



## **Television and other educational media utilization by primary school children in Nigeria: An appraisal**

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### **Abstract**

The television and video with their media sensory appeal tend to have taken over the control of the lives of not only adults but also that of the children. This is manifest in the relative disappearance of live – adults who hitherto interact with and provide the necessary feedback to children in their daily activities. Hence, the Nigerian society of late can be said to have become video centric. Since the television and video have come to play prime roles in the educational upbringing of children, it has become imperative for all those concerned: teachers and those in the television industry to work co-operatively towards not only improved technology but also towards the education of others to the effective use of the media. This paper therefore reviews literature relevant to the use of television, and other educational media for the effective education of children. It is hoped that this will provide a theoretical framework for the effective use of the various educational media for the overall development of our leaders of tomorrow.

**Keywords:** television, educational media, utilization, primary school children

### **Introduction**

The introduction and the patronage the television and of late the video enjoy in the Nigerian society are indications of advancement in the techniques adopted for the socialization of the individual. There are however mixed feelings as to the values of these technological improvements. While some point to the mass education of these media as an important aspect for their use, others are quick at pointing out the negative implications on society especially on the youths as they are exposed to and fast at adopting foreign cultural practices thereby adulterating the native norms and mores.

Scholars have thus embarked on series of researches to provide answers to such burning issues as the relationship between the television, video and viewers with regard to how the viewer's learn from and are affected by these media. This paper hence, tries to review literature relevant to the resolution of these issues so as to provide ample opportunities for the efficient and effective use of these and other educational media for the total upbringing of our children who are the potent instruments for the survival of our society.

### **Concept of educational media**

Media have been described as channels through messages, information, ideas and knowledge are conveyed and/or disseminated. They are also tools or instruments through which stimuli can be passed and/or obtained, Adewoyin (1991). He goes further to explain that 'when such media are used for instructional purposes, they are called educational media'. Educational media therefore refer to 'all educational resources whether graphics, photographic, electronic or mechanized means of arresting, processing or restructuring visual or verbal information or a combination of both' (p. 70). Educational media refer to all forms of communication through which teaching and learning take

place. Other terms associated with educational media are Learning Resources Centre, Media Centre, Instructional System or Media Technology.

According to Ibe-Bassey (1992), educational media are 'the media born of the communications revolution which can be used for instructional process alongside the teacher, textbook and chalkboard' (p. 21). Instructional media on the other hand 'are objects, devices, and things that are used by teachers to transmit, to transfer, and to share their encoded lessons with their learners (students) who will decode such lessons by analyzing and interpreting them to facilitate effective learning (Ibe-Bassey, Ibid, p. 20).

Though there is no rigid classification of educational media, different taxonomies have been used in literature. There is that where educational media are classified into print and electronic media. The former refer to textbooks, reference books, workbook, journals, magazines, newspapers, posters, bulletins, handouts and handbills while the latter are simply information – carrying devices which can be used for disseminating information.

Another classification scheme is that which categorizes all media under three broad sub-divisions of audio, visual and audio-visual. Audio media carry sound alone as found in audio-tapes, record players, public address system, disc, telephone, microphone, talking drums, human voice, etc. Visuals can only be seen (pictorials) and are sub-divided in projected and non-projected. The audio-visuals also known as transmitted media combine both sound and vision as found in Educational and/or Instructional Television (ETV/ITV) and Closed-Circuit Television (CCTV). The main difference between ETV and ITV is that 'while the former is directed at larger audience, the latter which is usually tied to specific instruction or curriculum is directed at specific and small audience' (Adewoyin, op.cit, p. 73). Educational media as used in this paper is in the area of mass communication.

### Television, Video and Other Media

There is evidence in literature that the introduction of the television as a new medium has brought about a reduction in the use of other media such as reading, listening to radio and to phonographic recordings, attending to movies, and participating in both indoor and outdoor activities. This was evidenced in the research undertaken by Murray and Kippa (1978) <sup>[9]</sup> in Australia in which they concluded that 'the most significant result of viewing television is its displacement effect'. Advancing reasons for arriving at this conclusion, they submit that:

There is no doubt that in most homes, no other medium Dominates so much time, demands such individual Attention, or occupies the favoured position as the Glowing image of the television and video (p. 21).

They finally described the television and video as those media that have 'turned viewers into passive 'zombies' and the most likely misused by the entire family members'. This view seems to be supported by Rubin (1977, p. 356) when he states that 'from the time children are two and a half years through adulthood, large numbers of people have become 'hooked' into television viewing'. Hence, Winn (1977, p. 68) <sup>[18]</sup> suggests that 'in viewing television, the grownups as well the child, is taking an advantage of an easily available opportunity to withdraw from the world of activity into the realm of non-doing, non-thinking, indeed, temporary non-existing'.

Furthermore, Medrich's (1979) <sup>[10]</sup> study, suggests that many homes have become 'constant television households' where 'the television set is on most of the afternoon, through the dinner hours, and during most of the evening'. The survey found that 'children from constant viewing households are more likely to watch whatever is on' and that they tend 'to stay up later' (p. 175). The above view is supported by the statement that:

--- Fifty-six million families are watching television on a Monday night. Among them after the 8-9 'family hour' Is over, and the youngest are supposedly safely tucked in bed, there will still be eleven million children, ages 2-11, Watching from 9-9.30. From 9.30-11 p.m., the number Will be 9.7 million. From 10-10.30 p.m., there will still Be 6.8 million children below 12 in the audience. From 10.30-11 p.m., 5.6 million below the age of 12 will still be watching (Kirshner, 1979, p.239) <sup>[6]</sup>.

There is abundant evidence in existing literature to suggest that the television and recently the video industries foster and cater for the television and video addictions portrayed above. This is achieved not only through improved technology but also through their broadcasting structures. Primarily, technology has improved television reception, so that given an appropriate television set, a broadcast system and all the broadcasting paraphernalia, and a piece of broadcast spectrum, it is possible for television to be seen anywhere. This is especially evidenced in the presence of 'at least one television set in 98% of the homes in the United States of America or 72.9 million homes (Owen, 1975) <sup>[11]</sup>. The above picture is also obtainable in most developing countries as Nigeria as most people are overwhelmed by the broadcast technology, and often use the acquisition of such to reflect their improved status-quo. It is also boosted by the

presence of at least one television station in each of the States of the Federal Republic of Nigeria including the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. This is out of the myriad of home video houses scattered in the nooks and crannies of this country doing brisk business.

In addition, the current structure of the broadcasting industry tends to have created a huge economic enterprise through which broadcast stations 'sell' audiences to advertisers, so that the networks can become rich. As a result, the quality of both the advertising and the programming contents have been found by Mander (1978) <sup>[8]</sup>; Rubin (1977) and Bloome & Ripidch (1979) <sup>[2]</sup> to be of controversial nature involve television commercials, violence, stereotypes and sex.

### Commercials

If it is true that the average child watches more than 20,000 commercials annually as established by Bloome and Ripirch (1979) <sup>[2]</sup> among United States children, then it is reasonable to suggest that children learn from and are influenced by commercials. Some consumer groups however feel that commercials are inherently deceptive as the aforementioned researchers found that 'the behaviour and language used in commercial messages lead children to believe that products have the power to resolve social interactions and social situations' (p. 224). Typical examples in the Nigeria media are those reflected in the advertisement of tobacco products such as Benson and Hedges, Ruthmans, Aspen, etc. in which children and youths are misled to believe that intake of such products ensures academic, social, physical and emotional successes.

**Violence:** When children watch violence on television and/or video, they are encouraged to accept violent forms of behaviour which foster moral and social values about violence in their daily lives which are unacceptable in a civilized society such as ours. Research results abound to show that violence is enshrined in children programmes. For instance, Quarfoth (1979, p. 218) states that 'the rate of violence on children's cartoon programmes are three times the rate of violence on other television programmes'. In addition, Roberts and Schramm (1971, p. 608) <sup>[14]</sup> note that 'high frequency of exposure to violence on television may de-sensitize a child to the undesirable effects of violence in real life'. Supporting the above researches, Gerbner, Goss, Singnorlielli, Morgan and Jackson-Beeck (1979) <sup>[4]</sup> found that 'those children who are television's heaviest users tend to express fear and interpersonal distrust and possess a heightened and unequal sense of danger and risk in a mean and selfish world' (p. 196).

On stereotypes, Rubin (1977) cites the 1975 study by Fruch and McGhere which found that 'sex role attitudes are revealed by those children who watch television excessively'. He further states that 'relatively little academic work has been done concerning sex on television'. However, analysis of programmes in prime time broadcast during the 1975-1978 seasons by Rubin (Ibid) confirm the 'absence of explicit sex and documents a continued increase in sexual innuendos' (p. 67).

The bulk of these researches therefore suggest that controversial nature of television programming and content result in negative effects especially on those children who are excessive or chronic viewers. Why and how often children watch television? Results from studies undertaken by Rubin (1977) and Singer (19789) show that time spent in

television's viewing averages to about 'three hours per day for pre-scholars, peaks at four and a half to five hours per day for elementary school aged children and descends to two and a half hours per day for seventeen year olds'. Children's preferences for programmes also become diversified as children mature. For instance, Rubin (1977, p. 356) found that:

First graders prefer cartoons and situation comedies  
And adventure programs; tenth graders prefer  
Programs. --- Few children prefer news programs,  
And even fewer preferred children's educational  
program.

This strictly confirm earlier research findings that 'any media use centering on something other than entertainment is learned late', Mander (1978) [8].

A variety of reasons have been given why children watch television. Winn, 1977 [18] and Cohen, 1979 [3] for instance, insist that most children watch because their parents make them because some parents have found the television a convenient baby sitter. In the sampling of nine, thirteen and seventeen year olds, Rubin (1977) found six principal sets of reasons for viewing television. These include 'to learn, pass time or as a habit, for companionship, to forget, for arousal and for relaxation' (p. 367). He concludes that from these, 'to pass time or as a habit, was the predominant reason for viewing television across the age groups'. In his own research, Maccoby (1954) [7] found that the primary motive for pre-scholars to watch television is 'fantasy, a desire to escape from frustration encountered ... under certain conditions children with personal or social problems search for escape ... obtaining vicariously some satisfaction not offered in life situation'. He therefore concludes that 'television viewing and content provide the younger child with some form of pseudo-friendship' (p. 240).

### Television and Other Educational Media

An examination of existing literature tend to suggest that children respond differently to television's all persuasive influence on their lives when a key-person - whether parent, relative or teacher participates in their television experience. Accordingly, Tower, Singer, Singer and Biggs (1979) [16, 17] state that: more learning takes place when children watch television with their parents and interact concerning what they have seen.

They further suggest that 'children need time with parents and other 'life' care-givers who talk with them, listen to what they say, and encourage their imaginative development by telling stories, singing songs or playing pretend-games' (p. 30).

There is also evidence to show that television viewing has led not only to a reduction in the children's play time, but also to changes in the very nature of children's play. It is feared that these changes have affected some children's ability to keep a motive at work over long periods of time. The Singer's (1979) [16, 17] studies at the Yale Family Television Research and Consumption Center found that 'children who engage in make-believe play are the most imaginative children, and when rated by research observes, are co-operative presenters, and more joyful than those children who are heavy television users' (p. 32).

While there is a paucity of empirical evidence that can substantiate these claims of Singer, this paper supports the

views of Winn (1977) [18] and Maccoby (1954) [7] to the effect that the television interferes with the reading habits of children. This is because 'it is easier to turn on or harder to turn-off the television set than to go to the library for a book, or to sit and share a book with a child.

Television displacement effect has thus been summarized by Pellerin (1981) as:

1. The introduction of television as a new media has brought about the curtailment of other media uses, such as books, radios, record players, movies and outdoor activities.
2. While the use of these displayed media may have returned, viewers have become 'hooked on television'.
3. The television industry fosters and caters this addiction through its improved technology and its broadcast structure.
4. The programming content provided is often found to be of controversial nature, involving television, violence, commercials, stereotypes and sex.
5. The controversial nature of television negatively affects those children who are excessive viewers.
6. Pre-scholars and elementary school-aged children spend the most time in front of a television set.
7. These children primarily watch television out of boredom, to escape frustration and for companionship.
8. Television pervasive environmental influence has curtailed other media use: live human interaction and feedback through key adults, creative play and books (pp. 126-127).

### Then What Next?

One may ask: 'Is there nothing good about television? All that has been said so far seems to portray television as a poison rather than a panacea. Since television is dangerous to society as it removes the children from their environment, as Owen (1975) [11] and Mander (1978) [8] are of the opinion that may be we would be better off without it. This paper, however, toes the line of Singer (1979, p. 34) [16, 17] who states that:

We have to take a more realistic approach and stop  
Blaming television for our misuse of the medium.  
Rather, it is time to pay the piper, to think of and  
How to teach others better ways to use television.  
We can learn to control it so that it does not  
Control us.

### How can this be achieved?

Singer (1979) [16, 17] suggests 'a massive, graduated and slow down of materials presented, continuous consultation with child development specialists, careful research on children's reactions to programming and the clustering of commercials'. In his contribution, Winn (1977) [18] however argues that:

Efforts to make television more attractive to parents  
And children by improving programming can only  
Lead to increased bondage of children to their  
Television sets---. The preponderance of offensive  
And banal programs may act as a natural check on  
Television since conscientious parents are likely to  
Limit their children's television intake if any  
Unsavory programs are available (p. 7).

This implies that there is need to develop this conscientiousness in responsible adults so that they will take a more active role in controlling children's television viewing. This challenge of going back to the fundamentals is further emphasized by the identification of five adult behaviours which provide the human feedback cooperation which make television a tool for encouraging the child's mental and emotional growth. Kirshner (1979) <sup>[6]</sup> identifies the five adult behaviours as:

1. The adult sets a model of the language expected from the child.
2. The adult continually conveys a desire for the child to achieve and points out with pride to the child's achievement.
3. The adult takes about interesting ideas with the child, encourages the child's curiosity, and encourages the child to think and plan.
4. The adult supports and provides help whenever the child encounters a learning difficulty.
5. The adult structures the child's life schedules of time and place, thus providing a sense of control of self-versus acting on impulse (p. 24).

Another outlet is ensuring that majority of people become television literate through the organization of conferences, seminars and workshops, all geared towards achieving the following objectives:

- a. To understand how the television medium works from its basic technology to its total communication impact.
- b. To develop vocabulary, writing and critical thinking skills.
- c. To explore personal and social values conveyed by television news, drama and documentaries.
- d. To become discriminatory consumers by learning how and why television commercials are made.
- e. To distinguish between fact and fiction, fantasy and reality, actual and staged violence, Pellerin (1982, p. 128) <sup>[12]</sup>. Furthermore, selective viewing should be encouraged so that there is deliberate choice of certain programmes to be seen while turning off the television set at the approach of undesirable ones. This can be achieved through the effective use of the Television Guide, the daily newspaper listing or review of television programmes.

### Conclusion

Today in Nigeria as in the developed world, the important member of the family seems to be the television and/or video set rather than the parents as evidenced in their displacement effects. Our misuse of these media has invariably led to their control of over much of our day-to-day living. While it might be true that we adults may learn to overcome this monopoly of our time and energy, we cannot help but be concerned about their impact on our children. It is therefore imperative for all those concerned; parents, television programme designers and teachers to work co-operatively toward removing our leaders of tomorrow from the emerging impending video centric society. It is only through sure that we can beat our chests as responsible adults committed to the good of our children who are inheritors of our societies.

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