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CAREGIVERS PERCEPTION ON THE USE OF CHILDREN THEATRE APPROACH ON HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT OF EARLY YEARS IN ORUMBA SOUTH LOCAL GOVERNMENT EDUCATION AUTHORITY

Bosah, I.P. PhD; Okoli. I .A. & Obumneke Okeke, M.I. PhD

Early Childhood and Primary Education
Nnamdi Azikiwe University

ABSTRACT

Children's theatre is a powerful tool for reaching children because it taps into the instinct with which they are born, the instinct to explore by pretending.The study was on the perception of caregivers on the use of children's theater approach on holistic development of early years in public primary schools in Orumba South LGA of Anambra State. Three research questions guided the study. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population of the study comprised all the 110 early childhood educators in public primary schools in Orumba South Local Government Area. The entire population was used because it is not too large. The instrument for data collection was a 20-item structured questionnaire developed by the researchers titled "Caregivers Perception on the Use of Children's Theater Approach on Holistic Development of Early Years Questionnaire" (CPUCTAHDEYQ). The Instrument was face validated by three experts two from the department of early childhood and primary education and one from the department of educational foundations. To establish the reliability of the instrument, Cronbach Alpha was used and a reliability coefficient of 0.72, 0.76 and 0.78 was obtained for the three clusters with an overall reliability coefficient of 0.76 obtained for the entire instrument. Data collected were analyzed using the mean scores. The findings showed that the extent to which caregivers perceived the use of children's theater approach on holistic development of early years in public primary schools in Orumba South LGA of Anambra State were to a high extent. Findings also showed that the use of children theatre in teaching improves physical development, communication, social interaction, emotions, listening skill, imagination, leadership skills, problem solving skills and stimulates team spirit in the early years of the learners and some challenges which included that the approach is time consuming and encroaches on other subjects in the timetable, needs a lot of material which are not readily available. Based on the findings, it was recommended among other strategies, the recruitment of trained caregivers, provision of spacious and conducive learning environment, organizing seminars workshop and in service trainings for caregivers.

Keywords: Caregivers, Children's Theatre, Children's Theater Approach, Early Years, Holistic development

Introduction

Children in early years are reservoirs of immense potentials. Early years is a time of critical change and development, a time when children attain physical, mental and emotional skills they will use for the rest of their lives. According to UNICEF, (2015) early years is defined as the period which spans up to 8 years of age. UNICEF (2021) reports that a child's first1000 days of life strongly shapes their physical and brain development, mental health, readiness to learn and social abilities. During the early years of humans, the brain develops most rapidly and flexibly that is why early experiences gained then tend to affect the development of the brain architecture, which provides the foundation for all future learning, behaviour and health. Oduolowu and Olowe (2011) noted that the early years of children are years of extreme vulnerability and tremendous potentials, during which adequate protection, care and stimulation are essential to provide the foundation for well-being and development. It is therefore very essential to recognize and harness these potentials through the vehicle of education.

Children grow very quickly especially during the first five years of their lives, which is called pre-school years. At this period, children make sense of the world around them through play. The child's spontaneous play provides opportunities for exploration, experimentation, manipulation and problem solving that are essential for constructing knowledge. On this basis, children's play should form a basis for their learning. Bodrova and Leong in Mabagala and Mabagala (2014) assert that children play make-believe in order to develop roles, learn adult expectations for behaviours, and master social norms. In order to make desired impact in teaching and learning in early years, pedagogy should tap from children's inclinations. Innovative, appropriate learning approaches in early years should derive from children's natural play and target the holistic development of the children.

Holistic development is the social, emotional, physical, mental, and intellectual growth of a person. Taking a holistic approach to the education of the child means taking cognizance of all aspects of a child's growth not just the cognitive aspect. It is about the child's overall wellbeing. According to Schenk (2022) holistic development encompasses three processes: biological-which involves bodily changes, cognitive-which thinking, intelligence and language skills, social-emotional which comprises personality processes. The three processes influence and impact each other are not mutually exclusive. The child will not reach the full potential without an education that addresses all areas of holistic development.

One of such appropriate learning approaches drawn from children's play is the children theatre approach. Theatre as a medium of education employs entertainment to awaken and sustain the learners' attention and induce enthusiasm in their minds to listen attentively and identify correctly the educational messages being communicated. Children

theatre is a powerful tool in pedagogy. Its main objective is to enhance learning and intellectual development than entertainment of the audience. It provides meaningful contexts for bringing language alive, for enabling interactive learning to take place and providing children with medium for the expression and presentation of their learning. Children never learn things in isolation. They always tend to associate things with something. Children's Theatre in a social constructivist perspective view of learning, fulfils the yearning of children not to be seen as empty vessels to be filled but as active recipients or co-constructors of meaning and learning.

Children's theatre approach as a participatory approach to teaching and learning with dramatic methods, creative innovations is best begun in the pre-primary education stage. In this connection, Duruaku in Omeora(2011) observes that the tender age of children makes it the more compelling that attention should be paid to the development of affective, cognitive, and psychomotor spheres of children's growth as they participate actively and observe processes and events in dramatic exercises which lead to learning. To meet this end, children's theatre is one of the most effective and appropriate medium. According to Omoera (2011) children's theatre is an educational instructional approach which focuses on development through drama, it is a relaxed kind of theatre that is geared towards developing of its participants. Devi and Praveen (2015) explain the introduction of children theatre as a novel approach to involve children physically, socially, cognitively and emotionally in education on issues related to the society, health and well-being. Eluyefa (2017) expounded that children theatre is a pedagogical approach to creating a piece of theatre for children between the age of 4 and 10 that can enable them to learn and be morally developed while being entertained at the same time.

Children's theatre provides to the children in their learning process the element of imagination. To understand any concept, children may not reach to the core level until and unless they develop their faculty of imagination. Imagining the idea in their own way and giving a form and shape to those ideas in their own imagination makes learning more effective and enjoyable. Children must be involved in the learning process and they should arrive at an emotional state where they should forget the fact that they are doing the activities for a specific purpose rather they are doing it out of their own interest. If such a kind of involvement happens from the part of children, then learning becomes a delightful exercise. In this regard, there is no replacement for theatre for the children to derive such a pleasure in their learning process. Children who are introduced to theatre and given the opportunity to express themselves at a young age grow up to be more confident, creative, and innovative, in addition to becoming stronger leaders.

Children Theatre is important because it is a tool that can positively influence a child's development while introducing the child to

different social and emotional issues that foster engagement in critical thinking. In the use of this approach, children are involved in creating a just and humane world, empowering them to better their lives and the lives of those around. An online newspaper, Medical Daily (2019) submits that theater is like a gymnasium for empathy. It is where children are taught to build up the muscles of compassion, to practice listening and understanding. There is no doubt that children theatre not only entertains, but also enhances children's lives in many ways. Integrating children literature which theatre is an integral component in early years' pedagogy nurtures global intelligence and speaks to emotional literacy.

Moreover, children are multi-sensory learners and this calls for a teaching approach that appeal to the various sensory channels. Children theatre can be used to teach a variety of academic subjects in a more engaging way. While it works to jumpstart the imagination, it also lengthens the children's attention span. Therefore, theatre has the capabilities to create awareness, instill in children, cultural, traditional values system through performances. According to Gunderson (2018) children theatre connects to the importance of reading and they show a better understanding of reading materials. There is need to incorporate children's theatre into lessons. By incorporating children's theatre into lessons, teachers can turn their classrooms into exploratory arenas of learning for themselves and their pupils.

Children theatre as a developmentally appropriate practices inform the teacher, who is the designer of learning experiences to use such practices to support learning. The quality of learning, skills and experiences which young children acquire at the early years of life, depends on the quality of the teachers/caregivers who handle them. Optimal performance and achieving the purpose of early years education demands that instruction be handled by appropriately trained personnel who are capable of accommodating the challenges of different learners as they occur, and ensuring high quality pre-school experience for all children under their care. In support of the need for competent teachers to utilize this innovative approach, Omeora (2011) stated that it must be noted that the success of the children's theatre approach in supporting early years education depends largely on the teacher's imaginative and organizational abilities.

The teacher or caregiver in this context, must assume the status of a life coach who must have tons of enduring patience which the children will often tax to the limits. They must see their job as a helping profession so as to be able to instill confidence and make learning a fascinating challenge to children. The provision for theatre and learning depends very much on the competence of a caregiver who is flexible and skilful enough to interweave children's interests with learning and to do so without pressuring the children. The nurturing and teaching style of the caregivers has a strong influence on children's motivation and learning. Therefore, it is crucial that the caregiver

should have the capacity and temperament to build a warm, caring relationship with young children. Having seen the crucial role of caregivers in the use of children theatre approach, it is not known if the caregivers perceive the use of this learning approach as worthwhile therefore it became imperative to investigate the perception of caregivers on the use of children's theatre approach on holistic development of early years.

Statement of the Problem

Children theatre is a veritable instrument for the holistic development of children in early years, especially those at the pre- primary level whose curriculum philosophy revolves round the concept of educational play. Regrettably most educators have little knowledge on how important the approach could be. They seem even not to be aware of the existence of children theatre. Despite all the benefits of Children theatre approach, it is not known how the caregiver as the main facilitator perceives its usage. Perception differs from one individual to another. Different teachers might have different perception towards the use of children's theatre in early years. This study will therefore investigate perception of caregivers on the use of children's theater approach on holistic development of early years in Orumba South Local Government Education Authority.

Research Questions

To guide this study, the following research questions were posed:

1. What is the perception of caregivers on the use of children's theater approach on holistic development of early years in public primary schools in Orumba South LGA of Anambra State?
2. What are the challenges caregivers encounter in the use of children's theater approach on holistic development of early years in public primary schools in Orumba South LGA of Anambra State?
3. What are the strategies to improve on the use of children's theater approach on holistic development of early years in public primary schools in Orumba South LGA of Anambra State?

Research Method

The study was on the perception of caregivers on the use of children's theater approach on holistic development of early years in public primary schools in Orumba South LGA of Anambra State. Three research questions guided the study. The research adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population of the study comprised all the 110 early childhood educators in public primary schools in Orumba South Local Government Area. The entire population was used because it is not too large. The instrument for data collection was a 20 item structured questionnaire developed by the researchers titled "Caregivers Perception on the Use of Children's Theater Approach on Holistic Development of Early Years Questionnaire" (CPUCTAHDEYQ). The Instrument was face validated by three experts two from the department of early childhood and primary education and one from the department of educational foundations... To establish the

reliability of the instrument, Cronbach Alpha was used and a reliability coefficient of 0.73, 0.75 and 0.78 was obtained for the three clusters with an overall reliability coefficient of 0.76 obtained for the entire instrument. Data collected were analyzed using the mean scores. The level of extent of the items for research questions 1 was determined in relation to the boundary limits as indicated in the four-point rating scale of Very High Extent (VHE) = 3.50 – 4.00, High Extent (HE) = 2.50 – 3.49, Low Extent (LE) = 1.50 – 2.49 and Very Low Extent (VLE) = 1.00 – 1.49. For research questions 2 and 3 a four-point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA) = 4, Agree (A) = 3, Disagree (D) = 2 and Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1 were used. The criterion mean was set at 2.50. Any item scoring 2.5 and above were regarded as agree while any item scoring below 2.5 were regarded as disagreed.

Presentation of Results

Research Question1: What is the perception of caregivers on the use of children's theatre approach on the holistic development of early year's children in public primary schools in Orumba South LGA?

Table 1: Mean scores of respondents on the perception of caregivers on children's theatre in public primary schools in Orumba South LGA of Anambra State.

S/N	Perception of caregivers on children theatre in public primary schools	X	Decision
1	I use children's theatre approach in early years teaching.	3.72	V H E
2	Use of children's theatre helps in the physical development of the child.	3 .57	V H E
3	Use of children theatre enhances communication skills in early years.	3 .76	V H E
4	Use of children theatre enriches the imagination of the child.	3 .50	V H E
5	The approach improves the social interaction among children	3 .60	V H E
6	Children theatre influences the children's emotions positively.	2 .90	H E
7	It helps in the development of leadership skills in early years	2 .54	H E
8	Use of children theatre helps to develop problem solving skills	2 .63	H E
9	Use of children theatre enhances listening skills of children	2 .28	L E
10	Use of children theatre stimulates resilience in early years.	3 .54	V H E
	C l u s t e r M e a n	**3 .20**	

Table 1 above shows the extent to which caregivers perceived the use of children's theatre approach on the holistic development of children in early years in public primary schools in Orumba south LGA of Anambra State. The respondents (Caregivers) agreed that they enjoy using children theatre in teaching early year's class to a very high extent. The respondents perceived to a very high extent that the use of children theatre in teaching improves physical development, communication, social interaction, emotions, listening skill, imagination, leadership skills, problem solving skills and stimulates resilience in the early years learners. This can be attested to by the grand mean for all

the respondents which shows a mean of 3.20 which is of very high extent.

Research Question 2: What are the challenges caregivers encounter in the use of children's theater approach on holistic development of early years in public primary schools in Orumba South LGA of Anambra State?

Table 2: Mean scores of respondents on challenges caregivers encounter in the use of children's theater approach

S/N	Challenges caregivers encounter in the use of children's theatre approach in public primary schools	X	Decision	
1	Use of children's theatre in early years classroom is time consuming.	2.47	H	E
2	Use of children's theatre needs a lot of material which are not readily available.	3.40	H	E
3	Use of children's theatre requires experiencesfrom the teacher.	2.76	H	E
4	Use of children's theatre approach requires special assistive technology	3.50	H	E
5	Use of children's theatre approach requires more support staff.	3.40	H	E
	Cluster Mean	**3.10**		

Table 2 above shows the challenges caregivers encounter in the use of children's theater approach on holistic development of early years in public primary schools in Orumba South LGA of Anambra State. The respondents agreed that the use of children theatre in teaching have some challenges which include that it is time consuming and encroaches on other subjects in the timetable, needs a lot of material which are not readily available, requires special efforts from the teacher, requires special assessment techniques and requires more support staff .This can be attested to by the grand mean for all the respondents which shows a mean of 3.10 which is above the bench mark of 2.50.

Research Question 3: What are the strategies to improve on the use of children's theater approach on holistic development of early years in public primary schools in Orumba South LGA of Anambra State?

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Table 3: Mean scores of respondents on the strategies to improve on the use of children's theater approach on holistic development of early years in public primary schools in Orumba South LGA of Anambra State

S/N	Strategies to improve on the use of children's theater approach on holistic development of early years in public primary schools	X		Decision
1	Recruiting qualified early childhood caregivers	2.47	H	E
2	Spacious and conducive learning environment should be made available for the use of children theater	3.40	H	E
3	Seminars and workshops should be organized for caregivers development	2.76	H	E
4	Time table in early years classroom should be flexible to accommodate children theatre.	3.32	H	E
5	Provision of both electronic and digital play materials	3.50	H	E
	Cluster Mean	**3.09**		

Table 3 above shows the strategies to improve on the use of children's theater approach on holistic development of early years in public primary schools in Orumba South LGA of Anambra State. The respondents agreed that the strategies included the recruitment of trained caregivers, provision of spacious and conducive learning environment, organizing seminars workshop and in service trainings, provision of suitable play materials and making the time table flexible to accommodate children theatre approach. This can be attested to by the grand mean for all the respondents which shows a mean of 3.09 which is above the bench mark of 2.50.

Discussion

Findings from Table 1 above shows the extent to which caregivers perceived the use of children's theatre approach on the holistic development of children in early years in public primary schools in Orumba south LGA of Anambra State. The respondents (Caregivers) agreed that they enjoy using children theatre in teaching early year's class to a very high extent. The respondents perceived to a very high extent that the use of children theatre in teaching improves physical development, communication, social interaction, emotions, listening skill, imagination, leadership skills, problem solving skills and stimulates team spirit in the early years learners. This is in line with Devi and Praveen (2015) assertion that the introduction of children theatre as a novel approach involve children physically, socially, cognitively and emotionally in education on issues related to the society, health and well-being .In agreement, Eluyefa (2017) also expounded that children theatre is a pedagogical approach to creating a piece of theatre for children between the age of 4 and 10 that can enable them to learn and be morally developed while being entertained at the same time.

Findings in Table 2 above shows the challenges caregivers encounter in the use of children's theater approach on holistic development of early years in public primary schools in Orumba South LGA of Anambra State. The respondents agreed that the use of

children theatre in teaching children in early years have some challenges which included that theatre approach is time consuming and encroaches on other subjects in the timetable, needs a lot of material which are not readily available, requires special efforts from the teacher, requires special assessment techniques and requires more support staff. Most of the challenges above are directly or indirectly related to the teachers' duties. From the above findings it can be seen that the challenges tasks the teachers' imagination, professionalism and instructional delivery. This is not a healthy development because teachers are key participants in the development of the child. If they are hindered from using children theatre approach because of such challenges the learners will not benefit as seen in the teachers perceptions. This is in agreement with Osakue (2011) that it must be noted that the success of the children's theatre approach in supporting early years education depends largely on the teacher's imaginative and organizational abilities.

Findings from Table 3 above shows the strategies to improve on the use of children's theater approach on holistic development of early years. The respondents agreed that the strategies included the recruitment of trained caregivers, provision of spacious and conducive learning environment, organizing seminars workshop and in-service trainings, provision of suitable play materials and making the time table flexible to accommodate children theatre approach. If the caregivers are adequately equipped with these strategies to use this approach in early years classes, probably, they would have the wherewithal to harness the potentials of children in early years .

Conclusion

The findings of this study shows the extent to which caregivers perceived the use of children's theatre approach on the holistic development of children in early years in public primary schools in Orumba south LGA of Anambra State. Their perception was of a high extent as they identified the various benefits of the approach on the teaching and learning of young children. This is a welcome development because such perception will eventually lead to acceptance and subsequent use of the approach in early years learning. There is need for teachers to be open-minded, knowledgeable and aware of their responsibilities toward the use of children theatre in early years. Various strategies suggested will also enhance the use and ameliorate challenges in the use of children theatre approach on holistic development of early years.

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