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Music in Early Childhood Education: A Tool for Language Literacy Development

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Abstract

Music is an essential element in early child language literacy development. However, Caregivers, parents and teachers have placed little emphasis on the use of music during preschool period. This may be often due to lack of understanding of the importance of music in children language literacy development. Thus, this paper explores the roles of music in early childhood language literacy development. Researches on the importance of music in literacy development have also been extensively reviewed in this work. The paper concludes that music is a good technique that enhances language development of the early child. Thus, it is recommended that music should be used by caregivers, parents and teachers in teaching the early child so as to enhance his or her language literacy development.

Keywords: Early childhood Education, Music, Language literacy development.

Introduction

It is a thing of thought, when one begins to think how music is essential in the education of any early child. It is not only that music is essential in education of an early child but an essential element in every child's all-round development. However, the early stage of a child is of great potential for growth and development as pointed out by International Labour Organisation (ILO, 2012). Therefore, essential strategies and techniques should be employed in teaching the early child. When one thinks of techniques to be used, music comes as an essential technique in teaching the early child. Ogurinde (2013) states that music is essential, inseparable and a fundamental part of Africa Cultures. The traditional systems of Nigerian society consider music to be an indispensable part of education and some families were renowned with long traditions of music making. Music participation in class activities prepares a unique opportunity for literacy development. Whether the children are singing, playing or listening, they are directly or indirectly learning.

The classrooms and other learning environments are important to the language literacy development and the future being of children (Bande in Faremi, 2013). Brokle (1971) agrees with the above statement when he said that natural response to the nonverbal communicative character of music contributes

to the emotional, intellectual, physical and social development of the child. The Africans see music as an essential part of their daily activities especially in informal education. Nketia (1974) also states that the African mother sings to her child and introduces him or her to music right from the cradle. Emeka (1994) notes that children in growing up and playing together generally improve their language and number skills by playing musical and rhythmical games while doing household chores or running errands.

Moreover, learning begins before a child first walks into a formal learning environment (ILO, 2012). The Childcare Education Institute explained that babies begin learning language skills before they are born. In the womb, babies learn to recognize familiar voices and respond to various sounds. These days, children learn a lot from what they watch, hear and see. The visual and audio-visual materials for a child should be best captured in songs and rhythms. This is because children learn fast in reciting, singing alongside with movements in play way teaching methods

Early childhood

Early childhood begins from the moment a being is formed in the womb but education of the early childhood begins from the moment the child is brought home from hospital and continues when the child starts to attend play stage of being in Preschool, the early childhood education has started fully. Early Childhood Education is a starting point for a child's development and key foundation of Nigerian Education System (FRN, 2012). This stage is very critical to future development of the child in all aspects of life including literacy development. In agreement to the above assertion, Bendele and Faremi (2013) believe that the early childhood education is a crucial period for the development of the mental functions of children. The development of the child includes all learning area: The language literacy development, the development of skills (psychomotor domain), the acquisition of knowledge (cognitive domain) and the emotional development (affective domain).

Furthermore on the early childhood education, Cherry (2011) explained that the early childhood is a time of remarkable, cognitive, social and emotional development. Cherry stated also that the early childhood education is not only a period of analyzing physical growth; it is also a time of remarkable mental development. This mental development of a child includes the emergence of abilities and skills in arrears such as language, motor skills, psychosocial cognitive and learning.

The development of a child is greatly influenced by exogenous factors including the nature of the educational environment to which the child is exposed during the first 6 to 8 years of life (Bowman, Donovan and Bums, 2001, cited in Stanford University School of Education 2011).

The objectives of pre-primary or early childhood education as stated in (FRN, 2012), includes:

- I. Effecting a smooth transition from the home to the school;
- II. Preparing the child for primary level of education;

- III. Providing adequate care and supervision for children while their parents are at work;
- IV. Inculcating in the child the spirit of enquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature and environment, art, music and playing with toys, etc.;
- V. Develop a sense of co-operation and team spirit;
- VI. Inculcating social norms;
- VII. Learn good habits, especially good health habits; and
- VIII. Teaching rudiments of numbers, letters, colours, shapes, forms etc. Through play.

Music in Early Childhood Teaching Process

Music is an art of sound that expresses ideas and emotions in significant form. Although, this can be achieved through the elements of rhythm, melody, harmony and colour, music participation in and outside the classroom provides a unique opportunity for literacy preparation (children music workshop, 2016). Bamberger (1991) described music in social context, where learning was developmental. It involved different ways of representing musical knowledge, as children interacted with each other in a multimodal manner. Music is a strategy process in teaching and meaning during early childhood years.

Within the age range of 0 – 4 years, a child can be influenced by music and music can be influential to children's language literacy development. In early child, above 70% of children's activities should come in form of music such as singing, rhythm folk tales, dancing and children react to music. Children's stimulate to songs, singing and dancing are always obvious.

Language Literacy Development

Language literacy development is understood as reading and writing. Although, the core elements of language literacy development are reading and writing, listening and speaking; this is delicate to the development of a child (Teacher handbook, 2008). National Council for Curriculum Assessment (2009) defined literacy as being more than having ability to read and write. Moreover, language literacy development is about helping children to communicate with others and to make sense of the world. Before a child can read and write, they need to learn about sounds, words, language, books and stories. NCCA also stated that the language literacy development should include oral and written language and other sign system such as mathematics, arts, sound, pictures, Brailles, sign language and music. The early child's literacy can be effective by communicating with the early child, reading with the early child and teaching the early child about sounds in ways that are fun. The language children understand well while trying to learn is fun in form of music, singing, dancing and playing. These activities have a great influence on children in learning new words and also in developing their mental abilities.

Although, the overwhelming issues for building a strong early foundation for the early child is everywhere but the early childhood education is still

characterized by insufficient resources and fragmented planning in teaching (UNESCO, 2011)

Music in Early Childhood Language Literacy Development

The role of music in the development of a child cannot be over emphasized. The Nigerian child is particularly born and nurtured in music (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2009). Children learn and develop the ability to learn language from their environment. The childhood stage of life is mostly that of passive listening and absorption of sounds that constitutes the music around the child's environment. According to Onyiuke (2005) through the natural process of growth and development of musical consciousness, the child's language and literacy development improves.

The early child education begins from 0 – 2 years of age and can influence a child future education. More so, the early childhood education often focuses on learning through play. Based on the research and philosophy of Jean Piaget which explained that play and music meets the physical, intellectual, language, emotional and social needs of children.

Music fosters positive attitude, curiosity and learning in children, thereafter, developing a child's imagination. It also stimulates and sustains the interest of children in the task of acquiring a language, most often, in an unconscious way.

The use of music as a process of early child's learning offers repetition of words, sounds, rhythms and sentences in a fun format that is useful in children's development in mathematics, pattern-recognition skills and language. Toddlers love to dance and move to music. The key to toddlers' music is the repetition of songs which encourages the use of words and memorization (Harman, 2008). Henze (2013), introduced ways to incorporate music and rhythm into a child's life. Use songs and sing-song voices to tell stories and to ease transitions into new activities. The using of well-known song is also to work on vocabulary and memory by singing, for example "Head, shoulders, knees and toes" Row, Row, Row your boat "Three Blind mice", if you are happy ...Based on the study of Onyiuke (2005) more structural musical sounds induce bodily movement, rhythmic movement and singing in children and the child learns to respond, even if unsteadily by way of bodily movement to music. Furthermore, music has a natural power of energizing a child and his desire to learn more.

Long ago, professionals of early childhood education recognized the importance of language and literacy in preparing children to succeed in school (Strickland and Riley-Ayers, 2016). Despite the awareness of the importance of language and literacy in preparing children are attracted to music and singing, there is still negative motives in teaching the early child through music in schools (Onyiuke, 2005).

Early language literacy plays major role in enabling the child learn a lot from experiences. Research showed that there are linked between early learning experiences and academic achievement, language achievement, reduced grade

retention, higher graduation rates and enhanced productivity in adult life (Strickland and Riley-Ayers, 2016).

The above statement cannot be achieved without making a child interested in learning. Child magazines (2016) outlined the benefits of music to children such as;

1. Speech and vocabulary; Singing songs and saying rhythms on a regular basis are proven to enhance early language and communication skills and broaden children's vocabulary.
2. Brainpower and memory: Actively participating in music making has been shown to strengthen children's cognitive and memory skills even more so than if they were simply listening.
3. Listening skills: Singing songs, following directions and working in a group situation all assist with development of listening and comprehension skills.
4. Movement and coordination: Moving to music, playing instruments and using props and puppets give children of all ages a chance to improve their gross and fine motor skills.
5. Social Interaction: Music cultivates positive social skills and independence through interaction with other children and by giving each individual a role in a large "ensemble".
6. Self-expression: singing, dancing and playing instruments and musical games imaginations.
7. It is a special way for parents to nurture a special bond with their child.

More so, children in their early stage respond to smiles, music and sound.

They try to imitate the sounds and facial expressions of people around them especially adults. Singing to children teaches them, the rise and fall of sounds and introduces them to songs and stories of their culture (Onyiuke, 2005).

Music ignites all area of child developments, culture, intellectual, social and emotional motor, language and all aspect of literacy (Bright Horizons, 2016). The stages of language literacy development according to Kennedy, Dunphy, Dwyer, Hayes, McPhillips, Marsh, O'connor and Shiel (2012) are word recognition, vocabulary development, reading fluency development, comprehension development, writing and spelling development. These stages are related, interconnected and simultaneously through music, the body and mind of a child is develop together. Exposing a child to music can make a child learn sounds and meaning of words. Dancing to music tone helps children build motor skills as well as allowing them to practice self-expression (www.en.m.wikipedia.org).

Music brings interpersonal relationship among children, children and teachers, and parents. Music is crucial for building children's social and intellectual competence (Bandeled and Faremi, 2013).

Conclusion

There is no doubt that the Early Childhood Education is the bedrock of educational system, therefore, it is not an issue only for the government. It is

collective struggles to make the bedrock of educational system a strong foundation in language literacy development. What we need to do is to rise and change teaching and learning strategies and techniques in Early Childhood Education. This is because the process of learning changes and it is effective when the right strategies, methods and techniques begins at a younger age and continue through adulthood. The researches reviewed show that music provides clear teaching techniques in development of a child especially in language literacy development.

Recommendations

Teachers, caregivers and parents should encourage the use of music in developing children's language literacy. Teachers are required to include play way method that involve music. This is because music stimulates children's attitudes and curiosity towards learning. Children should be taught and assess through multiple methods and information gotten should be used to improve teaching and preschool programme.

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