



Communicating Innovative Potentials of Students through Creative Drama in Preparatory Secondary School, Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Background: Creativity is essential for invention, innovation, and personal development, yet it appears under-appreciated in many formal educational settings. Despite the benefits of creative dramatics in enhancing innovative potentials, there is a dearth of research on its implementation in Nigerian secondary schools, particularly in Calabar.

Objective: This study examined how the innovative potentials of students could be cultivated through creative dramatics at Calabar Preparatory International School.

Method: The study adopted a qualitative research design. A total of 25 participants, 20 students from two arms of Junior Secondary School One (JSS1) and 5 teachers were selected using random sampling. Primary data were collected through observation and interviews, while data analysis was conducted narratively.

Results: Findings revealed that both students and teachers initially had little or no knowledge of creative drama, and students exhibited low confidence during pre-test activities. The students were post-tested and the students' performance significantly improved, demonstrating increased creativity and teamwork.

Conclusion: The study concludes that creative drama is an effective method for cultivating students' innovative potentials, enhancing confidence, collaborative skills, and creative thinking.

Unique Contribution: This study contributes to educational scholarship by providing empirical evidence of how creative drama can be integrated into school curricula to foster creativity and problem-solving skills.

Key Recommendation: The study recommends that teachers and instructors adopt creative drama techniques in teaching, while schools provide environments that encourage students to think independently, develop ideas, and engage in imaginative, interactive learning activities.

Key words: Communicating, Creativity, Drama, Innovation, Students, Potentials



INTRODUCTION

To best prepare students for what will likely be an unfamiliar and fast changing future, teachers and educational professionals today need to consider “21st century skills” among the tools students will need, and chief among those skills is creativity. An understanding of how and where creativity happens, from the perspective of adolescents, could provide valuable information to educators who seek to prepare students for the workforce of tomorrow. Innovation and creativity are fundamental to all academic disciplines and educational activities, not just the arts (Nsude & Nwafor, 2016). The creative process is a critical component of making sense of learning experiences. Postmodern society places new demands on individuals on a daily basis due to the evolution of trends in practically all spheres of life (the arts, sciences, technology, fashion, and entertainment, to mention but a few). Therefore, schools all over the world need to look more towards cultivating the creative abilities of students, enabling them to have the ability to cooperate in group processes and acquire information.

Creative drama is a non-exhibitional, process-oriented form of drama in which participants are guided by a facilitator to imagine, enact, and reflect on both real and imagined experiences. According to Igbe (2021) and Okoro and Nwafor (2015), participatory communication encourages collective contributions by drawing on the ideas and inputs of multiple individuals to address shared problems. Scholars further describe participatory communication as “a tool of mobilization which many researchers have used to gain the attention of their participants” (p. 46). Within this framework, creative drama serves as an alternative theatre approach for children, with significant potential to enhance both their academic performance and social skills. According to Igbe (2021), it is a type of theatre used for educational purposes that helps children work on social skills and academic subjects using theatre games and improvisations while being led by a trained instructor. It provides a safe environment for students to explore behavior, ideas, creativity, and school subjects. Ultimately, creative drama is an out-of-the-box approach to learning that engages imagination, concentration, and sensory awareness in the child’s learning process.

According to Saad (2019), “creative drama is one of the most effective tools for improving communication and thinking skills. The use of creative drama technique in the classroom is student centered, in which learning process results in the development of the students of any curriculum” (p. 71). Creative drama processes require a leader or tutor who is well skilled to lead children through the process. Jack (2018) defines creative drama as “an improvisational form of theatre in which participants are guided by a leader to imagine, enact and reflect on human experiences” (p. 67). Similarly, the American Alliance for Theatre and Education (AATE, 2016) defines creative drama as “a group creation of a play under the guidance of a leader, using the theatrical techniques of pantomime and voice improvisation; it is improvisational, non-exhibitional, reflective and most importantly, process-oriented” (p. 135). Creative drama focuses more on the process rather than the product. It is more concerned with the measures the child takes towards achieving a particular goal, even if the expected goal is not achieved. Creative dramatics is solely about process and building the necessary skills for students to participate in activities, helping them develop new understandings of themselves and the world around them,



and become skilled in new ways to communicate through voice and body (Anderberg & Kratochvil, 2017, p. 3).

The process of creative drama enables children to think critically and creatively, grooming them to become highly creative individuals capable of thriving in confronting situations. Although creative drama instruction differs in its specific methods and emphasis, what remains central is that it is always improvised and playful. Play is essential to children's creative drama activities because it fosters the development of cognitive and affective processes fundamental to creative performance (Yeh, 2015, p. 135).

Creative drama makes special use of theatre in schools and educational institutions and does not require many facilities; therefore, it can be particularly helpful for schools in Nigeria and other educational centers that lack such facilities. Creative drama can act as a new and effective tool in the educational system. In the process of creative drama, children who inherently possess creative and impudent minds are provided opportunities to display their creativity. Psychologists such as Lev Vygotsky (1978) believe that creativity manifests in the early years of a child's life and is closely tied to imagination. Children tend to be more creative and productive in learning processes involving play, particularly drama. They integrate creativity and personal experiences or imagination into play. Since creative drama is not a structured play, children have the freedom to structure their actions and dialogue creatively.

Improvisational drama challenges children to imaginatively make, share, and respond to each other's ideas, collaboratively co-authoring new narratives, and encompasses considerable spontaneity and playfulness (Cremin, 2015, p. 3). Creative drama emphasizes collective group work while also valuing individual achievements. Lorie (2016) describes creative drama as "a holistic approach to academic learning that creates trust among students through shared understanding and collaboration" (p. 7). A creative drama approach grounded in experiential learning and group dynamics relies on improvisational role-playing of pretense themes often indirectly related to students' real-life problems (Toivanen et al., 2013, p. 170). Environment plays a significant role in creativity, and creativity-friendly environments enhance students' creative development. According to Besançon, Fenouillet, and Shankland (2015), flexibility and creativity help individuals cope with rapid societal changes and are essential components of problem-solving processes (p. 105).

Creativity development among children is realized through play, enabling peer interaction and imaginative engagement. In Nigeria, Osemwegie (2018) evaluated the effects of creative dramatics in schools and found that although teachers recognize its value, many hesitate to use it due to insufficient training (p. 25). The purpose of creative drama is to create an interactive and positive learning environment in which knowledge construction occurs through social relationships (Toivanen et al., 2013). Creative drama differs from dramatic play due to the leader's training and structured environment, while still fostering imagination across subjects such as mathematics, science, social studies, and language arts (Edward, 2014, p. 95).



Creative drama develops problem-solving skills through improvisation and use of available resources (Edward, 2014). Tulay (2012) argues that creative drama holds hidden educational values deserving a prominent place in school curricula (p. 93). Abone (2011) describes creative drama as “the most valuable tool in contemporary education” (as cited in Okonkwo, 2016, p. 47). Creative drama fosters divergent thinking, communication skills, confidence, cooperation, and self-discipline (Allen, 2017; Ehrlich, 2010; Jacobson, 2014). It helps children discover themselves, understand others, and explore alternative solutions to problems (Okoronkwo, 2015; Caslin, 2013). Due to the complexities of the 21st century, creativity is now considered a premier skill necessary for adaptability, innovation, and survival (Kleibeuker et al., 2016; Aligwe et al., 2018). Creative drama supports self-actualisation, cooperation, and lifelong learning (Tulay, 2012). Creativity involves imagination and innovation, and adolescents’ brains are in rapid developmental stages where exposure to creative activities strengthens cognitive growth (Craft, 2005; Abone, 2011). Morrell (2012) emphasizes the importance of 21st-century skills for students navigating complex societies (p. 25).

Despite the growing body of literature emphasising creativity as a core 21st-century skill and recognizing creative drama as a powerful pedagogical tool, existing studies reveal several notable theoretical and empirical gaps. Much of the scholarship on creative drama has focused on its general educational benefits, such as improved communication, collaboration, and problem-solving skills (Saad, 2019; Tulay, 2012; Allen, 2017; Nwafor et al., 2013), with a strong concentration on early childhood education and arts-based learning contexts. While these studies establish the pedagogical value of creative drama, they tend to treat creativity as a broad outcome rather than interrogating *how creativity is experienced, constructed, and developed by adolescents themselves* within formal school environments. Furthermore, a significant proportion of existing research has been conducted in Western or non-African contexts, limiting the applicability of their findings to countries such as Nigeria, where educational resources, teacher preparation, and cultural attitudes toward drama-based pedagogy differ markedly. Although some Nigerian studies acknowledge the usefulness of creative drama (e.g., Osemwegie, 2018; Okonkwo, 2016), they primarily focus on teachers’ perceptions, curricular challenges, or general classroom outcomes. There remains a paucity of empirical research that examines creative drama as a structured pedagogical process for nurturing *adolescents’ creative potential*, particularly from the learners’ perspective. This study seeks to fill this gap by examining creative drama not merely as an instructional technique, but as a dynamic, process-oriented learning environment through which adolescents construct meaning, express creativity, and develop essential 21st-century skills.



OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The major aim of this study is to enable teachers, instructors, guardians alike, to have knowledge of creative drama and its techniques in teaching and cultivating the innovation potentials of adolescents students of Calabar Preparatory International School, Calabar. Other objectives include:

1. To examine teachers and instructor' knowledge of creative drama processes and techniques
2. To examine the extent to which adolescents of Calabar Preparatory International School are provided with opportunities and an enabling environment to generate, develop, and express their creative ideas.
3. To identify the challenges in developing creative potentials among adolescent students of Calabar Preparatory International School, Calabar
4. To delineate the effects of creative drama in fostering creative potentials of adolescents of Calabar Preparatory International School.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is based on a theory that describes the creative potentials of human being and stresses that creativity is the foundation for arts as well as for science and technology. This theory is Lev Vygotsky's Theory of social constructivism. Theory of social constructivism: Lev Vygotsky (1896 -1934) was a soviet psychologist who researched on children's learning in social and cultural contexts. In particular, his theory of 'social constructivism' discussed the importance of social interaction in children's cognitive development. Vygotsky was also very interested in creativity and imagination and how these were understood in education. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory views human development as a socially mediated process in which children acquire their cultural values, beliefs, and problem solving strategies through collaborative dialogues with more knowledgeable members of the society. Vygotsky's theory is comprised of concepts such as culture-specific tools, private speech and the zone of proximal development. This is also very evident in the creative drama process because it is usually made up of a group of student which forms the social part of the theory and participants in creative drama are usually guided by a leader, instructor or teacher, this also relate to a part of the theory which is that of proximal development.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research method, as it was best suited to address the research questions and objectives focused on developing the innovative potentials of students through creative drama. The study was conducted in Calabar Municipality, a Local Government Area in Cross River State, Nigeria, with the accessible population being teachers and adolescent students of Calabar Preparatory International School. The students involved in the study were aged 9–12 years, while the teachers ranged from 25–45 years, with the school having a total population of



802, comprising 752 students and 50 teachers. A sample of 25 respondents, consisting of 20 students and 5 teachers, was selected using a random sampling technique to ensure that each member of the population had an equal chance of being included. Data were collected through observation and interviews and were analysed narratively to provide detailed insights into the impact of creative drama on the students' innovative potentials.

RESULT

Research Question One: Do teachers and instructors know and use the creative drama approach in teaching?

The findings from the interviews conducted among five teachers of Calabar Preparatory International School revealed that teachers have limited knowledge and exposure to creative drama as an instructional method. Out of the five teachers, two had a partial understanding of the concept. Miss Evelyn James defined creative drama as “a process whereby you help the children, make them have their own idea on a particular thing they are being taught to have more ideas,” while Mrs. Rachel Asuquo described it as “a short play that is acted with the children to educate them about whatever activities in the school.” These definitions, while touching on elements of student-centered learning and participation, lack the depth of formal creative drama principles, such as improvisation, non-exhibitional process orientation, and reflective engagement (American Alliance for Theatre and Education, 2016; Jack, 2018). One teacher, Mr. Echeng Echeng, had only a vague familiarity with creative drama, describing it as “something that sounds familiar,” and the remaining two teachers, Mr. Ejiro Marho and Miss Favour George, had no knowledge of the approach. Further, none of the teachers reported using creative drama in their classroom practices.

Despite the lack of knowledge and use, all teachers expressed willingness to incorporate creative drama into the school curriculum once they received proper training. Two teachers who demonstrated some understanding attributed the absence of creative drama in teaching to environmental and systemic factors, including school facilities and the structure of the Nigerian educational system. This aligns with Osemwegie (2018), who found that teachers in Nigerian schools are aware of creative dramatics but rarely implement it due to insufficient training and the rigidity of the curriculum. Hisham (2019) also emphasizes that creative drama is a highly effective tool for improving students' communication and thinking skills, but its benefits can only be realized when teachers are adequately prepared to facilitate the process.

From a theoretical perspective, Vygotsky's social constructivist theory (1978) underscores the role of the More Knowledgeable Other (MKO) in guiding learners through social interaction to co-construct knowledge. The lack of teacher expertise identified in this study limits the potential for students to fully benefit from creative drama, as the teacher acts as the central facilitator in scaffolding students' creative thinking and problem-solving. The findings therefore highlight a critical need for teacher capacity building and professional development in creative drama to enable the practical application of this approach in schools and fully harness the creative potential of adolescents.



Research Question Two: Are adolescents of Calabar Preparatory International School given the opportunity and space to think up, develop, and exhibit their new ideas?

Observations and interviews with students and teachers at Calabar Preparatory International School revealed that adolescents are rarely provided opportunities to think independently, develop ideas, or express themselves creatively. The school predominantly follows a teacher-centered, traditional pedagogical approach, where students' participation is limited to answering questions directly related to the lesson content. This restrictive learning environment mirrors Yeh's (2015) assertion that creativity is suppressed in rigid classroom systems that limit play-based and improvisational learning.

However, when creative drama was introduced during the study, students gradually overcame initial shyness and timidity. Through role-play and improvisational exercises, participants were able to express themselves, generate ideas, and interact collaboratively with peers. For example, students created two improvisational plays on drug abuse and career choice, structuring their actions and dialogues based on their own ideas. Cremin (2015) argues that such improvisational activities encourage children to imaginatively make, share, and respond to ideas, promoting collaborative learning and co-authorship of new narratives. By observing the participants, it was evident that students began to value collective decision-making while simultaneously recognizing their individual contributions, illustrating the dual focus of creative drama on group and individual development (Tulay, 2012; Lorie, 2016).

The findings are consistent with Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist theory, which posits that knowledge is co-constructed through social interaction and that learners thrive in environments that allow active participation and collaborative problem-solving. In this study, the creative drama sessions created a Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), wherein students' latent creative potentials were activated with scaffolding from the facilitator and peer collaboration. This demonstrates that when adolescents are provided structured yet flexible environments to explore ideas, they can effectively develop creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills.

Research Question Three: What are the challenges in developing innovative potentials in students?

The study identified several key motivators for adolescents' creativity at Calabar Preparatory International School. Students' natural curiosity, concentration, and imaginative capacity emerged as primary drivers of creative engagement during the drama sessions. Participants were observed eagerly generating ideas, experimenting with scenarios, and working collaboratively to achieve group objectives. This finding aligns with Craft (2005), who emphasizes that imagination and curiosity are fundamental to children's creative development. Students' testimonies further reinforced this observation: one participant, Mary, noted that creative drama "gives her freedom of expression which aided her being free and intellectually decisive," while Victor described how he became more confident and assertive through participation. These



examples demonstrate that adolescents' intrinsic motivation can be harnessed effectively in environments that value creative exploration (Abone, 2011).

Despite these motivators, several challenges were highlighted that hinder the development of students' innovative potential. Teachers reported limited knowledge and experience in administering creative drama, reflecting a systemic gap in teacher training programs (Osemwegie, 2018). Additionally, the rigid structure of the Nigerian educational system and the marginalization of creative drama as an extracurricular activity restrict opportunities for creativity to flourish. This resonates with Besançon, Fenouillet, and Shankland (2015), who argue that creativity requires a flexible, supportive environment to thrive. Teachers' admission that they were never exposed to creative drama during professional training further underscores the structural and professional barriers impeding adolescents' creative growth.

Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist perspective explains that social and cultural contexts are critical for learning and creativity. In the current environment, the lack of systemic support and trained facilitators constrains adolescents' ability to co-construct knowledge and develop innovative skills. These findings suggest that addressing both environmental and professional development barriers is essential to fully realize the creative potential of students in Nigerian schools.

Research Question Four: How effective is creative drama in fostering creative potentials of adolescents?

The findings of this study indicate that creative drama is a highly effective method for fostering the creative potentials of adolescents. Observations revealed that students who were initially timid and hesitant gradually became confident, expressive, and capable of articulating their ideas. Participants demonstrated notable improvements in verbal communication, improvisational skills, problem-solving, brainstorming, and critical thinking. Bonaventure explained that creative drama "helped to develop his improvisational skills and to solve problems," while another participant shared that it made him "brave, bold and confident." These results corroborate Hisham (2019), who posits that creative drama enhances both communication and thinking skills, and Edward (2014), who emphasizes the role of improvisation in problem-solving and decision-making under pressure.

Creative drama also facilitated career exploration among students. During role-play activities, participants were able to reflect on their interests and make informed career choices, indicating that the approach fosters self-awareness and decision-making skills. This aligns with Ehrlich (2010) and Jacobson (2014), who note that creative dramatics strengthen self-image, social competence, and the ability to navigate real-life challenges.



From the perspective of Vygotsky's social constructivist theory, the effectiveness of creative drama is grounded in collaborative learning and scaffolder exploration. Students learned through interaction with peers and guidance from the facilitator, co-constructing knowledge and developing practical problem-solving abilities. The creative drama sessions functioned as a dynamic learning environment, enabling participants to develop cognitive, social, and emotional competencies simultaneously. This demonstrates that creative drama is not only a vehicle for creative expression but also a powerful educational tool that aligns with 21st-century learning goals (Tulay, 2012; Lorie, 2016; Cremin, 2015).

Creative drama proves to be a robust approach for nurturing adolescents' creative, cognitive, and socio-emotional skills, validating both the empirical findings of this study and the theoretical underpinnings of social constructivism. It provides a structured yet flexible platform for experiential learning, collaboration, and personal growth, highlighting the need for its integration into formal curricula to enhance students' holistic development.

CONCLUSION

Teaching through creative drama methods provides students with opportunities to develop creativity, problem-solving skills, and critical thinking while allowing them to engage with ideas beyond traditional written activities. Group-based drama activities enhance both verbal and nonverbal communication, foster cooperation, and help students feel supported in the learning environment. Exemplary teachers like Opeifa Olasunkanmi demonstrate how fun-based, innovative approaches incorporating music, dance, and poetry can make learning engaging and stimulate student creativity. By using dramatization, educators give students a platform to express themselves, collaborate, and practice interactive skills, while nurturing imagination, ambitions, values, and aesthetic appreciation. Creative dramatics enrich the educational experience, encouraging holistic personal and academic growth in students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

After much investigation of the problem under study and analysis of the data collected from sample of the entire population, the following recommendations have been formulated for this study;

1. The Ministry of Education should organize seminars, workshops, symposia and conferences more often to educate teachers and instructors on the advantages and ways of using creative drama as a method of teaching and improving creativity in adolescents.
2. Teachers should consider theatre and creative drama-based activities such as warm-ups in their method of teaching. Drama Warm-ups help students to relax and focus on the lesson ahead, or to simply set the atmosphere.
3. Creative drama should be made an integral part of the school curricular and not as an extra-curricular activity like what it is in the current Nigerian School curricular.
4. Students should be shared into smaller groups and given subjects, ideas and tasks to think about, develop, rehearse and present more often before an audience and teachers. This is of concern because preparing, rehearsing, and performing are



important life events (e.g., a job interview, college application, business/ job presentation or wedding) are a natural part of the everyday human experience in any culture.

Ethical clearance

Ethical consent was sought and obtained from the participants used in this study. They were made to understand that the exercise was purely for academic purposes, and their participation was voluntary.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Authors' Contributions

David and Thelma conceived the study, including the design, Lawrencia collated the data, and Edadi and Thelma handled the analysis and interpretation. All authors have critically reviewed and approved the final draft, and are responsible for the content and similarity index of the manuscript.

Availability of data and materials

The datasets on which conclusions were made for this study are available on reasonable request.

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