

CHILDRENS' EDUCATIONAL TELEVISION PROGRAMMES: A VIABLE FOUNDATION FOR EFFECTIVE PRIMARY LEVEL EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Solid foundation for children's educational programmes is a panacea for a virile and vibrant educational system for the growth and development of any society such as Nigeria. Several reasons are pointers to this research – poor quality of education in Nigeria has affected the proper planned policies and lack of proper implementation of any designed policy among others. Also, lack of a clear-cut method for teaching children at the primary level of education is another major factor to the current sorry state of education in Nigeria. Several attempts have been made towards addressing this handicap but to no avail. The authors' feels that time has come for children's educational television programmes (CETP), to take the centre stage in educating children at the primary level of education in Nigeria.

Key Words: Children's Educational Television Programmes (CETP), Virile/Vibrant, Primary Level, Nigeria, Children, Learning/Instruction

Introduction

Education is the concept of awareness. It is therefore regarded as power in every individual, society and country. Primary education is the foundation upon which all levels of education are built on, but sadly today it is the most neglected. Federal Government of Nigeria/United Nations International Children Emergency Fund, (1992) report that children that finish from primary schools (especially public) can hardly read or write. This is because education at the primary level has been ignored; emphasis has been on the post-primary and tertiary institutions. The result is that even after finishing their primary education the graduates are for all practical purposes, considered as largely illiterates. Most attempts in teaching children, effectively in recent times, leave much to be desired, because there is no clear-cut method of teaching at that level. Today, Children's education has taken-a-new turn; emphasis is shifting away from regimental approach towards a method that is more captivating and entertaining as well as sustaining attention (Elbert, 2000). Children's Educational Television Programmes (CETP) is one of such modern ways or methods of imparting knowledge to children. Sadly, in this 21st century it is not in use as a method of teaching children in the primary schools in Nigeria. This is primarily because the curriculum is not designed with that in mind. Children easily assimilate through entertainment therefore; it is a method that needs to be considered as a viable teaching option (Elbert, 2000).

New and better ways of educating people especially the young are always sort for; Bass (2010) asserts that, when children are having fun, they tend to learn better. Hodge (1998) asserts that, it is even scientifically proven that retention of information is higher when it is communicated using both visual and verbal communication. Therefore, CETP as an option offers exciting possibilities for meeting the needs of 21st century learners especially children. The use of CETP in educational instructions can significantly enhance pupils' learning if properly designed and implemented. (Chandler, 2000)

Some of the reasons why CETP is viable in teaching children in Nigerian primary schools are:

- i. Pupils' population has increased, such that a single teacher cannot give adequate attention to all the pupils as expected of him. Therefore, CETP as a method is better in this scenario because a large number of children can access information from the instructions on the screen and anything said by the instructor will be given due attention.

- ii. Instructional materials have become expensive. This places them out of the reach of the schools. The use of CETP as a medium will help reduce the problem of insufficient instructional materials.
- iii. Learning today has become dynamic; instead of learning in abstract terms, children prefer to hear and see everything clearly and practically as afforded by the television medium.

Contextual Definition of Key terms

Children: These refer to persons between birth and puberty. Persons not yet considered as adults and therefore not old enough to be responsible for their actions. (Persons between 5 and 11 years old)

Education: A process of teaching, training, and learning especially in schools or colleges, to improve knowledge and develop skills.

Educational Programmes: Activities that are used to impart knowledge and skills.

Children's Educational Television Programmes: Programmes on the television that are meant to educate children.

Edutainment: Educational programmes that entertain and impart knowledge.

Television: Electrical equipment with a screen on which one can watch programmes with moving pictures and sound.

Who is a Child?

Onibukun (1989) states that, "Childhood could be defined in cultural and socio-economic terms, even though chronological age is the more popular indicator". According to the Laws of the Federation of Nigeria (1958), dealing with children and young person's states that "a child means a person under the age of fourteen (14)". A young person is one who is above 14 years of age but under 17. More recently, the National Child Welfare Policy (1989) defines a child as anybody who is twelve years or below. However, in line with the United Nations Convention (1990), the new Decree on the Rights of the Child in Nigeria (1996) adopts a person below 18 years as the age of a child. The UN Convention (1990) defines a child as any human being below the age of 18, unless under the law applicable to his state otherwise.

It is well established that, in traditional societies in West Africa in general and Nigeria in particular the span of childhood is much narrower than what is obtained at present in developed societies which until recently had a narrower span of childhood themselves. Oloko (1997) states that "Independent assessments of the threshold of age demarcation in different West African countries have identified twelve (12) years as the upper limit of childhood in ethnic groups in Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone and The Gambia (Callawa, 1995, Bartels, 1975 and Ford, 1975)." The age of 12 represents the period when children are perceived as having attained mental and social adaptation to their environment to be able to solve the various problems which may confront them when they are not directly supervised by adults" (Oloko, 1997).

How Children Learn

Children are not capable of mental activity or thinking in the same way as adults. Children have to learn through real action. When it is said that children are "active" learners, this must be taken in a literal sense. It is the reason, for example that Montessori said that "play is the child's work". In play, the child is practicing the various actions that will eventually be internalised as thorough. Accordingly, however, convenient it may be for grown-ups to think of children as learning while they are sitting still, what they learn in this way is likely to be learnt by rote and to have little lasting value. In contrast, what children acquire through active manipulation of their environment is nothing less than the ability to think.

According to Jean Piaget (1975), One of the most serious and pernicious misunderstandings about young children is that they are most like adult in their thinking and least like adults in their feelings.

The young Child's inability to learn externally imposed rules has special implications for the educational programmes to which he is subjected. It has already been noted that the young child learns best through playing with and manipulating materials in his environment.

Certainly, children can be accelerated in particular skills if they are taught long and hard enough. But the price may be too steep in regards to what the child misses or the emotional problems that ensue in the process. In general, a child who elaborated the skills he does have, such as the ability to order materials, is likely to be better prepared for future learning than a

child who has learnt a great deal in a short time but who has not really had the opportunity to assimilate and practice what he has learnt.

The growth of children's perception and thinking is imminent and gives room for an immense amount of development to occur before a child takes a real interest in the television set offered but by and large all refer to shared system of values and behaviour (Baddeley, 1986).

Sociologist like Herbart Marcus, (1999) are critical of the effect that mass media is having on culture, especially television. Others like Chandler, (2000) feel that, there is need for the intellectuals in the society to be the trend setters in the development of culture through their transformational effect on the lower masses.

Television

While we all know television to be that box whose size varies that emits pictures in either colour or black and white, and it gets people of various ages, backgrounds and dispositions watching and listening for lengths of time, people have described it in various terms depending on what they perceive its role or effect to be. Television has been variously described as follows: The Stone (2004) states that, "television is an electronic system for transmitting still or moving images and sound to a receiver that projects a view of the images on a picture tube or screen and re-creates the sound. "...TV is the most important medium that exist. Everything it does or does not do will be important" (Norman 1990). "Television is a visual and aural medium that is accessible to who can see and hear; it requires no specialised training or skills"- (Kellner, 1990).

The above quotes open the examination of how a television is variously perceived. While some see it as the all-in all of communication, others see it as chewing gum for the eyes, something to while away time. Still there are those who perceive that television has changed the world forever. In politics, people tend to take sides based on what is reported on TV. Some election results tend to be lost or won on television nationally and internationally.

Role of Television

Television is no doubt ubiquitous and central to the everyday lives of a large number of people both in rural and urban areas in Nigeria. People spend more time in front of the TV than on any other leisure activity. More people depend on it for news and information than other sources. What role is television expected to play in its viewers' lives? There are various roles, both assigned and perceived. The general role prescribed for the NTA for example is stated in the document objectives on the authority. The three major objectives are:

- i. To encourage the preservation and development of human values and respect for the dignity of man.
- ii. To promote social justice based on the responsibilities and rights of the individual in society: and
- iii. To promote the development of a high level of intellectual and artistic creativity (Salama 1978).

In summary, it says television in Nigeria should be made to influence societal values profoundly, and in so doing, improve and strengthen social, economic political and technological fabric."

Television can act as an opiate for the people, to divert them from their immediate and basic problems of lack and want and as a symbol of nationhood, (Salama 1978). Television has been described as a vital medium of reaching out to people in the society, especially children (Nwuneli 1978). The America TV code says; TV programmes are supposed to be innovative and reflect a high degree of creative skill; deal with significant moral and social issues and also present concepts and subject matters that reflect the world to the viewers, (Rivers 1975). What was once thought of as luxury-television sets, for example-came to be thought of as "novelties" (with an element of awe about them) awareness taken for granted.

Television is expected to present role models of behaviour, and offer wide ranging role models. It is expected to provide information beyond immediate experience. It ought to give clear definition, no ambiguities. TV ought to provide or suggest appropriate values. It is supposed to be an avenue of uniformly informing a people. As part of the media, it should set agenda for public discuss. TV moves public opinion. (Grabber, 1994) TV is very strategic to quality information as it is poised in directing attention to important parts of the objects. It uses interactive graphics, with hints on viewing strategies. It presents procedures that enhance visual learning which includes practice of the procedure in the instructional sequence.

Impact of Television

There has been series of debates and controversies around TV's impact on viewer's everyday life. While some see it as a promoter of violence, descent and culturally negating influences, others maintain it is primarily pro-social. Still, others see TV as promoting democracy and populist culture. Some people believe television creates cultural wastelands (Kellner, 1990).

Barnouw (1982) Opines thus:

"The luminous screen in the home carries fantastic authority. Viewers everywhere tend to accept it as a window to the world, and to watch it for hours each day. Viewers feel they understand, from television alone, what is going on in the world. They unconsciously look to it for guidance to what is important, good and desirable and what is not it has tended to displace or overwhelm other influence such as newspapers, school, church, family. It has become the definer and transmitter of a society's values."

The quotes sum up the tremendous impact television wields on its audience. The Encyclopedia Britannica (2004) has this to say on the impact of television; *"The effect of a television system is to extend the sense of vision and hearing beyond their natural limits."*

Garbner et al, (1982) in their thoughts on the impact of television content that, TV programmes mould the perceptions of reality held by viewers in a socially undesirable way. They describe TV as *"a centralised system of storytelling, its drama, commercials and news and other programmes bring a relatively coherent world of common images into every viewing home"*. Garbner et al (1982) also states that, TV brings its audience into a level playing ground, but, the environmental, political and cultural realities of all television viewers are not at the same level. As a result, foreign programmes can give a wrong signal to the Nigerian viewer, while being in correct consonance to the viewer in the country of origin. A great deal of research has been carried out on the extent to which TV influences social behaviour, globally; the main concerns have been about whether TV makes people lazy and less varied in social habits, in particular, whether it causes more violence in the society. This kind of research shares the problem of much social science; when faced with controversy.

Hesmondlgh (2009) says it is difficult to provide the definite proof of cause and effect. Showing programmes to children in a laboratory and then testing whether they become aggressive, will only illustrate how children behave in a laboratory, rather than in the home or the playground in the real world. Even where violent behaviour clearly does occur in response to a violent programme, there is still the question of how to separate the TV cause from other causes, such as family upbringing, neighborhood life, and so on. Many have been willing to accept the difficulties of such proof, on the grounds that authority figures might use evidence of links between TV violence and real violence as a justification for controlling what is shown, and, in a broader sense, for social control. Others have argued that, given the very large amount of violence on TV (a consequence of the fact that most narratives are based around conflict that is often resolved by violence), and given the sheer amount of time that many people watch it, it is difficult to believe that these images could have no effect. Some think that TV encourages the view that the world is a more violent place than it really is. Argument has also centered on appropriate broadcast time for programmes that are primarily aimed at adult audiences.

Power and Reach of Television:

The power and reach of television is such that goes beyond the physical sight and sound to the working of the mind. *"Television transcends historic barriers of literacy and mobility to become the primary, common source of everyday culture of an otherwise heterogeneous population"* (Garbner 1982).

Mander (1978) in arguing that TV be eliminated cited its power and reach as cogent reasons to do away with it in the society. He said television changes the nature of artificial environment from passive to active. It enters into human homes, minds, and bodies. Mander (1978) expands that the TV experience can be held by virtually all at the same time. A few people who are in control of majority's awareness can play societal havoc with people's minds; perceptions and reaction; TV focuses people on events well outside their lives, and in the process reduces their ability to be self-aware. Because TV speaks in images, it adds a dimension of mirror imaging to the thought process, thus TV creating a surrogate society where television is everyone intimate teacher, adviser, and guide to behaviour and awareness, and it is its own feedback system.

Television derives its power from its nature of creativity, attention grabbing and flexibility and the range or scope of services it has to offer, variety of programmes that include film features; documentaries situation comedies, news coverage and current affairs commentaries including live interviews and coverage of happening events. Television has the ability to put its audience in the driver's seat (Belch and Belch 2001).

The level of illiteracy in Nigeria should have made television the most viable means of reaching the masses, because the range of its services makes it possible to address itself to all sectors regardless of social standing or demography. This is because the programming can be adapted to suit particular localities, language groups, sex, or educational status (Mohammed, 1999). Television takes part of the credit for turning the world into a global village. Anywhere something is happening, television viewer can "be there" in this 21st century. Even dating back to the 20th century, television has become one of the most important means of mass communication. But inadequate energy and level of poverty nullify this seeming advantage.

Television takes part of the credit for turning the world into a global village. It embodies the three P's of a largely capitalist oriented society where material acquisition is elixir of the existence. The three P's represent power, prestige, and profit. This importance is due to the employment of 'multimedia', as it were, that is the employment of sight and both still and moving picture. This gives it the power and ability to bring together people of varied and diverse interest, lifestyles and occupation. It has the ability to make them share experiences without physically participating in it; it gives them a sense of shared identity, regardless of what strata of society they occupy.

Television commands a larger attention span than any other medium; it is an attention consuming medium. Unlike radio, television refuses to be confined to background noise. Television is a personification of excitement and glamour and the message it conveys are seen as such. Television employs the AIDA model of get Attention, hold Interest, arouse Desire and elate Action. This is the model that depicts the successive stages a buyer passes through in the selling process. (Belch and Belch, 2001).

Recent research has tended to view that audiences for TV programmes are active interpreters of meaning engaged in discussion and about favorite characters, storylines, and presenters. Whether this activity represents a critical engagement with the world or a trivializing distraction remains an issue for debate.

Children and Television

Children are dedicated viewers of television. A substantial part of their "waking" hours is spent in front of the "box". As children watch television, they learn important and complex structures of meanings and develop capacities for thinking and judgment that are necessary parts of the process of socialisation and education.

The place of Television in Education

The word "television" is made up of two parts – tele from the Greek word which means "far" and vision which means "to see". Thus, television means "seeing from a distance" (Bensinger, 1973). As used today, the word means the transmission and reception of moving visible images so that at a distance, the likeness of the original scene can be viewed. The television is a versatile tool which can be applied in many ways. The various types are grouped under two main headings: The Open Circuit or broadcast television and the Close Circuit television (CCTV). The open circuit television can be used for both commercial and educational purposes but the closed circuit system is used mainly for educational purposes.

The educational use of the television may either be in form of educational television (ETV) or instructional television (ITV). While educational television applies to anything of educational nature like adult education and documentaries. The instructional television is for teaching purposes.

Osasona (1987) in a bid to analyse the relevance of television in education in the eyes of UNESCO noted that, it satisfies some needs which include the need for improving instruction in the classroom, teaching teachers, increasing and spreading literacy and fundamental skills, supplying extra moral extension to the school and supplying adult education opportunities. Instructional television, however, has not really achieved much success in Nigeria. This is due to bad planning even at inception and the fact that most schools do not have television sets while the ones which have do not use them for instructional purpose (Ogunranti & Ajayi, 2004).

Currently, most public schools are day schools which mean even if they are interested in instructional television they are not likely to have the opportunity to utilise it because after school hours' pupils will not on their own have access to practice television for revisions.

The same cannot be said, however, about educational television. As Ajayi (1985) observes, the various television stations in the country produce programmes which inform, educate and entertain viewers. Some of them, according to him, shape attitudes, beliefs and personalities of viewers especially children. He gave the example of programmes like "Sesame Street" which help children of pre-school and lower elementary age to count, recognise letters and words, identify shapes and acquire reading and writing skills. He, however, warns that caution should be taken in the use of these imported programmes because most of them were designed specifically with the western child in mind. The Nigerian child needs to be helped in interpreting the materials in the programme if they are to be effective because western produced educational materials are very unlikely to be successful transferred without modification to African audiences.

Educational television has been used in some third world countries with some level of success. In 1964, for example, the educational system in American Samoan was bedeviled by low standards, poorly trained teaching staff, a high dropout rate and high rate of truancy. The country then decided to use educational television to solve these problems by recruiting teachers from the U.S.A to teach her teachers and students (via educational television) both at the elementary and secondary schools. The results were encouraging as the problems were gradually erased and the operations were, over the years increasingly turned over to the Samoans themselves (Theroux, 1979). Ivory Coast (i.e. Cote D' Voire) also in the early 1960s experienced explosion in elementary school enrolment. The problem of adequate number of teachers to handle this explosion thereby set in. The solution came with the adoption of educational television which eventually came to be used in the early 1970s. It did not only remove the problem of inadequacy of teachers, it also improved the quality of education (Wilson, 1999).

Another case in point is that of Niger Republic which, according to Okunronfo (1974), began her educational television pilot project in 1964. Niger was the first African Country to give pupils complete instruction via television and the first to use classroom monitors to offset the problem of teacher shortage. The most important thing the project planned to do was to teach primary school children to communicate effectively in French, the national language. The achievement was impressive. It ensured a low failure rate within the television classes. Out of 800 pupils, none failed, while the average rate of repeaters among the traditional classes was about 25 per cent.

Effective Communication in Learning

Communication has been defined as the various kinds of interactions which take place between organisations, animals, mechanical devices etc., and which modify the behaviour of both the sending and receiving organisations (Ogunranti, & Ajayi 2004). This shows that it is a two-way affair in which case, it could also be said to be a process of information exchange between two or more individuals. It is an exchange with a focus that leads to a change in behaviour of the individuals involved. The importance of education to the overall development of the individual cannot be overemphasized. This is so because the challenges of modern day life can best be faced by an educated person. Be that as it may, establishing a very solid foundation for educational development is sine qua non with a successful educational life of every individual and society.

Primary level of education is the foundation of educational system, yet it is the level that is most bedeviled with numerous problems making it very difficult to successfully impart lasting knowledge to our pupils. These problems range from those of physical infrastructure, manpower, to instructional ones.

Several attempts have been made to overcome these problems with no significant improvements being recorded. There is a lack of a well thought-out plan for effective instruction in our primary schools and also poor implementation of existing plans which in themselves need urgent review to conform to modern trends and challenges worldwide.

Technology today has taken over methods of teaching children. It has made it very easy for children to learn quickly and conveniently. A key component of this technology-driven method of

teaching is the use of animation. The importance of animation in the education of children cannot be overemphasized as it provides practical approach to learning. Animation has been a method tested and proven to be an effective way of imparting knowledge in pupils in many parts of the world. Children assimilate easily and quickly through the use of animation. This is because it is entertaining and captivating and motivates children towards learning due to its entertaining features.

Edutainment

Edutainment (also educational entertainment or entertainment-education) is a form of entertainment designed to educate as well. Edutainment typically seeks to instruct and socialise its audience by embedding lessons in some familiar form of entertainment in television programmes, computer and video games, films, music, websites, multimedia software, etc. Examples might be guided nature tours that entertain while educating participants on animal life and habitats, or a video game that teaches children conflict resolution skills.

Animation can be used as a medium for edutainment. Most often, edutainment seeks either to tutor in one or more specific subjects, or to change behaviour by engendering specific sociocultural attitudes. Successful edutainment is discernible by the fact that learning becomes fun and teachers or speakers educate an audience in a manner which is both engaging and amusing. Various groups in the United States and the United Kingdom have used edutainment to address such health and social issues as substance abuse, immunisation, teenage pregnancy, HIV/AIDS, and cancer.

Children's Educational Television Programmes

These are programmes on the television that are design for the sole purpose of educating children. Because these programmes are targeted on educating children and since children learn better and faster through entertainment, these programmes are often with a lot of entertainment. In the United States of America for example, it was well established that quality educational television programming can have significant positive effects on young viewers' cognitive and social development. This evidence prompted the Congress to enact the Children's Television Act of 1990 (CTA) to ensure that commercial broadcast television stations provide programming "specifically designed" to serve the educational needs of children in return for the free use of the publicly-owned airwaves. Some of these programmes are PBS's Sesame Street and Mr. Roger's Neighborhood. In Nigeria also, *Tales by Moonlight* has been a Children's Educational Television Programme that came on air in 1982 in Nigerian Television Authority (NTA). There has not been any known programme on children's television especially programmes that border on our norms, folklores, tales and cultural heritage in Nigeria like *Tales by Moonlight*. It is the longest running children's Educational Television Programme (from 1982 till date) on NTA network. The creator of *Tales by Moonlight*, Dr. Victoria Ezeokoli, the then Director of Programmes recognised that these tales were priceless treasures. When *Tales by Moonlight* came on the screen, it became an instant hit. The children, entire families lapped it up and were charmed (Ukoha, 2002).

Tales by moonlight has helped a great deal in educating the young ones in Nigeria especially in the areas of identification of things, counting, reading and writing, and also basic science and humanity. It has also imparted positively on the children the way of life (good moral upbringing), societal norms and values and good cultural heritage of the Nigerian society. This has gone a long way in educating and shaping the life of children at the basic school level. Sadly, though, *tales by moonlight* has a lot of limitations, as there were very few houses with television sets Nigeria in the 80s and 90s. Therefore, the targeted children were not covered. Also, most of the Nigerian communities were in rural areas without electricity, which caused a set back to the success of the programme. The major set- back of *tales by moonlight* is that successive governments in Nigeria did not see the need to make it part of the curriculum at the Primary level of education despite its loft objectives.

Some of the benefits of Children's Educational Television Programmes (CETP) are:

- i. Promotes literacy and effective age-appropriate social and problem-solving skills among children. CETP enables children to understand the value of reflection and critical judgment in creative work. By emphasising on development of pupils' skills and understanding of creating and responding.
- ii. Sparks a love of learning in children and an interest in the world around them. As stated earlier, children learn better and faster on things that entertains them. CETP

- offer such opportunities to the children and make them fell in love with such programmes and often they glue to television watching.
- iii. Inspires children to explore basic science, technology, history and mathematics. The CETP provides practical teaching sequence thereby simplifying any concept that is hitherto difficult to teach using the traditional method.
 - iv. Stories that promotes children's social, emotional, health and behavioral life. CETP provide inspirational and entertaining stories (some may be fictions) that widens pupil's horizon in matters of life.
 - v. Promotes literacy and helps bridge children's vocabulary gaps. CETP are designed with simplified but well-articulated language and vocabularies that children try to emulate.
 - vi. Increases children's understanding of concepts related to the natural world. CETP enables students to apply imagination and rational thinking. It helps in introducing career possibilities to children.
 - vii. Introduces cultural diversity, social skills, and exploration of children's surroundings. CETP are designed with good moral values of multi-cultural diversity that help children learn and appreciate other people's way of life thereby promoting unity in diversity.
 - viii. CETP uses artistic literacy as a natural enhancement to learning in other content areas.
- All these are presented in an entertaining and engaging way.

Conclusion

Nutritionists say "You are what you eat" Psychologists say "You are what you think" (Marvell, 2001). With the proven influence of Children's Educational Television Programmes in the character formation of the child, it can be said that "You are what you watch and listen to". More and more people in Nigeria are getting access to television. About thirty years ago, owning a television set in Nigeria was a luxury. Today, television sets are so common that families without them are gradually diminishing in number and many more children are easily reached. The use of children's education programmes is vital in enhancing their education at the primary level. This is because it helps in laying a solid foundation in their education thereby encouraging quality education at all levels.

Recommendations

Observations of this research revealed that Children's Educational TV programme is not part of the curriculum at the primary level of education in Nigeria. It is therefore recommended that such programmes be introduced even though it may be a costly venture but the benefits are overwhelming. This study also revealed that there are very few indigenous Children's Educational TV Programmes. It is also recommended that more indigenous educational TV programmes be produced in Nigeria as this will go a long way in teaching not just educational foundations but also indigenous culture and good morals and values Parents are advised to encourage their children and wards to watch more of Children's Educational TV Programmes, as this will improve and fast track their learning process. Television media establishments both government and private are encouraged to air more Children's Educational TV Programmes in their stations in order to cover a wider percentage of children as target audience.

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