

TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS ABOUT THE EFFECTS OF CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCES OF LEARNING ON THEIR LATER EMOTIONAL AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

It is generally believed that children's success in grappling effectively with emotional and social challenges in later years largely depends on their childhood experiences. Using a mixed-methods approach, this study explored the perceptions that teachers in a primary school in Ghana held about this belief. Data was collected using a questionnaire and interviews. Sixty teachers voluntarily participated in the study. The study found, among other things, that the ability of a child to cope with emotional and social challenges in later years depends on teachers' attitudes in terms of their commitment, sensitivity to the child's needs, and ability to structure the teaching and learning environment. Based on the findings, the study recommends that in making placement decisions in primary schools, educational departments should place emphasis on teachers' commitment to children's development.

Key words: childhood, primary education, social, emotional, development, teachers

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INTRODUCTION

The significance of social and emotional development is seen in every area of a child's life. A child may have a strong foundation for later development if he or she can manage personal feelings, understand others' feelings and needs, and interact positively with others. Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998) suggest that childhood development takes place through processes of progressively more complex interaction between a child and other persons, objects and symbols in his or her immediate environment. They suggest that one's environment influences others, and that these bi-directional influences occur at all levels of the environment (Berk, 2000). Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, or human ecology theory, upholds that human beings develop in relation to the family and home, school, community, and society; and these environments are conceptualised as nested systems (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). The child might not function directly in these ecological environments, but these environments do affect his or her development (Paquette & Ryan, 2001). These environments incorporate, inter alia, the attitudes and ideologies of a child's cultural values, social customs, and laws (Berk, 2000). The researchers will therefore concentrate on the school's environment, especially the teachers' influence on the children's social and emotional development.

Importance of childhood development

Research on childhood education shows that high-quality child-care experiences support the development of social and academic skills that facilitate children's later success in school. There is also mounting evidence that close relationships between primary school teachers and children are an important part of creating high-quality care environments and positive child outcomes (Johnson, Christie & Wardle, 2005). Though children have growing abilities, they sometimes find it difficult to regulate their thoughts and emotions in ways that allow them to succeed at new tasks. At these times, close relationships with meaningful adults, including teachers, can help children learn to regulate their own behaviour (Blair, 2002). According to Howes, Matheson and Hamilton (1994), pre-schoolers with close teacher relationships have been shown to be more engaged in classroom activities, have better attitudes about school, and demonstrate better academic performance. Therefore, teacher-child relationships appear to be an important part of children's social and academic success in school (Birch & Ladd, 1997).

Classrooms are inherently social places, wherein teachers and children negotiate the curriculum together. Guided participation in the activities of children is the primary role of the teacher; play and the expression of ideas through interactions with adults, peers, and the environment are the primary business of children (Fu, Stremmel & Hill, 2002).

In order to allow children to learn in an environment that encourages learning through social relationships, schools need to engage in activities that are real and meaningful to children, and activities that encourage the development of skills, knowledge, ways of thinking and learning, and a disposition for learning. The UNESCO Policy Briefs on Childhood (2002) emphasise the need for childhood development to encompass a series of learning processes, during which the children learn about the environment and themselves. The subsequent paragraphs discuss pupils' emotional and social development.

Pupils' emotional development

Emotional development is the emergence of a child's experiences, expression, understanding, and regulation of emotions from birth through late adolescence. It also comprises how growth and changes in these processes concerning emotions occur. Emotional development in children and adolescents encompasses how children recognise, label, and control the expression of their emotions in ways that are generally consistent with cultural expectations. By about age 7 to 11 years, children are better able to regulate their emotions and to use a variety of self-regulation skills. According to Trentacosts and Izard (2006), children may develop expectations concerning the outcome that expressing a particular emotion to others might produce, and develop a menu of behavioural skills to control how they express their emotions. Emotional development does not occur in isolation; neural, cognitive, and behavioural development interact with emotional development and social and cultural influences, and context also plays a role (Moissinac, 2003). Dworetzky (1996) points out that emotions perform valuable functions, such as motivating and helping individuals to communicate their desires and wishes to others.

Birch and Ladd (1998) examined relations between kindergartners' (N = 199; M age = 5 years 6 months) behavioural orientations and features of their first-grade teacher-child relationships (i.e. conflict, closeness, dependency). Results indicated that early behavioural orientations predicted teacher-child relationship quality in

that (a) unique associations emerged between children's early antisocial behaviour and features of their first-grade teacher-child relationships (i.e. negative relation with closeness, positive relation with conflict and dependency) and between social behaviour and teacher-child dependency; and (b) prosocial behaviour was correlated with, but not uniquely related to, any feature of children's first-grade teacher-child relationships. In addition, specific features of the teacher-child relationship (e.g. conflict) predicted changes in children's behavioural adjustment (e.g. decreasing prosocial behaviour). Learning in an interpersonal style helps students not only to initiate, but also maintain and manage positive social relationships with a diverse range of people in a range of contexts (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2007).

Pupils' social development

Vygotsky, a social-constructivist, proposed that social interaction profoundly influences cognitive development and emphasised that biological and cultural developments do not occur in isolation (in Driscoll, 1994). Vygotsky believed that this lifelong process of development was dependent on social interaction and that social learning actually leads to cognitive development. This phenomenon is called the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Vygotsky (1978) described ZPD as the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers. This therefore means that if children can be expected to develop emotionally and socially, then the caregivers must encourage social interaction.

During the last two decades, a convincing body of evidence has accumulated to indicate that unless children achieve a minimum of social competence by about the age of six years, they have a high probability of being at risk for retarded development (Ladd, 2000). It is therefore obligatory for childhood educators to give high priority to enhancing young children's social development (Hartup, 1992). Hartup (1992) suggests that peer relationships contribute a great deal to both social and cognitive development and to the effectiveness with which we function as adults. Hence, the single best childhood predictor of adult adaptation is NOT IQ, NOT school grades, and NOT classroom behaviour; but rather the level at which the child gets along with other children. Children who are generally disliked, who are aggressive and disruptive, who are unable to sustain close relationships

with other children, and who cannot establish a place for themselves in the peer culture, are seriously 'at risk' (Hartup, 1992). Therefore, when teachers learn to understand children's earliest peer conflicts, they will be in a better position to help them overcome their problems. Research reviewed by Jones (1996) indicates that teachers rank children who have serious or persistent behavioural problems as their chief cause of stress. Jones, however, suggested that teachers take direct action towards minimising classroom conflicts by socialising children in a classroom environment that is conducive to learning.

Key elements of successful child socialisation include modelling and instruction of prosocial behaviour; communicating positive expectations, attributes, and social labels; and reinforcing desired behaviour (Dix, 1993; Good & Brophy, 1994). Successful socialisation further depends on a teacher's ability to adopt diverse teaching styles for classroom management, and to employ effective counselling skills (learned in teacher training colleges and universities) when seeking to develop positive relationships with individual children.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In Ghana and every other country in the world, children constitute the future leadership and workforce of the nation, and therefore require serious commitment from the adult population, particularly teachers, who have the responsibility to educate them. In Ghana, this is given credence and is manifested in the various constitutional provisions and parliamentary acts and legislative instruments. For example, the 1992 Constitution provides the broad policy goal, which is to promote the survival, growth and development of all children. In 2003 the government of Ghana developed a strategic plan to improve educational quality by building upon already proven initiatives, through: (a) *improving and augmenting the supply of human and physical resources available to the system*; and (b) *making them more effective (including the improvement of teaching practices, learning conditions and support facilities)*. Key to this are the efforts of government to ensure an improved standard of living and enhanced quality of life for families in Ghana, as envisaged by the Millennium Development Goals (MGDs) of 2015.

In western literature, empirical evidence exists to support the fact that childhood experiences have an effect on emotional and social development in later years (Dworetzky, 1996; Katz, 1995). In Ghana, however, there is no research to support this evidence, since literature pertaining to this has yet to be published.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions that teachers at the University Primary School of Cape Coast, in the Central Region of Ghana, held about the effects of childhood experiences on children's later emotional and social development. The primary school was established for the children of the University of Cape Coast employees. The study further explored the activities the school engaged in that promoted pupils' emotional and social development, as well as the measures the school adopted to enhance the children's development.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In order to find answers to the problem, the following research questions were formulated to guide the study:

- R.Q. 1. What perception do teachers of the University Primary School of Cape Coast hold about the emotional impact of childhood experiences on later emotional and social development?
- R.Q. 2. What perception do teachers of the University Primary School of Cape Coast hold about the social impact of childhood experiences on later emotional and social development?
- R.Q. 3. What school activities do teachers at the University Primary School of Cape Coast engage in to promote pupils' emotional and social development?
- R.Q.4. What measures do teachers of the University Primary School of Cape Coast suggest be adopted to enhance children's emotional and social development?

METHODOLOGY

Research design

Even though other research designs, such as descriptive survey and ex-post facto approaches, could have been appropriate for a study of this nature, since we were interested in reporting on a single case (that is, a Primary School in Ghana) we adopted a mixed-methods approach for the study design. According to Creswell (2012) a mixed-methods research design is a procedure for collecting, analysing, and 'mixing' both quantitative and qualitative research and methods in a single study to understand a research problem better.

DATA COLLECTION

Research participants

The total population of the teachers in the University Primary School at the time of gathering research data for the study was 60. There were 42 male and 18 female teachers and their ages ranged between 21 and 59. In terms of their qualifications, all were professionally qualified. About two thirds (2/3) of the teachers had taught for more than five years.

Sampling techniques

We were interested in exploring what teachers perceived to be the importance of childhood development in terms of its effect on later emotional and social development; hence, we used the purposive sampling technique to select all the teachers, including the head teacher of the school and her two deputies. The purposive technique is a non-probability sampling method. In using this technique, the researchers deliberately handpicked cases or subjects (which, in our study, involved the teachers of the primary school in question) to be included in the sample on the basis of the judgement 'of their typicality or possession of the particular characteristics being sought' (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2007: 115). We selected five of the academic staff, including the head and her two deputies, and two other teachers for interviews, using the purposive technique.

INSTRUMENTS AND METHODS FOR DATA COLLECTION

Questionnaire

Questionnaires and interview guides were adopted in this study. The questionnaire, which was self-developed, was used to determine teachers' perceptions of the importance of childhood development, and comprised school activities that promoted children's emotional and social development and suggestions to enhance their development. It consisted mainly of close-ended items and had five sections. Section A of the instrument sought information on the demographic characteristics of participants. This section comprised four items, namely: gender, age, academic qualifications, and number of years of teaching in the current school. Section B examined the perceptions of teachers as to the importance of academic and emotional and social development during the early years. There were twenty-four items that research participants were expected to respond to on a Likert

scale of 'Strongly Disagree' (SD), 'Disagree' (D), 'Agree' (A) and 'Strongly Agree' (SA). Section C elicited information on the school activities that promoted pupils' emotional and social development. It was presented on a Likert scale of 'Rarely' (R), 'Occasionally' (O), 'Often' (Of) and 'Very Often' (VF)'. Section D sought to identify availability of guidance and counselling services, mentorship, sporting activities and entertainment in the school. Section E sought suggestions that could enhance childhood development, and was also presented on a Likert scale ranging from 'Strongly Disagree' (SD), to 'Disagree' (D), to 'Agree' (A), to 'Strongly Agree' (SA).

In order to ascertain the reliability of the questionnaire instrument, and more importantly to eliminate ambiguities, the questionnaire was pilot tested at Flower Gay Primary School in the Cape Coast Metropolis. The school was chosen because it had similar characteristics to the University Primary School, such as professional teachers, playgrounds and a Parent Teacher Association (PTA). The Statistical Product and Service Solution (SPSS) version 16 was used for the analysis of the data, and the Cronbach alpha was used to determine the coefficient alpha. This was found to be .70, which we considered appropriate for the study (Field, 2005) since it was close to 1 (Cook & Beckman, 2006).

Interviews

The semi-structured interview format was used and the data solicited from the interviews aimed to build around the data gathered in the questionnaire instrument. The interviews revolved around the central themes (social and emotional development of pupils) and how these are fostered by teachers (teacher-pupil interaction, pupil-pupil interaction). This was in order to help us gather information on what could not have been provided by the questionnaire, and to give us a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study.

Procedure

We used two days for the data collection. The questionnaire instrument was administered on the first day and took thirty minutes to complete. Subsequently, we had interviews with five of the teachers for fifteen minutes each on the second day.

Ethical considerations

Prior to the data collection, we visited the school to familiarise ourselves with the environment. We obtained a letter of introduction from the Head of the Department of Educational Foundations, in order for the school authorities to allow us to collect the data. Written requests for the study to be conducted in the school were also sent to the Vice Chancellor of the University of the Cape Coast and the Headmistress of the University Primary School.

DATA ANALYSIS

Analysis of questionnaire data

The data was analysed using SPSS version 16 software. The four research questions were analysed using the means and standard deviation scores, to ascertain whether the data were close to the average; since low standard deviation indicates that the data points tend to be very close to the mean, whereas high standard deviation indicates that the data is spread out over a large range of values. In analysing our 4-point Likert scale of Rarely (1), Occasionally (2), Often (3), and Very Often (4), the mean score was set at 2.5. Hence, a score below 2.5 was interpreted as a school activity that respondents did not consider as a childhood experience contributing to later emotional and social development. However, a score of 2.5 or above was regarded as a childhood activity that contributed to later emotional and social development.

Results of the analysis of Research Question 1 are indicated in Table 1.

Research Question 1: What perception do teachers of the University Primary School of Cape Coast hold about the emotional impact of childhood experiences on later emotional and social development?

Table 1: Teachers' perception of the emotional impact of childhood experiences on later emotional and social development

Statement	Mean	SD
In order to help pupils develop high self-esteem in later life, schools should help pupils to develop their self-identity (i.e. know who they are).	3.48	.62
If pupils are trained to be sensitive to others' emotional reactions, they become sympathetic to the plight of others in later life.	3.33	.68
The quality of pupils' relationships with adults should have significant impact on their emotional development.	3.25	.63
The competencies and skills fostered through childhood programmes should have positive effects on emotional development.	3.20	.51
If pupils develop close attachments with parents and other caregivers in childhood, they forge closer relationships with others in later years.	3.13	.95
Knowledge of the child's personality should be influenced greatly by childhood experiences.	3.12	.78
Pupils should experience a wide range of emotions in childhood in order to handle emotional problems in later life.	2.90	1.00
In order to handle emotional problems effectively in adult life, in childhood years, pupils should express and act on their emotions.	2.32	.83

The results in Table 1 show that all the items had means above the average (2.5) which may imply that the teachers generally recognise the importance of childhood emotional experiences in relation to their later emotional development. Table 2 summarises the social impact of childhood experiences.

Research Question 2: What perception do teachers of the University Primary School of Cape Coast hold about the social impact of childhood experiences on later social development?

Table 2: Teachers’ perception of the social impact of childhood experiences on later social development

Statement	Mean	SD
If society wants to have responsible adults, then discipline should be an integral part of childhood development programmes.	3.72	.49
Childhood care and education should promote safe and supportive environments for pupils’ development.	3.58	.64
For a child to trust the people around him or her, the social environment should be trustworthy.	3.57	.56
The quality of care in childhood years should have significant impact on pupils’ social development.	3.45	.65
If in childhood years pupils have an opportunity to contribute to ongoing activities, they grow to become useful members of their community.	3.35	.66
If in childhood years pupils assert their own rights and needs appropriately, they grow up to respect the rights of others in later years.	3.35	.78
The competencies and skills fostered though childhood development programmes should have positive effects on social gains.	3.08	.59
If pupils are to grow up to be independent in later years, then they should be provided an opportunity to become autonomous in childhood years.	2.87	.98

Results shown in Table 2 demonstrate that all the items had means that were far above the average (2.5). This may also give credence to the importance of childhood social experiences on later social development.

Table 3 provides results regarding the school activities that teachers of the University Primary School of Cape Coast engaged in to promote pupils’ emotional and social development.

Research Question 3: What school activities do teachers at the University Primary School of Cape Coast engage in to promote pupils' emotional and social development?

Table 3: Activities in school that promote pupils' emotional and social development

Statement	Mean	SD
Teachers meet to discuss new instructional ideas.	4.75	12.4
Teachers are regularly in attendance at school.	3.92	.28
Teachers give homework every day to pupils to reinforce their learning.	3.78	.56
Teachers are punctual at school.	3.78	.45
Pupils are encouraged to love one another as themselves.	3.68	.60
Pupils are discouraged from using abusive words like 'stupid', 'foolish', 'idiot', etc.	3.65	.73
Teachers serve as role models.	3.65	.69
Pupils are encouraged to report to teachers when others are fighting.	3.62	.72
Pupils are involved in school activities.	3.58	.70
Teachers ensure that lesson plans meet pupils' unique needs.	3.50	.77
Teachers allow pupils to retell their story in their own words.	3.4	.65
Pupils are encouraged to report to teachers when someone is crying.	3.43	.72
Teachers celebrate the success every child attains.	3.37	.78
Pupils are highly motivated.	3.25	.73
Teachers teach pupils about how nice it feels to be part of a group.	3.20	.82
Pupils are given training on interpersonal skills.	3.05	.81
Staff meeting to review teaching skills.	3.03	.92
Teachers explain to pupils how sad it feels to be excluded.	2.90	.88
Teachers monitor pupils during break and recreation.	2.87	.83
Teachers encourage children to discuss personal experiences and highlight them.	2.83	.92
Teachers teach pupils to handle emotional problems.	2.82	.83
Teachers allow pupils to reflect on/discuss their feelings when something is broken, like a favourite toy.	2.65	.90
Teachers use 'circle time' to brainstorm a list of possible ways of looking out for and protecting pupils' belongings.	2.62	.92
Teachers monitor pupils until parents and guardians pick them up after school hours.	2.48	1.03
Teachers receive in-service training on child care.	2.47	.96

The results as portrayed in Table 3 may imply that if children are to be equipped adequately to meet the emotional and social challenges of life, then the activities schools put in place for their children should be given careful attention. Table 4 features measures considered to enhance childhood development.

Research Question 4: What measures do teachers of the University Primary School of Cape Coast suggest be adopted to enhance children’s emotional and social development?

Table 4: Measures to adopt to enhance childhood development

Statement	Mean	SD
We should invest in children now; not when they become adults/reach school age.	3.73	.58
Research and training for parents and professionals involved in young children’s care and education should be paramount.	3.63	.52
Provision should be made for the development of young children.	3.60	.59
There is the need to invest in the very young and improve basic learning and specialisation skills.	3.57	.53
In the classroom, nursery rhymes should be used to promote healthy child development through a series of engaging activities.	3.52	.65
Epigenetic effects during childhood development should be prevented through good nutrition and correct stimulation.	3.52	.62
A wide range of policies should be directed toward early care and education.	3.48	.08
The environment in which children live and learn should have a significant impact on their psycho-social development.	3.45	.09
Social and emotional development is crucial in helping children to develop a positive sense of themselves and others.	3.42	.67
Public investment in human capital should be directed towards the very young.	3.28	.64
Investment in children should be policy driven.	3.28	.78
The competencies and skills fostered through childhood development programmes should be directed to cognitive gains.	2.75	.10
Childhood development should start in school.	2.17	.14

The findings in Table 4 reveal the important role schools play in developing emotional and social capacities. If schools are willing to invest in the development of their children, then they can expect them to develop emotionally and socially in a manner that is appropriate and healthy.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS OF INTERVIEW DATA

In our analysis of the interview data, we categorised the data into commonly recurring themes (Braun & Wilkinson, 2003) bearing in mind the importance of childhood emotional and social development and its influence on later development.

With regard to the dimension of emotional development, the respondents were in agreement that children's correct emotional development has a positive impact on their later development. One of the respondents (with the pseudonym 'B') said that 'if a child is not supported to mature emotionally, he or she will grow to be wayward and become a social misfit'. Another (with the pseudonym 'G') was of the view that 'it is only when adult members of a community help a child to grow emotionally that the child can be tolerant to others'.

From the social perspective, the interviewees underscored the positive impact a child's social environment can have on his or her later development. One interviewee (with the pseudonym 'A') opined that 'when a child's social environment is defective, it impacts negatively on the child's later years' social interaction'. Another (with the pseudonym 'M') indicated that 'proper guidance and positive teacher-child relationships help children to grow to respect their elders and interact cordially with others'.

DISCUSSION

The empirical study examined the perceptions that teachers at the University Primary School of Cape Coast in the Central Region of Ghana hold about the importance of childhood experiences on later emotional and social development. It further explored the activities the school engaged in that promoted pupils' emotional and social development, as well as the measures the school adopted to enhance childhood development.

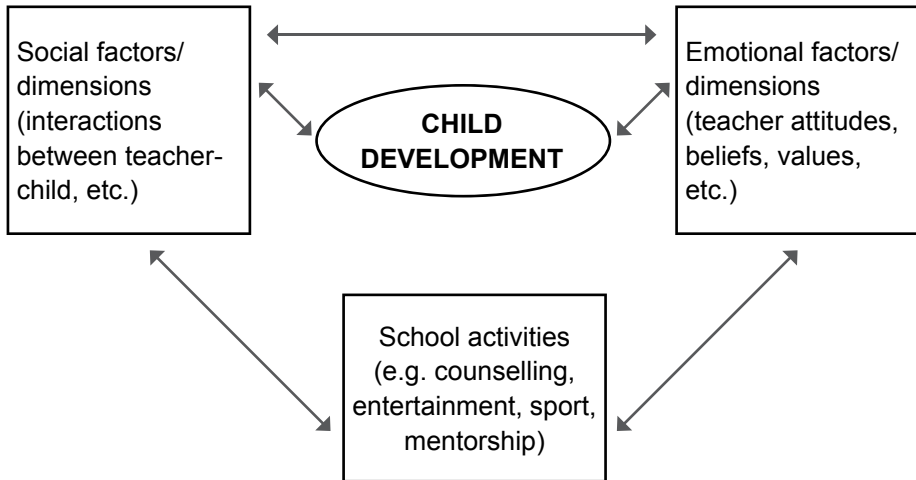


Figure 1: Factors influencing childhood development and later development

In discussing the findings of the study, we only took into account the main variables identified for investigation (see Figure 1). The study revealed that for a child to develop positively in later years, his or her emotional development (i.e. attitudes, beliefs, values), social development (interactions), and environment, coupled with the activities (e.g. counselling, entertainment, sport, mentorship) the school provides for, are important.

Teachers’ perception of emotional and social childhood development and resulting later emotional and social development

In this study, we identified certain emotional and social factors, with which the respondents agreed strongly, and which supported the importance of childhood emotional and social development when one considers future outcomes. The emotional aspect of childhood development, though underrated, is probably one of the most important aspects of learning how to function within society. Emotional development plays a part in neural, cognitive, and behavioural development; and social and cultural influences shape the development of the child (Moissinac, 2003). Emotional development of children is seen in their growing ability to identify and understand their own feelings, accurately read and understand the feelings of others, manage the way they feel, shape the way they behave, develop empathy

for others, and build and keep good relationships with friends, family and others. Hauck (1974) posits that no matter how excellent intellectual, physical and linguistic development may be, a person is doomed to live a life of frustration and difficulty if he or she has not gained satisfactory emotional development.

The current study has underscored how crucial childhood experiences are to the individual's future social and emotional development. The findings revealed that the teachers who were surveyed recognised the importance of helping children to establish self-identity, training pupils to be sensitive to others' emotional reactions, and promoting the quality of pupils' relationships with adults (among others). These findings give credence to Hartup's (1992) argument that the single best childhood predictor of adult adaptation is the adequacy with which the child gets along with other children. Therefore children who are generally disliked, and who are unable to sustain close relationships with other children, may not fit well into their peer group or culture.

Raver's (2002) research has established a strong link between social/emotional development and behaviour and school success, particularly in the first few years of schooling. He indicates, among other things, that if a child fails to control negative emotions, the child will have trouble learning to read or stay on task in other educational activities. This was corroborated in the interviews on the impact of emotional development (Table 1). The respondents were in agreement that children's correct emotional development can have a positive impact on their development in later years. Research on childhood education shows that high-quality child-care experiences support the development of social and academic skills, which facilitate children's later success in school. There is also mounting evidence that close relationships between teachers and children are an important part of creating high-quality care environments and positive child outcomes (Johnson et al., 2005; Blair, 2002). The assertions by Johnson et al. (2005) and Blair (2002) were given credence in this study, since the teachers who were surveyed agreed that the quality of care in childhood years has a significant impact on pupils' social development.

It is therefore important for caregivers to pay particular attention to the childhood years, which underscores Ladd (2000). It is important to note that unless children achieve minimal social competence, they have a high probability of being at risk during adulthood in several ways. Again, this empirical study supports Ladd's caution, by emphasising that one should provide children with the opportunity to become

autonomous in childhood years, in order to be independent, fully-functioning and contributing members of society in later years.

Activities schools engage in that promoted pupils' emotional and social development

Learning and living in an environment that encourages healthy social relationships does not occur by chance. The school has to put into place certain activities and programmes as part of its curriculum requirements to shape the future development of the child. This study found some essential teacher activities that promoted pupils' emotional and social development. Among the teacher-based activities were: teachers meeting to discuss important and new instructional ideas; being regular and punctual at school, serving as role models, ensuring that lesson plans meet pupils' needs, and giving homework every day to pupils.

Teachers play a pivotal role in childhood development. Dworetzky's (1996) investigations showed that children in a particular elementary school who had achieved the highest grade and who in their later years of development demonstrated superior status as adults, all had one thing in common: namely, their first-grade teacher. As implementers of educational policies, teachers are expected to behave appropriately and to live above reproach. If the child is to grow up without exhibiting any antisocial or delinquent behaviour, then the teacher's attitude, in terms of his or her commitment, sensitivity to the child's needs and ability to structure the teaching and learning environment, becomes critical. This empirical study supports Dworetzky's results: the teachers who participated in the survey agreed that lesson plans ought to meet pupils' unique needs. Therefore teachers are not only expected to impart knowledge and skills, but also to encourage their pupils to do their best, have confidence in themselves, set high standards for themselves, and maintain them.

The pupil-based activities which were dealt with in the study had to do with the need for pupils to love one another, not using abusive words such as 'stupid', 'foolish', or 'idiot'; and to participate in school activities. In this regard, guiding participation during the activities of children as the primary role of the teacher (Fu, Stremmel & Hill, 2002) becomes paramount. The aforementioned corroborates Blair's (2002) position: close relationships with meaningful adults, including teachers, regulate children's own behaviour. Furthermore, positive peer relationships, both in and out of school, are important.

The study further revealed some services that the school under discussion made provision for, so as to enhance the emotional and social development of the pupils. The study found that the school engaged the pupils in various forms of activities, including sports, entertainment and cultural shows, educational field trips, and guidance and counselling services. It must be pointed out that all these activities have a role to play in children's emotional and social development. Educational or field trips, for example, expose children to a variety of events that shape their thoughts and emotional well-being and build their self-esteem and confidence. It must also be stressed that guidance and counselling services, if taken seriously, enable schools to help pupils (and for that matter adults) make well-informed life choices. According to a UNESCO Report cited in Guez and Allen (2000), through the services rendered by guidance co-ordinators, pupils' social and emotional needs are addressed. The UNESCO report emphasised Good and Brophy's (1994) suggestion: key elements of successful child socialisation include modelling, communication of positive expectations, and reinforcing desired behaviour.

Measures suggested to enhance child development

This study brought to the fore some suggestions from teachers that could be considered in order to enhance childhood development. These included the need to invest in children now (not when they become adults or reach school age) and also to develop training programmes for parents and professionals. The early years of life are a period of considerable opportunity for growth – but also, on the other end of the spectrum, a period of great vulnerability to harmful influences (Laurie et al., 2003). This implies that children's development should not be taken for granted. The empirical results in this study again support The UNESCO Policy Briefs on Childhood (2002) which emphasise the need for childhood development to involve a series of learning processes about the environment and themselves.

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study have confirmed earlier findings: later social and emotional development is predicated by childhood experiences. This study has revealed the important role that teachers play in fostering the positive emotional and social development of children. It has also revealed that schools have to consciously put in place certain measures to promote the development of children. It has further underscored the importance of teachers' attitudes. Indeed, as teachers develop a keen interest in and affection for their pupils, guiding them in their play, comforting

them when they feel hurt, and drawing them closer when they feel isolated, they help their pupils emotionally and socially. Children's development must not be left to chance. They must be properly guided to grow into responsible adults. This implies that schools should be well equipped with qualified teachers to handle pupils' emotional and social needs.

It is therefore imperative for schools to have policies on childhood development. The policies should cover teacher-child relationships, health and safety, and strategies for conflict management. Schools should display these policies on their bulletin boards and ensure that every teacher abides by them. Activities (e.g. sports, entertainment and mentorship) that promote the child's social welfare and emotional development must be given priority in all primary schools, both public and private.

The basic school curriculum should place emphasis on childhood development. The curricula of educational institutions, such as colleges of education and universities, should also emphasise childhood development in their courses. Issues related to emotional and social skills should form the basis of courses in teacher preparation. Also, prior to placement, prospective teachers should be encouraged to pay regular visits to pre-schoolers and primary schools so as to familiarise themselves with school activities that promote childhood development. This will help them identify practices that work, in order to strengthen their training. Schools' co-curricular activities must promote social and emotional development, allowing pupils the opportunity to practice adult roles through role play, dramatisation and simulation.

The Ministry of Education should enforce the Code of Ethics. Teachers who are less inclined to heed children's welfare should be sanctioned. There should be regular checks on teacher criminal records. Teachers who have any records of child abuse, such as child neglect and/or abandonment, as well as insensitivity, should not be permitted to teach at the early years. Teachers' lifestyles should be exemplary in order for them to be effective role models.

Lastly, pupils should be encouraged to behave properly. A reward system can be implemented, whereby pupils who exhibit exemplary behaviour are recognised. This will motivate others who want to be the recipients of such awards to behave well in class and school. If children are to be expected to grow up socially competent and emotionally well balanced, then what schools do during the early years of childhood development is crucial.

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