

Drama as an Effective Medium for Child Development using NUCO Primary School, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State as a Case Study.

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Abstract

Child development involves the biological, psychological and emotional changes that occur in human beings between birth and adulthood. Developmental changes may occur as a result of genetically controlled processes, known as maturation, or environmental factors and learning, but most commonly involves an interaction between the two. It may also occur as a result of human nature and of human ability to learn from the environment. This work examined the effect of drama on child development using NUCO primary schools as a case study. The study used the Observational Learning Theory by Bandura and Lev Vygotsy's Social Learning Theory. This study further adopts a qualitative method or paradigm of inquiry. The research instrument used for the study was a researcher's developed instrument titled "Drama and Child Development Questionnaire" (DCDQ). The data gathered were exhaustively described using the explanation building analysis which explains the similarities and differences of viewpoints from the questionnaire data. Findings from the study revealed that there is a significant effect of drama on the social development of children including physical development, cognitive development, language skills development and socio-emotional development. The work recommended amongst others that school administrators should engage their children in drama activities as it has been found to improve social development skills of children.

Keywords: Education, Child development, Role-playing, Creative Drama and Drama

Introduction

Education has become a concept that is changing shape in the face of the requirements of the developing age. Teaching methods cannot be said to stay the same in a system, in which information is constantly growing. It is possible to say that the educational system of today has features of the constructive point of view. According to Wagner, Benjamin (13), teachers' ability to be a guide, the active participation of the student in the learning process and the fact that the process is more important than the result, that the information is formed by the individuals efficiently, and that the learning is not independent from the society and the cognitive processes overlap the teaching understanding of the drama in education. Peter

Slade (13), opined that children experience the sense of socializing while learning with the drama method in education which is an area in itself and a teaching method at the same time. Drama in

education is also a method that strengthens the individual's communication with himself/herself, (Österlind, Eva 37).

The theory of child development is a theory that describes how children learn and develop through social interaction and their cultural environment. Lev Vygotsky (119), argued that children's cognitive development is inseparable from social context, and interactions with adults and peers play an important role in shaping their understanding and abilities. According to Vygotsky (124), children experience development through what is referred to as the zone of proximal development. This zone refers to the distance between what children can do independently and what they can achieve with the help or support from adults or more skilled peers. Children can acquire new, more complex skills and knowledge through interactions within this zone of proximal development. Vygotsky also emphasized the role of language in child development. According to him, language is not only a means of communication but also a tool of thinking. Heathcote further explains that:

At the end of primary school, children understand a variety of simple theatrical techniques, such as acting (playing) and group dynamics such as improvisation, or characterization elaboration through action and reaction. Furthermore, students understand that there are rules in theatre play and ensemble work, descriptions of performance arrangements such as storylines, settings, and characters in the production process of simple performances. In this phase, students can begin to be introduced to the theme of traditional stories to enrich cultural insights. Through this experience, students are expected to be able to collaborate in achieving performances, learn to be responsible for their respective roles, and be able to respond and anticipate to dominate the stage, both individually and in groups (113).

Through theatre learning, children can develop various skills and abilities, including creativity, cooperation, communication, self-confidence, problem-solving, and understanding the perspectives of others.

Many researchers including Richard Courtney (99), early years in the development of a child is considered to be vitally important in the formation of a child's intelligence, personality and social behaviours. Research proves that education during early years of development has long lasting impacts on the formation of children and researchers especially emphasizing the importance of the quality of education during this period. Catterall (21) insists that the main purpose of primary education is to maximize the potential a child brings by birth, thus, kindergarten (nursery school) is the institution providing the best organized playing atmosphere for children. In this atmosphere children find an opportunity for physical, mental, emotional and social development. Bolton (19) also emphasized that during the pre-school period children learn rules for collective living and develop an attitude for assistance and cooperation as well. Meanwhile, while learning to protect his or her own rights, Berk and Winsler (87) argued that a child also learns sharing and not violating other persons' freedom. Pre-school education being the first step of the contemporary education system, provides a program of education aiming to provide self-confidence to children.

Hence, pre-school education occupies an important place in the education system. During this education, children's development properties, personal differences and capabilities are taken into account so that children find a chance for physical, emotional, lingual, social and mental development in a healthy way. Pre-school education also intends to lay the foundations for a positive personality and aims to reveal creative aspects of children.

Creative drama is action status, improvisations and animations formed by children according to their own original ideas, creative discoveries and knowledge about the subject without having to refer to a written text (San, 19). It can be said that drama takes the children to the center and makes the student active during the process of learning. It provides the teacher with the space to play the role of a guide during the process and enables children to make presentations by doing and experiencing and provides a permanency by using all the audiovisual, actual and affective learning fields of products created during the process (Baldwin and Fleming, 113). In this manner, the motivation to learn becomes stronger and healthier in terms of learning principles.

Research Questions

The following questions guided the study:

- i. What is the effect of drama activities on children's physical development?
- ii. How does participation in drama influence cognitive skills development?
- iii. What is the impact of drama on language usage among children?
- iv. What is the influence of drama on socio-emotional development of children?
- v.

Statement of the Problem

Child development encompasses various domains, including cognitive, emotional, social, and physical growth. While traditional education methods focus predominantly on academic achievement, there is growing evidence that extracurricular activities, particularly drama, can play a crucial role in holistic child development. Despite this, many educational curricula undervalue or overlook the integration of drama into the school system, primarily due to a lack of empirical data on its benefits and the perceived non-academic nature of drama activities. Current educational practices emphasize standardized testing and core academic subjects, often at the expense of creative arts. This narrow focus can hinder the development of critical life skills such as empathy, communication, and social interaction, which are vital for children's overall growth and success. Furthermore, children in underprivileged or resource-constrained settings are particularly disadvantaged, as they have limited access to drama programs and related activities.

Several researchers have focused on the benefits of theatre in elementary school children's learning. Still, no researcher has paid attention specifically to how drama specifically, should be positioned in child development psychology. Therefore, this study examines how drama influences child development using NUCO primary school experience as a case study.

Theoretical Framework

Observational Learning Theory (Bandura 1961)

The Observational Learning Theory was proposed by Albert Bandura in 1961. It states that learning consists of observing and modeling another individual's behaviours, attitude or emotional expressions. Bandura stresses that children were more likely to imitate an adult's actions. Learning by observation is a very effective domain as it helps to gain and retain attention. Learning occurs through imitation and modeling while observing another. The behaviour of a teacher has more influence on learners who will imitate, regardless of whether it is good or bad.

Based on this theory, the teacher demonstrates and analyses in the classroom while teaching, the children observe. The observation cuts borders in various aspects in teaching primary school children; the learners observe and imitate as the teacher demonstrates. This leads to direct learning through

observation, as the learners can replicate the same techniques if given the same apparatus. Bandura, however, stressed that children learn positive and negative attributes from their teacher just like children learn both good and bad attributes from their parents, by observation. The reliability of observational learning is proportional to that of demonstration; the teacher demonstrates while the learners observe.

The relevance of this theory to the present study is that when constructivist approaches are student centered such as the observational method that consists of modeling another individual's behaviours, attitude or emotional expressions through role play or drama are applied, childhood development increases. However, when conventional methods such as lecture methods is used, the reverse is the case.

Lev Vygotsky and Social Learning Theories (1962)

Lev Vygotsky, a Russian teacher and psychologist, stated that we learn through interactions and communication with others. Social learning theories help us to understand how people learn in social contexts (learn from each other), inform us on how teachers construct active learning communities and examine how our social environments influence the learning process (Inyang, 2022). Vygotsky suggested that learning takes place through the interactions students have with their peers, teachers and other experts.

Consequently, teachers can create a learning environment that maximizes the learner's ability to interact with each other through discussion, collaboration and feedback. He argued that culture is the primary determining factor for knowledge construction. This simply means that we learn through cultural terms by interaction.

Vygotsky assumed the following condition:

Developing learning communities

Community of learner's classroom

Collaborative learning and group work

Discussion-based learning (Socratic questioning) (Inyang, 2022).

Drama: Historical Perspectives

Drama is the specific mode of fiction represented in performance; a play, opera, mime, ballet etc., performed in a theatre or on radio or television. Considered as a genre of poetry in general, Adefarasin (21), argued that the dramatic mode has been contrasted with the epic and the lyrical modes ever since Aristotle's Poetics, the earliest work of dramatic theory. The term "drama" comes from a Greek word meaning "deed" or "act" which is derived from "I do". The two masks associated with drama represent the traditional generic division between comedy and tragedy. In English, the word play or game was the standard term for drama until William Shakespeare's time just as its creator was a play-maker rather than a dramatist and the building was a play-house rather than a theatre (Baldwin and Fleming, 113).

According to Wagner (13), the use of drama in a more narrow sense to designate a specific type of play dates from the modern era. "Drama" in this sense refers to a play that is neither a comedy nor a tragedy, for example, Zola's *Thérèse Raquin* or Chekhov's *Ivanov* (208). It is this narrower sense that Berk and Winsler (87), argued that the film and television industries, along with film studies, adopted "drama" as a genre within their respective media. The term radio drama has been used in both senses originally transmitted in a live performance. It may also be used to refer to the more high-brow and serious end of the dramatic output of radio.

The enactment of drama in theatre, performed by actors on a stage before an audience, presupposes collaborative modes of production and a collective form of reception. Bolton (19), also emphasized that the structure of dramatic texts, unlike other forms of literature, is directly influenced by this collaborative production and collective reception. Slade (13), opines that mime is a form of drama where the action of a story is told only through the movement of the body. According to many researchers including Courtney (99), drama can be combined with music: the dramatic text in opera is generally sung throughout; as for in some ballets dance expresses or imitates emotion, character, and narrative action. Catterall (21), argued that musicals include both spoken dialogue and songs; and some forms of drama have incidental music or musical accompaniment underscoring the dialogue. Closet drama is a form that is intended to be read, rather than performed. In improvisation, the drama does not pre-exist the moment of performance; performers devise a dramatic script spontaneously before an audience.

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative method or paradigm of inquiry. Qualitative paradigm is an umbrella term that identifies different ways and techniques of making meaning from the social world. It seeks to understand the meaning of people's responses and knowledge as they are constructed (Hammond & Wellington, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016 cited in Inyang, 2022). By describing, interpreting, and acknowledging the meaning of issues in the society, qualitative study creates room for data to be drawn from multiple sources.

Population of the Study

The population of this study was 31. This number comprised all primary 5 pupils of NUCO primary school, Uyo Akwa Ibom State.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The study used simple random sampling techniques in selecting respondents for the study. The sampled group was between the ages of 9- 13. This was done to have a group who could easily comprehend the concept of drama and storytelling as a learning medium.

Method of Data Collection

The research instrument used for the study was the researchers developed instrument titled "Drama and Child Development Questionnaire" (DCDQ). The Drama and Child Development instrument (DCDI) had 20 items and 4 point rating scale with the weight of 4-1 representing strongly agree (SA) =4, Agree (A)= 3, disagree (D)=2, and strongly disagree (SD)=1. One hour was allowed for filling of the questionnaires.

Method of Data Analysis

The data gathered were exhaustively described using the explanation building analysis which explains the similarities and differences of viewpoints from the questionnaire data over the effect of drama on the social development of children.

Discussion of Findings

What is the effect of drama activities on children's physical development?

Physical development (PD) is the growth and development of the body and brain in infancy and early childhood. It involves the development of physical coordination and muscle control, as well as changes to the brain and senses. PD also includes the refinement of motor skills, which are the abilities to use and control the body. According to Baldwin and Flemming (17), physical development refers to the advancements and refinements of motor skills, or, in other words, children's abilities to use and control their bodies. Physical development is one of the many domains of infant and toddler development

Findings from this study answered the research question one which revealed that there is an effect of drama activities on the physical development of children. Respondents' responses revealed that they were of the opinion that participation in drama leads to enhanced physical fitness in children; children involved in drama activities exhibit better hand-eye coordination; drama participation increases children's stamina and physical endurance and regular engagement in drama helps children develop better spatial awareness. This finding is in line with the opinion of various researchers and literature.

Lee *et al.*, (33) insist that drama activities have a profound impact on child development, fostering a range of skills and attributes that are crucial for overall growth. Engaging in drama helps children develop their emotional intelligence by providing a safe space to express and explore their emotions. This process allows them to understand and manage their feelings better, leading to improved emotional regulation. According to a study published in *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts*, children who participate in drama activities demonstrate higher levels of empathy and social understanding compared to their peers who do not engage in such activities (Goldstein & Winner, 202). This emotional development is essential for forming healthy relationships and navigating social situations effectively.

Cognitive development is another significant benefit of drama activities. When children engage in role-play and improvisation, they enhance their problem-solving skills and creativity. These activities require them to think on their feet, make quick decisions, and adapt to changing scenarios. Research highlighted in the *Journal of Educational Psychology* suggests that drama-based instruction can improve children's reading comprehension and narrative writing abilities (Lee, Patall, Cawthon, &Steingut, 15). This cognitive flexibility and improved literacy skills can contribute to better academic performance and a greater love for learning.

Drama activities also play a crucial role in physical development. Through movement and acting, children improve their motor skills, coordination, and spatial awareness. Activities such as mime, dance, and stage combat require precise control over body movements, which helps in refining both gross and fine motor skills. As stated by Goodill (25), in the *American Journal of Dance Therapy* participation in drama and dance can enhance physical health by promoting fitness, flexibility, and body awareness. These physical benefits are particularly important in an era where sedentary lifestyles are becoming increasingly common among children.

Furthermore, participation in drama can significantly boost children's self-confidence and self-esteem. Performing in front of an audience, receiving constructive feedback, and succeeding in challenging tasks help children build a positive self-image. A study by McLauchlan and Winters (14), in the *Journal of Applied Arts & Health* found that children involved in drama activities exhibited increased self-confidence and a stronger sense of belonging. These experiences are vital for developing resilience and a proactive attitude towards new challenges in both personal and academic contexts. Overall, drama activities offer a multifaceted approach to child development, nurturing emotional, cognitive, physical, and social growth.

Research Question Two: How does participation in drama influence cognitive skills development?

Cognitive development is the process of learning to think, developing the brain, and being able to process information. It can be strengthened when children are healthy, emotionally secure, and socially connected. Cognitive development means the development of the ability to think and reason. Children ages 6 to 12, usually think in concrete ways (concrete operations). This can include things like how to combine, separate, order, and transform objects and actions.

Based on the data collected from the responses of respondent, this work concludes on the answer to research question two that participation in drama influences cognitive skills development of children. Respondents opined that engaging in drama activities enhances children's problem-solving abilities. In the same vein, they insisted that drama participation improves children's attention and concentration. Furthermore, children who participate in drama activities demonstrate better memory retention. Majority of the respondents were of the opinion that drama activities help develop children's critical thinking skills. Also, participation in drama fosters children's creativity and imagination.

Findings from this study agrees with that of Caterall (18), that drama activities significantly contribute to the development of cognitive skills in children, providing a dynamic and engaging method for enhancing various mental processes. One of the primary cognitive benefits is improved language and literacy skills. Engaging in drama requires children to understand and use language in different contexts, which enhances their vocabulary, comprehension, and expressive abilities. A study published in the *Journal of Educational Psychology* found that children who participated in drama activities showed significant improvements in reading comprehension and narrative writing skills (Lee, Patall, Cawthon, &Steingut, 15). These activities often involve storytelling, script reading, and dialogue creation, all of which stimulate linguistic development.

Another critical cognitive skill fostered by drama is problem-solving. Drama activities often involve improvisation and role-play, requiring children to think quickly, adapt to new situations, and solve problems creatively. This engagement helps develop higher-order thinking skills such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. According to a study in *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, children who regularly participate in drama activities demonstrate enhanced creative thinking and problem-solving abilities (Karakelle, 9). By navigating the complexities of various roles and scenarios, children learn to approach problems from multiple perspectives and devise innovative solutions.

Memory enhancement is also a notable benefit of drama activities. Learning lines, cues, and sequences in a play or performance requires significant memorization, which strengthens both short-term and long-term memory. This repetitive practice of recalling information helps children improve their retention and recall abilities, skills that are transferable to academic learning and everyday life. A study by Noice and Noice (6) in the *Journal of Aging and Health* found that drama activities improved memory and cognitive function, suggesting that these benefits extend across different age groups and can have long-lasting effects

Additionally, drama activities enhance children's concentration and focus. Performing in a play or participating in a drama exercise requires sustained attention to detail, whether it is remembering lines, staying in character, or responding to fellow actors. This practice helps children develop better concentration and attention span. A study conducted by Goldstein, Lerner, and Winner (17) in

Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts demonstrated that children engaged in drama showed significant improvements in sustained attention and task performance. These skills are crucial for academic success and effective functioning in various aspects of life.

Research Question Three: What is the impact of drama on language usage among children?

Language acquisition is the process by which humans acquire the capacity to perceive and comprehend. In other words, it is how human beings gain the ability to be aware of language, to understand it, and to produce and use words and sentences to communicate. According to Toivanen *et al.*, (18), language acquisition involves structures, rules, and representation. Language can be vocalized as in speech or manual as in sign. Human language capacity is represented in the brain. Even though human language capacity is finite, one can say and understand an infinite number of sentences, which is based on a syntactic principle called recursion. Evidence suggests that every individual has three recursive mechanisms that allow sentences to go indeterminately.

Following the questions answered by respondents in the course of this study. The research question one was answered thus; there is an impact of drama on language skills acquisition and usage among children. Respondents were observed to opine that drama activities contribute to children's vocabulary expansion. In the same vein, they also agreed that children's communication skills are enhanced through drama participation. Also, most respondents responded that drama helps improve children's pronunciation and articulation. Questioning the respondents more, they agreed that participation in drama encourages children to express their ideas more clearly and finally; respondents believe that drama activities enhance children's storytelling and narrative skills.

Drama activities play a vital role in language acquisition, offering a dynamic and immersive environment for children to develop their linguistic abilities. Through participation in drama, children are exposed to a wide range of vocabulary and language structures that they might not encounter in everyday conversations. This exposure enhances their vocabulary acquisition and understanding of complex sentence structures. A study published in the *Journal of Educational Psychology* found that drama-based instruction significantly improved children's vocabulary and language comprehension skills (Podlozny, 20). Engaging in dialogue, reading scripts, and listening to peers in a drama setting provides rich linguistic input, crucial for language development.

Moreover, drama activities enhance speaking and listening skills by encouraging active verbal interaction. When children take on different roles and characters, they practice using language expressively and effectively to convey emotions, intentions, and narratives. This practice improves their articulation, pronunciation, and fluency. Research in the *Journal of Research in Reading* indicates that drama activities can lead to notable improvements in children's oral language skills, as they provide a context for authentic communication and the application of new vocabulary in meaningful ways (Cremin, Gooch, & Macdonald, 6). This interactive form of learning helps children become more confident and competent speakers.

Drama also aids in developing non-verbal communication skills, which are essential for effective language use. Through acting and role-play, children learn to use body language, facial expressions, and gestures to complement their verbal communication. This holistic approach to language use helps children understand the nuances of communication beyond words. According to a study in the *International Journal of Education & the Arts*, children who participate in drama activities demonstrate better understanding and use of non-verbal cues, which enhances their overall communicative

competence (Toivanen, Komulainen, & Ruismäki, 11). This skill is particularly beneficial for language learners, as it supports the interpretation of meaning in social interactions.

Additionally, drama activities foster a positive attitude towards language learning. The engaging and enjoyable nature of drama helps reduce the anxiety often associated with language acquisition, creating a more relaxed and supportive learning environment. This positive emotional experience can boost children's motivation and willingness to practice and use new language skills. A study by Kao and O'Neill (18) in *The Journal of Educational Research* found that drama activities increased students' motivation and positive attitudes towards learning a second language. By making language learning enjoyable and relevant, drama encourages children to take risks and experiment with language, leading to greater language proficiency over time.

Research Question Four: What is the influence of drama on socio-emotional development of children?

Social and emotional development (SED) is a gradual process in which children learn to understand, express, and manage their emotions, and to build relationships with others. It is a critical part of a child's development, laying the foundation for their mental health, relationships, and future success. According to Goldstein *et al.*, (17), social and emotional development means how children start to understand who they are, what they are feeling and what to expect when interacting with others. It is the development of being able to form and sustain positive relationships. Experience, manage and express emotions

Based on findings from this work and analysis of respondents' responses, this work revealed that there is an influence of socio-emotional development of children. Findings from the study showed that drama helps children develop better empathy and understanding of others; participation in drama boosts children's self-confidence and self-esteem. Furthermore, children involved in drama activities show improved teamwork and cooperation skills. Also, they insisted that drama participation helps children manage their emotions more effectively. Finally, majority of respondents were of the opinion that children's social interaction skills are enhanced through drama activities

Drama activities significantly contribute to socio-emotional development in children by providing a platform to explore and express emotions in a safe and supportive environment. Through role-play and storytelling, children can experience different perspectives and emotions, enhancing their emotional intelligence and empathy. A study in the *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology* found that children who participated in drama activities exhibited higher levels of empathy and better understanding of others' feelings (Goldstein & Winner, 12). By stepping into different characters' shoes, children learn to recognize and appreciate diverse emotional experiences, which is crucial for building healthy relationships and social interactions.

Additionally, drama activities help children develop self-awareness and self-regulation. Performing and rehearsing require children to reflect on their thoughts and emotions, fostering greater self-understanding. This reflective process enables them to manage their emotions more effectively, leading to improved self-regulation skills. According to a study published in the *Journal of Educational Psychology*, children involved in drama programs demonstrated enhanced self-regulation and reduced behavioral issues compared to those who did not participate in such activities (Lee, Patall, Cawthon, & Steingut, 15). These skills are essential for emotional resilience and coping with stress and challenges in everyday life.

Drama also promotes social skills by encouraging collaboration and communication among participants. Children in drama activities often work in groups, requiring them to cooperate, negotiate, and resolve conflicts to achieve common goals. This collaborative environment helps them develop essential social skills such as teamwork, communication, and leadership. Research published in *Youth Theatre Journal* highlights that drama activities can improve children's social competence by providing opportunities for meaningful social interactions and teamwork (Catterall, 21). These skills are critical for successful social integration and forming positive peer relationships.

Furthermore, drama activities boost children's self-confidence and self-esteem. Performing in front of an audience and receiving positive feedback can significantly enhance their self-worth and confidence. This boost in self-esteem is crucial for personal development and encourages children to take on new challenges and opportunities. A study by McLauchlan and Winters (14), in the *Journal of Applied Arts & Health* found that children involved in drama activities exhibited increased self-confidence and a stronger sense of belonging. This positive self-perception is vital for overall well-being and success in various life domains. Overall, drama provides a multifaceted approach to socio-emotional development, nurturing empathy, self-awareness, social skills, and self-esteem.

Conclusion

Based on the findings revealed, this work concludes that there is a significant effect of drama on the social development of children including physical development, cognitive development, language skills development and socio-emotional development.

The study therefore recommends that:

Government initiates policy that mandate schools to set up drama clubs and specific days for drama performance so as to improve their social development skills.

Parents on their part should engage their children in role play activities to naturally imbibe the spirit of drama in them.

Teachers should adopt more of demonstrative teaching technique, since children spend most of their time in school, they would easily emulate the demonstrative nature of their teachers in drama classes.

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