

Harnessing Information and Physical Literacy's Skills for Physical Fitness of Special Children in Nigeria

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Abstract

Information literacy skill is an essential social service which should be provided to every Nigeria child. Every child is a special person, but some may need special care due to physical, emotional, health or development needs. However, special children because of their unique nature should be fully equipped to harness the potentials of information literacy. Hence, rationale and relevance of information literacy among special children were discussed. The relationship between information literacy and physical literacy were also highlighted. Measurement of the health related component of special children in Nigeria have revealed that modern sedentary lifestyle is creating major health problems among which are the onset of degenerated diseases, low work output, increased stress and low self esteem. In conclusion, the more they will be willing to make appropriate use of information through information literacy skills, the better special children will be able to promote and safeguard their health and in final analysis enhance their physical fitness.

Key words: *Information, Physical, Literacy, Special Children, Nigeria*

Introduction

According to Francis Bacon knowledge is power. However, one cannot be knowledgeable and powerful, if one does not have relevant information to empower his/her thinking and enhance his/her understanding (Ajibero, 2012). Information has been universally viewed as a basic resource which all people including special children use to improve their condition of living and is essential to developmental process. Uhegbu (2007) opined that information is a common term, something that changes a person's state of knowledge in a subject that affect or influences individuals in the conduct of their business. For this reason, at every stage of human development, information is required. Conjecturally, the CNN, Christiana Amanpour notes, information is life, information is power, information is security, information is money, and information is business. In addition the researcher is also of the opinion that information is a panacea for physical fitness because actively seeking health information is a component of health literacy that transcends the understanding of words and the ability to follow directives.

Literacy is not restricted to reading and writing UNESCO (2003); Literacy is concerned with how we communicate in society and the social practices and relationship, about knowledge, language and culture. Traditionally, literacy means the ability to read and write, literacy if adequately provided could help special children to change their traditional attitudes, beliefs and practices that will promote human and national development. Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community and wider society (UNESCO, 2005). On the other hand, Lau (2006) describes information literacy as the ability to find right information and use effectively, evaluate information critically and competently and use information accurately and creatively.

Information literacy skill is an essential social service which should be provided to every citizen, the federal government recognizes information literacy skill as the right of every child. Information literacy skills empower special children with the critical skill which will help them to become independent lifelong learners. They know how to learn because they know how knowledge is organized, how to find information and how to use information in such a way that others can learn from them. According to the American Library Association, information literacy is the ability to "recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information (ACRL, 2000). The whole concept is to train and develop the total child to be able to fit in and function in the society.

Information literate special child become more thoughtful and versatile in seeking and using information either in the raw form of empirical data or in the highly processed form called “knowledge” which is critical to their all round development. They now have ability to acquire information, to decide what information is needed, for what purpose and how to access and apply them to confront circumstances and situations that confront them. Information literate children possess some generic skills like information seeking, problem solving, communication, information use and critical thinking.

In Nigeria every child is entitled to fundamental human rights and is to be treated with dignity. Besides, every child is a special person, but some children may need special care due to physical, emotional, health or development needs. For instance some children may have recognizable disabilities, such as a child with cerebral palsy who is in a wheel chair or a child with vision difficulties who wears glasses. Other children, while having been diagnosed with a specific disability, may exhibit challenging behaviors that interrupts the daily routine.

Children may have a nonspecific diagnosis, such as developmental delay. Pediatricians and other medical professionals often prefer this diagnosis for young children, since it implies that, given times and opportunity, the child may “catch up” in the areas in which they are currently delayed, in other cases, a child may be “at risk” for a disability because of environmental conditions or due to a chronic health conditions, such as a depressed immune system or chronic asthma. At risk does not mean that the child has a particular disability. It simply means that there is a high probability that, without intervention the child will develop a permanent delay. Today these categories of children are exposed to poverty, violence, abuse, exploitation, resulting to a declining quality of information, as evidence in a good percentage of them who are unhealthy, poorly nourished, unwilling to participate and not supported in learning by their families and communities at large.

Regardless of the type of challenge a child experience, it is important to keep in mind that special children and indeed all children can learn and should be allowed to participate in everyday routines and activities to the best of their capabilities. Research tells us that children learn best in natural environments with typically developing peers (Allen& Cowdety, 2004, Brown, Hemmeter & Pretti- forntzak, 2005). This interaction not only benefits the child with special needs, but also helps children without special needs to learn about tolerance and acceptance of others. It is also pertinent to note that early intervention programme that include strong information literacy stimulus can be effective in equalizing outcomes, especially of the most at risk (special children). Hence, the relevance of information literacy on the child’s learning, development and wellness is transferred from the home to the pre- school, to the primary school and to the post - primary school to promote smooth transitions.

Rationale for Information Literacy among Special Children

Despite the fact that information literacy is highly popular with educational environment, literacy has evolved from library education practices, and therefore the debate presented is based on the review of the literature generated by the library and information science disciplines. As the literature clearly illustrates, information literacy has developed to address the requirements generated by the phenomena such as information overload caused by the rapid developments in digital technologies, by the needs of the information society for competent information consumers, and to meet the requirements of the knowledge economy for a responsive and informed workforce(Andretta,2005). Hence, special children because of their unique nature should be fully equipped to harness the potentials of information literacy.

According to Californian University Information Literacy Fact Sheet (2000) an information literate individual is able to:

- Determine the extent of information needed.
- Access the needed information effectively and efficiently.
- Evaluate information and its sources critically.
- Incorporate selected information into one’s knowledge base.
- Use information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose.
- Understand the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information, and access and use of information ethically and legally.

Arising from these fundamental importance of information literacy to every individual including special children, it therefore has to be looked at holistically and not only as a process where special children go through training to acquaint themselves of the need to cherish information but also to make effective and efficient use of information for development.

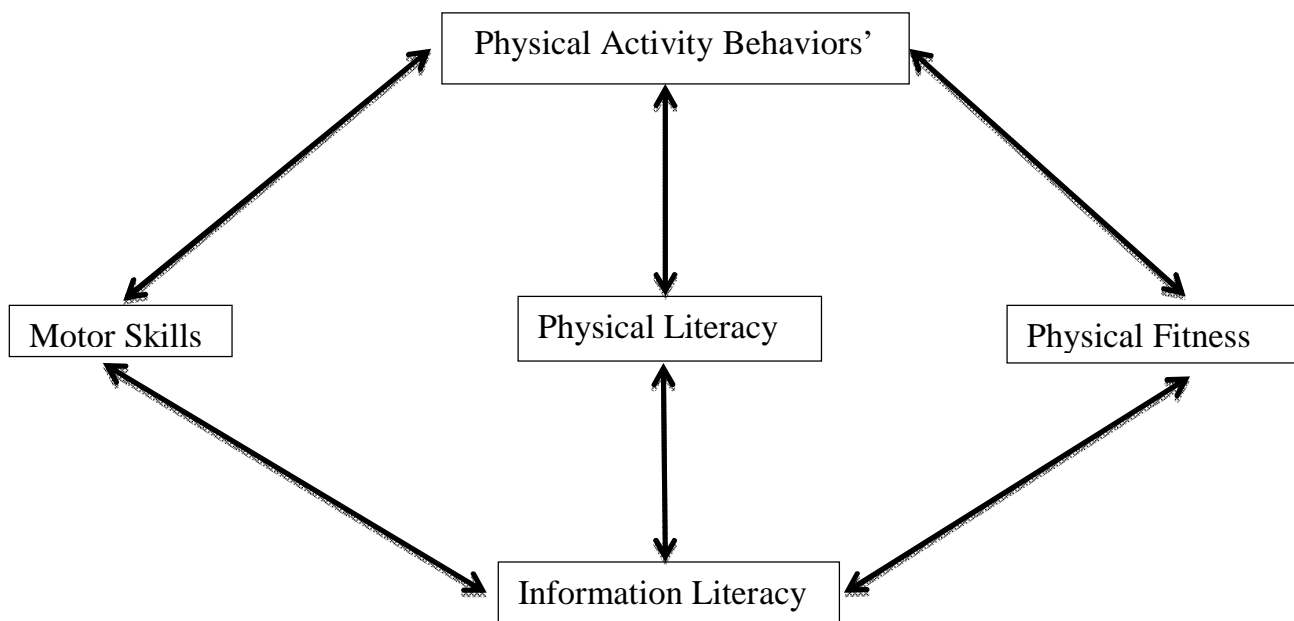
Relevance of Physical Literacy to Special Children

Physical literacy of a special child goes beyond the physical development of the special child (its ability to move), it involves intellectual development (making the right decision based upon problem solving when and how to move, as well as emotional development confidence and self esteem), and even social development (teamwork), physical literacy entails a commitment to the holistic nature of the child with interaction of capabilities. Hence Whitehead 2010 gave a well known definition as follow:

“As appropriate to each individual endowment, physical Literacy can be described as a disposition in which individuals have the motivations, confidence, physical competence, knowledge and understanding to value and take responsibility for maintaining purposeful physical pursuit throughout the life course”.

Special children who are physically literate, can move with competence and confidence in a wide variety of physical activities in multiple environments that benefit their healthy development. Being physically active facilitate maintenance and development of capacity to move and is, therefore, important from cradle to grave, i.e. physical literacy of every child involves a life- long process, it is not just something that we “do” in school physical education lessons. However, physical education plays a vital part in the process, because this is the only time we can guarantee all children will be given the opportunity to receive guidance and encouragement to learn and practice thereby developing their physical literacy skills.

The Relationship between Information Literacy and Physical Literacy



A cursory glance at the diagram above shows that information literacy has been identified as essential to achieving a healthy society and an informed and empowered citizenry. Hence promoting physical literacy is not about finding individual or special children with the best skills, giving them extra tuition and ignoring the rest, physical literacy as the goal of all physical activities recognizes each child will be travelling in different context, at different speed and often in different directions. The role of the teacher and all other major stakeholders are to guide the child based on the peculiarity of the child to make, progress on his/her journey, giving support and direction where need arises.

Physical literacy entails a commitment to the holistic nature of the special child with interaction of capabilities.

It is important in all the following sectors: recreation, education, vocation, health and activities of daily living of all categories of children. Therefore, there is the need to impact physical literacy in special children to enable them achieved the following:

- enable them to take care of their personal and community health
- Instill in special children the need for a healthy life, for quality living that will ensure high productivity
- Change their attitudes from negative to positive one
- Encourage special children to use available health services
- Change their undesirable behavior to desirable ones
- Making special children to realize the need for preventing diseases rather than spending more time and money for treatment and.
- Encourage special children to see their situation as avenue to do exploit.

In addition to helping special children improve their physical fitness and wellness, physical literacy skills encourages them to fulfill other health related roles and the potentials to facilitate behavior medication among special children by empowering them to make healthy choices. Nigeria has large structure of human and material resources, unfortunately, both are grossly untapped as a result of stifling austerity of information to people and most especially to special children who constitute the bulk of human in the country. Physical fitness is imperatives to national development. We do not need a magician or fortune teller to emphasize the inextricable relationship. If human resources are not optimally developed, the nation optimally is underdeveloped. One vital indicator for physical fitness thus, is information literacy.

Physical Fitness and its Relevance to Special Children

Physical fitness has been defined as the ability to perform occupational, recreational and daily activities without becoming unduly fatigued (Heyward. 1991). Physical fitness is the capacity of an individual to perform his normal daily task without undue fatigue and with enough strength and energy left over to satisfactorily meet with any emergency situation that calls for physical exertion (Igbanuge, 2006). This makes physical fitness a dynamic entity defined by observable physiological factors that describes persons capacity to function optimally. Research has also shown that without the development of physical literacy, many children and most especially children with special care withdraw from physical activity and turn to more inactive, unhealthy choices during their leisure time. Physical literacy therefore becomes an indispensable means for active participation in the societies and the development and maintenance of good health.

Measurement of the health related component of physical fitness of special children in Nigeria have revealed that modern sedentary lifestyle is creating major health problems among which are the onset of degenerative diseases, low work output, increased stress and low self esteem. Hence, Nabofa (2010) noted that modern day society is witnessing a wide variety of health problems including a preponderance of hypo kinetic diseases arising from sedentary living. It was hypothesized that information literacy would have some influence on health related physical fitness of children and special children will not be an exception Achebe (2013) position that information as an “ architect personified” takes the role of a designer of building and large structures, who prepares, plans and supervises constructions leading to a perfect finish.

Conclusion

Information literacy is crucial to the acquisition, by special children of essential life skills that enable them to address the challenges they can face in life. It also represents an essential step in basic education, which is an indispensable means for effective participation in the societies and economies of the twenty first century. The more the special child value information the more they will be willing to make appropriate allocation of resource to promote and safeguard their health, physical literacy in special children development is not only to provide for safe and healthful environment and services to the children entrusted to its care, but also precaution against hazards become necessary both at home, school and the community.

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