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STATE OF THE ART OF PSYCHOMOTOR EDUCATION AT THE PRESCHOOL LEVEL IN THE COMMUNE OF PORTO-NOVO IN BENIN

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Abstract:
Context: In general, well-conducted psychomotor activities promote harmonious development and have a positive impact on children's health. These activities also condition the acquisition and improvement of the child's global motor skills. In the Commune of Porto-Novo, incomplete motor skills are observed among primary school children in both the public and private sectors. This is why the present study aims to investigate the causes of this observation in kindergarten in order to propose approaches to remedy it. **Materials and Method**: Twenty-seven (27) teachers from both public kindergartens with at least 100 pupils (15) and private kindergartens with at least 70 pupils (12) were randomly selected. They were grouped according to spontaneous, hidden and evoked interventions. Spontaneous and hidden interventions represent practices that are not conducive to children's psychomotor development, whereas evoked intervention was found to be the best option for promoting children's psychomotor

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development. Data were collected through individual semi-directive interviews and open observation in the classrooms. These data were analyzed and the percentages were compared. **Results**: Only 8 teachers (29.63%) practiced an evoked intervention. However, 19 teachers (70.37%) practiced either spontaneous (11) or covert (8) intervention. The comparison of these observed percentages shows a significant difference ($p<0.05$) at the 5% risk. **Conclusion**: The incomplete achievements observed at the primary level are due to the lack of space, and teaching materials and especially to the lack of knowledge of the concept of psychomotricity and its implications. Initial training that deviates from these requirements does not seem to be conducive to the harmonious psychomotor development of kindergarten children.

Keywords: psychomotor development, preschool education, educational program, Porto-Novo

1. Introduction

Sport and physical education should be seen as key instruments for achieving the goals of sustainable development. Physical activities have widely demonstrated their potential to break down barriers between generations, genders, religions, castes, origins and nationalities. They are, by their universal scope, useful tools for the achievement of many sustainable development goals (UN, n. d. b). Physical education must, in this respect, be popularized among young people, the best way being to include it in pre-school education up to secondary school, which corresponds well to the principle of quality education.

In Benin, several reforms have marked the life of the school, from primary education to higher education, including secondary, general, technical and vocational education. Thus, since the early 2000s, several evaluations of the Beninese education system at the primary level have been conducted by the CONFEMEN education systems analysis program. At the end of the last evaluation in 2019, it was found that the performance of pupils is quite low and is similar to that revealed since the evaluations of 2000 and 2006. All in all, the successive assessments show that Beninese pupils learn little. Their skills are far below those provided by the general curriculum (STP-PDDSE, 2018). We will then have to go back to kindergarten to understand the reasons for this phenomenon.

Kindergarten education has been very little affected by these reforms. However, psychologists and specialist researchers are now unanimous in recognizing that 'everything happens before the age of six' (MEMP, 2009). In 2011, the MEMP launched the implementation process of its new preschool program with the technical and financial support of the NGO Right To Play. This program, which includes five major areas of child development, has been made available to preschool teachers for implementation. Of these five areas, only one is of real interest to us in this research. This is the domain of physical well-being and motor development.

This domain refers to children's psychomotor development, but also and above all to the teachers' knowledge of psychomotor competence, which, it should be remembered, is at the heart of preschoolers' development. To accompany these teachers in their mission, the NGO Right To Play has developed a support document based on free play and sports activities to promote children's development. However, neither the MEMP program nor the Right To Play guidance document defines a clear plan for teachers to carry out these psychomotor activities. This planning should be based on the different components of psychomotor skills to be developed in early childhood. Worse still, the psychomotor activities proposed are not based on prior knowledge of the children's real abilities as soon as they enter nursery school. Motor practices should consist of planned movement activities that are specific to development and instruction. Does the pre-school program in Benin's nursery schools meet this principle?

In kindergarten, children's participation in activities, as well as being in an environment where teachers encourage them, promotes normal development and affects children's overall health (Piek et al., 2008). If gross motor development is not mastered, children may experience lifelong difficulties in acquiring later motor skills. Therefore, gross motor development is essential, but despite this, many preschool teachers neglect the importance of motor development (Clark, 2008). What, then, are the organizational conditions put in place by teachers in Benin's preschool classrooms? What are the main interventions strategies used?

Thus, we realize that little is known about what is actually done in kindergarten classes. It seems important to us to go and see how psychomotor education is experienced in a singular way in pre-school. This lack of knowledge is at the origin of our research and it is useful to document this phenomenon. To do this, this research proposed to take stock of the practice of psychomotor education in preschools in order to determine whether it meets the requirements of psychomotor development in children.

2. Methodological approach

The objective of the research is to take stock of psychomotor practice in pre-schools in the commune of Porto-Novo. Thus, we define the stages and choices of the research approach.

This study is subdivided into two phases: In the first phase, we organized interviews with the teachers to gather information on their daily reality and on their conception of teaching, learning and psychomotricity. Then, in a second step, we went to the field for observation in the classroom in order to inquire about the real organizational conditions, the strategies as well as the exercises proposed by the teachers within the framework of the psychomotor practice of the children (Table 1). In short, the aim is to observe how psychomotor education is carried out in the kindergarten classroom.

Table 1: Modality of intervention approaches

Interviews with teachers	**Teaching, learning and psychomotor conception**
Classroom observation	What did they do
	Content of their psychomotor activities
	The reasons for the choice of activities

2.1 Framework and type of research

Our study is of a cross-sectional type with an analytical aim, carried out in 24 public and 134 private pre-schools and the pre-school children enrolled in these schools in the commune of Porto-Novo.

2.2 Population and sampling

The study took into account public schools with a minimum of 100 pupils and public schools with a minimum of 70 pupils. We thus have 15 public schools and 12 public schools in our sample. Most of the public schools have an enrolment that sometimes exceeds the enrolment of10 public schools. We also decided to limit our research to the age group of 2 to 5 years for two reasons: firstly, it is between 0 and 6 years that the psychomotor evolution is more marked.

After this period, the child constantly refines his or her acquisitions. Secondly, children from 0 to 2 years of age develop and acquire muscle tone regulation step by step, while children from2 to 5 years of age are already walking and developing other psychomotor skills that are of great interest to us. In each school, a single pedagogical group was also randomly selected, as well as the teachers in these groups. As a result, we have 27 teachers participating in our research. In order to get a better understanding of the object of study, several variables were investigated in this research.

2.3 Dependent variables

- Initial training of teachers;
- The way psychomotor activities are implemented;
- Teachers' perceptions of child development, learning, the concept of psychomotor skills and its components.

2.4 Independent variables

Components of psychomotor skills.

2.5 Data collection

After obtaining the necessary authorizations from the school authorities at various levels, we visited the 15 public and 12 private pre-schools in the sample. We used two modes of data collection: individual semi-directive interviews and open observation in the classrooms. It is important to note that after collecting information from the 27 teachers in our sample, we noticed that for several of them, the classroom observations were very similar. We then decided to group them according to three types of intervention. These are "spontaneous intervention", which includes 11 teachers, "hidden intervention", which includes 8 teachers, and "evoked intervention", which also includes 8 teachers.

The research carried out required a progressive construction of the phenomenon studied to allow for an interactive process between the elements related to the data collection and the research object. Consequently, we had to use an analytical approach based on embedded theorising, which allows us to start from a pre-construction of the object of study towards a co construction of this same object with the actors in the field.

3. Results

Before beginning the presentation of the data, it should be noted that all the teachers attended a teacher training college.

3.1 Spontaneous intervention

The first type of intervention, which we called "spontaneous practice", corresponds to teachers who make very little use of all the components of psychomotricity and who intervene in the heat of the moment, intuitively, to respond to everyday requests and problems. Moreover, the meaning given to their practice is based on intentions that are translated into habits or automatisms. The actions taken are not necessarily aimed at psychomotor competence; they are based more, as St-Arnaud (1996) mentions, on non-conscious dimensions of the action, in routine activities.

3.2 Hidden intervention

The second type of intervention corresponds to teachers who demonstrate a "hidden" and abstract practice. This type of intervention refers to teachers who are at odds between "spontaneous" intervention and "evoked" intervention (which we will see later) in the sense that they have a discourse that has some conceptual clarity, but is not translated into their practice.

These teachers use all the components of psychomotricity in a moderate way. Like the first type of intervention, psychomotor activities are integrated into routine activities and relate more to habits and automatisms. The place that teachers give to psychomotor activities is further supported by the definition they give to the child's need to move. This emphasis on the child's need to move differentiates them from the teachers of the first type of intervention.

3.3 Evoked intervention

This third type corresponds to teachers who explicitly express the actions taken and the intentions that guide these actions. They have an "evoked practice" of the actions taken, reasons for acting, motives and goals that make it possible to objectify the meaning of the action. This profile tends toward a dimension of explicit and reflective practice to account for their action.

Beaudoin and Friedrich (2001) speak of a self-interpretation between "doing" and "saying".

4. Discussion

We note, through the syntheses, diversified and nuanced practices that are identified and grouped into "types of intervention". That is to say, beyond individual particularities, it was possible to identify constants and principles of action that led to types of intervention.

To this end, St-Arnaud (1996) defines three categories of intentions that relate directly to the response to psychological needs: desires, or habits. We see the distinction of these categories of intention in the presentation of the types of intervention. For example, a teacher who satisfies the needs of security will be inclined towards pedagogical actions mobilized by habits and automatisms, whereas a teacher who is situated in the needs of competence or coherence will guide her pedagogical actions by projects or desires.

4.1 Spontaneous intervention

The teachers with "spontaneous practice" made very little use of all the psychomotor components. They represent 40.74% of all teachers. As this type of practice was the most significant in the sample, we observe that the gross motor and spatial organization components were the most used of all the components. Moreover, laterality is absent in their practice. This weak use of psychomotricity components raises questions about the application methods used in the classroom to meet the requirements of the MEMP program.

These teachers use psychomotor activities to respond to the children's everyday manifestations or to problems encountered from time to time. Interventions related to psychomotor competence are either emergency interventions based on the needs expressed by the pupils or, on the contrary, they are part of the usual planning, depending on the situation.

4.2 Hidden intervention

For these teachers, the planning of psychomotor activities is integrated into their daily routine.

They represent 29.63% of the total number of teachers. They fit the profile of a "spontaneous practice" insofar as habits and automatisms guide their teaching actions, their questioning and set their limits. In this sense, their planning is often intuitive, based on requests or problems encountered rather than on the development of psychomotor skills. That is to say, their planning is adjusted according to the context of implementation, and the availability of space and time.

For these teachers, there is a gap between what they can say about their practice and what they do. Sometimes they are very explicit in their discourse on the place given to psychomotor skills in their class, for example, in the workshops where they can briefly name the psychomotor learning achieved by the children. However, psychomotor activities are hardly or not at all present in their planning.

4.3 Evoked intervention

In contrast to the first two types of intervention, the participants with an "evoked" practice orient their actions based on the category linked to the project. Most of the time, the psychomotor activities experienced in the classroom or elsewhere were planned. The plans refer to human and documentary resources. These teachers represent only 29.63% of the workforce, and although they are not in the majority, their pedagogical actions related to psychomotor skills are based on very specific goals related either to the components of psychomotor skills or to the needs of the child. In addition, they can target psychomotor learning achieved by children during free activities. As a result, they have a good knowledge of the components of psychomotricity and its influences on the child's overall development.

In summary, Table 2 shows the proportion of teachers corresponding to each type of intervention in our research.

Table 2: Proportion of teachers corresponding to each type of intervention

Spontaneous Intervention	Hidden Intervention	Evoked Intervention
11 teachers	8 teachers	8 teachers
40,74 %	**29,63** %	**29,63** %

From this table, we can see that only eight of the twenty-seven teachers in our sample engage in the practice of psychomotricity, which represents 29.63%. We also note that the teachers who engage in psychomotricity either spontaneously or in a hidden way are limited by the lack of space, teaching materials to a lesser extent, and above all by the lack of knowledge of the concept of psychomotricity and its implications, despite their initial training in teacher training colleges. As for the strategy of intervention, we notice that they intervene in the heat of the action, in an intuitive way to answer solicitations and problems in everyday life or, have difficulties implementing in a practical way their speech. We note that none of the teacher's had previously carried out a so-called "diagnostic" assessment and then proposed an intervention adapted to the children's level. In sum, we find that there is a real problem with the teaching of psychomotor skills in preschools in Benin.

The results of this study corroborate the findings of Gagen and Getchell, (2006) in that free play is often the only opportunity for children to participate in movement activities. While this may encourage movement, it does not promote the learning of fundamental motor skills. Motor practices should consist of planned movement activities that are developmentally specific (Valentin and Rudisil, 2004; Robinson and Goodway, 2009). Thus, a psychomotor development program cannot be implemented without first knowing the children's developmental potential and level.

5. Conclusion

In short, this study has enabled us to take stock of psychomotor practice in pre-schools in the commune of Porto-Novo. The results show that 70.37% of the teachers in our sample engage in either spontaneous or hidden practices. According to St-Arnaud (1996),

these practices are not conducive to the psychomotor development of children in terms of applied pedagogy.

However, 29.63% of the teachers in the sample engaged in a practice mentioned. However, 29.63% of the teachers in the sample engage in a practice mentioned above, which is the best option for promoting and supporting children's psychomotor development. The incomplete achievements observed at the primary level can be explained by the high proportion of teachers who practice interventions that are not conducive to the psychomotor development of kindergarten children. This is due to the lack of space, teaching materials and, above all, ignorance of the concept of psychomotricity and its implications, despite initial training in teacher training colleges.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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