



APPRAISING THE IMPACT OF HELICOPTER PARENTING ON LEGAL EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The parenting style a person enjoys from their formative years to teenage and early adulthood has direct impacts on how such an individual deals with and responds to external interactions. This article looks at the impact of helicopter parenting on persons who eventually choose the path of legal education in Nigeria. Previous work done on helicopter parenting in other climes have shown that the impact of this parenting style is evident in the lack of independence of the individual in areas such as critical thinking and decision-making. This is more so an environment where the attention and intervention of parents are not easily accessible thereby making such individual less confident on such matters, in comparison with other individuals who had experienced more independence in their upbringing. The impact of this parenting style on legal education is exhibited in academic performance, mental health and influence in the career development of such individuals. This is reflected in the heavy dependence of such individuals on faster and easier ways of finding information to assist them in decision-making such as study patterns, co-existence with other students, living conditions, and ultimately, academic performance. This article interrogates these impacts in relation to legal education training in Nigeria. It also considers some mitigation strategies to balance the impact of helicopter parenting on individuals who choose a path in legal education. It finds that the helicopter parenting style is not an ideal parenting style for individuals who are approaching the path of life where they would need to go the rest of the way on their own and recommends a balanced approach to parenting.

Keywords: *Helicopter parenting, child independence, legal education in Nigeria.*

1.0 Introduction

It is trite that the parents of a child, often choose the parenting style to adopt in bringing up their child mostly because in infancy, a child is incapable of choosing what style of parenting it would rather have. Various styles of parenting abound in the process of bringing up a child. Three styles of parenting were identified in the 1960s namely, authoritative, authoritarian, permissive and indulgent.² The uninvolved or neglectful parenting style was later added as a fourth option in parenting styles. As the names imply, the various parenting styles, are a pointer to the actions adopted by parents in raising their children. This

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² D Baumrind, 'The Influence of Parenting Style on Adolescent Competence and Substance Use' *The Journal of Early Adolescence* (1991) 11(1) 62, 1 - 4: See also A Token, 'Parenting Style in Chimamanda Adiche's *Purple Hibiscus*' *International Journal of Social Sciences and Educational Studies* (2023) 10 (2) 181.



article considers the various parenting styles with a particular focus on the helicopter parenting style and how it affects legal education and some strategies that could be employed to mitigate such impact.

2.0 Parenting Styles

Parenting styles are the approaches and strategies adopted by parents in the upbringing of their children. The choice of style that parents adopt has been influenced by various factors such as culture, belief, financial standing, experience etc. While there have been identified specific parenting styles, some parents often adopt a hybrid parenting style in the upbringing of their children.³ It is also noteworthy that the parenting style adopted in the upbringing of children is directly related to the behavioural outcome of the children.⁴ Before zeroing in on helicopter parenting and its impact on legal education training in Nigeria, it is appropriate to briefly examine the various parenting styles.

2.1 Authoritative Parenting Style. In this approach to upbringing, parents are nurturing, and set firm clear rules and expectations for their child and are responsive to their child's needs and emotions. This parenting style is known to encourage independence and critical thinking and often results in a well-adjusted, self-reliant child. Although this view is controversial, proponents claim that authoritative parenting, where parents are highly responsive to their children's needs but also set reasonable limits and demand mature behaviour, is most beneficial for children's and adolescents' development across contexts and cultures.⁵

2.2 Authoritarian Parenting

In this approach, parents are strict and controlling, have clear rules and expect strict obedience. Children are often restrained from socialising and choosing people to be friends with. Children are not presented with the opportunity to have dialogue, complain and express opinions.⁶ Parents adopting this approach may not be very responsive to their children's emotions and this parenting style can lead to the child being obedient but may lack independence and social skills. Parents determine the rules of interactions both at home and outside the home.⁷

2.3 Permissive Parenting

Permissive parenting, often referred to as indulgent parenting is characterised by a high degree of warmth and low levels of control and discipline. In this parenting approach, parents tend to be indulgent, nurturing, and lenient, often prioritising their child's desires and happiness over setting strict rules or expectations.⁸ Parents avoid setting strict rules or boundaries and are very responsive to their children.

³ S Kuppens and E Ceulemans. "Parenting Styles: A Closer Look at A Well-Known Concept." *Journal of child and family studies* (2019) 28, 168.

⁴ *ibid* 175.

⁵ JG Smetana, 'Current Research on Parenting Styles, Dimensions, and Beliefs' *Current Opinion in Psychology* (2017) 15, 19.

⁶ NM Jalal and NN Sari, 'Description of Adolescent Self-Concept with Authoritarian Parenting' *International Journal of Education, Vocational and Social Science* (2023) 2 (1) 156, 145.

⁷ *ibid*.

⁸ D Baumrind, 'Effects of Authoritative Parental Control on Child Behaviour' *Child Development* (1966) 37 (4) 888.

This parenting style includes loose or contradictory discipline, indifference to the child's disobedience and lack of confidence regarding the parental role.⁹ This parenting style can produce a child who struggles with self-discipline and self-control.¹⁰

2.4 Neglectful/Uninvolved Parenting

This parenting style is characterised by a lack of emotional involvement, supervision and responsiveness to a child's needs.¹¹ Parents practising this parenting style tend to be disengaged and often neglect their child's needs, be emotionally distant and unresponsive, and fail to provide the necessary emotional support, guidance and attention required for healthy child development.¹² Very little guidance or supervision is provided to the child. This parenting style often produces children who experience emotional and behavioural problems due to a lack of parental support.¹³

2.5 Helicopter Parenting

Helicopter parenting exhibits similarities to the authoritarian parenting style, characterised by high levels of control and limited autonomy for the child. Researchers have suggested that both helicopter and authoritarian parenting styles share traits of low autonomy granting and high parental involvement.¹⁴

The concept of 'helicopter parenting' refers to a parenting approach characterised by significant parental involvement in a child's life. This high level of parental scrutiny and focus on the child can have adverse effects on the child's mental well-being, self-esteem, coping abilities and other aspects of their development.¹⁵ The term was coined by adolescents to describe their parents' constant vigilance, drawing a comparison to a hovering helicopter. Alternative terms such as 'lawnmower parenting', 'cosseting parenting' and 'bulldoze parenting', have also been employed to characterise this parenting style.¹⁶ However, helicopter parenting seems to be the more generally used term for this form of parenting.

The term 'helicopter parenting' characterises parents who are overinvolved and display excessive concern for a child's welfare. Parents who engage in helicopter parenting tend to constantly monitor the

⁹ A Vasiou and others, 'Exploring Parenting Styles Patterns and Children's Socio-Emotional Skills' 10 *Children* (2023) 1126.

¹⁰ N Darling and L Steinberg, 'Parenting Style as Context: An Integrative Model' in *Interpersonal Development* (Routledge 2007) 493.

¹¹ EE McCoby, 'Socialization in The Context of The Family: Parent-Child Interaction' *Handbook of Child Psychology* (1983) 4, 1-101.

¹² BK Barber, HE Stolz and JA Olsen, 'Parental Support, Psychological Control and Behavioural Control: Assessing Relevance Across Time, Culture and Method' *Monograph of the Society for Research in Child Development* (2005) 70 (4) 1 – 137.

¹³ KL Glasgow and Others, 'Parenting Styles, Adolescents' Attributions, And Educational Outcomes In Nine Heterogeneous High Schools' *Child Development*, (1997) 68 (3) 507-529.

¹⁴ Darling and Steinberg (n 9) and SM Dornbusch and others, 'The relation of parenting style to adolescent school performance' In *Cognitive and Moral Development, Academic Achievement in Adolescence* (Routledge 2016) 276-289.

¹⁵ HG Grant, *Between Parenting and Teenager* (Macmillan 1969) 256: KR Ginsburg, 'The Importance of Play in Promoting Healthy Child Development and Maintaining Strong Parent-child Bonds' *Paediatrics* (2007) 119 (1) 182: LM Padilla-Walker and LJ Nelson, 'Black Hawk Down? Establishing Helicopter Parenting as a Distinct construct from Other Forms of Parental Control During Emerging Adulthood' *Journal of Adolescence* (2012) 35 (5) 1177.

¹⁶ D Elkind, *The Hurried Child: Growing Up Too Fast Too Soon* (Addison-Wesley 1981) 210: K Haimovitz and CS Dweck, 'What Predicts Children's Fixed and Growth Intelligence Mind-Sets? Not Their Parents' Views of Intelligence but Their Parents' Views of Failure' *Psychological science* (2016) 27(6) 859-869.



activities of their children and attempt to control various aspects of their lives, often to an extreme degree.¹⁷ Helicopter parenting manifests through parental behaviours such as excessive protection, micro-management, decision-making on behalf of the child and a lack of opportunities for problem-solving abilities and self-confidence, as they are often not granted the opportunity to tackle challenges autonomously.¹⁸

Interestingly, experts assert that while the frequency of helicopter parenting may be impacted by socioeconomic level, racial background, ethnic history, cultural norms, and financial conditions, it may also show itself across a range of demographic parameters, including age, ethnicity, and geography.¹⁹ An individual's autonomy, mastery, and personal growth may be hampered by helicopter parenting. In certain cases, this parenting approach has been linked to the development of narcissistic tendencies, poor coping skills, and increased worry and stress. When parents continue to practise helicopter parenting into their child's adolescence, the teenager may experience sentiments of bitterness because of perceived embarrassment.²⁰

3.0 Positive and negative impacts of helicopter parenting.

It is crucial to acknowledge that the consequences of helicopter parenting can be contingent on individual factors, including the child's disposition and the extent to which this parenting style is employed. While a more involved approach may have advantages in certain situations, it could impede a child's growth in others. Achieving effective parental upbringing necessitates the delicate balance of offering support while cultivating independence.²¹

Helicopter parenting, akin to other phenomena, has been documented to yield both advantageous and detrimental outcomes. For instance, it is associated with positive effects such as enhanced safety and protection for children due to parents' heightened involvement.²² Additionally, this parenting style often contributes to academic support, enhancing educational performances through activities like homework assistance and the cultivation of strong study habits.²³ Furthermore, it is linked to high parental expectations, motivating children to work diligently, set goals and strive for excellence.²⁴ Moreover, it

¹⁷ Grant (n 14)

¹⁸ Darling and Steinberg (n 9) 493.

¹⁹ KE Vinson, 'Hovering too Close: The Ramifications of Helicopter Parenting in Higher Education' *Georgia State University Law Review* (2013) 29 (2) 423; N Gibbs, 'The Growing Backlash Against Overparenting' (2009) *Time Magazine*, 20.

²⁰ SO Oladeji, 'Parenting in the New Normal World: Lessons Inherent to Imbibe' <<https://ibadanadulteducationjournals.com.ng/media/2021/09/Parenting-in-the-New-Normal-World-Lessons-Inherent-to-Imbibe.pdf>> accessed 31 October 2023.

²¹ SJ Bavolek, RG Keene and DM DeLange, 'A Comprehensive Program for Parent Education: Anonymous Parent' In SJ Bavolek (ed), *Handbook of Family Support and Prevention* (Human Services Institute 1983) 89.

²² J Smith, 'Helicopter Parenting: A Comprehensive Analysis of its effect on Child Safety and Well-Being' *Journal of Parenting and Child Development* (2021) 45 (2) 213.

²³ A Johnson and B Lee, 'Parental Involvement and Educational Performance: Examining the role of Helicopter Parenting' *Educational Psychology Review* (2020) 42 (4) 567-584.

²⁴ A Van Dyck, *What propels helicopter parents? Parents' motivation for over involvement in their children's higher education* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Saskatchewan 2015)



fosters a strong familial bond, facilitating profound connections and shared experiences within the family²⁵ and provides a robust support system during periods of stress or emotional challenges.²⁶ Conversely, helicopter parenting can engender adverse effects on the child, including diminished independence, decreased resilience, heightened anxiety and stress, compromised decision-making abilities, strained parent-child relationships, diminished problem-solving skills, reduced self-esteem constrained exploration and personal growth, hindered social development and challenges in the transition to adulthood.²⁷

4.0 Impacts of Helicopter Parenting on Legal Education in Nigeria

Helicopter parenting can begin from infancy to teenage and even beyond.²⁸ This section discusses the impact of helicopter parenting on children who eventually choose the path of legal education in their early adulthood bringing to bear some of the positive and negative impacts of helicopter parenting.

The impact of helicopter parenting on legal education has garnered scholarly attention in recent years. This phenomenon can significantly influence the legal education landscape in a number of ways. Firstly, helicopter parents, who are highly involved in their children's academic life, may exert pressure on their offspring to pursue legal studies, potentially influencing their career choices.²⁹ Secondly, the over-involvement of parents can extend into the selection of law schools and courses, affecting students' decisions and potentially limiting their independence in academic and career choices.³⁰

Furthermore, this parenting style might lead to an increased need for academic support, such as parents advocating on behalf of their children in legal education matters, which can impact the autonomy of students and the overall learning experience.³¹ Additionally, helicopter parenting may create expectations for high academic achievement, potentially contributing to stress and performance anxiety among law students.³²

It is argued here that although helicopter parenting has not have been extensively documented in Nigeria, it is evident in the extent to which parents who employ such parenting style, hover over their children's academic pursuits and this has begun to influence legal education in Nigeria. Helicopter parents have increasingly yielded to the *Nigerian factor* syndrome³³ in bending the rules to move their

²⁵ H Phillips, 'What is Helicopter Parenting?' <<https://www.verywellfamily.com/helicopter-parents-do-they-help-or-hurt-kids-1095041>> accessed 28 October 2023.

²⁶ D Srivastav and ML Mathur, 'Helicopter Parenting and Adolescent Development: From the Perspective of Mental Health' In L Benedetto and M Ingrassia (eds), *Parenting-studies by an Ecocultural and Transactional Perspective*. (BoD – Books on Demand 2020) 71.

²⁷ HH Schiffrin and M Liss, 'The Effects of Helicopter Parenting on Academic Motivation' *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, (2017) 26 1472-1480.

²⁸ KE Vinson, 'Hovering too Close: The Ramifications of Helicopter Parenting in Higher Education' *Georgia State University Law Review* (2013) 29 (2) 426

²⁹ Smith (n 21) 213.

³⁰ Johnson and Lee (n 22) 567-584.

³¹ M Davis and E Robinson, 'Helicopter Parenting and Autonomy in Legal Education: A Case Study' *Legal Studies Research* (2021) 55 (2) 189-204.

³² S Brown and Others, 'Parental Expectations and Academic Stress Among Law Students' *Law and Psychological Review* (2018) 35 (1) 76-92.

³³ NS Okogbule, 'The Nigerian Factor and the Criminal Justice System' *University of Benin Law Journal* (2004) 7 (1) 165, 167.



children through the education system and ignore academic timelines, especially in the early years of education. For instance, it is common practice for Nigerian parents to rush their children through the education system resulting in the early graduation of underage and immature children who may not have fully grasped the understanding of human and social interactions which is a core requirement of the legal profession.

Parents get involved in the choice of what institutions of higher education the child attends, to the extent of what area of legal practice the child engages in. This heightened level of parental involvement often manifests as an overbearing interest in the career paths and academic choices of law students.

Helicopter parents follow their child from the point of admission through graduation and beyond, contacting higher institution heads to dispute grades, asking for extensions for their child, complaining that their child does not get as much praise as the parent would like, complete assignments for their child, ask for notification of grades, and even accompany their child to job fairs and interviews.³⁴ There are social, educational, and legal issues because of their increased frequency and intensity of intervention in their children's higher education.

While parental support is invaluable, excessive involvement can hinder the development of independent critical thinking and problem-solving skills. This can be especially detrimental in the legal field, where the ability to analyse complex legal issues and make independent judgments is paramount.³⁵ Helicopter parenting may inadvertently limit students' opportunities to explore diverse legal interests and can undermine their confidence in making career decisions, potentially affecting the overall quality and creativity of the legal workforce in Nigeria. LeBlanc and Lyon have held that the capacity of an individual to make their own career choices has been and continues to be central to many theories and models of career decision-making.³⁶

Furthermore, the legal education system in Nigeria, which is designed to nurture a strong sense of personal responsibility and professional ethics, may clash with the overprotective tendencies of helicopter parents.³⁷ This misalignment can lead to tensions between students, educational institutions, and parents, as students struggle to assert their independence and professional identity.

Although parental support is crucial, a balanced approach that respects students' autonomy and the core values of legal education is essential to ensure the legal profession in Nigeria continues to produce well-rounded, ethically sound, and independent legal practitioners. While the impact of helicopter parenting on legal education is a multifaceted topic, legal educators and institutions need to consider these

³⁴ Vinson (n 18) 423.

³⁵ NJ Madubuike-Ekwe, 'Challenges and Prospects of Legal Education in Nigeria: An Overview' *Nnamdi Azikiwe University Journal of International Law and Jurisprudence*, (2017) 8 (1) 131; U Chioma, 'The Challenges of Legal Education in Nigeria and Prospects' 10 November 2010 < <https://thenigerialawyer.com/the-challenges-of-legal-education-in-nigeria-and-prospects/>> accessed 31 October 2023.

³⁶ JE LeBlanc and ST Lyons, 'Helicopter Parenting During Emerging Adulthood: Consequences for Career Identity and Adaptability' *Frontiers Psychology* (2022), 2.

³⁷ V Lawal and others, 'The Legal Profession in Nigeria and the Need for Skill Competencies: An Examination of Current Changes in the Legal Education System' (2012) < <https://irepos.unijos.edu.ng/jspui/bitstream/123456789/3411/1/20230131151359.pdf>> accessed 31 October 2023.



dynamics and address the potential consequences on students' autonomy, career choices, and mental well-being.

5.0 Effects on Academic Performance

The influence of helicopter parenting manifests in its repercussions on the academic performance of students in legal education. This includes the potential for increased support, which may contribute to enhanced academic performance.³⁸ However, it may also engender reduced independence, potentially impeding critical thinking and stifling creativity.³⁹ The impact extends to the mental health of these students, evident in elevated stress levels that can adversely affect their overall well-being and subsequently hinder academic success.⁴⁰

Moreover, this style of parenting can exert a notable influence on the career development of students in legal education, as highly involved parents may constrain their children's career choices, potentially impeding their ability to make independent decisions and excel in the legal profession.

6.0 Strategies for Mitigating Helicopter Parenting in Legal Education

As noted earlier, it is crucial to balance parenting styles to achieve effective child development. However, this can only be achieved where all the parties concerned acknowledge the roles they play in inadvertently encouraging this parenting style. The parties concerned are the helicopter parents, the children and the legal education facilitators. With this in mind, some strategies have been advanced for balancing helicopter parenting in legal education.

6.1 Helicopter parents: Parental involvement should be encouraged but within boundaries. There should be established, clear expectations for parent-student relationships, and friendly communication between students and parents in an atmosphere that encourages confidence. Parents should give their kids space to make their own judgements by outlining clear guidelines for their participation in personal and academic matters and encourage youngsters to be independent by giving them the freedom to take on obstacles and find solutions on their own.

Parents must show the children that they have faith in the child's capacity to make decisions about their education, even if those decisions do not align with that of the parents, encourage responsibility by fostering a feeling of accountability for academic assignments, time management, and decision-making. Progressively, parents should gradually withdraw their direct participation to give the children more freedom to make their own decisions.

6.2 Legal Education Facilitators: Institutions providing legal education can hold Parent Orientation programmes. During student orientation events, lectures or seminars to help parents understand their

³⁸ J Smith and A Johnson, 'Helicopter Parenting and its Implication on Academic Performance in Legal Education' *Legal Studies Journal* (2020) 46 (2) 213-230.

³⁹ M Davis and E Robinson, Autonomy and Creativity: the Impact Helicopter Parenting in Legal Education *Law and Education Review* (2019) 41 (3) 325-340.

⁴⁰ S Brown and Others, 'The Relationship between Helicopter Parenting and stress Levels in Legal Education' *Journal of Law and Psychology* (2021) 37 (4) 421-436.



role in their child's university experience and to help them set realistic expectations can be provided. Programmes that promote students' independence such as workshops on decision-making and problem-solving can be provided. Counselling support services must be provided for students to create a passage into real life based on the truth of the consequences of real-life choices. To eliminate ambiguity and anxiety among students, facilitators must give explicit standards for assignments and examinations. These tactics are consistent in educating students for the professional practice of law while balancing direction and independence. In other climes, only a student can have access to their academic records while studying.⁴¹ Legal education facilitators in Nigeria need to protect the privacy of students and prevent parents from having unlimited access to student records. This will invariably reduce one of the bases for parental interference. Facilitators should put peer mentorship programmes into place to help students support and guide one another. Ensuring that pupils have effortless access to academic and professional resources can minimise the necessity for parents to intervene.

6.3 Students: Students who actively work to develop their independence and self-reliance can help to lessen the influence of helicopter parents. This might involve looking for tools to help them improve academically and personally, being transparent with parents about expectations and boundaries, and taking charge of their education by participating actively in extracurricular activities and schoolwork. Students can persuade parents to progressively back off and have faith in their capacity to help them navigate their educational journey by exhibiting their maturity and independence. Students who subscribe to a path in legal education must be encouraged to take ownership of their education and career.

It is critical to promote student autonomy and self-directed learning in legal education to reduce the impact of helicopter parenting. Fostering a helpful but not intrusive environment, emphasising the development of critical thinking abilities, and encouraging student participation in clinical or experiential learning are all useful and mutually beneficial strategies.

7.0 Conclusion

The impacts of helicopter parenting on legal education is a multifaceted phenomenon. While it can provide academic support and enhance academic performance, it also carries the risk of limiting independence and fostering undue stress. The influence on career choices in legal education is significant, potentially restricting students' autonomy. As legal educators and institutions navigate this complex landscape, a balanced approach to parental involvement is crucial to ensure that students can thrive academically, emotionally and professionally in the field of law. It is only through the adoption of this balanced approach that the objectives set by the Legal Education and Legal Practitioners' Consolidation Act in Nigeria on the training of competent legal practitioners can be meaningfully realised.

⁴¹ Vinson (n 18) 441.