

# **THE PARALLELS OF SHINICHI SUZUKI'S AND JEAN PIAGET'S THEORIES: IMPLICATION ON EARLY CHILDHOOD MUSIC EDUCATION IN NIGERIA**

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## **Introduction**

There are numerous theories to teaching and learning from Vygotsky, Pavlov, Gagne to Bloom. The similarities and parallels of Shinichi Suzuki and Jean Piaget theories of teaching and learning have good effects and worth modelling in entrenching quality early child educational in Nigeria. Education is considered to be an essential key to a nation's development and growth irrespective of its differences. The effective teaching of music, or with music, at pre-primary stage is the bedrock and foundation of all other learning. All children irrespective of their background are expected to pass through qualitative learning approaches. It is unfortunate however that many pre-primary school teachers are not adequately trained and equipped with requisite skills and knowledge in order to fully appreciate the use of music as a means of facilitating children's learning.

Abdullahi (2017) asserted that the United Nations Children's Fund (2013) posits that, early years of childhood form the basis of intelligence, personality, social behaviour and capacity to learn and nurture oneself as an adult. Thus, the quality of education given to children at the early age will determine the kind of future that awaits the nation. Piaget and Suzuki approaches, if properly implemented, will contribute greatly to enhancing the quality of education in Nigeria now and in the near future.

This paper identifies the parallels in the approaches and theories of a music educator, Shinichi Suzuki, and a psychologist, Jean Piaget, as well as the effects they can have on the early child music education in Nigeria. The study also explores the level of awareness of the learning theories among the primary school teachers

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in Bwari Area Council (BAC) with a view to promoting more awareness of these models. Arguably, many early child educators have little knowledge about the importance of music in a child's development. Expounding Suzuki and Piaget's theories will serve as an eye-opener to providing the much needed enlightenment for primary school teachers in BAC.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework adopted for this study is Cognitive Learning Theory propounded by Jerome Seymour Bruner. Bruner's theory is relevant and has similarities with Suzuki and Piaget's learning theories. Bruner (1915 – 2016) is a modern theorist who made significant contributions in cognitive learning theory in educational psychology.

The development of human intellectual functioning from infancy to such perfection as it may reach is shaped by a series of technological advances in the use of the mind. This further substantiates the views of Suzuki and Piaget on the need to expose children to music at their early stage. The spiral curriculum, associated with Bruner, is a concept which suggests that teachers vary their instructional methods based on the developmental level of the pupils. Instructors should revisit materials that has been previously learned in order to reinforce it and build upon it even more (Williams, 2004).

This theory is germane to this study as the three stages of developmental sequence of Bruner are in line with the subject of this research. The stages are Enactive, Iconic and Symbolic - these are ways people represent knowledge. Enactive representation includes use of motor skills. Suzuki and Piaget strongly believe that every child has talent and skills. Iconic presentation has to do with images and things that can be altered; symbolic implies using symbols to change knowledge into a code.

### **What Is Suzuki's Theory?**

Shinichi Suzuki was a prominent Japanese musician, philosopher and educator and the founder of Suzuki Theory - a method of Music teaching and learning. He was born on the 17th October, 1898 and died 26th January, 1998. Suzuki developed a philosophy for music, educating children of all ages and abilities. His search for viable method of teaching music to young children was motivated by a desire to

assist Japanese children to develop to their full potential in a nation depressed and devastated by the war.

Shinichi Suzuki resolved to bring music to help bring joy back to the lives of the children. A classical violinist who believed in the remarkable abilities developed a visionary method of teaching music. His approach is based on Psycholinguistic development, called "the mother tongue method". He observed how easily children learn to talk, noting that they speak their native language or mother-tongue fluently at a very young age. He felt that if children have the ability to master complicated language skills, then they should have the ability to master other kinds of knowledge and skills. Suzuki incorporated the major language learning components of observation, imitation and repetition into a process of music learning.

Suzuki theory was initially developed for violin and cello instruments. However, in recent years, music educators have adapted the approach for the piano. The method is founded on the belief that an individual is a product of the environment. The environment is necessary to promote optimum learning in music is well-defined and strictly adhered to in the Suzuki method. He advocates that musical learning should begin as early as possible and ideally by providing the child with recorded music within the environment (Suzuki, 1976).

### **Technical Aspect of Suzuki's Theory:**

Nnamani, et al, (2005) stated the following seven technical aspects of Suzuki's theory:

1. **Starting age:** Early exposure to music is germane to Suzuki, although the actual playing of musical instruments does not begin until the age of three. Suzuki stressed the importance of informal listening experiences before the formal instruction begins. Playing of recorded music by the parent several weeks prior to the first scheduled lesson of instruction has a lot to contribute to the learning. This strong partnership of parent, teacher and child is often referred to as the Suzuki triangle.
2. **Learning by listening:** Suzuki advocates rote learning at the beginning of skill development and suggests that the child listens regularly to the music being studied as well as the music to be studied. Listening also aids in developing accurate pitch and rhythmic pulse.

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3. **Play by ear**: One of the methods of Suzuki is that of learning to play the instrument by ear. This approach allows the child and parent to focus on how they are playing rather than on what they are playing. In other words, the goal of a Suzuki student is to focus on how well you can do something rather than on what you are able to do playing by ear. This approach frees the eyes to observe fingers and bow arm. This observant approach helps us to evaluate how we are doing rather than having eyes glued to a page of music.
4. **Parental involvement**: Suzuki's talent education approach to music learning requires that one parent attend each lesson and learn along with the student.
5. **Individual lessons**: Suzuki Advocates for lessons to be taught individually to allow each student learn at his or her own pace. Technical skills are broken down into the smallest possible steps, so that information is introduced in a way that is understood by both parent & child.
6. **Group lessons**: Group lessons approach are designed to allow children to share their music with others, while reinforcing the important skills introduced at the private lesson. Another function of the group experience is to learn how to play together. The social benefits of group classes are a tremendous aid in the motivation to practice at home.
7. **Mother tongue approach**: Suzuki's approach is also known as Mother Tongue Approach. Every child learns his or her native tongue in the first few years of life by listening to and imitating the mother's voice. The same process can be used to teach music.

Suzuki's method, a basically traditional Japanese method of teaching music, is now being adapted to local beliefs and customs in numerous countries. Embracing its theory will positively affect the early childhood education in Nigeria.

### **Jean Piaget's Theory**

Jean Piaget was the son of a University Professor of ancient literature at the University of Neuchatel, his hometown in Switzerland. Jean grew up very interested in studying about many things. At the age of eleven (11), he wrote an intellectually

stimulating paper about the albino sparrow. This was considered to be the start of a brilliant scientific career made of over sixty books and several hundred articles (Smith, 2000). His adult research interests moved from natural science at the University of Neuchatel, where he received his PhD.

Piaget's theory had a tremendous influence on the emergence of developmental psychology as a distinctive subfield within psychology and contributed greatly to the field of education. He is also credited as a pioneer of the constructivist theory, which suggests that people actively construct their knowledge of the world based on the interactions between their ideas and their experiences.

Piaget later developed an interest in psychoanalysis and spent a year working at a boy's institution created by Alfred Binet. Binet is known as the developer of the world's first intelligence test, and Piaget took part in scoring these assessments. While his early career consisted of works in the natural sciences, it was during the 1920's that he began to move toward work as a psychologist. He married Valentine Chateney in 1923, and the couple went on to have three children. It was Piaget's observations of his own children that served as the basis for many of these theories.

VandenBos, 2017 postulated that Piaget's theory suggested that children sought knowledge they acquire through their experiences and interactions into groupings known as schemas. When new information is acquired, it can be assimilated into existing schemas or accommodated through revising an existing schema or creating an entirely new category of information.

Today, he is best known for his research on children's cognitive development. Piaget studied the intellectual development of his own three children and created a theory that described the stages that children pass through in the development of intelligence and formal thought processes. The theory identifies four stages according to VandenBos, 2017:

1. The Sensorimotor Stage (Birth to two years): The first stage of development lasts from birth to approximately age two. At this point in development, children know the world primarily through their senses and motor movement.
2. The preoperational stage (2 to 7 years): The second of development lasts from the age of two to seven and is characterized by the development of language and the emergence of symbolic play.

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3. The concrete operational state (7-12 years): The third stage of cognitive development lasts from the age of seven (7) to approximately age eleven (11). At this point, logical thought emerges, but children still struggle with abstract and theoretical thinking.
4. The formal operation stage (12 years upward): In the fourth and final stage of cognitive development, lasting from age twelve (12) and into adulthood, children become much more adapted at abstract thought and deductive reasoning.

Jean Piaget provided support for the idea that children think differently than adults, and his research identified several important milestones in the mental development of children. His work also generated interest in cognitive and developmental psychology. Piaget's theories are widely studied today by students both in psychology and education. Piaget called his collective theories on child development a "genetic epistemology" He also relied on the concept of schemas, defined as the cognitive structures and frameworks through which we understand the world, to help further explain his developmental theories.

### **Applying Jean Piaget Theory in Classroom**

1. Use concrete props and visual aids whenever possible.
2. Make instructions relatively short, using action words.
3. Do not expect the students to consistently see the world from someone else's point of view.
4. Give children a great deal of hands-on practice with the skills that serve as building blocks for more complex skills like reading comprehension.
5. Provide a wide range of experience in order to build a foundation for concept learning and language.

### **The Parallels of Suzuki and Piaget Theories**

1. **The two great psychologist and educationist, Suzuki and Piaget are crusaders of early childhood education.**

Suzuki's music (2005) opined that Suzuki's method combines a music teaching method with a philosophy that embraces the total development of the child. The Suzuki Early Childhood Education group music class is specifically designed to prepare babies and toddlers (ages 0-3) for future Suzuki lessons. Children have the opportunity to learn nursery rhymes, action songs, finger play, story-telling and other musical skills - social, emotional, size, pitch, number, fine and gross motor co-

ordination, observation, listening and sequencing, memory and pre-literacy skills. Suzuki believed that children are usually quite ready to begin learning a musical instrument by the time they graduate from early childhood education programme at about three years.

Jean Piaget's passion for Early Childhood Education was averred by Keudra Cherry (2020).

*Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development suggests that children move through four different stages of mental development... He believed that children take an active role in the learning from sensorimotor stage: birth-2 years, preparational stage (2-7), concrete operational stage (7-11), and formal operation stage 17 upward. (P.232).*

The sensorimotor and preparational stages of Piaget are equivalent to the early childhood education promulgated by Suzuki method. The features of the two stages are in collaboration with the theory of Suzuki. In the sensorimotor stage, for instance, children learn about the world through basic actions such as sucking, looking and listening. In the preparatory stage also, children begin to think symbolically and learn to use words and pictures to represent object. Children become much more skilled at pretend play during the stage of development, yet continue to think very concretely about them.

## **2. Mother tongue approach**

Suzuki and Piaget promulgated that mother tongue (first language or native language) is essential for learning as a part of intellectual ability. Mother tongue is the language human beings acquire from birth. It helps the child in his/her mental, moral and emotional development.

The intellectual development of children is linked to the language they speak (FAO, 2002). Suzuki closely follows the parallel with language learning and recommends that musical training should also start from birth and that music should become an important part of the baby's environment. When the infant's environment includes fine music as well as the sounds of the mother-tongue, it is understandable that the child will develop the ability to speak and to play an instrument before being

required to read in either language. Formal lessons frequently begin as early as three years of age.

Children learn to speak by listening and imitating the language spoken around. This is in line with schema, one of the concepts of Piaget. Schema is an internal representation of the world. It helps children to learn the language spoken around them. Schemas are cognitive structures that represent a certain aspect of the world. And they can be seen as categories which have certain pre-conceived ideas in them. Piaget also believed that the children's conversation could be divided into two categories: egocentric speech and socialized speech.

However, in the Suzuki method, children can start learning playing of instruments from the age of two or three, when their brain are most open to learning new mental and physical processes. Children learn to speak while immersed in an environment of language, so the Suzuki method aims to provide an immersive musical environment. Furthermore, Piaget states that children at this age, in the pre-operational stage, are actively engaged in language development.

### **3. Introduction of sound-to-symbol approach**

Jean Piaget and Sinich Suzuki theories embraced sound-to-symbol teaching and learning philosophy. The ways children learn to understand and speak complex languages without formal training, so likewise teachers should introduce music and other contents to the learners.

At the preparatory stage of Piaget theory (Children between the ages of 2 to 7 years), knowledge is presented by language, mental imagery and symbolic thought. And this also aligns with Suzuki's theory that emphasized and believed the same lesson should apply to teaching music initially. Although he used his idea only with violin, they are transferable to every musical instrument.

### **4. Parental influence on learners**

The two theories are in support of teaching and learning. Student achievement and success in music, the CCA and other subjects depend majorly on the contribution of the parents. The parents' involvements contribute greatly to outcomes from early childhood education.



## **The Implication of Jean Piaget's and Sinich Suzuki's Theories on Early Childhood Music Education in Nigeria**

Early childhood education is the bedrock of all educational levels. All children irrespective of the social status or religion are required to go through this level of education. Music plays a vital role in our lives. McKenzie (2015) opined that music is an essential part of every child's development; a great song can light up their eyes, encourage them to move around and dance and even help instill a sense of confidence.

The theories of Suzuki and Piaget have implications on the early childhood music education in Nigeria. The following are the implications of the two theories under review (i.e Piaget and Suzuki on the early childhood music education in Nigeria):

1. Curriculum should provide specific educational experience based on children's developmental level. Instruction should be geared to the level of the child.
2. All children have talents: There is need to explore the talents – inbuilt abilities of every learner early. Every child has talents; it is the duty of the teacher to help the child/learner to discover his/her talent. Good environment will aid talent discovery.
3. The cognitive development of a child is determined by the early attention accorded to the child at early age by parents and teachers. There is need to train early childhood educators/teachers in our various schools to rise up to the herculean task ahead of them. This was supported by Faseun (2001) when he maintains that “music occupies a vital place in the life of the African in general and Nigerian in particular. Every aspect of this life, ranging from birth till death is accompanied with one form of music making or the other.” p. 85.

### **Research Methodology**

The study employs the survey method. Questionnaires were administered to Cultural and Creative Arts (CCA) teachers in Bwari Area Council, FCT Abuja.

### **Data Collection and Instruments**

The researcher developed a questionnaire for the purpose of the study and administered it to forty-five (45) CCA teachers in ten (10) Primary Schools in Bwari Area Council, Abuja.

### **Findings:**

1. 64% of the CCA teachers are not aware of Suzuki theory of teaching and learning.
2. 54% of the teachers are aware of Piaget theory.
3. 60% of the teachers enjoy teaching music as an aspect of CCA.
4. 67% of the schools have musical instruments.
5. 92% of teachers use singing method while teaching.
6. 97% of them will like to be trained on the importance of music education to Nigerian child.
7. 36% of the respondents attended in-service training in the last two years.

### **Discussion**

The findings by the researcher made it crystal clear that the awareness of the Suzuki and Piaget theories among the CCA teachers in Bwari Area Council is very low. Majority of these teachers are not familiar with the theories under review, although they all indicated interest to be trained on the importance of music education to the Nigerian child.

The study also revealed that there is need for professional development programme for CCA teachers in Bwari Area Council in order to enhance their knowledge on the relevance of Piaget and Suzuki theories of learning. This will further contribute to raising the attainment level of the learners.

### **Conclusion**

Music plays a vital role in the education, development and growth of a child. The findings of this study have shown that the theories of Sinich Suzuki and Jean Piaget emphasized the need to expose every child's activities that will enhance their cognitive development at early age. Suzuki (1968) opined that "teaching music is not my main purpose. I want to make good citizens. If children hear fine music from the day of their birth and learn to play it, they develop sensitivity, discipline and endurance. They get a beautiful heart". Piaget also was of the opinion that the goal of education is not to increase the amount of knowledge but to create the possibilities for a child to invent and discover, to create men who are capable of doing new things.

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From the above submissions, there is an urgent need to revisit the ways and manners music in CCA is being taught and applies the approaches of Suzuki and Piaget to the existing methods of learning and teaching on pupils in the early childhood classes in Primary Schools in Bwari Area Council, Abuja.

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