

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT) AND NURSERY SCHOOL CHILDREN'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS SCHOOL

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Abstract

This paper is on the influence of information and communication technology (ICT) on nursery school children's attitude towards school. The paper shows that children in nursery schools need adequate learning facilities to have a positive attitude towards school. The school environment has to be made stimulating and inviting enough for them to develop a liking for school and remain there to study. Their learning has to be carried out as they play. ICT provides games, songs, rhymes, rhythms and dances that help the pupils to like the school and learn well. This ensures a smooth transmission from the home to the school. Learning strategies for this level of education can also be assessed using ICT. Nigeria has a laudable ICT vision statement. For this to be realized nursery school teachers have to become computer literate, public power supply stable and computers made affordable and available to the nursery schools.

Introduction

The provision of education for the child at the same formal or informal settings at the pre-primary level has become a necessity for contemporary Nigeria. This is based on the desire for parents to provide a sound educational base for the child (Ekanem, 2007). Working mothers have always needed places for the safe-keep of their children till they come back from work. This need coupled with the need to lay a solid educational foundation for the child from the first decade of his life has placed much premium on the provision of early childhood education to the Nigerian child.

Today there has been a rapid increase in the number of Nursery schools in Nigeria generally and Akwa Ibom State in particular. This is an indication that there is an increase in the demand for nursery education.

For the children to learn well there has to be facilities that would enable them to touch, smell, see, taste where necessary hear. The use of these five senses makes learning real and permanent. Furthermore, Familusi (2001) has stressed that children tend to learn more than they are having fun. The concept of "enter-educate" developed by John Hopkins University (USA) asserts that children learn best when they are entertained. This is very true of the children in nursery schools who are just learning their first steps in the education enterprise.

The National Policy on Education (2004) defined early childhood institution as education in an educational institution given to children aged 3-5 years and prior to entering the primary school. One of the facilities that can be used and is being used to facilitate learning at this stage is Information and Communication Technology. In this paper, the influence of ICT on pupils performance in nursery schools is assessed.

Meaning of Information and Communication Technology

Kazaure (2003) has defined ICT as the management of computer with telecommunication technologies. Commonwealth Secretariat (1991) described it as a phrase used to encompass a range of new technologies and their applications including all aspects of the use of computers, microelectronic

A.O. Atakpa and C.O. Igbokwe

devices, satellite and communications technology. All forms of electronic technology and other modern technology that are used in disseminating, receiving or retrieving information at a fast and wider pace are referred to as ICT. These include internet services, radio, television, satellite and other communication technologies.

Omonu (2006) defined ICT as the technology of creation, processing, storage, retrieval and transmission of data and information. Other technologies such as telecommunications, satellite technologies, electrical and electronic (hardware) and electronic computing (software) are also included in ICT. Rahman (2002) asserted that a good telecommunication network and information technology are skills that are to be required.

Adeboye (2002) reported that internet is a global computer network that allows data to be transferred from one computer to another computer.

Njena (2002) asserted that ICT operates over standard telephone and computer network. Information is broken down into digital packets which makes technology extremely cost effective. Large quantity of information can be assessed and distributed over long distances at relatively little cost.

Kazaure (2003) noted that in the 1970s and 1980s when large mainframe computers were used, the focus of ICT was only on computing; that is, how to put data into a computer, process it and get results without necessarily communicating with another computer. ICT refers to telecommunication and the information super highway of which telecommunication is the primary enabling technology. In order for one computer to communicate with another computer, it has to do so through telecommunication technology. Telecommunication's main purpose therefore, is to enable the transmission of signals representing voice, data (physical data and images) between remote locations. Since the 1990s, it has come to be realized that ICT is not a luxury but a prerequisite of the development of nations.

Frenzel (1996) asserted that ICT is radically altering the balance of power between institutions, government and people by broadly disseminating important information.

ICT and Nursery School Child

The need to provide "whole" experiences to the child makes pre-primary school education an important tool for the modern child. Osayin (1986) warned that lack of proper early childhood experiences could lead to production of "crippled adults" who would make little or no contribution to the task of nation building. Basic equipment and facilities such as adequate classroom space, ventilation, seats, library, portable water, canteen, toilet and urinary should be made available and proportional to the number of pupils.

Instructional materials are indispensable tools for a successful teaching and learning in the pre-primary school (Ekanem, 2007). No lesson should be taught to the preschool child without appropriate stories and related materials.

Isangedighi (1988) had observed that learning results from learning environment interaction. When unmotivated learners interact with an impoverish learning environment, the result is low quality education. When a poor foundation is laid at the lower level, it becomes difficult to correct at subsequent levels. Mkpa (1994) has asserted that instructional materials in pre-primary schools are far from being adequate in quantity and quality. He observed that in many schools, only the chalkboard, chairs, tables and mats are available in reasonable quantities. In his findings, modern equipment such as television, video equipment, radio computer, tape recorder and musical instruments exist in percentages ranging from 0% to 33% of the school he sampled. With this scenario, it is obvious that

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and Nursery School Children's Attitude towards School

many children in pre-primary schools would not achieve high level of performance as would be expected of them.

One of the variables that affect the performance of children in the school is their attitude towards the school. Attitude has been defined in various ways. Rokeach in Akpan (2006) defined it as a relatively enduring organization of beliefs around an object or situation predisposing one to respond in some preferential manner. Some predispositions are momentary ones. In such cases, they are not called attitude. While such concept as set are typically employed in refereeing to a momentary predisposition, the concept of attitude is typically reserved for more enduring, persistent organization of predispositions. Mehrens and Lehmann (1975) defined attitude as predispositions to respond overtly to social objects. A child's attitude to school determines whether he will like the school and stay there. The proper use of ICT can help the child to have positive attitude to the school in the following ways:

- (i) **Smooth transition from home to school:** One of the most difficult periods in the life of a school child is the point at which he leaves home for school for the very first time. Bush (2001) observed that most children cry a lot on their first day to school. They cling to the mothers or parents that take them to school and refuse to follow the teacher. At the mention of the word "school" most of them weep a lot. This goes on for days until he gets used to the school environment.

The use of the computer, the television and other ICT facilities have helped part time learners to have a relatively smooth transition from the home environment to the school. As stated in the National Policy on Education (2004), one of the purposes of pre-primary education is to effect a smooth transition from the home to the school. It is this educational institution that is supposed to help the child start learning how to leave the home and stay in school. The school has a culture of its own (Musgrave 1979). This culture is mostly regimented and controlled by the bell. It is in the nursery school that a child is made to like the teachers and what they teach. One way of achieving this is to ensure that the school environment is made as interesting, stimulating and as inviting as possible. As the crying child is collected from the parents and is made to sit near a computer and a computer game is played for him, he soon stops crying and pays attention to what is done. As Ikpe (2005) has explained, if one is a lover of music, movies, reading or computer games, then the internet is a favourite place.

There are computer games in the internet for every age. The child when made to watch a game, would be calmed down. In the same vein, the use of some educational music on the television, computer or internet goes a long way to cultivate children's interest in the school. Such programmes like Sesame Street has been variously used to get young children interested in school activities.

Goldman (2004) described a group of children that were allowed to watch a programme made 72% stop crying and became interested. Thus, the use of the ICT can help young children in nursery schools to develop a positive attitude towards the school. This tends to improve their class attendance and subsequently, their performance in school.

- (ii) **Obtaining Materials for Teaching Pupils:** Today, it has been difficult to obtain good quality and current books for use in pre-primary schools. Ikpe (2005) explained that online libraries with millions of volumes on any topics under the sun are available for people to use. Teachers of nursery schools can easily lay hands on rhythms, songs and others for use with their pupils. When these are used in teaching, the pupils tend to enjoy classes more than when they are not used.

- (iii) **Individualized Learning:** Programmed instructions are now available through computerized methods and are available in the internet. They make use of a number of different aids including teletype writers, television screens. These materials are programmed so that the learner can be helped to progress at his own pace. Alpert and Bitzer (2000) explained that the internet provides these materials to teachers and learners at a greatly reduced cost and convenience. It enables the learner to learn at a rate determined by his own capacity and motivation. Glaser (1999) added that the internet provides materials that learners of all levels can use which permit a greater individualization of instruction that is not possible in the conventional method. The learner is often monitored and continuously assessed and he receives continuous feedback as to his progress.
- (iv) **It can easily be used for Teaching Handicapped Children**
When children with physical handicaps that do not allow them to leave home often are linked to the internet, they can still receive their lessons and answer simple questions on those lessons with ease. This enables them to make progress just like any other set of learners.
- (v) **For Communication with Parents**
As noted by Ikpe (2005), one of the most popular uses of ICT is for communication. E- mail as well as the website of schools can be used to send information from schools to parents and vice-versa. This allows for easy communication within a short time. The information is delivered to the computer exchange where it is stored and distributed. Used with the GSM that was launched in Nigeria in 2001, a formidable information super highway has come into existence which has allowed easy linkage between the school and parents. Where the learner is in need of anything, the parent is contacted.

Nigeria's ICT Vision Statement

Nigeria has an information vision statement which is to make the country an IT capable country in Africa and a key player in the information society by the year 2005.

The mission statement is specifically aimed at:

- (a) Empowering Nigeria to participate in software and ICT development.
- (b) Encouraging local production and manufacture of ICT component in a competitive manner.
- (c) Empowering children, women and disabled by providing special programmes for the acquisition of ICT skills.
- (d) Empowering the youths with ICT skills and prepare them for global competitions.
- (e) Integrating the ICT into the mainstream education and training.
- (f) Creating ICT awareness and ensuring universal use in order to promote ICT diffusion in all sectors of national life.
- (g) Establishing new manufactured ICT institutions as centers of excellence to ensure Nigeria's competition in international markets.
- (h) Developing human capital with emphasis on creating and supporting a knowledge base society (Kazaure, 2003).

For now, few nursery schools in Nigeria make effective use of ICT. Few have internet services. Several teachers at this level are yet to be computer literate. Public power supply is still very erratic while the costs of computers are still out of the reach of many Nigerians. These are the issues

that have to be addressed for the benefits of ICT to be effectively harnessed for the pre-primary school level.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The benefits of ICT to contemporary society are enormous. Learners in nursery schools should be afforded with its benefits from this early stage of education. For this to happen, the following recommendations are made:

- (i) Nursery school teachers should be computer literate.
- (ii) Public power supply should be made more reliable.
- (iii) The computer sets taken from the computer centers in schools in Akwa Ibom State that have been handed over to missions should be distributed to schools including nursery schools in the state.
- (iv) Nursery schools should have computer education as one of their subjects on their timetable and employ qualified teachers to teach it.

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