

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES

The Impact of Workplace Participation on Child Cognitive Development

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Abstract:

This paper focused on child participation in workplace as a cognitive development process. The method of study adopted in this work is an empirical reviews of literature in the area of child development and participation in the activities of More Knowledgeable others to prepare them for the actual work as adults to be. Lev Vygostky's theory of cognitive development was adopted in the work to explain the impact of workplace participation on cognitive development. This paper discovered that take-your-child-to-work is still a new term in developing countries, but have taken deep root in developed countries as a method of preparing children for future responsibilities as growing adults. The study recommended among other things that in other to be fair to our children, government agencies such as the federal and states ministries of education, and ministries of labour and productivity should map out strategic plans aimed at including a child participation day in primary and post-primary schools' calendars. Similarly, companies, and individual organizations should incorporate workplace participation to promote the virtues of hard work, mentoring, and opportunities for self-improvement and critical thinking which will enable children to see the adult world while still in the process of becoming adult's in the societies.

Keywords: Participation, child, and cognitive development

1. Introduction

The notion of work is typically of people engaged in mental and physical activities for the realization of certain goals and objectives. It is widely believed that workplace activities are preserve of adults. Hence, the involvement of children at work is often viewed as undesirable, unacceptable, and a deprivation of child dignity (Kendra, 2017). Few literatures examine the role of children's participation in the workplace. Most empirical studies focus on the workplace and its negative impacts on child development and national image.

Before now, children were often regarded as small version of adults, and little attention was paid to the many advances in cognitive abilities, language usage, and physical growth. Interest in the field of child development finally began to emerge early in the 20th century. With psychologist, including Sigmund Freud, and Eric Erickson, regarding children as immature being in a state of development (Asker & Gero, 2012; Kendra, 2017). Later in the 1950s, children were viewed as actor's worth investing. It was recognized that increasing skills and knowledge resulted in future returns from children (Asker & Gero, 2012). This is the basis for 'bring-your-children-to-work', an annual event which is fast gaining acceptance in the sociology of work. Bring-your-child-to-work, also called child participation or child-to-work is a program which is prevalent in developed countries. It originated in 1993 as 'Take your daughters to work', and was established as a non-profit educational program founded by Gloria Steinem and the Ms. Foundation for women. Sons were included a decade later (Mckecuen, 2012). Established in the United States of America (USA), Canada and Australia, it revolves around employees taking their children and wards to work for one day. In the USA, it is done on the Fourth Thursday of each April, with more than 37 million people participating in it (Mckecuen, 2012). Child participation is an event that encourages employees to take a child to work for the purpose of being exposed to workplace activities. It is an inclusive, non-formal education programme that encourages employees to take their child to work on a particular day of the year. UNESCO (2009) report reveals that inclusive education is the best means to overcome future learning deficiencies.

The essence of child participation is hinged on the premise that "not all of the work that children do is harmful and exploitative" and children's participation in work that does not affect their health and personal development, or interfere with their schooling, is generally regarded as being positive (Crivello, 2016; ILO, n.d). Child participation not only involves taking part, but having children exercise some influence over their actions in the workplace. Since childhood is a process of shaping adulthood, it follows that the importance of child participation cannot be overemphasized.

Children constitute a formidable proportion of Nigeria's population with 79,615,259 of her 186,053,386 which constitutes 42.79% of the entire population falling in the 0-14 years of age group (Boyer, 2017). Unfortunately, government and labour organizations are yet to marshal out policy programmes that will assimilate them into a proper understanding of the world of work. This is why Olawoyin (2017), remarked that many Nigerian youths are seriously lacking in employable and transferability skills so critical for success in 21st century world of work. The need for child participation is also rooted in the necessity to re-invent our value system. Gone are the days when society placed importance on hard work. The new behavioural pattern places emphasis on affluence, wealth and unrealistic expectations at the expense of hard work (Nwosu,2012). This negative value system has led to the emergence of a youthful population desirous of getting rich quick through ritual killings, armed robbery, drug peddling, prostitution, advanced free Fraud (419), and kidnapping. For instance, Ngwama (2014) reveal that between January to June 2009 alone, 512 kidnap cases were recorded, while 352 cases were recorded in 2008 with Abia State leading with a total of 110 kidnapping cases. These ugly incidences have made the world to regard Nigerians as dishonest people, hence denting their global image.

Furthermore, with Nigeria's Human Development Index (HDI), groping at an HDI value of 154 in 2012 out of 187 countries (HDR, 2013), and 152 out of 188 countries (Olawoyin, 2017), there is need to address the resultant consequences such as poverty, brain drain, and laziness. Hence, the need for a shift in young people's mindset; many which are rooted in unfounded unrealities. Therefore, to thrive as productive human capital in a globalized world, it is important to marshal out children's annual participatory programme as a strategy for producing future adults who are self-reliant, hardworking and committed to the virtues of dignity in labour.

1.1. Conceptual Issues

2.1.1. Child

Psychologists believe that children are born 'tabular rasa', that is, they are born with innate abilities to learn. A Child according to law, within the context of care and welfare, could be defined as all individuals who have not reached the age of eighteen (18) complete calendar years (ACPF,2012). As a new born, children seek to comprehend their immediate environment using their senses. "Most newborns can focus on, and follow moving objects, distinguish the pitch and volume of sound, see all colours, distinguish hue and brightness and start anticipating events such as sucking at the sight of a nipple"(Encyclopedia of children's health, n.d). At two to three years, they begin to familiarize objects and obey subtle orders, take interest in sex organs and help put things away (Encyclopedia of children's health, n.d). Again, at four to five years, they pretend to read, recognize their names and common words, recognize letters, and ask meaning of words (Encyclopedia of children's health, n.d). The first few years of the child's life are marked by maternal indulgence and no developmental demands; the child gradually enters a world where he is faced with inflexible standards of absolute obedience and conformity to familial and social standards(Kakar, 1981; 2003).

2.1.2. Cognitive Development

Spencer (1988) states that children attempt to assimilate new ideas to exist but when they could not assimilate the events, it becomes a mirage in the minds of the children; this is the concern of cognitive development. The concept of cognitive development focuses on the development of children's ways of perceiving and mentally representing their world (Spencer, 1988). It is a process through which a person's perception, thought process and comprehension of his environment are accommodated through the combination of genetic capabilities and learning factors (healthofchildren.com, n.d). Schacter (2009) further defined cognitive development as the emergence of the ability to think, understand, and imagine the world. Jean Piaget was a major propounder of cognitive theory of stages of development in the child as the sensor motor promotionally creates operational and formal operational periods. This means that cognitive development moves from being dependent on actions and perception in infancy, to an understanding of the more observable aspects of reality in childhood, to capturing the underlying abstract rules and principles in adolescence (Schacter, 2009; Carlson, 2005).

2.1.3. Participation

Participation is the mental and emotional involvement of people in group situation that encourages them to contribute to group goals and share responsibilities (Bamidele & Ella, 2013). Participation involves two conceptual meanings; first, participation showcases meaningful involvement rather than mere muscular activities, while the second view focuses on motivating people to make contributions on issues. Participation seeks to promote teamwork, shared objectives, and collaborations through which work goals are attained. In the context of this study, participation is a mechanism for children and MKO to express opinions, exert joint responsibilities, and seek common solutions which may arise in real workplace situations. Participation creates room for mentorship. By mentoring young people, participation creates a class of children who will build relationships with their MKO and team members, develop the need for skills, confidence, and vision to be responsible future human resource in 21st century world of work.

In the light of the above explanations, workplace participation is most suitable for children within six to eighteen years. These age cuts across Jean Piaget's 'concrete operations' stage, a period which is characterized by children's use of logical and coherent actions in thinking and solving problems, understanding concepts of performance and conservation, increased attention span, and increased independence for problems solving, understanding abstractions, learning specific information's needed for an occupation, and thinking in ways that stimulate efficiency and teamwork (childdevelopment.com, n.d). Levin (2006) concludes that the idea of inclusive participation in decision making, and

management programmes is to positively encourage the development of children towards emotional stability. It also promotes proper understanding of the work situation and increases productivity of the organization (Newstrom & Davis, 2004; Zetlin, 2014).

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. *Theory of Cognitive Development by Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934)*

Lev Vygotsky's theory will be used in discussing the impact of workplace participation on cognitive development. Psychologists believe that children are social animals. Social animals have additional advantage in how they can learn about the world (Clamp, 2001). At an early age of 3 to 5 years, children develop a longer attention span, talk a lot, and ask many questions, test physical skills and courage with caution. At 5 to 8 years, they gain curiosity about people and how the world works (ECD, n.d). As they get older, a tremendous amount of knowledge is passed through the process of watching and imitating More Knowledgeable Others (MKO). In the performance of specific developmental task, this forms the basis of cognitive development.

Vygotsky (1978), posit that every function in a child's cultural development appears twice: First, on the social level, and later on the individual level; first between people (inter psychological) and then inside the child (intrapyschological). This implies that cognitive behavior develops with a participant's ability to learn from an MKO, and the society at large and is further internalized within the child. He argues that Adults and MKO in a society promote children's cognitive development in a systematic manner by engaging them in challenging and meaningful activities (Hurst, n.d; Kendra, 2017). By so doing, children can perform more challenging task when assisted by more advanced and competent individuals (Hurst, n.d). Consequently, by interacting with MKO's such as parents, caregivers, mentors and even inanimate objects such as workplace computers, they become integrated into an understanding of the world of work. Since learning is a precondition for cognitive development, it follows that consciousness and cognition are the end product of socialization (Learningtheories.com, 2014). Cognitive development theory also attaches value to the importance of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Learningtheories.com, 2014). ZPD is a hypothetical distance of a child's ability to successfully accomplish a task under an MKO and the ability to solve problems independently (Shabani, Khatib, & Ebadi, 2010). Implicitly, children's ability to develop skills needed as productive adults are hinged on adequate socialization, mentorship by MKO's, a conducive workplace learning environment, allocation of accomplishable task, and "the opportunity to allow children to take on work roles they would normally not be able to perform in real life" (Hurst, n.d).

3. Methodology

This research is a presentation of issues and already existing perspectives on child participation in the workplace and its impact on cognitive development. Secondary sources such as online articles, text books, journals, etc. were utilized to gather information on the issues under review. The generated viewpoints were then critically reviewed using content analysis to present the role of child participation in the workplace and its effect on child development viz a viz its impact on cognitive development, promoting hard work, teamwork, dignity of labour, increased productivity and boosting organizational image. Recommendations were further made based on the findings of the study.

3.1. *Importance of Child Participation in the Workplace*

Children are the future. Every parent dream about having successful children and bringing them to work is a great way to get them off on the right note (Ilgaz, 2015). A DFID (2010) report agrees that children represent the foundation for effective development, and if engaged through a mentoring process, they will improve many of the development challenges that we face today. Bruce & Bridgel and (2014), argue that the efficacy of quality participation, through a mentoring process helps young people to succeed in school, work, and life. "A strong research base supports the efficacy of quality mentoring, including a recent meta-analysis of more than 73 independent mentoring program found positive outcomes across social, emotional, behavioural and academic areas of youth development". (Bruce & Bridge land, 2014). Participation of young people in the workplace helps in broadening their knowledge of work. Belli (2015) argue that young people sometime lose sight of the fact that their parents are real people. Chances are, they don't spend much time thinking about what their MKO's life is like when they are at work. Thus, having the opportunity to watch them in workplace activities will reshape their understanding of work, responsibilities and better appreciation of work life (Belli, 2015; Lewis & Pesce, 2015). It enables children to experience, discuss and appreciate the challenges faced by their parents and adults in combining work and family responsibilities. Anderson (2016), aver that giving employees the chance to explain their work roles to children is a unique opportunity to get perspective and infuse fun into work, thus, breaking a perhaps boring work routine. Sabin (2016), Lewis & Pesce (2015), add that, allowing young people to participate in work instills the value of hard work into them. This mindset they argue will help them to be achievement oriented, independent, and self-sufficient adult who appreciate the importance of hard work.

Furthermore, specific tasks, assigned under the guidance of MKOs enables the child to appreciate the importance of role playing. This is made possible through a collaborative teaching where MKOs are present to share equal responsibilities with participants (Oblak & Vehovar, n.d). By sharing work responsibilities, children learn to appreciate workplace conflicts, while tolerating diverse opinions which are necessary skills for building good social relationships. Evidently, children who engage in good social relationships perform better academically than those who do not, and develop pro-social behaviours (Street, Hoppe, Kingbury, & Ma, 2004; El-Mallah, 2014).

Bringing a child to work also promotes cordial relationship among employees. This is because, it enables employees who do not have children to understand the challenges faced by working parents in their routine of combining work and family responsibilities (Smith, 2012). A research by Crush (2017), shows that employees who perform monotonous and demanding jobs experience presenteeism. This condition has been shown to increase the likelihood of errors, stress related issues and conditions which inhibit productivity in the workplace (Malatesta, 2015; Rhodes & Collins, 2015). However, parents who take a play break with their children can get a true mental rest from their routines and return to their desks with renewed energy, focus and happiness (Zetlin, 2014). This finding supports a study by economists at the University of Warwick which found that happy employees are 12% more productive while unhappy workers are 10% less productive (Lewis & Pesce, 2015).

Child participation is also beneficial to organizational image (Zetlin, 2014). A study by Crush (2017) reveals that firms that encourage child participation scores positive points for being family friendly employers. This is because; inclusive participation of young people emphasizes firms' commitment towards employee work-life balance and tends to promote employee commitment towards their organizations (Kirby, Lanyon, Cronin, & Sinclari, 2003). An ECD (n.d) report posit that participation increases young people's citizenship roles and social inclusion, by helping young people to develop numeracy skills, solve workplace problems, practice teamwork, develop a sense of personal competence, engage in question and observation, acquire basic work ethics, leadership skills and other attributes which are needed for a productive adulthood (ECD, n.d; Ilgaz, 2015).

3.2. *The Process of Participation*

Meaningful child participation at the workplace is a process. It requires developing a child-MKO relationship rooted in mutual trust and respect, and engaging in dialogue (Kirby et al, 2003). Participation goes beyond bringing young people to observe workplace procedures by an MKO. It is an intricate process of mentoring young people to participate at work, under the guidance of an MKO. The process should enable participants to make mistakes. However, such mistakes will likely not affect organizational functioning since they were made under the guidance of a more knowledgeable mentor (Sabin, 2016). Participation is planned to accommodate the peculiarities of participants demand in line with acceptable standards. Mckecuen (2012), suggests that for an organization to have a successful child participation programme, the following processes must be considered.

- Provide participants with general information's regarding the company's work specification
- Take the age group of participants into consideration before organizing a child-to-work day.
- On the appointed day, work should commence with a brief meeting between management, employees, and participants in expectations of the programme.
- Factor in time for breakfast, and other important breaks.
- A facility tour of the various departments and their functions.
- Encourage MKO's to build mutual interaction with participants
- Provide participants with necessary safety equipments, and writing tools that will enable them record the day
- Encourage role playing by participants.
- Allocate tasks to participants. For instance, sending e-mail messages, answering telephone calls with proper etiquette and drafting memos, etc.
- Organize activities that will enable participants to passively participate in meetings from whence their opinion can be aired.
- Encourage a roundtable discussion among team members
- Conduct brief interviews with participants with the aim of sampling their views on the day's activity.
- Close the day with light refreshment
- Encourage participants to write back the organization on their impression.

3.3. *Cognitive Development: A Comparative View*

Global organizations in developed countries are coming to term with different ways of engaging children through annual activities that will enhance their capacities as responsible future adults. Child participation, commonly observed as 'Bring-your-child-to work' is common in USA, Australia and it is currently gaining grounds in the United Kingdom (UK), and France (Crush, 2015). Crivello (2016) reports that, the hashtag "Take Your Child To Work Day" generates a hub of positive tweets from parents in diverse sectors across USA, Australia, World Bank, Scientific organizations and many groups. A cursory view of the tweets reveal that children were viewed as 'young minds at work', ready to explore their potentials and many employers keyed into it as an image boosting strategy. Global brands that are desirous of promoting their corporate image have aligned with child participation programmes. In 2014 for instance, children of Cable News Network (CNN) employees, ages 8 to 13 were given the opportunity to play the roles of television anchors by reading from a teleprompter; interview CNN anchors and reporters, and get a tour of CNN studios and newsrooms (Wallace, 2014). Similarly, multinationals such as Deutsche Bank, Confused.com, Northern Thest, and Google are among corporations which have keyed into the initiative (Crush 2015). More than 1,500 children of employees of US multinational banking and financial services company JP Morgan Chase have so far participated in the programme throughout their locations in US, UK, and Hong Kong (www.jpmorganchase.com, 2005). The financial giant reveals that their child participation programme centers on teaching children the role of cyber security and computer programming with the belief that a knowledge of cyber security will help them succeed in an increasing digital world. They also believe that the impartation of such knowledge will stimulate their critical thinking and promote problem-solving skills as future adult.

(www.jpmorganchase.com, 2005). However, there are no evidences of organizations in Nigeria that engages in child participation programmes.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

A review of literature thus far shows that adequate participation of children is a veritable means of cognitive development, this is more so because workplace participation promotes the virtues of hardwork, mentoring, and opportunities for self-improvement and critical thinking. In view of this, corporate organizations in the developed countries have keyed into it as a motivating strategy of improving their employee work-life balancing and promoting a positive corporate image. However, it was discovered that no known corporate Nigerian firm have imbibed child participation programme neither have relevant government agencies inculcated it. Based on these findings, this study recommends that:

- Relevant government agencies such as the federal and states ministries of education, and ministries of labour and productivity should map out strategic plans aimed at including a child participation day in primary and post-primary schools' calendars.
- Organizations should earmark a child-to-work day preferable during long vacations. This will not only promote employee work-life balancing, but will go a long way to portray them as child friendly, thus attracting high productivity and a positive corporate image.
- Mentoring should be employed as a complementary strategy to address the problems militating against the future generation, "when mentoring is integrated into national initiatives such as child participation, it will strengthen efforts to reduce poverty, truancy, drug abuse and violence, and promote healthy decision making, positive behaviors, and strong futures" (Bruce & Bridgeland, 2014)
- If participation is integrated with other research-oriented reforms, economic prosperity will increase as a result of greater commitment from employees and future national workforce.
- Schools should encourage children to share work day experiences with their classmates'. This strategy will enable children to reflect on their experiences, and seek guidance from their MKO on career choices. Similarly, employers should devise a feedback strategy which will enable participants to express their views concerning their day at work. Such measures will allow for future strategic planning so as to improve on the programme where need be.

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