

DRAMA AS A STRATEGY FOR THE SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT OF STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION CENTRE, MBIABONG ETOI, UYO. AKWA IBOM STATE.

Idaresit O. INYANG (Ph.D).
Department of Theatre and Film Studies,
Faculty of Arts,
University of Uyo.
Uyo, Akwa Ibom State
idaresitofonime@gmail.com

&
Uduak Ini SUNDAY
.Department of Theatre and Film Studies,
Faculty of Arts, University of Uyo.
Akwa Ibom State

Abstract

Drama serves as a powerful tool for emotional expression, social interaction, self-confidence, communication and problem solving skills. The purpose of this paper is to provide these students with a creative and inclusive outlet to develop their skills and abilities. Most special needs students lack emotional literacy and do not know how to communicate effectively or express themselves without being violent and aggressive. To solve this, this paper engaged the students in a drama experiment where they performed using role-play and improvisation techniques in a playback and story theatre. This paper carried out observations, interviews, audio and video recordings of the interview and performance. During the observation and, interview with the students, this paper found that the students had developed self-confidence and could relate with each other in a peaceful manner. This paper therefore, recommends that a safe and supportive environment should be cultivated for the students so they could express themselves without any fear of being criticized or mocked using creative activities.

Keywords: Social Development, Special Needs Children/Students, Mental Retardation/Challenge, Drama

Introduction

In recent years, there has been an increasing recognition of the importance of drama as an effective strategy for promoting the social development of students with special needs. In the past, individuals with disabilities were often segregated from mainstream society and deprived of educational opportunities. This segregation led to limited social interaction and hindered social development. Until the mid-20th century, many individuals with special needs were institutionalized or kept at home, isolated from the community. The prevailing belief was that they were incapable of participating fully in society and did not possess the same social and intellectual capabilities as their non-disabled peers.

Special education has been the target of criticism throughout history. Some of the criticism has been justified, some unjustified. Some criticisms brought to light ineffective practices, such as the inefficacy and inhumanity of relegating all persons with disability. Special needs students have historically faced stigmatization and discrimination, which can impact their social development. Negative stereotypes and misconceptions about disabilities can lead to bullying, exclusion, and social isolation, preventing them from developing meaningful relationships and social skills.

Drama has long been a tradition for cultures to express themselves. From ancient Africa to Greece, the use of theatre or oral tradition was used to create relationships, form public opinion, and wage war

(Smith, 2). The use of drama in the curriculum for children with special needs is sometimes automatically equated with drama-therapy. Given that drama is a social art form (as opposed to something that can productively be engaged with in a solitary way), active engagement in dramatic activity can facilitate positive social outcomes such as a sense of belonging to a group.

Statement of the Problem

Many special needs students face challenges in social interactions and communication skills, which can significantly impact their overall development. Traditional teaching methods may not effectively address these issues. Drama offers a unique platform for social engagement, self-expression, and interpersonal skills development. Many special need students have problems with obedience, patience, lack of self-respect for themselves and respect for others, emotional intelligence and anger management. Most special need students are violent and aggressive as that is the only way they know how to express their emotions.

The effectiveness of drama in promoting social development among students with special needs has not been extensively studied or implemented in educational settings. Drama can be used to improve self-esteem, cooperative learning and constructive play. The method of drama employed in the Special Education Centre is a viable tool in showing and teaching special needs students how to become better individuals and how to relate with each other and the society at large.

Methodology of the Study

Materials for this research were collected from the library sources in related areas and this paper made use of qualitative method. To conduct this research, a group of students were selected and the participants were divided into two groups. Observations were made during the drama experiment to assess the student's interaction, communication and teamwork skills. Interviews, audio and video recording of the sessions carried out with the MC (mentally challenged) 5 and 6 students of the Special Education Centre, Mbiabong Etoi, Uyo serve as data sources for this paper.

Theoretical Framework

Constructivism

Constructivism is a theory in education which posits that individuals or learners do not acquire knowledge and understanding by passively perceiving it within a direct process of knowledge transmission, rather they construct new understandings and knowledge through experience and social discourse, integrating new information with what they already know (prior knowledge). For children, this includes knowledge gained prior to entering school. Piaget's theory of constructivism impacts learning curriculum because teachers have to make a curriculum plan which enhances their student's logical and conceptual growth. The teacher must put emphasis on the significant role that experiences or connections with the adjoining atmosphere play in student education.

Constructivism emphasizes the role of active learning and the importance of constructing knowledge through individual experiences and interactions. Jean Piaget's work has had a significant impact on special needs education, particularly in understanding how students with disabilities learn and develop. Two of the key components which create the construction of a student's new knowledge are accommodation and assimilation. Assimilation causes a student to incorporate new experiences into the old experiences. This causes the individual to develop new outlooks, rethink what were once misunderstandings, and evaluate what is important, ultimately altering their perceptions. Accommodation, on the other hand, is reframing the world and new experiences into the mental capacity already present (Nola and Irzik, 175). Constructivism theory of learning involves the use of existing knowledge to gain new knowledge. This existing knowledge is integrated with new information to expand the knowledge a student possesses.

Maria Montessori was an Italian physician, educator and innovator who developed the Montessori method of education. She worked primarily with children who had special needs, particularly those with intellectual disabilities or developmental challenges. Her philosophy is based on the belief that children learn best when they are actively engaged in their own learning. Montessori observed that many children with disabilities were often neglected or marginalized by society and lacked appropriate educational opportunities and this inspired her to develop an educational approach that could support the development and learning of all children, including those with special needs. Montessori education is grounded in the constructivist theory, which suggests that children construct knowledge through their own experiences and interactions with the environment. The Montessori method encourages hands-on experiential learning, allowing students to actively engage in their own learning process. Montessori education provides materials and activities that are specifically designed to meet the developmental needs and abilities of children at different stages of development (Trabalzin, 36).

Review of a study that got result from social constructivism

In exploring an Active Learning Approach on Vygotsky's theories in Social Learning Constructivism, Inyang recognizes the importance of allowing:

an interactive and collaborative learning process, which becomes a social and personal construction of knowledge in the learning environment. In an engaging and inquiring learning process, learners become co-constructors and owners of such knowledge processes. This theory supports the use of drama to engage learners on a personal level (68).

Concept of Drama in Special Needs Education: An Overview

According to Ikpe:

Special Education is the education of children and adults who have learning difficulty because of different sorts of handicaps: blindness, partial sightedness, deafness, hardness of hearing, mental retardation, social maladjustment, physical handicap, etc, due to circumstances of birth, inheritance, social position, mental and physical health pattern or accident in later life (69).

In the National Policy on Education, Special Education is defined as a formal special educational training given to people (children and adult) with special needs (94). The term special education seems to communicate to most educators and informed lay persons an activity or domain within the total educational enterprise that is specifically concerned with students who have handicapped education. However, other observers may substitute a different term, exceptional education, with the conscious or unconscious connotation that the parameters include students who are at variance from the norm, or exceptional, in dimensions that would include the mentally gifted or talented as well. Special Education is an area within the framework of general education, which provides the right facilities, specialized materials and teachers with adequate training for all types of students with unusual needs.

In the context of special needs education, drama refers to the use of dramatic activities and techniques to enhance the learning and development of individuals with disabilities or special education needs. Drama is often about collaboration and negotiation and when it is used in mixed-ability groups it can act as a bridge between children with special needs and others in their peer group. It can enable students with particular difficulties and provides an ideal environment to encourage students to work together and to develop trust and friendships. The use of drama in the curriculum for students with special needs is sometimes automatically equated with drama therapy. Given that drama is a social art form, active engagement in dramatic activity can facilitate positive social outcomes such as a sense of belonging to a group (Wasylo, 297).

Drama offers a unique and engaging platform for individuals with special needs to express themselves, explore their creativity, build social skills, develop communication abilities, and increase self-confidence. Drama provides a safe and structured environment for individuals with special needs to express their emotions through role-playing, improvisation, and story-telling. Drama activities encourage social interaction and collaboration among individuals with special needs. Through group work and ensemble performances, they learn to communicate, cooperate, take turns, share ideas and develop empathy towards others. Through role-playing, special needs students can step into the shoes of different characters and gain a deeper understanding of others perspectives and experiences.

Playback Theatre and Story Theatre

Playback Theatre

This is an original form of improvisational theatre in which audience or group members tell stories from their lives and watch them enacted on the spot. It utilizes component theatrical forms or pieces, developed from its sources in improvisational theatre, storytelling, and psychodrama. Participants can gain insight, catharsis, connection, and self-expression through telling their stories and participating in enacting stories of others (Savinov, 126).

Story Theatre

Story theatre is closely related to readers' theatre. According to Paul Sills, whose production entitled Story Theatre captivated audiences of all ages a number of seasons ago, it evolved from readers' theatre. Sills had worked in readers' theatre, but in his search for a new form of expression, he developed a form as an oral story rather than as a piece of literature. Like readers' theatre, story theatre is hard to define because of its flexibility; no hard and fast rules apply. Actors are usually costumed and may speak or perform in pantomimewhile a narrator tells the story. There may be musical accompaniment throughout if desired, and the pantomime may approach dance, depending on the wishes and abilities of the group (McCaslin, 253).

Story theatre is a form of oral story presentation that combines elements of storytelling with theatrical techniques to create a dramatic performance.

Role Play and Improvisation as Techniques in Drama

Role Play

Role playing was developed by Jacob Moreno, a Viennese psychologist who contended that people could gain more from acting out their problems than from talking about them. In the beginning, this method required a protagonist (the client whose problems are being acted out); auxillary egos (group members who assume the roles of other people in the protagonist's life); an audience (other group members who observe and react to the drama); and a director (the therapist). The protagonist selects an event from his or her life and provides the information necessary for it to be reenacted. Besides genre, role plays fall into different categories; fandom, original group and one-on-one (Blatner, 15).

Role play is when an actor subsumes his natural behaviour and assumes the character of another person playing it believably. Role play involves imagining the perspective of another person and/or a specific situation, then speaking and behaving as one would imagine or hope. In other words, the term 'role play' is intuitive: in role play, people play certain roles without a script, and to a situation and setting determined by the role play director, facilitator or coordinator.

Improvisation

Improvisation often shortened to improve, is the activity of making or doing something not planned beforehand, using whatever can be found. Improvisation in the performing arts is a very spontaneous performance without specific or scripted preparation. It is a spontaneous and unscripted form of performance where actors create a scene or story in real-time. It requires quick thinking, creativity and collaboration. It is the activity of making or doing something not planned beforehand, using whatever can be found. Improvisation can be thought of as an "on the spot" or "off the cuff" spontaneous moment of sudden inventiveness that can just come to mind, body and spirit as inspiration.

Research Method and Design

This paper made use of qualitative research method. Qualitative research method is a method used to gather non-numerical data that focuses on understanding human behaviour, opinions, motivations, and experiences. It aims to explore and gain insights into the depth and richness of phenomena rather than providing statistical measurements. Qualitative research method relates to the nature or standard of something rather than to its quantity. This method includes various techniques such as interviews, focus group discussions, case studies, observations, and content analysis. These methods involve collecting data through open-ended questions, participant observations, and the examination of documents, audio/video recordings, or other relevant artifacts.

Data Collection Process

Various data collection techniques were utilized to collect comprehensive information and they are as follows:

- i. **Research question:** There were five research questions that guides this study and research project answers these questions.
- ii. **Sampling:** The researchers selected participants who could take part in the experiment of the drama techniques employed in this research
- iii. **Data collection:** We made use of interviews, observations, open-ended questions and audio/video recordings.
- iv. **Interpretation:** After the data collection and practical experiment, we generated meaningful interpretations that address the research questions.

Ethical considerations

Below are some of the ethical considerations applied in the course of the research;

- i. **Informed consent:** Before implementation of any intervention or carrying out any experiment, the students were asked if they would love to participate in the activities.
- ii. **Equity and fairness:** The students were treated equally and fairly and without any form of discrimination. The students performed in an inclusive and supportive environment.
- iii. **Confidentiality and privacy:** Every information collected will be kept confidential for the purpose of this research.
- iv. **Respect for diversity:** Not all students learn the same way. The learning style was flexible to accommodate all students.

Specific social development needs of the students

During the research, we discovered that the MC 5 and 6 students lacked the ability to communicate effectively with one another and understand each other. Another challenge was the ability to have conversations with each other without using insulting words. Also, some of them thought themselves as better than the others and so would look down on one another during the dramatic activities and some of the students were quick to react to situations without thinking or paying attention to what is being said or happening around them. With this information, we based our practical experiment on tackling these issues.

Using imitation drama, we were able to experiment and create a better perspective for the students during the dramatic activities. The imitation drama can be considered as one in which we re-enact, mirror or represent our performance experience at the level of reality. In a compressed paper presented by Ododo at SONTA 2002:

Imitation Drama is defined thus: This drama imitates totally or partially man's life and environment, real or imagined. Man learns and acts essentially through imitation, that is by imitating the thoughts, language, actions, environment, worlds, objects and cultural practices of others including his own (20).

With the above definition, we engaged the students and those who were active participated in the dramatic activities. They spent time rehearsing their roles and were involved in every activity from the outset. It is important to be patient with special needs students as they may need time to come out of their shell and be willing to engage in activities. Creating friendship with the students will help them to feel safe and be confident to express themselves and show their different abilities and strengths while unlearning and relearning.

Practical experiment

We worked with the MC 5 and 6 special needs students in Special Education Centre, Mbiabong Etoi, Uyo. This class had a total of fifteen students, nine boys and six girls and the duration for the experiment was two weeks.

MC 5 and 6; this is the advanced class for the MC. They can hold conversations, socialize and most of them are very active. From my observation, most of the students who are laid back, quiet, anti-social, and non-participatory in this class are this way because of their personality. This class has a beautiful blend of active and passive students and it was fit for my research and experiment.

This research and experiment required special needs students who could talk with each other, move around and act without any hindrance. It is pertinent to state that with special needs students, there is no age range and the capacity of their brain, their disabilities and challenges are the basis used to classify them.

Like all students, the student with mental retardation wants to be a member of a group, to contribute to it, and to have the contribution accepted. Drama offers this opportunity. One characteristic of these students is using imagination or dealing with abstract ideas these children need more help and encouragement than other children; they need to repeat experiences more often; and, finally, they must learn self-confidence and feel the satisfaction of having their contribution accepted. The game of pretending can help them learn to use imaginations, to prepare for new experiences, and to lay a firmer foundation for oral communication (McCaslin, 283).

Before the experiment proper, we took the students through a reading and acting test. For the reading test, we wanted to know how well they could pronounce words and allow them express themselves while reading what was on the board. We also wanted to know the words they were familiar with so it would be easy for them to say them while acting. At the end of the reading test, we realized that most of them knew the words and could pronounce them but they were a bit reluctant at first and some of them were intimidated by the others who pronounced it. Like we stated earlier, some of the students saw themselves as better than others so when those who are laid back were reluctant to speak, those who think they know better would either persuade them to talk or tell them to go back and sit down or ask us to ask them instead. To tackle this issue, we told the whole class to stay quiet while the person who is trying to say something can pull themselves together and speak.

During this exercise, we also discovered that the fear of failure and low self-esteem was very prominent in most of the students. For example; a student would be able to pronounce the words properly at first but later, when we called the same student to pronounce it again, they just couldn't. It seemed as though they didn't trust what they know and were so reluctant to speak so they won't say the wrong thing although they knew what to say. Another prominent challenge was that most students easily forget. It seemed as though what they just read was very foreign to them and they had to spend time rethinking it over and over again. On our end, it helped us understand the impact of mental retardation on students.

The acting test was quite different from the reading test as most of them were really anticipating it. We learnt that drama is something they look forward to as it is very different from rote learning. They had the opportunity to do something they don't do often and they jumped at it. This goes to show how much drama-based instruction or learning should be incorporated into the educational setting. Although most of them were shy to come out and act, a good percentage of the class was active and participated in the dramatic activities. The quiet and laid back students were the audience members and they also learnt something from the dramatic activities.

For the practical experiment, the class was divided into two groups; this was to allow us to experiment more and better within the limited time, and also to help the students so they won't get easily tired or exhausted.

Group 1: This group experimented with story theatre and role play. Story telling was incorporated here and the students were given the opportunity to tell stories and the best story was picked for the drama. The person whose story was best was the narrator and we selected the characters. Using role play, participants were told what to do and even acted for them to see what we wanted them to do. This way, they were learning by seeing how to interact with each other. With acting out the scenario, the students saw what they should imitate and acted that way. Each member of the group was given the opportunity to act. For this drama, there were three characters, two boys and one girl.

Group 2: This group practiced using playback theatre and improvisation. With playback theatre, we gave the students an opportunity to share their life experiences. Although most of them were reluctant to share their life experiences, one student came up to the task and shared his experience while another shared the experience of his neighbor which he had witnessed. We decided to work with the second story as it was more relatable. We didn't want to pick out characters for this second story, the researchers gave the opportunity for the group members to pick out the character they would want to play and I also allowed them to act out the story they heard without being told what to do. This was so they could enhance their imaginative skill. The first reaction or response to the situation was something they would obviously do without anyone telling them. They would react the way they are wired or from their personal experiences. This gave me the opportunity to know their mind sets and what they think about such things and also how they would react to the situation or relate with each other. For this drama, there were four characters, two boys and two girls.

The reason for fewer characters is so they can easily rehearse and remember their words although it didn't give room for participation from others. To solve this, we added a last experiment which included the whole class. This was very necessary as this story had to do with relating with one another in the classroom. Prior to the final day of the experiment, an issue ensued with some members of the class and it almost led to a fight if not for timely intervention. We adapted this situation into a story and we narrated it to the class and the story came to live. The students were very participatory and we rehearsed on the spot. This story made use of improvisation a lot as we didn't tell the students what to do but they engaged so well.

In enacting these three experiments, we incorporated play-way method. Play-way method of learning is a complete package that enables overall development of the student by developing in terms of feelings, intellect and skills parameters. It not only focuses on subjective development but the emotional development of the child as well. There is no rigid method of applying a play-way method of learning and it can be combined with other methods of learning as well. This method helps students to play and work with their peers. It's easier to work with people when you are enjoying the process and activity. Also, because of the problems which the students may have within themselves, they loosen up and participate in the activities. From research, play-way method is used often with children. Bringing it into the Special Education Centre was to allow the students to explore, ask questions and participate without any restriction. Also, using the play-way method allowed the students to open up and share ideas and contributions in the course of the experiment. It is easier to learn and to teach using the play-way method than the conventional method especially when it has to do with social development. It was not a case of telling the students what to do rigidly but bringing play into the drama experiment.

Effectiveness of the drama intervention on the social development of special needs students

With this drama experiment, the students learnt non-verbal communication. The drama involved physical expressions, gestures and facial expressions. By participating in these activities, students with special needs can develop their ability to understand and use non-verbal cues. Drama activities provide opportunities for students to practice speaking and expressing themselves in a supportive environment. Through interactions with peers, teachers, and audience members, students with special needs can improve their language skills, including vocabulary, sentence formation, and articulation. The reading test helped to achieve this.

With role-play, the students explored different characters and roles, they performed in front of others, and received positive feedback and applause which helped them believe in their own abilities. This helps to boost self-confidence and self-esteem. This confidence can transfer to other social situations, helping the students to better express themselves and engage with others.

Through group rehearsals, improvisation and role-play, students learn to cooperate, take turns, listen actively, and respond appropriately in social situations. These drama activities encourage students to step into the shoes of different characters, which help them develop empathy and understanding towards others. By exploring different perspectives and emotions, students with special needs can improve their ability to recognize and empathize with the feelings and experiences of others, leading to improved social interactions.

The drama activities and stories involved scenarios that require problem-solving and conflict resolution and through engaging in these activities, the students can develop critical thinking skills and learn strategies for resolving conflicts, negotiating solutions, and expressing their needs and concerns effectively. These skills can be transferred to real-life situations and improve their social interactions outside the drama context.

Unlike passive teaching methods, drama encourages students to participate, collaborate, and take on different roles. While other intervention methods, such as social skills training groups or individual therapy, also focus on social development, drama-based instructions offer unique benefits. Its experiential nature, emphasis on emotional exploration, communication enhancement, and transferability make it a highly effective approach for enhancing social development in students with special needs. It is when the special needs student sees himself or herself in a positive learning environment where he or she creates cooperatively with his or her peers; he or she is able to free him or herself from the stigma he or she harbors.

In constructivism, individuals construct new understanding and knowledge through experience and social discourse. During the dramatic experiment, the students could experience how a negative response to situations can have negative consequences and effects on another person and even themselves. Everyone came together to perform or see how the story will play out and they were moral lessons which each of them learnt from. There was a difference between their prior knowledge on handling conflict which is mostly to fight back or respond aggressively and the new information which requires peaceful resolution, not talking back and doing things calmly. As a facilitator, constructivism theory does not require giving a lecture as though it were a classroom teaching but it involves helping the student to understand the differences between two behaviours and responses and how it can help to make them a better person. You don't teach by telling, you teach by practice, allowing the participants to do and learn from what they did. This takes away focus from the teacher and lecture and puts it on the student and their learning.

Social constructivism emphasizes the collaborative nature of learning under the guidance of a facilitator or in collaboration with other students. During the practical experiment, we guided the students by describing what they are to do and watch them do it. The students collaborated and came up with different ideas on how to carry out the performance and bring the story to life. In social constructivism, individuals are active participants in the creation of their own knowledge. The aim of this research is to use drama to enlighten and impact the students on knowledge which is for their own benefit. If the individuals do not participate in gaining this knowledge, they will not be well-informed as they would be if they participated. Once the students master a particular skill, they are able to complete it independently. The facilitator's role is to guide the students towards mastery of the social skills so it can become their natural behaviour and response.

Some of the comments from the students during the interview session.

Student A.

Question: How has the drama helped you to be a better person?

Answer: It taught me not to fight and if something happens, I should settle it.

Question: If someone does something in class that you don't like, how do you respond?

Answer: I report to my teacher.

Question: How has the drama helped you to be a better student in school?

Answer: I listen to my teacher, I copy my notes and I go home on time.

Student B

Question: How did the drama help you to be a better person?

Answer: It helped me to behave calmly and not be aggressive. It has taught me not to steal.

Question: In your new class, how do you talk with and relate to your new classmates?

Answer: I am taking things slow with them. I respect everyone and treat them like my sibling and they do same. I am conscious of how I treat people because there is life after school.

Student C

Question: How does the drama help you to relate with students in your new class?

Answer: When I enter the class, I socialize with everyone. Sometimes, I ask for help and if the person refuses to help me, I go to another person for help.

Question: How did the drama help you to be a better child at home and a better student in school?

Answer: At home, when I wake up, I do my house chores and then, I prepare for school.

When I come to school, I sit down quietly, then leave for devotion. After that I go back to my class and do what I am supposed to do.

Presentation of findings of the research

The students actively participated in role-playing exercises which gave them a platform to express themselves without fear. During the reading test, student A was shy and could not answer the questions. Sometimes, she knew what to say but didn't know how to say it for fear of making a mistake or saying the wrong thing. During my observation, we noticed that she has become very confident in herself. When asked questions, she answered without hesitating and was very expressive and unafraid to speak up.

- i. The students demonstrated significant improvements in their social skills and exhibited better communication, listening and problem-solving skills. Moreover, their ability to work collaboratively and effectively with peers was also improved. We interviewed some of the new students who were promoted to the MC 5&6 class and we got a positive feedback on the behaviour of the old students who they had come to meet. Also, while observing, we noticed that the new and old students related very well and had become friends.
- ii. Through drama exercises that encouraged perspective-taking and understanding different characters' emotions, special needs students developed empathy towards their relationships with peers and allowed them to navigate social situations more effectively. These findings highlight the importance of incorporating creative arts and interactive activities into the curriculum to promote inclusive education.

Interpretation of the results

The interpretations suggest that this approach could have significant positive impacts in the lives of special needs students.

- i. Drama provides a unique and effective way for students with special needs to develop their social skills. Through participation in dramatic activities, these students have the opportunity to practice communication, collaboration and empathy in a controlled and supportive environment. The structured nature of drama activities allows students with special needs to understand social cues, verbal and non-verbal communication, and emotional expression leading to improved social interaction and integration.
- ii. Drama based instructions utilized multiple senses, including visual, auditory, and kinesthetic, to engage students. With this, students experience different social situations and perspectives, which help them understand social cues and norms more effectively. Traditional interventions might focus solely on verbal or written instruction, providing limited opportunities for multi-sensory learning.
- iii. Drama helps special needs students to break barriers and challenge stereotypes. By participating in performances, these students have the opportunity to showcase their talents and abilities, challenging common misconceptions about their capabilities. This can lead to increased acceptance and inclusion within their peer's groups and the wider community, promoting positive social development.
- iv. Drama can enhance self-esteem and self-confidence in students with special needs. Engaging in dramatic activities allows these students to explore different roles, express themselves creatively, and receive positive reinforcement from peers and facilitators. This positive experience fosters a sense of accomplishment and acceptance, which can significantly impact their overall well-being and social development.

These results emphasize the potential benefits of using innovative and creative methods to support the unique needs of special needs students

Identifications of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats

Strengths

- i. Drama encourages creativity and self-expression which is particularly beneficial for students with special needs.
- ii. Drama allows students to challenge common misconceptions about their abilities and promotes inclusion.
- iii. Drama provides hands-on immersive experiences that allow special needs students to actively engage with social situations and practice social skills in a safe and supportive environment.
- iv. Drama is often a highly engaging and enjoyable form of learning for special needs students, making the process of acquiring social skills more enjoyable and increasing their overall motivation to participate and learn.
- v. Drama allows for immediate feedback and reinforcement of positive social skills, providing opportunities for students to receive praise and recognition for their efforts, boosting self-esteem and motivation.

Weaknesses

- i. Certain elements of drama such as physical movement or understanding complex scripts, may be challenging for some special needs students.
- ii. The effectiveness of drama may vary depending on the specific needs and abilities of each student, requiring personalized approaches.
- iii. Some students may not be able to do certain activities because of their disabilities.
- iv. Drama activities that involve emotional exploration can trigger strong emotions in special needs students, causing anxiety, frustration, or difficulty in managing their feelings.

Opportunities

- i. Drama gives the students an opportunity to step out of their comfort zone and do activities they may not usually do in the classroom.
- ii. Collaboration between drama educators, special education professionals and therapists can enhance the effectiveness of drama programs for special needs students
- iii. Drama gives the children an opportunity to learn outside the traditional teaching method.
- iv. Continued research into innovative drama techniques, adaptations and interventions can further optimize the benefits of social development.

Threats

- i. Negative attitudes or lack of understanding from others may impede the acceptance and inclusion of students with special needs in drama activities.
- ii. Limited funding and access to trained drama instructors and resources can hinder the implementation of drama programs for students with special needs.
- iii. Parents play a crucial role in reinforcing and encouraging the use of social skills at home. Without their support, students may not receive consistent reinforcement, making it harder for them to internalize and apply what they learn in the context of drama.

Conclusion

Drama provides the students with a safe and supportive environment to express emotions, engage in social interactions, build self-confidence, develop communication skills, cultivate empathy, promote inclusion and acceptance, and enhance problem-solving abilities. By participating in drama-based instructions which often involves real-life situations and scenarios and allows students to practice social skills in a realistic context, students can apply what they learn in the drama activities to their everyday lives, helping them generalize social skills beyond the classroom. Other intervention methods may focus more on abstract concepts or isolated skill practice, lacking the real-life application aspect and this may not be beneficial to the students on a long-term basis. It is necessary for educators and facilitators to

receive training, so they will be equipped with the knowledge and skills needed to teach and guide special needs students.

References

- Adedola, Taoheed. New Initiatives on Effective Integration of Persons with Special Needs for Self Reliance and Relevance in the Society. *The Journal of Advocacy and Rehabilitation in Special Education*. Vol 1, 2003, pp. 13.
- Andzayi, Charity. *Introduction to Programmes and Services for Children with Special Needs in Nigeria*. Deka Publications, Jos. 2002.
- Charles, Johnson. Special Needs: Integration and Relevance. *The Journal of Advocacy and Rehabilitation in Special Education*; vol. 1, 2003, pp. 30.
- Cruz-Cunha, Maria and Miranda, Isabel, and Goncalves, Patricia. *Handbook of Research on ICTs for Human-Centered Healthcare and Social Care Services*. vol 2, 2013, pp. 19. doi: 10.4018/978-1-4666-3986-7.
- Ebong, Martin. *Nigerian Child and Integral Education in the New Millennium*. Robertminder Int'l Publishers Limited, Uyo. 2008.
- Farland, Babara and Tustin, Rachel. *Roleplay/ Overview, Types and Ideas*. 2022.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria. National Policy on Education. NERDC Press, Lagos. 2004.
- Fox, Jonathan and Salas, Jo. *Personal Stories in Public Spaces: Essays on Playback Theatre by its Founders*. 2021.
- Gallagher, Kathleen. *The Theatre of Urban: Youth and Schooling in Dangerous Times*. University of Toronto Press, Toronto. 2007.
- Graham Leo and Morrison Steve. *The Role of Drama in Promoting Emotional Expression among Students with Emotional and Behavioural Disorders*. 2014
- Hallahan, Daniel and Kauffman, James. *Exceptional Learners: Introduction to Special Education*. 2000
- Ikpe, Usen. *The Demands of a Modern Teacher*. Billy Publishing Company, Uyo. 2005.
- Inyang, Idaresit. *Applying Indigenous Knowledge Resources in Children's Play-crafting in Southern Nigeria. Practice-led Research Using Ibibio Folk Narrative*. <https://scholar.sun.ac.za/bitstreams/7730c016-510d-42fb-b5ec-2598c90d06c0/download>. 2022
- Jatau, Michael, Uzo Charles and Lere, Mark. *Elements of Special Education for Prospective Teachers*. Deka Publications, Jos. 2002.
- Jindal-Snape, Divya. and Vettraino, Elinor. *Drama Techniques for the Enhancement of Social-Emotional Development in People with Special Needs: Review of Research*. *International Journal of Special Education*. vol 22 (1), 2007, pp. 107-117.
- Kanal, Naina. *What is Play-way Method of Learning*. 2018
- Kee Tamanna and Horner Jas. *The Impact of Drama on Social Skills Development in Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder*. 2017
- Kempe, Andy. *Drama and the Education of Young People with Special Needs*. In: Schonmann, S.(ed.) *Key Concepts in Theatre/Drama Education*. Sense Publishers, 2011. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-6091-332-7_27.

- Lere, Mark. *The Organization and Administration of Special Education in Nigeria*. Jos University Press Limited, Jos. 2007.
- Madson, Patricia. *Improv Wisdom: Don't Prepare, Just Show Up*. Bell Tower.
- Matthews, William. *Constructivism in the Classroom: Epistemology, History, and Empirical Evidence*. pp 51. 2003
- McCaslin, Nellie. *Creative Drama in the Classroom and Beyond*. Pearson Education, Inc. United States of America, 2006.
- Michelle Davis and Jasper Smiths. *The Science of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy*. 2017
- Morin, Alain. *Encyclopedia of Human Behaviour*. 2012.
- Mpella, Maria and Evaggelinou, Christina. *Does Theatrical Play Promote Social Skills Development in Students with Autism? A Systematic Review of the Methods and Measures Employed in the Literature. Preschool and Primary Education, vol 6 (2), 2018, pp. 96-118. doi: 10.12681/ppej.16135*
- Ododo, Sunday. *The Performer: Illorin Journal of the Performing Arts. Department of The Performing Arts, University of Illorin, Illorin. Vol 4, 2002.*
- Okeke, Beatrice. *Essentials of Special Education*. Afro-Orbis Publications Limited, Nsukka. 2001.
- O'Neill, Cecily. *Structure and Spontaneity: The Process Drama of Cecily O'Neill*. Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books. 2006.
- Ozaji, Emeka and Okuoyibo, Joseph. *The Practice and Future of Special Needs Education in Nigeria. (A Book of Readings in Honour by Prof. (REV. SR) T. B .Abang). The Department of Special Education and Rehabilitation Sciences, University of Jos, Jos. 2006.*
- Ozaji, Emeka. *Special Needs Education and Rehabilitation for Beginner Professionals*. Deka Publications, Jos. 2005.
- Rao, Van. *Special Education*. APH Publishing Corporation, Darya Ganj New Delhi. 2007.
- Sasso, Gary. *The Retreat from Inquiry and Knowledge in Special Education. Journal of Special Education*. 2001, Pp. 178-283.
- Trabalzini, Paola. *Through the Seasons of the Method. The NAMTA Journal. pp 36. 2011*
- Vorobyeva, Anastasia. *Playback Theatre around the Globe*. 2022
- Wasylo, Yolanda and Stickley, Theodore. *Promoting Emotional Development Through Using Drama in Mental Health Education. In Teaching Mental Health. 2008, pp. 297-309. doi: 10.1002/9780470713617.*
- White John and Brown Lexia. *Enhancing Social Interaction through Drama for Children with Down Syndrome*. 2013