

## Impact of Mass Media on Children Upbringing

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This research work was carried out to study “The Impact of Mass Media on Children Upbringing”; the research work was carried out in St. Francis Primary School, Isale-Aro, Osogbo and Ministry of Education, Osun State Secretariat, Abeere, Osogbo, Osun State. A total number of 75 staff members of the afore-mentioned organizations were used as sample size from the studied population. The data collection and analysis were done through survey method; findings revealed that the impacts of mass media on children include learning of good and bad attitudes and that it also improves and causes decline in academic performance. It also revealed that to prevent children from learning bad things from media contents, effective regulation and censoring of media contents by the regulatory authorities should be ensured, there should also be sanctions on media stations/houses that transmits adult programmes without appropriate censor, parents and guardians should properly monitoring and control their children’s access to media contents. It also revealed that children should not be allowed to spend a long time watching television programmes to prevent obsession. It also revealed that apart from television, other media of communication through which children can learn bad habits are video sharing on mobile devices, books or magazines containing information that are meant for adults, spontaneous access to pornographic web pages (Internet). This research work is recommended to media houses to enlighten them on why they need to discourage the transmission of programmes that may have negative effects on the reasoning and attitudes of children at homes. This study is*

*recommended to nursery, primary and secondary schools to sensitize their managements to the need to ensure that television and other media of communication in their various schools are being used with proper monitoring, to prevent their pupils or students from being exposed to media contents that are not meant for kids. This research work is recommended to the media regulatory authorities to improve on effectiveness of their official duty of regulations and censoring of radio and television programmes and those of other media of communication. This study is recommended to parents and guardians to enlighten them on why they should properly monitor and control how their children are exposed to media contents.*

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## **Background to the Study**

Mass media is generally regarded as the means through which a large heterogeneous people can be reached at specific time for the purpose of information dissemination. There are various media of communication ranging from household electronics such as television and radio to print media like newspapers, magazines, journals, etc. Office and mobile equipments such as telephones, Internet and E-mail, Fax machine, etc. are also categorized as media of communication. Since this study focuses on the impact of mass media on children upbringing, it would focus more on the television programmes that children devote their time to watch since it is much easier for them to have access to this medium of communication than others already mentioned.

Mass media (such as newspapers, magazines, comic books, radio, video games, movies, and especially television) present a very different form of socialization than any other, because they offer no opportunity for interaction. Television has an influence on children from a very young age and affects their cognitive and social development (Elkind, 2007; Wright et al., 2001). Television is the medium with the greatest socialization effect, surpassing all the other media by far in its influence on the young child. The very fact that television is not an interactive agent is greatly significant to the development of young children. While watching, children have the feeling that they're interacting, but they're not. Since the average child watches 3 to 4 hours of television a day, the time left for playing with others and learning social skills is drastically reduced.

Of course, parents can control the time their children spend watching television, but many don't. They can monitor the selection of programs, but some allow their children to watch whatever happens to be on. Some parents don't consider how they can use television to teach decision making. They don't make children aware that when one program ends they can either weigh the various merits of the next offerings or turn the set off. Some children, especially those with a remote control in hand, flick through the channels periodically, randomly stopping at whatever catches their interest at the moment. That's very different from critically examining options and consciously deciding on one. This is where parent education could be effective. Some parents who grew up with television themselves haven't given much thought to the effects of that medium, and how to decrease these effects.

Children learn through watching television. Some of the things they learn are beneficial; others are not. They learn about the world and the ways of the society. They learn something about occupations, for example, getting an idea about what a nurse does, what a doctor does, and how the two relate to each other. They learn about the institutions of the society; what goes on in court, for example. They learn the language to go with these roles and settings and they also learn some things you would rather they didn't know! Children also learn about current themes

and issues, both from newscasts and drama; issues such as kidnapping, the homeless, and the spread of AIDS. Most of these issues and themes are not happy ones, and many are very frightening, especially when children watch programs that are intended for adults.

What then is a television? A television is a piece of electrical equipment with a screen on which programmes with moving pictures and sounds can be watched (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary 2001). Prior to 1965, film and television research tended to be simple media comparison studies which usually found no significant difference between the effectiveness of a conventionally-delivered lecture and the same instruction delivered via moving image (Wetzel et al., 1994). Since 1965, most television research, particularly that which examines the influence of television on attitudes and behaviors, has focused on incidental learning from mass media rather than on intentional effects from classroom presentation of instruction via visual media, and has particularly focused on children's television viewing. Much important work has been done on television's socializing effects on children, particularly the relationship between viewing violence and behaving violently. Other recent research has focused on the area of media literacy.

In 40 years of television research, "the emphasis on negative effects has been more salient than efforts to ensure positive effects through interventions" (Seels et al., 1996, p. 361) and "media research has generally not been theory based" (Wetzel et al., 1994, p. 189). Nevertheless, some positive findings have been made. While some theories suggest that viewers are merely passive absorbers of information, the active theory of cognitive processing supports the idea that viewers engage with the material presented to them. Several studies have indicated that viewers attend more carefully to television when guided by an instructor and/or told to view it for instructional reasons than when viewing it for fun (Wetzel et al., 1994). Television research related to portrayals of women, minorities, the elderly, etc. has tended to focus on the negative impact of stereotypes, but other studies have found that "programs that are designed specifically to produce positive images of subgroups appear to be successful" (Seels et al., 1996, p. 335).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Mass media, as generally known, is a means through which a large heterogeneous people can be reached for the purpose of information dissemination at a specific time. There are two sides to this; this means that as mass media has so many advantages, even so it does have its disadvantages too. People truly have access to important information through mass media even at the comfort of their homes, not only that, children also learn so many things from the educative programmes that are being transmitted on the television or radio or those that are published on the papers like magazines, newspapers, journals, etc. However, if children's exposure to media contents are not properly monitored and controlled by parents and guardians, they can also learn so many bad things from media contents as well.

The focus of this study is the impact of mass media on children upbringing; whether the media contents, more especially television programmes as the main focal point, have impact on children upbringing.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This research work is chosen to:

- Critically examine the impacts of mass media on children upbringing.
- Determine the measures that should be put in place to prevent children from learning bad things from media contents.
- Determine the roles of parents and guardians towards how children are exposed to media contents.
- Carry out an assessment of the performance of the National Broadcasting Corporations and other regulatory agencies in performing their duties of television programmes censoring.

### **Research Questions**

- What impact can mass media have on children upbringing?
- What measures should be put in place to prevent children from learning bad things from media contents?
- What are the roles of parents and guardians in how children are exposed to media contents?
- To what extent are the National Broadcasting Corporations and other regulatory agencies performing their duty of television programmes censoring?

### **Mass media**

Mass media refers collectively to all media technologies that are intended to reach a large audience via mass communication. Broadcast media (also known as electronic media) transmit their information electronically and comprise television, film and radio, movies, CDs, DVDs and some other devices like cameras and video consoles. Alternatively, print media use a physical object as a means of sending their information, such as a newspaper, magazines, brochures, newsletters, books, leaflets and pamphlets. The term also refers to the organizations which control these technologies, such as television stations or publishing companies. Internet media is able to achieve mass media status in its own right, due to the many mass media services it provides, such as email, websites, blogging, Internet and television. For this reason, many mass media outlets have a presence on the web, by such things as having TV ads which link to a website, or having games in their sites to entice gamers to visit their website. In this way, they can utilize the easy accessibility that the Internet has, and the outreach that Internet affords, as information can easily be broadcast to many different regions of the world simultaneously and cost-efficiently. Outdoor media is a form of mass media which comprises billboards, signs, placards placed inside and outside of commercial buildings and /objects like shops and buses, flying billboards (signs in tow of airplanes), blimps, and skywriting. Public speaking and event organizing can also be considered as forms of mass media.

### **The Role of Mass Media in society:**

The mass media perform their functions in every society. As they perform their functions in society, they do not work in isolation or in a vacuum, but in conjunction with other social institutions such as family and kinship, educational, economic, internal and cultural social function of the mass media.

*According to Okunna (1999:116) “Mass Media as a socializing agency works closely with other socializing agencies like the family, the school, the church, and the peer group. Through the process of socialization, the individual is made aware of and internalizes the values, norms and acceptable behavior patterns of the society. To internalize means to learn something so well that it becomes a part of you. The mass media as a socializing agency provides a common knowledge, the internalization of which enables people to operate as effective members of their society”.*

Wilbur Schram (1991) used the simple and common terms such as Watchers (Watchdogs), informer, teacher and entertainer, which in the opinion of Folarin are no longer adequate to describe the mass media as a social institution. Harold Lasswell indentified the following functions some years ago.

(a) **Surveillance of the Environment:** In every society, the Mass Media carefully watch what goes on and reports this in the news. In this way, the members of the society become aware of what is happening around them. This represents the way news stories or events about society are reported on the pages of the newspapers and magazines. Through exposure to the same information and the same interpretations of events, people learn to think along the same lines. They do not necessarily arrive at the same conclusions, although that may happen, but they focus on the same elements of an issue. This has been referred to as the agenda getting role of the mass media (Lang, and Lang, 1960). The Lands Conceptualized Mass Media as interacting with the public and with leaders on an issue, and in the process developing a consensus about that issue. They also know the threats and opportunities that abound in their societies. This is called the “Watchman” functions of communications.

(b) **Correlation of parts of the society in relation to their environment.**

This function amounts to a critical analysis of the events or news items and the preparation of the minds of the public for a possible reaction to such events going on around them. This is known as “Editorializing”. An editorial recommends a view points or proposes action on the part of the individual or government.

(c) **Transmission of culture from one generation to another.**

According to Harold Laswell (1993), this function is basically concerned with education and socialization. The society’s social heritage is passed from one generation to another. In primitive societies, one’s heritage and traditions were first passed along by word of mouth. Other functions of mass communication include entertainment, achieve, commerce, freedom of expression and self-actualization. The entertainment function involves provision of the messages to amuse the audience, help them to relax and ease their tension. Most programmes on FM radio are meant to entertain the audience. The Economic/Commerce function involves presentation of sales messages to the audience. Through media of mass communication advertisers (in this sense, anyone who has anything to sell) have opportunity to lay bare before their target audience that which they have to sell.

Mass communication has made mass production of goods and services possible. This has helped to lower the cost of production, unlike before when manufacturers would be searching for buyers, all they have to do today is to place advertisements in the mass media to inform, convince and persuade the audience to their bidding.

The freedom of expression: Mass communication gives individuals in the society opportunity to freely express themselves. This helps maintain harmonious relationships among individuals and

groups in the society. In other words, mass communication promotes “free market place” for freedom of expression. As an individual, you are free to lay bare before the society “whatever” sentiment, opinion or ideal you hold. Other social functions of the mass media include motivation and mobilization. The mass media encourage and ginger people up to achieve the aims or goals of the society. These goals are promoted by the media which then stimulate and foster the aspirations and activities of individuals and communities to achieve such goals. This formed the bases for instituting various mobilization agencies such as Mass Mobilization for Social and Economic Recovery (MAMSER), National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), national Orientation Agency, etc in Nigeria for effective grassroots mobilization towards the national objectives. None of these agencies could have impacted the society without media of communication.

Integration is another function of mass media. This is of immense importance in our modern world in which ethnics; religious, political and other diversities divide people both nationally and internationally. The social control functions include motivation and mobilization to achieve societal goals; integration of ethnic, religious and political differences both nationally and internationally.

### **Research on Attitudes and Attitude Change**

Simonson and Maushak have found that there is a dearth of good instructional technology research on attitudes:

*"It is obvious that attitude study is not an area of interest or importance in mainstream instructional technology research. Of the hundreds of studies published in the literature of educational communications since [1979] less than 5% examined attitude variables as a major area of interest" (p. 996).*

Moreover, there are several flaws common to many of the attitude studies that have been undertaken. These include poor definition of the construct (attitude) in question, poor measurement practices including the failure to document development of the measurement instrument, and the tendency not to consider attitudes at the onset of the research but rather to tuck on the attitude variable after data collection has occurred (Simonson & Maushak, 2001). In contrast, attitude research has been popular in the social sciences, particularly in social psychology since the 1920s, and remains central to the discipline (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993).

Instructional technology research findings do generally suggest that "mediated instruction *does* contribute to desired attitudinal outcomes in learners, especially when the instruction is designed specifically to produce certain attitudes or attitude changes" (Simonson & Maushak, 2001, p. 1000, emphasis in original) and that the three most important qualities such instruction should have are: the use of follow-up activities and open-ended questions; the use of realistic types of media devoid of contradictory cues; and the creation of an aroused state in the learner through emotional and intellectual involvement. Simonson and Maushak (2001) have drawn on findings from a number of studies to create a series of six guidelines for effective design of attitude instruction. These are: make the instruction realistic, relevant, and technically stimulating; present new information; present persuasive messages in a credible manner; elicit purposeful emotional involvement; involve the learner in planning, production or delivery; and provide post instruction discussion or critique opportunities.

### **Television and Attitude Change**

A 1994 research review titled *Instructional Effectiveness of Video Media* by Wetzel et al. discusses attitudes only in terms of the way attitude towards the delivery medium may enhance or impede learning of the content presented. A 1980 literature review by Simonson examined over 140 media/attitude studies, dividing them by medium (film, television, still images) and attitude type investigated (attitude toward a medium, comparisons of attitudes toward several media, attitude toward content, and attitude change toward content produced by mediated instruction). Of these studies, twelve were found in which televised treatments successfully changed learner attitudes in the desired direction. Of the twelve, one (Kraus, 1962) dealt with black-white relations and another (Evans et al., 1961) focused on prejudice. These are discussed below. In the aggregate, the studies demonstrated that televised messages could produce desired affective outcomes, provided that they were designed to do so and that the design was based on a theory of attitude change. Simonson also found thirty studies that reported significant attitude change in viewers of persuasive motion pictures and almost as many that reported no significant change. His conclusions suggest that the context in which viewing occurs is important, that variations in the media presentation (e.g., color v. black-and-white, alterations in the soundtrack) are important reinforcers for the content message, and that viewers are more likely than not to experience attitude change after viewing persuasive films.

### **Television and Children's Attitudes**

As stated above, research on television and attitudes has primarily focused on children's viewing, and it is unclear whether findings from such studies may be generalized to the population as a whole. McGregor (1993) conducted a meta-analysis of research on changing children's attitudes to race through role playing and anti-racist teaching which found that efforts to change racist attitudes have been more successful with K-12 children than with college students. It is unclear whether this would also be the case with video and television interventions. With generalizability limits in mind, several notable studies of attitude change in children following television viewing will be briefly discussed.

Fortner (described in Derosa, 1984) compared knowledge and attitude learning on the topic of marine mammals by students who watched a Cousteau documentary on the subject to learning by students who received the same content messages via classroom instruction. She found that both groups had significant knowledge increases, but only those who viewed the video showed significant attitude change. However, delayed post tests of attitudes showed that the gains shown by the viewing class had essentially disappeared: post test responses were not significantly different from pretest responses. The fact that the students in Fortner's study did not participate in class discussions on the topic may be significant. Several studies, such as Allison (1966), which focused on science; Wade and Pool (1983), which focused on English; and Bage (1997), which focused on history, have found that significant attitude changes were more likely to occur when post viewing discussions were held.

### **Television and Adults' Attitudes**

A 1989 study by Walker found that home viewing of the mini series *Amerika* produced changes in viewer attitudes towards communism and military defense. Walker suggests that earlier inconclusive studies of the impact of various mini series on viewer attitudes did not accurately

define the attitudes they purported to measure. Wakiji and Thomas (1997) found that although viewing a motivational video about libraries did not produce significantly different attitudes about libraries, viewers were more likely to indicate that their future behavior would change to include more library use and more consultation with librarians. The authors report surprise that both participant and control groups expressed overall positive attitude toward libraries, and state that their personal experiences with library users led them to expect reports of fear or intimidation. They do not discuss the validity or reliability of their questionnaire and the unexpected finding did not prompt them to call it into question. It seems more likely that the instrument failed to accurately gather data about pre-intervention or non-intervention library attitudes (perhaps due to use of terms like "fear" and "intimidation", which respondents may have been reluctant to indicate) than that the researchers' expectations were mistaken. Therefore, attitude change may have occurred in this study, although the researchers did not see it.

Donaldson (1976) found that a live panel discussion of the problems of the disabled had a significant positive effect on attitudes toward the disabled. A filmed presentation of the discussion had less of an impact, but was still effective in modifying attitudes toward the disabled, while an audio recording of the presentation had no significant effect. The theoretical foundation for Donaldson's study is the information processing and cue reduction theory, which suggests that the version of a presentation which provides the most informational cues will require the most complex cognitive reaction and therefore be most effective in producing attitude change.

Byrd and Elliot (1984) found that eighth-grade and college-age males who viewed an educational film about the disabled exhibited positive attitude change, but no significant change was demonstrated in the attitudes of males who viewed an episode of a situation comedy that featured a non-stereotypical portrayal of a disabled person. They suggest that situation comedy, which presented a subtle message in a distracting context, may not have offered a sufficiently focused and orderly argument to produce attitude change. In contrast, the instructional film balanced humor and logic while focusing on the relevance of the information presented. In other words, it was designed to promote the type of attitude change which occurred.

### **Attitude Change toward Racial Issues**

A 1990 literature review by Sanchez found several studies which showed positive change in white attitudes toward African Americans produced by a variety of instructional strategies, including curriculum modification and presentation of persuasive films, while a 1997 study by the same author found that white high school students who used a U.S. history textbook which included significant presentation of African American contributions experienced significant knowledge acquisition without any attitude change toward African Americans. Citing research that suggests that negative racial attitudes may become crystallized by adolescence, Sanchez suggests that learners' pre-existing negative attitudes may have been stronger than the potential attitudes promoted by the newly presented knowledge.

The idea of "attitude crystallization" has not found universal acceptance. Indeed, some suggest that "late adolescence and early adulthood are the 'impressionable years,' a period during the life cycle when individuals may be particularly vulnerable to the formation of attitudes and [attitude] change" (Hurtado et al., 1999, p. 28). The failure of facts alone to produce attitude change should be considered in the context of Simonson and Maushak's emphasis on learner involvement. Lee (1978) found that "a course of study which includes both the cognitive and affective levels of learning may be more effective in causing attitudinal change, fostering behavioral growth, and



improving race relations" (p. 8). Her study involved graduate students who took a required fifteen-week course about the cultural heritage and contemporary status of African Americans. Unlike the instruction described in the research reviewed by Sanchez (1990), which involved only text and lecture, the course studied by Lee involved a mixture of lectures, discussions, outside speakers, films, trips and group activities. The data provide evidence that adults can experience cognitive change in the area of race relations through instruction; however, Lee's study does not permit analysis of the relative impacts of the different instructional strategies employed.

Since there is comparatively little instructional technology research concerned with attitude change toward race, particularly among adults, research from other fields, notably sociology, must be consulted. Unfortunately, reports of this research do not always discuss in detail the nature of the instruction or intervention, and as such may have little to tell the instructional designer, beyond the fact that theory-informed instructional design is probably often absent from diversity interventions. The Southern Poverty Law Center's Teaching Tolerance Project provides free educational products to teachers and schools working to promote racial harmony. In a 1994 article, Heller and Hawkins discuss research into hate crimes that led to the creation of the Project but do not mention any research informing the creation of Teaching Tolerance's teacher kits, which usually include a video presentation. It appears that they have assumed that video would be an effective means of teaching attitude change but have not explored this notion in any scientific way.

Hood et al.'s (2001) report of a quantitative study designed to evaluate the changes in attitudes of university students resulting from the completion of a required course in organizational behavior states only that the course met for forty hours over sixteen weeks. Unless one accepts the untenable premise that all diversity interventions are somehow comparable, it would be impossible to replicate this study. Among the significant findings of this study is the fact that white Anglo males are less likely than other groups to show positive changes as a result of diversity training initiatives and may in fact exhibit worse attitudes than they had before the intervention.

This disturbing finding was echoed by Alderfer et al. (1992), who found that white Anglo males of middle-management status at a given corporation who were required to participate in a diversity workshop exhibited negative attitude changes, and by Ungerleider and McGregor (n.d.), who found similar negative effects in studies of anti-racist teaching of police and teachers. Other studies have focused on attitude changes in college students produced by voluntary participation in programs such as dialogue groups, which are designed to foster an appreciation of diverse cultures. The conception of intergroup dialogue is based on social justice education theory, which portrays dialogue as an essential step towards the elimination of oppression and subsequent promotion of social justice. Alimo et al. (2002) found that students who participated in the Intergroup Dialogue Program at the University of Maryland did experience some changes in beliefs, attitudes and behaviors concerning interactions with members of other racial and ethnic groups. Participants generally developed more favorable attitudes towards cross-group interactions but did not actively seek them out.

### **Television and Attitude Change toward Racial Issues**

Greenberg (1972) found that the more a child watches television, the more likely the child is to rely on television for information about people of other races and to believe that what they see on

TV is an accurate reflection of the real world. White children who frequently came into contact with Blacks were just as likely to get most of their information about Blacks from television as children who did not have such contact, and neither contact nor televised messages seemed to change the white children's attitudes towards Blacks. Gorn et al. (1976) found that preschool white children who viewed episodes of *Sesame Street* that contained specially-designed inserts featuring nonwhite children showed a strong preference for playing with nonwhite children as compared to a control group not exposed to the inserts. This finding contrasts with Greenberg's report of no attitude change in white children towards Blacks after watching television shows which featured Black cast members. Gorn et al. suggest that the difference stems from the fact that their study included segments created for the purpose of changing attitudes, while the programs viewed by children in the earlier study did not. Again, the importance of purposive design is seen. Kraus (1962) found that a filmed presentation on school integration featuring one Black and one white presenter produced positive attitude change toward that subject, while all-white and all-Black presentations did not significantly affect viewer attitudes.

Evans et al. (1961) attempted to measure the effect of a single program on viewer attitudes toward racial issues. The design of their study is superficially the closest of all those discussed in this literature review to the one described in this report, but is beset with grave errors which the current study hopes to avoid. The researchers simultaneously attempted to measure attitude effects after viewing a film called *Roots of Prejudice* and to determine the effect of taking a telecourse on attitudes toward televised instruction. Of the one hundred and sixty subjects for the latter-mentioned phase, fifty-seven also participated in the racial attitudes experiment, with thirty-three in the control group and twenty-four in the experimental group. The researchers seemed to lack confidence in the validity of one of the four instruments used, stating that it "purports to measure the degree of general intolerance of racial and religious groups" (p. 12). Even though "attitude studies are especially susceptible to pre-test sensitization ((McGregor, 1993, p. 223), the pre-test and post-test were administered two days apart. This rapid administration of pre and post tests, combined with the small size of experimental and control populations, casts doubt on their finding of no significant difference. Moreover, the other phase of their experiment found at a level of statistical significance that students who had taken telecourses viewed television as a means of instruction less favorably than students who had not. Of the one hundred and sixty participants in this phase of the study, forty-five had previous telecourse experience. The researchers did not include telecourse experience among the independent variables treated in the racial attitude phase of the experiment. It is possible that some of the twenty-four students in the racial experimental group had previous negative telecourse experiences which biased them against the delivery medium for the test film.

Many researchers examined the impact of the 1977 television mini series *Roots* on Black and white racial attitudes. Surlin (1978) conducted a meta-analysis of five of these studies (several of which are discussed below). He found that the percentage of Blacks who viewed the series was significantly higher than the percentage of whites who viewed. Most people who watched the series talked about it with another person, most often someone of the same race. The series elicited a strong emotional response on the part of many viewers but did not produce significant attitude change. Howard et al. (1978) conducted a nationwide survey of Black and white *Roots* viewers. While a majority of both racial groups predicted that the series would dangerously inflame Black viewers, few Blacks actually *were* inflamed or even angered: the vast majority were simply greatly saddened by what they saw. Over 60% percent of all viewers reported that

they "had increased their understanding of the psychology of Black people" (p. 285) by viewing the mini series.

In contrast to Howard et al.'s (1978) findings, Balon's (1978) Austin, Texas survey reported a far more optimistic white expectation of the impact of *Roots* on Blacks, while the Hispanics and Blacks he surveyed were pessimistic, predicting an inflammatory effect or no change. He also found that although viewing patterns were fairly consistent across all racial groups, Black motivations for viewing diverged sharply from those reported by whites and Hispanics. Balon's (1978) findings about attitudes toward program truthfulness and reports of learning from the mini series were consistent with those of Howard et al (1978).

Hur and Robinson (1978) found that whites who viewed *Roots* exhibited somewhat more favorable attitudes towards African Americans than those reported by whites who did not view the series, but suggested that this could be attributed to pre-existing attitudes which motivated viewers to choose to watch or to avoid watching the series, so that viewing choice could have created a biased, self-selected population. Most of the favorable attitudes towards Blacks expressed by white viewers of *Roots* were generalized statements related to current affairs, while over 30% of the whites who viewed *Roots* remained unconvinced that the experience of slavery was worse than white immigrants' experiences, a view shared by less than 40% of the non-viewers. In other words, the attitudes toward slavery of whites who watched the mini series were not very different from the attitudes toward slavery of whites who did not watch it. Overall, the findings suggested that the impact of the series was much less significant than media critics reported. This is an important point given the number of publications dealing with television and racial attitudes that do not substantiate their assertions with research.

Protinsky and Wildman (1979) conducted a study of the impact of *Roots* on high school students' knowledge, interests, attitudes, and actions. The study was conducted in March and April of 1978, approximately one year after the mini series was broadcast. The sample selection and survey instrument for the study are not described in sufficient detail in the report to allow for replication of the study. The authors state that patterns of male and female response were "very similar" (p. 173), as were patterns of Black and white response, and they therefore combined all the data into one set of response patterns. The possibility that similarities in Black and white response patterns might indicate a flaw in the survey was not discussed. The survey findings are presented in a table listing percentage of respondents who answered each question. Some typical responses to the open-ended question are included. A total of fifty-six separate open-ended comments were made, but it is not clear whether each was made by a different participant, or if some participants made multiple comments. Thus, the significance of the fact that 40% of the comments mentioned increased sympathy for or positive attitudes toward Blacks cannot be determined. About 25% of the participants had been given an assignment to watch *Roots* by their teachers. The study found that almost 50% of the participants read about Black history after viewing the program, while two-thirds felt sympathy for Black slaves. Hur (1978) found that the number of episodes of *Roots* viewed by white teenagers correlated positively with their perception that it was an accurate portrayal of slavery, a correlation not found with Black teen viewers. For both races, general attitudes about race were a better predictor of the viewer's appreciation of the hardships of slavery than was frequency of viewing. Hur found that 30% of white teen viewers retained the pre-viewing belief that Black slavery was no worse than the typical white immigrant experience, a finding consistent with the results of his survey of adults.

Ball-Rokeach et al. (1981) explored issues of viewership related to *Roots: The Next Generation*, the sequel to the original mini series. They found that people who watched more television overall were also likely to watch more of *Roots II*. Valuing egalitarianism was also a significant predictor of viewership, but viewing the mini series did not increase viewers' valuing of egalitarianism. A 1984 study by the same team of researchers found that uninterrupted home viewers of a persuasive half-hour television program called *The Great American Values Test* showed significant change in attitudes toward race, gender equality, and environmental protection, and that residents in the experimental viewing area were 60% more likely to respond positively to solicitations from groups associated with those issues than were residents of the control city (where the experimental program was not broadcast). This demonstration of media potency as a tool for attitude change -- and related research which suggested the power could be used for good or for ill -- so impressed the researchers that they considered not publishing their findings.

In a 1992 article, Lavelle discussed the ways documentaries may be used in the classroom. He begins this discussion on an alarming and inaccurate note:

*"Television is a medium that appeals primarily to the emotions. It has the power to move us to laughter, tears, anger, or wonder; occasionally, it often informs us. The information it provides, however, is usually of little substance" (p. 345).*

He goes on to state that some documentaries have great educational merit and lists three primary reasons teachers give for using historical documentaries in the classroom: to inspire further research, to provoke discussion, and to show the emotional truth of history. The remainder of the article provides recommendations for effective use of documentaries, including selecting, evaluating, and becoming familiar with the content of programs, preparing students, and engaging students in follow-up activities. No theoretical rationale is provided for any of these recommendations, nor is any specific research cited to support them.

### **Understanding How Children Develop Televisual Literacy**

Before discussing the impact of television on areas such as language development, for example, it is important to understand how children acquire the skills that enable them to understand television.

Children do not perceive television in the same way that adults do, and develop televisual skills step by step in line with their cognitive development. Age and linguistic maturity determine how a child will respond to and engage with TV. According to Piaget children experience four stages of cognitive development, which can be applied to television (Piaget, 1969; Lemish, 2007). Children under two experiences a 'sensory-motor' stage, where their senses and actions show them that objects on television feel differently to those experienced in real life (see Lemish, 2007: 39). During a 'pre-operational' stage between 2 and 7 when they are acquiring language, they develop representational thinking skills, which allow them to talk about their experience of television. Between 7 and 12 (the concrete operational stage), children begin to engage in abstract thought which allows them to understand the medium's codes and conventions sufficiently to follow storylines. They develop levels of perception (televisual literacy), which allow them to understand the chunks and segments that constitute a television programme and how they are linked (Signorielli, 1991: 28). From the age of 12 children are assumed to

understand television in a similar way to adults (See Lemish: 2007: 39; also Hodge and Tripp, 1986: 80-81).

According to Davies, while all children are born with ‘an innate human capacity to learn’, televisual literacy requires some learned and taught skills (1997: 3). She argues that ‘children need to understand the world in which they live, including the way that it is represented in different symbolic forms’ (1997: 3). These representations will vary depending on a child’s home environment (the cultural, political and socio-economic background of the family) and where they live. Literacy, therefore, is about giving children access to representations, which allow them to understand and use the systems that represent reality – including audiovisual representations of reality (ibid.: 4).

Media literacy shifts the focus of study from television effects to what children can do with television and other media. Under Section 11 of the Communications Act 2003, regulatory authority Ofcom has a duty to encourage others to bring about a better public understanding of the nature and characteristics of electronic media content and the processes and systems by which it is delivered. Ofcom defines media literacy as ‘*the ability to access, understand and create communications in a variety of contexts*’ without which people’s ability to participate in society is greatly curtailed (Ofcom, 2006:2). Media literacy comprises 1) the ability to use a range of media and be able to understand the information received, 2) the ability to analyze the media contents/information critically, 3) the ability to create video and audio content, and 4) the ability to control and judge what kinds of content should be avoided. Viewed from this perspective children are perceived as ‘active’ rather than ‘passive’ media users, capable of developing media literacy skills just as well as the traditional literacy skills of reading and writing (Huston & Wright, 1997).

Children develop different types of media literacy as they grow up. Today children start experiencing television almost from birth even if it is just on in the background, (see Rideout *et al* 2003: 12). As children mature, television viewing increases due to increased comprehensibility. Anderson and Pempek established that children aged 12 to 24 months paid higher levels of attention to *Teletubbies*, a programme specifically designed for them, than to *Sesame Street*, a programme targeted at older children (2005: 510). This act of paying attention was part of the process of developing cognitive skills. They state that

*“It appears that videos and TV programs that are directed at infants and toddlers can gain high levels of sustained attention ... In the case of infants and toddlers, if comprehension is minimal, attention to television by very young children may be purely reactive due to frequent elicitations of the orienting reaction by visual and auditory change. On the other hand, programmes that are directed at them may be comprehensible and, thus, reflect higher cognitive processing (Ibid: 509)”*.

*Teletubbies* is a good example of a programme that attracts high levels of active attention ‘with singing, dancing, pointing, imitating behaviours, speaking back to the television and generally reacting enthusiastically with great joy’ (Lemish, 2007: 46 citing research that first appeared in *Television*, 1999, 12/2).

Young children start to understand television from an early age. As they mature they learn to draw distinctions between their own world, what is shown on television and whether it is true to life. In a three-year British study of five year olds in a large urban school, Gosling and Richards

established that children could talk about what was real in television programmes, and some showed understanding of television's basic technical processes. These studies illustrate the extent to which children (from infants to preschoolers) gradually develop their televisual literacy.

While younger children acquire basic skills, older children can become critical viewers, using television to construct identities for themselves and distinguishing themselves from other children. In a study of how children's television tastes develop, Davies et al conducted interviews with children and found that the act of classifying programmes served as a means of social self-definition:

*“For example, when a group of Year 2 [6-7 year-old] boys collapsed into laughter at the mention of Teletubbies, they were clearly distancing themselves from the younger audience for whom the programme is designed - and from the girls in their class who had appropriated its ‘cuter’ aspects. Similarly, when a group of Year 2 girls covered their ears every time football was mentioned, they were self-consciously constructing their own girlishness by rejecting the male world of football” (2000: 8).*

The description above shows how children aged 6-7 have already developed gender identities and are able to categorize programmes through their own distinctive tastes. In a similar vein, Buckingham points out that the ability of older children to exercise critical judgments on programmes serves particular social purposes connected with their developing media literacy:

*“They enable children to present themselves as sophisticated viewers, who are able to ‘see through’ the medium, and hence to differentiate themselves from those who (by implication) cannot. Critical discussions of the media therefore provide important opportunities for ‘identity work’- for laying claim to more prestigious or powerful social identities” (2003: 109).*

In summary then, children gradually develop different types of skills through watching television. Over time they learn how to understand television, but may not perceive it as adults do. Understanding what children can and cannot do with television and how they perceive it is therefore essential for examining how it impacts their lives. As children acquire more experience of television, their ability to comprehend its content and translate those meanings into learning increases.

### **Television and Young Children's Language Acquisition**

Several studies have shown how young children's language acquisition can benefit from television. However, this seems to be limited primarily to age appropriate programmes with specific educational purposes for 3-5 year olds (Cross, 2004: 16; Lemish, 2007: 157). In one study it was found that babies and toddlers who watched *Sesame Street* learned vocabulary, concepts (shapes, colours) and could identify letters and numbers, particularly if they were aided by parents (Lemish and Rice, 1986). In a study of infants' and toddlers' television viewing and language outcomes by Linebarger and Walker (2005), it was shown that some pre-school programmes, but not all, can lead to larger vocabularies and higher expressive language (word production) scores among younger children under 30 months. Some programmes, such as *Blue's Clues*, and *Dora the Explorer*, which include on-screen characters talking to the child, encourage participation, label objects and invite children to respond, were positively related to expressive language production and vocabulary (2005: 639). Programmes such as *Arthur* and *Clifford*,

which had a strong narrative, were visually appealing, and contained opportunities to hear words and their definitions, also appeared to support language acquisition. They found for example that:

1. Combined viewing of *Arthur* and *Clifford* was related to 8.60 more vocabulary words at 30 months as well as an increase in the vocabulary growth rate of 0.61 words per month when compared with non-viewers.
2. Combined viewing of *Blue's Clues* and *Dora the Explorer* resulted in 13.30 more vocabulary words at 30 months as well as an increase in the rate of growth in vocabulary words of 1.35 words per month compared with non-viewers.

As with vocabulary, the relationship between certain programmes and expressive language production (the frequency of child communicative behaviours such as gestures, vocalizations, single and multiple word utterances during a six minute period) were different for different programmes (2005: 637). Combined viewing of *Arthur* and *Clifford* and of *Blue's Clues* and *Dora the Explorer* resulted in more single and multiple word utterances at 30 months when compared with non-viewers (2005: 637).

In an overview of the literature, Naigles and Mayeux (2001) found that in certain circumstances children can learn words and their meanings from educational programmes specifically designed for them. At the most basic level children under two frequently or occasionally call attention to objects on screen, they ask questions and can be very attentive to an engaging programme: 'laughing at appropriate points and repeating parts of the ongoing dialogue' (2001: 136). Singer and Singer (1981) found a modest relationship between the amount of educational television viewed by pre-school children and their use of commands and exclamations in spontaneous speech (in Naigles and Mayeux, 2001: 139). Although there is not much evidence to suggest that educational programmes help children to learn grammar, there is evidence to suggest that they can learn something about the meaning of words from educational programmes (lexical development – word diversity), which are designed with word learning in mind (ibid: 141).

In a longitudinal study of children and *Sesame Street*, the parents of children aged 3 or 5 years of age kept diaries of their children's viewing over a 2.5 year span so that the degree of children's vocabulary growth could be assessed (Rice *et al* 1990). This study revealed that the younger children (aged 3) who watched more *Sesame Street* between the age of 3 and 5 had greater vocabulary growth than those who watched fewer hours. Children aged 3 scored higher on school readiness, reading, number skills and vocabulary, if they were regular watchers. However, viewing at five did not predict vocabulary scores at seven, suggesting an 'early window' of opportunity where the effects of educational television are strongest.

In a further study, Singer and Singer (1998) investigated the extent to which pre-schoolers can learn unfamiliar nouns from *Barney and Friends*. Those children who watched 10 pre-selected episodes of the show over 2-3 weeks in a day care setting showed gains in their vocabulary to produce correct definitions compared to those children who did not watch the same *Barney* episodes. The gains were even larger if children participated in 30-minute lessons about the episodes after viewing (1998: 330-31), suggesting that the learning experience from television is enhanced through adult involvement (see also Close, 2004: 15). The finding that age-appropriate educational television for 3 to 5 year olds encourages the comprehension (receptive vocabulary) of spoken words was also established by St Peters *et al* (1989).

In another longitudinal study by Wright et al (2001) on the impact of educational television on the school readiness and vocabulary of 240 children aged 2 and 4 years from low-income families over a three year time span, it was established that children who watched *Sesame Street* between the ages of two and three gained in pre-academic skills. Children who watched educational television frequently when they were two and three years old performed better on the language tests (PPVT, Bracken school Readiness Scale, Woodcock-Johnson word subtest and applied problems subtest) at aged three than did those who were not frequent viewers (Wright *et al* 2001: 1356). This contrasted with children aged three who watched more general-audience programmes and who by ages four and five showed lower skills in school readiness and vocabulary tests (Ibid: 1357). Viewing at 4 yrs did not significantly affect scores later, which reinforces the notion of an ‘early window of opportunity’.

Based on an overview of predominantly US research, the benefits of television for language development in pre-school children in certain circumstances are further confirmed in a literature review for the National Literacy Trust in Britain. The review draws the conclusion that

*“Given the right conditions, children between the ages of two and five may experience benefits from good-quality educational television. For this group of children there is evidence that attention and comprehension, receptive vocabulary, some expressive language, letter-sound knowledge, and knowledge of narrative and storytelling all benefit from high-quality and age-appropriate educational programming” (Close, 2004: 4)*

But in keeping with the earlier American review, the literature has not established whether children develop grammar, phonological awareness and knowledge of literacy from viewing this type of programming. Some educational programmes appear to be beneficial and helpful in developing children’s linguistic skills, but this depends on the quality of programmes and whether they are age appropriate (see Linebarger & Walker 2005: 642).

In the UK, some of the findings relating to language development seem to be confirmed by parental observations. A British study of young children’s use of popular culture, media and new technologies found that parents of children under six were very positive about the educational benefits of high quality children’s television for pre-schoolers with 79% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that television helped their child’s language development (Marsh *et al* 2005: 33). Parents confirmed that their children were ‘actively engaged with television content for some of their viewing time, with singing, dancing, copying characters’ actions, shouting out answers and role-playing stories constituting some of the more popular activities (Marsh, 2005: 27) . In relation to language development and television, parents confirmed that their children learned the following in line with the curriculum for the foundation stage in England:

- to use words, gestures, simple questions/statements;
- to listen to nursery rhymes, stories and songs, joining in with repeated refrains;
- to enjoy listening to and using spoken language
- to sustain attentive listening, and respond
- to extend vocabulary, exploring meaning and sounds of new words
- to use language to recreate experiences
- to use talk to clarify thinking, ideas, feelings and events
- to link sounds to letters
- to begin to be aware of the way stories are structured



(Marsh *et al* 2005: 35).

The studies outlined above show that under certain conditions television can offer opportunities for language learning among young children, but more research is required on specific effects and causal relationships.

### **Positive and Long-Term Effects of Educational Television (Reading, Writing, School Readiness)**

The previous section examined very specific skills related to linguistic development. This section examines educational television's long-term effects on academic achievement. There is strong evidence that age-appropriate educational television has positive effects on children's development.

Much of the work carried out in this area relates to *Sesame Street*, a programme, originated in 1969 by the Children's Television Workshop (CTW), a non-profit subsidiary of National Educational Television in the US. This brought producers and writers together with child psychologists and educators to create an entertaining programme that was also guided by detailed research and curricular goals from the start (Morrow, 2006: 5). *Sesame Street* was designed to prepare children for school by encouraging knowledge and skills that improved vocabulary, numeracy, the use of language and understanding of the world around them (see Gunter and McAleer, 1997: 57). Each show had to demonstrate that it could hold the attention of its young audience (*ibid.*), and formative and summative research was used to improve the effectiveness of the programme's curricular goals (Morrow, 2006: 77).

Quite early on *Sesame Street* was found to have beneficial effects (Ball and Bogatz, 1970; Bogatz and Ball, 1971). Among 3-5 year olds who were heavier viewers of the programme, an increase in skills relating to the alphabet, numbers, body parts, shapes, relational terms and sorting and classification was noted, regardless of age, sex or socio-economic status, and native language. In a follow-up study in the second year of a subset of children who had started school (Bogatz and Ball 1971), it was found that children who had watched the programme frequently were better prepared for school than non or low viewing children. Improvements in cognitive skills relating to literacy and maths were also evident in research into international co-productions of *Sesame Street* in Mexico, Turkey, Portugal, and Russia (*cit. in* Fisch, 2005: 10). Later studies have confirmed the data about educational achievements (letter recognition, storytelling) and school readiness from *Sesame Street*, particularly among low income families (Zill, 2001).

A quarter of a century later the long-term effects of the show also became evident, with stronger educational performance by school students who watched the show as small children (Anderson et al, 2001). In a re-contact study, it was established that 570 high school students who had watched *Sesame Street* as young children achieved higher grades in English, Mathematics, and Science in junior high or high school, particularly among boys. They read more often, had higher academic self-esteem, and valued academic performance more highly (Anderson et al, 2001;Huston, et al, 2001). This suggests that those who watch educational programming enter school with learning skills that make them more interested and motivated learners, which sets them up for academic success (Anderson et al, 2001).

More recently Nickelodeon's *Blue's Clues* has also been successful in meeting educational goals for its 3 to 5 year old audience, who outperformed non-viewers in non-verbal skills and problem-solving ability. Their careers rated them as better at solving problems and more pro-social compared to non-viewers as well (Anderson et al, 2000). Programmes like *Blue's Clues* and

*Dora the Explorer* in particular invite children to actively solve problems and communicate while they watch.

Other studies have also shown that a wide variety of US educational programmes for children on PBS can enhance older children's skills and knowledge in language and literacy (*Between the Lions; The Electric Company*), mathematics and problem solving (*Square One TV, Cyberchase*) science and technology (*3-2-1 Contact, Bill Nye the Science Guy*) and current affairs (see Fisch: 2005: 11-12). British researchers have also established that pre-teens and teenagers can learn from science broadcasts, which may enhance their ability to recall scientific facts and their comprehension (cit. in Gunter and McAleer, 1997: 58-59)

The value of comparing early viewing of *Sesame Street* with school performance later is that not all children were exposed to the programme when it first started in 1969, therefore allowing more effective comparisons between viewers and non-viewers. In a recent study by the University of Chicago, Gentzkow and Shapiro suggest that children who watch television perform marginally better at school (2006). In order to test their hypothesis, the researchers examined whether the introduction of television in the 1940s resulted in a decrease in educational achievement. They looked at the educational achievements of students aged 11, 14 or 17 in 1965, who were pre-schoolers in television's early years. They found that pre-schoolers who watched television performed marginally better in reading and general knowledge at school – with non-whites, those where English was a second language and those with poorly educated mothers gaining the most.

In a study of *Barney & Friends* by Jerome and Dorothy Singer (1998), the effectiveness of this television series for preschool children was evaluated. Children in a US day care centre aged 2 to 7 watched the same episodes over two weeks and were interviewed. The findings showed that

- 1) Nearly two thirds of the children could report accurately what they had seen,
- 2) About 55% of the children also managed to mention some characters,
- 3) Sometimes children demonstrated evidence of new words in their vocabularies relating to a specific episode.

Episodes were chosen which reflected certain variables: cognitive, physical health, emotional, and social attitudinal features (Ibid: 313). In the first study, 121 white middle class children were divided into four groups. The first group viewed the series over two weeks, with each episode followed by a lesson connected to the programme's message. The second group watched without follow up lessons. The third group did not watch the programme but received a lesson, and the fourth group neither watched the programme nor received a lesson. The strongest gains were by those children whose viewing was combined with a follow-up lesson, followed by those who just watched the video and those who just received the lesson. Singer and Singer concluded;

*"It is evident that our pooled estimate of the didactic value of each episode in the area of cognitive skills (e.g. vocabulary, counting, numbers, shapes) is a striking predictor of what 3 and 4 year olds will retain and verbalize from an episode just viewed ... The evidence was very clear from this study. We found periods of concentrated group attention throughout more than 60% of the time in the half hour episodes. Rating by observers indicated many signs of open enjoyment, smiling, and laughing about 70% of the time as the children watched the episodes ... Singing along with some of the songs was common for a great many children during the musical episodes"* (1998: 326-7).

In a second phase, Singer and Singer sought to establish whether the same effects were evident among children from different ethnic groups and lower socioeconomic status. Children in day care settings in five regions of the US were split into different groups in order to establish the effectiveness of *Barney & Friends* for enhancing children's cognitive skills (e.g. vocabulary, counting, numbers or shapes). The groups were divided as follows:

1. Experimental Group A: Viewing of the 10 *Barney & Friends* episodes over a 2 week period, but with viewing followed by a teacher "lesson" or set of exercises augmenting the material included in the episode.
2. Experimental Group B: Viewing of the same 10 *Barney & Friends* within a 2 week period with no teacher follow-up.
3. A control group that received no special treatment

They also analyzed teaching plans (e.g. vocabulary, what children thought about what they saw and other skills), integrated with the episode (1998: 331). Again they found that the viewing-plus-teaching group made the strongest educational gains in terms of vocabulary, social attitude, and civility, with no consistent significant gains by the group that simply watched the programme. Experimental Group B followed them in areas of vocabulary, social attitude and civility, nature, and awareness of health. The study suggests that a combination of viewing and follow-up teaching is a more efficient way of teaching knowledge and skills to young children, than simply watching the television show without any follow-up. It also suggests that content is important for teaching specific issues, and that well-planned and appropriate-aged educational programmes play an important role in children's academic achievement. A study of the use by teachers of the educational programme *Look and Read* in Britain in the 1980s, also confirms that programmes are most successful in achieving their academic aims if there is relevant follow up work in class (cit. in Gunter and McAleer, 1997: 180)

Although there are few studies that correlate watching pre-school television with educational achievement in Britain, recent work by Marsh with parents of pre-school children revealed that parents were 'generally very positive about the role of media in their young children's social, emotional, linguistic and cognitive development' (2005: 5). Although the research does not examine the educational effectiveness of pre-school children's favourite programmes (*Tweenies*, *Balamory*, *Big Cook*, *Little Cook*, *Dora the Explorer*, *Scooby Doo*, *Bob the Builder*, *The Fimbles*, *Noddy*, *Come Outside*, *Teletubbies*), parents were able to give examples of what they think their children have learned linked to the Foundation Stage Curriculum including:

- Mathematical development: willingly attempt to count, recognize numerals 1 to 9, recognize and recreate simple patterns, and begin to use mathematical names for shapes.
- Knowledge and Understanding of the world: find out and identify some features of living things, objects and events and also some features in the place they live and in the natural world; ask why things happen and how things work; begin to operate simple equipment; begin to differentiate between the past and present; find out about events; gain awareness of the cultures and beliefs of others.
- Physical development: movement with control and coordination (songs and dance actions); show awareness of healthy practices (brushing teeth, and washing hands); recognize the importance of keeping healthy (safety/road issues).
- Creative development: response to sound with body movement (dance and sing); recognize how sounds can be changed, sing simple songs; match movement to music, make constructions, drawing and dances; explore colour, texture, shape and space and

form in two or three dimensions (making models); and use their imagination in art, design, music, dance, imaginative role play and stories.

(2005: 35-36)

The same study surveyed early years by practitioners who showed generally positive attitudes toward the role of media and popular culture in young children's lives (Marsh, 2005, 6, 60). 92% of practitioners surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that children learn from television, 67% disagreed that it is harmful for children's language development, although 83% felt that children watched too much (ibid: 48). Action research where practitioners were encouraged to use popular culture such as *Bob the Builder* or *Finding Nemo* as learning materials, was found to have a significant impact on children's oral development, especially for children who speak English as an additional language (Marsh *et al* 2005: 69). Older children can also benefit from watching television in a classroom setting. As Davies points out, the presence of a teacher watching with them, who is 'able to stimulate and share in the discussion', shows 'how much an interested adult can contribute to children's experience of watching television' (see Messenger Davies, 1989: 126).

A study that looked at how young school children engaged with the phenomenon of *Pokemon* illustrated the ways in which they can participate more effectively in traditional school-based literacy practices if they are given more opportunities to exhibit the knowledge and skills they have acquired from their own interests such as *Pokemon* (Bromley, 2004). Allowed to engage with *Pokemon* as a group in class, Bromley found that children become very creative in writing their own stories, or a child who had never had social status in the classroom gained confidence by his peer's acceptance and appreciation of his wide knowledge of *Pokemon* (Bromley, 2004: 223). In a climate where children have to follow teacher-led models for literacy and numeracy with little recognition of their interests, Bromley suggests that children should be given more opportunities to exhibit their knowledge and skills (Ibid). If educators had more flexible attitudes towards popular culture, they could use some elements to create 'educational' material, and also enhance children's media literacy as well as traditional forms of literacy (Bromley 2004; Marsh *et al* 2005).

Although very young children can and do learn from educational television, some programmes are more effective than others. Factors which raise this effectiveness include: the use of appealing elements such as humour; the use of age-appropriate topics and language; handling educational content in ways that are clear, direct and explicit; focusing on a small number of ideas in one episode and employing repetition; using action-filled visuals and characters with whom children can identify; encouraging children to actively engage in the content themselves through viewer participation and motivating children to carry their learning forward (see Fisch, 2005: 13; also Lemish, 2007: 173).

By contrast there have been very few studies which investigate older children's learning from television (Huston *et al*, 2007: 59). This may be due to older children being less receptive to educational television as they grow older, but it is also driven by the funding available for research into the effects of educational television on preschoolers in America. Educational television may also play less of a role once children enter school. Compared with younger children, older children prefer more complex programmes including drama, and programmes that feature verbal humour and relationships (Ibid), which means that they also become more drawn to adult programming. Likewise there is very little research on children under 3 years, partly

because of the difficulties of getting responses from very young children. However, in general it seems that educational television used in the right context can enhance learning.

### **Television and Pro-Social Behaviour**

While there have been many studies of the academic effects of educational television, there have also been studies that show that viewing of pro-social television programmes can result in positive changes in children's social behaviour including increases in 'altruism, helpfulness, generosity, and other social skills (Gauntlett, 2005: 55). Other skills associated with pro-social behaviour include self-control, delay of gratification, sympathy and empathy for others, learning to persist in a task, and reduction of stereotypes. As Gunter and McAleer point out, 'Television programmes contain many examples of good behaviour, of people acting kindly and with generosity. It is equally logical to assume that these portrayals provide models for children to copy, too' (1997: 117).

However, the research is rather limited and dominated by US educational programmes such as *Sesame Street* and *Mister Rogers' Neighbourhood* aimed at pre-schoolers which are made 'for explicitly and self-consciously 'pro-social' purposes' rather than more general programming that also targets older children (Gauntlett, 2005: 79). Gauntlett points out that few researchers have tried to examine the effects of 'regular' programmes, where positive effects are not the main aim (ibid). As a consequence thousands of programmes, such as super-hero cartoons or live-action programmes, which are not deliberately 'pro-social', but may feature 'good, moral heroes, or friends and families caring for each other, or any other ruminations about how best to go about life' have been ignored (Ibid.; also Hogan, 2001: 666).

In the case of *Sesame Street*, early studies in the 1970s showed that, in addition to teaching intellectual skills, regular and sustained viewing of the show also promoted friendship and other pro-social behaviour, including more positive attitudes towards children from other races (Bogatz and Ball, 1971). According to Lesser (1974: 225), children who were regular viewers of the show were rated more highly by teachers for their relationships with other children and for their school readiness than children who did not see the show. Studies of *Mr. Rogers' Neighbourhood* over time also showed that children improved pro-social skills such as persisting with tasks, assisting others, and being more cooperative after watching episodes where characters helped others (cit. in Lemish, 2007: 83; also Gunter and McAleer, 1997: 124)). The positive effects were stronger if accompanied by follow-up activities (see Mares and Woodward, 2001: 194). This pro-social tradition is continued by more recent shows such as *Dora the Explorer*, which introduce children to different cultures.

In one early study of pro-social behaviour from 1975, it was suggested that children who viewed an episode of *Lassie*, where the owner risks his life to save a puppy, were more likely to provide help to others (Sprafkin, Liebert & Poulos, 1975). However, this was deduced from the children's willingness to stop playing a game when they heard fictional puppies in distress. Children who viewed the pro-social episode pushed the button twice as long as children who did not.

More convincingly, in a recent study of US children in Grades 2 to 6, children were asked to note down the lessons they learned from watching pro-social and educational television on the public network PBS and Nickelodeon (Calvert & Kotler: 2003). Children in this study reported that they learned social-emotional (pro-social) lessons, followed by informational lessons, physical/well-being lessons and cognitive skills lessons from their viewing (Ibid: 303-4).

Retention of these lessons occurred more often when children watched educational programmes than entertainment programmes (2003: 325). In a similar vein teenage-targeted drama shows like the Canadian *Degrassi Junior High* have been shown to raise viewers' awareness of relevant issues (drugs, alcohol, relationships) and to reflect on these (Singer and Singer, 1994).

In a 1982 study of the drama *Freestyle* in the US, Johnston and Ettema found significant reductions in gender stereotypes among 7,000 children aged 9 to 12, who watched 26 episodes of the series designed to change sex-role stereotypes. Questionnaires administered before and after viewing found that boys became more accepting of girls participating in roles and sports that were traditionally considered male (mechanics, engineers), and girls became more interested in these. As with pre-school programming (see Singer and Singer, 1998), the effect was more pronounced if it was followed up by classroom discussions with teachers, typically doubling changes in attitudes and beliefs (Johnston and Ettema, 1982; also Mares and Woodward: 2001: 195). Other programmes that have been found to break down stereotypes include *Nash Maalo* (Our Neighbourhood), a project designed to encourage mutual respect and understanding in multi-ethnic Macedonia (cit in Lemish, 2007: 140). In Britain, research on *Rainbow* conducted with primary school children in the early 1980s showed that an episode where a mother went out to work and the father stayed at home produced a substantial short-term shift away from traditional stereotypes about domestic roles, but less change in beliefs about occupations (Durkin, 1983, cit in Gunter and McAleer, 1997:80).

There are few studies of the pro-social effects of children's television in Britain. In a recent report on young children's use of popular culture, media and new technologies, parents identified various pro-social behaviours in their children including 'social interaction, consideration of others, how to deal with situations' (Marsh et al, 2005, 36). In this study parents were able to identify examples of pro-social behaviour learned from television, which linked to statements from the foundation stage curriculum:

- maintaining attention, and learning to sit still
- being sensitive to the needs and views of others (e.g. manners, sharing)
- developing respect for different cultures including their own
- to value and contribute to their own well-being and self-control
- to understand agreed values and codes of behaviour, how to behave
- to have an awareness of behavioural expectations
- to understand what is right and what is wrong
- to dress independently and manage their own personal hygiene
- to understand that people have different needs, views, cultures and beliefs that need to be treated with respect

(Marsh et al: 2004, 35)

Although the survey illustrates the various pro-social skills that parents believe their children acquire from television, it does not refer to specific effects from specific programmes. Moreover, pro-social effects also occur from programmes which are not educational. For example, *Animal Hospital/ER* types of programmes can teach children the ethics of care, especially when children

see suffering animals (Hill 2005). In a similar vein, children who watched anti-social behavior in the BBC children's school dram *Grange Hill* learnt pro-social behaviour. According to Davies:

*“... if you see bullying and protection rackets on Grange Hill (particularly when you see the culprits being punished or ostracized) you may not be so keen to follow their example, because bullying other children is not such a pleasurable activity as having a good time with your mates at some activity or other” (Davies 1989: 160).*

Of course, the ability of television to bring about pro-social behaviour is also affected by a world which contains many more complex social influences on children. According to Fisch, the effects of pro-social television often appear less strong than the academic effects of educational television (2005: 18). This may be because attitudes and emotions are more difficult to define and measure than academic achievements, that some series are more effective than others or that children are more resistant to changes in their social behaviour than to their academic knowledge (Ibid.). Moreover, 'it is important to remember that the pro-social messages presented in an educational programme are likely to be mediated by lessons learned from family and peers, as well as children's own life experiences' (Ibid.: 12). That is, television can assist in the development of pro-social behaviour, but the cultural environment where a child lives influences a child's interpretation of a message. For younger children in particular pro-social concepts of fairness, equality and taking other people's views into account take time to develop, and are influenced more by family and community than television (see Davies, 1989: 161). Television can have socially desirable effects, but there is a need for more research to find out how this works and what type of content works best.

### **Why do Children watch TV and how do they watch?**

The previous sections have looked at what children, pre-dominantly pre-school children, can learn from television in terms of academic achievement and pro-social skills, but many British studies use a more child-centred approach which examines why and how children use the media, and relate it to the development of their media literacy. Reasons for watching usually revolve around passing time; for learning; for companionship; for relaxation, escape and arousal (Gunter and McAleer, 1997: 19). Studies in Britain have shown that children watch television when they get bored, and that they expect excitement and pleasure from television rather than education (c.f. Livingstone 2002, Buckingham 1996). According to Hill, 'For children, television is "good" when it is engaging, action packed, funny, and above all, entertaining' (2004: 183). The reasons why children watch television are complex and, like adults, relate to their need to find information, to pass time, to be entertained and to find comfort, with some research suggesting that it can be a way of dealing with hostile social environments (Master, Ford, Arend, cit in Gunter and McAleer, 1997: 28). An ITC (Independent Television Commission) report on children and cartoons underlines the pleasure children get from watching television:

*“After school, television is seen as something which helps children to relax and unwind. It keeps them entertained without their having to make much of an effort. It is entertainment for children on weekend mornings, keeping them company while mum and dad are still in bed. Cartoons have a particular role within children's (5-9 years) television viewing. They are short, easy to dip in and out of, fun, funny (they make children laugh), and exciting (the thrill of 'scary good') ... Children find cartoons both stimulating (action, colour and music), and relaxing (they require little effort to watch). They have a simple content which is easy to follow (Chambers et al 1998: 39)”.*

Younger children also use their experience of television in play, imitating *Power Rangers* or playing *Dragon Ball Z* games. In this way television content is used to construct make-believe worlds through imagined play (see Lemish, 2007: 63). Television in this sense acts as an important outlet to express feelings and fantasies. According to Huntemann and Morgan the media play an important role in the process of identity development, through the establishment of role models, and this shapes what children think about the world and how they perceive themselves in it (2001: 309). Children can develop a sense of themselves through the media, which offers a way of forging relationships with family members and peers (Marsh, 2005: 12). As they get older this applies particularly to drama. They can learn about secondary school, for example, from realistic soaps like *Grange Hill* (Davies 2001). Dramatic characterizations and plots can show children how to deal with other people, solve personal problems, make friends and get on in life (see Gunter & McAleer, 1997: 20). In this respect drama can be a major source of social learning where they learn about themselves and about life. However, according to Buckingham, children's involvement with drama is complex:

*“Children's responses to melodrama and soap opera also involve a complex combination of 'distress and delight', in which the masochistic experience of pain and suffering is balanced by a utopian desire for the joy and pleasure that might have been. Furthermore, as in the case of horror, these emotional reactions depend upon complex forms of cognitive or intellectual judgment, in which children's developing knowledge of the genre, and of the medium itself, plays a crucial role. And, here again, the social context of viewing and of talk about viewing significantly determines the ways in which children make meaning and pleasure from what they watch” (1996: 140).*

In watching television, older children also develop critical thinking, about what they like and don't like, becoming more sophisticated viewers in the process (Buckingham 1996:132; Hill, 2004). According to Buckingham this process of engaging in critical viewing practices is part of the process in which they construct their own identities:

*“Children inevitably become aware of critical perspectives on the media as part of their everyday experience. Judgments about whether television is or is not 'realistic', for example, are part of the stock in trade of most viewers' discussions of their favourite programmes. To some extent, this can be seen as a function of children's general cognitive development ... critical discussions of the media therefore provide important opportunities for 'identity work'- for laying claim to more prestigious or powerful social identities” (2003: 109).*

In the case of school children, television programmes which are not specifically produced for 'educational' purposes can teach them about society and its values. In evaluating programmes they are developing their own identities and critical thinking skills.

### **How do parents regard their children's viewing?**

It has already been pointed out that parents of children under six from all socioeconomic backgrounds often see media including television as an important educational tool that can assist their children's educational development in areas such as maths and literacy (Rideout et al: 2003, 12; Marsh et al: 2005). While teachers have some misgivings about the use of television, parents are more positive about its role in their children's social, emotional, linguistic and cognitive development and witness some beneficial aspects (see Marsh *et al* 2005; Rideout *et al* 2003). The success of educational toys associated with popular programmes such as *Teletubbies*, *Thomas Tank the Engine*, *Bob the Builder*, and *Noddy* are also indications that parents perceive



educational benefits from associated books and magazines (see Buckingham and Scanlon 2003: 76-79). They also recognize that these programmes are significant for children's identity construction. According to one parent:

*"I think they [media icons] are quite important to her, she's not got any particular favourite but she likes to, you know when she goes to play school she knows what all the other children are talking about you know, she has a 'Spot' and 'Thomas' lunch box, a 'Bob the Builder' lunch box, and I think because she's seen and been exposed to it, it helps her with sort of interpersonal skills of both sexes. I think it's, like, if she wasn't exposed to it she wouldn't maybe have anything to talk about or any relationship with these children, because she wouldn't know what they were talking about" (cit. in Marsh et al, 2005: 46).*

The socio-economic backgrounds of parents may influence their attitudes towards their children's viewing habits. Livingstone (2002), for example, points out that middle-class children have more options to fill in their 'unstructured time' with other leisure activities (e.g. piano lessons) other than television. On the other hand, there is an assumption that lower class families may use television as a baby sitter because it is a safe and relatively inexpensive way of occupying young children in communities with high levels of crime and poverty (see Jordan 2005: 534). However, in general parents in both British and American studies have witnessed beneficial aspects from their children's engagement with television.

This study is looking at the potential beneficial impact of children's television on children's lives. Debate usually centers on television's negative effects but, as expounded across a range of different studies, it is clear that television can enhance academic skills such as school readiness and vocabulary, as well as pro-social behaviours and critical thinking practices. Television is neither good nor bad for children, but its impact is complex in the way it affects children's knowledge, beliefs and values. Although children rarely seek out 'educational' content, they can derive both pleasure and learning from programmes which combine both elements. In this sense, 'edutainment' programmes (*Teletubbies*) which blur learning and entertainment are ideal for both children and parents (Buckingham and Scanlon 2003).

Related to such issues, recognition of television's benefits can help to inform the production of new programming, 'bringing the voice of children into the production process', ensuring that programming is tailored to their needs, interests and abilities (Fisch: 2005: 13). This child-centered approach is already reflected in the commissioning policies of the BBC, for example, which recognize that children need to have access to programming that is 'empowering, fun, and innovative, allowing children to relax and unwind in an environment which is relevant to their lives' (BBC 2006). At the same time, the BBC looks for factual programming that should aim to 'feed both the intellect and the imagination ... allowing them to express something of themselves and to help them understand their place in the world' (Ibid).

Although this review has focused on the potential beneficial aspects of television for children, it has not looked at the beneficial aspects of extended media such as children's experiences of interactive TV, websites and associated toys and games. Increasing media use across different platforms cannot be ignored and is already reflected in a range of studies (Sefton-Green 2002; Livingstone 2002; Rideout et al 2003; Tobin 2004, Calvert et al 2005, Buckingham 2006, Rideout et al 2006, Ofcom 2006).). Examining the impact of television in isolation may not be sufficient in future, and changes in the way that media are consumed across multiple platforms needs to be considered and examined as well.

## **Theoretical Review**

### **Post-Positivist Theory**

The goals of post-positivist theory are explanation, prediction, and control (and in this you can see the connection between this kind of social science and the physical sciences). Researchers, who want to explain the relationship between political advertising, predict which commercials will be most effective, and control the voting behaviour of targeted citizens would, of necessity, rely on post-positivist theory. Its ontology accepts that the world, even the social world, exists apart from our perceptions of it; human behaviour is sufficiently predictable to be studied systematically. (Post-positivists do, however, believe that the social world does have more variation than the physical world; for example, the name we give to things define them and our reaction to them, hence the post of post-positivism). Its epistemology argues that knowledge is advanced through the systematic, logical search for regularities and casual relationships employing the scientific method. And it is this scientific method that defines post-positivism's axiology, the objectivity inherent in the application of the scientific method keeps researchers' and theorists' values out of the search for knowledge (as much as is possible). Post-positivist communication theory, then, is developed through a system of inquiry that resembles as much as possible the rules and practices of what we traditionally understand as science.

### **Hermeneutic Theory**

Many communication theorists do not want to explain, predict, and control social behaviour (they see this as unnecessarily reductionist). Their goal is to understand how and why that behavior occurs in the social world. This hermeneutic theory is "the study of understanding, especially by interpreting action and text" (Littlejohn, 1996, p. 208). There are different forms of hermeneutic theory. For example, social hermeneutics has as its goal the understanding of how those in observed social situation interpret their own lot in that situation. As ethnographer Michael Moerman (1992, p. 23) explained, social hermeneutic theory tries to explain how events "in the alien world make sense to the aliens, how their way of life coheres and had meaning and value for the people who live it." Another branch of hermeneutics looks for hidden or deep meaning in people's interpretation of different symbol systems, for example, in media texts. As you might have guessed from these descriptions, hermeneutic theory is sometimes referred to as interpretive theory. Another important idea embedded in these descriptions is that any text, any product of social interaction – a movie, the president's State of the Union Address, a love letter, a conversation between soap opera hero and heroine, can be a source of understanding.

The ontology of hermeneutic theory says that there is no truly "real" measurable social reality. Instead, "reality cannot be understood except through a consideration of the mental and social processes that are continually constructing that reality" (Miller, 2002, p. 52). As such, what is knowable is based on people's interpretation of that which they know. This means that its epistemology, how knowledge is advanced, relies on the subjective interaction between the observer (the researcher or theorist) and his or her community. Put another way, knowledge is local; that is, it is specific to the interaction of the knower and the known. Naturally, then, the axiology of hermeneutic theory embraces, rather than limits, the influence of researcher and theorist values. Personal and professional values, according to Katherine Miller, are a "lens through which social phenomena are observed" (2002, p. 53). A researcher interested in understanding women's interpretations of romance novels or one curious about meaning-making that occurs in the exchange of information among teen fans of an online simulation game would rely on hermeneutic theory.

## **Critical Theory**

There are still other social scientists who do not want explanation, prediction, and control of the social world. Nor do they see understanding of the social world as the ultimate goal of their work. They start from the assumption that the social world is deeply flawed and in need of transformation. Their goal is to gain knowledge of the social world so they can change it. This goal is inherently political because it challenges existing ways of governing the social world and the people and organizations that exercise power in it. Critical theory is openly political (therefore its axiology is aggressively value-laden). It assumes that by reorganizing society, we can give priority to the most important human values. Critical theory is “especially concerned with inequality and oppression. Critical theories do not merely observe; they also criticize. Most critical theories are concerned with the conflict of interests in society and the ways communication perpetuates domination of one group over another” (Littlejohn, 1996, p. 17). Its epistemology argues that knowledge is advanced only when it serves to free people and communities from the influence of those more powerful than themselves. Its ontology, however, is a bit more complex.

What is real, what is knowable, in the social world is the product of the interaction between structure (the social world’s rules, norms, and beliefs) and agency (how humans behave and interact in that world). Reality, then, to critical theorists, is constantly being shaped and reshaped by the dialectic (the ongoing struggle or debate) between the two. When elites control the struggle, they define reality (in other words, their control of the structure defines people’s realities). When people are emancipated, they define reality through their behaviours and interactions (agency). Researchers and theorists interested in the decline (and restoration) of the power of the labour movement in industrialized nations or those interested in limiting the contribution of children’s advertising to the nation’s growing consumerism would rely on critical theory. Critical theorists are especially troubled by what they view as the uncontrolled exercise of capitalist corporate power around the world. They see media as an essential tool employed by corporate elites to constrain how people view their social world and to limit their agency in it.

## **Normative Theory**

Normative theory may be applied to any form of communication but is most often applied to mass communication. It does not try to represent or reform reality. Instead, its goal is to set an ideal standard against which the operation of a given media system can be judged. A normative media theory explains how a media system should operate in order to conform to or realize a set of ideal social values. As such, its ontology argues that what is known is situational (or, like interpretive theory, local). In other words, what is real or knowable about a media system is real or knowable only for the specific social system in which that system exists. Its epistemology, how knowledge is developed and advanced, is based in comparative analysis, we can only judge (and therefore understand) the worth of a given media system in comparison to the ideal espoused by the particular social system in which it operates. Finally, its axiology is, by definition, value-laden. Study of a media system or parts of a media system is undertaken in the explicit belief that there is an ideal mode of operation based in the values of the social system. Theorists interested in the press role in a democracy would most likely employ normative theory, as would those examining the operation of the media in an Islamic republic or an authoritarian state. Problems arise if media systems based on one normative theory are evaluated.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

## Research Design

Survey method was employed for this paper.

## Population of the Study

The study population for this research is the entire members of staff of St. Francis Primary School, Isale-Aro, Osogbo and Ministry of Education, Osun State Secretariat, Abere, Osogbo; the total population of which is 78.

## Sample Size/ sampling techniques

For the purpose of this study, simple random sampling techniques is used for the convenience of the researcher. The total number of seventy eight (78) staff members of St. Francis Primary School, Isale-Aro, Osogbo and Ministry of Education, Osun State Secretariat, Abere, Osogbo comprising sixteen (16) from the St. Francis Primary School, Isale-Aro, Osogbo and sixty-two (62) from the Ministry of Education, Osun State Secretariat, Abere, Osogbo were chosen for the administration of questionnaire without bias for their sex, age, years of experience or educational qualification.

## Research Instrument

The basic instrument that was used for data collection was questionnaire designed for the respondents. The questionnaire was developed to elicit response from the staff members of St. Francis Primary School, Isale-Aro, Osogbo and Ministry of Education, Osun State Secretariat, Abere, Osogbo being the respondents.

## Rate of Return of Questionnaire

The rate of returning of the questionnaire was satisfactory, seventy five (75) out of seventy eight (78) copies of questionnaires distributed were returned.

## DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Table 1

What possible impacts can mass media have on children upbringing?

Response	No. of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Improvements in academic performance	3	4%
Decline in academic performance	2	3%
Learning of bad attitudes	4	5%
Learning of good attitudes	0	
Improvement in academic performance and learning of bad attitudes	0	

Decline in academic performance and learning of good attitudes	0	
Improvement in academic performance and learning of moral attitudes	0	
All of the above	66	88%
Total	75	100%

The table shows that 3 representing 4% of the total number of respondents agreed that the possible effect of mass media on children was improvement in academic performance; 2 representing 3% of them disagreed that the possible effect of mass media on children was decline in academic performance, 4 representing 5% of them agreed that the possible effect of mass media on children was that it teaches children bad attitudes, while 66 representing 88% of them agreed that the possible effects of mass media on children include both good and bad attitudes, and that it also both improves and causes decline in academic performance.

Table 2

What measures should be put in place to prevent children from learning bad things from media contents?

<b>Response</b>	<b>No. of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage of Respondents</b>
Effective regulation and censoring of media contents by the regulatory authorities.	42	56%
Sanctions on media stations/houses that transmits adult programmes without appropriate censor.	5	7%
Parents and guardians proper monitoring and control of children's access to media contents	28	37%
Total	75	100%

The table shows that 42 representing 56% of the total number of respondents agreed that effective regulation and censoring of media contents by the regulatory authorities would prevent children from learning bad things from media contents, 5 representing 7% of them agreed that sanctions on media stations/houses that transmits adult programmes without appropriate censor would prevent children from learning bad things from media contents, while 28 representing 37% of them agreed that parents and guardians proper monitoring and control of children's access to media contents would prevent children from learning bad things from media contents.

Table 3

How well are the National Broadcasting Corporations and other regulatory agencies performing their duty of television programmes censoring?

<b>Response</b>	<b>No. of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage of Respondents</b>
Excellently	0	0%
Satisfactorily	6	8%
Fairly	54	72%
Poorly	15	20%
Total	75	100%

The table shows that 6 representing 8% of the total number of respondents remarked the performance of the National Broadcasting Corporations (NBC) and other regulatory agencies in performing their duty of television programmes censoring as being satisfactory, 54 representing 72% of them remarked the performance of the National Broadcasting Corporations (NBC) and other regulatory agencies in performing their duty of television programmes censoring as being fair, while 15 representing 20% of them remarked the performance of the National Broadcasting Corporations (NBC) and other regulatory agencies in performing their duty of television programmes censoring as being poor.

Table 4

Do you agree that children should not be allowed to spend a long time watching television programmes?

<b>Response</b>	<b>No. of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage of Respondents</b>
Strongly Agree	20	27%
Agree	45	60%
Disagree	10	13 %
Total	75	100%

The table shows that 20 representing 27% of the total number of respondents strongly agreed that children should not be allowed to spend a long time watching television programmes, 45 representing 60% of them also agreed (but not strongly agreed) that children should not be allowed to spend a long time watching television programmes while 10 representing 13% of them disagreed.

Table 5

Apart from television, which other medium of communication can children learn bad habits from?

<b>Response</b>	<b>No. of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage of Respondents</b>
Video sharing on mobile devices	27	36%
Books or magazines containing information that are meant for adults	10	13%
Spontaneous access to pornographic web pages (Internet)	38	51 %
Total	75	100%

The table shows that 27 representing 36% of the total number of respondents believed that apart from television, video sharing on mobile devices is another medium through which children learn bad habits. 10 representing 13% of them believed that apart from television, books or magazines containing information that are meant for adults is another medium through which children learn bad habits. 38 representing 51% of them believed that apart from television, spontaneous access to pornographic web pages (Internet) is yet another medium through which children learn bad habits.

### **Findings of the Study**

The followings are the findings made from the research:

- The possible effects of media contents on children include both good and bad attitudes, and that it also both improves and causes decline in academic performance.
- The following measures should be put in place to prevent children from learning bad things from media contents:
  - a. Effective regulation and censoring of media contents by the regulatory authorities.
  - b. Sanctions on media stations/houses that transmits adult programmes without appropriate censor.
  - c. Parents and guardians proper monitoring and control of children's access to media contents.
- The National Broadcasting Corporations (NBC) and other regulatory agencies are not performing their duty of television programmes censoring to the expectations of people. Their performance is only fairly good.
- Children should not be allowed to spend a long time watching television programmes.
- Apart from television, other media of communication through which children can learn bad habits are as follows:
  - a. Video sharing on mobile devices.
  - b. Books or magazines containing information that are meant for adults.
  - c. Spontaneous access to pornographic web pages (Internet).
- The roles of parents and guardians towards how children are exposed to media contents are as given below:

- a. Parents and guardians should ensure that the exposure of children to media contents are properly monitored and controlled by restricting their access to the television, mobile phones, inappropriate magazines and other media of communication.
- b. Parents and guardians should ensure that that only educative television programmes are allowed to be viewed by the children, if they must watch the television. Books or magazines that contain information meant for adults alone should be kept away from children.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The possible effects of media contents on children include both good and bad attitudes, it also both improves and causes decline in academic performance. All media of communication are intended for providing easy means of disseminating information to people, they can neither be adjudged good nor bad for children's or adults' use. Television for example is mean to transmit motion pictures for the purpose of entertainment and to meet the information needs of people, it can not be adjudged good or bad for children because some educative programmes are transmitted on television, which if children are allowed to view them, they will help them a great deal in their academic performances. There are also educative programmes that have been recorded on CDs and DVDs which can also contribute to the progress of children in their academic activities in school, on the other hand, some programmes which are not meant for children are also transmitted on television from time to time, such programmes are not good for children's view and in such cases, parent should ensure that children are denied access to viewing such programmes. One thing that should be noted here is that media content can have both positive and negative effects on children, but the type of media content that children are allowed access to would determine the type of effect it would have on them.

There are measures that can be put in place to ensure that children are not learning bad habits from media contents, such measures include effective regulation and censoring of media contents by the regulatory authorities like the National Broadcasting Corporations and other regulatory authorities in the country. Putting sanctions on media stations/houses that transmits adult programmes without appropriate censor is another way to ensure that programmes that are not meant for children is properly rated and parents' or guardians' discretion is advised before the commencement of transmission of such programme. Parents and guardians should also ensure proper monitoring and control of children's access to media contents.

The findings of this research have revealed that the National Broadcasting Corporations (NBC) and other regulatory agencies in the country are not performing their duty of television programmes censoring to the expectations of people. If they had been performing their official responsibilities effectively, media houses would have streamlined the kind of programmes being transmitted thereby making sure that the right thing is done as at when expected. By this, hardly will children accidentally have access to inappropriate television programmes when they are expected to watch programmes that will add value to their lives.

Children should not be allowed to spend a long time watching television programmes, especially when the programme being transmitted would add no values to their lives. It should be noted here that obsession to television can cause a reduction in the time to spend on their studies and this in turn may cause a decline in their academic performances. Parents may allow their children to watch educative television programmes very well because it will affords their children the



opportunity to acquire more knowledge academically, morally, psychologically and in all other ramifications. The knowledge that their children acquire from watching television programmes will complement the ones they are obtaining from school.

The study has also revealed that apart from television, other media of communication through which children can learn bad habits are as video sharing on mobile devices, books or magazines containing information that are meant for adults, and spontaneous access to pornographic web pages (Internet). Therefore, it is the responsibility of the parents and guardians to ensure that the exposure of children to the stated media is restricted and properly monitored. Children are expected to be restricted from having free access to the television, mobile phones, inappropriate magazines and other media of communication. Parents and guardians should also ensure that that only educative television programmes are allowed to be viewed by the children, if they must watch the television. Books or magazines that contain information meant for adults alone should be kept away from children as well.

### **Summary**

Mass media is believed by many people to contain be a medium from which children learn all sorts of social vices, this perception of people is not totally correct because it is neither meant to teach good morals nor social vices, mass media such television, radio, telephone, newspapers, magazines, Internet is simply meant for people to enjoy various kinds of programmes, receive information, communicate with one another, etc. In the case of television, the kind of programmes that children are allowed to watch will determine what they learn from it. This research has revealed that television could still help facilitate improvement in academic performance as children could make a great deal of benefit from the educative programmes that they watch on the television.

While the National Broadcasting Corporations and other regulatory authorities are expected to improve on how effectively they carry out their duty of censoring all programmes that are being transmitted on the television to prevent children from learning bad habits from it, parents and guardians are also encouraged to ensure that that only educative television programmes are allowed to be viewed by the children, if they must watch the television. Books or magazines that contain information meant for adults alone should be kept away from children as well.

### **Conclusion**

Contrary to the perception of some people that mass media do not have positive effects on children but rather teach them moral decadence, mass media is indeed a means of reaching out to heterogeneous people at a specific point in time to dissipate vital information that may be of great benefit to them. Children learn a lot of things from the mass media, especially from watching educative television programmes that will benefit them in all ramifications of life and can make them great people in the future. Parents, guardians and media regulatory authorities only need to join hands together to make sure that the children are not exposed to media contents that can have negative effects on their reasoning and attitudes.

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