

**DYNAMICS OR APPROACHES OF TEACHING AND LEARNING IN EARLY
CHILDHOOD EDUCATION**

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ABSTRACT

Learning for a child takes place in many ways and the curriculum accords equal importance to what a child learns and the process by which he or she learns it. The curriculum recognises that the child should be an active agent in his or her own learning and that the child's existing knowledge and environment experience should be the starting point for new knowledge. The school ethos, which includes the teacher and his or her relationship with the child, is viewed as being of paramount importance in the learning process and "it is the quality of teaching more than any thing else that determines the success of the child's learning and development in school. This study hereby examines the dynamics or approaches of teaching and learning in early childhood education in Nigeria.

Key words: Language, mother tongue, childhood education, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

According to Wolff and Ekkehard (2000), language develops slowly and gradually for children in schools, perhaps because these children are rewarded less for using it and more rapidly at home, probably because of their greater association with adults. Macdonald (2002) argue that learning is faster for the children of more educated parents. In children, much early sound takes the form of monologues that accompany action which helps to control behaviour (Johnston, 2006). According to Riojas-Cortez (2001), this is most common at the ages between two and four. A great deal of speech when others are present is 'egocentric' because the child does not put his/herself in the position of the listener, or worry too much about whether the message is being received. However, at some point middle childhood speech becomes more 'sociocentric'-the child addresses his/her hearer, considers his/her point of view and also tries to influence him/her, or actually exchange ideas with him/her (Niparko, Tobey, Thal, Eisenberg, Wang, Quittner, & CDaCI Investigative Team, 2010).

NPE (2013) further articulates that basic education in Nigeria is provided to children between the ages of 0 to 15 years old and this is divided into four sections. The first section is 0-4 early child care development and education, and these is principally in the hands of individual providers, communities, and social development services. This is provided in day-cares and crèches and is not considered part of the formal education system because there is no official curriculum or guideline concerning what is to be done at this level of the educational ladder. The second section spans 5-6 years and this is referred to as pre-primary. The pre-primary which is considered part of the formal education has formal guidelines provided by the Federal government for education. The third section is primary education which spans over a six years period, running from 7-12 years approximately. The last section is the junior secondary which runs for three years from 13 to 15. However, for purposes of harmonisation, monitoring and

policy coordination the Federal Government of Nigeria instituted the Universal Basic Education (UBE) to guide the provision of basic education both formal and informal.

Statement of the Problem

In Nigeria like elsewhere in the world, policy has always failed to translate to practice and in cases where it has been translated to practice, it is never the way it was planned. As already pointed out, the federal government has done little or nothing to keep its own part of the bargain, as such there are still a lot of challenges with the provision of early childhood education in Nigeria. This is one of the reasons for this study, especially since it seeks to explore the dynamics of learning amongst pre-primary learners in one of the districts in Nigeria. To better understand this, it is vital to look at the dynamics or approaches of teaching and learning in early childhood education.

Literature Review

Language as a tool of communication and instruction

Language is an important factor that promotes children's learning at the formal and informal settings. Araromi (2005) opine that language is the medium of communication, however, without it human beings would have difficulty to exist. According to Tannenbaum and Berkovich (2005), language is important to all manners of transmission of knowledge, values and socialisation processes. From the Ejieh's (2004) perspective, a language is an indispensable tool in the education of the child. In the same vein, Zhang and Alex (1995) maintain that language acquisition is a natural process for children that occur without effort, although the ability to communicate increases with age, this does not mean that such growth will lead to perfection. Language is central to learning which develops the ability of reading, writing and playing, this is linked to linguistic achievement in school (International Baccalaureate Organisation, 2008).

Mother tongue as the language of learning

According to UNESCO (2008), the medium of instruction and knowledge of language is very important to learning. UNESCO (2008) opine that, to enhance quality in learners' learning, the value of mother tongue instruction in early childhood and primary 1 to 3 classes of primary school must be encouraged. In addition, UNESCO (2008) encourage the protection of children's home or indigenous languages and the preservation of the linguistic diversity asserting that it needs serious efforts to make sure that pre-primary learners should be educated in their mother tongue. The above assertion was supported by Ball (2010) who report that the issues of language acquisition and the goal of Education for All (EFA) call for urgent attention to encourage the provision of quality education in their home language for learners.

In 2009, the former Oyo State Commissioner for Education, Youth and Sports in Nigeria delivered a speech in which he stated that using the mother tongue as a medium of instruction in pre-primary and primary schools was based on the fact that learners understand better when they are taught and learnt in their local languages, and they easily use the experience gained from the language to respond to their classroom issues.

Internationally, in Nepal, Nepali is a lingua franca (Khatai, 2011). This language was given the status of an official language, therefore, Nepali (as mother tongue) is useful in translating English concepts quickly and easily by the teacher to the learners in class for effective understanding (Khatai, 2011). Speaking in the same vein, Khanal (2004) had earlier stated that that moderate and judicious use of the mother tongue (Nepali) promotes the learning and

teaching of the target language. According to Alidou, Boly, Brock-Utne, Diallo, Heugh and Wolff (2006), early education in home languages is important and can be lasting and valuable when it is adopted as a language of instruction for children between the ages of two and eight years in pre-primary and primary education. Additionally, Alidou, et al (2006) maintain that reading and writing in the mother tongue should not only be narrating of stories to the children in the first three years of school. Rather, it should be developed to the level that written texts and oral language used for learning and teaching mathematics, science, history and geography in the primary school.

A study carried out by Kocakulah, Ustunluoglu and Kocakulah (2005) in Turkey indicate that learners who were taught “Energy” in a second language, could not understand effectively in class as those in the Turkish language. This was based on the fact that the learners did not understand the foreign language very well and it also was believed that learners would have performed effectively if they were taught in their mother tongue. Furthermore, learning through the mother tongue provides an easy stepping stone for the transition from home to school. In a study conducted by Mathooko (2009), the scholar posits that an indigenous medium is educationally preferable because it connects teaching with the home lives of the children. From all indications, it must be founded on cognitive ideas formed during the learners’ preschool experiences (Mathooko, 2009). Scholars such as Wilson and Kamana (2001), Wilson, Kamana and Rawlins (2006), Heugh (2008), Tembe and Norton (2008) argues that learning in a language different from the mother tongue of the learners puts them under intellectual pressure, this is because they have to learn new concepts in the second language. This may create a difficult situation whereby the learners have to cope with the problems that emerge from the second language used as a medium of instruction in schools (Skutnabb-Kangas & Dunbar, 2010). Additionally, Lightbown (2008) stressed that becoming completely fluent in English language is not, as many have claimed, ‘easy as pie,’ rather, takes several years. Thus, it is a mistake to assume that to allow day care or preschool children to learn in a second language is appropriate to prepare the children for academic success.

In another vein, a study conducted in Philippines, learners in grade 1 to 3 in the Lubuagan public schools were taught in their home language. Findings indicated that teachers did not only record high levels of participation among the learners, and they themselves started to use the home language orally which promote children’s friendly learning environment in the schools. Similarly, in a study conducted in Turkey by Kabadayi (2005), it was discussed that the mother tongue enhances continuity in the child’s learning process and maximises his intellectual development. In Mali, where ‘pedagogies convergente bilingual education program’ was operational since 1987, there were high achievement in language and mathematics in bilingual schools compared to monolingual schools (UNESCO, 2008).

Culturally, aside from preserving the cultural heritage of the people, it was reported by Kan and Kohnert (2005) mother tongue education facilitates smooth transition from the children’s home to school, inculcates permanent literacy in the learners, it prepares the learners to be ready for learning and gives the learners the opportunity to transfer learning effectively. Alidou and Mallam (2004) observes that the continued dominance of English at the pre-primary and primary schools do impede learning more so as the majority of the learners enrolling into the pre-primary and primary schools are from various mother tongue homes and neighbourhoods.

The dynamics or approaches of learning in early childhood education/pre-primary school

Learning and teaching is a complicated. Jordan, Carlile and Stack (2008) argues that learning is a complicated science with different approaches. Learning is therefore the process of acquiring

new information and expanding existing schemata for development purposes. These scholars continue that learning has several general principles which makes it effective. Bowman (1993, p. 120) articulate that “learning is primarily a social activity and participation in the social life of the school is central for learning to occur”. She continues that teachers principally determine or orchestrate what is learnt and how what is learnt is learnt. The dynamics or approaches of learning among children are therefore largely depended on the teachers, what these teachers teach and how they facilitate what they are teaching. Jordan et al. (2008) maintain that there are several approaches to learning in the pre-primary or early childhood education (as it is called in a majority of literature in the field as already pointed out in chapter two of dissertation) and this is dependent on the resources available, and the quality of teachers facilitating the learning. Since dynamics refer to the forces which stimulate growth or change within a particular entity (Abrahamson & Sánchez-García, 2016). The dynamics of learning is how the process stimulates or enhances learning. These processes are therefore in line with the approaches of learning since they both communicate how learning takes place and how such learning is enhanced.

Polychroni, Koukoura, and Anagnostou (2006), Hyson (2008) and Li-Grining, Votruba-Drzal, Maldonado-Carreño, and Haas (2010) argue that children are different and have different abilities and these abilities inform the way they learn and react to whatever they come across. Jordan et al. (2008) and Li-Grining et al. (2010) further argue that research has shown that 5 percent of children learn effectively through lecture or silencing to the teacher directly. Another 10 percent of children learn better by reading from books and other materials. Even though they sit in classes and listen to the teacher and engage in several activities, they learn better by reading. Furthermore, 15 percent of the children are visual learners or learn through visual arts (Li-Grining, et al, 2010). This means that they are more photographic in their memory and pictures make more sense to them. Another 30 percent of children learn better through demonstrations. When the teacher demonstrates in the classroom their understanding is heighten. Adding to this, another 50 percent learn better through small group engagements or work. Once they become participants in group endeavours whatever they might be doing, the knowledge acquired or constructed from such processes is enhanced. A great percentage of children or pupils, about 75 percent to be exact learn better through experimental work. Experimenting becomes an amazing tool or approach to construct knowledge and because it is constructed out of excitement and experience, the children own their knowledge and keep it. But a greater percentage of children, 90 percent to be precise learn more through peer tutoring. These children by engaging in education activities with their peers learn more rather than engagements with the teacher. The idea of peer tutoring which was development strong from Vygotsky’s “zone of proximal development” informs the dynamics or many approaches to teaching and learning in early childhood education today. Hannan (1996, p.20) an expert in child learning builds on Vygotsky’s “zone of proximal development” and recommends a “third/third/third” approach child learning cultured or founded from the zone of proximal development, with children “spending a third of proximal learning time in friendship pairings/groupings, a third in single gender non-friendship pairings and a third in mixed gender pairings, so that within one half term everyone works with everyone else.” This works better with activity based learning as well as other learning approaches which encourages participative approaches to learning or learning which stimulates development both at the individual level and at the classroom level.

From the above, it is clear that there are many individuals learning styles and children depending on their context, with some learners being dominant or having abilities in more than one particular style. These dynamics of learning be it visual or spatial, auditory or kinaesthetic all have different things to offer or help the child to develop effectively in different areas.

Kinaesthetic learners or children are kinaesthetically oriented learn best when they are physically engaged either by touching, feeling, or doing. Visual learners or those who learn more by seeing information or creating mental pictures of what is being said learning more in spaces with enhanced resources, while auditory learners prefer to hear information because their auditory senses are more heightened. These learning dynamics would influence the way teaching and learning unfolds in the classroom.

Gardner (2011) and Gardner (2015) argue that the theory of multiple intelligences is basically a psychological and educational theory which argues that different kinds of intelligences exist amongst human beings. Gardner argues that children have varying levels of abilities or intelligences which makes every child in the classroom unique and important. Gardner's theory which came to the lime light 1983 in the book; *Frames of Mind: The theory of Multiple Intelligences*, which highlighted seven key intelligences or learning styles as he called them. In this work, he defined the first seven intelligences. He added another two in another book published in 1999 titled; *Intelligence Reframed: Multiple Intelligences for the 21 Century*. According to Gardner (1983), these intelligences are: linguistic intelligence, logical-mathematical intelligence, bodily/kinaesthetic intelligence, musical intelligence, inter-personal intelligence, intra-personal intelligence, naturalist intelligence, existential intelligence and spatial intelligence.

Linguistic intelligence

Linguistic intelligence as a learning style or dynamic empowers children to make more sense of the world around them through language or communication. Their linguistic abilities are heightened making them more linguistically inclined to learning. This explains why children some children have been reported to speak as early as between six to nine months (Bertrand, 2007). Learners who learn using this approach use words to interpret and understand the world in which they live and in turn communicate this meaning easily linguistically. Learners find the words to express themselves in ways in which other learners would not.

Logical-mathematical intelligence

Another learning style used by children is the logical-mathematical intelligence, wherein children are more inclined to understand abstract or immaterial relations. Although these concepts don't physically exist in the world, they can easily imagine and document it with their brains. Children who would naturally excel in science, mathematics and technology use this approach as a principal learning style. With this style or dynamic of learning children are good in solving practical problems because they have a strong sense of imagination and can quickly test or implement their ideas in their head or on paper without waiting for a real-life situation to try it out.

Spatial intelligence

Spatial intelligence on the one hand as a learning style or dynamic deals with the ability by learners to process or perceive visual or spatial information easily, and transform this information into other visuals that helps them make more sense of the situation. Some learners find it easier to express themselves better in visuals or pictures rather than words. There are reasons why philosophers would accept the picture of a thing as a definition of such a thing. Children using this learning style find it easy to visually represent their ideas. Other children who use the bodily/kinaesthetic intelligence as their dynamic of learning, use themselves as examples in the learning process. Learners learn better when engaged in role plays, songs, dance, choreographies or any activity that would enable them using their entire body or parts of it in the

teaching and learning process. Children using this dynamic or approach to learning would also excel in hands on projects that involve craft or some form of hand work.

While others use their bodies to make meaning, others who learn better using musical intelligence as a learning style understand, create and communicate meaning or knowledge made out of sound. Learners prefer to memorise lessons into songs and easily lock on melodies and rhythms faster than numbers, pictures or words. In early childhood education, where a lot of singing and repetition is done, this becomes vital.

Inter-personal intelligence

Another learning style used by children in early childhood education is inter-personal intelligence. This kind of intelligence empowers children to understand and make distinctions about feelings, expressions and intentions of others. To Gardner (1983), this learning style focuses on temperaments, mannerisms, moods, motivations and intentions that manifest itself in the class. Since teachers do not only communicate with their voice but also with their mannerisms, there are several children who easily pick and make meaning of signals portrayed by the teachers (Gardner, 2013). On the other hand, intra-personal intelligence is a learning style used by children who learn more by constructing knowledge based on their experiences. Through their experiences children distinguish between their feelings, to build accurate mental models which represent themselves and their ways of life or meaning construction (Gardner, 2013). Children who learn from this approach use their experiences both positive and negative to improve their knowledge base. While some children learn better by using their experiences, some others learn better by using the environment.

Naturalist intelligence

Naturalist intelligence is another style of learning which empower children to make meaning from environmental features. Naturalist intelligence makes sense of whatever the society has to offer which others don't make sense of.

Existential intelligence

The last learning style advocated by Gardner is the existential intelligence. This learning style sees children develop the capacity to reflect or makes meaning of philosophical issues which or other thing which other children would not understand. This is the least developed or used learning style by children especially in the early childhood education.

Informal learning setting

Unlike formal learning environment where learning takes place in an organised, structured and systematic environment, informal learning happens though in an organised and systematic setting, but without policy framework that drive its operation. Most times, informal education is also referred to as traditional education. This is because the 'unseen curricular' used by the parents or members of the community is gotten from the community. According to Sennett (2012), informal learning may be seen as the learning that comes as a part of being involved in youth and community organisations. From all indications, informal learning setting consists of places which are not officially designated for learning and teaching, but it happens unconsciously and children learn in such situations. Dip (1978) says that home is a geographical space in which informal learning take place.

Learning from home

A home is a dwelling place where a child grows up. It is pertinent to say that irrespective of where an individual was given birth to, he/she grows up in a house where his/her parent(s) and other siblings' lives. Therefore, informal learning occurs when parents or any member of the immediate community expose children to certain activities such as story-telling, play, jokes, riddles among others which help them to develop mentally, emotionally and physically (Manolitsis et al., 2009).

Bradley, Corwyn, Burchinal, McAdoo and García Coll (2001) argue that children between the ages of zero and four learn effectively from the parents and other siblings. These scholars are of the view that learning that occur in children is through imitation from adult in the community. In a similar vein, Taylor, Clayton and Rowley (2004) observe that children's cognitive development and educational careers are also influenced by characteristics of the family and home learning environment. Bornstein and Bradley (2008) in their study exploring the nature and variation of early years home learning environments have found high variation between families such as family composition, housing, income, as well as parental educational beliefs and expectations impact the quality of the home learning environment.

Son and Morrison (2010) recently researched on the stability of the home environment as children approach school entry. However, the findings show that the quality of the home environment at age 36 months was highly correlated with the quality of the home environment at age 54 months. Additionally, it was also revealed that home environments are also subject to change and seem to improve as children approach school entry (Son & Morrison, 2010). In addition, Totsika and Sylva (2004) conducted a study using different measures of the home learning environment, the results have shown that it has a considerable influence on young children's cognitive development and educational outcomes. For instance, quality of the home environment as measured by the 'Home Observation for Measurement of the Environment Inventory' has shown positive correlation with outcomes including general cognitive ability and language (Totsika & Sylva, 2004). In addition, Whitehurst and Lonigan (1998) submit that other indicators of the home learning environment associated with better cognitive outcomes are quality of dialogic reading, use of complex language, responsiveness and warmth in interactions and library visits.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the children of today are the leaders of tomorrow, therefore, they should be well groomed cognitively, socially morally and culturally. However, the dynamics that influence the way children learn as highlighted in study makes this achievable. The importance of a solid foundation in education is obvious. Early Childhood education is where the foundation is laid. Poor performance in the other levels of academics can be traced to this foundation level. So a thorough knowledge of what, and how education is been handled at this level is imperative.

Recommendations

1. Effective measures should be ensured in the training of early childhood/pre-primary teachers through adequate scholarships, approving the mounting of such programmes in all Universities, Institutes of Education and College of Education. Moreso, if Nigeria wants to achieve the objectives of education for all, then, there is need for Early Childhood Development to cover children of 0- 3years.

2. There is need for state ministry of education officials to enforce the regulations laid down by the Federal Ministry of Education in regard to the provisions of early Childhood Education. Effective quality monitoring units should be set up by ministries of education and provide with necessary logistic support to ensure that minimum standards are maintained in both public and private preprimary institutions.

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