



Communicative Disorder in Early Childhood: A Constructivist View

Veronica Okhaise Odigie¹
Department of Educational Foundations
Faculty of Education
University of Port Harcourt

Abstract

Early childhood education programmes are the products of exciting heritage and an expression of our society's determination to provide the best for all its young. Moreover, through education children acquire relevant knowledge, skills and increased capacity for work which are required for national development. Education is the right of every child that is required for national development. Since education is the right of every child, it will be disadvantageous if a category of children with communication disorder are denied access to education which is capable to make them live happily among others in the society and contribute meaningfully to national advancement. This paper therefore, reviewed issues of children with communication disorder; communication develops in infancy, the constructive view of psychologist and philosopher early dictation, solutions and steps to enhancing their education.

Keywords: Communication, Language, Disorder development, Constructivist.

Reference to this paper should be made as follows:

Odigie, V. O. (2014). Communicative Disorder in Early Childhood: A Constructivist View. *International Journal of Scientific Research in Education*, 7(2), 131-139. Retrieved [DATE] from <http://www.ij sre.com>.

INTRODUCTION

Each child is a unique combination of inherited traits and environmental influences (Ololube, Briggs, Kpolovie, & Ezindu, 2010). From birth, infants can be described as communication who is interested in their surroundings. Vulnerability has always been a reality for special needs. Children – children who are in or near the poverty level, children with disabilities and children who are part of our linguistically and culturally diverse population. The qualities of a child are inherited from the parent and the events that occur in the child's life help sharpen the child's language development. Moreover, there has been anxiety both at the national and international levels to promote the proper upbringing of children especially at the early stages through language art.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

There are two major concepts that needed to be clarified if justice is to be done to this paper. There is need therefore to outline the major tenets of each of the two concepts in turn. Development corresponds to modernization of an individual. It is a type of social change in which new ideas are introduced to a social system in order to produce higher levels of living. If we can introduce entrepreneurship education into the system we can. Also we can think of the possibility of enhancing the education of children with disabilities as well as children with communication disorder.

Development is multi dimensional, in the case of human and personal dimensions; development is viewed as involving the increase in quality and quantity of life of the people through equipping it with necessary skills, knowledge and attitude. The concept of developing literacy in Early Childhood has been worldly acclaimed as having the potential of shaping, developing and enhancing the mental and moral power of the people particularly the children (Ololube et al., 2010).

To sustain the system of early childhood education which is given to children between the ages of 0-5 years, therefore, there is the need for proper implementation of programs for all aspects of childhood development. The onus of this paper therefore is to critically examine what can go wrong in the process of communication disorder and its early intervention through possible suggestions that can enhance the achievement of desired goals for the child and national development.

Development is not so much a matter of what we have, but of what we do with what we have, how we do it and how well. In summary, Asemah (2011) sees development as the sum total or the outcome of efforts made by the people to improve upon their living conditions. For the purpose of this paper we will define communication as Singh (2011) put it as a purposeful effort to establish commonness between a source and a receiver. Communication could therefore be seen as the process of exchanging or sharing information, ideas and feelings between the sender and the receiver.

Communication development therefore, as defined by Quebra (1972) is the art and science of human communication linked to a society's planned transformation from a state of poverty to one of dynamic socio – economic growth that makes for greater equality and the larger unfolding of individual potentials.

Rationale /Justification/ for the Education of Children with Communication Disorder

Three major psychological theories have influenced early childhood education namely; the maturation of structure within of structure within the individual. Secondly, the behavioural – environment view. In this approach, development is viewed as environmental inputs and behavioural output and the third school of thought is the constructivist (sometimes called interactionist) view. Constructivist theorist according to Decker and Decker (1999) see genetic makeup and environment, nature and nurture as important in development. They insist that the child moves from stage to stage. More so, the constructivist see development as the result of experience coupled with the way in which the human interprets recognizes or modifies experiences.

Philosophical position for the theoretical base of this paper, philosophers like Plato, Dewey, and Aristotle readily comes to mind. According to Rusk and Scotland “It is the Greek thought that we turn when we wish to consider any of the problems of ethics, politics or education”.

Philosophic wisdom or knowledge has to do with our belief about reality as a whole including man. It is critical examination of our views about the world in general and man in particular. In fact, Philosophic wisdom and activity is concerned with the existence of things around us, what is, and why it, as well as man's place in the universe was. Invariably, since a child with communication disorder is a man there is needed to create access to education. To this end, Plato, Dewey, Vitgotsky believe that education is the fundamental lever of social progress. Similarly, Kohlberg stated that philosophically, desirable ends must be rooted in the “facts of development” (Decker & Decker, 1997).

To this end the government realized that if education in Nigeria will be an instrument “par excellence” for effecting national development, it must start from pre – primary or early childhood education. This is evidenced by the priority given to early childhood education and pre – primary education in the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme.

According to Federal Ministry of Education (2000) blue print on basic education, the target groups under early childhood and pre – primary education comprises of:

- Children in early childhood
- Children in pre-primary schools
- Children of migrant fishermen
- Children of nomads
- Children in especially difficult circumstances such as street children
- Children with special needs.

Taking a cursory look at these groups of children, almost all of them have been neglected in Nigeria educational programme for a long time. Although, pre–primary or early childhood education is entrenched in Nigeria’s National Policy on Education (FRN, 1978), ages 0-3 years we conspicuously neglected, neither have they propounded any solution for children with special needs especially those with communication – language disorder.

What is Language?

The Oxford Advance Learner’s Dictionary (2002) defines Language as the system of communication in speech and writing that is used by people of a particular country. According to Azikiwe in Amadi-Ali (2008) defines language as a group of people and determinant of that group of people. Language is an identity. The story of the origin of language in Genesis Chapter 2 verse7 makes us to understand that the human race had one language originated from one source, and that human language is as old as man because during the bible’s theory of creation, there was no mention of man being created without speech.

Beginning of Communication – Constructivist view

Philosophers and Psychologist like Kochung (2000), Vitgostky (1978), Piaget and Inhelder (1971) in the past made attempts to bring about a systematic innovation in educational theory or practice across a community or society. In order words, Constructivism must be systematic in nature. In Philosophical terms, being “systematic” may be translated to mean absence of what is called “poverty of philosophy”. This has to do with the elimination of ambiguities, ensuring coherence, consistency and rationality.

Proponents of constructivism theorize that children acquire knowledge by constructing it mentally in interaction with the environment. The overall objectives of a constructivist’s approach would be promoting children’s involvement with interesting ideas, problems and questions. Language is a means by which a person communicates ideas, feelings to another in such a way that the meaning is mutually understood. For the purpose of this text, Language refers to a system of intentional communication through sounds, signs, or symbols that are understood to others. A child’s ability to communicate involves an integration of body sign. Logically a conclusion that children are communicator can be deduced from the following:

- All human beings communicate
- Children are human beings
- Children communicate

Invariably since infants can be described as communicators, the young infant contact with their mother is seen as their first step in establishing communication. Kholberg (1983), a constructivist observes that children acquire knowledge by constructing it mentally in interaction with the environment. Piaget in the same vein observes that as the child seeks to construct an understanding of the environment, the brain creates schemes (Odigie 2003).

Theoretical Framework of Language Development;

Vitgotsky's (1978) theory is a socio-cultural cognitive theory which emphasizes how culture and social interaction guide cognitive development. It is believed that children social interaction with more skilled adults and peers are indispensable in advancing cognitive development. It is through the interaction that the less – skilled members of the culture learn to use the tools that will help them adapt and be successful in the culture. For example, when a skilled reader regularly helps a child to learn how to read, it does not only add to the child's reading skills but also communicates to the child that reading is an important activity in the culture. To stress further on the importance of culture and environment in mental development, Vitgotsky (1978) proposed the basic principles underlying his theoretical framework which is the fact that children construct knowledge through their perception which is stored as a base for future oral and written language. Learning according to Vitgotsky in Machado (1999) can lead to development and that language plays a central role in mental development. Meanwhile, what is the relationship between language and development?

Relationship between Language and Development;

What is Language?

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- i) Thinking ability.
- ii) A Central nervous system perception.
- iii) Loving care.

In addition, for the purpose of organization and understanding development is commonly described in terms of period in early childhood which consists of:

- The pre – natal period
- Infancy
- Early childhood

PRE- NATAL PERIOD

Development of the ability to communicate begins even before the child's birth. That is why pre – natal environment plays an important role. The brain according to Machado in Santrock (2007) develops on a complex interplay between the genes the child is born with and experiences he has. Moreover, factors such as the mother's emotional and physical health and nutrition can affect the development and health of the unborn child. Many scientists believe that the neo – natal period to the first few years of childhood development there are number of critical or sensitive periods or “widows” when the brain demands certain types of inputs in order to create or stabilize certain long lasting structures. In addition, to show that young infants can co – ordinate visual and auditory information involving people, they look for instance more intensely at their mother when they hear her voice. The question is can a fetus hear?

During the last months of pregnancy the fetus can hear sound as it nestles in its mother's womb. It hears the voice of the mother, music etc. In agreement Santrock (2007) postulated that two Psychologist wanted to find out if a fetus that heard the story of “The cat and the Hat” read by the mother while still in the mother's womb would prefer hearing the story after birth. During the last month of pregnancy, sixteen women read the story of “The cat and the hat” to their fetus regularly, shortly after they were born the mother read to them two different stories “The king and the Lion” and “The cat and the Hat”. The child as was observed sucked the nipple in a different way suggesting that the infant recognized its pattern and tone of “The cat and the Hat”.

This study illustrates that an infant's brain has a remarkable ability to learn even before birth. In the period of infancy, while the child is learning to crawl and walk, he pays more attention to developing motor skills. At this stage, the child may listen more intently to what others are saying, digesting and gathering information to embark on the great adventure of becoming a fluent speaker.

What can go wrong? Threats to early language development: Implication for parents

Increasing focus and importance should be attached to quality care in infancy. It was recognized by GreenSpan in Santrock (2007) that certain kinds of emotional nurturing propel infants and young children to intellectual and emotional health. He added that as “babies grows, sensory impressions become increasingly tied to feelings”. In most situations:

- Adults fail to talk frequently to infants because its not in their culture to see infants as a legitimate conversation partner.
- Most Parents and adult stifles babies curiosity, they believe the child ask too many questions.
- Not giving the child a sense of feeling lovable and powerful, thereby influencing the child's assessment of self.
- Babies emotional exchange with parents and educators help in language development
- Much attention should be paid to parent's technique and home environment.
- There should be no disruption in the bonding attachment between infants and parents in the first year.
- Good nutrition.
- Interactive play, which plays a leading role in developing the quality of language.

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCES LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

1. Early experiences and time with caring and having parents or early childhood educators have become even more important as neuroscience teachers make new discoveries about infants and young children brain grows. Collaboratively, Bloom's Taxonomy in Odigie (2003) postulated that the rate of intellectual development in people occur in the following sequence: Conception to 4 years(50%), ages 4 - 8 (30%) and 8 – 17 years(20%) is almost not subject to any form of debate. A child's social

and emotional environment play a leading role in the quality of language development. These processes involve changes in an individual relationship with other people, changes in emotion and changes in personality.

2. Another factor that influences the learning of language is socio – cultural context of development in this sense refers to the settings in which development occurs. When we say culture it encompasses the behavioural patterns, beliefs and all other products of a particular group of people that are passed on from one generation to another. They provide information about the degree to which children’s development is similar or universal. Ethnicity which is part of socio – cultural context is rooted in cultural heritage, nationality, characteristics, race, religion, language, culture, values, history and race.
3. Another factor that influences the learning of language is the reaction of people in the environment.
4. Touch and pain also influences the learning of language. A touch to the cheek produces a turning of head and a touch to the lips produces sucking movements. Pain is observed most when the male child is being circumcised.
5. Smell – In the case of smell most researchers on development observes that newborn babies can differentiate odours. The expression on the faces seems to indicate that they like pineapple smell but do not like rotten eggs. In one investigation 6 day old infant according to Santrock (2007) showed a clear preference for smelling their mother’s breast pad by being stimulated to suck that a clean breast pad.
6. Taste- sensitivity to taste might be present even before birth but a study showed that only at two hours of age babies made different facial expressions when they tasted sweet-sour and bitter solutions.

Having given some positive characteristics in neo–natal, natal and infancy stages, it is important to know when there is disorder “Red flag behaviours”.

Early Childhood – What can go wrong?

Many scientists believe that in the first few years of the child, there are a number of critical or sensitive periods or “widows” when the brain demands certain types of input in order to create or stabilize certain long lasting structure.

Cowley describes “Red flag behaviours” that should alert parents of possible child learning difficulties. The following observations are made in stages:

- 0–3 months; the infant does not turn when you speak or repeat sounds like cooing which relates to a child’s comfort zone.
- 4–6 months ; Child do not respond to the word or changes in tone of voice, does not look around for sources of sound like a door bell or babble a speech like sounds such as; a , p, b.
- 7–12 months; Child does not recognize words for common items, turn when you call her name, imitate speech sounds or use sounds other than crying to get your attention.

These sensory and motor disorders observed in early childhood which includes visual and hearing impairments sometimes are described as part of a larger category called communicative disorder. Researchers (Briggs, Ololube, & Kpolovie, 2014; Briggs, Ololube, Kpolovie, Amaele, & Amanchukwu, 2012; Ololube, Kpolovie, & Egbezor, 2009) recommend that in educational approach:

- Many hearing impaired children should receive supplementary instruction devices beyond the regular class room instructions;

- Manual approaches which involve sign language and finger spelling should be used. Sign language is a system of hand movement that symbolizes words. Finger spelling consist of “spelling out” each word by placing the hand in different positions;
- Using sing – song speech style to help them connect objects with word;
- Giving Children regular eye examination.

Emotional and behavioural disorder is usually observed during children school year. It is recommended that excellent child care should be provided for working parents. Secondly, there is the need to talk a lot to babies. Thirdly, safe objects be given to explore and manipulate and finally loving, stress – reduced care should be given for emotional development.

Another form of disorder that requires an individualized education plan is mental retardation. Mental retardation is a condition of limited mental ability in which an individual has a low intelligent quotient below 70%. The concept of intelligence has been debated in the recent past. Intelligence is problem – solving skill and the ability to learn from and adapt to the experiences of everyday life. Intelligent quotient therefore is a person’s mental age (M.A) divided by chronological age (C.A) and multiplied by 100:

$$\frac{MA}{CA} \times \frac{100}{1}$$

55–69 - Mild category; Children with mild retardation are being taught in the regular classroom.

40–54 - Moderately retarded; they are children on the second scale grade level which need support from the adults in some types of assignments.

25–39 - Severe category; this level of children learn to talk and engage in very simple tasks but require extensive supervision.

Below 25 - These sets of children are profoundly retarded and need constant supervision.

CAUSES OF MENTAL RETARDATION

Organic retardation: Is a mental retardation that is caused by a genetic disorder or brain damage. For example Down syndrome is an abnormality of sex chromosome. It occurs when an extra chromosome is presented in an individual make up. It happens mainly when it involves the health and age of the male sperm or female ovum.

Characteristics of Down Syndrome are:

- Round face
- Flattened Skull
- An extra fold of skin over the eyelids
- A protruding tongue
- Short limbs
- Retardation of motor skills and mental abilities.

Socio-cultural factor: In this case retardation is characterized by no evidence of organic brain damage but the individual’s intelligent quotient is between 50 and 70. It may be as a result of growing up in a below average resource and intellectual environment, physical neglect and delay in seeing health care. Spouse abuse in child’s presence and permission of drug or alcohol use by the child .Abuse of the child, environmental toxins for example, lead, pre–natal and post–natal abnormalities and hereditary.

Dealing with Genetic Abnormalities

Genetic abnormalities can be compensated for by other genes or development. As a result it is often the case that not all of the affected individuals show the disorder. Secondly Healthy lifestyle can improve the abnormalities and finally early diagnoses and drugs can help to minimize the effect.

Solutions could be found generally to communication disorder through:

- Provision of amenities for parents below the poverty level;
- Social welfare and education care givers could be provided by the government;
- Special education programmes can be planned in such a way that provision of different educational services suitable for lifestyle of the various groups of disabilities. Government should make their education free in order to create more access to education and support to their parents;
- Health care delivery system should be provided.

Finally, policy should be formulated and implemented to meet up the learning needs of children with disability through proper planning and administration.

CONCLUSION

Education of children with disabilities is as important as that of normal children. Since education is the right of the child, these set of children are entitled to receiving proper education which will enable them enjoy full development to their highest potential. There is the need also to educate parents especially mothers, what signs to look out for in their infants, what to do and where to seek for help.

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ⁱ Dr. Mrs. V. O. Odigie, is a senior Lecturer in the Department of Educational Foundations and Management, Faculty of Education, University of Education, Port Harcourt, Nigeria. Her areas of specialization and research include early childhood education, philosophy of education, sociology of education, teacher education, and development studies. She has published several scholarly journal articles, authored several chapters in books, and contributed to conference proceedings.