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Clothing selection for preschool children in Abia state, Nigeria

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Abstract

The paper reviewed factors affecting clothing selection for preschool children in Abia State, Nigeria. Clothing as a learning tool for preschool children were also highlighted. The paper suggests clothing can be a shared experience between parent and child. Therefore, parents and teachers should be responsible for giving children numerous and various opportunities to promote their development, thinking and learning, expressing feelings, awareness of self and others, as well as communication.

Keywords: Clothing selection, preschool children, learning tool

Introduction

The preschool years are between the ages of two (2) to five (5) years. It is an exciting and active period for young children. The preschool years are an active time for young children (Santrock, 2005; Wolfe, 1989; Halliburton and Gable, 2002; Lloyd and Lederman 2002; Okeke, Madukwe, Eme, and Nwagbo, 2013; WHO, 2000) [17, 23, 8, 11, 12, 22]. The developmental tasks of the preschool children as enumerated by Birren, Kinney, Schaie and Woodruff (1981) [3] and Ezirim (2001) [6] include such things as learning to walk and take solid foods, initiating verbal communication, controlling the elimination of bodily wastes and learning the solid implication of sex differences. Similarly, Fickler (2003) [7] stated that between the ages of two and five years, children gain independence and the initiative to try new skills. While exploring their expanded world, they make huge strides in physical, social, language, emotional and mental development. Therefore, parents find this period of tremendous change baffling, amusing and frustrating.

Their independence and initiative enable them to explore their world in new ways. Therefore, parents and teachers should be responsible for giving children numerous and various opportunities to promote their development, thinking and learning, expressing feelings, awareness of self and others, as well as communication (Halliburton and Gable, 2002; Papilla, Old, and Feldman, 2002; Pilsner-Feinberg, 2004) [8, 13, 14]. Clothes that make a child look different from others may cause him or her to feel strange, be ridiculed and become withdrawn or rebellious (Wolfe, 1989) [23].

Children's wears provide opportunities to designers to experiment with colour decoration and design details. Presently, fabric producers are focusing on children's wear with special weaves and finishes such as soft denim or felted with fabric designers to produce new exciting prints (Priest and Pullen, 1990) [16].

Apparel for growing children may be classified roughly into three groups: infant's, children's and girls'. The infants' clothing extends to about two years. The children's from two to eight years and the girls' from eight to sixteen. Boys clothing are about the same as girls'. However, these do not represent sizes, but ages. Hence, the girls' sixteen dress should not be mistaken for misses' size sixteen found in another shop (Pepin, 2004) [15].

Factors affecting clothing selection for preschool children

Several factors influence the selection of clothing for infants and children. The comfort, practicality and safety are important considerations to make in this regard. In addition to these, it is also necessary to consider the climate, finance, the availability of laundry facilities, the colour and feature of the fabric (Cock, 1996; Wolfe, 1989) [4, 23].

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The factors affecting the clothing selection for preschool children have been highlighted as follows:

i. Appropriateness

Fabrics for children's clothes should be soft, absorbent and light weight for comfort (Tondl, 1984) ^[19]. According to Wolfe (1989) ^[23], preschooler's clothing should have adequate fullness where needed for freedom of movement. Allowance should be provided at the armholes, pant legs and crotch. It is necessary to make the provision since tight clothing have been observed to bind and restrict movement. Moreover, the author mentioned that toddlers and preschoolers need clothes that are built for comfortable and constant action. Their garments should also be well designed. Shoulder straps should be wide and crisscross in the back. Straps and pants that keep falling off cause frustration which can create a resentment toward dressing.

Several authors (Tondl, 1984; Wolfe, 1989; Duncan, 2004) ^[19, 23, 5] recorded that some form of trim can make a garment special to a child. Trimmings such as decorative machine stitching, embroidery, smocking, ribbons, braids, rickrack, appliques, ruffles, lace and bias binding may be considered. However, the care requirements should be suitable to the fabric.

ii. Practicality

It has been observed that children like to run, crawl and climb therefore their clothes must be able to withstand the wear and tear of active play. Fabrics should be tightly woven or knitted. Denim, corduroy, broadcloth, and firmly knitted fabrics are all good choices. Special features such as reinforced seams or reinforced knees, will help extend the garment's life. Light, soft but durable, easy -to- wash clothes are best for active children (Weber, 1990) ^[21].

Durable, sturdy fabrics that will withstand both the actions of the children and repeated washings should be chosen. Their garments should also be easy to launder. Firm, knits and firmly woven fabrics such as denims, poplins, broadcloths, and corduroys are adequate. Loosely woven and knitted fabrics that may snag or catch should be avoided (Duncan, 2004) ^[5]. Similarly, Tondl (1984) ^[19] and Duncan (2004) ^[5] recorded that denim, poplin, duck and many synthetic knits have a reputation for toughness and are ideal for play clothes. Polyester cotton blends can provide comfort, durability and easy care. Fabrics that may be rough or scratchy should be avoided since they may irritate the child's skin. Children prefer soft absorbent fabrics that do not scratch.

According to Wolfe (1989) ^[23] and Duncan (2004) ^[5] corduroy textured fabrics and prints help to hide wrinkles and soil. The best fabrics have soil and stain resistance. They should be permanent pressed, provide wrinkle resistance and easy care. Printed fabrics do not show soil or wrinkle as easily as solid colours. Printed designs stripes and plaids should be small and in proportion to the child's size. Large, splashy prints and large plaids are overpowering and out of proportion to a child's small size. It is necessary to ensure that printed fabrics are printed on the straight grain of the fabric.

Children's clothing should be constructed with only colourfast, washable fabrics. Several authors (Tondl, 1984, Wolfe, 1989; Duncan, 2004) ^[19, 23, 5] remarked that children's garments should be attractive in colour and style. They like bright colours such as red, blue and yellow. Colour fastness, shrinkage resistance, permanent press, flame resistance, soil resistance and wash ability are other fiber and fabric characteristics to consider when selecting fabrics for

children's clothes. Printed fabrics do not show soil or wrinkle as easily as solid colours.

iii. Growth features

Children outgrow their clothes fast if they do not have built-in growth features. Growth features allow garments to be 'expanded' as children grow. This does not suggest that children's garments should be far too big. Children's clothes should fit but also have features for growth. Clothes with growth features should have simple designs. They should also have large necklines. (Wolfe, 1989; Duncan, 2004) ^[23, 5]. Sleeveless armholes, raglan or kimono sleeves allow for expansion since there are no defined end to the shoulder in those designs. Large necklines and wrap styles have been shown to be adequate. Also, elastic waistbands and stretch fabrics adapt to growth (Wolfe, 1989) ^[23].

Children's sizes are based on chest, waist and height measurements. Children's clothes should always be bought large. Children have been shown to grow taller much faster than they grow wider. Therefore, their garments should have deep hem allowance that can be lengthened easily. Shoulder straps should be extra long so that the buttons can be adjusted as the child grows (Weber, 1990) ^[21]. Similarly, Duncan (2004) ^[5] Tondl (1984) ^[19] reported that children grow taller much faster than they grow wider, Length adjustments are the most important. Growth tucks can be added above the hem line on a child's dress to allow for lengthening. The additional length for tucking must be added before the pattern is cut and must also be considered when buying the fabric. Three rows of horizontal tucks each 1/2 inch (1.25cm) deep make for a decorative effect. Hence, the garment can be lengthened three inches (7.5 cm) without redoing the hem. Machine basting is suitable for tucks so that they can be easily removed later. Growth tucks can also be made with machine basting for easy removal lengthening (Aldrich, 1999; Aldrich, 2006; Hose good, 2006) ^[1-2, 9].

Growth tucks can be added on the lower part of long sleeves as a design touch. Tucks that are about 1/4 inch (0.63cm) deep should be made. Tucks are put in after underarm seams are sewn. Growth tucks can be added at the shoulders to increase shoulder width. Here, two 1/8 inch (0.31cm) tucks on each shoulder can be added to either the inside or outside of the bodice. It is necessary to alter both the bodice front and back pattern pieces before cutting fabric (Tondl, 1984; Wolfe, 1989) ^[19, 23]. Tucks should be released as the child needs width. A waistline tuck can be made above the waist-line seam using the same method. In this case, one or two inches (2.5 cm or 5 cm) can be added in length to the bodice before cutting the pattern (Duncan, 2004) ^[5]. However, if darts are involved the length of darts should be extended. The growth tucks should be sewn in before attaching bodice to skirt. The depth of tucks should be one-half the width of the addition. The tuck should be pressed up. The bodice length can be increased by releasing tuck. In addition to these, the crease lines should be covered when the tucks are let out (Tondl, 1984) ^[19]. Belt or trim can be used in covering any fade marks (Duncan, 2004) ^[5].

Garments should have wide hems and cuffs that can be let down. Definite waistlines is a growth feature. However, if clothes have shoulder straps, they should be adjustable. Cuffs which are added to the sleeves of the garment help in adding length (Wolfe, 1989; Tondl, 1984) ^[23, 19]. Garment styles that 'grow' with the child, such as raglan sleeves and elasticized waist should be chosen. It is better to choose simple patterns that have ruffles or tucks added for additional length. Two-

piece garments can be worn longer than one - piece garment since they are easier to lengthen. Besides, garments without waistlines can usually be worn longer than those with waistlines. Styles that are worn as tops with pants when they become too short for dresses should be considered. In addition, loose, fitting styles that will soon become too snug should be looked for (Wolfe, 1989) ^[23].

Moreover, Tondl (1984) ^[19] observed that when a pattern with a waistline seam is chosen, the waist circumference of the bodice and skirt should be increased by 1 inch (2.5cm) in order to allow for growth. Also, 1/4 inch (0.62cm) should be added to each side of the seam of the bodice and skirt, tapering out from original seam lines. Back dart if any should be omitted. A casing of bias tape should be made along the inside back waistline seam. Furthermore, the author stated that narrow elastic should be preshrunk and inserted into the casing.

Consequently, Duncan (2004) ^[5] wrote that one end of the elastic should be stitched in place by machine or hand, leaving any extra length of elastic inside the garment. The elastic should either be let out or completely removed for increase in length. Bulk can be reduced by stitching the elastic into the seam without using a casing. If the garment has straps add a little extra length to the button end. The button can be moved down as the child grows. Fullness should be adjusted to fit the child, then the other end of the elastic should be fastened inside the garment.

iv. Self - Help Features

Children's garments should be easy for them to manage. During the third year, children become aware of clothing and show interest in dressing and undressing themselves. They develop greater independence and responsibility if they can put on and also remove their garments themselves. Therefore, their clothes should have self-help features (Wolfe, 1989) ^[23]. Features of the garment should allow the child to dress without assistance. Children find it easier to manipulate front closures with large fasteners than back fasteners. The front of the garment should be distinguished from the back such that the child will have less tendency to wear it backwards (Tondl, 1984) ^[19]. The armholes should be large. Closings should be easy to fasten and also located in front where they will be visible and operated. Elastic waistlines enable children to pull pants on and off by themselves (Wolfe, 1989; Igbo and Iloeje, 2012) ^[23, 10].

Similarly, Weber (1990) ^[21] reported that one- piece garment that fall from the shoulders, shirts and sweaters that button up the front or on the shoulder all make it easier to dress the child. Pants with elastic waistlines are easier to pull up and down for toilet training than pants with shoulder straps. Large buttons, snaps and zippers with oversize pull tabs are good chances. Hooks and eyes, laces and tiny buttons are usually too complicated for the toddler to manage alone.

v. Safety

It is very essential to consider the issue of safety when buying clothes for children. Infants and young children like to put things in their mouths therefore, buttons and trims which a child could swallow should be sewn firmly. Also, avoid garments with flowing sleeves or long hemlines. Such garments could get caught during play, and the child could get hurt (Weber, 1990) ^[21].

According to Wolfe (1989) ^[23], children's clothes should make room for safety features such as flame resistant especially for night wear. Styles with long flowing skirts, tie belts,

drawstrings, or very full sleeves should be avoided. Trims firmly attached and placed where they will not disturb the child. Nevertheless, children's outwear should make provision from severe weather such that the fabrics will be water repellent and also provide warmth without having heavy weight. Heavy stains should not be placed on the shoulders. Bulky clothes can restrict proper posture.

vi. Easy Care

Small children lead active lives therefore their clothing requires frequent laundering. Some stains such as grass, formula and some foods and juices will need special treatment. It is necessary to check the hangtags and labels carefully for fabrics and care information when buying children's clothing. Besides these, if you are sewing the garment, you need to read the label on the fabrics. Words such as permanent press, soil- retardation, stain repellent, colour and shrink- resistance should be noted. People are happy when children's garments can be laundered quickly and easily (Weber, 1990) ^[21].

vii. Quality of clothing item

Wolfe (1989) ^[23] explained that to determine the quality of a clothing item, the individual should turn the clothing item inside out, looking carefully at the seams. It is necessary to find out whether the seams are secure. It is also essential to find out whether the edges were finished well. Furthermore, check whether the weaves as well as the colour of the cloth are even. Looking at the outside, find out whether there are any pulled threads, smudges or stain? (Wolfe, 1989; Pepin, 2004) ^[23, 15].

Clothing as a learning tool for preschool children

Clothing has in recent years become an important issue, even for growing children. According to Warren (2003) ^[20], most people do not think of clothes as a learning tool for young children. However, clothes have been found to be a perfect medium for parents to introduce size, colour, number and purpose to their children. The author highlighted the skills taught by clothes as follows:-

Arts skills

Children can learn designs and patterns by looking at clothes. They can also learn colours and shades of colours. Most children have been observed to prefer bright colours especially the primary colours. Red and yellow are the first two colours a baby can recognize. Bright colours tend to stimulate children. Language skills - Rough, soft, warm, silky can describe an article of clothing (Wolfe, 1989; Weber, 1990; Priest and Pullen, 1990; Warren, 2003) ^[23, 21, 16, 20].

Coordination skills

Important coordination skills are learnt with clothing. Working with buttons, zippers, for example help children become more coordinated and self- sufficient. Children also enjoy wearing clothes that are decorated with interesting trims and designs. It has also been shown that young children like fabrics that are soft and pleasant to touch such as corduroy, flannel, terry cloth, cotton, velveteen and quilted fabrics. Furthermore, children have to dress up themselves, therefore hook and loop fasteners should be attached to their clothes instead of buttons and button holes (Wolfe, 1989; Weber, 1990; Priest and Pullen, 1990; Warren, 2003) ^[23, 21, 16, 20].

Mathematics skills

Clothing usually contains shapes such as circles, or triangles which children can be familiar with. They notice differences in size and types (Wolfe, 1989; Weber, 1990; Priest and Pullen, 1990; Warren, 2003) ^[23, 21, 16, 20].

Science skills

Children can acquire experiences in sizes and designs while they are growing larger, their clothes are not. Clothes are specifically designed to meet the special needs of children. Society did not always recognize these different needs until 1990's, children were dressed like miniature adults. They wore scaled down versions of the dresses, suits, hats, shoes and stockings that their parents wore. Presently, children's wear is a separate and very important part of the clothing industry (Duncan, 2004; Simplicity Sewing, 2004) ^[5, 18].

Social skills

Clothing from different countries can introduce cultural awareness. Preschool children are expected to form concepts and to learn language that describe both social and physical reality. In addition to this, they must learn to distinguish right from wrong and therefore develop a conscience. Hence, in preparation for further socialization, preschool children also learn that signs can stand for words (Wolfe, 1989; Weber, 1990; Priest and Pullen, 1990; Warren, 2003) ^[89, 21, 16, 20].

Problem solving skills

Children can learn to make choices when they select an outfit among others. Beside this, children like to run, crawl and climb, therefore their clothes should be able to withstand the wear and tear of active play. Therefore, they like clothes they can use for all types of creative play (Wolfe, 1989; Weber, 1990; Priest and Pullen, 1990; Warren, 2003).

Conclusion

Clothing can be a shared experience between parent and child. Allowing preschool children to help choose their clothes at the time of purchase insures that they will wear the garments. It is also necessary to make provision for growth features in children's garments which allow clothes to be expanded as children grow taller than they grow wider.

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