

ENHANCING PRE-SCHOOL CHILDREN'S LEARNING THROUGH THEIR NEEDS AND INTERESTS: EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

By

Akande Oluwadare
FCE Model Secondary School
Federal College of Education Abeokuta

08033699397
darry_akande@yahoo.com

Abstract

It is no longer debate on idea that children who attend Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)s are more likely to be successful when they start school than children who do not. Children's readiness for school is frequently cited among governments' motives for this investment in the early years sector. How prepare are children continues to be a keenly debated political question in international forums where early child development seems to be increasingly perceived as a preparation for primary school. Moreover, the level of interest and needs of preschool children have to be much more considered as major factors for readiness of pre-school children in learning and total development, especially in preparing them for primary school education. This paper therefore tends taken a keen look into the concepts of learning, principles in Pre-School Child related activities, i.e their education, their needs and interests that are said to enhance children's total development of children through pre-primary education facilities.

Key Words: *Development, Pre-School Children, Education, Enhancement, Interest and Needs*

INTRODUCTION

A teacher of pre-school children must know about how little learners learn and this is the reason teacher gains knowledge about concept and meaning of learning in education. Learning is a natural phenomenon which is natural to all organisms including both humans and animals. Learning affects a child's development. A child learns new habits only through the process of learning and through imitated

traditions and customs. Intellectual skills are also developed through learning. The decision of right and wrong, the concepts of justice and aesthetic sense, etc. develop through learning. This process of learning continues throughout life. Learning for pre-school children and as well for adult learners is the basis of maturation.

Various psychologists and educationists have defined the concept and meaning of learning in their own way. Some define as a process, some as a change in performance and some define learning as acquisition and retention of knowledge. "The process of acquiring new knowledge and new responses is the process of learning." Observes learning as a process. "Learning is the process by which the individual acquires various habits, knowledge, and attitudes that are necessary to meet the demands of life, in general" (Boaz, 1984)

As a result of studying and analysis of the above-mentioned definitions of learning in education, the following facts come to light:

1. Learning is a modification in behavior.
2. Learning is the organization of behavior.
3. Learning is the confirmation of a new process.

Education, in the general sense, refers to the act or process of imparting or acquiring general knowledge, developing the powers of reasoning and judgment, and preparing intellectually for mature life. Formal education most often takes place through schooling. A right to education has been recognized by some governments. At the global level, article 13 of the United Nations' 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights recognizes the right of everyone to an education. Education is compulsory in most places up to a certain age, but attendance at school may not be, with alternative options such as home-schooling or e-learning being recognized as valid forms of education in certain jurisdictions.

Preschool education is education that focuses on educating children from the ages of infancy until six years old. The system of preschool education varies widely, with different approaches, theories, and practices within different school jurisdictions. The term preschool education includes such programs as nursery school, day care, or kindergarten, which are occasionally used interchangeably, yet are distinct entities. While pedagogies differ, there is the general agreement that preschool is responsible for providing education before the commencement of statutory education.

The proliferation of preschool education in the twentieth century can be connected to advances in developmental psychology, such as in the work of Jean Piaget which revealed the nature of psychological development that occurs in the early years of childhood, and from the educators such as Froebel who recognized that children need stimulation, particularly that provided by play and role playing, from a young age in order to develop their full potential, as well as from the needs of

large numbers of working mothers to provide a good environment for their young children during working hours. Thus, preschool environments vary depending on whether their main focus is care of the children such as in a daycare program, which nonetheless acts as a socialization experience that extends beyond the family and prepares the children for school, and those which were specifically designed to provide early educational experiences for young children, such as the kindergarten. Encyclopedia (2003)

The “Preschool Education Programme for Children 36-72 Months Old” was launched in the school year 2002-2003 to be tested and improved. Since then, there have been studies and feedbacks, new elements introduced to the Primary Education Programme in the school year 2005-2006, researches in the field of preschool education and analyses of practices of preschool education in European Union countries to comply with the EU and international norms in the field.

Principles In Preschool Education

The preschool phase is the building stone for future life. The pace of learning is particularly fast in this phase. The overall developmental characteristics of a specific age group are common for all in that group; however, it must not be forgotten that each child is unique in himself or herself.

Preschool education is based on some principles. These principles can be listed as follows:

1. Preschool education should consider the needs of children and individual differences.
2. Preschool education should support the psychomotor, social-emotional, linguistic and cognitive development of the child, build in self-care skills and prepare the child for primary education.
3. To respond to the needs of children, preschool education institutions should provide education environments in compliance with an understanding of democratic education.
4. While arranging for activities, means of the community and school should be considered in addition to the needs and fields of interest of children.
5. The process of education should start from what children already know and provide a room for learning by trying and experimenting.
6. Importance should be attached to children's correct and fluent use of Turkish.
7. Education given in preschool phase should be contributory to the development of children in terms of affection, respect, cooperation, responsibility, tolerance, solidarity and sharing.
8. Education should impart in children self-respect, self-confidence and self-control.
9. Play is the best method of learning for children in this age group. All activities must be arranged on the basis of play.

10. In communicating with children no behaviour that can hurt their personality should be adopted and there must be no place for intimidation or restrictions.
11. Children should be supported in developing independent behaviour and adult support, guidance and comforting proximity should be in place when they need help.
12. Children should be supported in recognizing the emotions of themselves and others
13. Children should be supported in developing their imagination, creative and critical thinking skills, communicative and self-expressive powers.
14. While developing programmes, circumstances in the family and close environments should be taken into account.
15. The child and his/her family should actively take part in the process of education.
16. The child's development and preschool education programme should be regularly evaluated.
17. Outcomes of evaluation on preschool education should feedback efforts for further developing the child, teachers and the program. Encyclopedia (2003)

Now, one of the principles of growth in human development identified as essential for effective growth and development for learning is principle of readiness, says Akinbote (2015). The presence of school readiness whenever the child is ready determines academic growth of the child as well as holistic development. This principle says optimum learning takes place only when the learner is ready. This means that there must be a balance of factors such as experiential background, mental maturity, physical ability and emotional interest before effective learning can take place. It is therefore a waste of time, energy, and resources to try to force children to do certain things of which they are not ready, and it may even be harmful or dangerous to do so.

It is imperative to define the word "child" i.e to see who is a child? We want to define child in a psychological definition, chronological definition and constitutional definition before moving further;

Concept of A Pre-School Child

To have a better understanding who a child is Akinbote (2015), gives the psychology definition and chronology definition as well as constitutional definition of a child

Psychological Definition of A Child;

The psychological definition of a child says a child is a person you have given birth to, your son or your daughter, a person who hasn't yet grown up, someone inexperienced in a certain periods of life. Invariably, you are always a child to your parents. an unborn or recently born person. Likewise, it refers to a young person of

either sex between infancy and youth or a young human being below the age of puberty or below the legal age of majority. Young individual who is under the legal age of majority, or who is the natural offspring of another is also regarded a child.

Again, Sigmund quoted by Armstrong (2012), in his stages of child's development enumerate the definition of child psychologically; Sigmund Freud (1856-1939): while exploring stages of early childhood development to explain behaviours and other related problems, he says stages of child development:

Infancy; the period of infancy begins at birth and ends at two years of age. It's the most rapid period of growth throughout the lifespan. During this period of child development, human beings go from being helpless, reflexive babies to toddlers who can communicate and reason. Specific physical milestones during this period include rolling over, sitting up, crawling, and walking. Fine motor development takes longer to develop, which is why babies generally cannot write or create refined drawings. Cognitive milestones include early problem solving and increased sensory awareness and perception. Social milestones that usually occur during this period include the development of a sense of self-awareness, or that prior to the age of 12 months, we really do not understand that we exist apart from our mothers or other caregivers.

. (Sigmund, quoted by Thomas Armstrong, 2012)

More so, stages of early development for early childhood this period lasts from two years of age through six years of age. Physically, our center of gravity shifts from the breastbone, where it was when we were infants, to the belly button. Our physical growth occurs much more slowly during this period as compared to the rapid growth that took place during infancy. We also increase dramatically in our fine and gross motor skills and are now able to run, jump, climb, and balance. We can also write letters and create very detailed drawings due to fine motor development. Cognitive processing speed increases, which allows us to advance in thinking, reasoning, and problem-solving, as well as master our native language. Social development advances as we learn to understand our own emotions and those of others; our earliest playmates tend to be chosen based on availability.

Child may also be described as a relationship with a parent (such as sons and daughters of any age) or, metaphorically, an authority figure, or signify group membership in a clan, tribe, or religion; it can also signify being strongly affected by a specific time, place, or circumstance, as in "a child of nature" or "a child of the sixties".

Chronological Definition of A Child

Chronology is a word meaning 'the study of time'. it comes from the Greek words Chronos(time) and logos (word). The adjective is chronological. Putting events in chronological order means: listing them in the order in which they happened.

A chronology is a series of significant events and changes that occur in a family/ child life. Each event should be considered for the impact it has in a child or young person's life. As a child is growing they are learning how to do some tasks in chronological order. They learn how to prioritize their goals and actions. Their behavior is transcending as they learn new perspectives from other people. They learn how to represent certain things symbolically and learn new behavior. As a child is growing they are learning how to do some tasks in chronological order. They learn how to prioritize their goals and actions. Their behavior is transcending as they learn new perspectives from other people. They learn how to represent certain things symbolically and learn new behavior.

Constitutional Definition of A Child

A child is a person 19 years or younger unless national law defines a person to be an adult at an earlier age. However, in these guidelines when a person falls into the 10 to 19 age category they are referred to as an adolescent (see adolescent definition). An infant is a child younger than one year of age. A child means every human being below the age of 18 years. convention on the rights of the child, 1989. article 1: for the purposes of the present convention, a child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier.

1. A young person. The law in either England and Scotland cannot be said to offer any single definition of the word. Various ages are defined as childhood, but all are under the age of majority, which is 18.
2. In wills and deeds, 'child' can refer to persons of any age. Normally 'child' will refer to issue in the first generation only, excluding grandchildren or remoter issue, but if the testator's intention can be interpreted as including descendants then the position may be different.
- 3 throughout the UK for the purposes of child support, a qualifying child is a person under the age of 16 or under 19 and in full-time (but not advanced) education or under 18 in certain circumstances and a person who has not contracted a valid, void or annulled marriage. a qualifying child is one for which one or both parents is an absent parent. (Stewart,2006)

Needs of Pre-School Children;

There is no human being without certain need in life, children inclusive. Therefore there are need and interest of the child that one must put into consideration while you are setting the learning environment for children. The need of a child born with basic physiological needs which must be satisfied for normal growth.

Now, a child like every other adults is born with basic psychological needs which must be satisfied for normal growth to take place. It must be noted that needs is general and constant for all children. Needs are universal hence cultural differences may not be an important determinant of needs. However, socio-

economic factor and other environmental factors may not to reasonable extent affect the level of satisfying and meeting the needs of children. Some of the needs are usually taken care of in a self-regulatory way with little or no active participation or involvement of the child or parent. Such needs being met are oxygen, sleep, etc . One of the resaerchers' assertion in sustaining and emphasizing the physiological need of children is Abraham Maslow, (1943)which postulates the hierarchy of human needs, from physiological needs to self actualization need. (Horne, 2021)

Maslow says that these needs cause us to want or desire certain things. he says that there are many other things that influence our behavior. Just because we may want something, does not mean we will try to get it. There could be something else in the way that causes us to act differently.

1- Physiological Needs of Preschool Children

The physiological level of Maslow's hierarchy includes basic human needs. These include water, breathing, food, and sleep. The physiological level contains the simplest needs. They are the most straightforward needs in the entire hierarchy. The human body tries to stay balanced inside. When a person is missing a physiological need, the body will naturally want the missing need.

In simple creatures such as rodents, physiological needs may be the only needs that have to be met. However, in humans, this is only the base of the hierarchy. After physiological needs are met, there are four higher levels in the hierarchy. People are often not aware when there physiological needs are being met. However, when these needs are not met it becomes very obvious. For example, most humans do not think about each inhale and exhale they take. This satisfies their need to breathe. However, if the oxygen supply were cut off, all people would immediately become aware of the need to breathe. Physiological needs are important from the time a person is born and throughout their entire life.

2- Safety Needs of Preschool Children

The safety level of Maslow's hierarchy includes varying levels of safety. These include safety of the self, family, resources, jobs, health, and life. Both children and adults are very aware of their safety needs. Needs of safety are just as important as physiological needs. However, these needs deal more with the mind. They include having a sense of safety in the world. Every person's sense of safety is different depending where they live. Adults, much like children, prefer the world to be organized. This ensures a level of safety.

3- Love and Belonging (Social Needs) of Preschool Children

The love/belonging level of Maslow's hierarchy deals with various social needs. These include a need for friendship, family, and other types of group inclusion. Love/Belonging also refers to personal relationships. These include romantic

relationships. It is crucial that the physiological and safety needs of a person are met first. Then they can develop needs of love and belonging. Once basic needs are met, then a person can focus on their social needs. These needs change throughout the human lifespan. If belonging needs are not met then a person may feel depressed. The field of psychology focuses on this level of the hierarchy. In modern society, many people suffer because their needs of love and belonging are not met.

4- Esteem Needs of Preschool Children

The esteem level is about how people need to feel that they play a part in the world. People want to feel that they have accomplished things that are valuable and important. They also want to feel independent, meaning that they can do things for themselves and do not need to depend on anybody else.

5- Self-Actualization Needs of Preschool Children

We cannot be truly happy without becoming everything that we want to become. People have different things that they might want in their life that go along with this level. These needs do not show themselves until all of the needs in previous levels have been taken care of. For example, if a person is worrying about feeding themselves and needs to think about their physiological needs, then they will not be thinking about self-actualization and their life goals. Making sure they have food and a home is more important. Someone only reaches the self-actualization level once all the other levels are fulfilled.

These hierarchy of needs are essentials to the overall growth of and development of child if learning must take place, because neglecting sleep, thirst, and hunger can impact performance even for adults in the workplace, and only by prioritizing your most basic needs can you perform your best. (Horne, 2021)

Interest of Pre-School Children;

Interest is specific according to individual child varies/transitory according to age, gender, and can be affected by age as well as gender and environment, says Akinbote, (2015). And what is universal to all children all over the world regardless of their parental background of religious background is play! why? It is because it is the only language that they understand and as well their area of interest at that stage of life. When they stopped playing, it is a signal that something is wrong. To emphasize the importance of play a s key area if interest of children, in early life and early stage of education, Moyle,(2010) Younger children are more interested in playing on their own and/or interacting with significant adults, while older ones prefer to play with their peers. Pedagogies of early childhood education, deriving from these theories and recent researchers, utilize play in different forms in kindergartens and preschool settings. The most valued form of play is however the 'free' play, when child chooses what to play. Early childhood settings are also

designed in a way that child can freely wonder around or join a group for a project led by an adult. Singing, dancing and reading are also other activities that could be classified as structured and adult-led play.

Other things (area) of interest to them include among several others;

Pre-school children are interested in colorful materials

They like adventure, i.e to move around without hindering them

They love freedom, in other words, they like autonomous...

How Will Interest Of A Child Be Discovered?

Have you ever been to a party and found yourself talking to someone with whom you have nothing in common? The conversation quickly goes downhill, with both of you feeling awkward and not having much to say. Conversely, chatting with someone who shares a common interest with you is easy and enjoyable. You do not need to think about what to say next and you are motivated to share your ideas.

The same is true for children. Once we take a closer look at what captures children's attention, and find ways to join them in their interests, we can interact with them in ways that build their communication skills. This premise is so important that the Center on Everyday Child Language Learning (CECLL) in the United States is dedicated to researching the effect of using children's interests and everyday activities on their communication and language skills.

More over, for a child's interests to be discovered has to be in the following ways; It is said of the olden parents that a child would be observed to see what he loved doing and tailored him around his interest as his career, if such child is not interested in a thing and was forced, then no learning might take place. Therefore, one must observe the area of their interest and direct them. And teachers too should foremost stimulate their interest before start teaching them. While you might know many of your child's interests, taking a closer look might give you some new information. the first step in using a child's interests to build communication is to observe his interests. in order to observe a child's interests, you need to

- Be at his physical level – this might mean lying or sitting on the floor, or sitting across from your child in his high chair.
- Be face-to-face – so that you can see what your child is interested in.
- Wait – instead of starting up an interaction, stop and wait to see what your child is doing first. Abandon your own agenda and make your child's interests your focus.

Thinking about the following questions can also help you identify your child's interests

What makes your child smile and laugh?

What gets and keeps your child's attention?

What gets your child excited?
What are your child's favorite things to do?
What does your child work hard at doing?
What "brings out the best" in your child?
What gets your child to try new things?
What does your child choose to do most often?

other ways are;

- Personal Interests– these are a child's favorite things, such as cars, water play, or music.
- Situational Interests– these interests emerge when something about an activity, material, or person attracts a child's attention or invites him to become involved. Situational interest often occurs when a situation is new, interesting, or unexpected.

Educational Implications

It is said interest is one of the basic reasons while children learn, and whatever that is of interest to the child will secure his attention. Therefore for the teachers of young children now to secure their interest and attention must use various methods of teaching;

- Use different instructional materials and as well an irresistible inviting atmosphere
- Planning your lesson according to needs and interest of children
- Make use of stories, poems, rhymes as well as songs, with pictorial in various forms to stimulate interest and invariably secure attention of children
- Take note of individual differences of children apart from the fact that there are no two individual that are exactly alike.

Interest of children is both time and age dependent, because their interest changes from moment to moment and transitory not permanent. Teachers and parents should be aware that their attention span is short!

Lastly, as educators we need a comprehensive understanding of needs and interest of children because it provides us with a larger context to relate their behaviors and actions. We often view the way a child behaves as singular rather than as a part of their broader life. When they are hungry, teacher should know that a child who is hungry cannot learn. A child who is stressed cannot learn. A child who is in an environment absent of unconditional love cannot learn. When they want to play, when more immediate needs are not met such as one's needs for food and safety, or when what is of interest to them are not there, it becomes increasingly unlikely that a child will be able to behave, will be able to learn, and listen to the best of their ability and thereby no learning will ever take place.

Conclusion

It one thing to discover the needs and interest of a child, it is another thing to meet those needs. Therefore, children need attention for their needs as well as enough freedom to play under the guide of their parents and teachers and thereby they can be motivated to learn.

Recommendations

Parents as well as care givers should more room for children to explore their local and immediate environment although under their guidance and supervision.

Teachers as facilitators should Plan lessons according to needs and interest of children. With this, children will be motivated to learn and this will enable them to move at their different pace

School should also create an enabling environment for children to play as well for their motivation to learn through playing around the classroom or school premise

Lastly, interest of children is both time and age dependent, because their interest changes from moment to moment and transitory not permanent. Teachers and parents should be aware that their attention span is short!

References

- Anning, A. (2010). "Play and the Legislated Curriculum." In *The Excellence of Play*, edited by J.
- Brooker, L., and S. Edwards. 2010. *Engaging Play*. Maidenhead: Open University
- Bruner, J. 2006. *In Search of Pedagogy*. Vol. 1. Abingdon: Routledge. [Crossref],
- Burman, E. 2008. *Deconstructing Developmental Psychology*. London: Routledge
- Coleman, James S., Ernest Q. Campbell, Carol J. Hobson, James McPartland, Alexander collinsdictionary of law © W.J.Stewart, 2006. retrieved
- Edmiston, B. (2008) *Forming Ethical Identities in Early Childhood Play*. Abingdon: Friedrich Wilhelm August Froebel (2002) *Encyclopedia of Education*. (The Gale Group, Inc, 2002). Answers.com Retrieved October 31, 2007.
- http://shropshirechildcare.proceduresonline.com/p_chronology.html
- <https://study.com/academy/lesson/what-is-child-development-definition-theories-stages.html>
- <https://study.com/academy/lesson/what-is-child-development-definition-theories-stages.html>

<https://www.futurelearn.com/info/courses/vulnerable-children/0/steps/5891>

https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/preschool_education

<https://www.oecd.org/education/school/48705972.pdf> retrieved May 21, 2021

International Journal of Early Years Education (2020) - Issue 3: School Readiness and Play

M. Mood, Frederick D. Weinfield, and Robert L. York. 1966. Equality of Educational

Martin Needham&Nurper Ulkuer, (2020)A growing interest in early childhood's contribution to Moyles, 19–33. Maidenhead: Open University Press. [Google Scholar] Press. Answers.com Retrieved May, 24, 2021

The Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia (2003) "kindergarten" Columbia University Volume 28,