comprehensive good enough parenting or child-upbringing of children, which ought to ideally begin at children's early years of life (Dibie & Robert, 2015). Parenting is simply the apt disposition of parental responsibility in taking care of and bringing up or training children. When parents live up to their expectation in child-upbringing, good parenting is realised. On the other hand, the otherwise parenting from some parents amounts to bad parenting. Bad parenting is a case of parental irresponsibility by some parents, who either abuse or neglect their parenting responsibilities. Good parenting goes beyond care, provision of basic needs, support and encouragement for children to effective socialisation, education, training, control, direction, guidance, counselling, exerting discipline, monitoring and so on.

Parenting does not stop at affection, care, feeding, grooming and education (information and formal) impartation for one's children/wards; it goes beyond these (Dibie & Robert, 2015). Doing the aforementioned alone, without inculcating discipline, punctuality, diligence, morality, self-control, self-reliance, virtues, forbidding or discouraging examination malpractice and other forms of corruption and so on, means bad or poor parenting. For Dibie and Robert (2015), any parenting, which is the exclusive preserved of those elements of parenting they point out, is no parenting but a mere or ineffective parenting. They stress that only good enough parenting is worthwhile; adding that any parenting by any parent(s) that stops at the elementary aspects of parenting is not good enough and manifests several nefarious and grave implications (Dibie & Robert, 2015, p. 166).

It is interesting that the conceptual perspectives of Dibia and Robert (2015) reflect the conceptual explanations of the concepts described by other scholars above and the subject matter of this study. In other words, their perspectives aptly reflect the concepts of family, parent, parenting, socialisation, education and even school. They challenge contemporary parents to live up to expectation and do the needful that would better the society, as their children beget good parenting from them and consequently perform well at school and behave well in the society at large. Their opinions are thus apt, objective, comprehensive and realistic, and thus adopted by this researcher. Drawing from the foregoing, parenting simply means the process and practice of all-round effective qualitative training of children, which influences and shapes the lives of the children at home, school and in the larger society as a whole.

As used herein, effects imply implications, results or impacts of parenting, which could be good or bad, positive or negative, productive or unproductive. Parenting has both good and bad effects. Good parenting brings forth good effects on children both at home and at school. Conversely, bad parenting breeds bad parenting effects or influences on children within and outside home. Good parenting influences children's academic influence. Academic performance as well as achievement depends on both school learning and home learning environments. The extent to which and how parents influence their children at home and beyond, up to the school environment, as students, have been aptly reiterated by Adewumi, Olojo and Falemu (2012, p. 196) viz: 'Parent has vital roles to play in the life of a child. The involvement of a parent on a child determines the future of such [a] child.'

It is noted that academic performance basically involves these processes viz: the ability to learn and remember facts; being able to study effectively and see how facts fit together and form large knowledge pattern; being able to think for oneself in relation to facts; and being able to communicate verbally and in writing (Pandey & Thapa, 2017, p. 132). Since parenting influences child's attitude, behaviour, performance and relationship with others, students' academic performance is influenced by parenting. This is simply because the child is one who doubles as a student. Besides, what affects the child at home also affects him/her at school.

Theoretical Framework

The study is guided by Baumrind's (1967), theory on parental styles. Baumrind's theoretical conceptualisation of parenting style has produced remarkably consistent picture of the type of parenting style conducive for successful child's integral development. Ibukunolu (2013) agrees that Baumrind's (1967) theory on parental styles figures out four key parental styles, which are authoritarian, authoritative, neglectful and permissive styles. These four parenting styles could affect adolescence in their academic achievement. Authoritarian parenting is a restrictive punitive style, in which parents exhort the child to follow their directions and respect their work and efforts, place firm limits and controls on the child and allows little verbal exchange (Ibukunolu, 2013; Santrock, 2008).

Students exposed to permissive parenting are noted to have significantly lower academic achievement, as compared to their counterparts who perceived their parents as authoritative or authoritarians (Odongo, Aloka & Raburu, 2016). Conversely, authoritative parents are noted to be responsible and reliable. They are very much concerned with their children's academic performance, they visit the school to check on their children and encourage their children to perform well through various contributions such as prompt payment of school fees, buying of learning materials and encouraging their children to work hard in class (Odongo, Aloka & Raburu, 2016, p. 104). They are always kind, respectful, responsiveness and have high affection towards their children, hence are always there for their academic needs, and this makes their children to perform well not only in academics but also in their social life (Woolfolk, 2007).

Authoritative parents respect their children, understand them, monitor their welfare and have warm and intimate times together with their children. An authoritarian parenting style is found to negatively correlate to children performance (Ashiona, 2013). Such parents, who inculcate such habit in their children, do not listen to principals, other administrators and teachers on issues of their children's academic performance. Rather they tend to detect for the school and even resort to transferring their

children/wards from one school to another without due course and processes. Consequently, their children continue to perform poorly. Parents, who practice this style, do not respect teachers and school authorities. For most of them they are better and more experienced, learned, well-to-do, aged, influential, and so on than school authorities and teachers. And so, they must prevail. The relationship between authoritarian parenting style and academic performance is negative. It undermines learning process (Verenikina, Vialle & Lysight, 2011). Such parents are cruel to both their children and the school.

Cruel parents shun their children from approaching them with any issues related to their social and academic life, which hampers such students from competing favourably with their mates, whose parents are otherwise. They mindlessly encroach into their children's study time and so on. There is a communication gap between them and their children. Their parenting style is detrimental to their children's social and academic performance (Ashiona, 2013). High level of parental pressure incorporated within the authoritarian style can often reduce children's intrinsic motivation, causing them to be reliant on extrinsic sources, thus undermining the process of learning (Verenikina, Vialle & Lysaght, 2011). Furthermore, permissive parents are found to be loose in parenting. They tolerate whatever their children do and support them even when they are wrong, including cases of indiscipline. They allow their children's impulses to prevail and employ little or no use of punishment as corrective measures. They also made few demands on their children (Odongo, Aloka & Raburu, 2016).

How Parenting Influences Students' Academic Performance

The study by Adewumi, Olojo and Falemu (2012) highlights the impact of parents' involvement in the activities and lives of their children, and the differences in the level of involvement engaged by parents. The study notes that parental involvement in children's education has a powerful impact on their attainment (i.e. their good academic performance). In all of this affirmed reality, language is used. It also states that children tend to succeed not just in schools but throughout life as a result of meaningful collaboration between schools and families in offering learning supports to children. When parents offer their children good parenting at home, the children do well at school. The teachers are left with little or minor workload. That is, the good parenting serves a good foundation for effective learning. So, teachers are left with their core roles of teaching rather than having to battle with teaching and parenting roles simultaneously in order for their students to do assimilate what is taught, do well in and outside the school environment and achieve greatly in their academics in terms of good grades.

Also, their study confirms that parents have essential roles to play in the life of every child, which determine to a large extent the future of the child (Adewumi, Olojo & Falemu, 2012). It considers parenting as resting on the involvement of parents in all the activities of their children, including their academics. According to them, parenting involvement is a catch-all term for many different activities, including at 'home,' good parenting, helping with homework, talking to teachers, attending school functions, through to taking part in school governance. Adewumi, Olojo and Falemu (2012) go further to note that when schools work together with families to support learning, children tend to succeed not just in schools but throughout life; adding that the most accurate prediction of a student's achievement in school is not income or social status, but the extent to which that student's parent is able to create a home environment that encourage learning and to express high expectations for their children's achievement and future careers.

Bakar, Mamat and Ibrahim (2017) also affirm the influence of parenting on students' academic performance, as they note that parents are the first teachers of their children. In the light of this, parental education influences student's academic performance.' The views expressed above indicate that parents need to be deeply involved in their children's education, including participating in the school's governing body, so as to contribute positively to school policies that affect their children as students. The foregoing reiterates the place of good parenting in the academic performance of every student. It implies that both parents and teachers have core roles to play in the lives and academics of children/students. And so when they fall short of their responsibilities, children/students also fall short of their academic performance, social behaviour, interpersonal relations, career [choice], life

achievements and all activities. Also, it implies that when parents fall short of their ideal parenting roles that would yield the aforementioned results, it is the case of bad parenting. The otherwise with the ideal roles and results constitute good parenting.

In fact, since education moulds the individual in various ways, the positive impact of the educational achievements, which arose from good parenting and teaching, continuously manifests all through their lives. Such parental commitment would bring about high interest in and good reading habit; routine study or learning both at school and home; monitored and controlled extra-curricular activities like watching of movies, playing and so on; parental encouragement of children for best pursuit of academic excellence; and socialising children on the value of education and need for excellent academic performance. It could be reasoned that parental commitment the child's education or academic activities is more attained from educated parents, because they get directly involved in the academic activities of their children and could personally assess their children.

Levels of involvement are positively related to social class and to maternal levels of education. Parental involvement decreases as the child gets older. Single parent status and problems with maternal psycho-social health, such as depression, have a negative impact on involvement. And, material poverty also has a powerful negative impact (Adewumi, Olojo & Falemu, 2012). It is shown that there are large differences between parents in the degree to which they see a role for themselves in their child's education and in the degree to which they feel confident in being able to help. It is demonstrated that many parents feel put off from involvement by the way some teachers treat them. Finally, the children themselves are shown to have a significant influence on the degree to which their parents get involved. Parents felt very involved the more so in primary than in secondary schools. Mothers felt more involved than fathers (Adewumi, Olojo & Falemu, 2012).

The empirical aspect of Dibia and Robert's (2015) reveals that when parents are responsible —indulge in good parenting, the task of good reading culture, commitment to academics, performing well academically and otherwise, behaving and relating well with others, being respectful, dissociating from social vices and so on would become part and parcel of what children, who beget the good parenting, carry about (Dibia & Robert, 2015, pp. 165-6). These scholars reflect on the 'Charity begins at home' maxim and reason that if parents are up and doing in their parenting roles, most of the issues recorded from children both in and outside home would barely obtain (Dibia & Robert, 2015, p. 165). With ample illustrations, they dissect the practical realities of the maxim in the context of parenting and education. Therefore, parents have a great role to play in their children's academics, including ensuring their good performance and remarkable achievements at school and beyond. Dibia and Robert (2015, p. 166) point out that discipline, monitoring, exemplary living effective communication and interaction/rapport, home management and economics, inculcating of moral and cultural values and norms, ethics and aesthetics, reading culture, efficacious socialisation, among others, constitute the secondary aspects of parenting for good enough parenting that is the panacea for students' poor academic performance and misbehaviour of all kinds, particularly in contemporary urban areas.

Regrettably, the widespread decline in good parenting continuously compounds the problems of education in Nigeria and many other parts of the world, where education standard continuously degenerate. These days, most parents challenge, harass and even arrest teachers for meting out minimal punishment on their children, who are the teachers' students. A student flogged minimally for poor performance in a test or an examination subject could either waylay the teacher(s) or bring his/her parent(s) to molest the teacher(s). Clearly, the teacher or others (is) are bound to overlook such students' poor performance, even when they are worried about it. Some students are offered various sources of distractions (e.g. costly phones) by their parents. Also, most parents either initiate or abet examination malpractice. The aforementioned examples and lots more are manifestations of bad/poor parenting, which cause students' poor academic performance.

Ubong (2021) observes that good parenting should go beyond parental visiting of children and wards at schools to significant domestic contributions to their academics in the course of parenting. He says

good enough parenting should go beyond care and provision of children's needs to regular checking of children's notes; reviewing their performances in tests, assignments and exams; inspecting their uniform outlook for neatness or dirtiness; designing home rewards for good performance with enticing gifts; timely building of the children; and employing home tutors (Ubong, 2021). Besides, it has to include discussing and subsequently assigning specific teachers and administrators to one's children for school extra-work and watch; stressing good performance both at home and school during the visits, up to telling teachers to the children's face to punish them for misbehaviour and poor performance; among others (Ubong, 2021).

Conclusion

Given the reasonable engagement with the subject matter and the data analysis, this study has shown that language use is fundamental to good parenting and the academic performance of students. All human endeavours involve language, and parenting, a crucial human activity, is no exception. Consequently, the way language is used in parenting is highly significant. Authoritative parenting becomes evident when parents use language positively. The positive and effective use of language by parents reflects their parenting style, as each style is characterised by specific linguistic features, including either positive or negative patterns of language use. Good parenting is marked by the positive and effective use of language for various purposes, including supporting and improving a child's academic performance. Therefore, parents should employ language positively and effectively and adopt the authoritative parenting style to maximise their impact on their children, particularly in enhancing their academic performance and achievement.

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