AN INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH IN UNDERSTANDING CHILD DEVELOPMENT: INTEGRATING PERSPECTIVES FROM HISTORY, SOCIOLOGY, ANTHROPOLOGY AND PSYCHOLOGY: A REVIEW ARTICLE

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ABSTRACT

Child development is an excellent global subject of discourse among scholars of various disciplines. There are several factors that lead to development in children. This paper explores interdisciplinary understanding of childhood and child development. An interdisciplinary approach in understanding child development involves ideas from different disciplines in solving the problems of developing child. This review points out some disciplines such as; history, sociology, anthropology, and psychology to view their approaches, focus and various contributions to child development. The paper aims at examining the types of argument emerging in the developmental transitions. The focus is justified by the evidence that will bring into the knowledge of the readers how the research on these multiple disciplines reflects the child and our contemporary understanding of childhood studies and transition within the growth and development in childhood stage of development. Integrating various disciplines would enhance our understanding of child development to provide a better and comprehensive understanding of how children develop. The paper contains briefly review the existing studies connecting argumentation, introduction, methodological approach, definition of concepts, reviewed literature, discussions and conclusions.

Keywords: Interdisciplinary, child, development, integrating, perspectives, History, Sociology, Anthropology and Psychology.

Introduction

The stage of child development forms the influential years, developmental process and events at this period cast long shadows in to the future. The study of this period captures the imagination and interest of teachers, parent, care givers, social workers, health worker and everyone who care about children. According to the UN Sustainable Development Goals about 43%(250 million) of children at their early childhood stage of development, who live in low- and middle-income nations run the risk of not reaching their full developmental potential(Briton et al., 2017; Richter et al., 2017). Since childhood is an essentially prospective state, what is a good for a child can only be something that will contribute to its good in adulthood (Matthews, 2021). This type of approach is very important and essential if not necessary for the developing child as an adult in making. The concern is to assist the children to develop the appropriate personality. Upbringing a children is therefore requires a comprehensive knowledge about kids.

As future potential and social investment children have long been the subject of academic interest and research. Researches from various scholars significantly lead to a wealth of literature on child development from different disciplines (Pufall, et al., 2004). As research in other areas, child development is an excellent global subject of discourse among scholars of various disciplines. There are several factors that lead to development in children (Berk L. 2015). This paper explores interdisciplinary review study with an emphasis on child development. An interdisciplinary approach in understanding child development involves ideas from different disciplines in solving the problems of developing child. The review points out some disciplines such as; history, sociology, anthropology, and psychology to view their approaches, focus and various contributions to child development. The paper also brings into the knowledge of the readers how the research on these multiple disciplines reflects the child and our contemporary understanding of childhood studies and transition within the growth and development in childhood stage of development. Integrating various disciplines would enhance our understanding of child development to provide a better and comprehensive understanding of how children develop.

Background

A child is a person in the early stage of life, who has not yet an adult (James, et al., 2012). Childhood can refer to the early cycles of the life-course of a person, that involves rapid physiological and psychological development (James, et al., 2012). Children are the social grouping of humans from birth to age twenty" while "childhood the life stage of these individuals (Parcel, 2018). Development is a gradual changes in function of an individual (Bjorklund, 2022). Therefore, Child development means changes that take place in the process of a child's growth and development about mental, physical, emotional and social wellbeing (Garhart, 2000). From the view of other scholars, development involves cognitive advancements, emotional regulation, and social interactions. Development is also a growth in psychomotor capacity, this process encompasses qualitative changes in abilities, skills, and psychological maturation(Balasundaram & Avulakunta, 2021; Bogin, 2015).

The existing literature reveals that child-development research is a result of social pressure to improve the lives of children. Some these researches let to the start of public education and question about what teach children, how to teach children at different level of growth and development was the most dominant at the early 20th century (Berk L. 2015).

Knowledge in the western world or system split into disciplines such as psychology, biology, history, pediatrics, philosophy, anthropology, sociology, geography, law, education, medical science, literature, media, economic and many more (Rose, 1999). Interdisciplinary involves the process whereby various disciplines or scholars shares interest or knowledge in an issue or a problem resulted in a positive solution to the complexity of a problem. It involves how does thinking or answers from different field of studies enhance or clear understanding of child and childhood studies (Thorne, 2007). Interdisciplinary is now becoming an integral part of the scholar's inquiry, childhood is a practical example of interdisciplinary inquiring (Carnevale et al., 2015). The most comprehensive source of information to solve general problem about child development is therefore, by the combine effort of different scholars of many discipline(Berk, 2015). This is also in line with the idea of Meadow, (2023) in her book Deafness and child development. Different fields, therefore, are necessary in understanding childhood and child development.

Method

This paper is an interdisciplinary review article aimed at studying child development, integrating perspectives from History, Sociology, Anthropology and Psychology. A comprehensive review of related literature was conducted. The researcher search across several database from the Scopus and Web science, using Google Scholar as a searching tool, to identified different views for the in-depth understand of the research topic. Publishing databases such as ResearchGate, Elsevier, Springer, Sage, Wiley and others were used to make the highly reliable and qualitative research. The review included cross-sectional studies based on their relevance and theme with a focus on child development. The searching normally conducted using keywords of "Childhood" "Child development" "interdisciplinary studies". Current and up to date article were given priority on the selection of the suitable article. The time taken mostly from 2012-2023 unless where necessary, that there is lack of current studies, then view from previous pioneers in the field were considered. However, some related content from other field were also considered. All the article were sorted, reviewed and integrated based on their content theme and relevance.

Discussion

Research is intensively acknowledged as an essential key for scholarly inquiry and researching child and his/her development is requires so many disciplines, because of the complicatedness nature of the child and the childhood. Such an approach is a notable example of interdisciplinary inquiry (Canevale, et al., 2015). Comprehensive understanding in this stage of life transition requires sharing of ideas of research from the different field of studies (Alanen, 2012). Several researches revealed about the necessity of interdisciplinary approach in understanding childhood, In Australia for example, It argues that a comprehensive understanding of each perspective is essential for shaping a successful future in early childhood education. Furthermore, it emphasizes that all government stakeholders must enhance policies and provisions to ensure better support and development within the sector(Garvis & Manning, 2017).

According to the Guo, (2021), in cross-border studies as an interdisciplinary science, An interdisciplinary approach involves suitable ideas from various disciplines, or distinct fields of expertise, to redefine problems outside of conventional boundaries and arrive at concrete solution regard to new understanding of complex problems or situations. This type of

approach is very important and essential if not necessary for the developing child as an adult in making.

In this context, interdisciplinary analysis contributed immensely to the space of childhood and a child as a growing organism. It manifested new ways and ideas of looking at children and speculation as a new academic field (Kehily, 2015). The practical examples of this theme are interdisciplinary conferences and cooperation projects where experts and scholars from various field shares ideas on complex problems like child's rights and child's labour (Thorne, 2007). Moreover, critical questions like to what extent are to attain fruitful interdisciplinary, the participatory discussion in the study of children and childhood? How the session come up with different forms of inquiry comprised well-established paths of knowledge? are the dominant agenda in discussion at this conference, which resulted to extensive dialogue among sociologists, economists, anthropologists, scholars in politics, law, and international development, NGO workers from different disciplinary backgrounds and policymakers (Thone, 2007).

Researching children is therefore, not a new practice among scholars of different generation or century. The concept child development and childhood as field of study noticed so many changes and contributions which resulted in severe criticisms and arguments among the scholars of various disciplines. The work of philosopher Jhon Locke has a significant impact on the new thinking of child development in the 17th century. His work "some thought concerning education" (1693), was well known about the psychological and physical development of children. The philosopher described the perception of upbringing as a stage or transition in life, vulnerable which requires attention (Greene, et al., 2005).

The effort of Rousseau, the image of childhood, where he viewed childhood concerning distinctiveness and value, as described in the work of Emile, was a useful contribution in the 18th century. Roussoeau beliefs in what he terms as 'the age of reasoning' (age 12), helps in understanding the children as incompetent of making significant judgements and enhanced the idea of children as "becoming" rather than "being" (Greene, et al., 2005).

By the late 19th and the early of 20th centuries, children and childhood studies had received the interest of both researchers and government, many institutions for the research of children emerged with the efforts of government and agencies (religious/ private) into family life to secure the children (Greene, 2005). The years 1890s brought about the birth of publications. Such as the Journal of human development established in the United States of America. An investigation on the "contents of children's minds" was also carried- out in Germany using questionnaire method(Greene, 2005).

Furthermore, the institutions for the study of the child continued to receive an improvement in method and objectivity within the western world. The academic departments researched children for the first time were the departments of a developmental psychology, home economist and education. The work of G. Stanley Hall on the idea of evolution, the effort of American scholar Baldwin and that of Piaget and Freut in Europe are highly significant at that moment in time(Greene, 2005).

The individual gaze looked on to the children from other end power, where issues of people with criminal offence and madness become the concern of some scientist, and applied the process involved describing, recording and finally assign discipline. Michel Foucault argued that the disciplines used technical procedures in a different institution like schools, hospital and factory, where a considerable number of people's similarities and differences duly observed (Kehily, 2015). The idea of an individualizing gaze of children emerged among scholars of disciplines in 19th centuries. Children are the primary concern and targeted object in the programme of individualization. In the latter half of the 20thcentury, science of individualization changed from the routine techniques of recording to a highly organized systematic device, where new patterns of observing child's body from the perspective of evolution and psychological science of technique of test emerged. The process involved careful observation, presentation and documentation of child's emotion, words and movements to assess how that can change over time (Rose,1999).

To a certain extent, Clinics and the nursery schools were the institutions used by the developmental psychologist in carrying those experiment (Rose, 1999). Children were observed and assessed based on their abilities and performance. The excellent example of this

work is the experiment of Arnold Gesell in 1930s and his colleagues. The Gessel's experiment was carried out at the Yale psychological Clinic (YPC) (Rose, 1999), which said had opened in 1911 for the assessment and treatment of children having a problem at school. The work took place in laboratory probably in the 1920s, and it was done within one kind of transparent Dome, inside himself and the child on the table with small bricks as playing materials presented to the child on the table(Rose, 1999). While outside the Dome are the observers(psychologists) observing the process, and one of which is taking note, on the other side is a technician scientist with his camera snapping the systematic conduct of the experiment.

Linking to the above significant contributions and efforts of various scholars to child develop and childhood studies in our contemporary time. Some of these efforts are the relatively cross-national emergence of interdisciplinary curricula, the degree, masters and PhD granting programs in childhood studies. Thus, University of London and Edinburgh became a center of master's programs in children's rights for several years across Europe (Thone,2007). In parallel and connected effort, places like Ecuador, Peru, Columbia in Latin America also links masters programs in children's rights. PhD program is also offered in the department of childhood study at Linkoping University in Sweden respectively (Thone,2007).

Recently, the University of Rutgers Camden created a department of childhood studies offering a full interdisciplinary BA, MA and PhD degree. Thus, to enhance this field, the University of Rutgers set a committee from various disciplines in 19th the September,2006, and asked the participants to write a "brief" on methodology and essentials information from the perspective of their discipline, draw a wide range interdisciplinary inquiry on children and childhood that would refresh and enhance the field of childhood studies. There were some clashes and disagreement in this session that leads to misunderstanding, for instance, many scholars meant different things in explaining the concepts children's agency (Thone,2007).

Intradisciplinary perspectives and Integration

After developing the framework in the meaning of the key terms in this paper, the importance of interdisciplinary approach in studying child and tracing the early and contemporary efforts in researching childhood. The paper will now explore the approach of history, sociology,

anthropology and psychology on child development. To explore how each discipline understand and view child development. While doing that, the paper will examine some of the criticisms and arguments within these disciplines and see how that contributed to shaping our understanding of children and childhood and the need of interdisciplinary approach in this perspective.

Historical approach

Historical studies or research have played a vital role in child development and childhood studies. Evidence in the investigations of some historians in the field of childhood shows that there were almost the same ways and manners in the treatment of children across times. Some of the differences in orientation to childhood that exists today are the generation of the other centuries (Greene, 2005). However, the work of philosopher Jhon Locke has significantly contributed in the 17th century to the now thinking of childhood in this discipline. Even though, contemporary histories of childhood suggested that the idea of childhood emerged excellently until the 18th century (Greene, 2005).

Similarly, historical research has pointed out that childhood relates thought about the self and locating selfhood; a child is a future adult, and his childhood, therefore, has a symbolic link between the past and the present. Historians believe that ideas and knowledge were historically accessed and developed, for examples; the child in the past-media age and western anxieties, the issues in child labour and the western and non-western perceptions of childhood. In 19th centuries, childhood was reconceptualized with a specific demonstration of concern on to the child's poverty and ill-health, that serves as the key to succeeding economically and in uplifting the status of the child. Barnardo's in Kehily (2015) made their approach in caring for children by saying;

> "Children go through childhood once in life; therefore they deserve protections physically, mentally, socially and emotionally, which are essential in life. Thus, support them feel at home wherever they are" (Kehily, 2015).

Barnardo's believes that supporting children to achieve their full potentialities, is an important responsibility not only to the parent alone, preferably to the teachers and every member of a

community. Mayhew's work is also an example of these themes. Mayhew focuses on the difficulties of life among physically abused people. For instance, she observed and documented the life of working class people in London. In his explanation to the childhood, Mayhew in (Kehily, 2015,) is quoted to have said;

> "Childhood is a stage in a life full of pleasure and lack of worries in which a child provided with his needs and freed from the adult world of work".

Sociological Approach

Sociology as a discipline about society and how human being interact, it explain changes in society and understand how power is shared among children and adult members (Thomas & Lewas, 2022). It also explain children and gender and the socialization process involve through family, peers, education system and media. However, the new sociology of childhood development, studies how various factors influences child development. Sociology as a discipline emerged around late 19th century existed as social sciences field of study. Scholars like; Durkheim, Comte, weber and Marx as funding father (Thomas & Lewas, 2022).

The sociological approach mainly interested and focuses on children as a social group. Children should be allowed and encourage to display and participate fully in the planning their social lives and that of people around them (Kehily, 2009). Sociology by its expansion and various contributions characterised with innovative ideas that work about children and childhood studies. As James and Prout (1990) in Kehily (2009), states some key features that constitute the sociological approach;

> "childhood is understood as a social construction, childhood is a variable of social analysis, children's relationships and cultures are are worthy of study in their own right, children should be as active social agents, ethnography is a useful method for the study of childhood, studying childhood involves an engagement with the process of reconstructing childhood in society" (kehily, 2009).

Gabriel, (2017), mentioned Norbert Elias (1897-1990) cited in (Thomas & Lewas, 2022), argued that a significant part work of sociologist is to understand and explain how nature, culture and society are interrelated. Sociological approach predominantly influences the claim made on childhood by the realm of common-sense reason, the approach points out that the child within the field of culture passes through a variety of discourse as social being and the approach also tries displays the processes of sociologist towards understanding of the childhood (Kehily,2009). One of the popular perspective within contemporary childhood studies is the view of sociologist which considered the idea of a child as a problem rather than the practical and pre-started being, the process that the child passes through to maturation. They beliefs that the child do not seek to offer advice regarding the suitable mode of maturation (Jenks, 2010).

Similarly, sociologist gives priority on the society and socialization of a child. In this context, children should be seen and understood as a social or cultural construction; who's the physical development and sexual maturity in transition into adulthood from childhood cannot often be directly proved from biological differences. Here social constructionism is in parallel with the other disciplines (James et al., 2011).

Anthropological Approach

Anthropologist argues how culture influences child development, how adult support young ones develop positive identities and how norms established a limited view of a child's development. Cultural relativism, enculturation, acculturation and ethnography are the key concepts relating to anthropology. The scholars places concern on culture within the context of child development(Thomas & Lewas, 2022).

Anthropology as a discipline viewed understanding the traditions, habit that people or community and society possess and how that influences other people's lives. Mentgomery (2023), cited in Thomas & Lewas, (2022), viewed anthropology as the study of people and their social relationships of family life, political, religion and economic life. Anthropologist maintain that culture has a great impact on the development of an individual and the best way to understand how child development, his interact with others in the society is within the

cultural practices in his/her community. Understanding culture is therefore, very crucial in knowing the child development. s

Anthropologists have also contributed immensely to the concepts of child development and childhood studies, specifically in their insistence on the importance of culture and culture relativism. They were consistently on the view of a global child is an impossible fiction, and the children's lives are strongly influenced by their culture, as it was by their biology.The anthropologist has been focusing on the children, their role in society and their place in the life-cycle (Montgomery, 2009).

However, it is through the understanding of childhood concerning social and cultural development, that the early British anthropologists such as Wake, Edward described the nature and development of human society(Montgomery, 2009). Some of these efforts can see in the work of Wake, who advanced the "theory of the stages of human evolution", directly correspond the observable stages in child development. In the evolution of morality, Wake tries to trace certain stages in understanding the children's morality. He described five (5) stages in moral development, which characterised as; "the selfish, the willful, the emotional, the empirical and the rational" (Montgomery, 2009).

Moreover, various scholars from the field of Anthropology in the United Kingdom such as Jean La Fontain(1986), Alan Proud and Allison James (1997), sociologists Berry Mayall(1994), Chris Jenks(1996), and Frances Waksler(1991) all viewed and argued that the childhood must be seen:

> "as a culturally constructed, social phenomenon which changes over time and place and that it should not necessarily be seen as a time of universal dependence and powerlessness, although this is often how children experience it"(Montgomery, 2009).

The anthropologists examined the period in which the children are taken to school living family and other members of the society, as the time characterised as the week, powerless, dependent and vulnerable, the child needs protection rather than empowered. La Fontaine clearly expressed that children should be studies as worthy subjects, rather than unshaped cultural beings. As she states;

"in general, anthropology has retained an outdated view of children as raw material, unfinished specimens of the social beings whose ideas and behaviour are the proper subject matters for social sciences" (Montgomery, 2009).

Similarly, Boas also examined the expected differences that exist between people as cultural somewhat than biological. Thus, was a strong challenge to psychologist like G. Stanlay Hall, who viewed the adolescence period as a "period of storm and stress" full of powerful biological changes (Montgomery, 2009).

Psychological Approach

There are up to 56 different branches of psychology, developmental, humanistic and positive psychology are very helpful in relation to understanding how children growth and develop, because these sub-branches discuses child development most. The developmental and humanistic highlighted the tension in the field of early childhood. Children's capabilities, strengths, difficulties and deficiencies were the main themes of discussion (Thomas & Lewas, (2022).

Psychology of child development appears to be the most dominant model for studying children, professional practice in care and education(Thomas, & Lewas, (2022). This view was ascertain by the anthropologist, as they discusses. For example, "culture influences child development in many complex ways and cross-cultural research can help challenge dominant discourses, such as developmental psychology and provide a deeper/alternative insight in to understanding childhood" (Thomas & Lewas,2022). The view of psychology been the dominant discipline was also explored by Parcel, (2018). At the mid-20th century, sociologist on the other hand were generally not focused on child development and studying childhood, the field was purely dominated by psychologist, who often studied children from the perspective of developmental psychology.

According to Kehily (2015), Psychological research mainly focused on the individual child. In this context, the Piaget's developmental stage theory was the influential as far as child

development as the concern, not only among psychologist within Europe but all over the world including USA ((Thomas & Lewas,2022; kehily,2009). At mid and late 20th century P. J's work on how child think was highly significant. According to him children's thinking process is influence by four different factors; Biological maturation, activity, social experiences and equilibrium. Although, some scholars criticized the P. J's estimation on children's abilities and argue the task he set for them were difficult and complicated (Thomas & Lewas,2022).

Moreover, psychologist belief development occurs in stages, the Piaget's system shows each phase of intellectual growth is characterized by a distinct and well-defined transition and sequence of physical and mental actions that govern the orientation of that child (kehily, 2009). Also, at each stage of development of physical, social, moral, emotional or intellectual, individuals show distinctive characteristics in all aspects of development, such as; height, weight, perception, mastering of language, and feelings (Balasundaram & Avulakunta, 2021; Bogin, 2015; Lawal etal., 2005). This is in line with view of (Dahl et al., 2018; Bogin, 2015), Human growth and development is a comprehensive concept that encompasses the physical, cognitive, emotional, and social changes that individuals undergo throughout their lifespan.

Despite the domination and contributions of psychologist on the child development and the field of childhood studies, the discipline has been challenged and criticized for its approach (developmental theory and method) to the childhood studies, within and outside the discipline, some of the critical voices are; Alldred and Burman (Greene, et al.,2005). Some of the sociology's dissatisfaction with psychology was mainly on some key issues as started by Greene (et al., 2005) are;

> "the perception that focus on development has led to the neglect of the quality and meaning of children's present lives, the search for universal laws of child development, the assumption that child development is natural (biologically based), a view of children as passive, and a focus on age-related competency/deficits rather than on subjective experiences" (Greene, et al.,2005).

John Flauvell (1992), admitted that the field of developmental psychology made an empirical study of children's cognitive development, but he criticized them of having a little about the children's subjective experiences. Cristtenson and Prout, described the psychological approach as only becoming prominent under the banner of the sociologist in the child development and childhood studies. Moreover, Sociologist criticized the focus of psychologist that cited age-related competencies in the process of knowing the child, argued that the developmental approach resulted to a detached and impoverished perception of children's need. They also differ in their perception of the nature of childhood as socially constructed. Such an argument was made by psychologist Kesen, (1979), who popularly argued that the child of developmental psychology was a cultural invention.

Besides, the work of Piaget on intelligence and child development has a universal effect on paediatrics care and practice, but other scholars criticized it. Archard started in Greene, et al., (2015) that;

> "Piaget suggested that all children acquire cognitive competencies according to a universal sequence".

Nevertheless, he has been criticized by on two grounds;

> "his ideal of adult cognitive competence is a peculiarly western philosophical, and children arguably possess some crucial competencies long before Piaget says they do"

According to Woolfolk, et al., 2013, in Thomas & Lewas (2022), the work of P.J disregards a Child's cultural and social. While this opinion was supported by Lev. Vygotsky. Vygotsky was interested in culture and symbolic tools. For example, how painting, signs, or art and language affects mental functioning.

Conclusion

This paper explores interdisciplinary approach in understanding childhood and child development, integrated ideas from some selected disciplines; such as, history, sociology, anthropology and psychology. The paper pointed out some dividends and limitation of various contributions made to the field of child development and childhood studies and how that enrich our contemporary understanding of child development interdisciplinary.

Interdisciplinary approach seen as the process where various disciplines or scholars shares interest or knowledge in an issue or a problem resulted in a positive solution to the complexity of a problem. Psychological research focused on the individual child. Sociologist viewed the children as a social group and concentrate on the aspects of socialization. Historians see a child as the future adult in the making and his childhood, therefore, has a symbolic link between the past and the present, while Anthropologist has been focusing on the children and their role in society and their place in the life-cycle and children's lives are strongly influenced by their culture.

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