

# Child Development: Aesthetic Education as a Core Learning Approach

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**Abstract:-** The article provides insights into child development and learning, with a focus on aesthetic education as a fundamental learning approach. Employing the traditional narrative review technique, the paper gathers information from peer-reviewed articles, government reports, and reputable non-governmental organizations. It delves into various approaches to child literacy and development, specifically exploring the role of aesthetic education in this context. The review concludes that incorporating aesthetic education as a core learning approach positively impacts child education and development in Nigeria. As a result, the paper recommends the integration of aesthetic education into the pedagogy of Early Childhood Education in Nigeria, aligning with policy objectives laid out in the Nigerian National Policy on Education.

**Keywords:-** *Aesthetic Education, Child Development, Child Education, Early Childhood Education, Learning Approach, Policy on Education.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, there has been a notable transformation in the field of child development. While the significance of traditional academic subjects is widely acknowledged, a growing movement underscores the vital role of aesthetic education in shaping well-rounded individuals (Arney et al., 2023). This examination delves into the expanding body of research on this approach, investigating its profound influence on various aspects of a child's life and advocating for its incorporation as a fundamental learning strategy. Aesthetic education goes beyond merely acquiring artistic skills; it instills an appreciation for beauty, sharpens observational skills, and fosters a deep understanding of the diverse forms of artistic expression that enhance human experience (Dickson et al., 2023). As Ma insightfully noted, art serves as the most effective mode of education (Ma et al., 2021), engaging not only the intellect but also the senses, emotions, and imagination, facilitating holistic development beyond traditional academic measures.

Increasing research supports the transformative potential of aesthetic education. Studies by researchers such as Lukaka (2023), Biber (2022), and Carlson (2023) demonstrate how aesthetic education promotes cognitive development.

Interacting with art stimulates critical thinking, problem-solving, and the ability to interpret and analyze various forms of expression. Children exposed to a rich array of artistic experiences learn to observe, compare, and discern nuances, enhancing their perceptual acuity and laying the foundation for lifelong intellectual curiosity (Qasserras, 2023). The impact of aesthetic education extends beyond the cognitive domain, influencing the emotional and social well-being of children. Artistic creation provides an outlet for self-expression, vulnerability, and the exploration of complex emotions (Stepney, 2017). It offers a safe space for children to navigate and process feelings, contributing to emotional intelligence and resilience. Additionally, collaborative artistic endeavors foster social-emotional development, promoting empathy, communication, and cooperation (Sullivan, 2023). Through shared creative projects, children learn to collaborate, resolve conflicts, and appreciate the diverse perspectives that enrich the artistic process (Boss and Krauss, 2022).

The focus on child development in this context pertains to early childhood literacy from ages 0 to 5, as defined by the Nigerian education system, which initiates primary education at age six (Ogbonnia, 2020; FRN, 2014). The concept of child development, particularly in terms of literacy, encompasses social and cultural practices that cultivate individual skills in reading and writing, utilizing various methods such as audio-visuals and play-based activities aligned with children's diverse social-cultural contexts (Choiriyah, 2021; Arthur et al., 2011). 'Literate,' as noted, extends beyond reading and writing capability to include cultural awareness reflecting an aptitude for decoding the world beyond printed words, embracing expressions and languages articulated in diverse manners (McDermott, 2023). Conventionally, literacy in early childhood involves the gradual progression of learning letters corresponding with sounds, acquiring words, understanding sentence structures, developing vocabulary, mastering book-handling, and gaining phonemic receptiveness (Zhang, 2022; McLachlan et al., 2013; Arthur et al., 2011).

The term "aesthetic" originates from "estesis," meaning "I feel beauty." Aesthetics involves the discernment and appreciation of taste and beauty, characterized by sensual and physical responses to values, nature, beauty, taste, and the arts (D'Olimpio, 2022). Aesthetic education, therefore, aims to instruct learners in recognizing and appreciating the beauties present in nature, vocabulary, language, social relationships,

and all aspects of life, fostering the development of their artistic taste and cultivating a love for beauty (Dewi, 2020). This educational process is designed to enhance learners and instill in them a sense of beauty, as human beings inherently shape their lives based on perceptions of beauty (Zhang et al., 2022; McLachlan et al., 2013). Aesthetic education is intricately linked to moral, intellectual, environmental, and social education.

Children, through their interactions within their families and communities, undergo diverse forms of learning in daily social and cultural activities, creating a reservoir of knowledge resources (Newman and Newman, 2022; Arthur et al., 2011; Moll and Amanti 2005). This pool of knowledge resources, described by Arthur et al. (2011) and Willmott (2023), constitutes historical, accumulated cultural, social, and environmental resources of knowledge and skills. These resources serve as the foundation of aesthetic education that children bring from their families and communities to school. This understanding forms the basis for analyzing aesthetic education as a fundamental learning approach in child development and literacy.

Aesthetic education aims to foster an aesthetic culture in individuals towards life, nature, and everything else through artistic activity within their environment, utilizing various means and pedagogical processes. However, scholarly attention on aesthetic education concerning early child development in Nigeria has been limited (Abdunabievich et al., 2022; Reimer, 2022; Xie and Deng, 2022). This paper seeks to explore aesthetic education as a core learning approach in child development, focusing specifically on early childhood literacy development, children's aesthetic acuties, aesthetic education, and its relevance in early childhood literacy development. The examination extends to the implications of aesthetic education on the policy objectives of the Nigerian National Policy for Education regarding child education in Nigeria.

This review embarks on a journey through the symphony of learning orchestrated by aesthetic education. It will investigate the theoretical foundations of this approach, delve into empirical evidence highlighting its multifaceted benefits, and explore practical strategies for integrating it into various learning environments. By embracing the transformative power of art, aesthetic education has the potential to weave a richer tapestry of child development, nurturing not only competent learners but also creative, empathetic, and well-rounded individuals who resonate with the beauty and joy of the world around them.

## II. EARLY CHILDHOOD LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

Early childhood literacy development holds a pivotal and foundational role in contemporary child development. The preparation of children aged 6 and below for primary education, as outlined in Nigeria's National Policy of Education, involves both informal and formal nurturing (Adeosun, 2019; Shoaga et al., 2017; FRN, 2014). Arthur et al. (2011) and Freeborn et al. (2023) contend that informal early literacy development within the family significantly shapes children's learning dispositions and attitudes, influencing the transition from home to school. Research supports the idea that early childhood literacy development is heavily influenced by social and psychological factors stemming from family backgrounds and the children's environment (Cahill et al., 2022; Raban, 2022; Hedges et al., 2011; Woodrow et al., 2011). Moll et al. (1992) and Leland et al. (2022) find that teaching methods grounded in daily life experiences and children's practices are effective for literacy development. However, Barratt-Pugh (2000) and Fridman and Meir (2023) observe that literacy patterns for children vary among cultures, highlighting the diversity in approaches.

Yoncheva et al. (2015) and Hosany et al. (2022) argue that knowledge gained by children from family activities, such as farming, animal management, and historical stories, serve as valuable assets for literacy in classrooms. They emphasize the need to harness these resources in children's literacy development, particularly in activities rooted in intuition rather than strict academic knowledge. Zippin et al. (2012) and Mindes (2021) suggest using this insight to design appropriate curricula that counter the perception of literacy disadvantage among children from economically challenged backgrounds. Woodrow et al. (2011) and Woodrow and Staples (2019) illustrate how educators in Chilean early childhood centers actively engage with families to create literacy strategies. They recognize that children are more motivated to learn when it is connected to their existing knowledge and familiar surroundings. Woodrow et al. (2014) recommend incorporating play into literacy materials, considering it a significant contributor to child development at home and in communities.

Studies indicate that active participation in social and cultural activities enhances a child's learning, understanding, and performance in literacy practices (Romero-González et al., 2023; Tang et al., 2023; Kim et al., 2023; Diaz, 2007; McLachlan, 2007; Yoncheva et al., 2015). McLachlan (2007) asserts that children's involvement in literacy-related activities outside the school environment equips them with the cultural, cognitive, and linguistic competence needed to thrive in broader society. This perspective is echoed by Diaz (2007), Merrifield, and Gray (2023), emphasizing that the classroom teaching process is enhanced and more effective when it incorporates the insights gained by children from experiences outside of school.

Yoncheva et al. (2015) and Rouse and Nicholas (2022) offer a comprehensive perspective on child literacy development, emphasizing the significance of social interaction among children, adults, and their environments in cultural activities. This includes the ability to derive deeper meanings from both written text and the surroundings, as well as the skill to decipher phonemes, graphemes, and signs conveying words and sentences. Studies by Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2002) and Mukherji and Albon (2022) highlight the importance of sustained shared thinking in early childhood literacy development. They argue that this principle, which involves reflective thinking and open participation to gain understanding collaboratively, can lead to deep and authentic learning outcomes when integrated into the teaching and learning process. Newman et al. (2011) and Goodman (2023) suggest that a knowledgeable teacher can support children's learning, fostering confidence and individuality through a focus on achieving profound and authentic learning outcomes.

Domestic activities such as cleaning, cooking, repairs, gardening, and participation in family businesses provide occasions for sustained shared thinking and creative activities with adults. This allows children opportunities for genuine inquiry, reflection, and exploration as they collaborate (Bittman, 2020). Comber (2011) advocates creating a creative space in classrooms through sustained shared thinking to make learning more engaging and meaningful. A well-maintained play area with diverse toys, print materials, and literacy materials like posters, labels, collage materials, signs, pictures, picture books, storybooks, informational books, interactive reading materials, easy-to-read books, e-games, e-books, traditional literature, poetry, riddles, joke books, biographies, brochures, packages, and everyday materials, complemented by socio-dramatic play (McLachlan et al., 2013), can facilitate and enhance the achievement of desired literacy development in children.

Zachary and Fain (2022) and Pullen (2003) emphasize that environments enriched with literacy learning materials support learning, especially when there is adult facilitation as part of the process. Yoncheva et al. (2015) elaborate on adult facilitation at home, including activities such as reading, telling stories, and engaging in discussions that clarify language sounds for children. Similarly, organized instruction in schools, where teachers interpret and explain words and expressions, plays a crucial role in building children's literacy development.

#### ➤ *Children Aesthetic Acuties*

Aesthetic acuties refer to a child's ability to perceive and appreciate beauty, derive enjoyment from aesthetic experiences, and express a pursuit of beauty. Schultz (2022) emphasizes that a child's home environment, including natural landscapes, plants, flowers, animals, works of art, music, sculpture, architecture, and social interactions, serves as the primary source for cultivating aesthetic feelings. Ernst and Burcak (2019) and Lin (2012) highlight that exposure to

aesthetic objects and experiences fosters curiosity, positive emotions, and a desire to explore the environment in children. This, in turn, contributes to the development of social awareness, an understanding of nature, and cultural identity. Yang (2013) further suggests that aesthetic acuity enhances a child's literacy capacity by instilling a desire to observe and nurturing an appreciation for beauty, ultimately shaping the child into a more globally-minded citizen. In the realm of early childhood education, it becomes crucial to ignite children's aesthetic acuties and creativity towards their surroundings (Torr, 2023). Yan (2013) recommends integrating aesthetic education into children's literacy activities and development.

Aesthetic acuties hold particular significance for children aged 2 to 6, and it is essential for preschool teachers and caregivers to expose them to various forms of art, such as pictures, shapes, drawings, diagrams, sculptures, collages, mosaics, music, and dramas, regardless of their abilities. This exposure aims to ensure a balanced literacy development by cultivating their aesthetic acuties, thereby building aesthetic pleasure that facilitates literacy acquisition (Barbosa et al., 2023). For instance, involving children in playful handcraft activities not only stimulates their enthusiasm for learning but also contributes to the development of their motor skills.

#### ➤ *Aesthetic Education and Child Development*

Education's core purpose is to mold children into individuals who comprehend living situations, recognize social responsibility, embrace civic awareness, and understand the need for active participation in service to society. Aesthetic education serves as a teaching methodology that utilizes the elements and qualities of beauty to stimulate learners' senses through activities involving music, drama, visual arts, color, sound, taste, aroma, and the perception of the environment and nature (Marshalsey, 2023; Furman, 2000). Greene (2001) and D'Olimpio (2022) define aesthetic education as a deliberate effort to nurture appreciative, reflective, cultural, and participatory engagements in arts and artistic works. These aesthetic experiences empower learners to be aware of color, patterns, and taste, enabling them to perceive and reason in unique ways. Greene (2001) underscores that aesthetic education is fundamental to the cognitive, perceptual, emotional, and imaginative development of learners, making it pivotal for child development.

Dewey posited that the art of teaching involves insights, sincere compassion, a keen sense of humor, and consistent execution. Chen and Hong (2007) argue that the principles of aesthetic education, viewed as an art form by Dewey, can help achieve these ideal qualities for teaching and contribute to children's literacy. Chen (2015) and Barton (2023) assert that aesthetic teaching is not confined to the arts alone but extends to history, mathematics, sciences, and other subjects and fields that possess aesthetic qualities, fostering balanced development in learners. The concept of aesthetic education is

deeply embedded in Dewey's writings, according to Chen and Hong (2007). Yan (2015) and Tan (2023) see the purpose of aesthetic education as enhancing the balanced development of intelligence, the body, morality, and aesthetic feeling in learners. Chou and Lee (2016) argue that early childhood development programs incorporating arts and designs, music, play, and other physical activities through aesthetic education strengthen cognitive skills, facilitate literacy, and foster the overall development of children.

Squire (2003) and Mokwunye and Anyanwu (2023) suggest that the use of arts for learning enhances tact, intuition, and qualitative learning experiences for children at an early age. Kellert (2002) emphasizes that character development helps children grow qualities of intuition and positive behavior, while Lindqvist (1996) believes that the primary aim of aesthetic education is to cultivate aesthetic sensibilities, imagination, mental power, and communication skills. Aesthetic education not only encompasses artistic expressions like paintings, sculptures, writings, drama, and music but also aspects of daily life (Yan, 2015). The nurturing of children's literacy and development through aesthetic activities depends on how teachers handle the concept of aesthetic education and conduct art and craft classes for children (Wu, 2016).

#### ➤ *Aesthetic Education, Children Literacy and the Nigerian National Policy of Education*

Children's literacy formally commences with early childhood education in Nigeria, as outlined by the Nigerian National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004). This phase, commonly known as pre-school or pre-primary education, is designed for children below the age of 6, the entry age for primary education, with the aim of preparing them for formal schooling (Folorunsho, 2022; FRN, 2004). The Nigerian National Policy on Education underscores the importance of education as a tool for national growth and advancement, emphasizing the creation of ideas, integration, and the interaction of individuals and ideas (FRN, 2004). It further articulates the philosophy that education is meant to instill values and virtues in individuals for their own sake and for the benefit of society as a whole.

The policy asserts that Nigeria's philosophy of education is centered on developing individuals into "sound and effective" citizens and fully integrating them into Nigerian society (Anowai and Okagbue, 2023). It also emphasizes the need for education to foster self-discovery, understanding, and contribute to national productivity, awareness, and unity across various domains such as social, political, economic, cultural, scientific, and technological aspects (FRN, 2004). Aligned with these philosophies, the National Policy on Education outlines national goals for the education of Nigerian children. These goals include fostering national consciousness, unity, instilling right values and attitudes, training minds to understand the environment, acquiring suitable skills, promoting self-development, and developing mental, physical,

and social competencies to contribute to societal advancement (FRN, 2004).

Given the overarching objectives of the National Policy on Education, it becomes evident that aesthetic education should play a more prominent role not only in child education but also across all levels of the education system in Nigeria. Aesthetic education, as a teaching methodology, utilizes the elements and qualities of beauty, incorporating art materials, nature, music, drama, color, sound, taste, smell, environmental, cultural, and social elements for children's literacy and development (Savenkova, 2022). It is designed to cultivate cognitive, civic awareness, perceptual, emotional, imaginative, and cultural competencies, fostering capacities, character, attitudes, intuition, and mental power necessary for survival in society. Aesthetic education provides children with opportunities for self-realization, the maximization of self-confidence, the development of potentials and character within their social and physical worlds, aiming for a balanced development of intelligence, the body, and morality, contributing to the greater good of the nation. Given these potential benefits of aesthetic education on child development and literacy, advocating for its integration as a core learning approach in children's education in Nigeria and beyond would be highly advantageous.

### III. A THEORETICAL EXPLORATION OF AESTHETIC EDUCATION IN CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Traditionally, education has predominantly emphasized cognitive development, relegating aesthetics to a secondary role. However, there is a growing movement advocating for the integration of aesthetic education as a fundamental approach in child development. This paper explores the theoretical foundations of this movement, examining how theories of child development highlight the transformative potential of art in shaping holistic individuals. Andrade-Girón et al. (2023) provide a foundational perspective for aesthetic education, suggesting that, similar to how children construct their understanding of the physical world, they can also construct their understanding of the aesthetic world through creative engagement. Interacting with various artistic expressions such as painting, music, and dance fosters curiosity, experimentation, and the development of unique perspectives. These artistic explorations serve as cognitive laboratories, nurturing higher-order thinking skills like analysis, synthesis, and evaluation, which extend beyond artistic domains into other academic areas (Canham, 2023).

Blackburn (2020) adds another dimension to the learning experience. Artistic expression and collaborative projects create an environment for the vital interplay between social interaction and cognitive development. Sharing interpretations, negotiating ideas, and co-constructing knowledge within a supportive community become the scaffolding for building new understandings. Collaborative

artistic endeavors, like musical performances, foster communication, cooperation, and an appreciation of diverse perspectives, nurturing both artistic skills and essential social-emotional competencies (Mitsea et al., 2021). Neidenbach (2022) emphasizes the importance of aesthetic education by advocating for the nurturing of artistic talents alongside other intelligences. This approach leads to a comprehensive sense of self and a diverse skillset that enriches learning experiences. Recognizing and validating a child's artistic abilities empower them to explore their unique strengths and discover alternative pathways to knowledge acquisition. This recognition is particularly crucial for children whose learning styles may not align with traditional academic models, allowing them to thrive and contribute in ways that conventional assessments might overlook (Noddings, 2015).

Despite the compelling theoretical foundations, integrating aesthetic education encounters challenges, including concerns about resources, the perceived lack of standardized assessment methods, and worries about compromising academic rigor for artistic exploration. To address these challenges, there is a need to advocate for increased funding and professional development for educators, develop authentic assessment strategies focusing on the process and growth of creative skills, and emphasize the symbiotic relationship between artistic expression and academic achievement. By tackling these challenges and embracing the theoretical richness of aesthetic education, its transformative potential can be unlocked, enabling children not only to learn but also to truly come alive within the symphony of learning.

Aesthetic education is not a mere embellishment to traditional education; it is a vital thread woven into the fabric of child development. Understanding the theoretical foundations connecting art to cognitive, social-emotional, and individual growth allows us to harness its transformative power and cultivate well-rounded individuals who resonate with the beauty and joy of learning.

#### **IV. RESULT ON AESTHETIC EDUCATION IN CHILD DEVELOPMENT**

In the realm of child development, the incorporation of aesthetic education yields notable results across various domains. Research findings consistently indicate that exposure to the arts significantly enhances cognitive development in children (Liu, 2023; Bone et al., 2023; Bowen and Kisida, 2023). Engaging with aesthetic experiences, such as visual arts, music, and literature, stimulates critical thinking and problem-solving skills. The process of interpreting and creating art fosters cognitive flexibility, encouraging children to explore multiple perspectives and solutions. This cognitive enrichment contributes not only to academic success but also to the development of creative thinking and an appreciation for diverse forms of expression.

Aesthetic education also plays a pivotal role in nurturing emotional intelligence among children. Studies have shown that active participation in artistic activities contributes to the understanding and expression of emotions (Ávila et al., 2023; Saavedra-Macías et al., 2023; Clarke et al., 2023). Through the exploration of artistic mediums, children develop a heightened awareness of their feelings and those of others. This emotional literacy not only enhances interpersonal relationships but also provides children with a valuable toolset for navigating complex emotional landscapes, promoting resilience, and aiding in the development of a well-rounded emotional intelligence.

Furthermore, the collaborative nature of many aesthetic endeavors positively impacts the social development of children. Whether engaged in group art projects, theatrical performances, or musical ensembles, children learn essential social skills such as teamwork, communication, and cooperation (He et al., 2023; Eddy et al., 2021). Aesthetic education creates an environment that encourages peer interaction, fostering a sense of community and shared accomplishment. As children collaborate on creative endeavors, they not only develop a sense of belonging but also acquire valuable interpersonal skills that extend beyond the realm of artistic expression, laying a foundation for positive social interactions in various aspects of their lives.

#### **V. CONCLUSION**

Aesthetic education, characterized by its life-based learning approach that integrates teaching with real-life experiences, has garnered support from various scholars and studies, highlighting its role in providing a comprehensive and authentic education. The review concludes that aesthetic education exerts a positive influence on the child development process, enhancing the tapestry of development with vibrant hues and intricate patterns. Theoretical frameworks such as constructivism, the sociocultural approach, and the theory of multiple intelligences shed light on the transformative potential of art in fostering cognitive, social-emotional, and individual growth. Despite existing challenges, recognizing the power of artistic expression and addressing implementation obstacles present a promising path toward nurturing well-rounded individuals who derive joy and appreciation from learning. The call is made to orchestrate a symphony of learning, envisioning an educational environment where each child discovers their unique voice and contributes to the harmonious chorus of a flourishing humanity.

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

To cultivate "sound and effective" citizens who are seamlessly integrated into society, contributing to national productivity, awareness, unity, and advancement across various domains, it is crucial to instill in children the values and attitudes necessary for survival in the Nigerian context.

This includes fostering national consciousness, imparting appropriate skills, and developing mental, physical, and social abilities and competencies. To achieve these goals in alignment with Nigerian policy objectives, it is recommended that all stakeholders prioritize and implement aesthetic education as a core learning approach in child literacy and development.

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