

THE ROLE OF PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION IN ENHANCING CHILDREN'S TOTAL DEVELOPMENT

By

AKANDE OLUWADARE

*Students' Affairs Department, Federal College of Education, Abeokuta
08033699397 | darry_akande@yahoo.com*

Abstract

Present modernization had brought about industrialization that made many parents to look for means of meeting their daily needs especially in this contemporary Nigeria. As a result, many parents cannot adequately nurture their children for better development. This paper examines the trends in pre-primary education as a foundation for life-long learning for young children and the purpose for pre-primary education. Those areas of developmental domains of childhood are also identified such as physical developmental domain, social developmental domain, emotional developmental domain, cognitive developmental domain, language developmental domain that are said to enhance children's total development of children through pre-primary education

Key Words: *Development, Domains, Education, Enhancement, Policy*

INTRODUCTION

Thinking of where to begin the education of young children for good foundation and better development including their learning has become a serious concern for parent of young children especially the mothers and pre-primary education has been found soothing such concern. Regarding primary education as the starting point of formal education is becoming a thing of the past because children are already getting acquainted with activities in four wall classroom as well as all rudiments in reading and writing before getting to age of entering primary education

In every modern society, it is believed that education is the key to national development and there is a need to maintain every level of education especially the pre-primary stage, because it is the bedrock upon which all other levels of education build. Once a child misses that early stage it is usually difficult for the learner to get back to the basics. Pre-Primary education is a common practice in most societies; they make provision for early childhood education programme of various types for children below the official school age (usually 6 years) mainly to prepare them for the rigors of primary education and beyond. Individual children develop at their

own paces, all children individually progress through an identifiable sequence of physical, cognitive, and emotion growth and change. (Bredekamp, 2011).

It is as a result of this, this paper tends to take a look at the concept of mother-tongue, and the concept of pre-primary education as well as the different domain that enhance development of these young children within the environment of pre-primary environment

The Concept of Pre-Primary Education

Pre-Primary Education is concerned with the care and education of children from 2 plus or 3 years of age to 5 years, while Early Childhood Education caters for children from birth to 8 years. This programme serves children and their families. It is also a field of study designed to prepare professionals for working directly or indirectly with children from birth to 8 years of age and their families at different age groups. Some of the programmes are:

Pre-School Education which has been referred to group settings for children between approximately three and five years old which are deliberately designed to stimulate and support their mental, physical, emotional, language, development and so on. It has been called different names by the psychologists, educationists, school owners, and policy makers in education, variety of names such as Nursery Education, Kindagrten Education, Pre-Primary Education. All the names given serve the term Pre-school Education which is to cater for children before gaining entry to the level of Primary Education. (Singh, 2004)

There are different names given to Pre-Primary education they are; Nursery School Education, Pre-School Education, Kindergarten, Early Childhood Education, and so on. The following terms according to Martin and Dombrowski, (2008) may be used for educational establishments for this age group:

- * Pre-Primary school was said to be an institution for children from 6 weeks old to 6 years old. It is an educational childcare service that can enroll child(ren) in before primary school. May also be used to define services for children younger than kindergarten age. The Pre-Primary programme takes place in a Nursery School.
- * Nursery School (UK and US) was said to be for children from 0 months to 5 years old- is a pre-primary educational child care institution.
- Daycare (US) for children from 0 months to 2½ years old- held in a Nursery School, but can also be called “a child care service” or a “crèche (Martin and Dombrowski, 2008)
- * In Nigeria, it is referred to as pre-primary education as contained in the national policy on education (1998) which is education given in educational institution to children age 3 plus to 5 years of age prior the age of entering primary school. (Oladebinu, 2012)

Purpose of Pre-Primary Education

There are two schools of thought concerning the purpose of pre-primary education. The first set of people are those who believe that Pre-Primary Education is unnecessary luxury for children and these are those that believe that the best place for the development of a child and his education particularly at a formative stage is the home under the care of his mother. To these people the home environment of the child as against the school environment alone is a resource for learning. Example of such people are Robinson and Robinson(1968) who hold the view that young children are not mature enough to learn complex task skills that are required of them in the pre-school programmes. They also argue that the warmth and love of a mother is more important than any educational programme.

On the other hand, another school of thought comprises of scholars who agree with Pre-Primary Education. They believe it provides an environment which is conducive for the stimulation and development of the child. Some research evidence like that of Rolnick and Grunewald,(2003) show that Pre-Primary Education has a positive influence on children's affective, conceptual and social development in later years. (Rolnick and Grunewald, 2003)

Pre-primary education serves the following purposes among others:

- I) Custodial care for children: increase in the number of women joining the labour force, Pre-Primary Education provides an attractive environment for children during the day, which they find exciting and stimulating. The mothers who would have stayed at home taking care of the children are now working mothers taking up one job or the other in order to assist their husbands to make financial ends meet.
- ii) To provide an opportunity for social development: Another major reason for the provision of pre-primary education is the assertion that children need the companionship of one another for a healthy social development. The home no matter how wealthy cannot provide the type of environment that the school will provide for the development of the child. Children from different families, from different tribes and tongues all create avenues for social interaction in pre-primary education institutions. Consequently, children gain social poise, friendliness, confidence, cooperation, and other desirable attributes.
- iii) To provide for cognitive development: The criticality of the age of the Pre-School children in the cognitive makes it paramount to provide a solid educational foundation on which other future educational attainment will be built.
- iv) To provide an opportunity for language development : The language of the immediate environment is the recommended medium of instruction as stipulated in the national policy on education (NPE). Many pre-school

providers do not put this into practice, as the medium of instruction in most of these pre-schools generally is English Language because of the multilingual nature of the society as well as the desire for prestige. Pre-School education helps children to have better understanding of the various languages.(that is English Language as well as the language of immediate environment) (Adejobi, 2005) quoted by Akande, 2014

- V) To provide for healthy physical development: Play-way method is the best method of teaching in the Pre-Primary school as recommended in the NPE (FGN, 2004). At the age of two, the mental behavior of children like the use of language, curiosity, persistence, concentration and problem solving develop from a child's spontaneous play and his relationship with others. Also, gross motor skill, fine motor skills, are gradually developing.
- Vi) To provide the needed stimulation for optimum growth: The standard of living in Nigeria in recent years has made it difficult for most parents to provide necessary stimulation and encouragement needed by the child to actualize his potentials. Therefore, to avoid retardation in the rate of maturation and ultimate reduction in the level of achievement of the child, the child, Pre-School Education is unavoidable.
- vii) Lastly, to provide the children with formal training or education: Formal pre-school education may be indispensable when specific and stated changes in the child are sought through training. Formal education occurs when children gain experiences by interacting with other children, with toys, with games,(some with clay or paints or sands) (Adejobi, 2005). Rudiments of letters, numbers, shapes and colours are also learnt in preparation for primary level of education.

Childhood Developmental Domains

Physical Developmental Domain: Right from birth to age of 5 plus, children are said to be in need of training that will enhance their physical development. Often, children are always engaged in one activity or the other like walking, sitting or carrying things about and so on. These activities aid their physical growth. For proper physical development, the nursery schools provide lots of opportunities for gymnastic exercise; through copious provision of play equipment like swings, merry-go-round, climbing frame, slides, suitable play ground, ropes and tyres for rolling and so on. The average child's home may not satisfy the physical need of the child by providing these equipment.

Social Developmental Domain: This refers to the connection they have made with people and how well they are interacting with them. All children can gain from Nursery education, but it is particularly valuable for children whose homes and

lives are restricted. Children come from different families to the nursery school. Here, they are made to learn together, interact and associate like siblings. They are made to respect other people's rights and learn to be law abiding. Some children suffer some kind of social handicap such as lack of companionship. Others come from homes that are too crowded, isolated or poor in other ways. Various games are organized in the school to help children develop a team spirit, cooperation and leadership trait.

Emotional Developmental Domain: This refers to the emotional connections and amount of self-confidence children have. A child from the moment of birth to the very first few years after birth is strongly and emotionally attached to the mother. The child would do anything to resent any programme that will separate him from this dear person. During these early years, a child is very difficult human being to cope with. The emotion of the child can be adequate and successful if such child is catered for in love, in an environment like pre-primary school environment, well secured from dangers and allowed to relate well with people around him all

Cognitive Development Domain: During the early years, children need to interact with stimulating environment in order to stimulate their cognitive abilities and skills. Nursery institutions provide this type of environment which is planned, organized, and enriched to enhance their cognitive growth. By giving sympathetic and skilled guidians as well as supervision, children may make great educational progress before the age of five and the statutory age of the primary educational level.

Language Developmental Domain: This refers to how well children communicate with people, how they represent their feelings and emotions. Children attending nursery schools are capable of developing further in the use of language in thought and in practical skills

Children are allowed to explore their environment so as to learn by discovery thereby developing their soft skills. (Akande, in Akinkuotu (2014)

According to Akande, in Akinkuotu(2014) teachers as Early Childhood Educator, as well as teachers and facilitators should be aware that the school exists because of these children if the future of education of Pre-School children is important to them and they are ready to impact knowledge they should bear in mind that;

- i) Pre-School Education programme should be non-formal because it is not the stage of reading, writing and arithmetic. All learning should be done through play.
- ii) Pre-School teachers need the knowledge of child development.

- iii) Children learn through play, which gives as many as experiences as possible. For instance, while playing certain games, they develop curiosity and creativity.
- iv) Children are very curious at birth. This curiosity motivates the child to ask questions. They should be encouraged by answering their questions honestly.
- v) Effective programmes should be developed for children with special needs
- vi) Every child is primarily an individual and should be treated as such. Children should not be compared.
- vii) Children learn through experiences. Each child's effort should be rewarded
- viii) The early development of a child has an enormous and decisive influence on his later life. Therefore early childhood experience should be in a conducive and stimulating environment

Much of the first two years of life are spent in the creation of the child's first "sense of self". Most children are able to differentiate between themselves and others by their second year. This is crucial part of the child's ability to determine how they should function in relation to other people. Early care must emphasize links to family, home, culture, and home language by uniquely caring for each child. Contemporary research establishes the fact that a child's brain grows at an extraordinary pace in the first six years of his life and lays the foundation for lifelong development. The experiences that a child draws from his surroundings contribute significantly to the formation of the synaptic connection in the brain. It is believed that education is like the the gardener under whose care a thousand trees blossom and grow. He contributes nothing to the actual growth; the principle of growth lies in the trees themselves. He plants and waters but God gives the increase. Therefore, the educator impacts no single power to men. He gives neither life nor breath. He only watches, lest any external force should injure or disturb. He takes care that development runs its course in accordance with its own laws. Therefore, whatever a man may attempt to do by his instruction, he can do no more than assist in effort which the child makes for his own development. (Akande,2014 quoting Adejobi,2005)

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, it should be noted that Early Childhood is a crucial stage of life in terms of a child's physical, intellectual, emotional, social as well as language development. The most important years of learning begins at birth. During these early years, humans are capable of absorbing more information than later on. The brain grows most rapidly in the early years. During this period, children need a high quality personal care and learning experiences Pre-School education is the beginning of the education process which provides solid foundation for such development that subsequent education and later life will build upon.

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