

CHAPTER 24

THE PLACE OF MUSIC IN THE LINGUISTIC DEVELOPMENT OF PRE-SCHOOLERS: IMPLICATION FOR LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Lovelyn C. Olisaeke & Festus Ife Olisaeke (PhD)

Abstract

Children are naturally acquainted with music as music is part and parcel of their lives. The early years of a child's life present a unique opportunity that fosters healthy development. Research has underscored the importance of the first five years of life in shaping children's linguistic development, both positive and negative experiences. Thus, through exposure to music and musical instruments, preschool children acquire language command, and develop eloquence in speech, while playing musical instruments fosters their cognitive and psychomotor developments speedily. This paper, therefore, through theoretical construct and literature reviews the importance of music in enhancing literacy skills development of the pre-schoolers and the need to apply music skills in the education of children at this level. The paper concludes by recommending among others that parents, caregivers and preschool operators should ensure that these children have access to good music and musical instruments to enable them to reap the full benefits abound in them their training and linguistic development.

Keywords: Pre-schoolers, linguistic development, music, early childhood education

Introduction

Music is an intrinsic cultural activity that has characterized the lives of people from time immemorial and has transcended ages. It is expressed in divergent ways, including singing, humming, dancing, playing instruments, and other forms of physical demonstration. Music

provides a means of transmitting knowledge, information, history, and cultural heritages as well as its role in entertainment which is its major domain. Music has the capacity for the retention of knowledge and fosters the language development of preschool children. According to Onyiuke (2006), "Music plays a very important role in the all-round development of the child... When children listen to music, they respond with their feelings and emotions, manipulative skills through intellectual means and by a combination of these (p. 56)".

Language is the vehicle through which humans express their feelings, listen, speak and read and write. It enables individuals to pass down information to one another and creates a rich cultural heritage (Stantrock, 2000). The years from infancy to six years correspond to preschool years for language development, and children learn at a terrific rate at this stage. Research shows that at this preschool level, children have lots of ideas which they want to communicate to their friends and teachers, but because their language development is not yet complete, they resort to other forms of expression such as cries, and hitting to indicate resentment, pointing and touching to draw attention to something, and smiling or laughing to show approval. These forms of communication interpret what the child intends to say since the child's language is not complete. The most complete means of human communication is a language which communicates information with feedback. Communication, according to Onwuegbuna (2011:272) is defined as

A process that involves the exchange of information between a source and a target via a medium or multimedia of sounds, signs, symbols, and acts. For the communication to be considered effective, the target audience must be able to access the information, decode the content, understands it, and acts accordingly and appropriately enough to feedback on the source.

Conceptually, language is a system of sounds and sound symbols that are acquired. It is an activity that involves self-expression with parts of human speech organs like the tongue, teeth, vocal cords, lips, and mouths, among others. It is the expression of ideas utilizing speech sounds combined into sentences with the combination leading to more ideas and thoughts. Maduewesi and Akahara (1996) explain the processes an idea passes through before meaning is achieved. An idea begins with speech sounds that produce the words, the words are then put together to produce meaning according to the syntactic combination of a given language. Furthermore, language is a system of vocal conventional signs, characteristics of the interaction of one or more communities of human beings. Language is also defined as the body of words used in common by a nation, people or race to communicate their thoughts (Kluckholm: 2021).

The importance of language development for children in early childhood education cannot be played down as their overall progress in adult life is considerably tied to it. Effective language use gives children the power to have a say in what they want and need. Language is an essential key for learning and enabling children to make sense of the world around them. It provides an

important opportunity for a child to socialize with his/her peers and the people around them. Therefore to facilitate a faster and retentive language acquisition at this level of education, music should be exposed to children in many ways, possibly as a medium of knowledge impartation.

Characteristics of Language

Major characteristics of language have been outlined by Cayaningtyas, Hasannah, Prayogi, and Suwartono (2022) thus:

- Language is systematic; a language is a structured system of communication which consists of a set of sounds, signs and written symbols which are used by the people of a particular country, region or group for talking, writing or communicating.
- Language is symbolic: almost every human is primarily made up of symbols. A symbol is something that stands in for or represents something else.
- Language is social: language as social interaction with other persons is psychologically necessary to learn the language.
- Language is arbitrary: the sound of a word gives very little or no clue to the meaning of the word. When one for instance says or writes 'dog'. It does not give it any clue as to what it means.
- Language is dynamic: it is always changing, evolving, and adapting to the needs of its users.
- Language is variation: there is more than one way of saying the same thing. Speakers may vary pronunciation (accent), word choice (lexicon), or morphology and syntax (grammar).
- Language is meaningful: a language signal/symbol always conveys meaning. In linguistic terms, all the symbols/signals of language have semantic content.
- Language is cultural: language is one of the most important parts of any culture. Culture as a whole is transmitted through language. The fact that humankind has a history in the sense that animals do not is entirely the result of language.

It is important to note that these qualities of language are also possessed by music thereby making the two easy to complement each other.

Who are the Preschoolers

Preschoolers are children who are no longer babies but are not yet old enough to go to primary school, rather, they are found in preschools (kindergarten, play class, crèche, etc). They are between the ages of three and five years old. At this stage, they learn to use and test their bodies and abilities. Locomotion plays a large role in motor and skill development and includes activities of moving the body through space – walking, dancing to music, running, hopping, jumping, rolling, climbing, and leaping. Preschoolers use these activities to investigate and explore the relationship between themselves, space and objects in space. These children also like to participate in fine-motor activities such as drawing, colouring, painting, cutting and pasting. They need programmes that provide action and play which enables them to talk.

Language development

Preschoolers are in the preoperational stage of development. Characteristics of the preoperational stage are:

- Children grow in their ability to use symbols including languages.
- Children are not capable of operational thinking. An operation is a reversible mental action which explains why Piaget named this stage preoperational.
- Children centre on one thought or idea, often to the exclusion of other thoughts.
- Children are unable to conserve.
- Children are egocentric.

Chem (2009) states that at the preoperational stage (2 – 7 years), children build on object permanence and continue to develop abstract mental processes. This means they can think about things beyond the physical world, such as things that happened in the past. At this stage, children's language command is not yet well developed, thus, they ponder so many questions to comprehend facts and get words to express themselves.

Language formation of a growing child

Preschoolers' language skills grow and develop rapidly at this stage. Vocabulary increases and sentence length increases as children continue to master syntax and grammar. During preschool years preschoolers' language development is diverse and comprehensive, and it constitutes a truly impressive range of learning. An even more impressive feature of this language acquisition is that children learn intuitively, without a great deal of instruction, the rules of language that apply to the words and phrases they use.

An overview of the language pyramid

Language formation is about children learning rules for putting words together in a way that will express their thoughts and feelings and understanding the meaning of both written and spoken words. The first five years of a child's life are the most important in terms of language formation, although they continue to develop through the rest of childhood and adolescence. As preschoolers, new nerve cells grow and connect in the brain which enables the child to use language for self-expression. It is therefore important that the child is stimulated during this time, to ensure normal and good communication skills.

Although each child forms language skills at their own pace, Robertson (2021) states some general milestones that can act as indicators that language is forming normally. These include:

- Early stages: in the early stages of language formation, the child's brain is geared to pay attention to sounds used in speech, so he/she can attempt to mimic and reproduce the sounds. The child may also make up sounds.
- Three months: once a child has reached three months, the child may start making "cooing" sounds, smile in response to being spoken to, recognize certain voices and make different crying sounds depending on what he/she wants.

- Six months: after six months, the child may be able to make various sounds such as "babbling and gurgling". The child moves the eyes in the direction of where a sound is coming from and expresses pleasure or displeasure using his/her voice. The child may also respond to changes in tone of voice.
- Twelve months: after twelve months, the infant starts to mimic speech sounds, understand simple instructions, recognize the words used to describe common items and be able to say a few words. An infant usually utters their first words sometime between nine and eighteen months of age, with the most common being "mama" or "dada".
- Eighteen months: after eighteen months, the child may be using up to ten words and be able to assemble a couple of words to make a simple sentence such as "mummy throw the ball", "give me my thing", etc. They may also be able to recognize the names of people and objects that commonly surround them and follow simple instructions.
- Two years: by the age of two, the child may use various simple phrases, ask and understand simple one-to-two-word questions and have a vocabulary of up to fifty words.
- Three years: by about three years of age, the child has started to use language for various things such as trying to get what he/she wants and trying to tell stories.
- Preschool age: by the time the child is old enough to go to preschool (4 – 5 years), he is familiar enough with language rules to be able to connect, qualify and express thoughts, with his language becoming closer to that of an adult.
- Primary school age: once attending primary school, the child continues to expand the use of spoken language, as well as starting to learn how to read and write. As the child progresses through upper primary school, he/she continues improving on vocabulary and grammar, the writing becomes more complex and his reading and comprehension skills continue to grow. Children's language skills grow and formed rapidly during the preschool years. Vocabulary increases and sentence length increases as children continue to master syntax and grammar. During the preschool years, children's language development is diverse and comprehensive, and it constitutes a truly impressive range of learning. An even more impressive feature of this language acquisition is that children learn intuitively, without a great deal of instruction, the rules of language that apply to words and phrases they use, rather some factors enhance the formation of children's language easily.

At any of these stages, music plays vital roles in different degrees in the development of children.

How does music enhance language development?

Music is naturally captivating and lures people to itself including children. It is very effective in every human activity in numerous ways. That is why it is easily recommended in many institutions that manage human affairs including hospitals, churches, educational institutions, and so on. Music has many uses but for this research, we wish to limit those uses as pertain to education especially those of children and its effect in enhancing the development of language. It

is a very good tool for enhancing the retention of facts and ideas through memorization. Beautiful and easy tunes with captivating rhythms help in memorizing the words of the music; this becomes more prominent in African tunes with their unique repetitive patterns. Bilingual children particularly can benefit more from singing songs in their second language.

Music is one of the few activities that involves using the whole body system. It demands absolute concentration. It is inherent in all cultures and can have surprising benefits not only in language acquisition, but in improving memory and focusing attention, and also for physical coordination and development. Music enhances language learning and communication and plays a very important part in children's learning in both their native languages as well as additional ones. As children, they can imitate the rhythm and musical structure of their mother and immediate environment long before they can say or sing the words of the music.

Music stimulates the brain which is for learning and boosting language development, that is, music and linguistics share a neurological network. The network is called 'neurons' which are electrical and chemical impulses to transmit and process information in the brain (Shoreman, 2022). Music fires up children's sense of syntax (word order), vocabulary knowledge, and speech patterns every time they sing. According to Cullinan (2002), music-making activities are so much more than just noise. Shaking bells, banging on pan lids with wooden spoons, and tapping on tables are all child's ways of expressing his/her ideas and emotions, exploring his/her creativity and developing auditory processing and listening skills, thus language is strengthened. The rhythms of music, beautiful melodies, as well as repetitive patterns within songs help children to memorize words. Even if most words are difficult and unfamiliar at first, constant mimicking of the words in the songs can help children practice producing sounds in the new language.

In furtherance to the above, compared to language, music has rules for ordering elements, including notes, chords, and intervals, transforming them into complex structures that convey emotional meanings. Due to similar features that music and language share, many of the brain areas that process language also process music. In a piece on the everyday language learning of a pre-schooler, Zaraysky (2010) says that learning a language through music, at least in part, is easier because it activates more areas of the mind than language alone. Music calls on both the left and right sides of the brain to work together and leads to higher comprehension, thus communication is made easy.

Implication for childhood education

The benefits of music in the language development of pre-schoolers cannot be overemphasized. No wonder the Federal Republic of Nigeria in her National Policy on Education (2013) on the purpose of early childcare development and education, stated that it is a process of inculcating in the child the spirit of inquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature, the environment, art,

music, and the use of toys with music instruments included. Music is essential in the total growth and development of pre-schoolers. It contributes to the physical, intellectual, social and language development of the children in addition to other benefits, and therefore needs to be supported as an essential part of their education. Alyousef (2020) stated that singing may significantly improve spatial intelligence, the kind needed for high-level maths and sciences.

Music is perfectly designed for training children's listening skills and concentration. Good listening skills and school achievements go hand in hand. Music helps to develop children's imagination and creative experience of feelings. It can help develop a child's personality (especially a shy individual) by easing their way into self-expression in the way of humour, happiness, beauty, or sadness through speech/song as well as movement. Children often do not have the words to express their emotions. Music improves the child's muscular coordination. It develops precise control of smaller muscles in the arms, hands, and feet through movement and instrumentation as well as internal muscles used in breathing and singing. Music helps in the teaching and memorization of alphabets, numerals and skills. It builds memory retention and verbal and nonverbal skills. Music boosts a child's self-confidence by performing in public, and many more. The general implication of music in childhood education appears inexhaustible but its place in aiding language development in the growing child is a matter that should not be played down.

Conclusion

Music is somehow a voluntary activity that one impulsively identifies with. It has the ingredients that make one get attracted to it even when he does not wish to. Every component of it is useful in achieving that inevitable compulsion it possesses – rhythm, melody, harmony, application of instruments, and so on. These elements of music make it possible for it to have the capacity of fostering learning, and retention and give feedback to children. Pre-schoolers most times sing alphabet letters (ABCD) without the ability to identify the letters immediately but with repetitive practice and as the child advances in age the knowledge becomes permanent and never forgotten. Learning seems to take place where there is meaningful feedback which is made easier with the application of music.

This work highlighted the place of music in the linguistic development of pre-schoolers, and its importance to the language formation of a growing child. How children learn and acquire vocabularies determine the extent of their language development, thus parents and preschool educators should always incorporate music and musical instruments in the children's activities and learning process in the classroom because music complements learning especially mastering their language development and skills in childhood years.

Recommendation

Music in every form of it is a fundamental and essential factor to pre-schoolers in childhood education. It significantly contributes to developing vocabularies and language in the early years

of the child's learning, and for this to take place, the following recommendations should be taken into consideration:

- Parents should ensure that they enrol their children on preschools that make adequate use of music and music facilities for children's teaching and learning.
- Parents should provide their children with some music facilities at home and always endeavour to create opportunities and avenues for singing and dancing with them.
- Children should be allowed to watch music series on television because it has a positive effect on their progress through language development.
- Government should ensure that relevant musical instructional materials are made available for children's development of language in preschools.

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