International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Research
ISSN: 2455-2070
www.socialresearchjournals.com
Volume 1; Issue 2; December 2015; Page No. 26-37

Television as an instrument for children educational advancement a case study of Ife North local government area of Osun state Nigeria

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Abstract
Television is believed by some people to be a technology from which children learn all sorts of social vices, this perception of people is not totally correct because this technology is neither meant to teach good morals nor social vices, it is simply meant for people to enjoy various kinds of programme, it depends on what kind of programme one devotes his or her time to watch that determines what one learns from it. This research has revealed that television could indeed be an instrument of educational advancement as children could make a great deal of benefit from the educative programmes that they watch on the television. Parents would allow their wards to watch television programmes provided such programmes are those that will make good impact academically, morally and psychologically in the lives of their wards. This research work was carried out to study "Television as an Instrument Children Educational Advancement"; the research work was carried out in Ife North Government, Area, Osun State. A total number of 78 staff members of the Local Government office were used as sample size from the studied population. A well-structured questionnaire was constructed and administered to elicit responses from respondents. The framework for data collection for the study was built on 3 research questions: (i) to what extent is television contributing to educational advancement? (ii) In what light are students benefiting from watching television programmes? (iii) What types of television programmes should be transmitted on television to help facilitate educational advancement? The data collection and analysis were done through survey method; findings revealed that the television is contributing a great deal to educational advancement. It also revealed that students are benefitting more from watching television academically and morally than in social vices. It also revealed that parents would allow their children to watch television programmes very well, especially the educative ones. It also revealed that most of television programmes should be educative. This study is recommended to students to encourage them to utilize the opportunity of the educative programmes being transmitted on the television to their advantage. The study is also recommended to academic institutions to sensitize their constituted management to the advantages associated with the use of television for delivering effective teaching to students. This research work is also recommended to the government to identify the importance of television to educational advancement, and provide necessary supports needed to make broadcasting of educative programmes to people. The research work is also recommended to parents to enlighten them on why they should encourage their wards to watch benefitting television programmes that will put their wards ahead of their contemporaries in school.

Keywords: Television, instrument, children educational, government, Osun Nigeria

Introduction

A television is a piece of electrical equipment with a screen on which programmes with moving pictures and sounds can be watched (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary 2001).

In1959, the Regional Government of Western Nigeria established the first television station in Nigeria and in Africa. Even though it promoted the station as a means to educate the people about development and the world, it initially served as a means for an opposition leader to address the people of Western Nigeria. The regional governments of Eastern and Northern Nigeria and the Federal Government in Lagos followed and started their own TV stations in the early 1960s. (Soji Alabi: 2010). All four of these stations basically existed to serve partisan political objectives for the various governments. Stations established after these four continued this same political and regionalist heritage. In 1973, a new surge of regional consciousness occurred after the Gowon military Government allowed the division of the country into 19states. This change the concurrent oil boom, and the effectiveness and importance of existing TV broadcasting led to a new surge of state owned TV stations. Three years later, the military Government established the National Television Authority (NTA) to coordinate nationwide coverage. The NTA then acquired existing TV stations. This event slowed the growth of TV broadcasting until 1979 when General Olusegun Obasanjo handed over power to the Government of Shehu Shagari. The five political parties vying for election in the states revoked the NTA charter and a proliferation of TV stations occurred. This also happened because the civilian administration was disorganized. As regionalization played a role in the broadcasting of political propaganda, so did it play a role in educational programming?

In 1992, a new chapter opened in the history of Nigeria broadcasting, the Federal Government under General Babangida deregulated the broadcast industry by granting licenses to private individuals and organizations to set up television and radio broadcasting stations. Suffice to say, that the licenses granted to private individuals and organizations to own radio and television stations opened a new chapter in the program structuring in broadcasting in Nigeria, their program designs were not influenced by the government. Today, there are over a thousand television and radio stations in Nigeria.

Prior to 1965, film and television research tended to be simple media comparison studies which usually found no significant

difference between the effectiveness of a conventionally-delivered lecture and the same instruction delivered via moving image (Wetzel *et al*., 1994). Since 1965, most television research, particularly that which examines the influence of television on attitudes and behaviors, has focused on incidental learning from mass media rather than on intentional effects from classroom presentation of instruction via visual media, and has particularly focused on children's television viewing. Much important work has been done on television's socializing effects on children, particularly the relationship between viewing violence and behaving violently. Other recent research has focused on the area of media literacy.

In 40 years of television research, "the emphasis on negative effects has been more salient than efforts to ensure positive effects through interventions" (Seels *et al*., 1996, p. 361) and "media research has generally not been theory based" (Wetzel *et al*., 1994, p. 189). Nevertheless, some positive findings have been made. While some theories suggest that viewers are merely passive absorbers of information, the active theory of cognitive processing supports the idea that viewers engage with the material presented to them. Several studies have indicated that viewers attend more carefully to television when guided by an instructor and/or told to view it for instructional reasons than when viewing it for fun (Wetzel *et al*., 1994). Television research related to portrayals of women, minorities, the elderly, etc. has tended to focus on the negative impact of stereotypes, but other studies have found that "programs that are designed specifically to produce positive images of subgroups appear to be successful" (Seels *et al*., 1996, p. 335).

Statement of the Problem

Education is said to be the best legacy that anyone can give to his children, learning is a process and it begins from homes. Teachers in various institutions of learning have their duty to impart knowledge into their students while the parents at home also have their parts to play, however, some people believe that students should not be allowed to watch television programmes for a long time, as this could get them obsessed and in turn create adverse effects on their education.

On the other hand, some people do not agree with this, rather, they believe that television is a technology which can help students acquire more knowledge to complement whatever they are learning in their various schools. It is believed that students benefit a lot from educative programmes that they watch on the television which reflects on their academic performances in school.

The in focus of this study is the contribution of television to educational advancement, whether television is truly an instrument of educational advancement or not is the crux of this study and whether in actual fact television and education have anything in common is the focus of the study.

Research Questions

- To what extent is television contributing to educational advancement?
- In what light are students benefiting from watching television programmes?
- What types of television programmes should be transmitted on television to help facilitate educational advancement?

Objectives of the Study

- This research work is chosen to:
- Ascertain and critically examine how students are benefitting from watching television programmes.
- Determine the extent to which television is contributing to educational advancement.
- Determine the types of television programmes that should be transmitted on television to help facilitate educational advancement.
- Ascertain and critically examine how students are benefitting from watching television programmes.

Literature Review

Television

A television is a piece of electrical equipment with a screen on which programmes with moving pictures and sounds can be watched (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary 2001).

Children's television is a potentially beneficial medium; in certain circumstances it can be a powerful educational tool, it can inform and inspire and it is culturally relevant to today's children. Many discussions of television's impact on children focus only on its negative influence in relation to violence and advertising, for example, but it is also important to recognize that television can also have a positive impact. As two noted commentators point out:

Television can be of general benefit to children. It can bring them into contact with aspects of life they would not otherwise become aware of. It can provide a valuable tool in the home and at school not simply to keep children occupied but also, if used appropriately, as a constructive way to use their time….Television is not a 'one-eyed monster' lurking impishly in the corner of the living room, kitchen or bedroom waiting to exert an evil influence over young members of the household. It is a channel through which a range of entertainment, drama and learning can be obtained and experienced and increasingly these days it is under the control of the viewer (Gunter and McAleer, 1997: xii-xiii).

However, before starting such a review it should be noted that children's television consumption now takes place in a much more complex media environment. When British academic Maire Messenger Davies wrote her book *Television is Good for Your Kids* in 1989, which challenged the view that television turned its young viewers into 'lay aborts' and 'morons', most British children only had access to the terrestrial offerings of the BBC, ITV and Channel 4. This landscape has radically changed, and British children now inhabit a 'media-rich' environment of multichannel television, mobile phones, the internet and computer games (Livingstone 2002: 41). Ofcom's latest media literacy audit, 72% of children aged 8-15 now have access to digital TV, 64% have access to the internet at home, half own game consoles, and 65% of 8-15s own mobile phones (including 49% of 8-11year olds) (Ofcom 2006). However, although they use different media in their everyday life, television is still the most popular medium, occupying a significant proportion of children's time, up to 13.9 hours a week, with higher viewing for those from ethnic minority (15.2 hours) and low income groups (15.5 hours) (Ofcom, 2006; see also Livingstone, 2002: 60; Rideout, 2003: 12).

Television is still an important medium for children and they use television actively. However, while children regard it primarily as a source of entertainment (see Buckingham, 1996: Livingstone 2002), many parents often see media, particularly for young children, as an important educational tool that can assist children's intellectual development (see Rideout *et al* 2003: 12). In a recent American study, only 38% of parents believed that television mostly helped children's learning, but they were relieved to make use of media, because they saw advances in the educational quality of media content (Kaiser Foundation: 2006: 32). In focus groups almost all parents pointed to 'learning' as one of the biggest advantages of television, and observed their children learning from television (ibid.). Buckingham and Sefton-Green, writing about the *Pokemon* phenomenon, point to the potential pedagogic value of non-educational programmes for children as well (i.e. those not particularly produced for educational aims), that show children how to learn (2004). They argue that *education* should be distinguished from *learning* (ibid.: 29).Children can learn skills from popular culture (e.g. *Pokemon*) such as how to behave, what to want and to feel and how to respond (p. 28). This type of learning is distinguished from 'official' educational knowledge. Viewed from this perspective the 'learning' that takes place via television makes it one of the major players in the socialization process alongside more traditional socializing agents such as the family, school and peer groups (Signorielli & Morgan 2001: 333), reflecting society's values and culture (Takanishi 1982: 99).

In this review, the educational impact of television is related to a certain official curriculum while the learning impact of television has a broader meaning encompassing the socialization process and how children develop their understanding of television. In general most of the studies that look at the educational impact of children's programmes originate in the US. They focus predominantly on educational programming (particularly *Sesame Street*) aimed at children aged three to five and the extent to which these programmes promote school readiness and academic skills. As a result, there is very little existing research concerning the potential beneficial impact of children's entertainment programming, and even less research that relates to British experiences and British programmes, where the categories of education and entertainment are often blurred (Close, 2004: 10). Finally, there is very little research on the potential beneficial impact of television, either generally or educationally, on older children.

Understanding How Children Develop Televisual Literacy

Children do not perceive television in the same way that adults do, and develop televisual skills step by step in line with their cognitive development. Age and linguistic maturity determine how a child will respond to and engage with TV. According to Piaget children experience four stages of cognitive development, which can be applied to television (Piaget, 1969; Lemish, 2007). Children under two experiences a 'sensory-motor' stage, where their senses and actions show them that objects on television feel differently to those experienced in real life (see Lemish, 2007: 39). During a 'pre-operational' stage between 2 and 7 when they are acquiring language, they develop representational thinking skills, which allow them to talk about their experience of television. Between 7 and 12 (the concrete operational stage), children begin to engage in abstract thought which allows them to understand the medium's codes and conventions sufficiently to follow storylines. They develop levels of perception (televisual literacy), which allow them to understand the chunks and segments that constitute a television programme and how they are linked (Signorielli, 1991: 28). From the age of 12 children are assumed to understand television in a similar way to adults (See Lemish: 2007: 39; also Hodge and Tripp, 1986: 80-81).

According to Davies, while all children are born with 'an innate human capacity to learn', televisual literacy requires some learned and taught skills (1997: 3). She argues that 'children need to understand the world in which they live, including the way that it is represented in different symbolic forms' (1997: 3). These representations will vary depending on a child's home environment (the cultural, political and socio-economic background of the family) and where they live. Literacy, therefore, is about giving children access to representations, which allow them to understand and use the systems that represent reality – including audiovisual representations of reality (ibid.: 4).

Media literacy shifts the focus of study from television effects to what children can do with television and other media. Under Section 11 of the Communications Act 2003, regulatory authority Ofcom has a duty to encourage others to bring about a better public understanding of the nature and characteristics of electronic media content and the processes and systems by which it is delivered. Ofcom defines media literacy as 'the ability to access, understand and create communications in a variety of contexts' without which people's ability to participate in society is greatly curtailed (Ofcom, 2006:2). Media literacy comprises 1) the ability to use a range of media and be able to understand the information received, 2) the ability to analyze the media contents/information critically, 3) the ability to create video and audio content, and 4) the ability to control and judge what kinds of content should be avoided. Viewed from this perspective children are perceived as 'active' rather than 'passive' media users, capable of developing media literacy skills just as well as the traditional literacy skills of reading and writing (Huston & Wright, 1997).

Children develop different types of media literacy as they grow up. Today children start experiencing television almost from birth even if it is just on in the background, (see Rideout *et al* 2003: 12). As children mature, television viewing increases due to increased comprehensibility. Anderson and Pempek established that children aged 12 to 24 months paid higher levels of attention to *Teletubbies*, a programme specifically designed for them, than to *Sesame Street*, a programme targeted at older children (2005: 510). This act of paying attention was part of the process of developing cognitive skills. They state that

It appears that videos and TV programs that are directed at infants and toddlers can gain high levels of sustained attention … In the case of infants and toddlers, if comprehension is minimal, attention to television by very young children may be purely reactive due to frequent elicitations of the orienting reaction by visual and auditory change. On the other hand, programmes that are directed at them may be comprehensible and, thus, reflect higher cognitive processing (Ibid: 509).

Teletubbies is a good example of a programme that attracts high levels of active attention 'with singing, dancing, pointing, imitating behaviours, speaking back to the television and

generally reacting enthusiastically with great joy' (Lemish, 2007: 46 citing research that first appeared in *Television,* 1999, 12/2).

Young children start to understand television from an early age. As they mature they learn to draw distinctions between their own world, what is shown on television and whether it is true to life. In a three-year British study of five year olds in a large urban school, Gosling and Richards established that children could talk about what was real in television programmes, and some showed understanding of television's basic technical processes. These studies illustrate the extent to which children (from infants to preschoolers) gradually develop their televisual literacy.

While younger children acquire basic skills, older children can become critical viewers, using television to construct identities for themselves and distinguishing themselves from other children. In a study of how children's television tastes develop, Davies et al conducted interviews with children and found that the act of classifying programmes served as a means of social self-definition:

For example, when a group of Year 2 [6-7 year-old] boys collapsed into laughter at the mention of Teletubbies, they were clearly distancing themselves from the younger audience for whom the programme is designed - and from the girls in their class who had appropriated its 'cuter' aspects. Similarly, when a group of Year 2 girls covered their ears every time football was mentioned, they were self-consciously constructing their own girlishness by rejecting the male world of football (2000: 8).

The description above shows how children aged 6-7 have already developed gender identities and are able to categorize programmes through their own distinctive tastes. In a similar vein, Buckingham points out that the ability of older children to exercise critical judgments on programmes serves particular social purposes connected with their developing media literacy:

They enable children to present themselves as sophisticated viewers, who are able to 'see through' the medium, and hence to differentiate themselves from those who (by implication) cannot. Critical discussions of the media therefore provide important opportunities for 'identity work'- for laying claim to more prestigious or powerful social identities (2003: 109).

In summary then, children gradually develop different types of skills through watching television. Over time they learn how to understand television, but may not perceive it as adults do. Understanding what children can and cannot do with television and how they perceive it is therefore essential for examining how it impacts their lives. As children acquire more experience of television, their ability to comprehend its content and translate those meanings into learning increases.

Television and Young Children's Language Acquisition

Several studies have shown how young children's language acquisition can benefit from television. However, this seems to be limited primarily to age appropriate programmes with specific educational purposes for 3-5 year olds (Cross, 2004: 16; Lemish, 2007: 157).

In one study it was found that babies and toddlers who watched *Sesame Street* learned vocabulary, concepts (shapes, colours) and could identify letters and numbers, particularly if they were aided by parents (Lemish and Rice, 1986). In a study of infants' and toddlers' television viewing and language outcomes by Linebarger and Walker (2005), it was shown that some pre-school programmes, but not all, can lead to larger vocabularies and higher expressive language (word production) scores among younger children under 30 months. Some programmes, such as *Blue's Clues*, and *Dora the Explorer*, which include on-screen characters talking to the child, encourage participation, label objects and invite children to respond, were positively related to expressive language production and vocabulary (2005: 639). Programmes such as *Arthur* and *Clifford*, which had a strong narrative, were visually appealing, and contained opportunities to hear words and their definitions, also appeared to support language acquisition. They found for example that:

- Combined viewing of *Arthur* and *Clifford* was related to 8.60 more vocabulary words at 30 months as well as an increase in the vocabulary growth rate of 0.61 words per month when compared with non-viewers.
- Combined viewing of *Blue's Clues* and *Dora the Explorer* resulted in 13.30 more vocabulary words at 30 months as well as an increase in the rate of growth in vocabulary words of 1.35 words per month compared with non-viewers.

As with vocabulary, the relationship between certain programmes and expressive language production (the frequency of child communicative behaviours such as gestures, vocalizations, single and multiple word utterances during a six minute period) were different for different programmes (2005: 637). Combined viewing of *Arthur* and *Clifford* and of *Blue's Clues* and *Dora the Explorer* resulted in more single and multiple word utterances at 30 months when compared with non-viewers (2005: 637).

In an overview of the literature, Naigles and Mayeux (2001) found that in certain circumstances children can learn words and their meanings from educational programmes specifically designed for them. At the most basic level children under two frequently or occasionally call attention to objects on screen, they ask questions and can be very attentive to an engaging programme: 'laughing at appropriate points and repeating parts of the ongoing dialogue' (2001: 136). Singer and Singer (1981) found a modest relationship between the amount of educational television viewed by pre-school children and their use of commands and exclamations in spontaneous speech (in Naigles and Mayeux, 2001: 139). Although there is not much evidence to suggest that educational programmes help children to learn grammar, there is evidence to suggest that they can learn something about the meaning of words from educational programmes (lexical development – word diversity), which are designed with word learning in mind (ibid: 141).

In a longitudinal study of children and *Sesame Street*, the parents of children aged 3 or 5 years of age kept diaries of their children's viewing over a 2.5 year span so that the degree of children's vocabulary growth could be assessed (Rice *et al* 1990). This study revealed that the younger children (aged 3) who watched more *Sesame Street* between the age of 3 and 5 had greater vocabulary growth than those who watched fewer hours. Children aged 3 scored higher on school readiness, reading, number skills and vocabulary, if they were regular watchers. However, viewing at five did not predict vocabulary

scores at seven, suggesting an 'early window' of opportunity where the effects of educational television are strongest.

In a further study, Singer and Singer (1998) investigated the extent to which pre-schoolers can learn unfamiliar nouns from *Barney and Friends*. Those children who watched 10 pre-selected episodes of the show over 2-3 weeks in a day care setting showed gains in their vocabulary to produce correct definitions compared to those children who did not watch the same *Barney* episodes. The gains were even larger if children participated in 30-minute lessons about the episodes after viewing (1998: 330-31), suggesting that the learning experience from television is enhanced through adult involvement (see also Close, 2004: 15). The finding that age-appropriate educational television for 3 to 5 year olds encourages the comprehension (receptive vocabulary) of spoken words was also established by St Peters et al (1989).

In another longitudinal study by Wright et al (2001) on the impact of educational television on the school readiness and vocabulary of 240 children aged 2 and 4 years from low-income families over a three year time span, it was established that children who watched *Sesame Street* between the ages of two and three gained in pre-academic skills. Children who watched educational television frequently when they were two and three years old performed better on the language tests (PPVT, Bracken school Readiness Scale, Woodcock-Johnson word subtest and applied problems subtest) at aged three than did those who were not frequent viewers (Wright *et al* 2001: 1356). This contrasted with children aged three who watched more general-audience programmes and who by ages four and five showed lower skills in school readiness and vocabulary tests (Ibid: 1357). Viewing at 4 years did not significantly affect scores later, which reinforces the notion of an 'early window of opportunity'.

Based on an overview of predominantly US research, the benefits of television for language development in pre-school children in certain circumstances are further confirmed in a literature review for the National Literacy Trust in Britain. The review draws the conclusion that

Given the right conditions, children between the ages of two and five may experience benefits from good-quality educational television. For this group of children there is evidence that attention and comprehension, receptive vocabulary, some expressive language, letter-sound knowledge, and knowledge of narrative and storytelling all benefit from high-quality and age-appropriate educational programming (Close, 2004: 4)

But in keeping with the earlier American review, the literature has not established whether children develop grammar, phonological awareness and knowledge of literacy from viewing this type of programming. Some educational programmes appear to be beneficial and helpful in developing children's linguistic skills, but this depends on the quality of programmes and whether they are age appropriate (Linebarger & Walker 2005: 642).

In the UK, some of the findings relating to language development seem to be confirmed by parental observations. A British study of young children's use of popular culture, media and new technologies found that parents of children under six were very positive about the educational benefits of high quality children's television for preschoolers with 79% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that television helped their child's language development (Marsh *et al* 2005: 33). Parents confirmed that their children were 'actively engaged with television content for some of their viewing time, with singing, dancing, copying characters' actions, shouting out answers and role-playing stories constituting some of the more popular activities (Marsh, 2005: 27) . In relation to language development and television, parents confirmed that their children learned the following in line with the curriculum for the foundation stage in England:

- to use words, gestures, simple questions/statements;
- to listen to nursery rhymes, stories and songs, joining in with repeated refrains;
- to enjoy listening to and using spoken language
- to sustain attentive listening, and respond
- to extend vocabulary, exploring meaning and sounds of new words
- to use language to recreate experiences
- to use talk to clarify thinking, ideas, feelings and events
- to link sounds to letters
- to begin to be aware of the way stories are structured (Marsh *et al* 2005: 35).

The studies outlined above show that under certain conditions television can offer opportunities for language learning among young children, but more research is required on specific effects and causal relationships.

Positive and Long-Term Effects of Educational aspect of Television to children

There is strong evidence that age-appropriate educational television has positive effects on children's development.

Much of the work carried out in this area relates to *Sesame Street*, a programme, originated in 1969 by the Children's Television Workshop (CTW), a non-profit subsidiary of National Educational Television in the US. This brought producers and writers together with child psychologists and educators to create an entertaining programme that was also guided by detailed research and curricular goals from the start (Morrow, 2006: 5). *Sesame Street* was designed to prepare children for school by encouraging knowledge and skills that improved vocabulary, numeracy, the use of language and understanding of the world around them (see Gunter and McAleer, 1997: 57). Each show had to demonstrate that it could hold the attention of its young audience (ibid.), and formative and summative research was used to improve the effectiveness of the programme's curricular goals (Morrow, 2006: 77).

Quite early on *Sesame Street* was found to have beneficial effects (Ball and Bogatz, 1970; Bogatz and Ball, 1971). Among 3-5 year olds who were heavier viewers of the programme, an increase in skills relating to the alphabet, numbers, body parts, shapes, relational terms and sorting and classification was noted, regardless of age, sex or socio-economic status, and native language. In a follow-up study in the second year of a subset of children who had started school (Bogatz and Ball 1971), it was found that children who had watched the programme frequently were better prepared for school than non or low viewing children. Improvements in cognitive skills relating to literacy and maths were also evident in research into international co-productions of *Sesame Street* in Mexico, Turkey, Portugal, and Russia (cit. in Fisch, 2005:

10). Later studies have confirmed the data about educational achievements (letter recognition, storytelling) and school readiness from *Sesame Street*, particularly among low income families (Zill, 2001).

A quarter of a century later the long-term effects of the show also became evident, with stronger educational performance by school students who watched the show as small children (Anderson et al, 2001). In a re-contact study, it was established that 570 high school students who had watched *Sesame Street* as young children achieved higher grades in English, Mathematics, and Science in junior high or high school, particularly among boys. They read more often, had higher academic self-esteem, and valued academic performance more highly (Anderson et al, 2001; Huston, et al, 2001). This suggests that those who watch educational programming enter school with learning skills that make them more interested and motivated learners, which sets them up for academic success (Anderson *et al*, 2001).

More recently Nickelodeon's *Blue's Clues*has also been successful in meeting educational goals for its 3 to 5 year old audience, who outperformed non-viewers in non-verbal skills and problem-solving ability. Their careers rated them as better at solving problems and more pro-social compared to non-viewers as well (Anderson *et al*, 2000). Programmes like *Blue's Clues* and *Dora the Explorer* in particular invite children to actively solve problems and communicate while they watch.

Other studies have also shown that a wide variety of US educational programmes for children on PBS can enhance older children's skills and knowledge in language and literacy (*Between the Lions; The Electric Company*), mathematics and problem solving (*Square One TV, Cyberchase*) science and technology (*3-2-1 Contact, Bill Nye the Science Guy*) and current affairs (see Fisch: 2005: 11-12). British researchers have also established that pre-teens and teenagers can learn from science broadcasts, which may enhance their ability to recall scientific facts and their comprehension (cit. in Gunter and McAleer, 1997: 58-59)

The value of comparing early viewing of *Sesame Street* with school performance later is that not all children were exposed to the programme when it first started in 1969, therefore allowing more effective comparisons between viewers and non-viewers. In a recent study by the University of Chicago, Gentzkow and Shapiro suggest that children who watch television perform marginally better at school (2006). In order to test their hypothesis, the researchers examined whether the introduction of television in the 1940s resulted in a decrease in educational achievement. They looked at the educational achievements of students aged 11, 14 or 17 in 1965, who were pre-schoolers in television's early years. They found that pre-schoolers who watched television performed marginally better in reading and general knowledge at school – with non-whites, those where English was a second language and those with poorly educated mothers gaining the most.

In a study of *Barney & Friends* by Jerome and Dorothy Singer (1998), the effectiveness of this television series for preschool children was evaluated. Children in a US day care centre aged 2 to 7 watched the same episodes over two weeks and were interviewed. The findings showed that

- Nearly two thirds of the children could report accurately what they had seen,
- About 55% of the children also managed to mention some characters,
- Sometimes children demonstrated evidence of new words in their vocabularies relating to a specific episode.

Episodes were chosen which reflected certain variables: cognitive, physical health, emotional, and social attitudinal features (Ibid: 313). In the first study, 121 white middle class children were divided into four groups. The first group viewed the series over two weeks, with each episode followed by a lesson connected to the programme's message. The second group watched without follow up lessons. The third group did not watch the programme but received a lesson, and the fourth group neither watched the programme nor received a lesson. The strongest gains were by those children whose viewing was combined with a follow-up lesson, followed by those who just watched the video and those who just received the lesson. Singer and Singer concluded;

It is evident that our pooled estimate of the didactic value of each episode in the area of cognitive skills (e.g. vocabulary, counting, numbers, shapes) is a striking predictor of what 3 and 4 year olds will retain and verbalize from an episode just viewed … The evidence was very clear from this study. We found periods of concentrated group attention throughout more than 60% of the time in the half hour episodes. Rating by observers indicated many signs of open enjoyment, smiling, and laughing about 70% of the time as the children watched the episodes … Singing along with some of the songs was common for a great many children during the musical episodes (1998: 326-7).

In a second phase, Singer and Singer sought to establish whether the same effects were evident among children from different ethnic groups and lower socioeconomic status. Children in day care settings in five regions of the US were split into different groups in order to establish the effectiveness of *Barney & Friends* for enhancing children's cognitive skills (e.g. vocabulary, counting, numbers or shapes). The groups were divided as follows:

- Experimental Group A: Viewing of the 10 *Barney & Friends* episodes over a 2 week period, but with viewing followed by a teacher "lesson" or set of exercises augmenting the material included in the episode.
- Experimental Group B: Viewing of the same 10 *Barney & Friends* within a 2 week period with no teacher follow-up.
- A control group that received no special treatment

They also analyzed teaching plans (e.g. vocabulary, what children thought about what they saw and other skills), integrated with the episode (1998: 331). Again they found that the viewing-plus-teaching group made the strongest educational gains in terms of vocabulary, social attitude, and civility, with no consistent significant gains by the group that simply watched the programme. Experimental Group B followed them in areas of vocabulary, social attitude and civility, nature, and awareness of health. The study suggests that a combination of viewing and follow-up teaching is a more efficient way of teaching knowledge and skills to young children, than simply watching the television show without any follow-up. It also suggests that content is important for teaching specific issues, and that well-planned and appropriate-aged educational programmes play an important role in

children's academic achievement. A study of the use by teachers of the educational programme *Look and Read* in Britain in the 1980s, also confirms that programmes are most successful in achieving their academic aims if there is relevant follow up work in class (cit. in Gunter and McAleer, 1997: 180)

Although there are few studies that correlate watching pre-school television with educational achievement in Britain, recent work by Marsh with parents of pre-school children revealed that parents were 'generally very positive about the role of media in their young children's social, emotional, linguistic and cognitive development' (2005: 5). Although the research does not examine the educational effectiveness of pre-school children's favourite programmes (*Tweenies, Balamory, Big Cook, Little Cook, Dora the Explorer, Scooby Doo, Bob the Builder, The Fimbles, Noddy, Come Outside, Teletubbies*), parents were able to give examples of what they think their children have learned linked to the Foundation Stage Curriculum including:

- Mathematical development: willingly attempt to count, recognize numerals 1 to 9, recognize and recreate simple patterns, and begin to use mathematical names for shapes.
- Knowledge and Understanding of the world: find out and identify some features of living things, objects and events and also some features in the place they live and in the natural world; ask why things happen and how things work; begin to operate simple equipment; begin to differentiate between the past and present; find out about events; gain awareness of the cultures and beliefs of others.
- Physical development: movement with control and coordination (songs and dance actions); show awareness of healthy practices (brushing teeth, and washing hands); recognize the importance of keeping healthy (safety/road issues).
- Creative development: response to sound with body movement (dance and sing); recognize how sounds can be changed, sing simple songs; match movement to music, make constructions, drawing and dances; explore colour, texture, shape and space and form in two or three dimensions (making models); and use their imagination in art, design, music, dance, imaginative role play and stories. (2005: 35-36)

The same study surveyed early years by practitioners who showed generally positive attitudes toward the role of media and popular culture in young children's lives (Marsh, 2005, 6, 60). 92% of practitioners surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that children learn from television, 67% disagreed that it is harmful for children's language development, although 83% felt that children watched too much (ibid: 48). Action research where practitioners were encouraged to use popular culture such as *Bob the Builder* or *Finding Nemo* as learning materials, was found to have a significant impact on children's oral development, especially for children who speak English as an additional language (Marsh *et al* 2005: 69). Older children can also benefit from watching television in a classroom setting. As Davies points out, the presence of a teacher watching with them, who is 'able to stimulate and share in the discussion', shows 'how much an interested adult can contribute to children's experience of watching television' (see Messenger Davies, 1989: 126).

A study that looked at how young school children engaged with the phenomenon of *Pokemon* illustrated the ways in which they can participate more effectively in traditional school-based literacy practices if they are given more opportunities to exhibit the knowledge and skills they have acquired from their own interests such as *Pokemon* (Bromley, 2004). Allowed to engage with *Pokemon* as a group in class, Bromley found that children become very creative in writing their own stories, or a child who had never had social status in the classroom gained confidence by his peer's acceptance and appreciation of his wide knowledge of *Pokemon* (Bromley, 2004: 223). In a climate where children have to follow teacher-led models for literacy and numeracy with little recognition of their interests, Bromley suggests that children should be given more opportunities to exhibit their knowledge and skills (Ibid). If educators had more flexible attitudes towards popular culture, they could use some elements to create 'educational' material, and also enhance children's media literacy as well as traditional forms of literacy (Bromley 2004; Marsh *et al* 2005).

Although very young children can and do learn from educational television, some programmes are more effective than others. Factors which raise this effectiveness include: the use of appealing elements such as humour; the use of age-appropriate topics and language; handling educational content in ways that are clear, direct and explicit; focusing on a small number of ideas in one episode and employing repetition; using action-filled visuals and characters with whom children can identify; encouraging children to actively engage in the content themselves through viewer participation and motivating children to carry their learning forward (see Fisch, 2005: 13; also Lemish, 2007: 173).

By contrast there have been very few studies which investigate older children's learning from television (Huston et al, 2007: 59). This may be due to older children being less receptive to educational television as they grow older, but it is also driven by the funding available for research into the effects of educational television on preschoolers in America. Educational television may also play less of a role once children enter school. Compared with younger children, older children prefer more complex programmes including drama, and programmes that feature verbal humour and relationships (Ibid), which means that they also become more drawn to adult programming. Likewise there is very little research on children under 3 years, partly because of the difficulties of getting responses from very young children. However, in general it seems that educational television used in the right context can enhance learning.

How do parents regard their children's viewing?

It has already been pointed out that parents of children under six from all socioeconomic backgrounds often see media including television as an important educational tool that can assist their children's educational development in areas such as maths and literacy (Rideout et al: 2003, 12; Marsh et al: 2005). While teachers have some misgivings about the use of television, parents are more positive about its role in their children's social, emotional, linguistic and cognitive development and witness some beneficial aspects (see Marsh *et al* 2005; Rideout *et al* 2003). The success of educational toys associated with popular programmes such as *Teletubbies,*

Thomas Tank the Engine, Bob the Builder, and *Noddy* are also indications that parents perceive educational benefits from associated books and magazines (see Buckingham and Scanlon 2003: 76-79). They also recognize that these programmes are significant for children's identity construction. According to one parent:

I think they [media icons] are quite important to her, she's not got any particular favourite but she likes to, you know when she goes to play school she knows what all the other children are talking about you know, she has a 'Spot' and 'Thomas' lunch box, a 'Bob the Builder' lunch box, and I think because she's seen and been exposed to it, it helps her with sort of interpersonal skills of both sexes. I think it's, like, if she wasn't exposed to it she wouldn't maybe have anything to talk about or any relationship with these children, because she wouldn't know what they were talking about (cit. in Marsh et al, 2005: 46).

The socio-economic backgrounds of parents may influence their attitudes towards their children's viewing habits. Livingstone (2002), for example, points out that middle-class children have more options to fill in their 'unstructured time' with other leisure activities (e.g. piano lessons) other than television. On the other hand, there is an assumption that lower class families may use television as a baby sitter because it is a safe and relatively inexpensive way of occupying young children in communities with high levels of crime and poverty (Jordan 2005: 534). However, in general parents in both British and American studies have witnessed beneficial aspects from their children's engagement with television.

This study is looking at the potential beneficial impact of children's television on children's lives. Debate usually centers on television's negative effects but, as expounded across a range of different studies, it is clear that television can enhance academic skills such as school readiness and vocabulary, as well as pro-social behaviours and critical thinking practices. Television is neither good nor bad for children, but its impact is complex in the way it affects children's knowledge, beliefs and values. Although children rarely seek out 'educational' content, they can derive both pleasure and learning from programmes which combine both elements. In this sense, 'edutainment' programmes (*Teletubbies)* which blur learning and entertainment are ideal for both children and parents (Buckingham and Scanlon 2003).

Related to such issues, recognition of television's benefits can help to inform the production of new programming, 'bringing the voice of children into the production process', ensuring that programming is tailored to their needs, interests and abilities (Fisch: 2005: 13). This child-centered approach is already reflected in the commissioning policies of the BBC, for example, which recognize that children need to have access to programming that is 'empowering, fun, and innovative, allowing children to relax and unwind in an environment which is relevant to their lives' (BBC 2006). At the same time, the BBC looks for factual programming that should aim to 'feed both the intellect and the imagination … allowing them to express something of themselves and to help them understand their place in the world' (Ibid).

Although this review has focused on the potential beneficial aspects of television for children, it has not looked at the beneficial aspects of extended media such as children's experiences of interactive TV, websites and associated toys and games. Increasing media use across different platforms cannot be ignored and is already reflected in a range of studies (Sefton-Green 2002; Livingstone 2002; Rideout *et al* 2003; Tobin 2004, Calvert *et al* 2005, Buckingham 2006, Rideout *et al* 2006, Ofcom 2006).). Examining the impact of television in isolation may not be sufficient in future, and changes in the way that media are consumed across multiple platforms needs to be considered and examined as well.

The goals of post-positivist theory are explanation, prediction, and control (and in this you can see the connection between this kind of social science and the physical sciences). Researchers, who want to explain the relationship between political advertising, predict which commercials will be most effective, and control the voting behaviour of targeted citizens would, of necessity, rely on post-positivist theory. Its ontology accepts that the world, even the social world, exists apart from our perceptions of it; human behaviour is sufficiently predictable to be studied systematically. (Post-positivists do, however, believe that the social world does have more variation than the physical world; for example, the name we give to things define them and our reaction to them, hence the post of post-positivism). Its epistemology argues that knowledge is advanced through the systematic, logical search for regularities and casual relationships employing the scientific method. And it is this scientific method that defines post-positivism's axiology, the objectivity inherent in the application of the scientific method keeps researchers' and theorists' values out of the search for knowledge (as much as is possible). Post-positivist communication theory, then, is developed through a system of inquiry that resembles as much as possible the rules and practices of what we traditionally understand as science.

Methodology

The survey method was employed for this project. According to Adewale (2000) survey is "a method usually adopted when handling a large population especially on issues that include systematic collection and use of questionnaire, interview and consecration. This section is meant to provide details of steps taken and methods used in sourcing for data and information. Most data used for this work were based on primary and secondary data collection, these ranges from already existing sources like textbook, relevant journals, interview and internet of different websites. Staff members of Ife North Local Government, Area, Osun State were given several copies of the questionnaire.

The research instrument for this study was the questionnaire. It had two sections; Section A was for bio data/demographics and Section B focused on questions on how television can be an instrument of educational advancement.

The data collected by the researcher through questionnaires were then analyzed in terms of frequency distribution and interpreted in simple percentage where necessary. The formula that was adopted for the analysis of the data is:

$$\% = \frac{\sum F\ x}{N} \quad \frac{100}{1}$$

Where % = Percentage
$\sum F$ = Frequency summation
N = Total number of respondents.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Seventy eight copies of questionnaire were distributed to the staff members of Ife North Local Government Area but the researcher was able to collect back seventy five copies. This analysis would be based on seventy five copies of the questionnaire returned.

However, the table is divided into sections A and B; section A deals with respondents' personal data while section B deals with responses to the various questions related to the research work in the questionnaire.

Section A

This table shows the total number of respondents categorized according to their genders.

Table 1: Sex Distribution of Respondents

Sex of Respondents	No. of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Male	55	70.5%
Female	23	29.5%
Total	78	100%

The table shows that 55 representing 70.5% of the respondents are male, while 23 representing 29.5% are female.

Table 2: Copies of questionnaire distributed.

Respondents	No. questionnaire distributed	No. of questionnaire returned
Male	55	53
Female	23	22
Total	78	75

The table shows that a total number of 78 questionnaires were distributed, out of which 75 were returned. Further analysis will be based on the number of returned questionnaire.

Table 3: Age Distribution of Respondents

Age ranges of Respondents	No. of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
21 – 25 years	5	6.7%
26 – 30 years	20	26.7%
31 – 35 years	17	22.7%
36 – 40 years	25	33.3%
41 years and above	8	10.6%
Total	75	100%

This table shows the age of the respondents. The table shows that 5 representing 6.7% are between 21 and 25 years, 20 representing 26.7% are between 26 and 30 years, 17 representing 22.7% are between 31 and 35 years, 25 representing 33.3% are between 36 and 40 years, 8 representing 10.6% are of age 41 years and above.

Table 4: Marital Status of Respondents

Sex of Respondents	No. of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Single	12	16%
Married	63	84%
Total	75	100%

This table shows the marital status of the respondents. The table shows that 12 representing 16% of the total number of respondents are single, while 63 representing 84% of them are married.

Table 5: Educational Qualification of Respondents

Qualification	No. of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
ND/NCE	27	36%
HND/B.Sc.	48	64%
MA and Above	0	0%
Total	75	100%

The table below shows educational qualifications of the respondents. The table shows that 27 representing 36% of the respondents have either ND/NCE, 48 representing 64% have either HND/B.Sc.

Section B

Table 6: Number of years at work

No. of years	No. of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
1 – 5 years	23	30.7%
6 – 10 years	12	16%
11 – 15 years	18	24%
16 – 20 years	12	16%
21 years and above	10	13.3%
Total	75	100%

The table below shows the number of years of respondents at work in the organization. The table shows that 30.7% of the respondents have between 1-5 years of working experience, 16% have between 6-10 years of working experience, 24% have between 11-15 years of working experience, 16% have between 16-20 years of working experience, 13.3% have 21 years of working experience and above.

Table 7: Job interest

Interest	No. of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Very interesting	38	50.7%
Interesting	21	28%
Not interesting	16	21.3%
Total	75	100%

The table below shows the job interest of the respondents in the organization. The table shows that 38 representing 50.7% of the respondents described the job as being very interesting, 21 representing 28% described it as being interesting, and 16 representing 21.3% described it as not being interesting.

Table 8: To what extent is television contributing to educational advancement?

Response	No. of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Very much	53	70.7%
Just a little	16	21.3%
Not at all	6	8%
Total	75	100%

The table shows that 70.7% of the respondents agreed that television is contributing to educational advancement; 17% of them agreed that television is contributing just a little to educational advancement, while 8% of them disagreed.

Table 9: In what light are students benefiting from watching television programmes?

Response	No. of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Academically	42	56%
Good morals	28	37.3%
Social vices	5	6.7%
Total	75	100%

The table shows that 56% of the respondents agreed that students are benefiting from watching television programmes academically, 37.3% of them agreed that students are benefiting from watching television programmes by learning good morals, while 6.7% of them believed that students do not benefit but only learn social vices from watching television programmes.

Table 10: How much would you allow your children to watch television programmes?

Response	No. of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Very much	54	72%
Just a little	15	20%
Not at all	6	8%
Total	75	100%

The table shows that 72% of the respondents would allow their children to watch television programmes very much, 20% of them would allow their children to watch television programmes just a little, while 8% of them would not allow their children to watch television programmes at all.

Table 11: Do you think television programmes should mostly be educative?

Response	No. of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Yes	68	90.7%
No	7	9.3%
Total	75	100%

The table shows that 90.7% of the respondents agreed that most of the television programmes should be educative, while 9.3% of them disagreed.

Findings of the Study

- The followings are the findings made from the research:
- Television is contributing a great deal to educational advancement.
- Students are benefitting more from watching television academically and morally than in social vices.
- Parents would allow their children to watch television programmes very well, especially the educative ones.
- Most of television programmes should be educative.

Discussion of Findings

Television is contributing a great deal to educational advancement in Nigeria and other countries of the world. Children learn one thing or the other when they watch the programmes that are being transmitted on the television.

Although, what children benefit from watching television programmes vary; some learn positive things that will make them better people in the future, while others only learn all sorts of moral decadence. This study however revealed that students benefit more from watching television academically and morally than in social vices.

Parents would allow their children to watch television programmes very well, especially the educative ones, because it affords their children the opportunity to acquire more knowledge academically, morally, psychologically and in all other ramifications. The knowledge that their children acquire from watching television programmes will complement the ones they are obtaining from school.

Parents, by virtue of their willingness to allow their children watch television programmes prefer that most of television programmes, especially those that are specially created for children enjoyment, be educative so that their children can benefit more from television programmes academically than in other areas.

Summary, Conclusion & Recommendations

Summary

Television is believed by some people to be a technology from which children learn all sorts of social vices, this perception of people is not totally correct because this technology is neither meant to teach good morals nor social vices, it is simply meant for people to enjoy various kinds of programmes, it depends on what kind of programme one devotes his or her time to watch that determines what one learns from it. This research has revealed that television could indeed be an instrument of educational advancement as children could make a great deal of benefit from the educative programmes that they watch on the television.

Parents would allow their wards to watch television programmes provided such programmes are those that will make good impact academically, morally and psychologically in the lives of their wards.

Conclusion

Contrary to the perception of people that watching television programmes does not benefit people but rather teaches them moral decadence, television is indeed a means of reaching out to heterogeneous people at a specific point in time to dissipate vital information that may be of great benefit to them. Children learn a lot of things from watching educative television programmes that benefit them in all ramifications of life and can make them great people in the future.

Recommendations

Students: This research work is recommended to students to encourage them to utilize the opportunity of the educative programmes being transmitted on the television to their advantage.

Academic Institution: This research work is recommended to academic institutions to sensitize their constituted management to the advantages associated with the use of television for delivering effective teaching to students.

Government: This research work is recommended to the government to identify the importance of television to educational advancement, and provide necessary supports needed to make broadcasting of educative programmes to people.

Parents: This research work is recommended to parents to enlighten them on why they should encourage their wards to watch benefitting television programmes that will put their wards ahead of their contemporaries in school.

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