

Harnessing Children Literature for Productive Early Childhood Education in Nigeria

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Abstract

Early childhood education is the foundation training give to a child and is a highly dependent on the quality of materials used for instruction and interaction. One sure way of training young children is through exposure to literature materials. This kind of literary experience is indeed critical to the children's personal development and personal development is a reflection of the type of education received by an individual. This review assessed harnessing children literature for productive early childhood education in Nigeria. Findings reveal that early childhood education provides experiential learning skills that are necessary for the overall development of a child. Findings also identified some challenges that mar effective early childhood education in Nigeria. These challenges include education of parents, problem of demarcating between children and adult literature, non-availability of quality literary teachers in early childhood centres. In essence, this paper beams its light on the present status quo with the view to recommending resuscitation of this important aspect of repositioning early childhood education in Nigeria.

Keywords: Early Childhood, Education, Literature Materials.

Introduction

Early childhood stage is a preparatory period for adulthood that equips one with potentials of independence. It is a sacred period of character formation, acquisition of norms, values and culture. Children's literature materials offer the child various learning opportunities which enhance his development in all areas. It follows therefore that whatever a child experiences between birth and puberty constitutes his/her childhood. Scientists agree that the early childhood stage of life is critical to all round development of any human being. In this regard, Umo (2020) observed that early childhood education is critical time for developing the brain function necessary to handle information, express emotion normally and become proficient in language. Hence, the necessity of using appropriate literature materials in teaching of children in this first years is incontrovertible. A child who is trained with verbal and physical expression of love would enjoy stable mental and emotional growth (Mohammed, 2013).

In Nigeria, the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013) acknowledges the role of education in achieving productive development. Specifically, FRN (2013) emphasised that the goal of the Nigerian education is to prepare learners for effective and productive life in the society. The implication of this is that education is expected to equip learners with the necessary knowledge, attitude, values, skills and

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competencies which would enable them respond positively to the continuously changing world in which they live and work (Clara & Corresponding, 2022).

Osakwe (2006) opined that education being an indispensable tool in nation building is a process of systematic training and instruction designed to transmit knowledge and acquisition of skills, potentials and abilities which would enable an individual to contribute efficiently to the growth and development of an individual; physically, socially, morally, intellectually and emotionally. Nonetheless, the method of instilling these knowledge, values, attitudes, skills and competencies is recommended at the early childhood education level. Evidently, early childhood education, is the level at which the foundation of knowledge, attitude, values, skills and competency acquisition for personal and national development is laid (Clara & Corresponding, 2022; Olowe, et al., 2014). This is the basic stage of a child's life that skills for productive life can be inculcated into the child.

Teachers on the other hand, may not be fully aware of the importance of harnessing the benefits of early childhood education due to the dearth of qualified teachers in the educational system of the country. It is in the light of this that this review posits to assess harnessing children literature for productive early childhood education in Nigeria.

Concept of Children's Literature

There are various types of books, some meant to be used as book for classrooms purposes and some contain quick information for reference purposes. There are picture books which ideas and concepts are presented to children in graphic forms. Some others are creative fictional events which are regarded as true literature for children. There are still books children read voluntarily for pleasure.

According to Umo (2020), early childhood literature materials deal with all books written for children excluding works involving comic, cartoon, jokes and no fictions books. Early childhood literature materials generally portray human feelings, thought and insights. Webster (2024) defines literature as "the class of writing in which imagination, expression, aesthetic form. Universality of idea and permanence are characteristics features". Literature is further defined as the written work of a culture, language, people over a period of time. Summarily, literature is written work of artistic values, body of written knowledge or subjects, body of music printed materials and literary work.

Children's literature materials therefore comprise of written work, works of value written on subjects, body of music, printed information and production of literary work which has been specifically written for children. They are necessary for instilling socio-cultural and socio-political awareness of Nigeria among young children (Umo, 2020). According to Mistry (2010), children's literature are all books written for children excluding work such as comic books, jokebooks, cartoons and non-fiction works such as dictionaries, encyclopedias and reference materials. Literature includes books considered appropriate by different authorities such as teachers, reviewers, scholars, parents, publishers, librarians, retailers and various books award committee.

Literature for children reading are picture books, traditional literature, and fiction and non-fiction biographies including auto-biography, poetry and verses. Thus, children's literature is anything that children read; specifically, fiction, non-fiction, poetry or drama intended for and used by children.

No nation can be stable economically, socially, and politically without quality early childhood education materials offered her young citizens. The quality of leaders tomorrow is at the mercy of the

quality of exposure young children of today are opened to. Umo (2020) assert that literature materials educate and inform the young mind to respond appropriately to the exigencies of life. This is due to the stories they are written to pass across to their readers.

The history as well as culture of different countries are captured in the literary texts they present to their young children. This is intentional as early childhood literature materials equip young children with basic skills, intellectual, social and emotional skills necessary to effectively participate and succeed in the society (Mohammed, 2013).

Experiential Learning through Early Childhood Education

Early childhood education provides experiential learning skills that young children acquire in the early stage of learning. These learning experiences have shown to be pertinent to the development of a child (Olowe, et al., 2014). According to Curphey (2023) children's literature materials are important due to the following reason:

- **Early Literacy Skills**

Children's literature serves as a foundation for developing early literacy skills, including letter recognition, phonics, and reading comprehension. Exposure to books and stories at a young age contributes to building a strong foundation for later reading and writing abilities.

- **Language Development**

Children's literature exposes young learners to rich vocabulary, sentence structures, and language patterns. Reading aloud to children helps them develop their listening and speaking skills, expanding their vocabulary and understanding of language.

- **Cultural Awareness and Diversity**

Children's literature exposes young learners to diverse cultures, traditions, and perspectives. It helps them appreciate differences and promotes inclusivity. By reading stories featuring characters from various backgrounds, children develop a broader worldview and acceptance of others.

- **Imagination and Creativity**

Children's literature fosters imagination and creativity. Through vivid illustrations and captivating stories, children can explore different worlds, characters, and scenarios. This imaginative play supports their creative thinking and helps them develop their own storytelling abilities.

- **Cognitive Development**

Engaging with stories and books stimulates children's cognitive abilities. They learn to follow narratives, make predictions, and understand cause and effect relationships. It enhances critical thinking, problem-solving, and comprehension skills.

- **Emotional Development**

Books provide a safe space for children to explore and understand their emotions. Stories often feature relatable characters facing various challenges and experiences. Children can identify with these characters and develop empathy, compassion, and emotional intelligence.

Children's literature materials are necessary in early childhood education and development because it supports language development, cognitive growth, imagination, emotional understanding, cultural awareness, and early literacy skills (Curphey, 2023; Olowe, et al., 2014). Moreover, Curphey (2023) and Natalie (2022) further observed that by incorporating quality children's literature into early learning environments, young learners can be positively impacted.

Development of Children's Literature in Nigeria

The purpose of developing children's literature materials in Nigeria stems from the notion put forth by FRN (2013) that the concept of 'play' be stressed in the passing of instruction to pupils in this level of education.

The purposes of early childhood education otherwise known as pre-primary education as expounded in the National Policy on Education (2013) are as follows: The development objectives of FRN (2013) policy on early childhood education include:

1. To effect a smooth transition from the home to the school
2. To Prepare the child for the primary level of education.
3. To Provide adequate care and supervision for the children while their parents are at work (on the farm, in the market, offices and other places).
4. To inculcate social norms.
5. To inculcate in the child the spirit of enquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature and the environment, art, music and playing with toys and other non-dangerous objects.
6. To develop a sense of co-operation and team spirit.
7. Learn good habits, especially good health habit and
8. Teach the rudiment, letters, colours, shapes, forms, etc. through play.

These developmental objectives emphasis importance on early childhood education as an instrument for developing productive traits in young children early in life. Furthermore, these objectives align with principle seven of the United Nation Declaration of the right of children state that the child is entitled to receive education which shall be free and compulsory at least in the elementary stages. The child should be given an education which will promote his general culture and enable him on the basis of equal opportunity to develop his abilities, his individual judgement and his sense of social and moral responsibilities and be a useful member of his society. Children's literature can contribute in no small measure towards achieving these objectives.

Impediments to Early Childhood Educational Development in Nigeria

Several challenges currently confront early childhood education development in Nigeria. These challenges invariably impede the actualization of the FRN (2013) objectives for early childhood education in the country.

- **Education of Parents**

The education of parents and care giver can greatly determine the quality of early childhood education young children receive. It is no doubt that a well educated parent will help spur self confidence in their children (Clara & Corresponding, 2022). Children given to domestic chores end up developing lifelong skills that set them apart. On the other hand, parents who due to low social status often resorts to refraining their children from interacting with their peers. In essence, parents are to beacon of morals young children look up to and as such, parents given to negative societal norms will in turn bring up their children in the same way of thought. This is because the children will learn and cultivate what they see as they and make same their habit in the future. Parents must therefore, position themselves as role to their children at all time and must not be found wanting if productive traits are to be inculcated in children.

- **Non-availability of Quality Literary Teachers**

The non-availability of quality literary teachers across various strata of the Nigerian society is a major impediment to early childhood education development in Nigeria.

- **Government Negligence of Educational Institution**

The deteriorating state of educational institutions in Nigeria is largely due to the negligence of the government in terms of providing the enabling learning environment. Lack of policy to checkmate maintenance culture of existing early childhood education. is also another short coming of the government as a major stakeholder on education provision in the country.

- **Economic Challenges**

Most families are not well to do economically. This has greatly affected the well being of young children whose provision of basic necessity such as food, health care etc determine their overall development. Umo (2020) observed that children from low-income family are prone to having low cognitive score and complex behavioural issues.

- **Demarcation of Literary Text Problems**

Literature texts that do not conform with the age of young children will invariably militate against effective passage of early childhood developmental skills in children. Hence the need to follow prescribed text by the relevant authority in early childhood education.

Conclusion

Harnessing children literature for productive early childhood education in Nigeria is presented. From this review, it is obvious that, the menace of lack of zest for education among the youth in Nigeria today is an aftermath of poor early childhood educational development. The findings of this review posit that the productive traits of early childhood education can be utilized for the overall development of Nigeria as a nation. Based on these findings, it is therefore recommended that;

- Policy makers ensure adequate measure to checkmate standard of literary materials used in the instruction of young children.

- Well trained early childhood educators should be recruited to teach in early childhood institutions.
- Provision of relevant teaching aid and learning materials should be readily provided by the Government and private individuals. This will serve the learners as well as keep the teachers abreast of current trends in early childhood educational development.

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