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RESEARCH ARTICLE

FATHERS' PARENTING PRACTICES AND THE CHILDREN'S COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT FROM THREE THROUGH FIVE YEARS; A CASE FOR MITYANA DISTRICT, UGANDA

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ABSTRACT

Cognitive development begins right from birth, and as a child develops with time his/her mental abilities increase, depending on stimuli and people he/she interfaces with. The research study focused on examining the fathers' parenting practices and the children's cognitive development from three through five years of Mityana District. The study used a cross sectional research design and data was generated using focal group discussions, interview guides and child behavior rating scale. The study revealed that there were various parenting practices among fathers' which contribute to the Children's development of language, problem solving skills as well as growth in intelligence from three through five years. After the Pearson correlation coefficient statistics was done it was established Fathers' parenting practices and Children's concept development were found to have a very positive relationship ($r=0.417, p<0.05$), Fathers' parenting practices and Children's development of language were found to have a significant positive relationship ($r=0.532, p<0.05$) and Fathers' parenting practices and children's problem solving were found to have an average positive relationship ($r=0.380, p<0.05$). Arising out of the findings, the study recommends that fathers' parenting programs be put in place to help them commit more quality time with their children for better mental development.

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INTRODUCTION

The researcher argues that the fathers' need not think that the kind of support they provide as parents should only have to do with finances but rather a lot more. It is learnt that the fathers do play an important role in their children's lives particularly in the cognitive, behavioural, and general health and well-being areas of a child's life; having a positive male role model helps an adolescent boy develop positive gender-role characteristics; adolescent girls are likely to form positive opinions of men and are better able to relate to them when parented by the father (Oliver, 2011). The researcher points out, however, that there has been since a change where the traditional role of fathers as providers is being challenged with the increasing social changes. Cognitive development in early childhood refers to baby or toddler's mental capacity for problem solving, language acquisition, learning about objects and relations between cause and effect. Shivangi, (2019) describes mental development as an important aspect of growth, embracing the various mental abilities.

It begins right from birth, and as the child develops with the passage of times his/her mental reactions also change. These reactions are very simple to start with, but in due course, they lead to complex mental activities. Amol, (2014) explains that mental development includes such abilities as attending, perceiving, observing, remembering, imagining, thinking, solving problems and growth of intelligence as well as of language. These abilities change, grow and mature with age and decline in old age. The rates of change vary with age and special experiences. The study comments that at all times the child needs the close attention to enable it pick confidence in acquiring skills. The various mental abilities or activities mentioned above are inter-related and they develop as a whole. Shivangi, (2019) pointed out that they are inter-dependent and do not develop in isolation. The study further points out that the factors that affect mental development include maturation, learning and education. The kind of nervous system the human child inherits is an important factor. It helps him/her to co-ordinate various activities and responses. It regulates the activity of all the organs Antonio et al, (2013). The brain is an important part of the nervous system, plays a more significant role in the mental development of the individual than any other part. It helps in the perception of the surrounding world and perception is the basis of the mental activity all thought and consciousness.

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Fathers are often stereotyped as clueless when it comes to raising children with both the father and mother believing that women are more 'naturally' wired to be caregivers. However, mothers 'who traditionally stayed at home to be full time parents' are now working, although they are still bearing children who need full parental support. The solution has been to leave children with relatives, nannies or even strangers. However this has proved inadequate as stories of child abuse, neglect, abandonment and runaway children abound in the media. The fathers of the children have generally decided to abandon ship and the women have bravely taken on the task of being both the 'father' and mother to their children which is not always successful. Omurungi (2010) says that it is decreed by law that both parents of a child should share the responsibility of bringing them up. However, in Uganda, it is becoming increasingly difficult to make fathers own up and this has left many mothers desperate. Sharon (2016) says that 'absent fathers' is an issue which affects women across Uganda today regardless of their fathers' age, tribe, profession or background. According to Rutgers (2015), over 1,000 single mothers report cases of child neglect by fathers and failure to offer maintenance support ranks the highest. In 2009, about 1,600 women reported failure of offering maintenance support from their children's fathers. Roux *et al* (2016) comments that the large number of fathers abandoning their children or refusing to provide any sort of financial support is becoming more common in Uganda, as children grow, so does the cost of sustaining them.

Many men state that unemployment and the absence of well-paying jobs leaves them unable to provide for any child comments (Tami *et al.*, 2016). However, it should be noted that fathers' involvement in parenting is not only about the financial support but also about being part of the cognitive, behavioural, and general health and well-being aspects of children. Therefore, the father needs to give more time to the child in order to have a strong attachment and strong relationship. The benefits to this will lead to having a strong, wiser, kind and trusty worthy child in society (Ranjit, 2014). The study endeavoured to establish how fathers detachment and absenteeism /little and infrequent presence affects children's cognitive development. It is out of this study that intervention strategies of improving fathers' parenting practices will emerge.

The study was underpinned by the cognitive theory: Swiss biologist and psychologist Jean Piaget (1896-1980) observed his children (and their process of making sense of the world around them) and eventually developed a four-stage model of how the mind processes new information encountered. He argues that fathers are key elements in children's environment and have the potential to contribute to children's cognitive development. He posited that children progress through four stages and that they all do so in the same order. These stages are: sensorimotor stage (birth to 2 years old) the intelligence is demonstrated through motor activity without the use of symbols. Then the pre- operational stage (2-7 years), intelligence is seen through use of symbols, memory and imagination are developed, the concrete operational stage (7-11 years), intelligence is demonstrated through logical and systematic manipulation of symbols related to concrete objects. For the formal operational stage (11years-above), intelligence is demonstrated through the logical use of symbols related to abstract concepts.

Kendra *et.al*, (2019) noted that Piaget believed that children take an active role in the learning process, acting much like scientists as they perform experiments, make observations and learn about the world. In Piaget view early cognitive development involves processes based upon actions and later progresses to changes in mental operations.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study was to investigate fathers' parenting practices and the children's Cognitive development from three through five years in Mityana District, Uganda

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study was guided by the following objectives:

- To examine fathers' parenting practices that promotes children's concept formation from three through five years,
- To explore how fathers' parenting practices promote the Children's language development from three through five years,
- To analyze how fathers' parenting practices contribute to the Children's problem solving skills from three through five years.

HYPOTHESIS:

- There is a relationship between Fathers' parenting practices and children's concept development in Mityana District.
- There is a relationship between Fathers' parenting practices and Children's language development in Mityana District.
- There is a relationship between Fathers' parenting practices and children's problem solving in Mityana District

METHODOLOGY

The study being that it focuses on Fathers' parenting practices and children's cognitive development three through five years. In this study the researcher employed cross sectional designs. A cross sectional design refers to the type of research design where data can be collected different respondents at a single point in time (Kothari, 2003). This research design was preferred because it is cheap in terms of time and resources as the data was collected simultaneously from respondents at single point in time. It also enabled the researcher to triangulate information from study questionnaires and interviews. Under the cross sectional design, both qualitative and quantitative approaches were used to adequately analyze the data Amin (2005) recommends use of both qualitative and quantitative techniques as an important form of triangulation especially in studies that involve large numbers of people and this subsequently made it easy to have a clear and scientific view on the opinions by having them on questionnaires (Creswell, 2016). The study may have had the experiences related to the phenomenon in question and wants to gain better understanding of the experiences of others. The study gave priority to the qualitative aspect of the study and the findings were integrated during the interpretation phase of the study.

Mityana District is the geographical site where data was generated using a number of sources including Likert scale guide, Key Informative Guide and child behavior rating scale. The study was carried out in Mityana District. According to (UBOS, 2017) the population for households headed by male is 15, 854. The children's total enrolment by gender from 3 – 5 years is 2,308 boys and 2,393 girls (MoES, 2016). The target population included a total of 160 respondents including; 100 fathers, 60 children from different nursery schools. The study points out that two age ranges of three years and five years has been adopted because the two age categories include periods in which children have rapid growth and development. These categories also represent entry points for children to move from one level of stimulation to another. The study used stratified sampling techniques to select one sub-county from 3 sub counties in Mityana county north constituency of Mityana district where the research was conducted. These sub counties were grouped into strata after which the researcher randomly selected one of them. Kothari (2014) explains that stratified sampling is applied if the population from which a sample is to be drawn does not continue a homogeneous group. Snowball sampling was to identify the children who stay with their father. The study explains that this type of sampling requires one to select a member and that member leads you to other members Simple random sampling techniques were used to select the nursery school. Kothari (2014) explains that simple random sampling is where each and every item in the population has an equal chance of inclusion in the sample and each one of the possible samples, in case of finite universe has the same probability of being selected. A Pearson's correlation was used to find a linear relationship between two variables. Pearson's correlation coefficient is the test statistics that measures the statistical relationship, or association, between two continuous variables. The Pearson correlation coefficient, often referred to as the Pearson R test, is a statistical formula that measures the strength between variables and relationships. To determine how strong the relationship is between two variables, you need to find the coefficient value, which can range between -1.00 and 1.00

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Fathers' parenting practices and Children's concept formation: As children grow and develop they form concepts through the interactions with others and from experiences. Young children generally form concepts through the use of their senses. When a child forms a concept they must isolate characteristics of experiences based on similar attributes. According to the results in Table 1, Fathers' parenting practices and Children's concept development were found to have a very positive relationship ($r=0.417$, $p<0.05$). Thus, the hypothesis that stated that father's parenting practices would have a significant influence on children's concept formation is partially accepted. This means that father's parenting practices have a positive effect on children's concept formation, which implies that children's concept formation improves with good father's parenting practices. Thus good fathers' parenting practices in Mityana District lead to increase in the children's concept formation. It was noted during interviews that majority of the respondents believed fathers' parenting practices play a significant role in the child's concept formation.

Fathers' parenting practices and Children's Language development: Language development is a critical part of your

child's overall development. It supports your child's ability to communicate, and express and understand feelings. It also supports thinking and problem-solving, and developing and maintaining relationships. Learning to understand, use and enjoy language is the critical first step in literacy, and the basis for learning to read and write. In their first 12 months, babies develop many of the foundations that underpin speech and language development. And they keep developing language skills at an amazing rate in the first three years of life. According to the results in Table 2, Fathers' parenting practices and Children's Language development were found to have a significant positive relationship ($r=0.532$, $p<0.05$). Thus, the hypothesis that stated that father's parenting practices are significantly related to children's language development is largely accepted. This means that father's parenting practices positively affect their children's Language development, which implies that children's language development depends largely on father's parenting practices. Thus good father's parenting practices increase children's language development in Mityana District.

Fathers' parenting practices and children's problem solving: By exploring social relationships, manipulating objects, and interacting with people, children are able to formulate ideas, try these ideas out, and accept or reject what they learn. Constructing knowledge by making mistakes is part of the natural process of problem solving. As children are constantly learning new ideas, skills and concepts, these will all help them develop their problem solving skills. It is important to remember that problem solving is not an activity it is the process in which children go through to find a solution. According to the results in Table 3, Fathers' parenting practices and children's problem solving were found to have an average positive relationship ($r=0.380$, $p<0.05$). Thus, the hypothesis which stated that father's parenting practices have a relationship with children's problem solving is accepted. This means that father's parenting practices positively affect their children's problem solving abilities, which implies that children's ability to solve problems is determined by the parenting practices of their fathers. Thus if the father's parenting practices are good, and then the children's ability to solve problems will also be high.

Regression Model: To further confirm the relations obtained in the correlation analysis tables 1-3 using Pearson correlation coefficient, the researcher carried out regression analysis not only to examine the relationships between variables, but also to predict the influence of one variable from another. The table above gives the overall model coefficients and the significance of these values which indicate the individual contribution of the variables in the Fit model for fathers' parenting practices, Children's concept formation, development of language and problem solving. The value of $B=1.970$ means that when fathers' parenting practices are not effective; then children's concept formation, language development and problem solving will decrease by only 1.970 units.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Fathers' parenting practices and Children's concept development: The study has revealed that fathers' parenting practices promote children's concept development in different ways and where majority of respondents agreed that there is a relationship between Fathers' parenting practices and children's concept development.

Table 1. Relationship between parenting practices and Children's concept formation

		Fathers' parenting practices	Children's concept development
Fathers' parenting practices	Pearson Correlation	1	.417(*)
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.025
	N	160	160
Children's concept development	Pearson Correlation	.417(*)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.025	
	N	160	160

Source: Primary Data (2019)

Table 2. Relationship between fathers' parenting practices and Children's Language development

		Fathers' parenting practices	Children's development of language
Fathers' parenting practices	Pearson Correlation	1	.532(*)
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.025
	N	160	160
Children's development of language	Pearson Correlation	.532(*)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.025	
	N	160	160

Source: Primary Data (2019)

Table 3. Relationship between fathers' parenting practices and Children's problem solving

		Fathers' parenting practices	Children's problem solving
Fathers' parenting practices	Pearson Correlation	1	.380(*)
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.025
	N	160	160
Problem Solving	Pearson Correlation	.380(*)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.025	
	N	160	160

Source: Primary Data(2019)

Table 4. Overall regression model Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.970	.356		4.091	.002
	Concept development	.184	.079	.632	3.301	.093
	Language development	.0843	.311	.041	.521	.332
	Problem solving	.231	.0502	.099	3.024	.310

Source: Primary data, (2019)

The study revealed that 73% of the respondents agreed that fathers provide the child with objects in a variety of shapes, colors and sizes. The results agree with Cilesiz (2016), who commented that it is the father/parent's role to avail a child with simple learning objects of different kinds and shapes and even different in sizes such that the child is able to differentiate between different types and sizes of certain objects and this is done to help them grow in concept formation. The study further discovered that majority 76% of the respondents were in agreement that fathers' assist their children to collect, form groups, match or sort objects that have common characteristics. Such findings were in line with Kendra 92018) and Cathey *et al* (2018) who had earlier argued that once a father gives a child different objects, it is of importance for them to further assist the children in matching and forming groups of similar objects which deepens their concept formation efforts. The researcher discovered that a significant number of respondents (79%) agreed that fathers engage children in noticing the contrasts in simple color, shape, movement and sound patterns which findings were earlier supported by Daisy (2018), who stressed that once children have been helped by their fathers to match similar objects, it is their role to engage the children in differentiating the same objects basing on color, sound patterns among others.

It was also found out that most of the respondents (69%) agreed that fathers demonstrate for children to arrange and order materials and objects in different ways. The findings were supportive of Zenith (2014) earlier findings that with the assistance from fathers, children should be supported and taught how to arrange and order objects depending on the given instructions and once they can arrange them satisfactorily then that shows their concept formation levels are improving. Study findings further revealed that majority 68% of the respondents agreed that fathers expose children to numbers and number concepts in pictures, books and songs which was in tandem with Radian (2015) who asserted that fathers should play a lead role in getting their children familiar with counting numbers in ways like songs which helps them develop number concepts of counting and writing figures. Finally the researcher found out that 79% of the respondents were in agreement that fathers encourage children to talk about similar things in given pictures The results are in agreement with the findings of authors like David *et al* (2017) who observed that fathers' parenting practices should be able to influence a child's concept formation by helping them describe and explain pictures in form of the activity taking place in different ways as this would be significant in children's concept development efforts.

Fathers' parenting practices and the Children's development of language: Study findings also revealed various ways of how the fathers' contribute to children's language development. Majority of respondents 81% observed that fathers contribute to children's language development explaining to the children things they are doing. Such findings are in line with Julie (2017), who had earlier asserted that in order for a child to develop the language, it is important for their father to always explain to their children what they are doing such that they are engaged in word formation and development thus helping them learn the language. It was also found out that most of the respondents (65%) were in agreement that fathers converse with the children as they play. The findings are in agreement with Linda (2015) earlier observations that engaging children in verbal and signal conversations during play with their parents like fathers helps them to learn and develop language as they begin trying to imitate or pronounce and eventually pronouncing what their fathers are telling them.

The researcher also discovered majority (67%) agreement that fathers encourage the children to listen and repeat what is said or heard which findings concurred with Giorgi's (2016) assertions that engaging a child in a talk and repeat or imitate exercise is so much helpful to them as it facilitates their effort of word formation which translates into language development. The study also found out that 70% of respondents agreed that fathers speak clearly using complete sentences and appropriate volume and tone for the children to be able to hear and such findings concurred with Meredith *et al* (2013) who asserted that when talking to children, it is paramount for the parents or fathers in this case that they use clear and simple words in order for children to hear clearly which eventually helps them to learn the language. It was also found out that majority 79% agreed that there is a relationship between Fathers' parenting practices and Children's development of language especially that fathers read with the children a variety of interesting stories and books and also tell children stories. These findings are in line with previous authors like; Edith (2015) & Elaine (2018) who advanced that fathers' parenting practices promote the Children's development of language in many ways as storytelling and reading interesting books especially coupled with objects in carton form which makes the stories more interesting and help the children to learn and develop languages.

Fathers' parenting practices and children's development of problem solving skills: For the third study objective, the study found out that fathers' parenting practices contribute to children's development of problem solving skills where by majority 77% of the respondents agreed that fathers guide the child to tell the difference in appearance of the 3 basic shapes (circle, square and triangle). The findings concur with authors like; Lamb (2015) who had earlier suggested that fathers need to play an important role in helping their children learn the different basic shapes of objects so as to assist them in solving different problem issues especially in maths subject. The study also revealed majority 64% agreement by respondents that fathers allow children to measure heights, width and length of given objects. Such results agree with Plan (2015) who noted that fathers/parents are responsible for making sure that their children get to know how to measure different units including height, weight, width and lengths of objects as this would help them in solving issues concerning volume and area covered by different objects.

It was also found out that a significant figure (62%) of respondents agreed that fathers assist children to identify the quantities represented by given pictures which was supportive of Kristein (2018) who acknowledged that it is the responsibility of fathers/parents to teach their children on ways to deal with quantities such that they can be able to solve problems concerning quantity of pictures and objects. Study findings further revealed majority 67% agreement from respondents that fathers help children to count the objects represented in the pictorial form. Such findings are in tandem with Clare (2015) and Lea *et al* (2015) who posited that in any problem solving situation, the basics of counting are important and the children must learn such basics from their parents thus fathers need to play a lead role in ensuring that their children get from them such basics of counting which can be used in their simple problem solving situations. Finally, study also revealed that majority 71% of respondents agreed that fathers guide children to group according to their attributes which was in line with Donald *et al* (2016) who posited that a child's problem solving abilities largely depend on the parenting practices applied by their fathers especially when it comes to counting and grouping of items.

Study conclusion: The study concluded that various parenting practices of fathers' contribute to the children's concept development, and these included but not limited to; fathers' providing the children with objects in a variety of shapes, colors, sizes; assisting children to collect, form groups, match or sort objects that have common characteristics; engaging children in noticing the contrasts in simple color, shape, movement and sound patterns; demonstrating for the children to arrange and order materials and objects in different ways; exposing child to numbers and number concepts in pictures, books and songs as well as encouraging the children to talk about similar things in given pictures.

The study also concluded that fathers' parenting practices were contributing to children's development of language, as was manifested in ways like; fathers explaining to the child things he/she is doing, conversing with the child as children play, encouraging the child to listen and repeat what is said or heard, speaking clearly using complete sentences and appropriate volume and tone, reading with the child a variety of interesting stories and books as well as telling child stories among others and all these were significant in a child's language development process. It was further concluded from the study that fathers' parenting practices including but not limited to; fathers' guiding the child to tell the difference in appearance of the 3 basic shapes (circle, square and triangle), assisting the child to compare, allowing the child to measure heights, width and length of given objects, assisting the child to identify the quantities represented by given pictures, helping the child to count the objects represented in the pictorial form and guiding the child to group according to their attributes were all contributing to children's development of problem solving skills from three through five years.

Recommendations of the study

Non-Government Organisations and school administration should organise workshops and seminars with fathers to train them on various techniques of language development in their lives. Parents should teach their children to develop creativity and reasoning skills to sharpen their minds so as to improve their problem solving abilities.

The Government through the Ministry of Education & Sports should pass laws where by any father who is found to neglect and not giving their children attention is arrested and punished.

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