



Over-Schooling and Language Acquisition among Primary School Pupils in Zaria, Kaduna State

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Abstract

This paper examines the implication of over-schooling on language acquisition among primary school pupils. Over-schooling at the primary school is a serious violation of the provisions of National Policy on Education. It is seen as over burdening, over-tasking and over-tutoring of the of the primary school children. Also, over-schooling occurs when one takes up a job that does not match one's qualifications or salary. The paper further shows that emerging technologies are likely to lead to over-schooling because the skills require one to stay longer than necessary in the school. Language is a structured form of communication that is unique to humans. The impact of over-schooling on language acquisition among primary school pupils cannot be overemphasized. One of the effect of over-schooling on language acquisition of primary school pupils is that the teacher will find it very difficult to come down to the level of the children, because the National Policy on Education for primary school stipulates that instruction be given principally in the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community and this invariably affect the English language acquisition of the child. The paper suggests that skill acquisition should be incorporated into the curriculum of all primary schools to prevent over-schooling. To reduce over-schooling schools should employ qualified NCE teachers to teach in primary schools.

Keywords: National Policy on Education, over-schooling, language acquisition.

Introduction

The National Policy on Education (2013) specifies the Nigerian Certificate in Education schools, at the primary school level. Based on this premise, attempts are being made to ensure that teachers that teach in primary school have NCE as their basic qualification. Although in the primary system, there are still teachers with higher degrees. This amount to over schooling as the teachers with higher degrees posses levels of education in excess of that which is required for their jobs (Dolton & Vignoles 2000). Over-schooling at primary school is a serious violation of the provision of National Policy on Education. It is seen as over education of the primary school children which can affect their language acquisition and thus hinder their development.



Concept of Over-Schooling

Basically, over-schooling is a controversial term that has various meanings for various people. Vander-Meer and Glebbeck (2001) see over schooling as a result of imperfect allocation in the labour market, a situation where many workers have jobs which is below their qualifications. Perhaps the primary school teachers who have higher qualifications such as Masters and Ph.D whereas the required minimum qualification is either NCE holders or a Bachelor's B.Ed. this situation may call for nonchalant attitude on the part of the teacher towards the job. In extreme cases, some teachers may be frustrated. An individual therefore, could be said to be over-schooled if his or her educational level exceeds the required level of education to do his or her job. For Anon (2013b), schooling is defined as a formal form of education where pupils are taught subjects in a classroom based on a curriculum. Thus, over-schooling means undergoing and undertaking the act or process of being trained, being drilled, instructed, taught or educated far above or in excess of what is provided in the curriculum. In this study the researcher views over-schooling as overburdening, over-tasking or over tutoring children with school-related activities which will give them no opportunity to adequately interact with their environment, especially through play. However, this concept of over-schooling is not yet fully understood but it is explained in terms of over-education which is defined as the phenomenon in which individuals feel burdened or oppressed by the weight of their education according to scholars. It is in this view that this paper is being carried out to examine the implication of over-schooling in language acquisition among primary school pupils.

Furthermore, Green, McIntosh and Vignoles (1999) posit that, over-schooling is an excessive turn out of graduates from tertiary institutions thus creating a gap between what is produced by the educational system and what is demanded in the labour market. The Nigeria situation is a typical example where many states and federal universities, state and federal polytechnics and monotechnics, state and federal colleges of education produce graduates without equivalent labour force that will absorb them. There are many schools of thought that agree that over-schooling has been very controversial according to (Gill and Solbery; 1992) and this stems from the manner in which language is acquired at childhood.

Language Acquisition

Language acquisition is the process by which humans acquire the capacity to perceive and comprehend language, as well as to produce and use words and sentences to communicate. Language acquisition is one of the quintessential human traits, because in humans do not communicate by using language. According to Ezike et al (2010), language acquisition takes place in the infant and the young child at a time when he/she is acquiring many other skills and much other skills and much other knowledge about the world.

Noam Chomsky's (2007) Theory of Universal grammar is right, it's hardwired into our brains. In the 1960's Linguist Noam Chomsky proposed a revolutionary idea: humans are



all born with an innate knowledge of grammar that serves as the basis for all language acquisition. In other words, for humans, language is a basic instinct. Chomsky also stated that language is so complex, with an unlimited combination of sounds, words, and phrases, that environmental learning is not able to account for language acquisition alone (Chomsky Language Acquisition Device, LAD).

There are basically four stages of language development:

- a. **Babbling:** This occurs approximately between 6-12 months. The sounds children produce in the babbling stage are universal. Children in the babbling stage lack all features of language except for phonology, where they can form and recognize sounds/speech but could not use any of this information to form sentences or to define words/understand what words mean.
- b. **Holophrastic:** The one word or holophrastic stage occurs between approximately 11 months of age and 1.5 years of age. By this point in time, children know which sounds and words get the attention of their parents (*e.g. mama, dada, etc*) and are again, positively reinforced.
- c. **Two-word stage:** After a few months of producing one-word utterances, a child will begin to use two word utterances and continue to do so until they are around the age of 2.5 years old.
- d. **Telegraphic stage:** The telegraphic stage is the last stage of language before a child can speak fluently and begins roughly around 2.5 years of age and onward indefinitely until a child has fluent language skills.

Over-schooling and Language Acquisition

1. Over-schooling among other things can hinder child's language acquisition in spite of Chomsky's argument on LAD i.e. Language Acquisition Device, which is an instinctive mental capacity that enables infant to acquire and produce language.
2. Over-schooling can make the child's language acquisition to be delayed. That is, the inability of the child to acquire language fast.
3. Over-schooling can bring about confusion in the mind of the child during language acquisition especially children born from parents of different ethnic groups.
4. Over-schooling causes lower productivity. That is, the over-schoolers are likely to be less satisfied with their jobs.
5. General poor attitude of over-schoolers towards relating with people in the society. A dissatisfied person is an angry person.

Implication of over-schooling on Language Acquisition

Dimensions of over- schooling to be considered include: staying long hours in school, volume of tasks usually given as homework, academic work involvement of children at



school, influence of over-schooling on the children and the possible solutions of over-schooling. Over-schooling at the primary level of education can be stressful to the children and in fact, makes school to be stressful. An over-schooled child, according to Joshua (2012), is regarded as one who has schooled beyond the level expected of him/her, or one who has spent a number of years in excess of the number required or expected of him/her. In fact, as a result of the overload of the curriculum of most schools at this level, children are made to stay for a long time in school in an attempt for the school to cover the curriculum without considering the adverse effect this long stay may have on the children.

Having children stay too long in school does not encourage creativity which is acquired through free play. Anderson-McNamee and Bailey (2010) noted that, play could be beneficial to children as it could help them to learn, to socialize, explore their immediate environment, develop an attitude of critical and reflective thinking which encourages creativity, mental and physical development and learning. Supporting this view, Okafor (2010) observed that children could be curious and this natural inclination of theirs should not be hindered but rather they should be allowed to discover facts by themselves by verifying it in an open domain of experience. Children should be allowed to be children.

The National Policy on Education (2004) provided a simple curriculum for this level where little teaching is done through play but this is often not followed as the proprietors overload the curriculum to the point that these children are made to stay long in school in order for the school to cover the curriculum, sometimes not necessarily for educational or social reasons but for economic consideration. In addition, most teachers at this level do not have teaching experience and requisite qualifications. Consequently, they teach the children what is beyond their intellectual development by overloading, overtasking and overburdening them.

Most parents contribute to the problem of over-schooling as they tend to believe that the longer the children stay in school, the more they learn. As a result, they send their children to private schools where they stay long hours in school and also attend schools during the holidays. For such parents, this is “computer age” and they want to push their children to move fast in order to meet up with the new trend. This amounts to over-schooling. Over-schooling at this level can be stressful to the children and in fact makes schooling to be very stressful. Children at this level are denied rest and play which are very necessary for their cognitive, social, emotional and physical development.

Children are simply exposed to information above and beyond their chronological age and developmental task. Overstimulation of their brain through over tutoring may be detrimental to their mental development and functioning. As over-schooling of children is gaining grounds, particularly in Nigerian private schools, there is a great need to understand the perceptions or view of parents on over-schooling of children at this level of education, and this is the focus of this study.



Another aspect of over-schooling to be considered in this research work is the volume of homework given to the children at this level. Primary education is very important because it is the early years that determine what the adult becomes. As summarized by Maduwesi (1999), early childhood education is necessary as a lifelong source of developing interest and aspiration among young children.

However, serious violation of the provisions and guidelines of the National Policy on Education (2004) are observed at this level, such as over-schooling of the children. Government provided a simple curriculum as a guideline for the operations at this level. This simple guideline allows the teaching of children through play. Curriculum, as explained by Umobong, Akubuiro and Idika (2012) is the official and authentic content which translates the expectations of the society into bits of knowledge, skills and attitudes that should be transmitted to learners with a given course or programme in both formal and non-formal school setting.

There is also the problem of non- uniformity of the curriculum used by different providers of pre-primary education. The non-uniformity of the curriculum used by different schools poses a lot of problems especially as government does not adequately monitor the pre-school programme. Ibiam(2012), advised that as a result of the young children's learning pattern, social, emotional and cognitive development should be at the children's pace taking place through play and active method, rather than having the curriculum of a particular class or school being overloaded beyond the level of the children. Another ugly situation is that it is possible that some teachers at this level of education are professionally unqualified, under-skilled, undereducated or under-schooled to actually understand the goals and purposes of this level of education as provided by the FRN (2004) in her National Policy on Education and the learning theories.

This actually violates developmental task orientation according to psychology of learning. Again, the proprietors and the professionally unqualified teachers feel that children can learn only if they are given a lot of homework (Umobong et al.2012). This is one of the reasons they keep children after the normal hours between 4.00pm to 5.00pm and they still go home with homework assignment to be submitted the next day.

Some overzealous parents may also push the children to jump to the next higher class, without considering the children's readiness and ability to cope with the new task. This violates Harvighurst's developmental task theory of 1977 which states that when the time is right, the ability to learn a particular task will be possible. It is as a result of this inability to cope with the task, that homework is done by their parents. This amounts to over-schooling. Marzano and Pickering (2007) observed that the issue of homework had been a perennial topic of debate in education.

Over involvement of the children in academic activities at this level is also another aspect of over-schooling. As observed by Umobong, et al. (2012), when the missionaries initially introduced formal education, children enrolled in school was between the ages of 5 or 6 when they were considered mature enough to be able to cope with the rigors associated



with school. As noted by the researchers today the story is different as children get enrolled at the very tender age of less than 2 years. These children are made to sit down for a very long period engaging in one academic work or the other in the day without enough recreational activities. Many children, as a result of being over involved in only academic activities, lose out on the simple pleasure of play (Umobong, et al, 2012). During childhood, play provides an excellent opportunity to learn and practice skills likely to enhance lifelong fitness and good health. Early mastery of these basic skills crucially helps the children to perform and understand the value of these activities better in their education or as adults. According to Eurydice-Network (2013), play fights against sedentary life style and obesity. Therefore, children should be allowed to play adequately because play is children's work. At this level, school related activities should not be overstretched because learning does not occur only within the school environment. The former President of United States George W Bush as cited by Spellings (2005) observed that, quality learning and education of our children at this level should not be compromised and when it comes to the education of our children, failure is not an option.

Psychology teaches that children have very short attentive span. They cannot sit down at one place for a long time unlike adults. Attention is of course very important in any learning situation because unless pupils pay attention in class, little or no learning can take place (Ibiamand-Aleke, 2012). Over-tutoring as observed by Uganga (2012) might lead to overstimulation of the learner's brain which could be detrimental to the learner's wellbeing and could lead to nervous disorder, depression and insanity. Wendy (2011) while expressing fear over this issue of over-schooling, stated that excessive tutoring could damage a child's intrinsic motivation and self-esteem. Children need a lot of time to relax and play for mental, intellectual, social, physical and emotional development. Play promotes mastery of the environment and practical skill which helps them to appreciate their world. This is actually lacking in our contemporary early childhood education due to the problem of over-schooling. Mostly private schools are victim of over-schooling.

Conclusion

To conclude, children should not be kept in school beyond the normal school period. This is so because if children are allowed to stay long in school they will not have enough time for free play. This does not encourage creativity. Overburdening pupils with homework will not allow them to have time for their leisure. This will also delay their language acquisition because there is no time for them to practicalize what they have been taught. However, they maintained that these children should be exposed to real teaching at school and not just the rudiments of numbers, letters, colours etc. From this study it is justified that over-schooling of primary school pupils have effect on their language acquisition.



Suggestions

- a) The curriculum planners should further develop curriculum in line with the age of pupils or capacity of the pupils and device a means of checkmating adequate implementation of the curriculum in schools.
- b) Government should provide employment opportunities that are commensurate with people's qualifications and allow workers in the job go for further studies as at when due.
- c) Children should not be overburdened with work that will make them stay longer in school. This paper recommends a period between 8am to 1 am for children at this level.
- d) Not too many languages should be exposed to a child during the period of language acquisition, that is, from birth to the age of five.
- e) Seminars should be organized by the ministry of education from time to time to educate teachers on the psychological implication of over-schooling of children at the primary school level.
- f) Teachers with higher degrees at the primary school level should be motivated and encouraged by the government and stakeholders to put in their best in the system.
- g) Government should ensure proper monitoring and supervision of the activities of both private and public schools on regular basis in line with the stipulations by the Federal Government of Nigeria in the national poilicy of education.
- h) Parents should be part of the decision making body of the school (Parent Teacher Association).

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