

Music: Pathway to Easy Learning in Early Childhood Education

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ABSTRACT

Human beings are created and tuned to listening to sounds, and when such sounds are pleasant to their ear, it stirs up different kinds of emotions in their mind, and causes them to take decisions for their lives. Music is one melodious sound that does this perfectly; hence it can cause war and bring about peace at the same time. It can bring tears to the eyes and at the same time bring consolation and comfort to the hurting soul, just to mention but few. The power of music transcends human reasoning. Children are not left out in this quest. Sing a song to a crying, wining and weeping child; you get a smiling, happy and relaxed child. In same way, bring in music in whatever you want a child to learn, you get a job done so easily and simply. Every child is created with the ability to understand the language of music, and if children must therefore learn what we want them to learn easily and simply, music must be the way out. But most people feel otherwise about this, considering the age of the children. This paper is out to reveal the possibility of this.

Keywords: Music, Early childhood, Education, Learning through music and Teacher responsibility.

Introduction

Few things in life inspire more joy and excitement than the miracle of a newborn baby. Whether that child fulfils his or her vast potential is largely in the hands of the family, the community and the country into which he or she is born. The early years of life are very crucial. When children are nurtured and cared for as should be in their years, especially with music; they are more likely to grow in a healthy way, develop full thinking capability, language, emotional and social skills that are very useful for their total well-being (Esimone, 2012:1). Music is said to be for just entertainment by most people, but researches abound that has proved music is much more than for entertainment. Music is used therapeutically, it is for relaxation, for the all round coordination of the man, and most of all it is the easiest and fastest way of teaching and learning in early childhood education.

Music is a gift from God hence every personality in this world especially children love music. Music's influence is so powerful that it appeals to the emotions and interest of children. Sing a song to a hungry crying child, that child will obviously stop crying and start listening to the pleasant sound he or she is hearing; if the song continues, the tendency is that, the child will start smiling and start mumbling along the sound he is hearing; and when the song continues for a little longer time, the child will sleep off. Only music of all the subjects has the ability to do this. Music indeed is very powerful. This paper adopted library and observatory method.

Music: its ability in the influence of the emotions of man especially children

Music according to Blacking (1973) is 'a humanly organised sound' (p.57) Walker (1998) says "it is a living analogue of human knowing, feeling, sensibility, emotions, intellectual modus operandi and all other life-giving forces which affect human behaviour and knowing" (p.57). Agu (2006) described it as "an aesthetic art of combing or putting together sounds that are pleasant to the ear" (p.1). Music is a pleasant sound capable of influencing anybody, anytime and anywhere. The power of its melody and lyrics gets into the emotions of man to cause him take a decision according to its demands.

Music is a language given to us by God, through it we express our joy for things that are real to us and our longings for the things that might be (Esimone 2012:15). To this, Aristotle in *Grounds* (1973) asserts:

Music directly emanates (shows) the passion or states of the soul-gentleness, anger, courage, temperance and their opposites and other qualities; hence when one listens to music that imitates a certain passion, he becomes imbued with the same passion, and if over a long time, he habitually listens to the kind of music that arouses ignoble passions, his whole character will be shaped to an ignoble form (p. 7)

Music has the potential to do all things hence it can be a great asset in helping children learn all that is expected of them. Music starts from the home. The home is the first environment every human being born is introduced to at birth. It is in this environment that he or she is nurtured. His first personality, ability and capability is made or marred here in the home. Music, for the child, originates from that home, and when children are brought up in homes where music is made and enjoyed, they tend to develop greater interest in the things they do in life as Ekpo (2008) observed:

Children are inclined to be more interested in music, and possess more positive attitude towards an appreciation for music; when they are brought-up in homes in which there is regular singing, in which various types and qualities of music are heard, performed, discussed and enjoyed, and most importantly, in which they are guided and encouraged to respond or participate (p.28).

Obviously, every home in our world today enjoy one form of music or the other, and most of the time make music themselves as they sing and dance. Most families who understand the importance of prayer to God, does that daily, with music initiating the communion. Children who are born in such environments are tuned very easily to the nuances of music; hence the argument, as some persons may want to know; why expose children or a child to music or even singing at such an early age, when that child has so much time in the future for such? The best answer to such an argument is that, children turn everything to music. One may have probably noticed how they tend to try to skip instead of walking, dance instead of strolling, even sing when they do not want to listen to instructions and when playing with their dolls and toys. Hence the best answer is that, children are naturally inclined to pleasant and melodious sounds. Music does affect and influence children's emotions.

Early childhood; definition and implication to children

Early childhood is a period from infancy to five (5) years of age for some Nations like Nigeria (Nigeria National policy on Education 2004). Some other Nations like the U.S extends it to eight (8) years of age. It is the most crucial time in the life of a child. Whatever happens to children at this age is of greatest importance to their general development, because early childhood sees the greatest growth development. As UNICEF (2001) rightly said:

Early childhood is the most crucial and rapid period of development in human life. The years from conception through birth to eight years of age are critical to the complete and healthy cognitive, emotional and physical growth of children. Early childhood development is the key to a full and productive life for a child and to the progress of a nation. Early childhood is a critical stage of development that forms the foundation for children's future well-being and learning. Research has shown that half of a person's intelligence potential is developed by age four and that early childhood interventions can have a lasting effect on intellectual capacity, personality, and social behaviour. Integrated programmes that target children in their very early years are, therefore critical for their mental and psychosocial development (p.1)

The above fact revealed that early childhood is the most important time and the most crucial time in the life of every child; and it is the time the brain develops more rapidly than in later years hence the importance of early interaction at this period can never be overemphasised. More so, "early childhood is a period when walking, talking, self-esteem, vision of the world and moral foundations are established. Early childhood is a period of rapid change and development and the most critical period in a child's musical growth, and has been identified in literature as the "music babbles" stage" (Gordon in Levinowitz, 1998). It is also "the time when children learn about their world primarily through the magical process of play" (Levinowitz 1998).

Also, children's social interaction, emotional attachments and development as well as their psychological build up and balance begins right in early childhood. It is at this crucial time of life that great care is required and much time invested so as to produce a quality personality capable of standing on his or her legs in the world and its system. Hence, education through music has been found to be one special means through which success is highly guaranteed.

Education: Important tool in early childhood learning

Education according to Brembeck (1971) is "a device by which men and women take what others before them have learnt to the next generation" (p.287). And Ukeje (1979) believes "it is a means by which human beings acquire the civilisation of the past, are enabled both to take part in the civilisation of the present, and make the civilisation of the future (p.372). Akinbote (2008) says "it is a process by which the community seeks to open its life to all the individuals within it to enable them take part in it" (p.8). And the *Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary of Current English* (2006) asserts "it is a process of teaching, training and learning, especially in schools and colleges, to improve knowledge and develop skills" (p.467).

Okafor (1992) however believed so much on the ability of education to transform man from what he is not, to what he is meant to be when he said:

Education is a process of acculturation through which the individual is helped to attain the development of his potentials, and the maximum activation when necessary, according to right reason and to achieve thereby his perfect self-fulfilment (p.40).

Education is actually the only way knowledge can be acquired whether directly or indirectly, formally or informally. The importance of education can not be over-emphasised here. Walker (1998) believed "it is a quest to gain understanding or what it means to be human in all its illogicality, its unpredictability, its irrationality and in all its uniquely varied cultural ways of doing and thinking" (p.32). Every human being in life started out as infants before adulthood, and as such, is born with the quest to know, understand and act; and to fulfil this quest, education is the answer. But, however this education is obtained is another important fact in the making of an individual. Children, in fact, are the starters of these individuals and are therefore indebted with the opportunity to be taught and made to learn.

More so to learn, culture plays much role in the learning process; that's why Onuora-Oguno (2009:73) defined education as an experience which bothers on the people's culture and which through learning processes prepares an individual for adult life in his particular society. Culture, which could be seen as environment is really important because, the influence of the environment in learning will dictate the outcome of the child in all his affairs. However the culture, it is important to note that individuals (children) are to be educated. Hence, education deals with the acquisition of knowledge and its application in all endeavours of life. This is why Adeogun (2006) concluded when he said: "education empowers human beings so that they can actualise their potentials and tendencies satisfactorily, and as members of society, they can interact with their environment richly" (p.152).

From all the above revealed facts, it becomes imperative to say that education, which deals with learning, actually starts in early childhood (cradle) and nurtured continuously all through life (grave). The importance of learning in life is one aspect of human development that can never be taken very lightly.

Easy learning through music in early childhood

Learning has had many explanations from different schools of thoughts and each of these schools of thoughts which could be referred to as learning theories, no doubt took their explanations from Blooms taxonomy of learning domains. Blooms theory covered three angles which are: cognitive domain, affective domain and psychomotor domain. To Bloom, cognitive domain deals with mental skills which includes recall or recognition of specific facts, concepts and procedural patterns. These help in the development of intellectual skills and abilities. Affective domains on the other hand goes with feelings and emotional growth; which work much with feelings, motivations,

attitudes, values, appreciation and enthusiasm; and psychomotor domain deals with physical actions based on what was learnt. This definition of Blooms' obviously is where the learning theories of today were hinged on.

Learning theories are important to be talked about here for this paper to be understood, and out of many of them; three shall be discussed here. One of the learning theories is propounded by Burns (1995). He sees learning as "a relatively permanent change in behaviour with behaviour including both observable activity and internal processes such as thinking, attitudes and emotions" (p.99), and which also involves motivation in its application.

Another theory is the Sensory Stimulation Theory which has its basic believe that "effective learning occurs when the senses are stimulated (Laird, 1985). Laird quotes research that found that the vast majority of knowledge held by adults (75%) is learned through seeing. Hearing is the next most effective (about 13%) and the other senses – touch, smell and taste – account for 12% of what we know". In other words, "by stimulating the senses especially the visual sense, learning can be enhanced" (Laird 1985). More so, Thorndike in his own learning theory has much to do with the sensory theory. According to Okoye (1998:16), Thorndike looked at learning as contingent upon conditions within the learner and conditions outside the learner. All, of which could be manipulated in the learning situations. This according to him involves identifying and isolating the environmental variables of which the behaviour is a lawful function. Thorndike's theory consists of "forming bonds or connection between stimuli and responses with new bonds formed through experiences and influenced by frequency, recency, intensity and vividness or experience, mood and capacity of the subject

The third learning theory is by Ivan Pavlov. His theory was defined as a process in which a neutral stimulus, by pairing with a natural or original stimulus acquires all the characteristics of a natural or original stimulus. This theory according to Okoye (1998:9) entails that when a simple subject, easy to attract and understand is attached to a difficult subject, or is used in teaching the difficult subject, there is a greater tendency that the difficult subject will not only be understood but may be seen as one simple subject because of the application of the easier subject.

All the above learning theories have so much similarity amongst themselves and so much to do with early childhood education. They are all referencing to the use of the senses which have strong connections to the emotions and which in turn affects human attitudes. Also, they dealt with re-enforcement, either by pairing difficult subjects with easy ones or using incentives (motivational tools) to achieve learning. If children must learn and learn what is expected of them, then these theories are of great importance; so much more is their application in the general teaching and learning environment.

Taking a look at the Burns learning theory; obviously, education can not be said to have taken place if learning is not permanent. Hence, for children, considering their age and its implications to their learning anything, music is an important tool. The reason is because children generally love music and can engage in musical activity at all levels as Paget (2006) observed:

Music activates more than just the right brain, for both sides of the brain are used in processing music. It elicits emotional responses, receptive or aggressive states and stimulates the limbic system which, along with the sub-cortical regions, is involved in engaging musical and emotional responses. More importantly, research has proven that the limbic part of the brain is responsible for long-term memory. This means that when information is imbued with music, there is a greater likelihood that the brain will encode it in long-term memory (p.5)

More so, in the second and third learning theories, the sensory stimulation theory, and the pairing of difficult subject with simple subject; it is obvious that what the eyes sees sticks longer than what it hears, and when music is used in teaching whatever subject (mathematics, science and so on), the fact is that, understanding is guaranteed. (Most of the songs for children are categorised under these groups: numbers, food, parts of the body, story songs and animals). A teacher who wants to teach about the parts of the body can apply singing while referring to the parts of the body. For example, Head, shoulder, knees and toes, could be taught using the hand and in demonstration mode, showing the different parts of the human body to the children. Also in the teaching of numbers (mathematics), songs like one, two, buckle my shoes, three, four, shut the door and so on can be used to teach the children.

More so in teaching the English alphabets, fruits or animals (science), subjects could be combined using flash cards just like we do in Nigeria. For instance, we use the alphabets not only to teach them the English letters, but also show them what the letters could represent with a song; this obviously drives the knowledge home. For example, A is for apple, B is for bird, C is for cat, D is for dove, E is for eagle and so on. With these alphabets and the pictures of what they represent attached to the letters on a flash card, the children will see and learn what they represent. Through this method, their senses are applied, they feelings are involved and their motor is utilised because, they sing along with their teacher, and see exactly the looks of what they are singing. Through this method, the writer observed that the knowledge always sticks. This is a fact, because the following day, the children will be the ones reminding you that they should sing the songs again by singing it themselves. With this, the sensory theory is achieved without stress and with less time. Just as Paget (2006) said:

Music acts as a premium signal carrier whose rhythm, patterns, contrasts and varying tonalities encode new information. The use of music as a partner can be a powerful way to carry a volume of content. In fact, music can do 60% of the teaching work in about 5% of the time (p.5).

Obviously, its difficult keeping a child for 30 minutes in the name of our rote teaching method, but a child can learn for more than an hour because singing (music) is involved. It is important to state here that music affects our emotions and movements; through it, children enjoy doing a lot. As Onyiuke (2006) asserts:

Music fills a basic human desire in that it satisfies the need to comprehend tonal beauty that man hears. Only music does this, therefore music education has a unique function in serving this need. When children listen to music, they respond with their feelings and emotions, manipulative skills through intellectual means and by combination of these (p.56)

Music is about creativity and creativity is the mother of innovation. Introducing children to psychomotor activities often yields greater results. Children appreciate group learning which enhances their social development. And one basic way of making them develop their innate ability to acquire skills is to introduce them to group musical instrument playing. There are children's violins and electronic guitars and pianos around us today, which are applicable to their age; helping them manipulate on these instruments encourages their desire to learn. Though the sound they will be producing from those instruments may be discordant, still, they should be allowed to keep on playing; such activity sharpens their attentiveness, equips them to be more creative, helps them to be persevering in knowledge acquisition, ensures their social and emotional balance and most of all, it enhances their self-esteem.

Teacher Responsibility in the teaching and learning activity in early childhood

Who is a teacher? Is one question that requires a candid answer. Is a Teacher one that enters the class and starts speaking to the audience? In a way yes, but in the context of teaching and learning, No. A teacher according to Senge (2000) is:

An expert who is capable of imparting knowledge that will help learners to build, identify and to acquire skills that will be used to face the challenges of life. The teacher also provides to the learner's knowledge, skills and values that enhance development. An educated person is capable of utilizing the available opportunities in both private and public sectors. The educated person can easily secure employment as well as having life skills that will enable him/her to interact well in the society (p. 26).

This implies that a teacher must have the necessary ability to pass across information that is necessary to help the learner acquire the knowledge. Senge believes the teacher must be an 'expert', expert in this sense may or may not necessarily mean the acquisition of a certificate in subject he is teaching; but having the acumen to disseminate that knowledge to his learners and make the learners learn comfortably and conveniently; liking both the teacher and what is being taught is what I believe he is talking about here.

Teaching generally is a great profession and should be held in high esteem because, in the four walls of the classroom, Presidents, Prime Ministers, Managers and Professions in all walks of life are made; and are made by this personality called "Teacher". However, in the context of this paper, a teacher is one that possesses the ability, knowledge, skills and special trainings in the psychology of children and their capability in understanding what is required of them by him or her the teacher. He must understand each child, and deal with them based on their ability;

not on who they are or where they come from. Who is their parents, what do they have and all that. He must see each child as very unique and must accord all the children equal attention if, and only if, his goal of imparting knowledge will be achieved. If such a teacher could do this, he the teacher will also find job satisfaction in his profession. Teaching is about give and take practice, you get from a child what you put in him.

More so, the importance of using music to teach children is of great importance. Most times, most educators' think that to use music to teach children entail the teacher must be musically trained or be a music professional if there must be success. It will be very good to be a music professional but it is important to make it clear here that a teacher does not really need to be a music professional to teach a child to understand. All the teacher needs is the confidence to sing and make music, be approachable, smiling and have interest in every child in his classroom. Make his class interactive, let the kids most times initiate the singing and readily listen to their winnings. The ability to sing does not lie in the acquisition of a music certificate, but in the interest of the teacher in singing for the child. To confirm this, Brendan Dunne (an internet source) noted:

Unfortunately for some, classroom singing may not have been a positive experience in the past and this may have led to unwillingness to try singing with students. Others may want to sing but do not feel confident enough because of how they see themselves as musicians. Nevertheless, singing to children seems to be a perfectly natural thing to do and many parents, carers and teachers seem to take to it easily and without concern for any lack of musical training. Singing is used to soothe, stimulate and entertain. Humour is often involved when singing to babies and toddlers and older children and the experience is usually positive for both children and adults. Singing in the classroom, however, is a more public activity and some teachers may feel shy about taking the plunge. Confidence, as in any performance activity is an important part of success. Yet, as with any other teaching technique, ability and confidence will usually improve with practice. <http://www.xtec.cat/cirel>.

When a teacher is a singing teacher, the fact remains that he can translate his teachings into singing. In other words, he can use songs to teach whatever he wants to. Children obviously love music and do love singing people, when a teacher is such, he can be sure of achieving his teaching aim in early childhood education and have the children love him. Also, at this age of children (one to five or to eight years) we are talking about here, the use of musical notes may not necessarily apply, the teacher can use simple notes, nursery rhymes and cradle songs to communicate his fact, and will obviously find the whole experience worthwhile. The teacher can as well slot in a CD or a Video CD (VCD) that have the songs he wants to use in teaching, and have that play for the children, when he feels he wants to take a break and allow the children time to do their own thing.

Conclusion

Early childhood is one important point in every individuals life; and it is where great care and love demands greater attention. Whatever happens to a child at this stage of life is very crucial; and will have a lasting effect on the entire life of that child. Education has been proved to be one great tool to educate an individual and make him an important personality in the society; and music has been found as a greater means through which the foundational knowledge about life should be transmitted to the growing child. From this paper, it is believed that Music has been proven to be indeed, a pathway to easy learning.

Examples of some songs

Songs on Parts of the Body

Soh:- lah soh, mi soh do: so la so:-
 Head, shoulder, knees and toes, knees and toes (Twice)
 mi-re do: mi: so: ti re-do ti-do la:-
 And eyes and ears, and mouth and nose,
 ti:- ti-so la ti do:- mi so do:-
 Head, shoulder knees and toes, knees and toes

Songs on the English alphabets

d: m: s: s: ld tl s: s: d: m: s: s: rf mr d: d:
 A b c d e f g h, i j k l m n o p

d: m: s: s: ld tl s:s: m: r: d:-
 q r s t u v w x y z

Songs on numbers

One, two,	Buckle my shoes.
Three, four,	Shut the door.
Five, six,	Pick up the sticks
Seven, eight	Don't be late
Nine, ten	Do it again

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