



PARENTING IN A GEN Z ERA: THE 21ST CENTURY CHALLENGE OF PARENTAL AUTHORITY AND CONTROL IN AFRICA

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Abstract

Parenting serves as a vital social function, deeply influencing the collective outlook of a society. This stems from the widely held belief that the character and future of society are largely shaped by the nature of parental guidance provided to its children. This philosophy is particularly resonant in African societies, where parenting transcends the personal realm to become a communal responsibility. Within this context, the authority and control traditionally exercised by parents are not exclusively theirs but are shared with the broader community. However, in the 21st century, parenting has undergone significant transformations, especially in comparison to previous eras. One major catalyst for this change is the pervasive influence of technology, which has given rise to a new generation often referred to as Generation Z or digital natives. This generation's distinct behavioural traits pose substantial challenges to traditional African parenting models, especially when viewed through the lens of customary Igbo societal norms. These challenges are not unique to Africa; they reflect a global phenomenon that necessitates deeper inquiry. This study, therefore, seeks to address several key questions: Who constitutes Generation Z? In what ways does Generation Z challenge the traditional parental authority and control prevalent in African societies? What specific difficulties arise in the process of parenting within the context of this generational shift in Africa? Adopting a critical descriptive analysis, this research focuses on the complexities of parenting Generation Z within the framework of traditional Igbo parenting practices in southeastern Nigeria. By drawing on secondary sources such as books, scholarly journals, and online resources, the study explores the generational concepts, the characteristics of Generation Z, the evolving nature of parenting in Africa, and the traditional Igbo approaches to child-rearing. Ultimately, it establishes that the advent of Generation Z has instigated a profound shift in the dynamics of parenting, challenging the long-standing norms that have historically guided parental practices in Igbo culture.



Keywords: Gen Z, Generation, Parenting, African Parenting, Igbo Parenting.

Introduction

Every individual is inevitably shaped by the socio-cultural and technological influences of their era. With the advent of each new age, parenting practices evolve in response to emerging societal demands, while also attempting to guide these changes in ways that benefit the broader community. This evolution reflects the inherently social nature of parenting, which plays a pivotal role in shaping the character and outlook of society as a whole. Consequently, parents of every generation strive to exercise their authority and control to mold their children according to the prevailing values and expectations of their time.

In past centuries, when technological advancements were minimal, parenting was characterized by a more rigid structure. Children, largely under the strict guidance of their parents, tended to be more compliant with rules, less expressive, and more likely to conform to societal norms. However, the significant technological advancements of the 21st century have fundamentally altered the parenting landscape. The proliferation of digital technologies and the rise of the internet have transformed not only how we live and interact but also how we raise and educate our children (Ibrahim, 2023). As a result, parenting in the contemporary era is markedly different from that of earlier centuries, with distinct shifts in technology, parental roles, disciplinary practices, education, and communication. These changes are further fueled by evolving social norms and lifestyles, contributing to a dynamic shift in parenting practices (Ibrahim, 2023).

It is within this context of technological evolution that the emergence of Generation Z, also known as digital natives, must be understood. This generation, born and raised in a world deeply intertwined with digital technologies—such as smart phones, smart TVs, and social media—has never known a life without them. Their identity is intricately linked to these technologies, as they are digital-centric individuals who navigate the world through the lens of technological integration (Shilpa et al., 2019). Being children of their time, Generation Z exhibits a markedly different worldview and behavioral tendencies compared to previous generations. They are more expressive, independent, and less amenable to traditional forms of authority and control, presenting a stark contrast to earlier generations that were more deferential to established norms and parental guidance.

This shift poses significant challenges to traditional models of parenting,



particularly within African societies where parenting has long been viewed as a communal responsibility. In traditional African settings, the proverb "it takes a village to raise a child" reflects the communal approach, where any elder could guide and discipline a child. African parenting practices have historically been strict, fostering conformity to societal expectations and leaving little room for individual self-expression. Prior to the rise of contemporary digital technologies, it was easier for parents to exert control over their children's lives, including monitoring their friendships, activities, and social circles. However, with Generation Z's heightened expressiveness, strong opinions, and advanced technological literacy—often surpassing that of their parents—maintaining traditional parental control has become increasingly difficult.

Given this context, this paper seeks to explore several critical questions: Who are Generation Z, or digital natives? How does Generation Z challenge traditional parental authority and control in Africa? What specific challenges do African parents face in raising children in the Gen Z era? To address these questions, the study adopts a critical descriptive analysis, focusing particularly on the traditional parenting styles of the Igbo people of southeastern Nigeria. Drawing on secondary sources such as books, academic journals, and online articles, this research delves into the concepts of generations, Generation Z, parenting in Africa, traditional Igbo parenting practices, and the unique challenges of raising a new generation in the context of rapid technological change. Ultimately, the study underscores the dynamic shift in parenting brought about by the rise of Generation Z and provides a conceptual framework for understanding how African parents, particularly those in Igbo society, are navigating these unprecedented challenges. The study begins by clarifying key terms central to the discussion, establishing a foundation for further exploration of these critical issues.

Towards an Understanding of Generations and the Generation Z

The concept of "generations" as a sociological phenomenon traces its intellectual roots to Karl Mannheim's 1923 seminal essay, *The Problem of Generations* (Pilcher 1994). Mannheim conceptualized generations as cohorts of individuals born within a specific time-frame who are shaped by common socio-historical events, particularly during their formative years. These shared experiences endow them with characteristics that distinguish them from other generational groups born in different periods (Pilcher 1994; Mannheim 1952). The notion that individuals are products of their time reflects the underlying premise that every generation, though composed of unique individuals with diverse values, behaviours, and



perspectives, is collectively influenced by the prevailing social and historical forces of its era.

The term 'generation' has long been used to demarcate age brackets and family lineage, such as parents, grandparents, and children, each representing distinct familial generations. However, beyond familial ties, individuals also belong to broader generational categories based on their birth period and shared life experiences. This idea of generational distinction has been a focal point for social scientists over the centuries, who have sought to understand how generational cohorts influence broader social patterns and transformations (McKinsey, 2024). Prominent thinkers like Auguste Comte have posited that generational shifts are key drivers of social change. According to this perspective, the progression of generations into new stages of life in a relatively synchronized manner acts as a catalyst for societal evolution. Major historical events, which profoundly impact large segments of the population, often leave a lasting imprint on the collective consciousness of a generation and are frequently used as defining markers for naming these groups (McKinsey, 2024). In contemporary discourse, the classification of generations—particularly in Western contexts—follows a widely accepted framework. For instance, the generations of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries are typically categorized as follows: the Lost Generation, born between 1883 and 1900; the Greatest Generation, spanning 1901 to 1927; the Silent Generation, from 1928 to 1945; the Baby Boomers, from 1946 to 1964; Generation X, from 1965 to 1980; the Millennials, or Generation Y, from 1981 to 1996; Generation Z, from 1997 to 2012; and Generation Alpha, beginning in 2013 (Jayme, 2024).

The disillusionment and sense of aimlessness felt by those who lived through the devastation of World War I led to their being dubbed the "Lost Generation" (1883–1900). Following them was the Greatest Generation, also referred to as the Veterans (1901–1927), who earned this title due to their heroic sacrifices during World War II. The children of this generation, born shortly after the war, are commonly known as Baby Boomers (McKinsey, 2024). The Baby Boomers, those born between 1946 and 1964, came into existence during the post-World War II "baby boom," a period marked by a significant rise in birth rates as Western nations recovered from the economic challenges of wartime. Throughout their lives, Baby Boomers benefited from extraordinary economic growth and prosperity. Though born during times of relative hardship, they enjoyed opportunities for advancement through education, government subsidies, rising property values, and technological innovations, positioning them as



one of the most affluent and successful generations in history (Shilpa et al., 2019).

Succeeding the Baby Boomers was Generation X, typically defined as those born between the mid-1960s and early 1980s. The formative years of Generation X were heavily influenced by pivotal global political events. In India, for instance, the nationalization of 14 banks, the near insolvency of the country's financial system, the introduction of the Rajadhani Express, and the establishment of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) were major events that shaped the outlook of this generation. Compared to their predecessors, Generation X tends to be more open to diversity, having learned to embrace differences in religion, sexual orientation, social class, race, and ethnicity (Shilpa et al., 2019).

Following Generation X came Generation Y, also known as the Millennials. These individuals, born between the 1980s and 2000, have been significantly influenced by the technological revolution that defined their youth. As technology evolved rapidly during their formative years, Millennials became deeply connected and tech-savvy, with technology integrated into their everyday lives. From mobile phones to laptops and tablets, Millennials are perpetually connected to the digital world, accessible online at any time. Many Millennials, observing the demanding and often stressful work lives of their Baby Boomer parents, have developed a strong inclination towards maintaining a work-life balance, shaping their attitudes towards employment and personal well-being. Generation Z follows the Millennials. Although there is some variation in the precise starting point of this generation, with scholars citing 1995, 1996, or 1997 as potential starting years. For this study, Generation Z is defined as those born from 2000 onward. Broadly, Generation Z refers to individuals born between 1996 and 2010. They occupy a unique position as the second-youngest generation, situated between Millennials and Generation Alpha, which comprises those born between 2010 and 2024. Generation Z is characterized by their upbringing in the digital age, where the internet has always been a part of daily life. As "digital natives," they were born at a time when internet usage had become widespread, shaping their identity and behaviour. Generation Z has also been shaped by broader socio-political issues such as climate anxiety, economic uncertainty, and the global COVID-19 pandemic, which has significantly influenced their outlook on life (McKinsey, 2024).

Conceptualizing the Generation Z behavioral patterns.

Generation Z, unlike any prior generation, is recognized by an array of



distinct names, including postmillennials, iGeneration, founders, plurals, homeland generation, Gen Tech, Online Generation, Facebook generation, Switchers, and even the “always clicking” generation (Mario et al., 2022). They are often described as the generation that learned to use a mouse before a spoon. Generation Z, the largest cohort globally, was projected to account for approximately one-third of the world's population by 2019 (Miller & Wei, 2018). This group is the first to experience its psychosocial development in a fully digitized society, a reality that has yet to be fully comprehended by both societal and academic frameworks (Jayme, 2024).

Growing up in the digital revolution, Generation Z has been immersed in an interconnected global culture, where the proliferation of the World Wide Web has transitioned from a luxury to an indispensable aspect of 21st-century life. From an early age, members of Generation Z have had nearly unlimited access to digital devices, especially smartphones, resulting in children and adolescents spending substantial amounts of time in front of screens. Despite cultural and regional distinctions, Generation Z exhibits several universal traits that can be observed across the globe (Jayme, 2024). This generation thrives in a culture of choice, self-expression, and self-actualization. For the first time in history, young people freely express their sexual orientation and gender identity without the constraints faced by previous generations (Mario et al., 2024). They are vocal, assertive, and unafraid to stand up for themselves, which presents considerable challenges for parenting in contemporary society.

Being highly internet-savvy, members of Generation Z can effortlessly access websites and online content without their parents' awareness. Their innate expressiveness allows them to voice their thoughts and opinions openly, without fear of reprisal. This generation also exhibits a distinct communication style—informal, direct, and individualistic—with social media playing a central role in their daily lives (Shilpa et al., 2019). Research from the *Generational White Paper* (2011), cited in Shilpa et al. (2019), suggests that Generation Z tends to be more impatient and focused on immediate gratification, with less ambition than previous generations. They display symptoms associated with attention deficit, a high dependency on technology, and shorter attention spans. Furthermore, Generation Z is characterized as self-directed, individualistic, demanding, materialistic, and often entitled. These generational traits raise critical questions about the effectiveness of traditional parental authority and control. As a result, understanding the concept of parenting becomes essential in navigating the complexities of raising children in the digital age.



Parenting

The term “parenting” is derived from the word "parent," which has its Latin roots in "parens" or "pareo," meaning "to give birth." However, the contemporary understanding of parenting extends far beyond its original etymology (Oso, 2020). Parenting is now conceptualized as the actions, behaviors, and responsibilities undertaken by primary caregivers in raising and socializing children, particularly during specific developmental stages. This process involves the application of time, effort, skills, and resources to ensure the growth and well-being of children (Spera, 2005; Wang & Fletcher, 2015). As articulated by Okorofo and Njoku (2012)

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Parenting is a social act, a responsibility, a process, and a role that is essential for society to ensure social stability, harmony, and progress. It is an act that demands a high degree of commitment, sacrifice, perseverance, attitude, knowledge, tolerance determination etc. It is a sort of function that is institutionalized by the family system in society. It goes with a sense of care, relationship, love, compassion, and hope. It is an act of close guidance and control at the very smallest unit of society. It can be seen as the act of entrenching social norms and values, training, and education of children and youths at the micro-social level (27).

According to Fagot (1995), “parenting entails not only giving birth but also providing for the child's physical well-being, as well as offering warmth and security to ensure proper psychological adjustment, discipline for moral development, and stimulation for intellectual growth” (p. 163). This definition emphasizes that not every woman who gives birth, nor every man who fathers a child, automatically qualifies as a parent. Rather, the essence of parenting lies in fulfilling these multifaceted responsibilities. As Francis (2016) noted, parenting is widely regarded as one of the most challenging and complex tasks in adulthood (section 84).

Scholars studying parenting have distinguished between two key interrelated concepts: (a) parenting practices and (b) parenting styles (Darling & Steinberg, 2017; Wang & Fletcher, 2015). Parenting practices refer to the specific actions taken to support a child's physical, intellectual, emotional, and social development, such as providing food, education, and recreational activities. Parenting styles, on the other hand, represent a broader psychological construct encompassing the general behaviours and emotional climate provided by caregivers, which can be categorized as authoritarian, indulgent, uninvolved, or authoritative. Parenting styles are not universal; they vary across historical periods, races, ethnicities, social



classes, cultures, and other societal factors (Darling & Steinberg, 2017; Wang & Fletcher, 2015). This understanding naturally leads to an exploration of specific parenting styles, particularly within African cultures, providing a pathway toward understanding the traditional Igbo style of parenting.

Parenting Styles

There are various styles of parenting, each with its approach to raising children. In this study, we will focus on three major types: permissive, democratic (or authoritative) and authoritarian, parenting.

Permissive parenting: In permissive parenting, parents exercise minimal control over their children's behaviour and impose few demands on them. They offer a great deal of freedom, allowing children to set their schedules and make decisions about activities, while rarely involving them in discussions about family rules or expectations (Cole & Cole, 2010). Such parents are typically uncontrolling, and non-demanding, and display warmth towards their children. However, this style of parenting can lead to children becoming immature and less exploratory, as noted by Biehler and Snowman (2012).

In this approach, according to Holmbeck, Paikoff, and Brooks-Gunn (1995), parents may inadvertently grant children excessive power within the family dynamic. Children in permissive households are often too independent, and this can result in role confusion, where the child assumes the role of authority in the family, dictating their desires and how things should be done. This imbalance can lead to a reversal of traditional parent-child roles, undermining the authority of the parent. Permissive parenting, though extreme in some cases, can also manifest in subtle forms within other parenting styles. For instance, parents may act permissively in certain situations by rescuing their children from disciplinary consequences or indulging them through excessive pampering. This flexibility in discipline and authority often blurs the lines between parent and child roles, contributing to potential developmental challenges for the child.

Democratic or Authoritative parenting style: The democratic (authoritative) style of parenting is often viewed as a balanced and ideal approach. In this style, parents show a high degree of warmth and affection towards their children, creating a nurturing environment while maintaining necessary boundaries. Children are granted a reasonable level of freedom, but this freedom is structured within clear limits and



expectations, providing both autonomy and guidance. One key aspect of democratic parenting is its grounding in a soteriological principle—the belief that both parents and children are of equal value as human beings and are entitled to dignity and respect. However, while all members of the family are treated equally in terms of their humanity, they are not equal in terms of authority. The parents maintain their role as the authority figures and leaders within the household, guiding the family with fairness but also setting boundaries.

In a democratic family, every member, including children, has the right to express their thoughts and feelings openly and to have their voices heard. Nonetheless, this freedom of expression does not translate into absolute freedom of action. Children are not free to do whatever they please or to disregard parental authority. While their opinions are valued and considered, they do not always get their way. As Holmbeck, Paikoff, and Brooks-Gunn (1995) emphasize, children in democratic families learn that having a voice does not mean having control, and they are encouraged to understand the balance between freedom and responsibility. This style fosters mutual respect while still upholding parental leadership and guidance, making it a healthy model for child-rearing.

The Authoritarian or Autocratic parenting style: In the authoritarian parenting style, parents seek to control their children's behaviour and attitudes under strict rules of conduct. These parents prioritize obedience to authority and often resort to punitive measures when their children deviate from expected behaviours. They typically do not engage in discussions about standards with their children (Baumrind, 1991). Authoritarian parents are generally more detached, controlling, and less warm than their counterparts, leading to children who may exhibit feelings of discontent, withdrawal, and distrust (Dembo, 1994). This style emphasizes conformity and compliance, as authoritarian parents expect their children to follow orders without question. They tend to operate their households in a manner akin to a military environment, adhering to the principle of "obey before complain" (Okorofor & Njoku, 2012). According to Holmbeck, Paikoff, and Brooks-Gunn (1995), punishment serves as the primary mechanism for enforcing authority within authoritarian households. When a child disobeys or challenges parental directives, they may face punitive measures designed to inflict discomfort, such as physical punishment, verbal reprimands, or the removal of privileges, along with additional chores (Holmbeck, Paikoff & Brooks-Gunn, 1995: 93-94). This approach tends not to cultivate responsibility or self-regulation in children; rather, it often fosters resentment, a desire for revenge, or withdrawal (Okorofor & Njoku, 2012).



An overview of African parenting pattern

Parenting occurs within a collectivist framework that emphasizes kinship and community networks in many traditional African communities (Amos, 2013; Bray & Dawes, 2016; Brudevold Newman et al., 2018; Degbey, 2012; Sodi et al., 2020). In this context, a child's paternal uncles are regarded as father figures, and the wives of these uncles are seen as mother figures (Houzel, 1999, in Sodi et al., 2020). Thus, while children recognize their biological parents, they also acknowledge numerous adults within their extended family as social parents who fulfil parental roles (Sodi et al., 2020). Traditional settings are characterized by a communal system that fosters strong bonds and connections among community members. Central to this structure is the concept of extended families and collective responsibility. Responsibilities are distributed among various community members, including the duty to oversee children's discipline (Duuki, 2023). Each individual holds the primary responsibility to ensure the moral integrity of society, particularly concerning children (Muzingili & Chikoko, 2019). Traditional African disciplinary methods employ both rewards and punishments; children who exhibit good behaviour are rewarded by the family and community, while those who defy parental authority face consequences (Duuki, 2023).

In a typical traditional African context, there exists a clear delineation of roles and responsibilities among community members, including children. Children are expected to engage in work that facilitates the transfer of knowledge and skills from older generations to younger ones. Much of the learning in African societies is driven by the necessity to meet communal needs, whether through group or individual training. This approach promotes cooperation and collaboration among community members, enhancing the mastery of knowledge and skills before passing them on to future generations (Duuki, 2023). Children are held to specific standards of behaviour, with parental authority being paramount. Parents' words often serve as law, and obedience to parents and elders is strongly encouraged. There is little tolerance for dissent, as children are expected to heed the wise counsel of their parents and elders, regarded as superior figures. Parental control extends beyond mere authority, encompassing decisions regarding children's social associations, activities, and even marriage partners. Consequently, children are expected to comply without question. With this understanding, we can now contextualize the concept of parenting or child-rearing within this framework.

Traditional Igbo parenting style or child-rearing pattern.

The Igbo people of Nigeria predominantly reside in five states: Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo. However, they are highly mobile,



found throughout Nigeria and across the globe (Okoye, 2022). Traditionally, the Igbo practiced their indigenous religion, centered on the belief in a Supreme God alongside various lesser deities serving as messengers. While many Igbo have since converted to Christianity, a small number still adhere to their traditional beliefs. Historically, Igbo society was agrarian, fostering a cultural norm in which men often married multiple wives to secure a labour force for farming. A man's economic status was frequently assessed based on the number of wives and children he had, as well as the size of his barn. The Igbo social structure is patrilineal, with inheritance traced through the father's lineage. Community and interpersonal relationships hold significant value, with extended family members often living in close proximity.

Marriage is considered essential for all adult men and women, with exceptions made for those who are intellectually disabled, chronically ill, or physically challenged. The primary aim of marriage in Igbo culture is procreation, reflecting a strong belief that a society without successors risks extinction. Consequently, childlessness is regarded as one of the gravest misfortunes an Igbo individual can experience. The Igbo place considerable importance on instilling good moral values in their children, preparing them to become beneficial members of society. This sentiment is encapsulated in the Igbo proverb, "A muta amaghi ihe na ume omumu bu otu," which translates to "Having an irresponsible child is as good as being childless" (p. 3). Such beliefs drive the Igbo to invest significant energy and resources into the upbringing of their children (Okoye, 2022).

Child rearing, referred to as 'izu nwa' in Igbo culture, encompasses the nurturing and education of a child from infancy to adulthood, ensuring they develop into responsible members of society. This process is vital for the continuity of any community, as children represent its future. The family serves as the primary foundation for child rearing, with parents playing a crucial role in guiding their children to become healthy and responsible adults (Okoye, 2022). An unruly child is often labelled "Nwa na enweghi Mzuzu," meaning "a child that has no training." As such, child-rearing is considered a significant responsibility, demanding considerable effort to nurture an infant and guarantee its survival (Okoye, 2022).

The cultural context in which a child is raised greatly influences their development. In Igboland, child-rearing is a collective effort involving not just parents, but also siblings, peers, and elders, all contributing to various stages of the child's growth. The arrival of a new child is a joyous event for parents, relatives, and the entire community. As noted by Nnokwe (2009, in Mgbemena & Muonwe, 2021), "the rites of childhood introduce the child



to the community" (p. 239). This communal belief underscores the expectation that children will mature physically, socially, mentally, and religiously (Okoye, 2022).

In Igbo culture, the notion of communal ownership of a child is significant, as illustrated by the saying "nwa bu nwa ora," meaning "a child belongs to all" (Mgbemena & Muonwe, 2021, p. 240). Supporting this perspective, Mbiti (1982, in Mgbemena & Muonwe, 2021) states that "a woman suckling a child may be called upon to suckle someone else's child" (p. 240). Additionally, Ogbalu (2006, in Mgbemena & Muonwe, 2021) emphasizes that "the caring and training of a child is everybody's responsibility, and every person is expected to correct a child, whether related or not" (p. 240). The training children receive in Igboland is designed to ensure their moral, physical, social, emotional, and legal development. According to Isidienu (2014, in Mgbemena & Muonwe, 2021), parents play a critical role in teaching children proper behaviour and socialization, which are essential for a fulfilling life. Okoye (2022) provides a comprehensive insight into the meticulous nature of child-rearing in Igboland, highlighting the collective efforts involved in this important cultural practice, thus:

Child rearing begins from the womb and ends after the rites of passage into adulthood for both males and female. After the rite of passage which is the transition ritual into adulthood, the young men can be independent and marry while the women marry and live with their husbands. Child rearing begins in the womb. That is, the expectant mother starts nurturing and training her child right in the womb by eating the right food and tapping the baby when it kicks too hard or oftentimes turns in a manner that makes the mother uncomfortable. The tapping makes the baby change its position or stop kicking as the case may be. There are some foods pregnant women are told to avoid for the sake of the child's health, proper development, and formation of desirable physical features. For instance, pregnant women are advised not to eat snails because it is believed that eating snails makes the baby drool like a snail after birth; they are also told to avoid ogbono soup which has a mucilaginous texture similar to okra soup because it is believed to make the child bald; they are equally advised not to eat nchi, the grasscutter (an animal) to avoid prolonged labour just like the grasscutter (p.6).

After childbirth, a new mother is typically supported by her mother or another close female relative for approximately one month to assist her in



caring for the newborn. This practice, known as omugwo in Igbo culture, is essential for helping the new mother adapt to her role. During this period, she learns vital skills such as holding, bathing, exercising, and feeding the newborn. According to Okoye (2022), a 63-year-old informant highlighted the importance of gently exercising the baby by tossing them lightly into the air and stretching their limbs. This practice helps the baby build resilience, making them less fearful of accidental falls.

In addition to physical care, the new mother receives dietary guidance aimed at promoting lactation and ensuring the baby's health. For example, she is encouraged to consume hot fluids, palm wine, bitter leaf soup, and ofe nsala (a type of white soup), while avoiding foods like ogbono soup and egusi soup for three months postpartum. This is based on the belief that a nursing mother's diet can directly impact the baby's digestive health, potentially leading to issues like frequent stooling (Okoye, 2022).

Traditionally, newborns were given water shortly after birth or within a day or two. Some mothers would rub a small amount of soup into the child's mouth when the baby showed interest in food by moving their mouth during mealtime. This practice aimed to familiarize the child with food flavours, easing the transition to solid foods later. Okoye (2022) notes that neglecting this could lead to the child rejecting food when weaning begins, creating challenges for both the child and the mother. Historically, infants were primarily nourished with breast milk, supplemented with water, plantain pudding, and corn pudding (agidi jollof). Snacks included fish, roasted corn, fruits, pears, palm kernels, and groundnuts. Around four months old, some mothers would introduce foods like mashed yams mixed with oil and salt, along with breadfruit (ukwa), to complement breast milk (Okoye, 2022). This comprehensive approach to infant feeding reflects the deep cultural understanding of child development within Igbo society. According to Okoye (2022):

The new mother breastfed her baby for 1-3 years and will not conceive another child until her baby is about three years old. This is to ensure that the baby is properly taken care of. The polygamy system of men marrying more than one wife was helpful. The man could always visit any of his other wives to satisfy his sexual needs when one of the wives was nurturing a baby. Also, in the past, most women do not conceive when they are breastfeeding their baby. Women who breastfeed their children experience a longer period of amenorrhea and infertility after delivery than do those women who do not breastfeed. He added that the length of postpartum amenorrhea is quite variable, and depends on several factors, such



as maternal age and parity, and the duration and frequency of breastfeeding. When the child is about three months old, the mother teaches the child how to sit. She supports the child by sitting behind him/her to arrest a fall in case the child falls (p.7).

After mastering sitting, the child progresses to crawling, standing, walking, and eventually running. In Igbo culture, child-rearing is a communal effort, with extended family and community members actively participating in the upbringing of children. For instance, when a child is around 3 to 4 months old, the mother often resumes her daily activities, such as farming or trading, leaving the baby in the care of her mother-in-law, co-wives, relatives, or neighbours. It is important to note that when children fall ill, they are typically treated with herbal mixtures and other traditional remedies (Okoye, 2022). Teaching children how to perform daily tasks is a crucial aspect of child-rearing. Okoye (2010) cites a 50-year-old informant who emphasized that parents should start sending their children on errands as soon as they understand the language. This early engagement helps children develop their senses and fosters a sense of responsibility. Children primarily learn through observation, although they are also instructed on specific tasks by their parents or relatives. As they grow older, children are assigned increasingly complex responsibilities, such as sweeping, cooking, fetching water, collecting firewood, and gathering fodder for domestic animals. Tasks are often assigned based on gender; for example, boys typically work on farms and gather firewood, while girls are responsible for fetching water, cooking, and weeding. It is generally frowned upon for boys to engage in cooking or participate in activities traditionally associated with women.

Parents begin assigning tasks at an early age to familiarize children with household responsibilities, instilling a sense of accountability. Failure to complete assigned chores can result in various forms of punishment, including scolding, physical discipline, or the denial of privileges (Okoye, 2022). Completing household tasks equips children with independence and adaptability as they grow, while the denial of certain privileges serves both as punishment and a means of teaching self-control. For instance, children may be denied eggs to prevent overindulgence, with the belief that such restrictions help them manage their cravings.

Play is also an integral part of childhood in Igbo culture. Children engage in activities such as running in the rain, playing with sand, singing, dancing, and visiting one another. Disciplining children is taken seriously, and older siblings are expected to serve as role models for their younger counterparts. As Okoye (2022) quotes Mrs Okoli, a 43-year-old informant:



“It is important to successfully train the first child well; others will fall in line, but if the first child becomes unruly, it is usually difficult to successfully train the siblings.” This reflects the understanding that children often learn by imitation, with younger siblings frequently looking up to their older ones. To instil essential Igbo values such as honesty, respect for elders, hard work, and contentment, parents utilize folktales, riddles, and stories that convey these moral lessons. These narratives are often shared after dinner or during moonlight gatherings. Discussions about sensitive topics like sex education are typically avoided by parents, who may send their children to older relatives for guidance. Importantly, parents model the behaviour they wish to impart; children observe their actions closely to determine whether they align with the teachings and values communicated by their parents (Okoye, 2022).

The Igbo culture places significant importance on disciplining children, emphasizing that this should be done lovingly and with consideration for the child's age and the nature of the offence (Okoye, 2022). This principle is encapsulated in the saying, “Enwere ofu aka tie nwata ihe, e nwere nke ozo guguo ya,” which translates to, “When you beat a child with one hand, you pacify the child with the other hand” (p. 9). This expression conveys that discipline should be accompanied by love, not bitterness. Thus, when a child is disciplined for misbehaviour, it is customary for the adult to comfort and advise the child afterwards, emphasizing the importance of correcting rather than punishing. In the Igbo belief system, the responsibility for disciplining a child is shared among family members and the community. When a child misbehaves, anyone who witnesses the behaviour is expected to intervene, correct the child, and report the incident to the parents for further reinforcement of discipline. This communal approach is captured in the adage, “Nwa bu nwa oha, ofu onye anaghi azu nwa,” meaning “A child belongs to all; one person does not train a child” (p. 9). This perspective underscores the belief that the collective effort of the family and community is essential for raising responsible adults who will contribute positively to society. Conversely, an irresponsible child can become a liability to both their family and community (Okoye, 2022).

Historically, in traditional Igbo society, mothers bore a disproportionate responsibility for their children's behaviour. This is reflected in the saying, “Nwa di nma, oyie nna, ojoo njo, oyie nne,” meaning “When a child is good, he/she takes after the father; but when a child is bad, he resembles the mother” (Okoye, 2022, p. 9). This adage illustrates the perception that a mother's influence is more closely scrutinized when a child exhibits negative behaviour. In the past, parents exercised strict control over their children, dictating their choices regarding friendships and marriage



partners, with children typically conforming to their parents' wishes. Given the absence of technology, this model of authority functioned effectively, as parents maintained a certain distance from their children and were not expected to engage in open discussions about their lives. Consequently, traditional Igbo parenting often oscillated between authoritarian and authoritative styles but rarely ventured into permissive parenting. However, with the emergence of Generation Z, significant changes have occurred in parenting dynamics. A considerable shift has taken place, creating a noticeable gap in traditional parenting practices. This evolving landscape will be further explored in the subsequent section of this paper.

Challenges of Parenting in a Gen Z era

The "Digital Natives," or Generation Z, represent a cohort born into an era of rapid technological advancement. Unlike earlier generations, this group does not rely on traditional mediums such as television. Instead, their world revolves around the internet, which serves as the primary source of information, communication, and entertainment. Generation Z prefers to conduct virtually every activity online—from reading e-books, shopping, and studying to ordering tickets—because they value convenience and efficiency over physically going to bookstores, markets, or other places. Their online presence is highly concentrated on social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok, where they frequently engage in multitasking, such as browsing the web while listening to music (Wahyuni et al., 2023).

While the advance of science and technology in the 21st century has brought numerous benefits, it has also introduced significant challenges to parenting, especially within traditional African settings. In the Igbo traditional context, the authoritative parenting model, which once served as a strong foundation for raising children, has started to erode due to the rise of Generation Z. Unlike previous generations, who were generally more compliant with parental authority, respected elders (even non-relatives), and were less likely to hold conflicting opinions, Generation Z displays a distinct shift in behaviour and worldview. These digital natives are far more independent, opinionated, and technologically savvy, which complicates the parenting process in profound ways.

The key challenge for modern African parents, particularly in the Igbo context, is grappling with Generation Z's mastery of technology. From an early age, members of this generation are exposed to and immersed in the digital world, and this exposure often undermines parental authority and oversight. Technologies like cell phones, computers, and the internet dominate the lives of Gen Z, making it difficult for parents to maintain



control or closely monitor their children's activities. Unlike past generations, where it was easier for parents to observe their children's interactions, the internet offers an opaque world where parents may struggle to track their children's behaviour or interactions, especially if the parents themselves are not technologically adept. Social media, while beneficial in many ways, presents its own set of challenges. Its negative influence cannot be dismissed, and parents now face the difficult task of figuring out how to discipline and guide their children in an era where social media often shapes their views and behaviours. Many parents find themselves at a disadvantage when trying to protect their children from harmful online content or relationships, as the digital proficiency of Gen Z allows them to evade parental control with relative ease. Consequently, parenting in this digital age has become an increasingly complex endeavour, demanding new strategies for addressing these unprecedented challenges.

Another significant challenge of parenting in the Gen Z era is the infiltration of media culture into the home. With both children and parents increasingly engrossed in new technologies, family bonds are weakening. Meaningful conversations between parents and their children have become rare, and children often retreat into their virtual worlds, interacting more with strangers on social media than with those in their immediate environment. The absence of parental guidance in their use of the internet further compounds the problem, as children are left to explore online spaces without supervision. This immersion in the digital realm diminishes their interpersonal skills, making it difficult for them to engage in real-life conversations and interactions outside of social media platforms.

Another pressing issue is the shift in moral values. The influence of modern societal and cultural norms has significantly transformed Generation Z's worldview compared to previous generations. With unrestricted access to social media, many children are exposed to habits and behaviours that challenge traditional values, including indecency, materialism, disrespectful speech, and disregard for elders. These negative traits often seep into the home, leaving parents puzzled as to where their children picked up such behaviours. In earlier generations, there was a stronger awareness of personal morality and a deeper respect for authority. Before engaging in questionable behaviours, individuals would consider the loyalty they owed to their families and the potential repercussions of defying family authority. Today, however, the sense of personal decency and the moral conscience that once guided decisions have eroded significantly.



Generation Z's inclination toward self-expression, fearlessness, and defiance of authority makes it difficult for parents to assert their traditional roles in the household. In some cases, it becomes unclear who truly runs the home—parents or children. The unpredictability of the modern world offers little assistance to parents striving to raise responsible children. As authoritative parenting declines and permissive parenting takes root, it becomes increasingly challenging for parents to regulate the very freedoms they afford their children. Many African parents, for example, have moved away from physical punishment as a disciplinary measure, which Gen Z may interpret as parental weakness. This perceived leniency can lead to open defiance, as children push the boundaries of authority in the home.

Furthermore, this defiance extends beyond the family unit, as Generation Z tends to exhibit disrespect for non-parental figures as well. The rationale is simple: if they can disobey their parents, why should they respect anyone else? This attitude is increasingly evident in schools, where students frequently challenge teachers and other authority figures. The rise in reports of students disobeying educators and other forms of established authority is a testament to this growing issue. In this evolving social context, parents are left grappling with the complexities of raising children in an era where traditional structures of authority are constantly challenged, and the influence of the digital world reshapes both behaviour and values.

Finally, globalization has further complicated parenting in the Gen Z era. While globalization has brought numerous benefits, such as advanced technologies and access to a broader global perspective, it has also posed unique challenges for parents. With the world becoming a global village, parents and children in Africa are increasingly exposed to diverse ideas, values, and lifestyles from other parts of the world. This exposure has contributed to a shift in children's behaviours, making them bolder and more expressive in ways that differ from previous generations. According to Okoye (2022), this phenomenon has also influenced elite and middle-class parents, prompting them to become more engaged in their children's lives. Many parents now check their children's food flasks, examine their bodies for injuries, and ask questions when they notice something unusual. They review their children's schoolwork and inquire about their day, making a conscious effort to be involved in their academic and personal lives. Mothers, in particular, ensure that their children complete their homework, go to bed at the right time, and maintain healthy routines. These parents emphasize the importance of keeping good company, avoiding negative influences, and discussing their children's challenges openly. Some parents even talk to their children about sex, encouraging open communication and fostering trust by allowing children to ask questions



without fear of judgment.

However, the pressures of modern life, particularly economic challenges, have resulted in many mothers becoming career women. Balancing career demands with the need for hands-on parenting has become a complex task. This shift has significantly impacted parenting dynamics, as more parents rely on nannies or daycare centre to care for their children while they work. In some cases, the quality of care provided by nannies has negatively affected children's behaviour, especially when nannies are not adequately equipped to provide proper guidance. As Okoye (2022) laments, this reliance on external caregivers can undermine the moral and emotional development of children, as they may not receive the same level of discipline, attention, or values that parents typically provide. In his words:

Indeed, most modern Igbo parents have no time to teach their children the basic African culture and values especially the sacredness of life. As a result, suicide and other social vices have increased among youths. In the African traditional society, it was unheard of and abominable for someone to take his/her life. In the contemporary time, most parents' values system have changed, they value academic achievement more than good behaviour unlike in the traditional Igbo society where raising children with good behaviour was a priority (p.12)

A child, as a beginner in life, requires consistent parental control and guidance to navigate their formative years successfully. Parental care, support, and direction are critical in equipping the child with the knowledge and social skills needed to face the challenges of adolescence and adulthood. Parents play a central role in shaping their child's moral, psychological, and emotional well-being, contributing to the development of a well-rounded personality. Unfortunately, the absence of sufficient parental involvement has exacerbated the growing value crisis in society, as some parents fail to impart essential values to their children (Okorofor & Njoku, 2022).

In recent times, many parents have shifted their focus almost exclusively toward their children's academic success. Children are often enrolled in school as early as one year old, with daily schedules packed with extra lessons after school. On school days, they leave home early and return late, fatigued from the long hours. Even during holidays, after a brief break, they are sent for holiday lessons. This practice reflects an increasing trend where parents delegate much of their child's upbringing to teachers, viewing school as a means to manage their children's time. While these children



may achieve academic excellence, they frequently lack the character development that comes from parental guidance and involvement.

In addition to this, some modern Igbo parents refrain from involving their children in household chores or errands, instead hiring nannies, housemaids, or houseboys to perform these tasks (Okoye, 2022). This approach deprives children of opportunities to learn responsibility, independence, and essential life skills, which are important for personal growth. These developments pose significant challenges to parental authority and control, particularly in the context of parenting Generation Z or the digital natives in 21st-century Africa. As parents focus on academics at the expense of character-building and life skills, and with increasing reliance on external caregivers, maintaining authority in the family unit has become more difficult. The rise of permissive parenting, coupled with the pervasive influence of technology, has further eroded the traditional structure of parental control, making it harder for parents to foster holistic development in their children.

Evaluation and Conclusion.

Our study thus far reveals that Generation Z presents considerable challenges for parenting, particularly in Africa, with a special focus on the Igbo people. Parenting this generation is far from straightforward. The emergence of Gen Z has significantly altered traditional parenting practices, disrupting the way things were done in earlier generations. Historically, Igbo parenting was a holistic process that, though often controlling, generally produced responsible individuals. However, this approach was not without its flaws. In some cases, it left psychological scars on children raised within such systems.

Parents in previous generations could be described as overbearing, exerting absolute control over many aspects of their children's lives. These parents often made all the decisions, leaving little room for children to learn from their own mistakes. As a result, children were conditioned to rely heavily on parental guidance, believing they could not act without direction. This lack of autonomy had lasting effects, as these children often grew up with diminished confidence in their judgment and decision-making abilities. In adulthood, they might struggle to make independent choices, limiting their potential and achievements. In extreme cases, the oppressive nature of such upbringing could foster rebellion, both within the home and in school settings (Okorofofor & Njoku, 2012). Thus, while the traditional Igbo parenting style was effective in instilling responsibility, it also risked stifling personal growth and creating long-term psychological challenges for some children.



With the rise of Generation Z, traditional parental authority and control have significantly diminished. Unlike previous generations, Gen Z is known for its independence, expressiveness, and boldness. This assertiveness often compels parents to adopt a more relaxed approach, leading to the emergence of both democratic and permissive parenting styles. In these models, parents are more inclined to listen to their children's opinions, fostering a closer bond and a friendship-like relationship with them. This openness encourages children to be more forthcoming and willing to share their thoughts. However, while these styles of parenting may promote stronger emotional connections between parents and children, they also carry the risk of overindulgence and unchecked freedom. As a result, some children may abuse the leniency extended to them, leading to potential disciplinary challenges. Okorofo and Njoku (2012) capture this dynamic concisely, stating:

The children to whom everything is given belong to the category that is suffering from overindulgence. If parents deny these children's wishes, they throw temper tantrums and try to manipulate their parents to give in through provocative behaviour (breaking things, crying continuously and even threatening to run away). Some children often measure their self-worth by the number of things they are getting. They associate getting with being loved and important. These children get so used to “getting” to the extent that they may feel threatened in the relationship when parents deny them something. They are the “give me” children, who always ask: “What did you bring for me?”, or they say “Buy me sweets, biscuits or toys”. Parents must, from infancy dictate what their children can have, when how, and in what quantity. This must be done rationally and modestly so as not to pamper children into the attribute of overindulgence (p.28).

Unlike previous generations, Generation Z—or the digital natives—possess a high level of technological proficiency, which enables them to evade parental control in various aspects of their lives. This evasion extends to whom they associate with, the content they consume, and how they interact with others online. Consequently, it becomes increasingly difficult for parents to monitor and regulate their children's behaviour, which may result in children developing anti-social tendencies seemingly out of nowhere. Parents may find themselves shocked by their children's sudden adoption of undesirable habits, often picked up from social media platforms like TikTok or Facebook, where explicit content—ranging from nudity to brazen disrespect and inappropriate language—circulates freely.



One major challenge is that some children use different usernames, rendering them virtually untraceable by their parents or other family members who could otherwise exercise a degree of oversight. This anonymity allows them to operate in a virtual world beyond parental reach, leading to behaviours that may remain undetected. Worse still, when confronted by authority figures outside their family, the usual retort is, “Are you my father?”—a stark reflection of how individualism, influenced by modern culture, undermines the communitarian approach to parenting traditionally seen in African, and particularly Igbo, society. This erosion of collective parenting, where the responsibility for raising children was shared by the community, poses a significant threat to parental authority and control. The shift from communal supervision to individual autonomy, driven by technology and modern attitudes, presents a formidable challenge for parents who must now navigate these complex dynamics while trying to guide and influence their children.

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