

CHILDREN'S THEATRE AND THE DOMAINS OF LEARNING AMONG CHILDREN OF SELECT PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN MAKURDI METROPOLIS

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Abstract

This paper entitled Children's Theatre and the Domains of Learning among School Children: A Study of Select Primary Schools in Makurdi Metropolis, aimed at examining the role of children's theatre in child development in the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of learning. The paper adopted the qualitative research approach for data collection and analysis in non-numerical formats, utilizing instruments such as oral interviews, library sources and select forms of children's theatre. Primary data were sourced from four primary schools: Dyege Memorial Nursery and Primary School, Peniel Nursery and Primary School Makurdi, Lady Victoria Academy and Villa Academy Nursery and Primary School, all in Makurdi metropolis, while secondary data emanated from other existing literature relevant to the study. The research was anchored on the constructivist learning theory and consequent upon analysis, it found out among other things that, under children's engagement in theatre activities, they are simultaneously impacted in the three domains. It therefore, concludes that children's theatre's impact on child development cannot be perfectly measured in a singular activity because it is limitless. The study recommends majorly that, given the potency of children's theatre in child development, school management should allot more time to it either as co-curricular activities, as teaching subjects or as complementary activities to other subjects in the formal school curriculum.

Keywords: Child Development, Children's Theatre and Domains of Learning.

Introduction

Naturally, every child tends to play. It is through these social activities that they display their talents. These activities shape their present and future by honing their skills and identifying their strengths. Play is a crucial aspect of a child's development, allowing them to explore their interests, learn social skills, and develop their cognitive abilities. During the process of playing, children discover their passions and gain a deeper understanding of themselves that will influence their future endeavours by developing a sense of self-awareness. Joan Cook and Greg Cook stated in their study that "50% or more of a child's mature knowledge is developed by the time he turns four" (3). What this means is that a significant portion of a child's knowledge and understanding of the world develops during early childhood. This developmental milestone highlights the rapid progress children make in their cognitive and language skills during this period. By the age of four, children have already acquired a significant body of knowledge, covering various areas such as language development, logical reasoning, and general knowledge.

It is little wonder, therefore, that scholars refer to an individual's early stages of life as the formative years. This, therefore, places utmost importance on parents and educators to provide the much-needed guidance necessary for shaping the child's life for the future. In today's society where imagination and creativity are paramount skills, children who have been given the requisite upbringing in their early stages are most likely to excel in their future endeavours.

Since time immemorial, children have been known to acquire most of their knowledge by learning directly from elders. However, this kind of education by role modelling has greatly reduced with the increased number of hours that children spend in schools acquiring formal education. With this, the much-embedded formal school curricula often restrict these children from freely expressing their naturally endowed talents which may sometimes be outside the formal learning, streamlined by the curricula. Thus, there arises a dire need for a method of learning which incorporates the formal curriculum while providing avenues for children to freely express themselves during the learning process.

The origin of children's theatre can be traced to the inclusion of children in theatre performances in the late 20th century. There are several perspectives as to what constitutes children's theatre. This diversity exists because the term is used as a literal description of theatre that involves children in one way or the other; theatre for children, theatre with children, and theatre by children. This complexity means there is a need to specify the sense in which the term is being used. There is however no universal agreement within academic discourse on the parameters of how the term should be defined. While some scholars suggest age as a defining factor, others think it should be decided by the performers who design a piece of theatre based on their knowledge of the children's audience. For this research however, while the meaning of children's theatre and its practice in Nigeria would be explored first, it will only serve as a way of foregrounding the discourse as emphasis will be laid on theatre as practised for children and its effects on their academic outcomes.

Children's theatre as a learning tool incorporates a methodology through which children learn while also having fun. It places the child at the centre of the learning process and also aims to tap into the abilities of the child to create ideas that will help improve his/her overall growth and development. As children actively participate in the playmaking, acting and evaluation process, lasting impressions are created in their minds which positively affect their creative abilities. This form of theatre is known for its focus on experimental attitudes in which mistakes, failures, weaknesses, strengths and exercises that in a normal sense may not work are viewed as useful learning tools for the child.

To achieve its purpose of child education and development, children's theatre adopts various forms and methods which include but are not limited to theatre games, dance and music, storytelling, puppetry creative and improvisational drama. All these forms uphold the participation of children in creating their own stories as well as acting them out which is an opportunity to identify each child's area of special abilities. This is done by making the learning process more interactive and in the end, making learning itself a social activity.

Children's theatre as a form of teaching and learning has gained a considerable place in the educational sector in Nigeria. Its acceptability keeps improving, given its proven potential to enhance effective teaching and learning. It is a truism too that this theatre form enhances the development of children in the learning domains of affective, cognitive and psychomotor, which many scholars have paid particular attention to in recent times. Children's theatre activities are therefore classified variously on the nature of activity and how they uniquely contribute to child development in any of the three domains.

Despite this important role of children's theatre in child development, it still does not get the due attention it deserves in Nigerian schools. This is because, the nature of this theatre involves fun activities which appear to educators as a mere motor or recreational activity. It is on this note that, this research espouses children's theatre practices, x-raying their successes in child development in the past years. Specifically, the children's theatre experiments conducted by this paper in the select schools under study, aimed at demonstrating the level of impact that children's theatre has on children's development in the three learning domains, thereby, projecting the theatre practice as a wholesome learning experience that transcends just recreational functions.

Conceptual Clarifications

For the avoidance of any doubt and ambiguity, children's theatre, domains of learning and theatre and child development have been conceptualised in the context of this paper as discussed below:

Child

It is quite difficult to provide a singular universally agreed definition of who a child is. This is largely because of the variations in societies and cultures across the world. Despite perspectives and definitions of who should be considered as a child by internationally recognised organisations such as the United Nations, these variations still exist. The Online Vocabulary Dictionary provides a broader view of who a child is when it suggests that, "any young person who is typically older than a baby but younger than ten should be referred to as a child". More elaborately, it opines that:

The noun *child* comes from the old English word *cild*, meaning "child, infant". Retaining a similar meaning in modern times, the word still refers to a young person, male or female. But you can be considered a child after reaching adulthood –in the eyes of parents, at least. Immature behaviour like throwing a temper tantrum can also mark you as a child. The word can also refer to someone in a clan or tribe, young or old (www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/child).

This definition is all-encompassing as it draws attention to contexts where a person can be referred to as a child, not minding his or her age, thus substantiating the earlier submission of the multifaceted nature of the word “child”.

In another perspective, Gowon Doki and Justine Awuawuer are more specific in their view of who a child is when they state that: “The United Nations had considered a child as a person between the ages of 0-18 years of age” (2). Also from the legal perspective, the Legal Information (Institute LII) opines that “a child usually refers to an individual who is a minor, who is below legal age or the age of majority” (<https://www.law.cornel.edu/wex/child>). What is referred to in this definition as the legal age or majority age is from the age of 18. Importantly also, the LII acknowledges clearly that, the age of the majority varies across states and humans below that age (children), remain under the guidance of parents or other adults and are bound to have fewer responsibilities and rights as compared to adults in this regard. Also, citing Article 2 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Gerson Lansdown and Ziba Vaghriaver that “Every human being under the age of 18 years must be recognised as a child, without discrimination based on any attributed of the child or parents” (10). Importantly, the definition of childhood must extend equally to all genders without discrimination.

From the above perspectives, this paper conceptualizes the meaning of a child based on age. It views the stage of childhood as being the stage of human life ranging from birth to puberty. This means that, apart from this factor, the term child as used in its noun forms is devoid of other discriminatory features such as gender, race socio-political or economic, and health conditions. This means that every human who is from within the stages of birth to puberty qualifies to be called a child, regardless of their gender or other physical or psychological conditions.

One feature of children that is natural is their love for play and fun activities as a way of adapting to their immediate environment at various stages of growth and development. This is their reason for frequent exhibitions and involvement in activities such as storytelling, dramatization, dances and songs. In the long run, these activities contribute a great deal to their development intellectually, socially and physically.

Children's Theatre

The concept of children's theatre has been topical across discourses and many scholars have viewed it differently. This is due to variations in perspectives and ideologies regarding its practice. For instance, Cheela Chilala submits that:

The general understanding of children's theatre in Africa differs from the Western one...The characteristic features of African children's theatre are different from those of children's theatre as practiced in the Western world. This is largely due to differences in cultural environment as well as perception. Also, the historical development of children's theatre in Europe and Africa has followed dissimilar paths, although both European and African theatre have their origins in ritual and ceremony associated with religion (1).

Then, one of the reasons responsible for the varying views of the concept of children's theatre is associated with the differences in cultural environments, in which it grew, as well as the different perceptions and values that led to its development in different parts of the world. While Chilala's view is valid, Dennis Eluyefa points out that “there is no universal agreement within academic discourse on the parameters in which the term should be defined. While some scholars suggest age as a defining factor, others think it should be decided by the performers who design a piece of theatre based on their knowledge of the children's audience”. (79) To some scholars, these different views exist because the term is used to literally describe the theatre that involves children in one way or the other.

It is clear from the foregoing that children's theatre has been researched by many scholars and their definitions of the term vary and differ as their faces vary and differ from one another. This, however, is not an excuse to evade conceptual clarity. To define is to adorn a blurred area of thought with a wall of meaningful words. Applying this stance to the topic being examined, some of the varying views provided by scholars are presented here. Eluyefa explains succinctly that “children's theatre is specifically created and performed for

children's audience, either by children actors or professional adult actors or a combination of both" (82). Eluyefa's explanation needs no further clarification. Although it states that it can either be performed by child actors or professional adult actors, a performance can only be regarded as children's theatre if it is specifically targeted at children's audience. Even though he recognizes that accompanying members of the family can be part of the audience, he stresses strongly that "the primary audience for all forms of children's theatre is children" (82). This view fails to realize that there are situations whereby children may use theatrical means to express their concern about certain unpleasant events in society. In such an instance, adults, rather than children, become the targeted audience, and the performance is still children's theatre.

Therefore, children's theatre manifests in three basic forms determined by the extent of children's involvement, that is, the degree to which it is participatory. The first form is termed theatre for children where adults perform for children audience who are passively involved in the action on stage. The content is usually carefully directed towards educating, correcting and entertaining the audience. Since children are merely the audience, the performance must be well-tailored so it can capture and sustain the audience's interest. The second form is theatre with children. Here, adults and children work together to present a theatrical piece to an undifferentiated audience. Usually, the adults in this theatre are the ones who coordinate the children. This form, if properly handled, serves as and process involved. Because children are co-performers and actively involved in the ongoing stage action, their attention is easily aroused and sustained. Theatre by children is the third form of children's theatre where the performers are all children. They generate the ideas, direct and coordinate themselves. They might perform a scripted play or engage in improvisation. Their performance could be a cultural display, masquerading, dance, among others. This form is the height of children's theatre and it is the second form that must serve as the preparatory ground for it to happen. Hopefully, this categorization helps to simplify and establish a proper understanding of the term as well as nullifies all the confusion associated with it.

Child Development

Child development can be viewed as a process of ensuring that a set of learning activities and outputs meet behavioural goals effectively and efficiently. It is the process of creating a learning environment or setting in which pupils are enabled to perform to the best of their abilities. Child development defines the interaction with a learner at every step of the way. It makes every interaction opportunity with a learner into a learning occasion. Child Development can be defined as a process which continuously identifies measures and develops the performance of the learners. To do so, each learner's performance and objectives are connected with the overall instructional objectives and goals.

Before any activities targeted at child development, the facilitators try to figure out, the existing performance level of the learners and work on improving that level. It is a systematic assessment of the performance of a learner and using the assessment to better the performance over time. As a communication system, it is developed to assist learners in succeeding. It not just requires direction, from the end of teachers, but also needs active participation on the part of learners. As educators, we always want students to succeed and excel, and look for ways to encourage that growth.

In recent years, researchers have studied many aspects of academic success. Educational research now draws connections between success in strictly academic subjects and participation in arts programmes. For instance, a study published by Abigail Todhunter-Reid of the Department of Childhood Studies at Rutgers University stated that "arts education (minutes per week of art and music instruction) positively predicted academic achievement and growth in reading and mathematics from kindergarten to 5th grade. Moreover, the positive associations increased in strength as students progressed to later grades." She is not alone in these findings, and in fact, many studies find similar results.

In visual arts for instance, students learn to develop their spatial learning, organizational skills, visual memory, and emotional development. These students come to their other subjects more prepared, and able to see connections that other students may miss. The students also are allowed an opportunity to learn history through the study of other artists, which can aid them greatly in reading and composition courses. The study from Rutgers University found these effects grew more profound over time, with students who sustained the arts education improving more overall. Marcellinus Asen posits that theatre naturally provides children with the

ability to solve complex issues and challenges within their immediate environments. According to him, “older children and adults can make better sense of all aspects of life, be it their own personality or motivations, or the complexities of science, social science, mathematics, and language. The theatre creates a holistic learning for children that encompass all areas of life” (80). What this entails is that theatre's impact does not stop at a person's childhood level, but continues to influence their choices and general lifestyle in their endeavours even as adults.

Performing arts like dance and theatre show some of the most profound impacts, as students who learn to perform, learn valuable skills that help in classrooms and beyond. Public speaking, verbal skills, memorization, emotional intelligence, literacy, and so on, are all developed by reading and rehearsing a play. Students who have the opportunity to perform often feel a sense of accomplishment, which can motivate them to achieve elsewhere as well. Additionally, this provides a chance for physical engagement which, especially at an elementary level, can be hugely beneficial to students' focus in their classes.

Children's Theatre and Child Development in Nigeria

Children's theatre is a specially designed theatrical performance before an audience. Its educational relevance lies not only in teaching the act of playmaking but also in learning about life generally to acquire the right values and moral standards. In the words of Irene Salami: “Children's theatre is not in the business of converting children into theatre artists precisely. But this is a medium of communication with the children and the content of communication is of prime importance” (30).

Society is made up of children of a particular generation who grow up to become adults and handle national responsibilities. It is, therefore, necessary for adults who are primarily concerned with the continuation of life and race after them to ensure the holistic growth of the individual child that forms the largest society. Children's theatre helps children to become better citizens through a reflection on the art form. The child is the one who has the least control over his environment but through this art form, he comes into reality with his environment.

Kenneth Graham consequently states the good values of theatre in children as the entertainment functions, and also develops the child's state of mind to suit his environment; it exposes the child to different situations and a way of finding solutions to them. It's a learning process for young children. On this note, Peter Slade states that “The child gains confidence, ability to observe, tolerate and consider others... a child's participation in folkloric tales comes in contact with certain experiences that help to develop his whole being” (11). SubasiMünevveret al further assert that:

It is possible to use drama in classes to contribute to the learning experience. This is because drama allows students to evaluate and examine not only the events and concepts being studied but also the attitudes, values and perceptions of others. Drama also strengthens students' verbal communication skills, thus allowing them to better express in words their newly forming opinions. Similarly, drama also provides students the opportunity to develop their ways of thinking and to interact with the opinions of others (30).

As earlier established, drama has proven to be a potent, viable, and effective method of teaching. Drama as a teaching method holds several advantages over the other methods and has been long recognized. “The use of drama as a tool is not new. Historically, both drama and theatre have long been recognized as potent means of education and indoctrination” (McCaslin 271).

According to Richard Courtney:

Brian Way, in *Development through Drama*, says the purpose of drama in schools is more to develop the people than to develop drama. The work of Dorothy Heathcote and Gavin Bolton in recent years has ensured that many British schools use drama in different ways; as a subject, as a method of learning other subjects, and as a helping tool for “special groups” ... (2).

Drama is a performing art, an outlet for self-expression, and a way of learning. Drama is an effective learning tool because it involves the students intellectually, physically, socially, and emotionally. Mandie Moore

reiterates that “Students are fully involved in learning with drama. They are immersed into the subject. Their bodies, minds, and emotions are extremely active when they become engrossed in the drama” (19). This entails that their whole being is active when partaking in drama. This helps to solve the problem of drifting attention. Drama as a teaching method naturally arrests the attention of the students and makes them develop a love for learning. Moore further asserts that “drama allows educators to teach their students in a way, which would create a love for learning. It provides problem-solving, social, and creative skills. Drama embraces the child's imagination and emotions, which in many classrooms are shunned” (28).

Activities in improvisation, pantomime, play-making, and scene enactment serve to develop the creative potential of the participants and also help to develop critical thinking skills. (Caldwell, web). This generic nature of drama makes it suitable for many subjects. Several different subjects and topics can be taught using drama as a medium. Moore posits that “Drama can be a way to teach all subject areas. Language arts, social studies, and science are subject areas, which are very successful in using drama”. (11) Reiterating this, Betty Wagner further avers that “It is particularly effective in making a historical event come alive for students” (5).

Drama as a teaching method seeks to dismantle the tripartite structure of education in which the teacher is assumed to know all and takes undue focus at the expense of the learners. Drama is a method that is learner-centred and participatory. It shifts attention from the teacher to the learner. Jeffrey Wilhelm avers that: “through drama, students became a part of the learning process rather than mere observers or inactive receptacles of the rich experience of learning; in this way, their learning was deeper, more sustained and definitely more complex” (1).

On the whole, the relevance of drama as a teaching method cannot be overemphasized. What is however worrisome is the fact that despite its proven efficacy in teaching, it is still not used or is underused in Nigerian schools by teachers. Rotimi Gbenga laments thus:...except for a few elitist private secondary schools, most schools do not have provision for educational theatre in their academic curriculum, but it is a common practice among all secondary schools in Nigeria to stage a dramatic performance to mark and celebrate the end of every academic calendar year (40). This situation calls for concerted efforts and research geared towards addressing this anomaly especially given that poor teaching methods also account for the decline in our educational standard.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Constructivist Learning Theory. This model was entrenched in the learning theories by John Dewey, Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, Robert Gagne, and Jerome Bruner. Constructivism is a theory, based on observation and scientific study, about how people learn. It says that people construct their understanding and knowledge of the world, through experiencing things and reflecting on those experiences. Christiana Ohia avers that “Social constructivists posit that knowledge is constructed when individuals engage socially in talk and activity about shared problems or tasks. To them, learning is seen as the process by which individuals are introduced to a culture by more skilled members” (171).

In the classroom, the constructivist's view of learning can point towards several different teaching practices. In the most general sense, it usually means encouraging students to use active techniques (experiments, real-world problem solving, etc) to create more knowledge and then reflect on and talk about what they are doing and how their understanding is changing. The teacher makes sure he understands the students' pre-existing conceptions and guides the activity to address them and build on them. According to Dewey:

The primary root of all educative activity is the instinctive, impulsive attitudes and activities of the child, and not in the presentation and application of external material, whether through the ideas of others or through the senses and that, accordingly, numberless spontaneous activities of children, plays, games, mimic efforts ...are capable of educational use, nay, are the foundation stones of educational methods (2).

Constructivism learning theory is a philosophy which enhances students' logical and conceptual growth. The underlying concept within the constructivist learning theory is the role which experiences or connections with

the adjoining atmosphere play in student education. The role of teachers is very important within the constructivism learning theory. Instead of giving a lecture, the teachers in this theory function as facilitators whose role is to aid the students when it comes to their own understanding. This takes away the focus from the teacher and lecture and puts it upon students and their learning. (teach-nology.com)

Instead of having the students rely on someone else's information and accept it as truth, the constructivist learning theory supports that students should be exposed to data, primary sources, and the ability to interact with other students so that they can learn from the incorporation of their experiences. Examples of constructivist learning activities include group discussions, field trips, watching films, research projects, experimentation and dramatization.

From the foregoing, it is evident that the constructivist learning theory is consistent with the founding principles and basic tenets of the practice of drama and Children's Theatre. Child-centred learning, teamwork, participatory activities, and construction of own knowledge as enshrined in the theory are abundantly inherent in the practice of drama and theatre in education.

According to Ndubuisi Nnanna:

The strategies for Theatre in Education include child-centered learning which places the child at the centre of the educational process and designs the curriculum to fulfil his or her overall needs for individual growth; it also includes project teaching which is activity-based and encourages independence and responsibility as well as characterized by the view of the child as a peculiar person with unique needs and is negotiated within an active relationship between the child and his environment and emphasis is on creativity and emotional development. And all of these are carried out within a theatrical context using role play (106).

What this means is that, while children's theatre targets children, it requires that, the right methods be tailored according to children's abilities for such activities to gain better results and actualise their aim. Therefore, the tenets of this theory resonate with the study in that it emphasises children's development as the essence of children's theatre activities, a feature of children's theatre that this research brings to bare through its analysis of children's theatre activities and how they impact children intellectually, socially and physically.

The Impact of Children's Theatre Workshops on the Domains of Learning

The children's theatre forms that were conducted for this study were carefully selected to capture the three domains of child development which include the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains. Therefore, in the course of these activities, the researchers carefully observed how these activities singularly and collectively impact participants accordingly in the learning domains. The synopses and analysis of these activities are presented below:

The Cognitive Domain

As stated earlier in this study, the Cognitive domain of children is concerned basically with the intellectual abilities of such children. Therefore, exercises in this category were carefully chosen to enable children to think critically about issues raised at the moment. The following activity was carried out in this domain:

The game "Animal Charades" was used. This game was intended to teach children about the different animals and their habitats, especially the animals around them. The game was played by dividing the children into two teams. One team had to act out an animal, while the other team guessed which animal it was. Particularly, for example, one team acted like a lion by roaring and prowling around, and the other team guessed by calling out the name of the animal "lion". This fun-filled game was intended to teach children about animals, to complement what they had learnt in other subjects about these animals and their behaviours. This theatre game was carried out in the Nursery section of the four schools under study. As obtainable with the other activities, the choice of this activity for the children was based on its compatibility with the level of comprehension and intellectual reasoning of the pupils.

Also, in this domain, children were engaged in drama performances. Drama in this domain was largely improvised, allowing children to develop actions and dialogue at the spur of the moment. Interestingly too, this improvised dramatization emanated from the storytelling sessions where children complimented events in their stories with songs and actions.

In light of the above, the researchers engaged participants after the experiment to test the level of impact of the activities on the children. The researchers asked to know from the teachers whether or not the school has been using similar activities to enhance teaching and learning. In response, the teacher in charge of the Nursery Section at Dyege Memorial Nursery and Primary School noted that such games do not just complement other formal teachings, but form the basis of the teaching, especially at children's tender age. She emphasized that learning for children will become boring and nearly impossible without the incorporation of these fun activities. On his part, another teacher from Peniel Nursery and Primary School revealed that the Cognitive development of children is one of the most important as it provides foundations for children and therefore, the level of children's Cognitive growth and development at tender ages is bound to determine how intelligent or not they became for their future endeavour. It is important to reiterate that, while this activity was ongoing, the researcher ensured that children were availed of a free atmosphere where they could creatively express themselves while also having fun.



Plate 1: A Pupil from Basic 3 in a Storytelling Session. (Source: Field Research at Dyege Memorial Nursery and Primary School Makurdi. 27th September, 2023).

The Affective Domain

In this drama category, the research aimed at children's social skills and empathy towards one another. The drama which was presented at Peniel Nursery and Primary School had the following scenario:

Scenario 1

In the classroom, at break time, Janet is seated alone. Grace enters to ask her what is wrong and she explains that she has no friends because her classmates say she is a dirty child. Grace who is an older child, encourages Janet, telling her that she still cares for her and will help her as a friend.

Scenario 2

In this scenario, Grace and Janet enter the scene. Janet looks brighter and neater amidst smiles. Other children are eager to touch and talk to her. Janet explains to them that, it was Grace that helped her to keep herself clean by teaching her how to wash her uniforms properly and to brush her teeth twice daily among other personal hygiene routines. This drama skit was formed after an interaction with the children. It was their views that provided the basis for the drama as they were also the actors. Participants in the drama were pupils from basics

three and six across the schools under study.

After the performance, as usual, the researchers engaged participants in a post-performance discussion, asking questions which triggered responses and discussions. One of the pupils of Peniel Nursery and Primary School by the name Gloria Apaa in response to a question, stated that what happened in the drama is what is obtainable in the school among pupils especially those who are unable to take care of themselves but in school and at home. On his part, one of the class teachers of basic six at Villa Academy Nursery and Primary School by the name Fidelis Abako noted that empathy is one of the key requirements for not just children, but every group of persons that desire progress. He further said that stigmatisation of all kinds is a problem even in the wider society, as people are stigmatised based on health conditions, social conditions and even economic status, where the rich are treated differently from the poor. In a separate remark, the Head Teacher of Dyege Memorial Nursery and Primary School said that, if children are trained to develop positive social skills at their early stages, they are bound to shun vices in the future, given that they consider the negative effects of such vices



Plate 2: Pupils of Peniel Nursery and Primary School Makurdi in a Drama Session. (Source: Field Research, 12th September, 2023).

The Psychomotor Domain

The psychomotor domain is concerned with the creativity of children and focuses on how children can bring to bear and display physically their creative potential. For this study, colouring was utilised as a fine motor activity. It was conducted as follows:

- i. Age-appropriate colouring books were provided for select children in consonance with their age and skill level.
- ii. Children were encouraged to use/experiment with a variety of colour combinations to express their creativity.
- iii. Children were guided appropriately to stay within the lines as designated in the colouring books to control their movements.
- iv. Importantly, children were allowed to experiment freely and explore their creativity, such that, their mistakes and choices of colours were informed by the moderators.
- v. Each child was encouraged to tell stories about their colouring/drawings and what informed their choices. This allowed them to use their imagination and express their thoughts and feelings.

In as much as this activity was designed to shape the children's fine motor skills, it was intended to be fun and not a serious chore.



Plate 3: A Basic 3 Pupil of Villa Academy expressing the impact of the colouring exercise.
(Source: Field Research, 25th September, 2023)

Key Findings of the Study

Consequent upon analysis of data collected, this research makes the following key findings:

- i. Activities that test children's development are not exclusively limited to a particular learning domain. This is because all children's theatre activities are tailored towards the intellectual and physical involvement of children. Thus, they are unconsciously affected in the three domains.
- ii. The effectiveness of children's theatre in some primary schools today is impeded by factors such as lack of time allotment for children's theatre activities by school management and lack of experienced teachers in the field and practice of children's theatre.
- iii. Children's theatre, its practice and adoption have immensely improved in schools majorly due to the efforts by university-based theatres that encourage students to specialise in this area. This is particularly the case with schools in the Makurdi metropolis which have enjoyed this advantage.
- iv. The responsibility of recognising the importance of the three domains on child development vis-à-vis children's theatre activities, rests not only on teachers but also on parents who take charge of their children's wellbeing at the home front. This enables a more holistic approach to children's development and provides a nurturing environment where children can thrive better and reach their full potential.

Conclusion

By way of conclusion, this research posits that children's theatre is a potent tool for children's development in the three domains of learning as earlier discussed in this work. This is no doubt because the method has been utilized over the decades by notable scholars in line with the ideas of progressive educationists such as Dewey, and Team Page among others. It is, therefore, sacrosanct for teachers and theatre practitioners to acknowledge the fact that children learn better through play activities that suit them. This is because, the absence of these fun and impactful activities such as theatre games, storytelling, songs and dramatization will affect the level of comprehension and assimilation of whatever lessons such children are taught. Therefore, the impact of children's theatre on children's cognitive, affective, and psychomotor development cannot be downgraded.

Recommendations

Arising from findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Management of primary schools should become more deliberate about employing specialised teachers in the area of children's theatre. This will boost the practice of children's theatre in these schools and by extension; engender more effective teaching and learning.
2. The Ministry of Education should carefully review the curriculum of primary schools to provide more opportunities for children's theatre activities not only as co-curricular activities but as subjects to be studied. This will go a long way in sustaining and institutionalising the culture of learning through fun activities for the good of the children while making teaching more expedient for the teachers.
3. Departments of Theatre Arts in tertiary institutions should not relent in constantly reviewing and improving the practice of children's theatre in their training of would-be professionals in this field. This will by extension, extend professionalism to primary schools in the larger society where graduates would later be deployed to add value to.
4. Managements of primary schools should engage in regular training and retraining of teachers to ensure that they are up to date with trends in the practice of children's theatre.

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