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PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THE PSYCHOSOCIAL THEORY: EXAMINING THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL IN PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT.

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ABSTRACT

Development in humans is characterised by such domains as physical development, cognitive development, emotional development, social development and personality development. This paper focuses on the domain of personality development. There are at least two common theories that have been used to explain personality development. These are the psychosexual theory and the psychosocial theory. The psychosexual theory was advocated by Sigmund Freud, whereas the psychosocial theory was advanced by Erik Erikson. The paper therefore focuses on Erik Erikson's eight stages of the psychosocial theory which are then used to explain personality development at Early Childhood Development (ECD) level. The paper discusses the relevance of the theory to education and how an appreciation of the theory can contribute to a better personality development. This was done through examining the role of the school in the development of the child. The paper concludes that the relevance of Erikson's psychosocial theory is found in its emphasis on the development of the ego and the relevance of life experiences in developing personality.

Key words: personality; personality development; psychosexual theory; psychosocial theory.

1. INTRODUCTION

Different personality theorists have used different theories to explain personality development. Among these are Sigmund Freud and Erik Erikson. The differences in the two are that Freud focuses on the psychosexual theory of development and Erikson emphasises the psychosocial theory of personality development. They both describe various steps and stages in personality development. The steps and stages are aimed at explaining the way an individual talks, walks, works or interacts with others, thus personality. This paper focuses on personality development and how the psycho-social theory has been used to explain personality development. The paper uses Erikson's eight stages of the



psychosocial theory to explain personality development. It also makes an attempt to illustrate how psychosocial theory can be applied in education, at Early Childhood Development level, to assist in personality development. The following key terms are defined: personality development; and psycho-social theory.

2. DEFINITION OF TERMS

To define the term personality development it may be important to look at the word personality first. Child (1981) defines personality as the more or less stable and enduring organisation of an individual's character, temperament, intellect and physique which determines that individual's adjustment to the environment. Atkinson and Atkinson (1990) concur with the above definition as they also view personality as characteristic patterns of thought, emotion, and behaviour that define an individual's personal style, and influence how the individual interacts with the environment. There are at least two key elements that stand out in the above definitions. First, is that personality is concerned with the totality of an individual's behaviour and secondly, it is also concerned with how the behaviour interacts with the environment. Therefore, personality has to do with persistent characteristics that can be seen through attitudes, commitment and interests. The Encyclopedia of Children's Health defines personality development as the enduring personal characteristics and the stages that individuals go through in acquiring these characteristics and takes place as a person acquires organised patterns of behaviours and attitudes that make a person distinctive. Personality development within the context of ECD is therefore the stages that children go through as they interact with others and the environment. It is therefore the growth of habitual patterns of behaviour in childhood development. These patterns of behaviour and attitudes make a child different from others and are characterised by such components as temperament, environment and character.

3. ERIKSON'S PSYCHOSOCIAL THEORY

The psychosocial theory can be explained by examining the stages of personality development. Theory helps us in terms of expressing ideas of how we view things. In a sense, theory gives us a representation of an idea and what the real thing ought to be. Psychosocial theory is psychological development in a social realm. That is psychosocial development is how a person's mind, emotions and maturity level develop throughout a life span and the development is dependent on biological processes and environmental interactions ([http. Answers.com](http://Answers.com), 2014). Psychosocial theory was propounded by Erik Erikson as an extension of Sigmund Freud's psychosexual theory. The psychosocial theory focuses on the development of the mind and brain, and social aspects thus external relationships.

Erikson's psychosocial theory is viewed as an extension of Freud's psychosexual theory. In his theory Freud attempts to explain personality development in terms of experiences that occur during infancy and childhood. Mataruse and Mwatengahama (2001) assert that according to Freud's theory of personality development, it is during the first five years that a child's sexual orientation is developed and determined. Erikson focuses on eight stages of psychosocial development. However, the paper is concerned with personality development at Early Childhood Development (ECD) level. As such, discusses the first four stages of Erikson's psychosocial theory in detail. According to Erikson, people experience a conflict and such experience serves as a turning point in personality development as these conflicts can either develop a psychological quality or fail to develop it (Ryckman, 2000). Since Erikson's theory was concerned with two possibilities, he focused on two crises at each stage, thus the potential for personal growth against the potential for failure. To signify the opposing relationship between each pair Erikson connected them with the word versus or against. Major areas of difference with Freud are that Freud held the notion that an individual's personality is established primarily during the first five years, whereas Erikson says that the development of personality is a continuous process throughout an individual's life. Developing personality is dependent on achieving a healthy ratio or balance between the two opposing disposition that represent each crisis (Meggitt, 2006).



Erikson's first psychosocial stage is the trust versus mistrust, which covers the age from birth to about two years. This age group is the newborn up to infants. This covers the stage that Freud referred to as the oral stage. For Erikson the experiences which children go through, and how they are brought up determines how they trust themselves and others. In order to develop this trust in the child, much depends on the quality of the care that is given by the caregivers. Trust makes the child feel safe and secure. In that regard, the theory considers some aspects of Maslow's theory which concedes that individuals are subject to two different sets of motivational forces, which are those that ensure survival by meeting basic physical and psychological needs, and the promotion of self-actualisation (Gross, 2005). In a way meeting the different needs contributes to the development of a personality. To help the child develop the trust, caregivers have to be available for the child, and avoid behaviours that contribute to mistrust. Lack of trust contributes to fear. In this first year of life, infants are helpless and therefore depend on their caregiver. The caregiver has to build a bond with the baby, through positive stimuli such as cuddling, smiling and providing comfort to the baby. Mahler (2011) in Mawere and Musiiwa (2011) observes that relief of discomfort through feeding promptly when hungry, changing nappies and providing an appropriate sleep environment help the infant to develop trust. This makes the infant feel love, a sense of belonging and security which are important physical and psychological needs as advocated by Maslow's humanistic theory (Gross, 2005). The role of the caregiver is to meet the needs of the infant. Within the context of developing human relations, there is need to communicate with both the infant and the parents. Communicating with the infant involves singing songs to the infant, reciting rhymes and playing games that contribute to the development of the infant. It is the role of the ECD Drop in Centres to share with parents on how to develop positive personalities in their infants by meeting their needs in time. The centres may also play an educative role by inviting specialists in child care to talk to parents at the centres. The caregivers have to maintain timetable schedules in order to build trust through habit formation. These timetable schedules indicate feeding times, time for checking and changing of diapers, time to talk to the infant, time for the infant to sleep and rest comfortably. The activities have to be well planned. Tull (2001) posits that well nourished children are healthy, active and cry less, while poorly nourished children are prone to illness, are weak and cry a lot. These contribute to building mistrust of the environment. Such mistrust contributes to the development of a negative personality.

On the other hand, changing caregivers regularly destroys the infant's trust. The other challenge is related to cases where the caregiver has to provide for more than one infant. In such a case, it may be difficult for the caregiver to be prompt to the child's demands all the time. At the same time it is important to note that caregivers have to focus on the baby all the time, which is at times practically impossible.

The second stage is autonomy versus shame and doubt. This stage covers children who are between two years and three years of age. These are toddlers. This stage involves the child exploring and handling objects. The child is able to demonstrate power as he/she pushes items within the immediate environment. According to Weiten (2001) citing Erikson, at this stage the child begins to take personal responsibilities such as feeding, dressing and bathing. The child learns how to walk and to explore the room that he/she is in. At this stage, the child begins to form a personality. It is important that children complete this stage in order to develop confidence and those that fail to complete the stage suffer from a sense of inadequacy and self doubt (Gasva, Mubika, Goronga and Zebron, 2011). Training at this stage also involves toilet training. Mastery over toilet training develops autonomy and is a significant social situation which gives the child the opportunity to develop a sense of autonomy or succumb to shame. Much therefore depends on the treatment the caregiver gives to the child. Caregivers have to avoid shouting at children when they do not get it right during the training, such practices contribute to the child feeling being ashamed and doubtful. The caregiver has to train the toddler in terms of time and the use of toilet facilities. The caregiver or parent guides children at this stage to exercise autonomy, by rewarding good behaviour. This stage is similar to Freud's anal stage, and overemphasis on toilet training may contribute to the development of a compulsive personality. The role of the caregiver, is to promote autonomy by encouraging children to do things on their own and rewarding them when they achieve success. Some of the activities that promote autonomy and independence include providing play areas that are safe. Activities include playing games, role playing of home chores, modelling and dramatising. In addition to these activities, the caregiver has to provide an



environment that promotes exploration, manipulation of objects, and discovery. Such activities help the toddler to acquire many physical and mental skills. Toys and equipment include rides, slides, chairs, tyres to push and pull, and blocks. All these have to be age related so that the toddler experiences success and happiness. Such achievement contributes to the development of autonomy. In cases where the toddler fails to accomplish an activity, the caregiver has to reassure and comfort the toddler so that the toddler does not develop a feeling of shame and doubt. At the same time, to develop autonomy, the caregiver has to guide the toddler in terms of making decisions and choices on which toys to play with. It is important to note that when children make mistakes they should not be shouted at or criticised.

The third stage is the initiative versus guilt stage. This covers those who are between the ages three and six years. In Zimbabwe, this is the age group that is found in pre-school. They form the ECD-A and ECD-B classes. These are now in the care of caregivers, parents and teachers. At this stage children begin to assert their power and control over the environment through directing play and other social interactions and failure contributes to a sense of guilt, self-doubt and lack of initiative (Gasva, Mubika, Goronga and Zebron, 2011). The development of a feeling of guilt and self-doubt results from being admonished. A sense of guilt destroys a child's confidence and discourages the child from trying. Initiative can be developed through encouraging play, sharing and providing children with the room to experiment. Such experiments have to be planned and guided to ensure safety of the children. The teacher has to ensure that the play centre is safe and the playing equipment is of the required standard. The planned activities have to help the child develop social skills that contribute to the development of a self-concept. This can come about as the children learn to play and share with others. The school has an important role to play at this stage, as it helps the child to acquire basic skills and knowledge. These contribute the development of the child's self-esteem. The teacher has to provide activities that help the children to develop their self-esteem. Such activities include insuring that children play with equipment and materials that they can handle and by engaging them in field trips and activities that give them direct experience. At the same time to support the child's initiative, the caregiver has to accept the child's decisions and encourage the child. If it is food, the child can be allowed to serve him/herself. At this stage the children begin to try new things on their own. Such initiative should be supported. Some of the activities that have to be promoted include manipulative and block play, caring for plants, cleaning play areas, and discovery play. Other activities that promote the development of initiative include participating in cultural dress shows, singing and dancing, dramatising stories and real life situations, telling and listening to folk stories. To promote the development of initiative and creativity in the teaching and learning of Social Sciences, the teacher has to use child centred approaches, where children are actively involved in hands-on experiences and play has to be central. The teacher has to make use of participatory methods of teaching that promote social interaction among children. The teacher also has to provide an environment that promotes group work. Working in groups allows children to interact and communicate. They are also able to develop friendship, which allows them to share interests, fears and appreciate other children's initiative. They communicate in their mother language and local language so as to express their ideas freely.

Erikson's fourth stage of the psychosocial theory focuses on industry versus inferiority. This stage refers to those children between six years and twelve years. This stage corresponds with Freud's latency stage. The child concentrates on activities that promote the process of socialisation. According to Zimbardo and Ruch (1980) citing Freud, through socialisation a child comes to recognise, practise, and identify with the values, attitudes, and basic belief structure of the dominant institutions and representatives of the child's society. This stage is the school going age. Children have to be helped to adjust to the requirements of the new environment, which is the school. At the same time, Erikson views this stage as an entrance to life, as the child becomes concerned with how things work and how they are made. They can be helped to develop their personality at this stage by being recognised for their achievements. Such recognition includes rewarding and praising children for their efforts, as failure to reward and praise encourages feelings of inferiority. To promote industry, children can be allowed to make choices and suggestions. Such choices may be related to what they want to eat and even given an opportunity to prepare the food they want to share with friends at school. They are also encouraged to join formal groups at school. Such formal groups include clubs, scouts and debate clubs. Children at this stage learn from their peers, as they learn and work together and provide emotional support to each other. The



development of personality can be supported by letting children draw personalities they like, role playing good behaviour of adults and peers, and imitating proper behaviour shown by adults.

The individual has to be helped to understand social skills and patterns within the context of the family, school and community. As noted by Seefeldt (1997) the community has a role to play in the child's development in the Social Sciences and as such teaching and learning have to expose the child to community life, since community has an effect on the child's development of social skills. The teacher has to be in constant communication with parents and guardians.

The fifth stage of Erikson's theory is the identity versus role confusion. The stage covers children who are at the puberty and adolescence stage. As noted by Erikson, there are many physical changes that are occurring on the adolescents which tend to confuse them. They are in the process of identity formation, at the same time they are under social pressures and have a desire to identify with groups (Crain, 1980). As a result of such pressures and the struggle for identity, the adolescent engages in a wide range of experimentation. There is need for proper guidance and counselling in order for them to make informed decisions. It is important that at every school there is a guidance and counselling department which is manned by properly trained staff.

The sixth stage by Erikson is the intimacy versus isolation. This is a stage young people make an attempt to fight against isolation as they seek intimate relationships. Success at this stage is very much influenced by how much they have worked on their identity. The sixth stage as advocated by Erikson, like the seventh stage (generativity versus stagnation) and the eighth stage (integrity versus despair) very much focus on adulthood and old age. The school may not have much to do at these stages, but it is suffice to say personality development at these stages is very much influenced by what happens in early stages of life as noted above.

4. THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL IN PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT

The development of human personality encompasses physical development, intellectual development, social development, and emotional development, moral and spiritual development. The school has an important role in the development of the child. What the child is exposed to at home and at school contributes to personality development of the child. The school has the duty to provide a proper platform for the socialisation of the child. Socialisation is promoted and developed by the adoption and implementation of a curriculum that addresses the child's needs. As noted by Haralambos and Holborn (2004), socialisation helps a child to become aware of the practices and values of the culture in which the child is born, at the same time becoming aware of the self. The school is therefore one of the agents of socialisation. This is possible if the school provides for resources that promote participation of the child. The child becomes the centre of learning. Such learning and teaching have to provide for the development of the child. Activities in the classroom have to promote teacher -pupil interaction and pupil-pupil interaction. Such interaction has to promote learning. This can be done through play, drama, role playing, and music among other activities. Through such activities, children learn to share, to talk and express themselves in different forms.

The school has to contribute to the development of the whole child. The curriculum should have a holistic approach to the development of the child's personality. The curriculum provided has to be grounded on an educational philosophy that contributes to a positive personality development. The education acquired has to assist the child to fit well into society. It has to contribute to behaviour modification and personality adjustment. In addition to that, the development of confidence is central to the development of personality. The teaching of all subjects at school level has to be characterised by activities that develop confidence in the child. This can be done by integrating subjects at all levels in school.

If the school is to positively contribute to the development of personality of the child, there has to be a link between the school and the home. Parents can be invited to participate in the organisation of school events. They can even play leading roles in areas they are experts. The role of the school is to identify such experts and utilise them to the advantage



of the child. Parents can also attend lessons so that they become aware of the extension work that their children may require. In that respect, the school as an organisation has to operate like an open system.

5. CONCLUSION

The paper has identified and discussed Erikson's psychosocial theory of personality development. It was discovered that the first five stages cover the school going age and that the last three stage focus on personality development in adult life. It can be concluded that Erikson's focus on the ego and the relevance of experiences in personality development have profound lessons for teachers who deal with children. It may also be concluded that there are many views about personality development, but Erikson's theory emphasizes the role of experience which can be shaped by the family, community and school.

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