

LANGUAGE USE AND ITS EFFECTS ON CHILD'S ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN PRIMARY SCHOOL IN EBONYI STATE

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ABSTRACT

Language is an effective means of communication. Its power is often under-estimated. Language is a unique human characteristic and although there are other paralinguistic modes of communication, language, is the most efficient means of communication. Therefore this paper reviewed language use primarily from the point of view of its negative effects on children. It also looked at the power of languages and its effects on Childs academic performance in primary school. In the light of this, after the investigation, the authors discovered t hat verbal abuse is a common feature in the country and that it has negative consequences on the personality of the children. Based on these findings, the authors concluded that it is generally proved by studies that children are more naturally endowed with the ability to acquire languages than the adults, and for that, language is seen as action which involves communication. As a result of this conclusion, it is recommended that to avoid verbal abuse and prevent the inherent problems associated with language use and child abuse, adults and parents should stop verbal abuse that can destroy the personality of children and children should as well be encouraged to report all cases of verbal abuse to counselors or social welfare officers in their areas in order to prevent it s effect on academic performance.

Keywords: Language, Uses, Effects, Child's Academic, Child Abuse, Primary Schools

Introduction.

Human beings are naturally endowed with the ability to learn and use language. Chomsky (2007) has identified this quality as Language Acquisitions Devices (LAD). This particular quality makes it possible for human beings to learn any language they are exposed to especially from childhood to early adolescence.

It has generally been proved by studies that children are more naturally endowed with the ability to acquire languages than the adult. One of the uses of language is for self expression. It is however unfortunate that the Nigeria culture imposes a lot of restriction on children and their use of language for self expression. Children are restrained from using language freely to express their feelings. A good child in the Nigerian

culture is quiet, does not talk much and does not ask too many questions. Little wonder why in Afikpo parlance, it is said that "when a child goes out with his father for a talk, he will be starved of a talk". This implies that even if a child knows how to talk, if it is in the presence of the elders, he will not be allowed to talk. A good child does not even express his feelings as freely as he would want to. Thus; whereas an adult in a family for example expresses himself freely, a child is denied this freedom and this is a form of abuse on the child. This has negative effects on the child and leads to such psychological problems as depression and withdrawal.

In fact, some children end up as introverts when they grow into adult hood as a result of suppression of self expression they experienced

in childhood. This problem even affects the academic performance of the child because some children accept this denial of self expression as a norm and transfer it to the school whereby they stay in class as quiet good boys who do not ask older people too many questions.

Another important function of language is that language is action. This quality of language is very important, especially as it affects children. When mother warns a hawking child/" you must not eat in this house today unless you sell all the items" the child automatically sees this action as a treat and he has to make sure that he accomplishes the task before he returns to the house. The child may end up doing a number of desperate things in order to make sure that he sells all the wares, e.g. going to bed with a man (If the child is a girl) who gives her money for the wares. This is a form of abuse on the child. Although the mother may not really intend to starve the child if he fails to accomplish what he has been instructed to do, the child has no way to finding out what the mother has in mind except from what she has said. Language is powerful and denotes action that has implications and it is important that caution is exercised in the way that language is used, especially on children because the innocent minds of children make them believe whatever they are told by the adult.

Communication is a general function of language. Communication involves the process of passing information. Language should be used in a way to actually communicate what we want to communicate. Language is often used to communicate wrong information that could be misleading to a child and this is child abuse. Verbal abuse is a common feature in this regard. It is common for the adult to say all sorts of things to children. Such verbal abuse as you are a criminal "you are a thief" and others. These expressions may not actually be intended to communicate. What these words mean. The child sometimes begins to see these verbal abuses as information being communicated to him and before long the child begins to act in ways that agree with these verbal abuses. It is common for a child to be called a thief for simply requesting for something which the parents feel should not be given to him, even when they are eating the thing.

The child could believe the parents and may end up a thief. We are therefore saying here that the constant taunting of the child with verbal language is capable of destroying the personality of the child. Also, that we parents and adults are not aware of the implications of the use of language on personality development.

Concept of Personality

Personality is the sum total of a child's behaviour. It is the dynamic organization within the individual of those psychological systems (habits, attitudes, sentiment and aspirations), that determines his or her unique adjustments to his or her environment. It means the total reaction of the individual both internally and externally. The child is bound to react to environmental conditions which can be inhibitive or expressive as seen by the child not being allowed to speak where adults are speaking or being branded talkative.

However, the personality of the child cannot be discussed without mentioning the family influence and the school. The family is the basic unit where personality of the child is developed. It is a place where languages inform of verbal talk, actions and gestures are used in teaching the child the basic rules about life. But with the present development in most nations, the responsibility of the family in building personality of the child is transferred to the school. Thus, the school performs a significant part of the child's formative life between the ages of 4-16 years. Also because of the expansion of facilities of nursery and the emphasis laid on early childhood care Education (ECCE) by UNICEF, parents move their children early to school irrespective of the normal and sequential stages of development.

As it is believed that much of a child's personality is already shaped by 5-6 years, hence it is also believed that reaction to school situations are transfers of attitudes, feelings, fear and others from what the child has learnt in the family. If the child develops hostility towards parents, then this is expressed towards the teacher in the school. If he feels insecure in the family then he becomes aggressive to other children and if he experiences intense sibling rivalry then he is also more jealous of his classmates.

However, it would be wrong to think that school situations are mere continuation and duplication of family situation. The child has to face certain new rules, requirements and tasks in the school. Each day in and outside the class there are new problems to face new models for imitation and identification, new rewards and punishment to be met. All these have their distinct influence on the personality of the child, and the ability of the child to react to them will depend on the child's ability to accept the language used.

Statement of the Problem

Language has been said to be a powerful means of communication. It has both positive and negative implications to personality development. It is assumed that language use has some psychological problems it can initiate and sustain, such as loss of self esteem and confidence, poor academic achievement, sexual promiscuity and unwanted pregnancy, frigidity, school drop-out, emotional instability and destruction of aspiration. With these problems, it is the purpose of this paper to investigate language use and its effect on child's academic performance in primary school. Based on this therefore cases will reveal the extent language use constitutes actual effect of language abuse on child academic performances yet to be determined what are the effects of language abuse on child academic performances.

Literature Review

Use of verbal words most times, touches on the feelings of the person receiving the words. Thus, Green Games and sand grand (1974) reports that verbal abuse can trigger off anger, hostility, frustration, tension, inner conflict and other anti-social behaviours. Odibo (2006) stated that emotional abuse represents injury to a child's psychological self. Its intent and effect are punitive and it is generally experienced as a parental hostility or rejection such as verbal criticism, harassment or denigration and sometimes criticism of a child's failure to meet up to expectations.

Characteristics of Abused Children.

Elmer (1999) stated that abused and neglected children are irresponsible, negative and depressive in their way of life. Johnson and

Morse (2003) expressed that they are fearless, apathetic and show likelihood to promote physical attack from others. Keogh and Donlan (2001) reported that children who are abused have poor attention and concentration span restless impulsive, lack flexibility in thinking and generally are poor in school performance.

Also, Glass and Hassibu (1978) found that abused children manifest nervous symptoms of behavioural deficiencies and including hostility and tension. They also stated that emotionally abused children grow up to be callous, insensitive adults with varied repercussions for family and the society

Findings.

In a research by Afamefuna (2005) she categorized language used in child abuse and presented the result in percentages. The word bastard was the most commonly used to abuse children and it had 30%, Idiot 13% fool 10% thief 8% mad person 7% and stupid 9%. There were other verbal comments such as you can never succeed in life, good for nothing, blockhead, God punish you and few others. These findings reveal that verbal abuse is a common feature in the country and that it has negative consequences on the personality of the child.

Results

Keogh and Donland (2001) in their case study reported that Clement was an 18 year old boy. He was an only son in a family of eight girls. He was brought for counseling by one of the elder sisters. The problem presented was that Clement did not want to be useful to the family. As a result, he was constantly abused verbally and physically. From investigation, Clement was stealing things around the home and was constantly told that he was useless and not good, right from the age of 7 years, so the physical beating had ceased to be effective, and Clement decided to drop out of school after failing JSS 3 two times. The parents left him at home for a year and he perfected his stealing act before the counselor intervened. All attempts to bring Clement back to obeying his parents and learn trades have not been successful. He only listens and obeys the counselor but not his family members. So they are still verbally abusing him in spite of series of counseling sessions with the

family members. In the above case, the client lost confidence in himself with the constant verbal abuse and the end result was academic failure and dropping out of school.

In a similar case, Oko (1999) reported that Ugwoma was a girl of 22 when she came for counseling. After a lecture on sexual promiscuity and delinquency delivered to her by the counselor, she realized that she was afraid of men coming close to her. To her, it was a problem because she felt that she could not marry. From investigation, Ugwoma grew up in the midst of boys and was constantly told that she is likely to become pregnant because of her association with boys. The verbal taunt of becoming pregnant has blurred her mind to the extent that she was afraid of talking to boys or men.

Class and Hassibu (2003) reported a case that Marbel was 2 years when the mother left the father. She was brought up by a step-mother, and because she was very dull in appearance, she was constantly told that she will be useless. She lost confidence in herself and refused to be useful to herself. She failed almost all classes and while her age mates were in the university, she was still in the junior secondary school. She was therefore sent to the counselor and in spite of the attempt by the counselor to bring her out of the bottled emotions, she constantly reminded herself of being useless and not good. The therapy is still on. Therefore the failure of the counselor in the reported cases reveals the power of language on the personality of the child.

Conclusion

Language is an effective means of communication; its power is often underestimated. It is a unique human characteristic. It is generally proved by studies that children are more naturally endowed with the ability to acquire language than the adult.

Therefore, language is action which involves communication. To avoid verbal abuse, the

society, parents and teachers should be liberated from ignorance.

Recommendations

To avoid verbal abuse and prevent the inherent problems associated with it, the following recommendations are made.

1. Verbal abuse has serious psychological implications on the child and it is important that the society becomes aware of this.
2. Adults and parents should stop verbal abuse that can destroy the personality of children.
3. Teachers at the primary and early secondary school levels are therefore being urged to help pupils to experience success by giving simple and hard problems at the same time. This will enable the dull pupils to get the simple sums and therefore not score zero.
4. Children should be encouraged to report cases of verbal abuse to counselors or social welfare officers in their areas.
5. The awareness campaign on the rights of the child should be inculcated in the children. Thus, education is the right tool for this campaign.
6. Children should know their rights and when it is being trampled upon.
7. Community Agencies should be opened for child welfare.
8. Counselors and social welfare officers should be fully involved in demanding for the right of the child.
9. Reported cases of child abuse should be practically followed up and solved.

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