

# CREATIVITY AND IMAGINATION AS A SINE QUO NON IN EDUCATIONAL THEATRE

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## Abstract

*This paper explores creativity and imagination as sine quo non in Educational Theatre. Through the qualitative method, the paper obtained data from video clip downloaded from TikTok titled “The Teacher Knows Every Students Voice” and considers constructivism by Jean William Fritz Piaget, Lev Vygotsky and John Dewey and the 3Ps model by Adediji Adeyinka as its theoretical framework. Constructivism emphasizes the active role of learners in constructing their understanding and knowledge through experiences and interaction with the environment while the 3Ps model stresses the involvement of learners in Theatre-in-Education through Play-making, Play-writing and Play-production. All these can be achieved through creative imagination and action, especially in educational theatre. The paper posits that creativity especially in the theatre can manifest in various forms such as playmaking, playwriting, improvisation, design of sets and costumes, interpretation of characters, the adaptation of scripts, and the integration of multimedia elements. The paper concludes that creativity and imagination in educational theatre foster critical thinking skills in students by challenging them to analyze situations creatively and find innovative solutions to problems. Through participation in educational theatre activities that require imagination and creative thinking, students develop skills such as critical thinking, confidence, communication skills, collaboration, problem-solving, adaptability, empathy, and resilience, all of which are crucial for success in both artistic endeavours and real-world situations. Creativity and imagination not only enhance artistic expression but also promote personal growth and cognitive development in students.*

**Keywords:** Educational Theatre, Creativity, Imagination Theatre-in-Education

## Introduction

Fostering creativity and imagination in students is increasingly recognized as essential for their holistic development. Educational theatre is an interdisciplinary approach that integrates theatrical techniques into the learning process and serves as a powerful tool to cultivate these attributes. By engaging students in dynamic and interactive experiences, educational theatre not only enhances their cognitive abilities but also nurtures their emotional and social skills. Creativity and imagination, the twin pillars of this pedagogical approach, are critical in preparing students to navigate the complexities of the modern world.

Generally, creativity is the ability to generate or create novel and valuable ideas, and imagination is the capacity to envision possibilities beyond the immediate reality and these are no doubt indispensable in educational settings. These qualities enable students to approach problems with innovative solutions, think critically, and engage in problem solving exercises and adapt to changing circumstances. Educational theatre leverages these attributes by encouraging students to take on diverse roles, explore different perspectives, and express themselves through various artistic mediums. This experiential learning process not only enriches their understanding of academic subjects but also promotes empathy, collaboration, and self-confidence.

Theatre generally means different things to different kinds of individuals depending on the concept that poses the theme. However, looking at the complexities of the definition of Theatre, bares us to these concepts: Theatre as a building where artistic production takesplace; Theatre as an art form that is expressed through artistic performance; Theatre as academic course of study and Theatre as a discipline.

In line with the focus of this work, it is imperative to lean on the concept of theatre as a discipline, which develops critical thinking for creativity encompassing the process of imagination and action. Towson University in exploring its theatre arts programme avers that the study of theatre engages students in an exploration of the world from multiple perspectives, while developing artistic skills and cultivating their capacities for collaboration, critical thinking, creative problem-solving and effective communication (1).

The above quote collaborates with Wright who outlined the goals of the theatre students in the standard of learning:

- a. Think and act creatively by solving problems individually or collaboratively and by employing originality, flexibility, and imagination.
- b. Develop the acting skills necessary for creative dramatic performance.
- c. Demonstrate knowledge of the elements of theatre production.
- d. Demonstrate an understanding of theatre arts about history and culture.
- e. Develop critical skills to evaluate their work and the work of others.
- f. Demonstrate awareness of and responsibility for the safe and ethical use of materials, methods, and technologies.
- g. Make connections between theatre arts and other fields of knowledge.
- h. Demonstrate ability to apply aesthetic criteria for making artistic choices.
- i. Develop awareness of copyright and royalty requirements when rehearsing, performing, or otherwise using the works of others (1).

The study of theatre is anchored on the above-outlined values as well as research and development of the critical mind in various strands of the theatre ranging from history, development, performance, management, criticism, TIE, TFD and so on. The curriculum for all these in the educational theatre is that of the approved academic system, however, a tilt to the professional viewpoint is considered in the process. All these are structured for solving problems through imagination and employing creativity either individually or collectively

### **The Concept of Educational Theatre**

Education can positively transform an individual's critical mindset; Prasad and Gupta agree that "Education is the most powerful weapon which we can use to change the perspective of the world. An educated person knows how to deal with different types of problems" (6). Theatre therefore, plays three cardinal functions: entertainment, information and education. Asen aptly submits that "Education as a cardinal function of theatre is rooted in theatre's ability to bring about knowledge and awareness" (3). The process of knowledge can be achieved through various forms of learning. Educational Theatre is a form of learning that incorporates dramatic and or theatrical methods into the teaching and learning processes. This enhances the learning and understanding experience.

Looking at the concept of Educational theatre, Vassileva considers "Educational Theatre" as a School Education Project" (150). She further stressed that Educational Theatre has not been created as a product with an independent role, parallel to education which can be used by students and teachers depending on their desire. It has been designed as an educational product meant to be presented at school to students... (156).

The designed concept as noted above creates an enabling environment where teachers and students should converge for teaching and learning, through a constructive means of artistic expression for mastering knowledge. Educational theatre domiciled in institutions of learning employs artistic and dramatic techniques in the tutorial processes to achieve their aims coupled with other approved methodologies. The process engages students in active pedagogies and various levels and strands of academic learning, ranging from drama, music, development, administration, event management and

so on. These and many more are structured under the academic curriculum of every academic institution offering educational theatre. One such, the Department of Theatre Arts at the Benue State University, Makurdi, is structured with a wide range of courses for the training of theatre artists. Theatre studies can involve studying different theatrical traditions, analyzing play texts, exploring the social and cultural contexts of theatre, investigating the impact of various theatrical techniques and styles, and examining the role of theatre in society. In all of these, imagination and creativity are pillars.

Artistic Performance and Drama are powerful tools for exploring creativity which builds confidence through imagination and action. It enables people to step into different creative roles and explore diverse worlds. Zigzag Theatre notes that “At the heart of the drama is imagination, which plays a crucial role in bringing the characters and stories to life.” (1). On this premise, Barbara Kerr stressed that **creativity is** “the ability to make or otherwise bring into existence something new, whether a new solution to a problem, a new method or device, or a new artistic object or form”(https://www.britannica.com/topic/creativity). It means that, invention and technological development generally is driven by creativity including imagination to make a creative construction of an idea, be it drama or song. In view of this, Dennis Akaha Gwer and Philip Sunday Bagustressed that “Obadiah Orkor stands out as a prolific gospel songwriter whose works merge linguistic creativity with spiritual depth” (92). This shows that, when creativity is combined with other depths of strengths can bring out a wonderful performance.

It is the capability to create things that can aesthetically motivate and inspire others, things that are pleasing in the eyes. Creativity is being able to express oneself in different varieties of artistic ways like painting, poetry, drama, music, sculpture, style, fashion, general performance and so on. Creativity and imagination are necessary ingredients and substratum to the theatre.

Bianca Vinther looks at 'creativity' in the art as the driving force of all artistic processes which is intrinsic. She further avers that “Creativity is a seed, an inborn and imperishable one, which can spread in manifold ways and can grow into extraordinary things” (2). It is a process to co-create reality. MaryAnn Kohl asserts that “Creativity focuses on the process of forming original ideas through exploration and discovery”. These ideas translate into the formation of various things that are exposed to the eyes. Creativity develops from experiences and imagination. Kohl further avers that “Creativity is not about doing something better than others, it is about thinking, exploring, discovering, and imagining. Creativity is found in the obvious art and music” (https://brightring.com/about-creativity/fostering-creativity). This is the substratum of performance.

Imagination is key to the creative process in drama and performance. It allows people to explore different scenarios and characters, to imagine what it would be like to be in someone else's shoes and to create stories that are unique and personal to them. Studies have found that being creative is using your imagination and visually expressing your ideas and thoughts. Afzal notes that creativity is inherent in everyone and further stresses that:

Creativity is simply the expression of self through creation. All you have to do to be creative is to create. It could be fine art, but it could also be something that entertains people or something t h a t simplifies life or makes it better or more interesting. It could be the creation of something t h a t defines new ways of doing or thinking about things (1).

Creativity and imagination in art must be interesting and entertaining, exposing the feelings and thoughts of a creative mind, capable of divulging amusement and aesthetics of life generally. Serge avers that imagination is the “ability to visualize” and the ability to “form images and ideas in the mind, especially of things never seen or experienced directly”. Creativity is part of the mind “where ideas,

thoughts, and images are formed” (3). Serge further stressed that training is a necessary component of creativity and imagination and this can be achieved “through various types of training”(3). Training institutions have the responsibilities to play that role, emerging the concept of Theatre in Education.

Imagination is the art of thinking and making artistic impressions. Serge concludes that Creativity is “applied imagination” which involves using materials to do something. Imagination is a powerful tool in educational theatre, owing to its indispensability in artistic creation. Susanne Langer cited in Betty Jane Wagner stressed that “Imagination is the primary talent of the human mind, the activity in whose service language has evolved” (8). The talent of imagination is refined through the process of creative education.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This paper is anchored on Constructivism, a philosophy of education theory developed by Jean William Fritz Piaget, a Swiss psychologist who is known for his work on child development. Jean Piaget is known as one of the first theorists of constructivism; however, the theory is associated with Lev Vygotsky and John Dewey. The theory posits that learners should construct knowledge rather than just passively take in information. As people experience the world and reflect upon those experiences, they build their representations of those experiences and incorporate new information into their pre-existing knowledge.

Bekki Brau stressed that “knowledge is an inter subjective interpretation. The learner must consider the information being taught and - based on past experiences, personal views, and cultural background, construct an interpretation.” This is a progressive and flexible way of asserting development in a learner.

The 3Psmodel of educational theatre developed by Adediji Adeyinka which means Play-making, Play-writing and Play-production is usually referred to as the effective theory in Theatre in Education (TiE) which is a more flexible way to impart knowledge in students. It holds that, students should be involved in play-making, writing and production through improvisation processes in order to develop their creative knowledge.

The significance of creativity and imagination in educational theatre is underscored by numerous studies and pedagogical theories. The constructivist approach to learning, for instance, posits that students construct knowledge through active engagement and social interaction. Educational theatre aligns with this approach by providing a platform for students to co-create narratives, experiment with ideas, and reflect on their experiences. Moreover, the integration of theatre into education has been shown to enhance students' motivation, retention, and overall academic performance.

Through the theory, students can also develop ideas that can enhance their performance in hands-on learning which encourages students to actively participate in their own learning process through direct practical activities such as drama role-playing, improvisation, and creative writing, to explore and experiment with ideas in a tangible way.

Furthermore, through collaborative learning experiences, students can work together to construct new knowledge. In educational theatre, students can collaborate with their peers on group projects, performances, and workshops, exchanging ideas and feedback to enhance their understanding of academic concepts. Reflection and inquiry-based learning techniques are powerful tools for developing knowledge in the educational theatre. Students can ask questions to get clarifications that will sharpen their creative knowledge.

Research has shown that humans construct meaning in the presence of three worlds: the world or

environment they are born with, their intrinsic human propensity to make sense of the world or environment and their capacity to acquire language and the culture in which they are immersed. These are attributes of creativity and imagination.

### **Methodological Analysis**

This paper adopted a qualitative approach to analyze the content of an mp4, 3.6MB of 576 x 1024 video clip downloaded from TikTok web titled “The Teacher Knows Every Students Voice” posted by Quirk handle. opines that “Video content analysis contemplate three types of information Jaimon Jacob, Sudheep Elayidom, and V. P. Devassiapresent in any video, viz audio, text, video” (6022). In this regards, the audio and video are subject as they explain the action required for this work.

The video clip shows a professional Theatre director who used his imagination to recognize his students' individual voices by sitting on a chair and responding to the greetings of the students as they take turns behind him for greetings. Only the aspects of the creativity displayed by the Theatre director are used for the purpose of this work.

In the video clip, Mr. Taylor, a professional theatre director could use his creative imagination in experimenting voice recognition especially as he is said to be good in speech art with special qualities in voice perception. In their cue behind him, someone would say “Hey Mr. Taylor” and he answers by the person's name. He was able to recognize many voices as Abby Reck, Catherine Nicks, Miles Stelson, Bryson. However, it was difficult for him to recognize others who have similar voice tones and would rather retort jokingly “Oh, do I know this person?” and they all laugh whenever he fails. “Um one more time” he would say and think and get the name correctly. In the art of acting, voice is a powerful tool that complement and project an action and it is recognized as a necessary ingredients in performance; this is because theatre activities hinges on both verbal and non-verbal communication skills. Students are requested to construct knowledge and make a positive reaction, engaging in critical thinking to give satisfactory results as posits by Constructivism theory. In engaging students in an exercise of creative imagination, it open doors of reasoning for positive results. Through the process of Theatre in Education (TiE), students can achieve a lot especially through imagination exercises.

### **Creativity and Imagination in Educational Theatre**

Educational reforms around the globe particularly in the 21st century learning processes are emphasizing and re-enforcing the learning system through innovative methods, one of which is Theatre in Education (TIE). This wheel of educational progress is being propelled by creativity through imagination and action. It is becoming increasingly noticeable that students nowadays are experiencing real-world problems of insecurity, economic instability, social disparity, cultural and political instability among other social issues of human suffering. In the context of the educational theatre, if students are to address these social issues, they will need to activate complex, organized, and empathetic creative thoughts about how such experiences are treating people.

Creativity and imagination are indeed, vital components of the theatre, acting as essential elements that enhance learning experiences for students. Sharon Bailin notes that “Creativity in drama is not confined to spontaneous improvisation but is possible in all aspects of dramatic work” (210). She further stressed that “directing a play is an arena for creative achievement because a script is usually pre-determined and fixed”(210).

Educational theatre goes beyond just presenting a performance through learning; it aims to engage, inspire, and provoke thought or ideas. Creative thinking allows students to explore ideas from new perspectives and experiment with different approaches. When incorporated into theatre education, those creative ideas stimulate the mind, engage the senses, and encourage students to think critically.

Creativity and imagination are essential skills in educational theatre and play a crucial role in engaging and inspiring students to learn. Some ways in which creativity and imagination work in educational theatre are:

1. **Creating a stimulating learning environment:** Educational theatre uses creative and imaginative techniques, such as role-playing, improvisation, and storytelling, to bring learning material to life. This helps students to actively engage with the material and make connections between what they are learning and their own experiences. The application of the 3ps hereinbefore stated is applicable as students engaged actively in role playing through the process.
2. **Encouraging critical thinking and problem-solving skills:** Through creative activities such as devising plays, creating characters, and exploring different perspectives, students are encouraged to think critically and creatively about the world around them. This helps them to develop their problem-solving skills and ability to think outside of their immediate environment – real-life scenarios. The applicability of Jean William Fritz Piaget with Lev Vygotsky and John Dewey Constructivism theory will yield more refined results.
3. **Fostering collaboration and teamwork:** Educational theatre often involves working collaboratively with others to create and perform plays or scenes. Working on any theatrical production requires teamwork and cooperation among actors, directors, designers and crew members. Creative collaboration encourages students to work together, communicate effectively, and support each other, fostering important social and communication skills and teaching students how to effectively work together towards a common goal.
4. **Expression and Communication:** Theatre allows students to express themselves creatively through acting, writing, directing, and designing. By harnessing their imagination, students can communicate complex ideas and emotions effectively just as in the exercise of voice recognition video under study.
5. **Emotional Intelligence:** By engaging with various characters and situations on stage and in the class, students can explore emotions and learn how to empathize with others perspectives. This builds emotional intelligence that can be applied beyond the realm of theatre.
6. **Confidence Boost:** Engaging in creative activities like acting can help boost self-confidence in students by allowing them to explore new roles or personas outside their comfort zone.

By and large, educational theatre provides a unique platform for fostering creativity and imagination in students while also nurturing their cognitive abilities, growing them into well-rounded individuals capable of thinking critically, responding objectively and developing effective communication skills through creative engagement on stage or behind it. Instantaneously at a voice behind “Hello Mr. Taylor” the director could comprehend who's vice and react by mentioning his student's name from the voice, however, not all, but largely, the education process is planted to development the students' cognitive abilities and swiftness of action. Asen posits that one of the contributions of the theatre in a learner's educational life is “creative skills of solving problems, decision making and visualising goals” Allthese culminate into knowledge of performance which is supported by the theory of Constructivism. When the theory is applied, learners can smoothly develop creative knowledge through the imagination of various experiences around them.

## Conclusion

This paper focuses on examining the role of creativity and imagination as an indispensable tool in educational theatre. In educational theatre, Creativity can manifest in various forms such as playmaking, playwriting, improvisation, design of sets, speech art and costumes, the interpretation of characters, the adaptation of scripts, and the integration of multimedia elements. By encouraging students to think deeply and explore their imaginations, the educational theatre opens up opportunities

for them to express themselves creatively and develop their artistic skills. Imagination plays a crucial role in educational theatre as well. Apart from tasking one to think deeply and react positively, it allows students to envision worlds beyond reality, empathise with characters from diverse backgrounds, and understand complex themes through a different lens. Imagination enables students to step into someone else's shoes, experience unfamiliar situations, and broaden their perspectives on various social issues.

Overall, creativity and imagination are essential components of educational theatre because they do not only enhance artistic expression but also promote personal growth and cognitive development. By embracing these qualities in educational theatre curricula, educators can create enriching experiences that empower students to explore their creativity while gaining deeper insights into themselves and the world around them just as captured in the video clip used herein titled “The Teacher Knows Every Student's Voice”. The Theatre director displayed cognitive prowess and imagination to recognize his students' individual voices from an improvisation action.

### Recommendations

Arising from the discussions in this paper, it is hereby recommended that:

1. Students of theatre arts especially those in educational theatre are encouraged to unlock their creative imagination by exploring a variety of ideas and collaborating with others to develop their confidence and think outside the box - to explore new ideas and experiment with alternative approaches in their performances, however, within the confinement of the approved academic programme. This will help them develop their creativity and imagination which is a necessary ingredient in Educational Theatre.
2. Educational professionals, trainers and all stakeholders should provide opportunities for collaboration and brainstorming; this fosters a collaborative environment where students can share their ideas and work together to come up with innovative solutions. This will help them learn from each other to hone their creative skills.
3. Academic institutions should incorporate improvisation exercises: Incorporating improvisation exercises into the curriculum can help students think deeply, adapt quickly, and spontaneously tap into their imagination.
4. Educational theatre trainers should explore different styles of theatre: Introduce students to a variety of theatrical styles, from traditional to experimental, to expand their creative repertoire and encourage them to think creatively about how they approach a performance.

By incorporating these recommendations into educational theater programs, educators can nurture the creativity and imagination of their students, helping them develop essential skills for both artistic expression and personal growth.

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