The influence of early childhood educational experiences on the language development of primary school children in the Buea municipality

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ABSTRACT

Language skills help children get some more information and improve their ability to understand, interact and socialize with other learners in the teaching/learning process. This study was designed to investigate how early childhood educational experiences influence the language development of children in primary schools in Buea municipality. The study employed the descriptive survey design and quantitative research methodology. The simple random sampling technique and the snowball were used to collect data from a total sample of 30 primary school teachers. The main instrument used for this study was the questionnaire. Data collected were analyzed descriptively using means and percentages computed with the help of the SPSS. Findings of the study revealed that: 1) there is a significant influence of teachers’ teaching methods on the development of language skills by primary school pupils in the Buea Municipality; and 2) Home environment has a significant influence on the development of language skills by primary school children in Buea. Based on these findings, it was recommended that teachers should be encouraged to make use of more interactive teaching methods that engage the learners; parents should provide assistance to young children in their learning, provide learning materials for them and expose them to the school’s language of instruction. Again, the state should invest more on the provision of instructional materials for the teaching of pupils in basic education.

Keywords: Early childhood education, teaching methods, home environment, language development, childhood experiences

Introduction

Early childhood (nursery) education is the foundation of learning because children who have a weak learning foundation can hardly perform as exceptionally intelligent students in their entire academic life cycle. It is at this early stage of learning that children are developed for higher academic exercises. The foundation of education for the child is the preschool education which forms an integral part of his or her early education which maybe formal or informal, usually given in an educational institution to children of age 1-6, prior to their entering the primary school. This educational level of the child provides for the physical, motor, health, nutritional, intellectual, aesthetic, emotional and social development of the pre-school child. If child education can provide these vital necessities which are fundamental to human life, it is not therefore unlikely to have an important and strong relationship with the pupil’s performance at the primary school level and perhaps at the secondary and tertiary levels (Nakpodia, 2011).

Background

Historically, before the coming of the Europeans, education in Africa in general and Cameroon in particular was largely informal (home based education). Before the introduction of Western education in Cameroon in 1884, informal education was provided in the family by parents, other family members and the society as a whole (McOjong, 2008). The family formed the basis for the education of children. Ojong (2008) further explained that the education of the Cameroonian child began from birth with the mother being the sole teacher up to about ages 5 to 6 years. The family concentrated on teaching children about their environment, norms, values, customs, beliefs
and religion of the Cameroon indigenes. Parents, relatives, and elders of the clan or community taught the young ones some basic functional skills such as craft work, drumming, singing, fishing, caring for younger siblings, and farming through the process of socialization. During this time, formal education had not been introduced in Cameroon.

The partition and colonization of Africa in the 19th century later came with a new system of socialization, which today is called formal education to be received in formal school settings. However, this did not totally exclude the participation of parents and other family members in the education of their children, be it formally or informally. As formal schooling/education developed, the gap between formal and informal education narrowed down, especially as some parents became more formally educated; many of whom were even teachers. This development together with the ancient traditional role of parents as teachers make parents to be more involved in the formal and informal education of their children,

Cameroon after its independence encountered several challenges of maintaining a quality education system. Education was seen as the best way to prepare young Cameroonians to occupy positions in government in order to ensure sustainable development of the new independent state. Education being an indispensable tool in nation building, is a process of systematic training and instruction designed to transmit knowledge and acquisition of skills, potentials and abilities which will enable an individual to contribute efficiently to the growth and development of his society and nation. It involves all round development of an individual (physically, socially, morally, intellectually, mentally) and language skills is one of those vital skills that education must develop for effective socialization of the child (Osakwe 2006).

Conceptually, language development is the process in which children acquire the forms, meanings, and uses of words and utterances from the linguistic input. Children often begin reproducing the words that they are repetitively exposed to. The method in which we develop language skills is universal, however, the major debate is how the rules of syntax are acquired. Language and communication skills are critical to a child's development. Good communication makes them better able to engage in socialization and to learn from their environment and from formal classroom instruction. When we talk about communication, we are talking about both speech which is the verbal means of communication and language which is using shared rules to put words together to express thoughts and feelings as well as to understand the meaning of language through both spoken and written communication. Since parents are a child's first teacher, knowledge of language development in children improves their ability to interact with their child, and to stimulate and guide them in their ability to understand and communicate with their environment (Esuah, 2003).

According to Chomsky (1999), from birth on, children are programmed to develop speech and language. The first five years are most critical, but language development continues throughout early childhood and on into adolescence. During the first five years, stimulation of language development is important as the brain is both developing new nerve cells as well as multiple connections between nerve cells to serve the function of language both expressive and receptive. Lack of stimulation during this time could result in a child making slower progress or end up with poor communication skills (Eku, 2003).

In the early stages of language development, the brain is programmed to attend to speech sounds and begin to mimic them. Early on, babies like to make sounds up on their own. Later they attempt to repeat sounds/words that they are exposed to from their environment. Children usually say their first words between nine and 18 months old. The most common first words are either
"mama" or "dada'. What is interesting is that no matter what language children are raised in, the first words usually are reference either to mother or father. By the age of 18 months a child usually has a vocabulary of 50 to 150 words (Eke, 2003).

By the age of 2, they can probably use over 300 words and understand about “I” words. By about 18 months children begin to put a couple of words together to form a sentence sometimes referred to as "telegraphic speech" such as "Mommy ball" Or "Mommy throw ball". Around 3 years of age, “I” children begin to use language for all kinds of things. They are not only trying to get things by asking, they are talking about past experiences and even beginning to use it to pretend. By preschool (4) they are beginning to understand and use the rules of language to express possession of something, connect thoughts and quantify. Their language is becoming more like that of adults. This sounds very interesting and cannot be effectively developed without necessary mechanisms and one of such is early childhood education. In elementary school, children continue to expand their use of oral language but are also learning to read and write. As children progress through middle school and high school, they continue to expand their vocabulary and refining their grammatical skills and write in more complexities as well as continue to develop reading comprehension skills (Edu, 2004).

Early childhood education, in the context of formal education can be said to be "a formalized educational process through which children between the ages of three through five plus are subjected to in designated pre-school institutions" (Mezieobi, 2006). Pre-primary education as defined by Omozegnian (1995) is the education meant for children between the ages of 3 to 6 years. Edu (2004) sees pre-primary education as the education given in an educational institution to children aged 3-5 years plus prior to their entering the primary school. That is to say that early childhood education is a special kind of education provided in an institution for children, prior to their entering the primary school.

Learning, according to Osakwe (2006) is a natural process of pursuing meaningful goals, discovering and constructing meaning from information and experience filtered through the learners' unique perceptions, thoughts and feelings. Hence, when a Child is born into the world, learning commences immediately to enable him to get adapted to the new system. The child learns to feed, hear, see and respond to stimuli, before learning to sit, walk, talk and behave like people around him. Day-to-day fluctuations in a child's behaviour may be expected as he strives between dependency of infancy and the dependency of childhood. He goes further to expose the world around him curiously seeking to acquire knowledge. The drive for curiosity is innate in every child and can be developed to yield greater results by giving him early educational experiences.

Early childhood educational experiences according to Barnard (2001) positively affect later home and school involvement in education. A child who fails to acquire early education may suffer emotionally, socially, intellectually and even physically if he is trusted into the primary school without a sustainable early childhood education experience that will give him a solid foundation of communication in the primary school. Therefore, for the effective and efficient unlocking and development of a child's latent abilities, attitudes and other forms of behaviour of positive values in the society in which he lives, early childhood education becomes very imminent. This is of utmost importance because researches on early childhood education have shown that early childhood education experiences have great impact on all areas of a child's development and had suggested that the first teacher is an extremely important person in the child's life.

According to Feeney, Christensen & Moravick (1997), early childhood education is an asset of immense value in the later academic pursuit of a child and much more lately in life. This early
experience exposes the child to all fields which make him more apt to learn in the primary level as the confidence in his learning capabilities which he acquired from the nursery school is lifted to the primary school. This eventually aids and facilitates his communication skills. The early childhood institution aims at developing the cognitive and affective potential at an early age. Anderson (2002) is of the view that when children are exposed to early childhood education, they develop superior communication skills, necessary physical ability and social unity needed in adult life and an increased cognitive and effective educational balance.

Miedel & Reynolds (1999) are of the opinion that when families are involved in their children's early education, children experience greater Success once they enter primary school and even in later life. The formal school setting in early childhood education is a supplement to the home and a substitute. It promotes the complete development of the child that the house can easily provide. Most parents are limited in what they can give such as space, variety of equipment, educational materials and experiences to their children. Many parents are burdened with their own concerns that they are unable to provide the guidance that a child needs as he faces problems and frustrations especially where mothers are the sole support or breadwinner of the family. Children may be left in the care of untrained and unhealthy people in crowded apartments devoid of play materials and playmates that children need leading to neglect and deprivation which may result to severe and negative effects in the life of the child. If however, the formative years are characterized by exposure to a wide variety of learning activities and social contacts, skilled teaching, and intelligent guidance, then healthy growth and adjustment occurs. An early childhood education gives children a group experience which extends values of family giving them a total experience in democratic living in which co-operation is strengthened and competition minimized.

Theoretically, Piaget (1956) spoke on the different effects of the environment on the growth of mental structures of the child which facilitates learning. He said that the environment stimulates learning and the development of the cognitive domain that the early years hold the key to leaning.

There is therefore the need for special attention to be given to the sensitive nature of early learning by affording the child the right environment where he will develop the potentials and skills for later life experience and education. Noam Chomsky's theory of language acquisition states that human beings are prewired to learn language and are born with basic rules for language intact. According to Chomsky, the human brain is readymade to quickly acquire language at specific stages in the development process. He believes that the human brain comes into the world with a pre-determined set of rules for language development. Chomsky believes that every child has a “language acquisition device” or LAD which encodes the major principles of a language and its grammatical structures into the child's brain. Children have then only to learn new vocabulary and apply the syntactic structures from the LAD to form sentences.

Contextually, the government has recognized the importance of education in our economic development and social transformation process; hence she has given priority to early childhood education by inculcating its purpose in the national policy of education as follows; effect a smooth transition from the home to the school, prepare the child for the primary level of education, provide adequate care and supervision of the children while their parents are at work (on the farms, in the markets, offices, etc.), inculcate in the child the spirit of enquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature, the environment, art, music and playing with toys, inculcate social norms develop a sense of co-operation and team-spirit, learn good habits, especially health habits, and teach the rudiments of numbers, letters, colours, shapes, forms. The government has a deliberate attempt to raise the quality of education at all levels in order to make the products of our
educational system more useful to the society. Therefore, early childhood education will provide that vital physical, psychomotor, affective, cognitive, and social potentials which are fundamental to human life that will play very essential role in the academic outcomes of children in the primary education level and even more in the later life of the individual child (DSOh, 2003).

Despite all government efforts, Ramiro (2013), reports that a UNESCO survey carried out in 2010 found that many children still find reading as a major problem. Problems such as lack of phonetic awareness, inadequate use of dictionaries, lack of parental encouragement, and inadequate exposure to printed materials are highlighted in relation to reading. English Language reading problems are aggravated in schools, especially in rural areas because children spent majority of the time speaking in pidgin and in their native language. English language is only read and/or spoken during school hours. Because of these fundamental knowledge gaps, teachers need to adapt teaching strategies to meet the needs of each individual learner particularly in the skills necessary to apply phonemics, decoding, fluency and comprehension. The issue is further compounded with poor strategies used by some teachers for the teaching of reading.

Many teachers are still stock with the old traditional methods of teaching reading. Many teachers get frustrated with children with reading problems because they lack effective strategies to handle diversity in the classroom. While some teachers exhibit poor knowledge of pedagogy of reading instruction, others simply find it too cumbersome to implement and prefer to use the traditional methods. It is not uncommon to find teachers who remain insensitive to diverse learners in the classroom and teach as if all children were of equal learning preferences. The consequence is poor outcomes of learners with either reading problems or poor communication skills in general. This is the crux of the problem which this paper attempts to analyze – the influence of early childhood experiences on the language development of primary school children in the Buea municipality.

The Problem

Some psychologists have opined that early childhood experiences have a lot of implications on the later life of individuals. The rearing practices which the child is exposed to influences the values, norms and beliefs of individuals even in later life. The contents or the knowledge which the child is exposed to early in life are bedrock to later education and life. There is a scriptural injunction that says "train up a child in the way he should grow and when he is old, he will not depart from it, proverbs 22 verse 6. From this injunction, conclusions can be reached quickly that the manner of teaching a child to learn in their pre-primary schooldays go a long way to help him/her through his/her educational pursuit and even more in his/her later life. For example, when language poorly develops in a child, this might affect the social interaction of the child with his or her peers because he/she might not communicate effectively to express their feelings.

Many children in primary schools are not able to achieve the necessary knowledge and skills in education because they lacked competencies in language. Lack of proficiency in English language or the language of instruction in general may lead to failure in accessing the knowledge using that language. Further, without competence in language, many learners get disadvantaged during the learning process and beyond. There is hardly any doubt that the decline in the English proficiency (for learners of the English Speaking Subsystem of Education) affects the entire education system and is detrimental to national growth. Therefore, this examines how early childhood education experiences influence learners’ language development in primary schools in the Buea municipality.
Concept of language development

Language refers to all forms of communication. This includes auditory language, such as speaking and listening, as well as written language, which involves writing and reading. Language can also include body language like facial expressions and other non-verbal movements that express meaning (Adam, 2001). Also, language is defined by Judd (1998) cited in Makinde (1998) as a means of arousing and establishing associations which expands personal thinking so that the mental life of an individual becomes a part of mental life of a group. It is a vehicle for building relationship through communication of thoughts, oral, written or through body movements.

Language also helps to maintain and retain cultural heritages which protect self-identities. It is in recognition of this that the Cameroon government considers language to be in the interest of national unity. Therefore, language development should be the focus in children in the early years to promote social interaction, peaceful environment and national unity. This should be done using the pedagogic philosophy of play to supplement the social psychology of social interaction to yield the result of appropriate language and social development in children in their early years.

Furthermore, language development is a process starting early in human life. Infants start without knowing a language, yet by 10 months, babies can distinguish speech sounds and engage in babbling. Some research has shown that the earliest learning begins in uterus when the fetus starts to recognize the sounds and speech patterns of its mother's voice and differentiates them from other sounds after birth. Typically, children develop receptive language abilities before their verbal or expressive language develops. Receptive language is the internal processing and understanding of language. As receptive language continues to increase, expressive language begins to slowly develop. Usually, productive language is considered to begin with a stage of pre-verbal communication in which infants use gestures and vocalizations to make their intents known to others. According to a general principle of development, new forms then take over old functions, so that children learn words to express the same communicative functions they had already expressed by proverbial means (Eke, 2003).

Language skills develop over the first five years of life through interaction with parents, teachers and caregivers. During the early years, listening and speaking are the primary ways that preschool children learn new concepts and ideas, and express their thoughts through observation and feelings. In the Pre-school environment, children must develop as listeners and speakers in receptive (listening) skills. Language grows as children are exposed to completely new words or words that they already know that are used in new and different ways. In order to create a language rich classroom environment, pre-school teachers should, according to Hart and Risely (2002) engage children in external conversation; encourage children to tell and retell stories and describe events; discuss a wide range of topics; model use of new and unusual words; discuss word meaning; and focus on the expressions of ideas.

Early Childhood

Early Childhood (EC) usually refers to the first eight years of a child's life. Explicitly it is the period before full-time schooling begins, for children aged 3 to 5. In essence Early Childhood Education (ECE) refers to education which includes the crèches, the nursery and kindergarten, while the primary education refers to education given to children between 6-10 years and above. The period is seen as turning point in child development for building human capital in the form of the basic social, cognitive, and scholastic skills needed for educational achievement. ECE is also seen as a preventive measure to reduce the incidence of remedial classes, grade repetition, getting assigned to special-education classes, and later dropping out of school. As an equity issue, ECE is
viewed as an equalizer between rich and poor, a way of providing children from disadvantaged backgrounds some of the human-capital builders experienced by children from more advantaged households (Hammond & Plesca, 2010).

Furthermore, early childhood development is the key to a full and productive life for a child and to the progress of a nation. Early Childhood is therefore, a critical stage of development that forms the foundations for children's future well-being and learning. Research has shown that half of a person's intelligence potential is developed by age four and that Early Childhood interventions can have a lasting effect on intellectual capacity, personality and social behaviour. Integrated programmes whose focuses are children in their very early years are critical for their mental and psychosocial development as opined by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2000).

Aldemir & Sezer (2009) also maintained that Early Childhood is a period when children begin to acquire their personality traits, moral behaviour, habit formation, and social interaction and communication skills. As a result of the increase in the number of young children whose primary caretakers or parents are in the workforce, education and care of children in the Early Childhood period therefore requires teachers who have professional knowledge to assess and respond to developmental and learning needs of all children. Such educators must have the ability to recognize and analyze their personal beliefs, which may clash and interfere with the teaching act. Though, awareness of early childhood education for children dates back to the period of the renaissance, this turned into the decade of the seventies with some marks of accomplishment (Akujo, 1991). During the past two decades there has been a steady growth of interest in improving and expanding educational opportunities for young children all over the world.

The process of language development

Infancy
Babbling occurs in the middle of the first year, and infants usually utter their first word at about 10 to 13 months. By 18 to 24 months, infants usually have begun to string two words together. In this two-word stage, they quickly grasp the importance of language in communication, creating phrases such as "Book there," "My candy," "Mama walk," and "Give Papa."

Early Childhood
As children leave the two-word stage, they move rather quickly into three, four-, and five word combinations. The transition from simple sentences expressing a single proposition to complex sentences begins between 2 and 3 years of age and continues into the elementary school years (Bloom, 1998).

In terms of phonology, most preschool children gradually become sensitive to the sounds of spoken words (Gammon & Sosa, 2010). They notice rhymes, enjoy poems, make up silly names for things by substituting one sound for another (such as bubblegum, bubblegum, bubblegum), and clap along with each syllable in a phrase. As they move beyond two-word utterances, there is clear evidence that children know morphological rules. Children begin using the plural and possessive forms of nouns (dogs and dog's); putting appropriate endings on verbs (-s when the subject is third-person singular, -ed for the past tense, and -ing for the present progressive tense); and using prepositions (“in” and “on”), articles (“a” and “the”), and various forms of the verb to be (“I was going to the store”). In fact, they over generalize these rules, applying them to words that do not follow the rules. For example, a preschool child might say "foots" instead of "feet" or "goed" instead of "went."

Children's understanding of morphological rules was the subject of a classic experiment by
children's language researcher Jean Berko (1958). Berko presented preschool and first-grade children with cards. Children were asked to look at the card while the experimenter read the words on it aloud. Then the children were asked to supply the missing word. This might sound easy, but Berko was interested not just in the children's ability to recall the right word but also in their ability to say it "correctly" with the ending that was dictated by morphological rules. Although the children were not perfectly accurate, they were much better than chance would dictate. Moreover, they demonstrated their knowledge of morphological rules not only with the plural forms of nouns.

Berko demonstrated that the children relied on rules, but also that they had abstracted the rules from what they had heard and could apply them to novel situations. Preschool children also learn and apply rules of syntax (Lidz, 2010). After advancing beyond two-word utterances, the child shows a growing mastery of complex rules for how words should be ordered. Consider questions, such as "Where is Daddy going?" or "What is that boy doing?" To ask these questions properly, the child must know two important differences between wh- questions and affirmative statements (for instance, "daddy is going to work" and "That boy is waiting on the school bus").

First, a 'wh'- word must be added at the beginning of the sentence. Second, the auxiliary verb must be inverted that is, exchanged with the subject of the sentence. Young children learn quite early where to put the wh- word, but they take much longer to learn the auxiliary-inversion rule. Thus, preschool children might ask, "Where daddy is going?" and "What that boy is doing?" The speaking vocabulary of a 6-year-old child ranges from 8,000 to 14,000 words. Assuming that word learning began when the child was 12 months old, this translates into a rate of five to eight new word meanings a day between the ages of 1 and 6. A 6-year-old is simply a much better conversationalist than a 2-year-child.

At about 3 years of age, children improve in their ability to talk about things that are not physically present. That is, they improve their command of the characteristic of language known as displacement. Children at this stage become increasingly removed from the "here and now" and are able to talk about things not physically present, as well as things that happened in the past or may happen in the future. Preschoolers can tell you what they want for lunch tomorrow, something that would not have been possible at the two-word stage in infancy. Preschool children also become increasingly able to talk in different ways to different people.

**Early Childhood Educational Experiences**

Early childhood education is an activity that takes place before formal school, in this case, preschool is a part of early childhood, and the aim is the versatile development of child's personality and also helping the child to be ready and mature for a smooth transition to school (Ajala, 1998). In other words, early childhood education programme encompasses both qualitative education and care, which should not be separated but provided in a complementary fashion. Quality early childhood educational experiences will earn children a position or state of readiness to learn in a formal and non-formal setting. Disposition to learn refers to development of social skills and behaviour in formal educational environment, while readiness to learn is related to the fact that children will start schooling on a solid (footing) foundation to develop their potentials.

Emphatically, early childhood education is seen as an evolving field of study, research and practice, which concerns itself with all aspect of early life experience, from separation of anxiety to early literacy development. The necessity and importance of early child education for a smooth transitional formal schooling has been stressed. This is because the pre-school education is responsible for determining whether young people get the right start or not. By the time children commence attendance in a preschool setting, they have already had a variety of experiences and
have developed in a number of ways. In order to utilize and build upon the learning especially for language development from those experiences that they have taken from the home and its immediate environment, adults should provide children with a rich variety of play activities and other experiences in a stimulating and challenging environment.

The focus should be to allow children to learn without experiencing a sense of failure. The early stage of language development is characterized by children learning from their environment through their senses (Piaget, 1966). They gradually develop the ability to form images of objects not physically present and may develop primitive means especially those that concerns communications (Abeles, 1999). Most young children are interested in themselves and their environment. They are curious and like to explore, investigate, and create. They have a sense of wonder and amazement; they are developing concentration and a range of skills and competences; they enjoy stories, rhymes and music; and they enjoy physical plays and are becoming physically independent. The absence of strong, affectionate and caring relationship may retard children's curiosity and consequently lead to intellectual, social and emotional problems (Osanyin, 2002). This implies that children need a loving and responsive environment with adults encouraging and supporting them. The earliest years of a child's education is fundamentally formative, and throughout the world, government and educators are investing their respective resources in the development and enhancement of learning opportunities for young children (Cous, 2003).

Arnold (2004) supported that early childhood experiences and development is an investment that offers outstanding returns in learning. This philosophical base for early education dovetails into the philosophy of education which among other things, is based on educating and raising up the individual into a sound and effective citizen with equal educational opportunities for all and it is suggested that this should start from the cradle (Anyanwu, 2000)

Through early childhood experience, children learn through dynamic social interaction with Other adults and Other children in their environment and develop their imaginations and creativity through play. Akinbote (2010) supported that all aspects of a child's growth and development particularly from birth about six years is very crucial because this is when lifelong habits of thought, physical expression, social and emotional responsiveness are formulated. Tymms & Jones (2007) found out that children who participate in a high quality early childhood education programme make better transition from home to school and from school to community and ultimately, gain lasting benefits as socially responsible adults; it helps children to learn; experiences in the early years of life are more influential on the development of the brain than at any other time in life.

Early brain development has a profound impact on a person's learning, social interaction, emotional maturity and language development and competence. Children also learn how to be friendly, share and cooperate with others. They develop the ability to act with confidence and they gain independence. All these should be easily achieved with the proper play technique that suits and interests the children. Hence the assertion of Akinbote (2010) that pre-primary education is not a luxury but an avenue for helping children to have a holistic development that could have a lifelong impact on their language and social development is very crucial. Maggi (2005) supported that three domains of child development physical, social emotional, and language/cognitive are affected by family in terms of stimulation, support and nurture of all three areas of development.

Every child develops language within complex and interactive social relationships, located within social institutions and organizations such as families and communities. The immediate family environment of the child, where interactions occur, is the main learning site for most of the
preschool years. As far as the early development of language and communication skills is concerned, the importance and influence of parent-child interaction (PCI) has been highlighted by many Early work, comparing adult-child with adult-adult speech, laid claim to the existence of a particular mother-child language code called child directed speech, that differs in form and functional characteristics from adult-adult speech (Furw & Benedict, 2000).

Early Childhood is the most critical period in human development, thus comprehensive and quality early childhood education can make a significant contribution to the physical, psychomotor, cognitive, social and emotional development of the child; including the acquisition of languages and early literacy. Children are active learners from birth, and the early years are vital to their success in school and later in life. Early childhood education might be considered to be education which takes place before compulsory education. The term refers 10 education in its broadest sense, including childcare and development. This includes early childhood services provided in kindergartens, nurseries, pre-school classes, child-care centers and other similar institutions. It goes beyond what some refer to as pre-school education, as it is education in its own right, having not only the purpose Of preparing children for school, but for life in the same way as all other parts of education systems contribute to this process (Hayes, 2010).

Reast (2001) agrees that parenting is multiplying factor determined by characteristics of both parents and children. In terms of parent characteristics, parent age, education, income, and race/ethnicity (to name a few) have all been shown to relate to the three aspects of parenting discussed above. For example, compared to older mothers, teen mothers display lower levels of verbal stimulation and involvement, higher levels Of intrusiveness, and maternal speech that is less varied and complex. Mothers with fewer years of education read to their children less frequently and demonstrate less sophisticated language and literacy skills themselves, which affects the quantity and quality of their verbal interactions with their children. Parental socio-economic Status, in tum, relates to household income: poverty and persistent poverty are strongly associated with less stimulating home environments and parents living in poverty have children who are at risk for cognitive, academic, and social-emotional difficulties.

Objectives

This paper sought to:
1. Investigate the impact of teaching methods on the language development of primary school children in Buea.
2. Examine how home environment influences the language development of primary school children in Buea.

To achieve the above objectives, the following research questions were posed:
- What is the impact of teaching methods on the language development of primary school children in Buea.
- How does home environment influence the language development of primary school children in Buea.

Methodology

Research Design

The survey research design was used in this study which allowed for rapid collection of data about an issue over a large area, community or population within a short time using questionnaires, observation techniques etc. This study involved all nursery and primary school teachers in the Buea
Municipality.

The target population of this study comprised of all the teachers from nursery classes up to primary 6 in some selected primary schools in Buea municipality. The sample population was drawn from three primary schools which were; Saint Therese Bilingual primary School (SBPS) Molyko, Catholic School Buea Town (CS), Government Practicing School Buea Town (GPS).

**Sampling**

Data was collected from a sample of 30 teachers (using a structured questionnaire) selected from the parent populations using the simple random sampling and the snow balling techniques.

**Findings**

*The findings of the study are presented in this section based on the different objectives of the study starting with the demographic variables.*

**Demographic characteristics of respondents**

The demographic characteristics of the respondents (teachers) are presented in table 1.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Gender, teachers sampled per school and teaching experience</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Frequency (f)</strong></td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>30</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Percentage (%)</strong></td>
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<td>63.3</td>
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<td>09</td>
<td>30</td>
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<tr>
<td>Percentage (%)</td>
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<td>Catholic School Buea Town (CS)</td>
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<td>Percentage (%)</td>
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<td>Government Practicing School Buea Town (GPS)</td>
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<td>Percentage (%)</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teaching Experience (yrs)</strong></td>
<td>0-5</td>
<td>6-8</td>
<td>9-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Frequency (f)</strong></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Percentage (%)</strong></td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Findings in table 1 revealed that about two-thirds (63.3%) of the respondents were female while about a third (36.7) were males. There are more female than male teachers in each of the schools sampled.

Three schools were sampled for this study involving 30 teachers. Of this number, 12(40.0%) were drawn from St. Therese Bilingual Primary Schools, 9(30.0%) from Catholic School Buea and 9(30.0%) from Government Practicing School Buea.

Pertaining to the teaching experiences of the teachers, a vast majority of the teachers sampled 14(46.7%) have teaching experiences between 12 and 15 years, 10 (33.3%) of them have worked for 9-11 years, 4(13.3%) have a teaching experience ranging from 6 to 8 years with just 2 (6.7%) still in the first two years of teaching. None of the teachers sampled have a working experience greater than 15 years.

**Presentation of findings according to objectives**

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Research Objective one: To investigate the impact of teaching methods on the language development of primary school children in Buea

This research question was designed to measure the influence of teaching methods on the language development of primary school children in Buea. This was done using five (5) questionnaire items whose responses are summarized and presented in table two.

Table 2:
Impact of teaching methods of the language development of pupils (N=30)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>Stretched</th>
<th>Collapsed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly agree(SA)</td>
<td>Agree (A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When teaching, it is good to often take into consideration learners’ learning styles.</td>
<td>15 (50.0%)</td>
<td>10 (33.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children often develop communication skills when they play</td>
<td>9 (30.0%)</td>
<td>15 (50.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers should use indoor and outdoor activities during lessons</td>
<td>13 (43.3%)</td>
<td>10 (33.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When pupils are involved in drama, they develop speaking skills</td>
<td>10 (33.3%)</td>
<td>10 (33.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The school adequately prepares the class with teaching aids</td>
<td>10 (33.3%)</td>
<td>10 (33.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple response set</td>
<td>57 (38.0%)</td>
<td>55 (36.0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Findings in table 2 show that teachers about three-quarters (74.7%) of the respondents generally agreed that teaching methods influence the development of language by primary school children in Buea municipality while about one-quarter of the disagreed. More significant is the fact that 80.0% of the teachers generally agreed that teaching is more meaningful when the teacher takes into consideration learners’ learning styles. The involvement of students in learning activities like drama, play with peers, and exposure to adequate teaching aids will improve the development of language skills by primary school children.

Research Objective two: To examine how home environment influences the language development of primary school children in Buea.

This research question was designed to find out the influence of teaching methods on the language development of primary school children in Buea. This was done using five (5) questionnaire items whose responses are summarized and presented in table three.
Table 3:
Influence of home environment on language development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>Stretched</th>
<th>Collapsed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly agree(SA)</td>
<td>Agree(A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most of the parents usually give feedback about their children</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(33.3%)</td>
<td>(53%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents of tend help their children with homework tasks</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(56.7%)</td>
<td>(33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The relationships parents have with their children help their communication skills</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(60.0%)</td>
<td>(33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents often buy their children learning materials</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(33.3%)</td>
<td>(33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When parents respond to their children, they easily develop communication skills</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(40.0%)</td>
<td>(33%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Findings from table 3 revealed most of the teachers 88.7% in primary schools in Buea generally agree that the home environment is a significant influence on the language development of primary school children while 1.3% of them disagree.

The teachers (86.7%) also reported that parents give feedback about their children while 13.3% of them reported a contrary opinion. Again, 90.0% of the respondents agree that parents tend to help their children with homework tasks while upholding by 93.3% that the relationship parents have with their children help in the development of their communication skills. The teachers are of the opinion that the exposure to language usage that parents give to their children is very significant in developing language skills especially if parents in addition to this, buy for their children learning materials.

Discussion of Findings
The discussion of findings is presented according to the objectives of the study as follows:

Objective One: To investigate the impact of teaching methods on the language development of primary school children in Buea
Findings revealed that teaching methods have a big role to play in the development of language in primary school children. From the findings, a greater percentage of the teachers agreed to this fact and believe that when teachers use appropriate and varied teaching methods, children easily and quickly develop language. This is in line with the fact that teaching is a process of transferring or imparting knowledge and skills to the learner. It is also providing pupils with instructions and related guidance.

Teaching/learning methods enabled pupils learn planned activities. Learning activity according to Ngaroga (2007) is a task a pupil is expected to perform during a lesson in order to achieve the objectives intended by a teacher. These included activities such as observing, recording, demonstrating, experimenting, orderings, classifying, listing, writing, drawing therefore, and effective teaching most consider appropriate teaching method base on the learning styles of the learner. Teaching methods are also an essential tool to addressing learning needs of the children because each learner has diverse learning styles which if not appealed to will not bring about any meaningful learning (Tchombe, 2012).

Objective Two: To examine how home environment influences the language development of primary school children in Buea.

The findings revealed that home environment has a major role to play on language development in children students. From the findings, majority of the respondents believed that the experience children are exposed to at home, enforces language development. It should be noted that the home is the first environment in the child's life where learning takes place. Therefore, majority of the respondent reiterated that children develop language when they are exposed in their homes.

This is in line with Awe (2000) early and consistent participation in routine learning activities, such as shared book reading, storytelling, and teaching about the letters of the alphabet by parents at home, provide children with a critical foundation for early learning, language growth and emergent literacy. Routine activities provide young children with a familiar structure for interpreting others' behaviors and language, anticipating the temporal sequencing of events, and drawing inferences from new experiences. Moreover, engagement in learning activities expands children's vocabulary and conceptual knowledge. In particular, shared books reading, as well as the sharing of oral stories, facilitate young children's vocabulary growth, phonemic skills, print concept knowledge, and positive attitudes toward literacy.

Also, the findings of this study are in line with Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory of learning which believes that, teachers or caregiver or parents can enhance understandings and learning of language to the child. Vygotsky's states that by sharing meanings that are relevant to the children's environment, adults promote language development as well. This early experiences can influence thought processes and perspectives of the children when they are in new and similar environments. Also, since Vygotsky's promotes more facilitation in children's learning, he suggests that knowledgeable people (adults in particular), can also enhance knowledge through cooperative meaning-making with the child in their learning. Vygotsky's approach encourages guided participation and children exploration with support. Teachers, parents or caregivers can help children achieve their language development through consistent and regular interactions of collaborative knowledge-making learning processes.

Conclusions

This study concludes that early childhood experiences significantly impact language development in children. This study empirically investigated the contribution of early childhood experiences to language development in children. Some of the early childhood experiences include;
the type of teaching methods used by teachers, the home environment of the child and how the child interacts with his/her peers. It was evidently proven that these variables affect the development of language in children. In trying to compare the basic roles played by these early childhood experiences, in the educational process, the researcher came to a conclusion that they are complementary with each other and dependent one on the other to achieve a unifying goal. If children are provided with all the necessary exposure and assistance needed to succeed, they will certainly be high achievers. Teachers cannot teach pupils all the skills they need to survive without the available necessary learning exposure to complement the services of teachers and the support of the parents.

**Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

Government should inject more funds into the system for the procurement of teaching and learning facilities. This responsibility lies on the educational planners and administrators in the Ministry of Basic Education. Also, corporate organizations and individuals should be encouraged by the government to donate generously in cash and kind for the provision of educational facilities especially the needed one so that teachers can use them in enhancing the teaching and learning process.

Apart from school and public libraries, education resource centres should be established by government such as teacher centres and audio visual centres. Teachers' centres could serve as places where teachers could work together in groups to generate ideas that would make them more competent in the profession. Teachers should be made to use instructional facilities while teaching and where they are not available improvisation should be adopted.

Also, parents should be sensitized on the important role they play as the first care givers of the child. This can be done through PTA meetings where they should be encouraged to always monitor and communicate with their children, helping them to do home works. This is because when they interact as often with their children, they are likely to develop language fast.

**References**

8. Cous, R. (2003). *Sociocultural contributions to understanding the parenting and second


