

**CHILD'S DEVELOPMENT AND CHILDREN'S LITERATURE:
PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES**

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Abstract

Children literature plays important role in the development of every child. It is a fact to ascribe the level of a child's awareness over his/her being by the level of reading materials he/she have been exposed to. As a child's development continues to progress, so the way they tends to discover their world progress. Without exposure to reading materials, the world –science, technology, and civilization may not witness or been where it is today. Therefore, it is pertinent to narrate and explore the value of literature in the journey of a child and her world. Thus, this paper intends to introduces children literature as an aspect of child's development, conceptualizes learning and learning development (as a compass or horizon to the world of a child), it also relate child learning development and children literature, as well as prospects of children literature to the child's development. Challenges of developing literature for children were pinpointed, recommendations and conclusion made in the context of Nigeria.

Keywords: Child's Development, Child's Learning Development, Children's Literature, Children Library, Reading Materials

Introduction

When a baby is born, after a short time (about 0-3 months) the mother trains the baby to sit. She continues to do this until the baby is able to sit alone without help. No sooner had the baby learnt to sit that he starts to creep around the floor. From creeping, the baby, with time, starts to hold things around and practice standing with the help of the objects. Within the end of the 12 months, the baby can then stand and walk around in the room. As days go by, the child continues trying to do things by himself, he begins to eat by himself, make signs, tries to speak, and understand instructions. This will continue till the child begins to be aware of the world around him. When the baby continues to perform these tasks, we say that he is developing. Child development refers to the biological, psychological, and emotional changes that occur in human beings between birth and end of adolescence as the individual progresses from dependency to increasing autonomy (Akanwa, 2013).

The baby develops physically, intellectually, socially, emotionally, and also begins to make signs to show when he is in need.

- ❖ **Physical Development:** This is a change in body, brain, sensory capacities, and motor skills. This development is brought by growth in human embodiment. Sometimes, it can be related to movement. That is, moving from one stage of development to another.
- ❖ **Intellectual Development:** Changes in mental abilities –learning, reasoning, thinking, and language. It deals with how mental capabilities are being developed in a child. Learning outcomes, skills display, and social participation shows the quotient of the child's intellectual development, and how the child grows intellectually.
- ❖ **Emotional Development:** A strong manifestation or disturbance of (un)conscious mind, typically involuntarily and often leading to complex bodily changes and forms of behavior. In children, emotions reflect on the level of acceptance or rejections of their actions. This implies that, both physical and intellectual factors influence child's emotional development. For instance, examination conditions, social association, or situational crises can be managed accordingly by the experiences the child has.

- ❖ **Social Development:** This is acquisition of abilities to behave in accordance with social expectations. On this, children are developing coping skills; interactive skills, environmental/societal friendliness, and attitudinal responses according to the society approved ways.
- ❖ **Language Development:** Language is an instrument of collective thoughts, it deals with how a child develops speech or listens to words spoken to him. This can be in form of sound, words, or signs. Language acquisition or development starts early in childhood.

The periods of development could be: (0-3years) infancy period, (3-6years) early childhood, (6-9years) middle childhood, (9-12years) late childhood or middle adolescent, (12-15years) young adolescent. These periods of development will be extensively discussed under this sub-heading "*child's learning development and children's literature*".

Concepts of Learning and Learning Development:

Every developmental stage in a human being is characterized by learning. Psychologists usually use *learning* to qualify their assertion "the child *learns* how to speak, *learns* how to move, *learns* to stand, *learns* how to read, etc". Learning involves many processes that are involved in the daily living of a human. The most basic are perception and memory. Perception is strongly influenced by prior experience - we see what we know, what we recognize. While memory helps to recall, interprets and encode what have been experienced. Learning is influenced by motivation and attitudes, by prior experience, by culture and background. Learning includes facts, experience and emotions, Irunebo (2016). It requires individual effort, but is also a social experience.

According to (Hooper-Greenhill 1999), learning is an active process in which the learner uses sensory input and constructs meaning out of it. People learn to learn as they learn; learning consists both of constructing meaning and constructing systems of meaning. The crucial action of constructing meaning is mental-learning which happens in the mind. Physical actions of sorts can harness experience necessary for learning, especially for children, because, it provides activities which engage the mind as well as the hands. Hence, learning involves language. The

language we use influences learning. Learning is a social activity and our learning is intimately associated with our connection with other human beings, our teachers, our peers, our family as well as casual acquaintances, including the people before us or next to us as they behave. Learning is contextual and we do not learn isolated facts and theories in some abstract ethereal land of the mind separate from the rest of our lives. We learn in relation to what else we know, what we believe, our prejudices and our fears etc. One needs knowledge to learn. It is not possible to assimilate new knowledge without having some structure developed from previous knowledge to build on. It takes time to learn: learning is not instantaneous. Motivation is key component in learning (Hein, 1991).

Falk and Dierking (1995) believe that learning is an acquisition of knowledge and skills. Learning is an active process of collecting information, a process of utilizing this information to build complex and internal knowledge structures called *schemata*. Every individual's *schemata* are unique and appear to have a physical reality represented by many branching connections of neurons within the brain. *Schemata* are accessed both as places in which to store new information and as places from which to retrieve old information. By virtue of differences in both genes and experience, every individual uniquely acquires processes, and stores information.

According to Irunebo (2016) the process of learning can be conceptualized as involving seven major factors -the influences of prior knowledge and experience, subsequent and reinforcing experiences, motivation and attitudes, culture and background, social mediation or interactions, design and presentation, and the physical setting. To fully understand the nature of learning process, it requires an understanding of the role of these seven influences; this is made possible through teaching-learning, and exposure to sorts of literature.

Learning development is a process at which human acquires knowledge in a given stage (age) of life. Locke (1632-1704) describes the child's mind as a *tabula rasa* or blank slate, believes that knowledge is acquired through experience, repetition, training, and virtue. He emphasized the importance of enjoyable learning and insisted that teaching should begin in early childhood. Rousseau (1712-1778), for

example, argued that education should follow the child's natural growth rather than the demands of society. His emphasis on the innate development of human nature became the primary philosophical basis from any alternative movements in education (Bandura, 1978). Social Learning theorists advocate that individuals, especially children, imitate or copy model behavior from personally observing others, the environment and the mass media. As the child passes through stages, so he articulates all events into symbolic picture of the world, in insight, it forms totality of his continuing learning outcome, and the ways of his response to a given action.

Child Learning Development and Children's Literature

From the developmental stages, children have different personal and literary needs at different ages. Children in the same age group or at the same stage of development also have diverse interests and reading abilities that must be considered in giving a child a book. Understandably, what children read is necessary in order to help them to engage in reading materials that stimulate their interests, enjoyment, as well, help them in coping with psycho-developmental changes that occur and influence their beings. Grayson (1974) and DeGeorge (1988) revealed that children of all ages need literature because even from their early ages, literature can influence, direct and correct them.

In giving literature for children of varied ages, the following stages of learning development or developmental characteristics should be considered;

0-3years: At zero-first year -infancy or toddler, the child develops trust and attachment to the parents and adult people around him, whereas less satisfactory attachment may foster distrust in the child. 2-3years, children start to learn how to do things on their own. This autonomy stage requires to be supported by the adult around them, to harness their positive feelings of individual capability. This stage is also known as sensory-motor stage. Under here, children have the ability to respond to sounds, intimacy, affection, and therefore are found capable to learn. In schooling, 6months+ can be in daycare class, 12months+ should have been in pre-nursery. At 12months, the level of development especially in language and cognitive (intellectual) is really amazing. They can pronounce single

words like 'papa', 'mom', 'dad(dy)', 'taa', and understand limited vocabulary, such as 'no', 'come', 'go'. At about 18 months, children begin to put words together in two-word combination called 'telegraphic speech'. When children say words like 'mom see', 'baby jump', 'it's you', they are using telegraphic speech. The number of two-word combination increases slowly, and shows a sudden upsurge around 2yrs (Norton, 1999). Here, children literature should be bold enough in colorful picture books, with description of pictures on the pages. It is suggested that the item(s) (boldly pictured) on each page should not be more than two, and the pages should not be more than 10 for children less than 12 months or 30 for 12 months+. For example, a car can be drawn in a page with a description, this is 'A CAR', or 'C is for 'CAR' (kindergarten school ages). According to Unegbu & Nwanekezie (2014) quoting Brown & Tomlinson (2005) librarians', teachers or parents choosing books for children of this age should consider the practical aspect of physical development, such as how well infants can see the illustrations and how long they would sit still for a book experience. Often, these books are collections of nursery rhymes, concept books etc. Common features of the book types and formats are simplicity of content or story, repetitive text or language patterns, clearly defined brightly colored illustrations, usually on a plain background, physical durability and opportunities for the child to participate or interact with the book.

3-6yrs: At early childhood stage, the child begins to assume the body proportions of an adult. He grows in size and weight. The larger muscles and brain also develop. The child also develops a variety of motor skills such as self-feeding, self-dressing, bathing, brushing the hair, playing with toys, jumping, hopping and holding pencil normally. Child psychologist like Jean Piaget called this stage pre-operational. In schooling, they are potential nursery school ages. At this level, children can produce correct sentences, develop critical cognitive instinct, as how things relate to each other, how parts come together to make a whole, and space arrangement of letters. At social and personality development level, they have begun to associate with peers in games, riding bicycle, playing football, singing and dancing in oral tradition, etc. In doing these, they exhibit skills, show agility, and display dominant attitude to lead others in performance. In this level, children's literature of repetitive words and sentences, illustrative bold picture

and moderately worded description books, will aid to sharpen children's minds, thoughts, and as well, provide a cognitive experience that will boost their stands towards issues in a given situations. Children enjoy these kind of books because they can "read" the pictures and folktales because of their relatively simply plots, repetitive aspect and two dimensional easy-to-understand character. These type natures of books are recommended progressively as the child grows and moves to the next class of learning.

6-9yrs: Middle childhood, this stage connotes skills mastering, such as tool handling, socio-cultural participation, and can think logically about object, events and statements. This can also be called concrete operational stage. The school level of this stage should be in early elementary, they enjoy reading easy books and demonstrate their new abilities. They also love to write and speak correct words among their age group. At personality level, they seek independence, as they begin to assert their growing skills to meet their own needs, but, continue to desire warmth and security from adults. With these abilities, they enjoy reading and listening to books about the lives of children of the past and present in picture books, traditional books and some novels. The stories in the books should be able to provide models for the child's language structure expansion, and enhance their letter writing practical skills. Also, books that often center on the adventures of young characters within their neighborhood and communities should be considered.

9-12yrs: At this stage, children can appreciate more subtle character elements such as quirks and motivation. As they are going through many profound physical, cognitive, emotional, and social changes, they have a heightened awareness of their gender and peers, with the corresponding social expectations regarding gender roles and identities. As their reasoning and abilities on critical analysis mature, they start developing an interest in social and cultural issues.

9-12yrs old children are ready for more complicated story plots, including such device as flashback, symbolism, and dialects of earlier times or different cultures. Both historical fiction and science fiction, which are set in the distant past and the distant future respectively, are understood and enjoyed. They also enjoy stories

about their peers who are growing up, asserting themselves using their newfound skills, moving towards independence and meeting challenges as in survival stories. They are better able to recognize the legitimacy of opinions, and lifestyles different from their own and so enjoy stories that present alternative points of view, nontraditional characters and moral dilemmas.

12-15yrs: Young or early adolescent, here, sexual maturation has begun to be developed in the child. They will begin to cope with the changes happening in their body and try to develop faith in them. They also think logically about the world, their future, the possible outcome of decisions they make. Here, it could be said that formal development has occurred in the child. People within this age bracket have begun to develop and understand the chronological ordering of past events, and as well reflect on them. By school age, they should have been in junior secondary schools. People of this level have begun to understand lexicological flexibility, have the ability to understand that multi-meaning context of words as in riddles and pun. Historical, arts, social sciences, and science subject books, and prose (non)fiction books can help to understand varied view point. Topics and subject matter can extend beyond a child's range of knowledge and sentences can be longer and more complex, composite story elements, sub-plots and secondary characters can be introduced, including more sophisticated themes.

In these series of *learning* developments, children always discover new ideas, and ways of doing things, as well as acquire the required skills. This learning process continues to occur in a child till maturity and to death. Therefore, all stages of development –learning, emotional, social, and physical, mental, language etc., need to be supported through effective guidance, counseling, teaching, home training and above all sound education. These will aid to shape a child in such a way that he will articulate the realms of changes, growth, and antecedents that have become part of their living into learning outcome.

Prospects of Children's Literature in the Child's (Learning) Development

1. Literature can provide information materials; create opportunities and encouragement for children's intellectual development. For example, the

study of literature can be used to extend the range of perceptions of all the senses: sight, hearing, taste, and touch.

2. Literature provides materials which help to create an appreciation and understanding of the problems of others. Exposure to literary works could lead to development of love of country, democratic ideas, and the discovery of ethical values which are common to different creeds and which form a foundation of good character in the modern world.
3. Literature shapes children's character: The study of literature is likely to develop a keener sense of value in children who gain an intimate acquaintance with it. More than most other kinds of studies, it acquaints us with the whole range of possibilities of human life: from happiness, achievement, ecstasy, joy, love, freedom, friendship, self-respect to greed, defeat, despair, apathy, hate, disintegration, death etc. We may reason that a person who has been through the reading of a number of works of literature is likely to have a better sense of what is worth-while and what is not. The general probability is also that he will thereafter look upon the complexities of life with much greater understanding and insight, tolerance and sympathy.
4. Literature can make a fundamental contribution in providing intellectual and sensory motor development through drama to train the human body to express itself. For instance, no child on entering secondary school is expected to confront all the weighty responsibilities from the very beginning. However, teachers of literature can encourage respect for facts, distinguishing between what is certain and what is conjectural, establishing the evidence for an opinion, recognizing fallacious methods of argument, and so on. This will aid children to broaden their mental horizon, and establish their judgmental instincts in conformity with principles that guide the case.
5. Furthermore, other important outcome of children's literature reading is the extension and enrichment of children's experience of complex ways of

man's living. Gaining insight into one's personality and problems, providing opportunities to relieve and experience the adventure and ideas of others.

6. Literature helps in the training of children's emotions. Literature certainly presents us with a wide range of situations and predicaments which seem to stimulate some kind of emotional responses. On the whole, literature presents these situations in ways which enable us to explore and develop our feelings in an appropriate humane way. You will have to note here that the culture of the feelings, the training of the emotions is more frequently associated with the study of literature.
7. Social awareness is effective understanding of other people and this can only be based on understanding and appreciation of oneself and of one's own culture. A successfully educated person is one who has achieved an attitude of respect towards all other people in the world, which include at first his own family, his own friends, his own village, his own tribe, but then beyond that, all the other tribes, nations, and roles he may encounter in the world. A matured attitude is based on understanding and interest, which expresses itself in tolerance and friendliness. To be effective, this understanding must embrace all aspects of the ways of other people, including their work, their behavior, their customs, and their religion and so on. This social awareness attitude is not in children. A newly born infant has no conception of the world apart from its own needs, and all its activities as directed towards the satisfaction of its egocentric requirements. Then, it is literature that is used to produce a comprehensive awareness of other people. For example, modern writers have done much to stimulate interest in and sympathy for the problems of the unfortunate, the oppressed, the unsuccessful, the deranged, etc.
8. A reading program aided by children's literature can contribute to positive mental health. Good language and speech development and sense of cultural belonging are also some of the advantages.

Challenges of Developing Children Literature

Across Nigeria, it is unarguable that children libraries functions exist in theories than in practice. Despite enormous roles children libraries can play in acquiring children literature for consumption of the children, still developing children libraries remains a mileage. As no school or public library can boast of housing adequate children literature as obtain in advanced countries.

Specifically, the challenges of developing children literature in Nigeria are;

1. **Lack of Motivation to Children Literary Writers:** In a situation where an author writes a book and still struggle to market it with little or no help from government and her agencies to motivate him through financial support or facile right protection, or a situation where children books are only studied by adult as course requirement is not palatable. Children literary writers are faced with no incentives, no motivation, no benchmarks, to enable them increase the volume of children books in circulation.
2. **Absence of Policy Frameworks on Children Books:** For instance, in UK a child got reading material on visit to hospital or public places like museum (Makosti, 2009; Irunegbo, Obialor, Igbokwe & Alahie, 2012). But in Nigeria, no handy policy that protect a child from illiteracy, or obtaining reading materials, if not from the creation or making of the parent.
3. **Absence of well Equipped Children Libraries:** In nearly all cases, no school or public library can boast of operating efficient children library in relation to what is practiced in developed countries. This has hampered willingness of parents to visit children libraries. Also, schools are not graded as quality teaching-learning centres based on the availability of instructional (reading) materials within the reach of school community. These inadequacies are visibly in Nigerian schools –nursery, primary and post-primary by all assessment when compared with foreign counterparts. This phenomenon leads to inadequate collection of children literature, thus, leading to denial of access to reading materials.
4. **Poor Socio-economic Condition of the Parents:** socio-economic conditions of most Nigerian parents are low. Parents are battling hunger, especially

now that the country is facing economic recession. Nigerian parents pay for every item of a child's needs –health care, education, foods etc, along with shelter, clean water, transportation (mobility), and clothing/wares. In most situations, parents do not meet these family needs, resulting to forceful prioritizing or foregone alternative –food. Still, majority live below international rated poverty line of \$1 per day. The elements, construe socio-economic conditions of most Nigeria parents, show that they are poor, therefore, purchasing of (children) literature will be a difficult task. Children literature market is bleak, and that even if authors has good works for children, it may not be sold owing to poor socio-economic condition of the parents, which reduce their (parents) purchasing power.

5. Lack of Government Responses: In all these cases, the end seems uncertain; up till now, there is no functional policy that promotes children literature, citizens welfare –health, education, food subsidy etc, child care policy, writers protection, and the establishment of functional children libraries in both school and public libraries, not to talk* of formulation and implementation of information policy that mandate every child, right to ownership of digital information carrier.

Way forward

For every challenge, hope reigns if the people concerned determine to proffer solutions. Among other recommendations to shed-light, government is the prime factor in elucidating the situation.

1. There should be a motivation for children literary writers, through protection to copyright, financial reinforcement, broad market backed by policy framework that will encourage giving children books on visit to hospital, museum, or recreation places. In fact, it will be a great innovative if ad hoc staff charged with giving children care at home or public places also give them books like as done in immunization. If the same energy channeled in preventing epidemics in a child is replicated in preventing illiteracy in a child through adulthood, Nigeria will be better of educationally –scientifically, technologically, medically, culturally, and

politically. This will encourage book flood, and motivation to literary writers.

2. Institutions in charge of children library should be empowered, through timely release of adequate fund. The mode of acquiring children literature should embrace ICT to hasten its collection and access. Through policy formulation and strict implementation, authors of children literature should be mandated to deposit copies of their books to public libraries of their state. School libraries should be aggressively compelled to ensure ample collections of children books.
3. It will be a great ovation for Nigeria to attain sustainable economy dexterous of catering the needs of her citizens. A committed industrialized economy backed with corruption free system, that addresses low income, inequality, hunger and poverty, and social welfare will stimulate sound education and promote reading culture across Nigeria.
4. Nigeria government should be alive, agile to stir social well being of her citizens, especially, children. An articulated policy of child welfare – education, health, and feeding should be enshrined in the constitution, as child right bill. This should vigorously be pursued with adequate release of fund. Also, public/government institution like museum, public library, and school libraries should be strengthened through quality staff; acquisition of reading, materials, ICT induced innovative environment, and flexible services that will ensure wide coverage of children in scheme of giving out books. This is a charge for government to square-up its effort of achieving mass literacy, and a society driven by sound education.

Conclusion

In every developmental stage of a child, learning is central. As each stage is an opportunity to learn one thing or the other. In this journey reading is paramount, because, the universe is already in existence before a child is born. As a foetus-toddler-child-adolescent-adult metamorphoses, they are bent in discovering the world; making input, gauged in ideas and philosophies emanating from ages, and contextually documented and preserved as literature (book). Therefore, the child's development and children literatures are intrinsically and extrinsically the same. Emphatically, every person discovered himself and his world through literature. Therefore, the perspectives of exposing children to literatures is beyond rhetoric, rather, a structural hallow to make a child take control to rule his world through decisions, convictions, and believes. On this, challenges militating against developing adequate children literature, or giving a child unlimited access to reading should be tackled head-on.

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